

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY OF ASSAM



Indra (bronze) Kāhiliṭpārā



Natarāja (Stone), C. 14th Cent., Ambari, Guwahati

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY OF ASSAM

(Pre-Ahom Period)

R. D. CHOUDHURY



1985
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Foreword

The land of the 'Seven Sisters' occupies a significant place in the cultural history of India. Nature has showered on this land its bountiful gift of flora and fauna. Beginning from the hoary antiquity, this north-eastern part of the country has made its contribution, in variegated forms, to several cultural facets.

The two great epics, the Kālikā Purāṇa, several classical Sanskrit works and inscriptions refer to the land of Kāmarūpa and to Prāgyotiṣhpura. The literary accounts and the rich plethora of legends have immortalised this land as a part of paradise *par excellence*.

The valley of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley have furnished a valuable source material for the history of the land. This evidence, along with the testimony of the Chinese and other sources, has been of immense use. It has proved that the Indian culture developed in this part of the country since the proto-historic times. Welcome light has also been thrown on the inter-relations between the greater Assam and the regions of Bengal, Nepal and China.

So far only a few ancient sites in Assam have been excavated. The archaeological exploration work, conducted till now, is not adequate. With the recent opening of the new circle of the north-eastern India by the Archaeological Survey of India, it is hoped that the work will progress in the area in the right earnest.

The present work of Dr. R.D. Choudhury entitled 'Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (Pre-Ahom period)' is a welcome addition to the previous studies concerning this area. Dr. Choudhury has utilized in this work the material obtained from his own survey work and also the evidence from other relevant sources. He has tried to make the publication up-to-date, which I hope will be utilized by future workers with profit.

Sagar

4th April, 1985.

K.D. BAJPAI

Foreword

The fact of the Seven Years' War, 1756-1763, is a subject of great interest to the history of British America. It was a time of great change and development in the history of the continent. The war was fought between Britain and France, with the British emerging as the victors. This book is a study of the war, its causes, its course, and its consequences.

DEDICATED

TO

MY PARENTS

The war was fought between Britain and France, with the British emerging as the victors. This book is a study of the war, its causes, its course, and its consequences. It is a book that is dedicated to my parents, who have supported me throughout my life.

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Preface

It has been a little more than a hundred years since Assam first attracted the attention of scholars to study its past. The era was heralded by the publication of an article in *Athenaeum* (No. 2069, June 1867 22, P. 822) on the stone age of Assam by Jhon Lubbock as far back as 1867. He was followed by some British scholar-administrators, such as, J.H. Hutton, J.P. Mills and others who made a successful investigation of the pre-historic culture of Assam. Edward Gait's study marked the beginning of the second phase of investigation into the past of Assam. In 1897 he published his *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam*. In 1922 N.N. Basu contributed *A Social History of Assam* in three volumes. Soon after, Gait wrote *A History of Assam*. This work is monumental, but it does not give a fair idea about the history of the pre-Ahom period. In the meantime, scholars like T. Bloch, R.D. Banerji and others visited this region from time to time and published their reports in the *Annual Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India*.

With a view to unveiling the potentiality of the early History of Assam, through the Kāmarūpa Anusandhān Samity (the Assam Research Society), established in 1912, which gave birth to a journal, K.L. Barua carried on research which enabled him to write *The early history of Kāmarūpa* in 1933. The second edition of the book was published in 1966. Afterwards B.K. Barua wrote *A Cultural History of Assam* of which only the first part could be published. P.C. Choudhury went a step further with his research activities and contributed *The History of Civilization of the people of Assam from the earliest period to the 12th century A.D.* Published in 1959,

this book is comprehensive and deals with both the political and cultural aspects. The second edition of the book was published in 1966.

Though many a scholar contributed valuable papers on the pre-historic culture of Assam, yet till 1960, nobody had published the results of the research in this subject in the form of a book. For the first time, A.H. Dani included it in his *Pre-history and Proto-history of Eastern India*, published in 1960. T.C. Sarma conducted an extensive study on the neolithic culture of Assam and the result of his research on this topic were submitted to the University of London in the form of a doctoral thesis in 1965. His work is undoubtedly of a pioneering nature. But it is yet to be published. He was followed by H.C. Sarma, D.K. Medhi and a few other scholars.

In the field of historical archaeology of Assam, so far no scholar carried out any research work applying modern methods till the time of taking up present study in 1966. As early as 1931, P.N. Bhattacharya edited the *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī* in Bengali, which deals with some of the inscriptions of Assam. R.M. Nath published his *Background of Assamese culture* in 1948. In this book some sculptures of the early mediaeval period have been illustrated. But the book is not at all based on adequate research. B.K. Barua accommodated a small chapter, on fine arts in his work, while P.C. Choudhury has dealt with the archaeological remains of the State briefly in section V of chapter VI of his book. Both these scholars, so far as the archaeological sections are concerned, relied more on the published data. Moreover, their main objects were to study the cultural history and political history and not to make an extensive study on archaeology.

With a view to conducting a research on some problem of the archaeology of Assam, I approached Professor H.D. Sankalia, the then Head of the Department of Archaeology, Deccan College, Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune, in 1966. He readily agreed to help and guide me. At his advice, I consulted at the beginning of my research various articles, papers, books, etc. pertaining to the history, culture, religion and archaeology of Assam. Thus, examining all these past records of researches in Assam, I thought that it might be possible to work on the problem of historical archaeology of Assam and when I reported to Professor Sankalia, he suggested me the present problem.

One may ask as to why the jurisdiction of my study includes only the Brahmaputra valley and not the whole of Assam. It is known that Assam consists of both hills and plains. The hilly regions are occupied by various tribes. Though some regions of the long valley of the Brahmaputra were inhabited by some tribal people, for the advent of the Aryans or the Sanskrit-speaking people from the west in the early centuries of the Christian era, they had to move towards the foot-hills. However, a few tribes continued inhabiting here and there in the long valley. But later they became Aryanised. Even today we find in Assam mainly two cultures, viz. the Hindu culture (the Muslims came at a later period and Buddhism and Jainism had

some pockets only) in the plains of the Assam valley, watered by the Brahmaputra and the tribal culture having many branches in the hills. Therefore, temples, images sculptures, etc. belonging to the historical period are found in the plains and not in the hills. For this very fact the jurisdiction of the topic confines to the Brahmaputra valley only (Fig. I). The Kārbī Ānglong hills which are almost surrounded by the plains, definitely were under the influence of Hinduism, as some temple ruins and images of Brahmanical gods are found in this hilly district. In other words, it can be rightly said that the major part of the present study pertains to the study of the Hindu culture of old Assam.

The upper limit of the period of our enquiry has been put at early Christian centuries, while the lower limit of the same has been fixed at the end of A.D. 1200, i.e. before the rule of the Ahoms, who came from upper Burma and established their kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley.

The work was taken up in the second half of 1966 and after acquiring the knowledge of the method of exploration and acquaintance with archaeology of some other regions of India, I began my field work in Assam. The work of field study was accomplished in two successive winter seasons spending about eight months. Almost all the archaeological sites of the valley were visited and exhaustive notes along with photographs, etc. were taken at the spots.

Thus, the work is primarily based on my own field data. However, other published data from the reports of the Archaeological survey of India and other relevant literature which could be obtained, were utilised.

Compared to the other States of India, in the field of archaeology, particularly in the field of historical archaeology, Assam is not very rich. No standing monuments belonging to the pre-Ahom period exist to present day. It is because of two reasons—rains and earthquakes, all the objects of archaeological importance of the period are scattered throughout. In the present work, emphasis is laid on the images because a good number of images of the Brahmanical gods and goddesses have been found here and there. However, variety has been given more importance than the quantity of the images. As most of the images are loose it is not possible to find out their exact chronology. However, basing on the same grounds a rough chronology is found out.

In addition to the icons and sculptures, coinage, inscriptions and architectural remains have also been included in our study.

Thus, the present work is the outcome of my research conducted in the Deccan College, Post-graduate and Research Institute, Pune, during 1966-1969 and was approved by the University of Pune for the award of the Ph. D. degree in 1970.

The manuscript was given to a publisher after a few years of the award of the degree but, unfortunately, it was lying with him for some years. So, the manuscript had to be revised and made up-to-date as far as possible. Meanwhile, a few

books on the inscription and iconography and sculptures of Assam were published by some other scholars. M.M. Sharma published the *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam* in 1978. The *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī* edited by D. Sarma was published in 1981. A. Bhattacharjee published *Icons and sculptures of medieval Assam* in 1978. J.P. Singh and N. Ahmed edited and published *Coinage and Economy of North Eastern States of India*, which is the proceedings of the seminar of the Numismatic Society of India held in Shillong in 1977. T.P. Verma's *Origin and Development of Script in Ancient Kāmarūpa* was published in 1976.

The work done by M.M. Sharma is not original. All the inscriptions discovered in Assam had already been deciphered and published by various scholars. He has only given some new interpretation here and there. However, he deserves the credit for placing the Nagājari-Khanikargāon inscription (5th century A.D.) at the top of the list of the inscriptions found in Assam from the point of view of chronology. Since the earliest inscription of Assam dates back to only 500 A.D., the name of the book should have been *Inscriptions of Early Assam* instead of 'Ancient Assam'. Since P.N. Bhattacharya's book *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī*, the pioneering work on the subject was published in Bengali and other deciphered and published inscriptions were lying scattered in various journals, Sharma has certainly done a work to be appreciated by compiling them in one volume and publishing the same in English. The *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī* edited by D. Sarma is nothing but the repetition of Sarma's work. Neither it could carry any useful additional information relating to the latest discovery of the inscriptions nor its standard is maintained. Rather it has carried some misleading information to his discredit. A. Bhattacharjee's work on icons and sculptures of Assam does not have either an introduction chapter or a conclusion chapter. It is a catalogue of icons only, since he has not accommodated a chapter or section on sculpture although the name of the book is '*Icons and Sculptures of early and mediaeval Assam*'. The book has many wrong informations relating to the material of the execution of icons, identification of the sex of the icons, find place and so forth. In our review of the book, it has been discussed in details (*BASM* Vol. IV pp. 67-70). In fact, it is dangerous to rely on this type of books since it contains many wrong and misleading information.

B.N. Mukherjee's monograph '*East Indian Art Style*' was published in 1980, while B. Bandyopadhyay published his work '*Metal Sculpture of Eastern India* in 1981. In his monograph Mukherjee has accommodated a chapter on the art of Assam and an appendix on two inscribed images from Assam. The study on the art style on the images of old Assam is based on his K.L. Barua Memorial lectures delivered by the Assam State Museum, organised by the Kāmarūpa Anusandhān Samiti, Guwahati in 1978, when he came to Guwahati on invitation as State Guest to help the Assam State Museum authority for rearrangement of the coins of the Assam Provincial Coin Cabinet. Most of the photographs of the icons from Assam used by him were supplied by us. He also published some photographs in this monograph

actually meant for the Comprehensive History of Assam, a scheme taken up by the Publication Board, Guwahati, which should have been properly acknowledged. The proposed book, *A Comprehensive History of Assam* of which Late Professors. K Saraswati and D.C. Sircar were one of the editors, is yet to be published. However, Mukherjee has very critically examined the pieces of art objects included by him although we have not agreed to his views in certain cases as shown in the appropriate places. Bandyopadhyay in his work has included only three bronzes from the Kāhilipārā, (Narakāsūr hill hoard) which are being preserved in the Assam State Museum. He has wrongly mentioned in all the cases as "Kahilpara" (p. 117 & Fig. 62, 63 & 64) instead of "Kāhilipārā". In one place again he has mentioned as 'Kaklipara' (p.5). This has happened as he did not do field work and he quoted or borrowed it from some book of other scholars. He committed a glaring mistake by identifying a bronze image of Avalokiteśvara (a male figure) with Manasā (female figure, Fig. 64). This will certainly mislead the scholars. Without examining the original object it is dangerous to arrive at a conclusion by looking at some photographs.

After revision the manuscript was given to the present publisher. He sent the manuscript to the press and when some pages were printed, N.D. Choudhury's book '*Historical Archaeology of the Central Assam from Earliest period to the 12th Century*', (Ph.D. thesis) were out in the market. Again hurriedly this book had to be consulted. In fact, at the time of the preparation of Choudhury's thesis he consulted my work which was at that time in the form of an unpublished Ph.D. thesis.

It may be mentioned that the archaeological objects specially, the icons, found in the excavation at Āmbārī, Guwahati in 1969 and 1970-71 could not be included in the present work in the regular chapters as at the time of the preparation of the thesis, neither the excavation report was complete nor the excavation was completed. On the other hand, the number of images was large. Even now the excavation is not completed and the excavation report is yet to be published. However, the icons found in the excavation have been briefly noticed in the appendix. For our convenience similarly, notes on temple ruins from Madan Kāmdev Parvat and Mālinīthān and some temple ruins and old tanks have been briefly noticed in separate appendices. A few representative sculptural pieces have been included in this book. But looking at the number of sculptured stone blocks we are tempted to bring out a separate small monograph shortly on each the temple ruins at Mālinīthān, Madan Kāmdeva, icons from Āmbārī and bronzes of Kāhilipārā, (Narakāsūr hill). A monograph on sculptures from Pingaleśvar is also expected to be published jointly with Mr. C.D. Tripathi. Diacritical marks for a greater part of the work have been used. However, for anglicised and some well known names this practice is done away with.

It may be mentioned that entire North-East India including Assam remains to be properly excavated to ascertain the archaeological potentiality of the region and to throw new light on the unrevealed history and culture of the region. This was brought to the notice of the archaeologists of the country in the last annual conference

of Indian Archaeological Society, held in Guwahati in the month of December 1984. The present work is an introductory study of the archaeological wealth of the Brahmaputra Valley of the period under review based on mainly exploratory plus library work.

While acknowledging the help and co-operation received by me, I must say that I am greatly indebted to Professor H.D. Sankalia, Emeritus Professor, Deccan College, Pune, for his valuable supervision in completing the work, without whose help and guidance, it would have been not possible for me to complete this work. I am also equally indebted to my beloved and respected teacher Professor K.D. Bajpai, retired Professor and Head of the Deptt. of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, University of Sagar for writing the Foreward of the book.

