

ABSTRACT

The study area is well-known formed part of the ancient region called Puṇḍravardhana. The sources ascertain the fact that the region became quite prosperous as early as in the Mauryan period. There were towns of considerable size grown up. Archaeological excavations at Bangarh near the modern town of Gangarampur in South Dinajpur district have unmistakably confirmed the existence of a walled city of a considerable size in the area during the Mauryan period. Present scholar want to mention that Asuragarh near Dalkhola town of North Dinajpur is also an ancient site of the pre Mauryan and Mauryan origin.

Study Area

The ancient and medieval archaeological sites of northern Bengal are located mainly in three districts, viz. Malda, North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur. So the present study is based to a great extent on findings from the sites and remains of these three districts of west Bengal. Discussion of our area of study would not be complete without mention of the fact that the districts we have taken up for investigation do not alone constitute the ancient Puṇḍra region. Dinajpur (East), Rajshahi, Bogra, Pabna and Rangpur districts of Bangladesh, also formed part of the ancient Puṇḍra region. These districts are contiguous to our area of study. In ancient times, they shared the same socio-economic and political environment. The ancient river Mahananda forms the western boundary of the region and extends up to the river Karatoya in the East. This region is almost identical with the Varendra region of the Pāla and Sena inscriptions of early medieval times. The Ganges forms the southern boundary of Puṇḍravardhana. Puṇḍranagara on the Karatoya (Bangladesh), Bangarh on the Punarbhava, Asuragarh on the Mahananda and Gouḍa on the Ganges and several other urban centers owed their life and prosperity to the swift and navigable rivers connecting them with vast regions in northern, eastern and north-eastern India. The suggestion is that there was continuous maritime link between Puṇḍra and the ancient port of Tāmralipta near the shores of the Bay of Bengal is not at all farfetched since it is the Ganges that flows down to the sea washing the regions like Magadha, Mithilā, Puṇḍravardhana and Rādhā.

Scope of Research

The scope of the study extends of several aspects of the regions; growth in terms of economy, society, politics for a millennia and a half years. If the Maurya, Sun̄ga and Kuṣāna periods witnessed the dominance of the cities like Puṇḍravardhana, Koṭivarṣa, Kandaran and Asuragarh, the Gupta period saw the rise of Gauḍa on the Ganges. The flow of urban life in Puṇḍravardhana did not come to an end there. Thus Rāmāvātī on the river Mahananda, Madnāvātī on the Brahmani, Kandaran on the Mahananda continued to cater to the requirements of the flourishing populace of *Puṇḍra* with their geo-political thrust.

The unique position of *Puṇḍra* provides us with wide scope of study and research. It is a region which is served by network of rivers like the Ganges, Mahananda, Atreya, Puṇarbhava, Karatoya, Kalindi, Tangan, Nagar, Chiramati, Kulik etc. that contributed to the growth of civilization in the fertile delta of Bengal. The works of some eminent scholars as well as the Archaeological Survey of India led to the discovery and identification of some important archaeological sites: 1) Paharpur (Rajshahi), 2) Vasubihar (Bogra), 3) Bangarh (South Dinajpur), 4) Mahasthangarh (Bogra), 5) Nandadirghi, 6) Gauḍa, and 7) Pandua (Malda) etc. within the geographical boundary of ancient Puṇḍra.

Though macro level works on archaeology of this area have been made, micro-studies are still meager in respect of the little known ancient sites of these three districts. Even where such studies have been carried out, little attention has been given to the informal knowledge of history of this area. In view of the above deficiencies, this study has been undertaken. The present work is expected to explore the untold and even neglected history of the area.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEACH

Objective of the research is to reveal the settlement pattern in the three district of North Bengal (Malda, North and South Dinajpur). This study also intends to focus on the central place aspects of Bangarh (South Dinajpur), Amati (North Dinajpur) and Asuragarh (North Dinajpur). The excavated ruins from Bangarh put Bengal on the archaeological map of ancient regions of India where civilization flourished quite early.