I have no words to express my sense of gratitude to Dr. S.P. Gupta, National Museum, New Delhi and Mr. C.D. Tripathi, Addl. Secy. U.P.S.C., New Delhi and Sh. M.C. Joshi, Director, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, without whose help and advice it would not have been possible for me to make the final revision of the book and publish it. They offered their generous help at various stages of the printing of the book. I record my sincere thanks to the Govt. of Assam for allowing me to use the photographs from the Assam State Museum. My thanks are also due to Mr. R.C. Das, Mr. Samiran Barua, Mr. Gautam Sarma, Mr. Anil Das, Miss Protiva Barua, Mr. B. Malakar and Bisvesvar Goswami and others of the Directorate of Museums, Assam, for their valuable assistance. I record the assistance I received from Mr. Khagen Das, Guwahati. Whenever I felt necessary I consulted Mr. G.N. Bhuyan, Director of Archaeology, Assam. I am grateful to him. My thanks are due to Dr. Pradip Sarma for allowing me to use the plan of the Darparvatīā temple originally drawn by him. I offer my thanks to my wife Mrs. Mandira Dev Choudhury, who took the burden of my family and helped me in completing the work. While revising the manuscript I consulted Mr. Pradip Chaliha, Guwahati at one stage who offered me his valuable suggestions. I am very thankful to him. Dr. D. Chutia Secy. Kāmarūpa Anusandhān Samiti allowed me to use two old four colour blocks of two sculpture preserved in the Assam State Museum, originally prepared in connection with '*A source book of the Archaeology of Assam and other North Eastern States*' and '*A Reading in the History and Culture of Assam*'. I acknowledge the help received from the Kāmarūpa Anusandhān Samiti in this regard. At the last but not the least I record my thanks to Dr. Agam Prasad and his staff for taking up the work of publication of the book and Mrs. Sheela Chakravarty for editing the manuscript and carefully going through the proof etc. and offering her valuable suggestions for better production of the book. In spite of best efforts some mistakes might have crept in for which I crave the indulgence of the readers.

Guwahati
May 5, 1985

RABIN DEV CHOUDHURY

Abbreviations

A.B.O.R.I.	Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
A.I.	Ancient India.
A.R.E.C.	Annual Reports Eastern Circle (Archaeological Survey of India).
A.R.A.S.I.	Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India.
A.S.S.P.	Assam Sahitya Sabha Patrika.
A.Q.	Assam Quarterly.
B.B.M.P.G.	Bulletin of the Baroda Museum Picture Gallery.
B.D.R.I.	Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute.
B.S.O.A.S.	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.
C.I.I.	Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum.
E.I.	Epigraphia Indica.
E.W.	East and West.
I.A.	Indian Antiquary.
I.A.R.	Indian Archaeology—A Review.
I.H.Q.	Indian Historical Quarterly.
J.A.R.S.	Journal of Assam Research Society.
J.A.S.B.	Journal of Asistic Society of Bengal.
J.A.S.S.	Journal of Assam Science Society.
J.B.O.R.S.	Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society.

J.I.S.O.A.	Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art.
J.I.M.	Journal of India Museums.
J.O.I.B.	Journal of the Oriental Institute of Baroda.
J.U.H.S.	Journal of Uttar Pradesh Historical Society.
B.A.S.M.	Bulletin of Assam State Museum.
J.W.A.S.	Journal of Washington Academic Society.
K.S.	<i>Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī.</i>
M.A.S.I.	Memories of Archaeological Survey of India.
P.T.A.I.O.C.	Proceedings and Transaction of All India Oriental Conference.
A.S.M.	Assam State Museum, Guwahati.
B.O.A.S.	Bulletin of Oriental and African Studies.
Pros. N.S.I.	Proceedings of Numismatic Society of India.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A. GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Location of Assam : Assam, the easternmost State of India, lies between latitudes $28^{\circ} 18'$ and 24° North and longitudes $90^{\circ} 46'$ and $97^{\circ} 4'$ East. It is bounded on the north by the sub-Himalayan ranges of Bhutan, Akā, Daflā, Miri, Ābar and Mishimi. Previously, the whole region, inhabited by the tribal people, was under the jurisdiction of Assam. Now, this region is known as Arunachal Pradesh. To the west of this region, lies the territory of Bhutan. On the east the State is bounded by the Pātkai range, which defines the western boundary of Burma, the intervening ranges being inhabited chiefly by the various tribes of Nāgās and Manipuris. The hills bordering Burma occupied by the Nāgās were previously in Assam. Now, the Nagas have their own state—Nāgāland. Towards the south of Nāgāland lies Manipur, which comprises hills and plains alike and which is a full-fledged state now. To the south lies the Mizo Hills bordering Burma and Bangladesh. To the west, just near the Mizo Hills, lies Tripura, three-fourths of which are surrounded by Bangladesh. The south-west corner of Assam is bounded by the Meghālaya State comprising Khāsi, Jaintiā and Gāro hill districts, also bordering Bangladesh. Right on the west of Assam there are no hills. The southern portion of the western boundary of Assam touches Bangladesh while the northern portion of the same is touched by the Cooch-Bihar district of West Bengal, which was a part of Assam in the past.

The middle portion of the State is a plain plateau through which the mighty Brahmaputra flows. To the south of the plains of the middle Assam, there stand the

broken hills of the Assam range of the-Kārbi-Anglong. Slightly below this area, there stand the North Cāchār Hills of the same range. The Khāsi and Jaintiā Hills also can be called as broken hills of the Assam range. Cāchār was originally an independent state. It came to the hands of the British rulers in 1830 and later on it was attached to Assam as an administrative unit. As such the limits of Assam include both hills and plains (Fig. 2). At present there are only two hill districts in Assam, viz., Kārbi-Ānglong Hills and the North Cāchār Hills.

The Brahmaputra and its Valley : The plain area of Assam can be divided into two valleys, i.e., the Brahmaputra Valley and the Surmā Valley, named after two principal rivers flowing along these areas. The Surmā Valley comprises the southern plains of Assam, i.e., the plains of the Cāchār district, while the Brahmaputra Valley comprises the middle portion of Assam.

The latter is much more important from the geographical and cultural point of view. Through the heart of the province runs the great river whose ancient name is *Śrī Lauhitya*. In Assamese, it is called *Lohit* or *Luit*. The present name of this river is Brahmaputra. It enters the north-eastern corner of Assam through the Mishimi Hills of Arunāchal Pradesh where it is known as the Dihong river. Having entered the political jurisdiction of Assam, this river meets the Dibong, another river flowing from the north. Yet another river comes from the east and joins these two rivers at Brahmakuṇḍa near Dibrugarh. This combined water which flows westward, is known as the river Brahmaputra. It flows through all the plain districts of Assam and crosses the boundary of Assam near the Gāro Hills. Taking a turn there to the south, it flows through Bangladesh where it meets the Ganges. In fact, it is the chief artery and high-way of Assam which carrying the water of its tributaries flows throughout the length of the State, i.e., right from Śadiyā, the easternmost town of Assam, nay of India, to the western most town of Assam—Dhubri.

The Brahmaputra Valley comprises the district of Dhubri, Barpētā, Kāmṛp, Goālpārā, Kokrājhār, Sonitpur, Dārrāng, Lakhmimpur, Dibrugarh, Śiva-Sāgar, Jorhāt, Nogaon, and Prāg Jyotiṣpur. It is an alluvial tract of about 450 miles in length and 50 miles in breadth lying almost east and west in its lower portion, but its upper half tending somewhat to the north-east. The valley is shut up from the north and east by the Himalayan-ranges, from the south by the Kārbi-Ānglong, Khasi and Jaintiā and Gāro hills of Meghālaya. The western side of the valley is open and it joins the Ganges. In fact, this valley is the easternmost part of Indo-Gangetic plain.¹ The narrow fringe of the wall along the Cāchār district gives an easy access to cyclones to the heart of the valley.

The total population of Assam (Area : 47,257.2 square miles), including the hill districts is 1,46,25,000. The area of the plains of Assam is 24,525.2 square miles and its population is 10,557,603.² At present there are seventeen districts in the State : Dhubri, Barpētā, Kāmṛp, Goālpārā, Kokrājhār, Sonitpur, Dārrāng,

Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh Śivasāgar, Jorhāt, Nogaon, Prāgjyotishpur, Kārbi-Ānglong, Cāchār, North-Cāchār, Karimganja. About 60 per cent of the people of the plains belong to the Aryan stock. The tribals (mostly Bodo and rarely Garo) are occupying some areas here and there in this valley. Some parts of upper Assam are mostly occupied by the Āhoms and the Chutiās who belong to the Mongoloid stock. Physiognomically, they are different from the people of the Aryan stock. The non-tribal people, i.e. people belonging to the Aryan stock, physiognomically and culturally, are quite similar to those of other States of North India. The hills of Assam are occupied by the hill tribals who may, anthropologically, belong to Austric and non-Aryan stock. They speak their own dialects. In the plain, Assamese is the principal language.

Structure of Assam : Geologically, Assam may conveniently be divided into three regions, namely, the Extra-Peninsular region, the Indo-Gangetic plain region and the Peninsular region³ or Assam plateau.⁴ The Extra-Penninsular region is represented here by the eastern Himalayas. The Ākā, Ābar, Mishimī and the neighbouring hills are included in this region. The Brahmaputra Valley is included in the Indo-Gangetic alluvium. The Peninsular region or the Assam Plateau is formed by the ancient rock types. This region may also be termed as the Central Range and it includes the Gāro Hills, Khāsi and Jaintā, North-Cāchār Hills and Kārbi-Ānglong Hills.⁵

The Peninsular region lies along the continuation of the Archaeans of Bihar, but is separated from the latter by the Gangā-Brahmaputra Valley.⁶ This plateau can be divided into two parts. The eastern part of the plateau exhibits very intricate degree of squeezing as a result of which rocks are faulted and folded. The western part has undergone very little tertiary folding. The hills of the plateau are of relict type. The rivers, originating from this plateau have got comparatively lesser erosive capacity than those of the north. The Extra-Peninsular region is a zone of geosynclinal belt and comparatively less old than the former. Salient characters of the Indo-Gangetic plain is the extensive occurrence of alluvium. These extensive deposits of alluvium were brought down from the Himalayas by the river Brahmaputra and by its tributaries.

As far as the rock types are concerned, the "Assam Himalayas" or the Extra-Peninsular region has archaeans (granites and schists), dalings, buxas and gneisses.⁷ The bulk of the Assam plateau is made of gneisses, and granites; "with the diversified component" the gneisses are believed to be the oldest rock type in the province.⁸ "Besides gneiss (granitic in composition) sillimanite—quartz—schists, biotite—sillimanite—quartz—cordienite rocks, corundum—sillimanite—schists, pyroxene—horn blende—granulite, hybrid rocks, etc. are here included within the gneissic group of Archaean complex."⁹

Routes : Assam is linked with the rest of India only by her western boundary.

Evidently the cultural stream flows from the north of Central India to Assam through Bengal. The Ganges and the Brahmaputra played the main role in maintaining trade and commerce between Assam and the rest of India in the past. Till recently up to the date of partition of India and Pakistan, East Bengal (now Bangladesh) was the gate-way of Assam for cultural intercourse with India. But after the partition only a narrow margin is left in the eastern boundary of West Bengal to touch Assam. This is the route through which Assam maintains her trade and communication with the rest of the country to-day. Once the Assam-Burma routes, one over the Pātkāi Hills in the North-East, leading from Lidu-Mārgheritā road to China through the Hukawang Valley in Burma and the other through Manipur and Cāchār in the South-East or South of Assam, played important parts in the movement of the populace of those regions and in cultural exchange. Even today India has a fair route to Burma, *via* Manipur. The third route was by sea or the Bay of Bengal passing through Bengal or Burma. The fourth route was in the past through Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan.¹⁰ At present there are some routes from the North bank of the Brahmaputra to Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan.

Prāgjyotisha and Kāmarūpa : *The Ancient Names of Assam* : Historically, the name of the State, "Assam", is of quite recent origin. The ancient names of this land are Prāgjyotisha and Kāmarūpa. "Prāgjyotisha" is older than Kāmarūpā. It is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.¹¹ According to the *Raghuvamśa*¹² of Kālidās, the Prāgjyotisha country sprawled to the east where the river Brahmaputra flows. *Prāgjyotishapura* was the capital of the kingdom of Prāgjyotisha. Both the names are identical with each other. This Prāgjyotishapura has been identified with Guwahati. However, inscriptional evidence belonging to the pre-Āhom period for this identification is lacking.

The interpretations of the meaning of the word *Prāgjyotishapura* are given variously by various scholars. Gait means to say that Prāgjyotishapura means the city of "Eastern Astrology".¹³ The literal translation of the word should be the "Glory of the East" or the "Light of the East". The name of the city, it seems, had something to do with astronomy and not astrology. Gait's interpretation, therefore, seems to be wrong. K.L. Barua says, "It is significant that to the immediate East of the town of Guwahati there is a temple on the crest of a hill, known as *Citrācalā*, and this temple is dedicated to the Navagrahas or the nine planets. It is probable that this temple is the origin of the name of Prāgjyotishapura."¹⁴ According to B. Kākati, Prāgjyotisha seems to be connected with the topographical features of the land rather than with any religious cult. He thinks that the topographical features correspond to an Austric formation like *Pagar-juh (jo)-tic (c=ch)*, meaning a region of extensive high hills. Hence, Prāgjyotisha may be a case of Sanskritisation of a non-Aryan formation.¹⁵ Whatever may be the derivative forms of the word, it is likely that in Prāgjyotishapura,

identified with modern Guwahati, astronomy (*jyotirvidyā*) was practised in ancient times.

This country came to be known as Kāmarūpa probably in the early mediaeval times. It is referred to in many early mediaeval works.¹⁶ However, inscriptional reference to Kāmarūpa first occurs in the Allahabad *Praśasti* of Samudragupta.¹⁷ According to a popular legend Kāmadeva was burnt by Siva here. But Kāmadeva, by dint of his divine power again came to life (rūpa). Hence, the land came to be known as Kāmarūpa.

The present name of Kāmarūpa (Kām rūp) is applied to a modern district only. But in the past Kāmarūpa kingdom included a part of Bihar and North Bengal also. When the country was known as Prāgjyotisha, its western limit extended up to North Bihar.¹⁸

The name 'Assam' was applied to this land in A.D. 13th century, when the Āhoms came to the Brahmaputra Vally. These Āhoms belonged to the Shān tribe of Mongolian origin. As regards the derivation of the name Assam, there are controversies. Some say that it is derived from the *Āhoms*. According to others, *Assam*, the Assamese name of the province, is derived from Asama meaning unequal or peerless. B. Kakati thinks that *Assam* may be a later-day Sanskritisation of an earlier form of *Āchām* meaning in Tāi undefeated.¹⁹ Baden Powell thinks that *Assam* may be derived from Hā-com, meaning the low levelled country.²⁰ The Hā-com is a Bodo word. According to another interpretation of some local people, the name may be derived from *a-sama* meaning not plain. Whatever may be the derivative form of *Assam*, it seems that the present name of the State had something to do with her people or her physical features.

B. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The early history of Assam is shrouded in obscurity. Traditionally, the earlier kings of Assam belonged to non-Aryan tribes, such as, Dānavas and Asuras. Mahir-aṅga Dānava is said to be the first ruler of this country. He was followed by a few Dānava rulers of whom Ghataka was the last.

Ghataka was supplanted by Narakāsura. Naraka is mentioned in both the epics.²¹ According to the popular legend, Naraka was the son of Viṣṇu who assumed the shape of a boar to lift up Pṛthivī, mother of Naraka. It is also said that afterwards he was brought up by Janaka, the king of Videha. Naraka grew up and defeated Ghataka of Prāgjyotisha. Thereupon Viṣṇu installed him as the king of Prāgjyotisha. Afterwards he became friendly with Bānāsura, whose capital was in Sonitpur, modern Tezpur, and grew irreligious. Ultimately, Naraka was killed by Viṣṇu for his evil deeds. After the death of Naraka, his son Bhagadatta, who is

mentioned in the Mahābhārata, and who participated in the Kurukshetra war became the king of Prāgjyotisha. After him Vajradatta came to the throne. It is not known who were the immediate successors of Vajradatta.

The Kings of the Pushyavaraman family : The political history of Assam begins with the foundation of the Varman dynasty. In this connection, we get most valuable data from the account of Hiuen Tsang as well as from the Nidhānpur grant,²² the Doobi grant²³ and three clay seals of Bhāskaravarman, found at Nālandā.²⁴ The Nidhānpur grant contains the names of thirteen kings (and most of their queens also), all of whom belonged to the family of Pushyavarman. It is stated in the same grant that "when 3,000 years had passed after Vajradatta, Pushyavarman, the founder of the new line came to the throne of Prāgjyotisha."²⁵ From this it is quite evident that the people of this region of about A.D. 6th or 7th century (as A.D. 7th century is the date of the Nidhānpur inscription) did not know the date of Naraka correctly. Simply they knew those rules from the current tradition. The '3,000 years' mentioned in the epigraph is a vague term or it means a number of years.

These inscriptions are not dated, and, therefore, it becomes a problem to fix the date of Pushyavarman, the first ruler and the dates of kings of his family. However, the date of Bhāskaravarman, the last king of this line, is roughly known to us as he was contemporary of Harshavardhan. Accordingly, he is placed in the first half of A.D. 7th century. Calculating four generations to a century in the usual way, P.N. Bhattacharya has placed Pushyavarman in the middle of A.D. 4th century.²⁶ K.L. Barua²⁷ supports the view of Bhattacharya and considers Pushyavarman to be the frontier king of pillar Kāmarūpa, mentioned in the Allahabad inscription. But the assumption of the title, *Maharajadhiraja* indicates his independent status. No details of Pushyavarman was followed by Samudravarman. The Doobi grant indicates that he did not witness any political chaos. The assumption of the title of *Maharajadhiraja* suggests that like his father he ruled as an independent king. He was followed by Balavarman. Like his predecessors, Balavarman also assumed the title of *Maharajadhiraja*. But this Balavarman cannot be identified with the one mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription, as is well examined by P.C. Choudhury.²⁸

Kalyānavarman was the son and successor of Balavarman. He was succeeded by Gaṇapativarman, who was followed by his son Mahendravarman. He performed two horse-sacrifices. It appears that he was the first among this line of kings to celebrate horse-sacrifices, which undoubtedly indicates some political victory. Mahendra was followed by his son Nārāyanavarman, who does not appear to have been much renowned like Kalyānavarman and Gaṇapativarman.

The next ruler is Mahābhūtiavarman, the son and successor of Nārāyanavarman. He is named as Bhūtiavarman in the *Harsha-carita* of Bāṇabhatta, which mentions some of the names of the rulers of ancient Assam. The Nidhanpur copper-plate grant was originally issued by this king. But when these were burnt, Bhāskara re-issued them.

The Baḍagangā rock inscription of this king informs us that he performed a horse sacrifice, but to celebrate what political gain he performed this sacrifice is not mentioned. This inscription is dated to 24 Gupta Era (G.E.), corresponding to A.D. 554. This inscription is of great importance; as it offers some clue to the king. Bhattasali²⁹ has placed Bhūtivarman roughly in between A.D. 520 and A.D. 560. Both of his inscriptions bear witness to the new vigour that was added to the kingdom. He might have contested with the late Guptas and extended his sway to Bengal, as K.L. Barua³⁰ thinks.

After Bhūtivarman, his son Chandramukhavarman came to the throne. Chandramukhavarman was followed by his son Sthitavarman, who was, probably, installed a king during the life time of his father. It may be suggested that Chandramukha's easy going career was responsible for the disorder in the kingdom, which was set right by the strong hand of Sthitavarman. Bhattasali has rightly remarked, "The performance of two horse-sacrifices by Mahendra, one by Bhūtivarman and two others by Sthitavarman indicates the growing prosperity of the ruling family of Kāmarūpa."³¹

After Sthitavarman, his son Susthitavarman, who was also called Susthiravarman and Mṛgāṅka, became the king of Kāmarūpa. This king was defeated by Mahāsenagupta, a later powerful Gupta king. As a result, Mahāsenagupta gained the whole of Puṇḍravardhan from the Kāmarūpa king and the western boundary of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa was pushed back to the river Tistā or Trisvota. The incident is mentioned in the Āphsād inscription of Ādityasena.³²

Susthitavarman had two sons, namely, Supratishṭhitavarman and Bhāskaravarman. Supratishṭhita probably reigned for a few years. These two brothers, immediately after the death of their father had to fight with a mighty invading army of the Gaudas, as is evident from the Doobi grant. P.D. Choudhury observes that this invading army probably belonged to Mahāsenagupta.³³ Supratishṭhitavarman died a premature death. He was succeeded by his younger brother Bhāskaravarman, the most illustrious king of Kāmarūpa.

The most memorable event in the career of Kumāra-Bhāskaravarman was his alliance with Harshavardhana. The life and career of this king is known from the *Harsha-carita*, the account of Hiuen Tsang who visited the kingdom of Harsha and Bhāskara, and from some inscriptions. Bhāskara made an alliance with Harsha, when the latter marched to take revenge of Śaśāṅka, the ruler of Gauḍa, who had treacherously murdered his brother. The joint army of Bhāskara and Harsha might have been a blow to Śaśāṅka. But, unfortunately, there is no concrete evidence to show that Harsha succeeded in conquering Gauḍa during the life time of Śaśāṅka. Scholars have different views regarding this incident.

When Hiuen Tsang was at the Nālandā monastery for the second time, two requests came from Bhāskara to Śilabhadra to send the Chinese pilgrim to Kāmarūpa. By that time Harsha was busy with the conquest of Korigoda. At the request of the

king of Kāmarūpa, Hiuen Tsang went to Kāmarūpa. Meanwhile, Harsha came back to the capital and came to know that the great master was in Kāmarūpa. He then immediately despatched a message to Bhāskara to send back the pilgrim. Thereupon, Bhāskara himself accompanied the pilgrim and both of them proceeded towards the west. Harsha received them courteously at *Kio-shu-ho-kio-lu* (Kajurgira, near modern Rājmahal).³⁴

Bhāskara was not a subordinate ally of Harsha. That Harsha treated this king of Kāmarūpa as his equal, is evident from the reception given to Bhāskara by Harsha at the Kanauj and Prayāga assemblies. The reasons for treating him as equal may be that Kumāra Bhāskara offered his help to Harsha to defeat Śaśāṅka and that Bhāskara invited the Buddhist pilgrim to visit his kingdom, which shows his sincere respect for the Law of the Buddha, though Bhāskara was not a Buddhist.

Bhāskara was well educated in the śāstras. The very fact of Bhāskara's inviting the Chinese pilgrim to his court is itself a proof of his love for learning. This also proves that though he was a devout Śaiva, yet he was tolerant of all other faiths.

Bhāskara outlived Harsha (A.D. 606—A.D. 647) by a few years. He can be placed with certainty between 600 A.D. and 650 A.D.³⁵

Immediately after the demise of Harsha, his minister Arjuna usurped his throne. At the same time, the Emperor of China sent a mission to India. The usurper humiliated and punished some of the members of the mission. Thereupon, some of the members fled to Nepal and sought the help of the king there. They got the help from Bhāskara also. With the joint forces they became successful in defeating Arjuna's force and took him to China as a prisoner. Soon after this event Bhāskara expired.

Bhāskara probably did not marry and so he was popularly known as Kumāra-rājā or Kumāra-Bhāskara. This inference is further strengthened by the fact that after the demise of Bhāskara, the line of Pushyavarman became extinct.

The epithet, "King of Eastern India", may have been applied by the Chinese sources owing to the fact that Bhāskara's kingdom included the whole of modern Assam, a large portion of Bengal and some portion of Bihar or at least a part of Mithilā bounded on the west by the river Kośi.

The Kings of the Śālastambha family : It appears that after the demise of Bhāskara there prevailed an anarchy in the kingdom in the absence of a king on the throne of Kāmarūpa for at least a few years. Afterwards Śālastambha came to the throne. Like the genealogy of the Varman kings, the genealogy of the kings of the family of Śālastambha is also known from some inscriptions. In all fourteen kings of this dynasty ruled over Kāmarūpa. But very little of the careers and achievements of these rulers are known as is known of the Varman dynasty.

Considering the authenticity of the record, Śālastambha can be placed in the second half of A.D. 7th century.³⁶ Śālastambha, probably transferred the capital from Prāgjyotishapura to Hāruppesvara, modern Tezpur, on his succession owing to

some sort of infamy or other surrounding question of his descent. K.L. Barua thinks that he ascended the throne in about A.D. 655.³⁷

Śalastambha was succeeded by his son Vijaya. The immediate successor of Vijaya was Pālaka, who was followed by Kumāra. After Kumara Vajradeva (Vajradatta ?) came to the throne. It appears that from Śalastambha to Vajradevo, all the followers of Bhāskaravarman held undisputed possession of the territories which were acquired by Bhāskara.

After Vajradeva, Harshavarman came to the throne of Kāmarūpa. Harshavarman made some conquests towards the south and the west and extended the limits of his own territory. He was, however, not allowed to remain as the lord of this vast land by Yaśovarman of Kanauj, who defeated and killed Harsha in a decisive battle fought probably not prior to A.D. 748. This was the year in which the Paśupati inscription³⁸ of Jayadeva, a king of Nepal, to whom Rājyamati, the daughter of Harshavarman was given in marriage, was recorded.

Harshavarman was followed by his son Balavarman II. Next we find the name of Cakra and Arathi in the genealogical list, but they did not rule. Then came to the throne Prālabha, the son of Arathi. After Prālabha the throne of Kāmarūpa was occupied by Harjjaravarmā who is said to be a powerful ruler. But nothing is known about his career and achievements. His Tezpur rock-cut inscription dated 510 G.E. (A.D. 829) is an important record for fixing the dates of the other rulers. The "Hajjarapukhuri", a big tank, near Tezpur, excavated by him, still commemorates the king. After this king, his son Vanamālavarman came to the throne. He extended the kingdom as far as the lines of forest near the sea-shore. His capital, modern Tezpur was beautifully decorated.

In the last part of the life of Vanamāla, the throne was abdicated by him in favour of his son, Jayamāla. Jayamāla's second name was probably Virabāhu. He was probably contemporary of Dāvapāla, the Pāla king of Bengal. Jayamāla, like his father, abdicated the throne in favour of his son Bālavarman III. No account is available of the successors of Bālavarman III. There is a long gap of about 100 years between Bālavarman and Tyāgasimha, the last king of the Śālastambha dynasty.

It appears that even after Bhāskaravarman, at least the eastern part of Magadha perhaps with the whole of modern Bengal, excepting Samatata, was under the Kāmarūpa kings. This supremacy lasted about 100 years till the overthrow of Harṣavarman (about A.D. 750). Vanamāla made some conquests and extended his sway to the parts of South Bengal including Sylhet, Tripura and Mymensingh and Puṇḍravardhana in North-Bengal. It seems, his successors Jayamāla and Bālavarman could not retain those territories. But Balavarman must have made fresh conquests in North Bengal.

The Kings of the family of Brahmapāla : The family of Śālastambha became extinct after the death of Tyāgasimha. So Brahmapāla, who belonged to a collateral

line of the same family as that of his predecessors, both tracing their descent from Naraka, was selected by the subjects as the king of Kāmarūpa, according to the Baḍagāon inscription.³⁹ It seems that during Brahmapāla's reign, Kāmarūpa was attacked by Jātavarman, son of Vajravarman of the then Varman dynasty of Eastern Magadha, when the Pāla power began to wane.⁴⁰ It is not known how long Brahmapāla ruled but it appears that when Ratnapāla grew up, Brahmapāla abdicated in his favour.

Ratnapāla, son of Brahmapāla, ascending the throne, fortified the capital Durjayā. It is not clear whether he or his father shifted the capital from Hārūppeśvara to Śrī Durjayā, identifiable with north-Guwahati (?). Ratnapāla ruled for a long time. His title *Parameśvara Paramabhaṭṭaraka Maharajadhiraja*, proves that he was more powerful than his father, whose title was *Maharajadhiraja*.

Ratnapāla had a son, named Purandarapālā. It seems, Purandara died as Yuvarāja and did not rule. Therefore, Indrapālā, the son of Ratanpāla, next came to the throne. Like Ratnapāla, Indrapālā also ruled for a long time. Indrapālā was succeeded by his son Gopālā. Gopālā was followed by Harshapālā on the throne. Then came to the throne of Kāmarūpa, Dharmapālā, the son of Harshapālā. It appears that Dharmapālā ruled for a long time. He was succeeded by his son Jayapālā, who was the last king of the dynasty. No details of these kings ruled in due order of succession. King Jayapālā was overthrown by Rāmapālā, a Pāla ruler of Bengal. The Pāla rulers of Assam were not related to the Pāla rulers of Bengal. The rulers of the Brahmapālā family of Assam were different from those of the Gopālā family of Bengal.

These rulers fought several battles with the compeers of Bengal for supremacy. Sometimes the rulers of Kāmarūpa and sometimes those of Bengal were defeated. But upto the time of Dharmapālā, it is evident from the inscriptions, the rulers of Kāmarūpa could maintain their supremacy over North Bengal.