Known variously as *Koṭivarṣa*, *Soṇitapura*, *Umāvana* and *Devikoṭa*, this city rose to prominence in the Mauryan period. Amati, seems to be the site of the capital city of Bengal founded by Rāmapāla, the Pāla king in the late eleventh century. The findings from Asuragarh and the morphology of Asuragarh proves that it was a contemporary site of Bangarh and Mahasthangarh. These settlements are encircled by many minor sites flourished at deferent point of time. In this thesis, the central place theory was applied on these three different archaeological sites to pursue the relevant factors of central place issues in archaeological context.

Time Limit

The time limit of the thesis is from c. 300 BCE to 1200 CE. The entire ancient time, particularly the Hindu period, has been taken as time limit of the dissertation. The study starts with the finding of the Mauryan Brāhmī inscription of Mahasthangarh to the end of Sena power. Further, the time span of the proposal is bigger one, because of its archaeological leaning. Extant remains of archaeology always, it is seen, take longer span of time for indicating any changes in the form and nature.

Previous Study

The colonial masters as part of their official duties brought the archaeological remains of the study area under discussion in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the subject of archaeology, the colonial administrators were interested in translating of ancient epigraphs, not in field archaeology. Wilkins first read the inscriptions of the Pāla period found from Bengal and Bihar. He was followed by Broadly, Beglar, Kittoe, Cunningham, Anderson, Bloch, Buchanan, Addinson, Westmacott, Blochman, Kielhorn, Marshman, Strong, Creton, Monahan, Dalton, O'Malley, Stapleton and so on. Some scholars of Indian origin, R. Chanda, A. K. Maitra, R. Chakravarti, R. D. Banerjee, R. C. Majumdar, K. N. Dikshit, K. G. Goswami and so on, also made valuable contributions in the study. In the post colonial period systematic studies were carried out by D. C. Sircar, N. R. Roy, B. C. Law, P. Niyogi, S. Hossain, D. K. Chakravarti, D. C. Sen, M. S. Bhattacharyya, M. Bhattacharya, G. Sengupta, S. Panja and so on. Little but valuable efforts have been made by the regional historians like H. Sarkar, A. Roy, A. Basak, D. Roy and many more.

Methodology

The present study is designed to bring to light hitherto neglected archaeological sites of the ancient and early medieval period of the three districts of North Bengal (Malda, North and South Dinajpur). For the purpose of this research work, many materials and sources are collected through field survey and from the government museums, private collections and printed materials. For this, present scholar visited some archaeological sites, Indian Museum, National Museum, State Museums, collection of the private collectors. Oral traditions of the inhabitants of the sites have also collected through interview. The secondary sources for the study have been collected through bibliography.

The **introductory** chapter explains the limit of the study area, aims and objectives of the study, time frame, limitations of the previous study and the need of this thesis.

The **second** chapter explains the historical geography of the study area. In this chapter, an attempt is made to discuss the changes in territorial divisions, nomenclature, administration and their impact on the social life of the people. The study area was anciently known by different names in the changing scenario of time. Puṇḍravardhana, Matsya, Gauḍa and Varendra were the old name of our study area. Right from the time of the Vedas, this part of land was an important centre of human activities, till today. In respect of the ancient geography of our study area that even in medieval times a part of the area was known as Matsyadeśa. We ought to throw lights on this interesting issue as there are different claims about the identification of *Matsya*, regarded as a Mahājanapada.

It has now become possible to correctly identify the Vyāghrataṭi *maṇḍala*, which was wrongly identified by the scholars till date with the Sundarban region. This study suggests the land lying between the river Kosi and Mahananda was in all probability known as the Vyāghratati *maṇḍala*.

In the **third** chapter, the process of urbanization and geopolitics of the study area have been discussed. Here the central place theory is applied to identify the urban patterns of the archaeological sites. The process of urbanization, as the archaeological sources suggests, was started right from the time of the period of second urbanization of India. The archaeological data identified that the study area was a part and parcel of the ancient

Gangetic valley urbanization of North India. In this chapter, the process of Aryanization has been examined as a tool of urbanization.