The information regarding the rule of the Pālas in Kamarūpa was gathered from a few inscriptions of Brahmapālā. Now we have a valuable copper-plate inscription found at Gāchtal, which throws some new light on the history of the kings of dynasty. D.C. Sircar says that on the basis of the palaeography of the inscription of Ratnapālā, Indrapālā and Dharmapālā, Brahmapālā was assigned to the close of A.D. 10th century and Dharmapālā to the beginning of A.D. 12th century while the reigning periods of the four intermediate kings, viz., Ratnapālā, Indrapālā and Gopālā and Harshapālā were placed in the 11th century.⁴¹ The newly discovered Gāchtal copper-plates of Gopālā, as Sircar says, inform us firstly, that Indrapālā's history is apparently of the Deccan. Secondly, Ratnapālā defeated king Rājyapālā, a Gauḍa ruler. Thirdly, Kalyānachandra, son of Srīchandra, the king of Vaṅga, met Indrapālā in the battle-field. Lastly, Gopālā had his capital in the city of Haḍappakā. These are all pieces of new information, which shows that the chronology of the kings of Brahmapālā's line, so long accepted has to be discarded in that light.⁴²

As the dates of the Pāla and Gauḍa rulers, contemporaneous with the Pāla rulers of Kāmarūpa, are known, it is easy to know at least the approximate period of the rule of our kings also. In this way Sircar, says that Ratnapāla did not rule in the first half of the 11th century, but more than half a century earlier. In the same way we think that Indrapāla did not rule about the middle of the 11th century, but more than half a century earlier. Likewise, the new inscription throws fresh light on the history and chronology of the Brahmapāla line of kings whose dates are to be pushed upwards now. Another kind of information of great importance is that Gopāla of Kāmarūpa had his capital city of Haḍappaka, which was doubtlessly no other city but Haḍappeśvara, the capital of the Sālastambha line of kings,⁴³ identified as modern Tezpur on the picturesque Brahmaputra.

Reign of Tiṅgyadeva and others : After the conquest of Kāmarūpa, Rāmapāla set up a vassal king, Tiṅgyadeva by name, on the throne of Kāmarūpa. But soon after Tiṅgyadeva rebelled against the lord of Gauḍa, Kumārapāla, the son and successor of Rāmapāla. But Kumārpāla did easily defeat him. Afterwards Vaidyadeva, the minister of Kumārapāla, was entrusted with the administration of Kāmarūpa. Vaidyadeva also did not remain long as a feudatory of the Pālas of Bengal. For, within a short time, possibly, after the death of Kumārapāla, he declared independence and established a Brāhmaṇa kingdom in Kāmarūpa. He probably ruled till A.D. 1150.⁴⁴ It is not known who succeeded Vaidyadeva.

The Assam plates of Vallabhadeva,⁴⁵ dated 1107 Śaka era corresponding to A.D. 1185, refers to a new line of kings. Here the genealogy of Vallabhadeva is traced from Bhāskara, whom Bhattasali wants to identify with Bhāskaravarman.⁴⁶ The names of the kings, given in this epigraph, are Rāyāideva, Udayakarna and Vallabhadeva. There is a controversy among the scholars regarding the identification of these kings. It appears that they were immediate successors of Vaidyadeva or probably his successor, Buddhadeva. Probably either at the hands of Vallabhadeva or his successor Bakhtiyār was defeated in A.D. 1202.

Gācthal inscription, dated A.D. 1227, mentions the name of king Sundaradeva but no further details about him are available.

Sultan Giyāsuddin Iwaj led an expedition into Kāmarūpa and Baning in A.D. 1226. The next Muhammedan invasion was that of Ikhtiyar Uddin Yuzbek Tughril Khan of about A.D. 1257. Soon after these invasions, the old kingdom of Kāmarūpa seems to have split up into small principalities. By the beginning of A.D. 13th century the Āhom entered Assam through her eastern boundary and founded their dynasty.

The first Āhom king was Sukāphā, who came to Assam in A.D. 1228. He introduced the Āhom rule in the Brahmaputra Valley. He was followed by a number of rulers. The last king was Purandar Sinha, whose rule was ended by 1819 in all. The Āhom ruled in Assam for about six centuries. Soon after, Assam came into the hands of the British Government. During the rule of the Āhoms many a times the

Muslims from the west attacked Assam. But they failed to occupy any part of the State. The terror caused by the Māns from Burma to the Assamese people during the last phase of the Āhom rule is one of most dreadful events in the history of Assam. When the Āhoms were ruling in upper Assam, in some parts of the hills and plains of Assam, powerful Koch, Jaintiā, Kachāri and Chutiā rulers were ruling. The entire lower Assam including North Bengal was under the Koch kings.

The stronghold of the Āhom was in upper Assam. In the lower Assam, a separate kingdom, the present Kamatā by name, was formed. This kingdom included only Kāmārūp and Goālpara districts of Assam and the Cooch-Bihar district of Bengal. Ultimately, in the 19th century, it also fell in British hand.

C. CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF ASSAM

The earliest settlers in the eastern most region of India were the palaeolithic people. Since the last few years the Department of Anthropology, Guwahati University, has been conducting researches in some of the sites in the Garo Hills in the Meghalaya State, previously a district of Assam. The scholars who are investigating the sites are of the opinion that the tools, discovered there have affinity with those of the palaeolithic period found in some locations in South-East Asia, besides its similarity with other Indian palaeolithic cultures. This had led them to think that this culture probably migrated to South-East Asia⁴⁷ from this region. However, they feel that further researches in this field will uncover the fact. Stone-age sites have also been located in Manipur recently.⁴⁸

Until the discovery of the implements of the palaeolithic culture, it had been held that the Neolithic people were the earliest settlers in this region. Stone tools of this period have been reported for many years from several sites, both in hills and plains. At first, some British administrators carried out researches on it and discovered many polished stone tools. Later on, the Department of Anthropology, Guwahati University, conducted systematic exploration and excavation in a number of sites near Goālpara, North-Cachār hills, Kābi-Ānglong hills, and Gāro hills.⁴⁹ Amongst the sites mention may be made of Deojāli Hāding in North-Cachār hill and Selbalgāri and Rongrāmpur in Gāro hills which have yielded numerous stone tools of the period in question. This distribution of the neolithic site proves that the settlement of these people were mainly confined to the hills.⁵⁰

It is not known if the people of the chalcolithic period inhabited in Assam. Because, in the first place, no proper Archaeological excavation has been conducted in this region, and in the second place, we have not found any trace of such culture from any other source.

Assam, in her earliest period of civilization, witnessed the movement of the people of various strain.⁵¹ Linguistic evidence, popular customs and some of the

place names of the province indicate that speakers of the Indo-Chinese language of Mon-Khmer family which has been characterised by Schimdt as the Austric family of languages⁵³ came to Assam in a fairly early period. Though it is not possible to say exactly in which period they filtered into Assam, yet it appears that they penetrated into this province long before the advent of the Aryan or the people belonging to the Aryan stock from the West.⁵³

The next wave of Indo-Chinese invasion is represented by the various peoples speaking Tibeto-Burman languages. After reaching the Brahmaputra Valley they were divided into several groups and occupied the different hills of the State. It seems, they failed to occupy the Khāsi and Jaintia hills and it remained under the occupation of the Austric-speaking people. The most important group of the tribes of the Tibeto-Burman people was represented by the Bōḍos. They mainly occupied the plains of Assam. The Bōḍos, who are also known as the Kāchāris or the plain tribals of Assam, built strong kingdoms with varying successes and held sway over one or the other part of the province during historical times. There are some places and rivers in Assam whose names originated from the Bōḍo language.

When and how the Aryans entered Assam from the West is not quite clear. But it seems that they came comparatively at a late period.⁵⁴

The Vedic literature speaks of Eastern India as a *Malccha* country.⁵⁵ The *Mahabharata* refers to it as a *Mleccha* kingdom, which was ruled over by king Bhagadatta. In the same work it is referred to also as an *Asura* kingdom ruled over by the *Asuras*, i.e., Narakāśura and others.⁵⁶ This shows that the Aryans did not come to Assam at an early period, and that during the Vedic and Epic periods this region was ruled by the *Asuras*, who were non-Aryan and the predecessors of the of the Aryans. Ray Choudhury⁵⁷ while giving the description of the kingdom of Kōśala in the age of the great *Janaka*, says that the river *Sadanira* (in Bihar) was, for a time, the limit of the Aryan world in that direction and beyond it was a marshy region, not frequented by the Brāhmaṇas. Majumdar⁵⁸ says that gradually an increasing number of high-class Aryans poured into Bengal from the middle of India in the early centuries of the Christian era, either in the wake of military campaigns or for more peaceful pursuits.

All this shows that the Aryan migration to Assam took place at a later period and before that Assam was dominated by the *Asuras*, i.e., non-Aryans. Now let us see who these *Asuras* were. Banerji-Shastri has contributed two exhaustive papers on the *Asuras*, who are referred to in the Vedic and the Brāhmaṇical literature.⁵⁹ He has shown that these *Asuras* migrated from Assyria to India earlier than the Aryans. They first established themselves in the Indus Valley. Subsequently, the Aryans came and fought with them. The *Asuras* were defeated and pushed downwards. As a result, they came down to *Madhyadeśa* and made a stronghold there. But, afterwards, they were again beaten up by the Aryans. Ultimately, some of them had to go further to the East, i.e., Bengal and Assam, while the others entered South India (?).

The author further remarks that "Jarāsandha at Rājgir and Bhagadatta in Prāgjyotiṣa attest *Asura* individuality through Epic days and later" and that the closing point in the history of individual *Asura* chief centres round Bhagadatta of Assam and North Bengal (Prāgjyotiṣa) and Jarāsandha of Magadha."⁶⁰ Bhagādatta was an *Asura* king who was called Mleccha.⁶¹ *Mleccha* is allied to *Mlech*, Malka, an Assyrian form which is still used as Mlek or Malek in Baluchistan and as Malik in the Indus Valley.⁶²

With a view to finding out the real nature and content of the cultures represented by the *Asura* sites and determining their chronological position in relation to other cultures of the northern Indian plains excavation was conducted at Saradkel and Kuñjla in Bihar.⁶³ It is proved from both the sites that the culture represented by these so-called *Asura* sites was an iron using one and did not represent in any of its phases a completely stone or copper assemblage. It is reasonable to infer that the culture may belong to A.D. 110 or 200.

Therefore, our conjecture is that on this basis Naraka and Bhagadatta may be placed in c. A.D. 100 and that they and some of their predecessors, such as, Mahiraṅga, Ghaṭakāśura, etc. represented the early *Asuras* in Assam. P.C. Choudhury rightly says that Naraka and Bhagadatta might have flourished about A.D. 100.⁶⁴ These *Asuras* were none but the non-Aryan people.

After the end of the *Asura* rule in Assam, the Aryans might have started penetrating into Assam slowly. P.C. Choudhury, it seems, has rightly remarked that Bhagadatta might have come under the Aryan influence.⁶⁵ For, Bhagadatta is an Aryanised name. Moreover, Bhagadatta and his successor Vajradatta were the kings of the last phase of the *Asura* rule in Assam.

Apart from the literary evidence, we have inscriptional evidence to show that in the early centuries of Christian era, the Aryan people, who came from the west of Assam, settled in the Brahmaputra Valley. From the beginning of A.D. 6th century, it has become customary on the part of the rulers of Assam to create *agrahāra* settlement for the Brāhmaṇas and this royal policy was largely responsible for the settlement of the Brāhmaṇas and some other high class Aryans (inferior to Brāhmaṇas) in the land. The system of settling the Brāhmaṇas from Bengal and other parts of India was continued right up to the Āhom period. The same practice was in vogue in Bengal where the rulers imported Brāhmaṇas from various corners of Central India in a period between A.D. 6th and A.D. 12th centuries.⁶⁶ As a result of the spread of the Aryan culture, Kāmarūpa, as shown by Yuan Chwang became a noted centre of the Brahmanical learning in the early mediaeval period. Thus, with the Aryanisation in Assam, Hinduism became very popular. This relationship became very prominent and it seems that even some of the petty non-Hindu tribes came to become Hindus. By this time Sanskrit became the most popular language in the plains of Assam. This language not only became the court language during the historical period but also the medium of expression for poets and thinkers. As a result,



Introduction

by about the 10th century the modern Assamese developed as an Aryan speech out of Sanskrit.

The regimes of the kings of Aryan affiliation were ended (by the beginning of A.D. 13th century) as soon as the Shāns also known as the Āhoms, overran and conquered Assam. They occupied the parts of upper Assam and still their descendants are inhabiting most of the portions of upper Assam.

With the settlement of the Aryan people Hinduism became popular in the land, as we have already shown. Gradually, the grip of this faith became so tight in Assam that except the people who were occupying the hills, the whole bulk of the population of Assam became Hindus. Buddhism and Jainism do not seem to have been very popular in Assam, even though they flourished in Bihar and Bengal, its neighbouring regions. The reason may be that the people of the State were strong adherents to Hinduism and that the rulers of Assam patronised Hinduism only. Moreover, the hilly tribes of Assam had their own customs and beliefs affiliated to the non-Aryan faiths. Therefore, leaving Assam aside, the propagators of Buddhism and Jainism probably advanced south-eastwards by the sea route to preach the laws of Buddha and Mahāvīra in the south-east Asiatic countries.

Among the important cults that existed in Assam were Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śakti and Sūrya. Śaivism was popular in Assam from the early centuries of the Christian era and it became popular both among the aboriginals and Aryanised people. The numerous Śiva-līngas lying scattered in the ruins of the old temples belonging to the period ranging from about the 5th to the late Āhom period bear testimony to the fact that in the past this cult was very popular in Assam.

In addition to this, we get more comprehensive data pertaining to the predominance of Śaivism in this land from the epigraphs belonging to the pre-Āhom age. Prior to the king Dharmapāla (A.D. 12th century), all the rulers of Assam were devotees of Śiva. In almost all the inscriptions of these rulers invocations are made to Śiva. In the Nidhānpur grant of Bhāskaravarman, for instance, the invoking verse is: *Om praṇamya devaṃ Śaśi-śekhara-priyaṃ pinakina bhasma kaṇair-vibhūṣita*⁶⁷ and in the Doobi grant of the same ruler the verse of invocation to Śiva is: "*Praṇamya devaṃ Śaśiśekharaṃ priyaṃ piuakinam bhasmaka.....*"⁶⁸ In the Khanāmukhi grant Śiva is invoked as *Ardhanariśvara* (*Va idē tamardhayuvatisvaramadideva*).⁶⁹ That Śaivism of that period was a fully developed cult with various sub-cults can be seen from the various names of Śiva such as *Heṭuka-Śūlin* (Tezpur grant of Vanamāla), *Śambhū* (Guwahati grant of Ratnapāla), *Paramamaheśvara* (Tezpur rock inscription), *Rudra* (Nogāon grant of Vanamāla) etc., mentioned in connection with the erection of some Śiva temples and invocations in the inscriptions.

Apart from the archaeological data, we have literary evidence to show the popularity of Śaivism in old Assam. This fact is mainly substantiated by the *Kalika-purāṇa*,⁷⁰ a work of about A.D. 10th century and the *Yogin-Tantra*,⁷¹ a work of about

A.D. 16th century. Even now the cult is popular in the plains and some hilly regions of Assam.

The worship of Viṣṇu was evidently prevalent in Assam from early times, as it has already been noted that the kings of Kāmarūpa traced their lineage to Viṣṇu through Naraka. The Kālikā-Purāṇa refers to five sacred places in Kāmarūpa—sacred to Viṣṇu.⁷² Looking at the archaeological data that have come to light, it can be safely remarked that Vaiṣṇavism was in no way less popular than Śaivism in old Assam. Images of Viṣṇu are noticed in each and every corner of the Brahmaputra Valley, as in Bengal and other parts of India. However, like most of the Viṣṇu images of Bengal⁷³ a great majority of these images from Assam belong to a period ranging from A.D. 10th to 12th century. Images of Viṣṇu cult belonging to a period, prior to 8th century, are rare in Assam, as we shall show.

In addition to the iconographical data, we get epigraphic evidences to show that Vaiṣṇavism was a popular cult in Assam in the early mediaeval period. The earliest recorded reference to the worship of Viṣṇu occurs in the Baḍagaṅgā rock inscription of Bhūti-varman (6th century), and the king is mentioned here as *Paramadaivat-Paramabhagvata*.⁷⁴ The next concrete evidence is found in the Puṣpabhadra grant of Dharmapāla (12th century). It begins with an adoration of Varāhavatāra of Viṣṇu; and in the record itself the donee is referred to as a Brāhmaṇa, who was “from his birth a worshipper of the lotus-like feet of *Madhava (yo balaytaḥ prabhṛtimadhavapadpadmapūja—prapañca-racanamsuciram cakara)*.”⁷⁵ Bhattacharya has rightly remarked that Dharmapāla, at the time of issuing this grant, embraced the Vaiṣṇava faith.⁷⁶

Now, we see that both iconographical and inscriptional data prove that the cult became very popular during A.D. 10th-12th centuries and the same was introduced in the land in about A.D. 6th century. Prior to A.D. 7th century in all probability, the Śaiva cult was very popular in Assam, but side by side Vaiṣṇava cult did exist. The extreme popularity of the cult in the 12th century was probably caused by Jayadeva, the contemporary Vaiṣṇava propagator of Bengal, who composed the *Gita-Govindam*.⁷⁷ The Āhoms, who came to Assam from the east in A.D. 13th century also accepted the faith, though from the time of Rudra Singha (18th century) onwards they embraced Śaktism. Still this cult is popular among the majority of the people of the Brahmaputra Valley.

Just like Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, Śaktism was also quite popular in Assam. In fact, Bengal and Assam were the home-land of Śaktism. Eliot thinks that the birth-place of Śaktism as a definite sect seems to have been eastern India.⁷⁸ H.H. Wilson, in the preface to his translation of the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*, says that it is a singular and uninvestigated circumstance that Assam, or at least north-eastern parts of Bengal, seems to have been in a great degree the source from which Tāntrism and Śaktism proceeded. The origin and, later growth of the important elements of Tāntrism are to be attributed to the non-Aryans in ancient Assam.⁷⁹

But strangely enough, except the images of Mahiṣamardini and Cāmuṇḍā, images of other goddesses of this cult are rare in Assam. Images of Mahiṣamardini are found in many places in Assam, as in Benaal, Orissa, Bihar and some other parts of India. We have also noticed a few images of Cāmuṇḍā at Kāmākhyā. These images stylistically, belong to about A.D. 11th century. It is also a matter of surprise that in the inscriptions, there is no trace of Śakti worship, except a veiled reference in the grants of Vanamāla and Indrapāla to the temples of *Kameśvara Maha-Gaurī* and *Maha-Gaurī Kameśvara*. The reason is not quite clear. B.K. Barua thinks that the silence may, however, be due to the fact that "Śaktism represents a particular phase of religion which was in the main personal and esoteric", and so this cult had no connection with any public religious order or establishment. He further says that personal in origin, its tenets and history were preserved in a special class of magic and sacramental literature, commonly known as the tantras.⁸⁰ It may also be due to that that the goddesses of this cult were worshipped by the Śāktas in aniconic or symbolic form. Even the famous Kāmākhyā temple, the principal centre of Śakti worship, does not house any image of the deity in the *garbhagrha*. There are some other Śakti temples in Assam where the Devī is still worshipped in aniconic form.

Traditionally, Śaktism is considered to have its centre in Kāmarūpa with its chief temple at Kāmākhyā. Another famous shrine of Śakti worship is the Tāmreśvarī temple at Ṣadiyā. However, the present Kāmākhyā temple was renovated by Naranārāyaṇa, the powerful Koch King (16th century), and the Tāmreśvarī temple was built in the days of the Chutiās. Evidently, they belong to later periods. There are some other Śakti temples in Assam which were either renovated or built in the days of the Koch and Āhom. However, from the ruins of the Kāmākhyā hill, it is evident that there was some old Śākta temple, and this idea is substantiated by the extant Cāmuṇḍā images at the site. The Singri temple ruins also yielded a Durgā image.

The *Kalika.Purāṇa*,⁸¹ which mentions five sacred places to Devī in Kāmarūpa, describes many Śakti goddesses⁸² and it refers to the popularity of the worship of Devī in old Assam. The existing material,—records and remains, therefore, point to the widespread prevalence of the cult.⁸³ Even after the Vaishṇava reformation, a great bulk of the population remained as Śāktas and the temple of Kāmākhyā is still one of the great centres of Śākta worshippers, and hundreds of animals, birds are sacrificed at the altar of the Devī in the name of religion. In the past, even human sacrifice was in vogue in Kāmākhyā and Tāmreśvarī temples.

The cult of Sūrya also existed in old Assam. The antiquity of the cult of Sūrya is indicated by the very name *Prāgjyotiṣa* (meaning light of the East or eastern astrology), which finds mention in some of the early literary works, and in these nomenclatures like Navagraha and Shri-Sūryapāhār.

In addition to the literary evidence, we have sufficient archaeological materials to prove that once that cult was very popular in Assam, as also in Bengal.⁸⁴ Many

images of Sūrya have been noticed in the State. All these images belong to a period ranging from A.D. 6th to A.D. 12th century. Sūrya belonging to the Āhom period is very rare. Most of the discovered images of the god belong to A.D. 10th-12th centuries. It is probably due to the fact that some of the Sena kings of Bengal were devotees of Sūrya and possibly this caused popularity of the cult in Assam.

In Tezpur the ruins of a temple lead us to infer that originally the temple was dedicated to Sūrya. But we do not get inscriptional references to the popularity of this cult in Assam. However, in the Guwahati grant of Indrapāla occurs an expression, "*aditya-bhaṭṭaraka*", which Hoernle takes to mean Holy Āditya or Sun-god.³⁵

Sūrya Pāhār, according to a local belief, was an important centre of this cult. At Navagraha, Guwahati, there is a temple dedicated to the Navagraha.³⁶ It is a temple of later times where the deities are worshipped in aniconic forms. There are, however, at the present time, no distinct sects revering Sūrya and bearing his name in Assam. But the essentials of his worship are present everywhere in Assam and in many sects, more or less avowedly or in disguise. The present *Magha-bihu*, which is popular in the Brahmaputra valley definitely traces its origin from the Sūrya worship in vogue in old Assam.

Besides, the major cult images of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Devī and Sūrya, we have some references to other minor gods and goddesses whose ordinary representations are also found in Assam. The icons of minor gods and goddesses, such as, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Indra, Kuvera, Lakshmī, Sarasvatī, Manasā, etc. belonging to the mediaeval period, are found in Assam. But we have no definite knowledge of their cults.³⁷

Though numerous images of Gaṇeśa are noticed in the province, yet there is no sufficient evidence to show that Gāṇapatya was prevalent in Assam. Even today he is popular among the people of the plains of Assam as a minor deity and not as a cult deity. Now, it seems, except the worship of Gaṇeśa, Lakshmī, Sarasvatī and Manasā, the worship of other minor gods are relegated into background.

Buddhism could not get a strong foundation in Assam. Only a few images of the Buddha have been found in this land, but all of them are portable and they are evidently imported from the neighbouring regions, where the Law of the Buddha has its strong-hold. However, it is not known how and when they were imported to Assam. It is likely that some section of the people of Assam in the early mediaeval period were tempted to accept the Law of Buddha, as this was very popular in Bengal, Bihar, Nepal and Bhutan, the States bordering Assam and it may also be inferred that those few images might have been brought to Assam by some traders or some people who wanted to introduce the religion in Assam but could not do so, as the royal authorities were Hindus.

Regarding the existence of Buddhism in Assam, not a single epigraph of the early rulers give any direct hint. The expressions of 'dharma' and 'tathāgata' which occur in Bhāskaravarman's and Indrapāla's grants respectively have led some scholars like K.L. Barua³⁸ and others to think that Buddhism existed in Assam. P.

Bhattacharya⁸⁹ has rightly shown that the Nidhānpur grant of Bhāskara-varman in which the word 'dharma' occurs was issued from Karṇasuvarṇa, the place of victory (of Bhāskara), which was in Bengal. Probably, the locality of the grant had something to do with 'Dharma'. We know from Yuan Chwang's description of Karṇasuvarṇa that the place had many Buddhist statues and temples. Bhāskara, who had become liberal in views on account of his long association with the king Harsha, who was a patron of Buddhism, tried probably to gain popularity by the insertion of a passing tribute of respect to the local creed in his inscription.⁹⁰ However, we cannot say, basing on this passing expression, that Buddhism flourished in Kāmarūpa.

In all the epigraphs of the rulers of Assam, excepting the Baḍgaṅgā inscription of Bhūti-varman, prior to Dharmapāla (A.D. 12th century), invocations are made to Śiva. But Dharmapāla at last came forward to give up the traditional tutelary deity, Śiva and to accept Viṣṇu as the tutelary deity, who is invoked in the beginning of his Pushpabhadra grant. Dharmapāla was probably influenced by Jayadeva, the propagator of Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal in A.D. 12th century. Therefore, if there would have been any change in the religion, it would have certainly been indicated in the inscription of the local rulers.

On the other hand, we do not find any indication as regards the existence of Buddhism in the writing of Yuan Chwang. He has mentioned that in A.D. 7th century, the people of Kāmarūpa worshipped the *devas* and did not believe in Buddhism. Again, he has remarked that hundreds of *deva* temples existed in Assam.⁹¹ Moreover, Bhāskara-varman himself was a devotee of Śiva. Of course, it is true that Bhāskara had a deep respect for this Buddhist pilgrim and out of good feelings of his heart he invited the Master to pay a visit to Kāmarūpa.

There is a strong tradition current in Nepal and Bhutan that the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* of the Buddha took place in Kuśināra or Kuśinagara, a town in Kāmarūpa. Waddell⁹² identified it with the modern town of Śoālkuchi, near Guwahati and in the proximity of Hājo, where the Hayagrīva Mādhava temple exists. This Śoālkuchi and also Hājo are visited by the Bhutanese, Sikimese and Tibetan Buddhists. But the identification of Waddell is quite misleading. That Buddha breathed his last at Kuśinagara, a place in Uttar Pradesh, is an established fact, which has been accepted by all scholars. K.L. Barua rightly says that Waddell's identification is evidently wrong.⁹³ The Bhutanese (or Tibetan?) tradition is based on some unauthentic information. The Bhutanese also come to visit Hājo and some of them say that Buddha died at Hājo. Similarly, some of the Buddhists from Bhutan visit Śingri regularly with the same intention, i.e., to pay homage to the Lord.

The Tibetan historian, Tārānātha, in his treatise on the history of Buddhism, compiled in 1608, refers to the fact that the people of Kāmarūpa were the worshippers of the Sun prior to the advent of the Buddhist monk, Dhṛitika, who came there to convert the people from Sun-worship to Buddhism. In order to persuade the

Sun-worshippers to listen to him, Dhītika started pretending that he was an envoy of Sun-god; and having attracted their attention in this way, he revealed the Buddhist gospel there.⁹⁴ In the same way, it is now clear that the people of Buhtan, Nepal and Tibet, who think that Buddha died in Kāmarūpa were misled by the Buddhist monks. Therefore, it is to be sure, that their tradition is based on some wrong information. And, in this way, the Buddhist monks tried to attract and convert the people of Assam. But they were not given recognition by the Hindus.

P.C Choudhury has gone a step further to find evidence in some Buddhist works compiled at far off places from Assam, to make his argument strong that Buddhism did flourish in Assam.⁹⁵ G.R. Choudhury tries to prove that the Kāmākhyā temple was originally a Buddhist stūpa.⁹⁶ U.C. Talukdar⁹⁷ opines that Buddha died at Hājo. The theories of these scholars are not convincing due to lack of corroborative evidence. Therefore, on the basis of the above discussion, we can safely conclude that Buddhism was not accepted by the people of old Assam, as of to-day, and extend our support to the theories of B.K. Barua⁹⁸ and others who plead that Buddhism could not flourish in Assam. However, it seems that Dhītika or his followers, referred to above were partially successful in introducing some rituals of Tāntrik-Buddhism into Hinduism in Assam. Still we find some traces of Mahāyana Buddhism in some secret sects of Hinduism in this region.

Hinduism is the principal religion of Assam at present. The same past culture of the Aryans still exists in the Brahmaputra Valley with slight modification here and there. However, almost all the hill tribes have become Christian during the British rule. During the Moghal period, as a result of the attempts of the Muslims to invade Assam, many Muslims were left in the State. There are also Buddhist people of Mongolian origin in Assam, who migrated from upper Burma in about 16th-17th century.

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53. Hutton, however, has found traces of a Negrito substratum in the population of the inaccessible areas between Assam and Burma. They seem to have formed one of the earliest strains in the population of Assam. See *Man in India*, Vol. VII, pp. 257-262 and Vol. XII, pp. 1-18.
54. *Kāmarūpā*, Guwahati, 1967, p. 10.
55. Dikshitar, *I.H.O.*, Vol. XXI pp. 29f and Bhandarkar, *A.B.O.R.I.*, Vol. XXI, pp. 103-116.
56. Law, *op. cit.*, p. 152.
57. *Political History of Ancient India*, 1950, p. 77.
58. *History of Bengal*, Dacca, 1943, p. 564.
59. See *J.B.O.R.S.*, Vol. XII, pp. 243-284, and pp. 335-358.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.* There are some Bodos in Assam who write their surname as, 'Mech', which might be derived from *Mleccha*.
63. *I.A.R.*, 1964-65, pp. 11-12.
64. *Op. cit.*, p. 124. Kakati places Narakāsura in between 200 A.D. and 500 A.D. See *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhya*, 1948, Guwahati, p. 32.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
66. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 563-65.
67. *E.I.*, Vol. XII, p. 73.
68. *J.A.R.S.*, Vol. XII, p. 16.
69. *Ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 116.
70. Barua, B.K. *op. cit.*, pp. 143-144. Also see Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhya*, Guwahati, 1948, p. 11. This authority refers to fifteen places sacred to Śiva in Kāmarūpā.
71. *Ibid.*
72. Kakati, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
73. Bhattasāli, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, Dacca, 1929, p. 78.