It would appear that a number of big cities of Bengal were built in our study area. These were Koṭivarṣa, Gauḍa, Rāmāvati, Pānduā, and Tāṇḍa. The study area, as like as the remaining part of Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* was full of urban centers. Some of the settlements were quite big, viz, Bangarh, Asuragarh, Gauḍa, Maheṇḍra and Rāmāvati, which were also surrounded by numerous minor urban centres.

The study area have two central places of the second urbanization period, viz, Bangarh and Panchbibi and four central places of third urbanization period, viz, Kandaran, Amati, Pichli, and Ekdala-Bairhatta.

The **fourth** chapter deals with the political scenario and power structure of the study area. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to fill up the gaps of the obscure sides of the political history of North Bengal. The study area, at least from the beginning of the Vedic age, was an important political centre in the pan-Indian concept.

This thesis dealt with 5 new inscriptions (A fragmented Baigrama CPI, Nagavasū CPI, Mahatī-Raktamālā CPI, Second Mahatī Raktamālā CPI and Mastakaśvabhra CPI of Pradyumnabandhu) along with previous inscriptions.

Chapter **fifth** is the backbone of this thesis. This chapter is the result of the scholar's years long field survey reports. A site-to-site survey has been made to examine the local legends, topography, lethropedo character, spatial effects, treasures of antiquities and many more. In this chapter scholar tried to focus on the new findings only, which have not yet been discussed. This chapter dealt with such kind of archaeological sites, which are lying completely unprotected and have become an open field for the antique smugglers. The archaeological sites of this part of land have been destroying not by these morons only, the growing population, lack of awareness of the people about the historical values of the artefacts and encroachment of population on the archaeological sites are also responsible. Here an example of ignorance can be relevant. When a sculpture is recovered from a place, the busybodies of that place usually arrive and take possession of the antique to collect donations from the godly rural people. Because of this condition, the district authorities fail to take the sculpture in their custody. After some days, when

the enthusiasm and donation of the godly people become wane, the sculpture remains unprotected and taking advantage of the situation, the antique hunters become active. The Baragram site is the best example. Now not a single artefact is left. But fortunately present scholar takes some pictures of the antiquities of Baragram. In this chapter an attempt has been made to identify the present location of Jagaddala Monastery.

The **sixth** chapter is the conclusion of the thesis, which summarizes the important findings of the study area. It also discusses the value of the study and also the weaknesses.

Though the research work revealed many important information of the study area, like other scientific field research this time-bound project also have limitations. As we have mentioned heretofore that the study is based on the surface collections from the archaeological sites, sometimes access to some of these sites become difficult due to some unavoidable situations. In some cases, accesses to the private collectors become troublesome due to collectors' unfair motives. The most important lacuna for not only this work but for the entire research world is that, the unawareness of the inhabitants of the study area regarding their culture and history. For this reason the unholy personnel make selling of the artefacts as their way of livelihood. Another important weakness of the study is that the unavailability of large-scale archaeological excavation reports. We have only a portion of the mound of Bangarh and Ballalhati have been excavated so far. Most of the sites of the study area, particularly the Asuragarh mound, Ganeshvita, mounds of the Kandaran region, will be vanished by the encroachment of increasing population and agricultural works. In respect of the manuscripts of the study area, lack of initiatives of preserving and reading, are going to be vanished completely from the realm of history.

In this context, however, more detailed scientific excavations can be carried out at different sites on the basis of their importance which may reveal more information of the human activities of the past. These efforts will help us to understand the epigraphic data and the interpretations of the sites with more accuracy. The future excavations will also increase the possibility of tourism. If the accurate identification of the Jagaddala

monastery after excavating the proposed areas has been done, then this area can be a great place of interest for the Buddhist world.