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74. J.A.R.S., Vol. VIII, p. 139.
75. Bhattacharya, *Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvalī*, 1338, B.S., pp. 168f.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
77. Bhattachāli, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
78. *Hinduism and Bhuddhism*, 1954, Vol. II, p. 78.
79. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, pp. 413-416.
80. Barua, B.K., *op. cit.*, p. 148.
81. Hazra, R.C., *Studies in the Upa-purānas*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 194-258; also Gode, P.K., *The Date of the Kālikā-Purāna*, J.O.R., Vol. V, pp. 289-294. *Kakati*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
82. Gode, P.K., *Comm. Vol.*, Poona, 1960, pp. 1-18.
83. Eliot, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-90.
84. Bhattachāli, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
85. J.A.S.B., Vol. LXVI, pp. 113-32.
86. Chutia, D., *Some Observations on the Aniconic Symbols of the Navagraha Temple at Guwahati*, J.A.R.S., Vol. XXVIII, pp. 98-106.
87. Barua, B.K., *op. cit.*, p. 153; and Choudhury, *op. cit.*, pp. 427-428.
88. *Op. cit.*, p. 97.
89. *E.I.*, Vol. XII, p. 70.
90. The word '*tathāgata*', mentioned in the Guwahati grant of Indrapāla, leads N. N. Das Gupta to infer the existence of a *Sūrya* temple. See *I.H.Q.*, Vol. XXVI, p. 33f. The same word occurs also in the Puṣpabhadra grant of Dharmapāla.
91. Watters, *On Yüan Chwang's Travels in India*, London, 1904, Vol. II, p. 186f.
92. *Buddhism of Tibet*, London, 1895, pp. 307f.
93. J.A.R.S., Vol. II, pp. 39f.
94. Schiefner, *Taranathe de Doctrinae Buddhicae in India Propagatione*, p. 24; also Barua, B. K., *op. cit.*, p. 155.
95. *Op. cit.*, pp. 399-406.
96. *Sculptural Representation of the life of Buddha on the Buddhist Monuments at Nilāchal Hill, Guwahati*, 1964.
97. *The Place of Mahāparinirvāna of Gautama Buddha*.
98. Barua, B.K., *op. cit.*, p. 161.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The study of the aspects in the preceding pages offers an insight into the pre-Āhom culture of Assam. Here an attempt is made to review our whole study in brief and sum up the findings.

Possibly, it will not be out of place to write a few lines about the pre-historic culture of this region in connection with the culture of the period under review. If we peep into the pre-historic period of Assam and her neighbouring States: it is found that the palaeolithic people were the earliest settlers and they had their migration possibly from South India to South-East Asia through North-east India and *vice-versa*.¹ Evidence of neolithic culture has been found in many places throughout the North-eastern India.^{1a} On the basis of the present evidence, it can be postulated that there is no positive proof for an independent origin of the neolithic culture in Assam. On the other hand, there is ample evidence to show that neolithic culture of Assam bears a close affinity with that of South-East Asia.^{1b} It differs significantly from the neolithic culture of South India. But it has some common traits, only in respect of stone tools, with Santal Parganas and South Bihar.² This culture of Assam and her neighbouring States, specially Meghalaya, Most probably owes its origin to some source in the eastern Asia which may life in the high lands of South-east China and North Vietnam. It is quite possible that the Mongolians who came to the Brahmaputra Valley in successive waves brough the culture.³ Worman rightly says that Assam seemed to have served as corridor between the Indian mainland and South-East Asia through which neolithic traditions came to the eastern half of India.⁴

Assam received the Aryans or the Sanskrit-speaking people who may also be called Indo-Aryan speaking people from the middle of India or Upper India at a very late period. Before the advent of these peoples the "Asuras" and the "Dānavas" were ruling in Assam. The Aryan migration to this region took place in the early centuries of the Christian era. Bengal was Aryanised a little earlier as the archaeological objects prove. In this respect from the Mahāsthān inscription of the Maurya period we get corroborative evidence supported by the punch marked coins. By all means essential feature of an Aryan society was present in Bengal by A.D. 500, as the available evidence shows.⁵ It is evident from the land grants of rulers of Bengal, belonging to A.D. 600 and subsequent periods, that Brāhmaṇas belonging to various gōtras from upper India came to Bengal and settled all over this region. Assam received the Brāhmaṇas of different gōtras, mentioned in the land grants of the rulers of Kāmarūpa, from Mid-India. This shows that compared to other parts of India, excepting Bengal, Assam received the Aryan culture quite late, and not in a fairly early period, as is claimed by B.K. Barua.⁶ He further contends that Assam had contacts with India since the Mauryan period.⁷

This view requires an explanation. The Mahāsthān inscription seems to suggest the inclusion of North-Bengal in the Maurya empire.^{7a} There is little information about the socio-economic life of Kāmarūpa in the pre-Christian period and about its relations with the Mauryas.^{7b} Barua has made such comments possibly on the basis of the suggestion of this inscription. But, so far, not a single specimen of punch-marked coinage, which, might have in one of its periods of circulation, formed the currency of Maurya empire, nor any inscription of that age has come to light in Assam. Punch-marked coins in a good number have been discovered in the Bengal region.^{7c} However, if the miniature votive *stupas* and the caverns at Śrī-Śūrya pāhār, as Sarasvati^{7d} thinks, can be dated to c. A.D. 100 or 100 B.C., it—will not be difficult with more pieces of evidence to push back the beginning of of Assam link with historic cultures of India to the very beginning of the christian era to the Maurya age. Barua^{7e} might have also taken into consideration the identification of the place name. Suvarṇakuḍya, mentioned in *arthaśāstra*, as producing the best quality of *dukūla* along with Soṅkuḍiyā, a well-known village in the Kāmarūpa district of Assam. This identification was made by J.C. Ray, according to whom Suvarṇakuḍya produced the five fabrics of gold colour, known as *dukūla*.^{7f} It is supported by K.L. Barua^{7g} This identification may be right from the etymological point of view, but there is no corroborative evidence nor there is any strong tradition of exporting *dukūla* from the kingdom of Kāmarūpa or Prāgjyotiṣa to upper India in the days of Kauṭilya, the author of *Arthaśāstra*. But to be sure, from Gupta period onwards, Kāmarūpa had constant relation with other parts of the country. Archaeological excavation may throw new light in this connection.

As soon as the Indo-Aryan speaking people entered into and settled in the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam embarked upon a new phase of civilization. With the

spread of Aryan Culture or *Arya-dharma* in the Valley, Hindu religion in its various forms became very popular. Within a short span of time this faith could attract the mind of the people of the region in such a way that even some non-Aryan tribes also accepted Brahmanical religion and culture.

Amongst the important cults that existed in the Assam Valley were Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, and Saura. P.C. Choudhury⁸ thinks that the worship of Śivā prevailed in the region even before Naraka. But there is no archaeological evidence to support this theory. However, traditional demon king, Bāṇa, who is said to have been contemporary of Naraka is believed to have been devout Śaiva. But looking at the archaeological evidence, we can postulate that the cult became well developed in the early Christian centuries. All the kings of Kāmarūpa upto Dharmapāla, patronised Śaivism. There is definite archeological evidence to show that during the Gupta period Śaivism became a well developed cult in North India.⁹ Bengal was surely under the influence of this growing faith and it is evident from inscriptions that before the end of the A.D. 5th century, Śiva was worshipped in the linga form in parts of North Bengal.¹⁰ All this shows that the stream of this faith flew as far east as Assam and like some of the rulers of Bengal all the royal authorities of Kāmarūpa upto Dharmapāla regarded Śiva as their tutelary deity.

Vaiṣṇavism was popular in Assam from early time, for, the Kāmarūpa rulers traced their lineage to Viṣṇu through Naraka, according to a legendary belief. But there is hardly any doubt that Vaisanvism became popular in the land at least by the 5th-6th century A.D. We have archaeological evidence¹¹ to show that the cult became popular in Bengal by A.D. 5th century. In Kāmarūpa too the faith existed in A.D. 5th century, as known from the Umācal rock inscription.^{11a} Vaiṣṇavism, popularly known as Bhāgavatism, patronised by the Guptas, found its way to Bengal in the Gupta period and was firmly established in the Pāla period.¹² As in Bengal, in Assam also from the 8th century onwards the rapid development of the faith is proved by the iconographic evidence. The sculptural representation in the Guākuchī grant of Indrapāla (A.D. 100) show that though the king was a Śaiva officially, yet he regarded vaisnavism too.^{12a} The cult became very popular from about the beginning of the 11th century to the end of 12th century and onwards. The extreme popularity of the cult in the 12th century, in all probability was caused by Jayadeva¹³ (A.D. 12th century), the illustrious Vaiṣṇava propagator of Bengal, and probably due to this effect Dharmapāla (A.D. 12th century), a ruler of Kāmarūpa, who was previously a Śaiva, at his old age, gave up Śaivism and accepted Vaiṣṇavism.

The birth-place of Śāktism as a definite sect seems to have been eastern India, as remarked by Eliot.^{13a} Wilson also thinks that Assam or at least North-east Bengal seems to have been in a great degree the source from which Tāntrism and Śāktism proceeded.¹⁴ P.C. Choudhury thinks that the origin and later growth of some of the important elements of Śāktism and Tāntrism are to be attributed to the non-Aryans in ancient Assam and the foundation of both the faiths was largely laid by the

megalithic culture of Assam.¹⁵ It seems true that some of the elements, such as human and animal sacrifice, *etc.*, performed in connection with the Śakti worship in the State, were derived from the beliefs and customs of the tribal culture affiliated to the non-Aryans. That at least Kāmākhyā and Jāmreśvarī temples were great centres of Tāntrism and Śāktism is proved by the archaeological evidences.

THE KĀLIKĀ-PURĀṆA : This is believed to have been composed in this region about A.D. 8th/9th century,¹⁶ which gives the iconographical descriptions of several Śāktā goddesses. But, surprisingly, archaeological data, belonging to a period earlier than 9th-10th century, are very scarce. We do not get any clear-cut idea from the inscriptions of the Kāmarūpa kings about the wide prevalence of the cult in those days. However, several images of Mahishamardini, a few images of Cāmuṇḍā and Kālī,^{16a} that have come to light in the valley, conclusively prove that the Śakti worship was certainly prevalent in this region in the mediaeval period. Even at the present time, the Durgā-pūjā festival is performed most colourfully by the Hindus of eastern India. There are certain temples of Devī, for instance, Kāmākhyā temple, where the deity is worshipped in the aniconic form. Definitely this practice existed in the *Śakta-pīṭhas* of Assam in olden days.

That once the cult of Sūrya was popular in this land is quite evident from the very name Prāgjyotiṣa. Tārānāth^{16b} refers to the fact that the people of Kāmarūpa were the worshippers of Sūrya, prior to the advent of Dhītika, who spread Buddhism in Assam. It is also supported by the temple of Navagraha in Guwahati and Śrī-Sūrya-Pāhār. The present temple at Navagraha is, however, not very old. We have iconographic evidence to show that the cult existed at least from A.D. 6th century to the end of A.D. 12th century. Quite a good number of the images of Sūrya have come to light. Of them the majority belong to 11th-12th century. The cult became very popular about the same time in Bengal, as some of the Sena rulers became devotees of Sūrya.¹⁷ We have no much archaeological evidence to show that the worship of the deity was popular in the Āhom period. Unlike the other cult deities, Sūrya is not worshipped by the people of Assam at present.

The worship of Manasā was in vogue in Assam in the past, as in the present time. The prevalence of the worship of this goddesses in Assam in the past is proved by some extant image, belonging to about A.D. 11th-12th century. It is not unlikely that the worship of this goddess did spread to Assam from the Bengal region. At present the Khāsīs also worship snakes. But their worship is different and has nothing to do with the Manasā cult, prevalent in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Though we get images of the different deities of the Hindu pantheon, other than mentioned above, yet we have no knowledge of their cults. It is difficult to know the exact origin and spread of the different cults of the Hindu religion in Assam in a chronological sequence, as the archaeological findings are found scattered, and not in their original structure and position at that. However, we can

infer that different cults flourished more or less simultaneously in Assam, and in spite of the existence of different cults side by side, there might not have been any sectarian jealousy. This is comparable with the situation, as in Bengal.¹⁸

Buddhism and Jainism had some pockets in Assam, as is evident from archaeological objects. Traces of existence of Hinduism, Hinayān Buddhism and Jainism can be seen in the rock-cut sculptures at Sri-Sivya Pāhār. The miniature rock-cut votive *stūpas* and the rock-cut caverns at the place and at Pañcaratnaghāt represent the Buddhist relics. The Hindu divinities are represented at Pañcaratnaghāt by a *Śivalinga* of a ruined temple and the row of rock-cut sculptures representing Śiva Harihara, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, etc. at Sri-Sūrya Pāhār shows the existence of Hinduism at the place, while the rock-cut sculptures at the same place representing Nemināth and Rṣhabhanāth show the existence of Jainism. As such Sri-Sūrya Pāhār is a meeting place of three religions. Here, it appears that the miniature votive-*stūpas* and the caverns were chiselled in the early Christian centuries,¹⁹ while the representation of Jaina and Brāhmaṇical gods were sculptured about 8th-9th century. There are also other images of the Buddhist gods and goddesses, which are mostly of portable nature. Many of them must have been taken from Bihar and Bengal. With this small number of Buddhist and Jaina relics, it is difficult to say that Buddhism and Jainism were flourishing religions in Assam. On the other hand, all the Kāmarūpa Kings were Hindus. Hieun Tsiang reported in his account that there were hundreds of Deva temples in Kāmarūpa, Kūmar Bhāskaravarman himself and his subjects were worshippers of Devas. However, there were some people in Kāmarūpa who worshipped Buddha secretly and Bhāskaravarman had a great respect for the Lord. All this shows that though in the mediaeval period, Buddhism was not accepted by the people in Kāmarūpa, yet there were some pockets of Buddhism and so also Jainism. However, it is true that Tāntrik-Buddhism was prevalent in Assam, mixed with Tāntrik Hinduism. Traces of Buddhist rituals have been found in some secret rituals of Hinduism in Assam.²⁰

Archaeological objects of this state, specially belonging to the period under review, are not plentiful. Moreover, they are greatly destroyed by the well-known natural calamities—rain and earthquake. They are scattered throughout the state making it difficult to study their chronology. In all thirty inscriptions, the earliest being the Nagājari Khanikargāon stone inscription A.D. 5th century, belonging to the period under review have been discovered. Of them three are clayseals. But some of the inscriptions are not informative to a considerable degree. In all the epigraphs we find that the character of the script belong to the eastern variety of Siddhamātrikā or Kuṭila script, which is often called Early Nāgari. The language of all the inscriptions is Sanskrit. The copper-plate grants of the kings of Assam are quite similar to those of the contemporary kings of Bengal. Most of the four inscriptions are not dated. A few of them bear dates in terms of the Gupta era and the Saka era. Evidently, these systems of dating were borrowed from the contemporary inscriptions of the

neighbouring regions. The script of the inscriptions from Assam has a good deal of similarity with those of Bengal. But the seal of each of the copper-plate inscriptions, appears to have its own style.

The architectural monuments of this region are in ruins. They are not in their original places, and hence are in a great disorder. As such, the fragments of architectural objects are not fit for a comparative study. The *dvāra* noticed at Daparvatīā is of extraordinary merit. The carvings of the *dvāra* portrays the characteristic features of the Sārnāth School of the Gupta art. The figures of Gaṅgā and Yamunā, as in our *dvāra*, are also found in the *dvāras* of Doegorh, Tigovā, Bhumāra, and Nāchñakuthāra temples, belonging to the Gupta period. But they are heavy and rough in execution, while our *dvāra* with figures of the river goddesses is light and it has the sense of proportion and sensitiveness. However, the *candrasālā* design of the *śirapaṭṭi* of our *dvāra* shows close resemblance with those of the *dvāras* of the Gupta period, mentioned above. A *dvāra* of similar design has been noticed in North Bengal.^{20a} The *dvāra* depicting the figures of Gaṅgā and Yamunā preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta is also quite similar to ours. But the slight difference is that it is not so refined as ours. The simple plan of the ruined temple has early characteristic features.

The *dvāra*, found at Mājgāon, Tezpur, to a later period than that of Daparvatīā. It may be inferred that the artist in carving the image of the river goddesses of the Mājgāon *dvāra* followed the same tradition depicted in Daparvatīā *dvāra*. But here the peculiarity is that along with the figures of Gaṅgā and Yamunā, those of Dvārapāla and Nandī are also depicted.

The beautifully decorated huge *dvāra-śirapaṭṭi* from Tezpur is of rare type. It is assigned to A.D. 9th century. A stone slab from Tezpur bears on it a conventional representation of the *candrasālā* pattern, so common in the temples of central India, specially those in the Rewa district and at Khajurāho.²¹ A sixteen-sided *stambha* which is seen in Cole Park, Tezpur, is ornamented with a broad *paṭṭa*, having Kirttimukha at the top and the lower with dentils. Over the *paṭṭa* a shaft is round and "appears to be latheturned like the upper parts of the Western Chalukyan columns of the Bombay Presidency".²² It is possible to borrow something from central India to Kāmarūpa so far as the temple architecture is concerned. But the chālukyan columns, it appears, had no influence in Kāmarūpa for geographical reasons.

The outlines of the mouldings of the *adhishṭhanas* of the same motifs and figures as those in other parts of North India. The ornamentation of the *adhishṭhana* mouldings bears close similarity to those at Orissa.²³ The miniature temples of *śikhara* type, seen at Kāmarūpa, and Dīrghesrī show design, noticed in some Orissan temples.²⁴ This type of the *śikhara* designs sometimes is noticed also on the *śilāpaṭṭa* of some Buddhist sculptures of the Pāla school.²⁵ The *gajathara* mouldings seen at the *adhishṭhāna* of the Hājo temple belong to the pre Kailāsa temple, Ellora. Similar *gajathara* mouldings are employed in the ruined temple at Numāligarh, Guwahati and in a few places are noticed.

A peculiar feature of the Assamese temple architecture is that the level of the floor of the *garbhagṛha* is lower than that of the *maṇḍapa*. If we enter a temple of Assam, it is found that in order to reach the *vedi* or the place where the image of the chief deity is installed in the *garbhagṛha*, a *sopana* of stone is arranged, linking the *garbhagṛha* and the *maṇḍapa*. The temples of Kāmākhyā, Hājo, Umānanda, Gupteśvar temple, Singrī etc. have this characteristic feature. It appears this tradition existed in the temples of the pre-Āhom period, also because the extant ones are renovated during the days of the Āhoms and the Kochas. We do not know if these temples were built right on the *adhishthānas* of the old temples, but it is certain that these temples were built in the old sites. In some cases it is found that the stone slabs of old construction are fitted into the *bhitti*s or *adhishthanas* of the temples of later construction. At Mikirāti, however, a ruined *garbhagṛha* housing a Śivaliṅga is seen. It can be easily seen that the level of the floor of the *garbhagṛha* was lower than that of the *maṇḍapa* where a Śivaliṅga is seen in situ. But from the ruins of the temples at Kendugurī, Mornoi, it can be guessed Bāmuni fill, Daparvatī and Singrī T.E., that the levels of the *garbhagṛha* were not lower than those of the *maṇḍapas*. Low levelled *garbhagṛhas* are seen outside Assam also. The level of the *garbhagṛha* of the Kukudeśvara temple at Pur, twelve miles West of Junnar, is lower than that of the *maṇḍapa*.⁶ The same feature is noticed in the Ambarnāth temple and the Pāshān temple near Poona. The *garbhagṛha* of Bateśver temple North Bengal is of same style.

As regards the superstructure, i.e. *śikhara* of the temples of the period under review, we cannot have any idea, as all the temples have fallen down during earthquakes. It is difficult to have a clear picture from the stray architectural pieces lying in great disorder. However, the miniature *śikhara* design noticed on the *śirapattis* at Majgāon, Cole-park, Tezpur and rock-cut miniature temple designs at Kāmākhyā throw some light in this direction. We have reasons to believe that the pre-Āhom temples were constructed in the same style. There miniature *śikharas* reflect Orisian styles and they may be dated to A.D. 9th-10th or 11th century. It is possible that as the Pālas of Bengal were Buddhists, the Hindu people of Kāmarūpa, had more relations with Orissan Hindu people on religious grounds than the Buddhists of Bengal, in spite of favourable geographical factors. This reason may be responsible for the carving of Orissa miniature *śikhara* motifs in the art of Assam. The Gupteśvar at Singrī, although renovated at a later period, is evident that some old architectural members must have been used while renovating it. If the present temples was re-built in the old pre-Āhom style, is not very clear. It appears that the *adhishthānas* and the *bhitti* portions of the present Siddheswari temple, Soālkuchi are original and should be dated to c. A.D. 10th-11th century.

Some of the specimens of sculpture from Assam offer a good deal of stylistic similarity with those from other regions of India. The terracotta figurine from Daparvatī are more or less similar to those from Sagar, Raghurāpur, Bangarh, Pāhārpur and Nālandā. In fact, the terracotta figurines from all these places includ-

ing Kuṇḍilnagar and Daparvatīā represent the fifth school, i.e. the eastern Indian mediaeval school.²⁷ However, in style Daparvatīā sculpture is static while the Kuṇḍilnagar specimens are dynamic, and in date, Daparvatīā sculpture is earlier. The dancing scene, sculptured on a long slab of stone, preserved at Cole-Park, Tezpur, can be well compared with a dancing scene from Khajurāho, illustrated by Kramrisch.²⁸ No erotic sculptures from Assam offer similarities with the erotic sculptures of Khajurāho, Konārka, Ellorā and other places of India. This type of sculpture has its own peculiarity. Most of the erotic sculptures from Assam are depicted in the culminating point of their sexual desire. Probably, these sculptures were affected by growing popularity of Tāntrism in this region. The Pingalesvar ruined temple and the Madan Kāmdēv ruined temple have yielded quite a good number of such sculptures. Had these temples been not fallen down they would have definitely been able to attract the scholars and visitors to a great deal like the temples of the other parts of the country.

The figures of the male worshipper, mother and child the female pouring water from a pot, the male blowing a *śaṅkha*, sculptured in separate blocks of stone and stuck into the western *prākāra* of the Kāmakhya temple, are worth mentioning. The physiognomy of these figures, except the figures of the mother and child, suggests that they have some tribal feature. C.C. Barman²⁹ says that they were the product of the artist of the Āhom period. But the style and physiognomy of these sculptures are quite different from those of the Āhom sculptures. Our conjecture is that all these three sculptures were executed in the pre-Āhom period by some tribal sculptor. The sculpture of mother and child is finely done. Two mother and child sculptures, one from Bhinmal³⁰ and the other from Satrunjaya,³¹ show some resemblance with our sculpture. In both the cases the child is seated on the lap of the mother and touches one of her breasts. But the head of the mother in both the cases does not lean out of affection unlike the figure of the mother of our sculpture. The sculpture from Bhinmal is not refined. The affectionate embrace of the mother depicted in our sculpture is not seen in the other two sculptures.

The figures of the animals, i.e. buffalo, tiger, lion and deer and some other designs noticed at the *adhiṣṭhāna* of the Ghaṇṭākarna temple are so lively that their quality is unsurpassed in Assam.³² Flowers, creepers, animals, birds and serpent designs occurring on a *dvāra-śākhā* from Gāchtal are beautifully executed in a style which recall the art of the Pāla school. In Bāmunī hill, ruins of two large slabs of stone carry the lion-on-the elephant (*Gujasārdūla*) motif, which seems to have stylistic relation with the Pāla school of Bengal. In the Morar Park, Nowgaon, a stone slab is seen having the carving of a *ghaṭa* or *maṅgalakalasa*, flanked by two elephants, which strongly suggests later Gupta influence. Beautifully sculptured stone blocks from Ākāśigāṅgā show designs, as Ramacandran thinks, resembling the style of the Chālukyan art.³³ He further says that stone fragments from Gosāijuri showing *yavanikā* and other designs recall in shape and sculpture the art of South India, and

even Ceylon.³⁴ We have already said that chālukyan architecture and art had no influence over the art of Kāmarūpa. It is to be remembered there were some common architectural sculptural motifs in Indian art and architecture. The South Indian and Ceylonese art had also nothing to do with old Assamese art which was the product of the eastern Indian mediaeval school.

As in the fields of architecture and sculpture, in the field of iconography also, we find a similar picture. The image of Gaṅgā and Yamunā of the Daparvatīā *dvāra* are no doubt high in merit. They are the products of the Sārnāth school of art that flourished in the Gupta period, as mentioned above. The figures are slim in body structure and have proportionate limbs and elegant postures. In fact, such images of the river goddesses, depicted with the flying goose, are not seen anywhere in India. They have, indeed, enhanced the reputation of the Sārnāth school. The images of Gaṅgā and Yamunā depicted in the *dvāra*, preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta and referred to above resemble, to some extent, our images. Stylistically, it seems, that they belong to a slightly later period than ours. The Gaṅgā and Yamunā figures of Daparvatīā *dvāra* should be the best specimens of river goddesses in India in so far as the modelling is concerned.

The inscribed Viṣṇu image from Deopānī possesses some Gupta characteristic features, mixed with local tribal (Mongoloid) trait. It can be compared with a late Gupta image of the deities, preserved in the Rangpur Sāhitya Sabhā³⁵ Museum (now in Bangladesh). A similar image is also found in the Pāla art, for instance, the image of Viṣṇu, preserved in the Rājashāhi Museum,³⁶ bears the same style and features. However, a slight difference is marked. The facial appearance of the image from Deopānī depicts Mongolian features. In the same locality there are some other images which also have the same peculiar feature. It shows that these images have the late Gupta or early Pāla characteristic features, and at the same time, possess some local peculiar characteristic traits, affiliated to the Mongolian culture. However, in Bengal also certain sculptures are found which bear Mongolian features. Majumdar says that in some specimens of art from Bengal there is marked Mongoloid element which must have been due to ethnic infiltrations through the North-east.³⁷ This element certainly passed to Bengal from Assam. Another important solitary icon of Viṣṇu (appendix) was discovered at Dudhnoi (Fig. 28) and is removed to the Assam State Museum. Sculptured in pre-Pāla styles this icon shows Viṣṇu, flanked by his *āyudhapuruṣas* in the *samapādaṣṭhānaka* attitude. Similar icons of the deity have been reported in some places in Bangladesh, west Bengal, Bihar and some other regions too.

The carving of the figure of Venugopāla in the western *torāṇa* of the Kāmā-khyā temple recalls the decorative details of Gupta and pallava art, as remarked by Ramacandran.³⁸ However, we do not see any Pallava trait in this figure of the deity. One *chādāna* slab from Deopānī contains the figure of a Vidyādhara within the said vessel of a *padma*, showing close resemblance to Gupta and Pāla sculptures. The

facial expression is local, while the decorative and anatomical details of the figure recall the late Gupta and the Pāla style, according to Ramacandran.³⁹ Ramacandran is right in making such a comment that the late Gupta and the Pāla art style had a great influence over the mediaeval sculpture of Assam.

There are many images, belonging to A.D. 11th-12th century in Assam. The majority of them represent Vishṇu and Sūrya. All of them are quite similar to the sculptures of the Pāla school of the Sena period. They have long pointed and decorated *śilāpaṭṭa*. All of them are slim in the body shape, wear *paridhāna* of thin fabric, and profusely ornamented. The sculptures of Assam, belonging to an early period, i.e. the 9th-10th century or the Pāla rule in Bengal and Bihar, are not profusely ornamented, nor they have sharp pointed *śilāpaṭṭa* or elaborate decoration on it. It may be noted that the Senas were foreign people to Bengal. They came to Bengal from the south by the middle of the 11th century. It is quite likely that some of the decorative elements or features of their art were borrowed from Kanarese art (Hoyśāla art) which is famous for lavish ornamentation. The Sena artists did not disturb the Pāla school of art. They only improved it and made it more ornamental. This art elements from Bengal entered Assam and that is why most of the sculpture belonging to the 11th-12th century are carved in the style of the Sena art. There are certain images in Assam which are strikingly similar to the images of the Sena art and even the minute iconographic details of a few images from the Brahmaputra Valley tally with those of the images of Bengal of that period.

Icons of Sūrya are found along with the images of Brahmā, Vishṇu and Śiva, at Cole Park, Tezpur and Mahāmāyāthān, in the Kārbi-Ānlong district. It shows that the Sun god was equal in popularity as Vishṇu, Śiva and Brahmā. The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* gives such provision for Sūrya. Quadruplicate images, combining in one body Śiva, Vishṇu, Brahmā and Sūrya, have been found in Northern India.⁴⁰ The opinion of Sivaramamurti⁴¹ regarding the execution of a figure of Naṭarāja on the back of the *vāhana* of the deity in eastern India seems to be not very correct. Most of the images of Naṭarāja from Assam show the deity in the dancing pose on the *vāhana*. This feature is commonly found in the Naṭarāja images from Bengal and Orissa also. But the four armed Naṭarāja noticed in the ruins at Madan Kāmdev parvat is made to dance on the ground while his *vāhana* stands by the side of the god.

The images of Mahishamardini represent the same theme, depicted in the images of the deity from other places of India. But the images of the deity from Assam have striking similarity with those of Bengal. The modern clay images of the deity who is the most popular *Śākta* goddess, now being worshiped in eastern India today, are similar to those of the early ones.

The stone image of Indra, preserved in the Assam State Museum, is of particular interest. Because it has a hooded snake above the head of the deity. However, with regard to the identification of the image, there is a little doubt. Here the

deity is identified as Indra because of the presence of an elephant as the *vāhana* of the god. But the other features of the image, it seems, are contrary to the iconographic details of the image of Indra. The image of Indra having a snake-hooded canopy over its head is extremely rare in India. The bronze image of Indra, found at the Narakāsūr hill, is unique. Though the *ādhāra* and the *prabhāvalī*, with a *chatra*, are arranged in this image in the style of the Pāla bronze sculpture, yet, as far our knowledge goes, this type of Indra image, possessing rare workmanship has not been found anywhere else in India. The image of the deity from Chidambaram⁴² offers similarity to ours only in the sitting posture, other features of that image are quite different from those of the image from Narakāsūr hill, and that image is carved on stone and is inferior in beauty to ours. Likewise, the image of Manasā from Śilghāt, is now in the Assam State Museum of special interest. Because, Manasā image having Nāgendra (meaning elephant) *vāhana*, is extremely rare in India. To our knowledge, this is the only instance of Manasā image in India having an elephant as the *vāhana* of the deity.

Panels of the Vishṇu *avatāra* are found in some places of Assam. They are found, sculptured commonly on long slabs of stone, and were, on imitation, possibly employed as *dvāra-śākhās*. The style of execution of these panels seems to be peculiar. A few Narasimha images have been noticed. Two of them are quite peculiar because of the *ṣṭhānaka* attitude of the deity. In each case, the deity is made to stand only on one leg, the other being shown horizontally touching the other leg at the knee level. This singularity is certainly remarkable. All these works of art and some other images from Assam offer certainly an addition to the art of India as a whole.

The study of these outstanding art specimens or comparable specimens, though not outstanding, shows that the fine art of Assam tended to be closer to the art of the Guptas, the Pālas and the Senas. This intercourse was possible because of the geographical factors. Dikshit remarks that 'the affinity of Assamese art should seem to lie more with the sculptures of Bihar and Orissa than with the contemporary Pāla art of Bengal.⁴³ He is supported by B K. Barua⁴⁴ and P.C. Choudhury.⁴⁵ But on what basis he has made this remark is not known. We cannot say that the art of old Assam had less affinity with the Pāla school of Bengal. On the other hand, we can guess that the mediaeval Assamese art had less affinity with the Orissan art. The Pāla and the Sena art, indeed, have a good deal of resemblance with the art form of Assam. The Orissan art played a side role. This is very well supported by the geographical positions of the states and substantiated by our comparative study. In fact, in a broad sense the art of Assam, Bengal, East Bihar and Orissa belongs to one school. Rao⁴⁶ has rightly said that the fourth school of Indian art is chiefly represented by the sculpture of Bengal, Orissa and Assam. Therefore, Katakī's theory that Assam had her own school of sculpture, *i.e.* The Kāmarūpa school of sculpture, is not tenable.⁴⁷ However, we can definitely say that a popular or peculiar

art style, sometimes in combination with the classical eastern Indian style, did develop in Kāmarūpa. This is well evidenced by the stone sculptures from Deopani, the stone sculpture on either side of the western *torāṇa* at Kāmākhyā, and the medallions from the Narakāsūr hill. These medallions represent the folk art tradition that existed in A.D. 9th-10th century in Kāmarūpa. This folk art tradition has no affiliation with the classical art school which was popular throughout eastern India in that period. Moreover, slight regional variations in the art of the classical school are also noticed. For instance, the physiognomy of a sculpture from Sibsagar is different from that of Dabakā or Numaligarh. The sculptures from Mālinithān may slightly differ from the sculpture from Guwahati. It does not mean that the pre-Āhom sculptures from Guwahati and Mālinithān belongs to two separate schools. Kramrisch has rightly remarked that like plasticity and naturalism, dynamic characteristics, influenced by various racial factors determined the art history of India as a whole.⁴⁸ Dikshit has said that another current of influence flew from mid-India to Assam to mould the art of this region.⁴⁹ It seems that his view is correct because, some of our sculptures bear Gupta characteristic features and some have similarity with those of khajurāho, the art centre of the Chandelas. There was a regular route for communication from Assam to mid-India. Banerji has also rightly remarked that "the mediaeval architecture and plastic art of Assam were closely related to the general architecture and art of Northern India."⁵⁰

The paucity of valuable art specimens datable to early Āhom regime, compared to those of the preceding centuries, specially, three centuries, reveals, in a striking manner, almost a complete break with the tradition of the past, such as we can dimly perceive also in other spheres of culture and civilization of Assam, as in Bengal. Though the Āhoms soon became Hindus and tried to maintain the old tradition of Assam, yet the artists, patronised by the rulers, could not be art masters, probably, because of their lack of knowledge in Sanskrit, which was the prominent language of Śilpa-Śāstra and Vāstu-Śāstra. One can easily differentiate the archaeological objects, produced in the Āhom and Koch regimes, from the works of art of the preceding periods. The same thing happened to the art tradition of Bengal after A.D. 12th century.

It has been observed that many ruined temple sites include articles, belonging to different periods of history. Almost all the sites of archaeological interest in Assam present combined motifs and workmanship, that were characteristic of the pre-Āhom as well as the Āhom-Koch period. For instance, the Kāmākhyā temple⁵² is not the product of the artists of one period. Here we find objects, belonging to a period from c. 6th century (or Gupta period) to c. A.D. 18th century and so also are the Piṅgaśvara ruins. Sectarian jealousy, as is proved by the archaeological objects, did not prevail much amongst the adherents of different sects in Assam. Religious tolerance was very much in the minds of the people. It is because of this

tradition that even to-day also people belonging to different religious needs and faith live together amicably.

That the pre-Āhom Kings of Kāmrūpa had their coins is proved by the discovery of the coins at Dhulāpādung. Although the *cowrie* was in circulation in Bengal and Assam in the period, yet coins must have also been used by the traders of Kāmarūpa side by side with the farmer.

From the scattered archaeological objects of various types it is proved that Guwahati was an important city in the mediaeval period in Eastern India. There were a good number of temples and other works of architectural construction. The huge stone *stambhas* lying on the road at Āmbāsi and inside the Guwahati Medical College campus show that these architectural pieces were either employed in some huge temples or in some *prāsādas* in the pre-Āhom period. The river *Brahmaputra* must have played an important role in providing a riverine route for communications between Assam and the rest of the country. This river must have facilitated the growth of the old Guwahati city, which can be identified with Prāgyotishpura, the ancient city of the east. However, further evidence will be necessary to confirm this identification. Hārupeshvar, of the inscription of Vanamāla can be identified with Tezpur, another town of Assam touched by the mighty Brahmaputra. The other capital, Śrī Durjja, as mentioned in some inscription, is yet to be identified properly. Unless we get proper inscriptional evidence, it is hazardous to make any comment in this regard.

To sum up, in the pre-historic period, Assam witnessed the movements of various strains, mostly from further east, carrying the Mongolian and some other non-Aryan cultures to the province. From Assam the Monoglian culture spread even to Bengal where the Mongoloid element influenced some art pieces.⁵² In the early Christian centuries she imported the Aryan culture. Though she borrowed some noble ideas of Indian culture from her neighbouring regions in India, she did make some original contribute to the culture of India as a whole.

Saktism and Tāntrism, which were supposed to have developed in Bengal and Assam, are additions to the Indian religious system. The spread of the Monogolian culture to Bengal is also a notable contribution. Some of the art pieces having non-Ayan or Mongolian influence and some work of art of rare beauty from this State definitely have enriched the treasure of Indian art.

The Brahmaputra valley thus served as an easternmost out-post of Indian civilization. But, at the same time, it maintained relations with foreign countries like Burma, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet, the countries sharing common frontiers with Eastern India. Never the less, its art and architecture, as well as other objects of culture of the period in question were mainly of Indian origin and inspiration. It was and is, indeed, India's sentinel in the eastern horizon.

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- 1b. Sarma, T.C., "Researches on the Pre-historic Archaeology of the Assam", *J.A.S.S.*, Vol. IX, 1966, p. 9.
2. Allchin, "The Neolithic Stone Industry of the Santal Parganas", *B.S.O.A.S.*, Vol. XXV, Pt. 2, pp. 306-30. Also T.C. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
3. Sarma, T.C., *op. cit.*, p. 9.
4. *J.W.A.S.*, Vol. 39, No. 6, pp. 181-201. Also, T.C. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
5. Majumdar, R.C., *op. cit.*, p. 565. Prof. P.K. Bhattacharya, Department of History, North Bengal University told me that a few Gupta coins had been discovered in some place of North Bengal bordering Assam State.
6. *Op. cit.*, p. 198.
7. *Ibid.*
- 7a. Sirkar D.C., *Money in pre-Ahom Assam and its neighbourhood*" *Procs. NSI, Shillong*, 1977 (to be published).
- 7b. *Ibid.*
- 7c. *Ibid.*
- 7d. *Prakash* (an Assamese monthly), April, 1977, pp. 45-46.
- 7e. *Op. cit.*, p. 127.
- 7f. *Textile Industry in Ancient India, JBORS*, June, 1917.
- 7g. *JARS*, Vol. VII, No. 3, pp. 77-81.
8. *Op. cit.*, p. 416.
9. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 404-5.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 400.
- 11a. *E.I.*, XXXI, pp. 67-69.
12. Majumdar, R.C. *op. cit.*, p. 401.
- 12a. Bhattacharya, P., *op. cit.* p. 145 and Plate facing p. 140
13. It is believed by a section of people that this court poet of Lakshmana-Sena belonged to Kendubilvam, a village in the district Birbhum in Bengal. A 'mela' (festival) is held every year in the village in his honour. But there is no corroborative evidence to show that he was born there. Now a claim has been made that he was a native of modern Orissa. But this view is also not substantiated by evidence.
- 13a. *J.R.A.S.* 1920, p. 1153.
14. *Vishnu Purāṇa*, Chap. 39, V. 14 and Chap. 42, V. 9.
15. *Op. cit.*, p. 419.
16. Chutia, D., "Kālikā-Purāṇar Racanākāl" *A.S.S.P.*, 32nd year No. 2, p. 44. P.K. Gode has dated *Kālikāpurāṇa* to A.D. 10th century See, *P.K. Gode Comm. Volume*, Poona, 1960, pp. 1-18.

- 16a. *Svayampradhānamūrtis* of these deities are also found else where in India.
- 16b. Barua, B.K., *op. cit.*, p. 155.
17. Majumdar, R.C., *op. cit.*, pp. 408; also N.K. Bhattasali *op. cit.*, p. 77.
18. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 429.
19. *Prakāśh*, April, 1977, pp. 45-46.
20. Barua K.L., P.D. Choudhury and others plead that Buddhism flourished in Kāmarūpa. All these scholars on the basis of certain literary sources, both foreign and indigenous, say that Vajrayāna or Tantrik-Buddhism flourished in Assam. B.K. Barua says that the beliefs which were under the names of Vajrāyāna and Mantrayāna and which grew up as a result of fusion of Hinduism and Buddhism, some scholars maintain, has their birth in Assam". But we cannot say that Buddhism in its full capacity flourished in Assam, as we do not have concrete archaeological evidence in this connection up to the present time.
- 20a. For the views of the above scholars see, Barua K.L., *op. cit.*, pp. 100-104, Choudhury P.C., *op. cit.*, pp. 399-406 & 422-427, Barua B.K., *op. cit.*, p. 161-164 & 199.
21. *Adhyana Paricaya*, Saikia, N. (Ed.) Asam Sahitya Sabhā, 1978 pp. 161-165; also J.A.R.S. vol. XXVI, 1981-82, pp. 12-26.
22. *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1923-24, pp. 119-20 and 1929-30, pp. 45-46.
- 22a. *Ibid.* 1924-25, pp. 100-101.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.* pp. 90f.
25. *Ibid.*, 1923-24, pp. 80-81.
26. See *Rūpam*, No. 37, p. 118, No. 43.
- 26a. *B.D.C.R.I.*, Vol. II, p. 219.
27. Das Gupta, C.E., *op. cit.*, pp. 236-237.
28. *The Hindu Temple*, 1946. pl. LXVIII.
- 28a. D. Desai has not illustrated any such scene in her *Erotic Sculpture of India*, 1975, New Delhi.
29. *J.A.R.S.*, Vol. VIII, p. 24.
30. Sculptures from Samalajli and Roda, Spl. Vol. of *B.B.M.P.G.* Vol. XIII, Fig. 22.
31. *Western Indian Art*, Spl. No. *JISOA.*, 1965, Pl XXXIII, Fig. 8; also see Fig. 7.
32. *ARAS.*, 1923-24, pp. 80-81.
33. *Ibid.*, 1936-37, pp. 54f.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *MASI*, 1929-30, Pl. XXXVI.
36. *Rūpam*, No. 37, p. 108. Fig. 2.
37. *Op. cit.*, p. 546.
38. Ramachandran, *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1936-37, pp. 54f.
39. *Ibid.*,
40. *Rūpam*, No. 37, p. 122.
41. *P.K. Gode Commemoration Vol.*, Poona, 1960, pp. 113f.
42. *I.A.* No. 6, p. 61.

43. Rao, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, PL. CL.
44. *A.R.A.S.I.* 1927-28, pp. 112-113.
45. *Op.cit.*, p. 200.
46. *Op.cit.*, p. 478.
47. *Op.cit.*, Vol. I, pt. 1, Intro. p. 37.
48. *J.A.R.S.I.* Vol. VIII, pp. 38-43. B.N. Mukhejee also wants to speak of a Kāmarūpa school of sculpture on the basis of the style of execution of a few icons from Deopāni, Śrī-Śūrya Pāhār, Mikirāti and four plaques of bronzes from Kāhilipārā. The icons from these places (excepting Kāhilipārā bronzes) were executed in the late Gupta style in classical formula of course, some of them do bear local traits. But we cannot give them a separate school. The bronze plaques bear sculptures having heavy folk influence and they are not executed in classical formula, See, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-27.
49. *Indian sculpture*, pi 25.
50. *A.R.A.S.I.*, 1927-28, pp. 112-113.
51. *Ibid.*, 1924-25, p. 94.
52. *J.A.R.S.I.*, Vol. XXVI 1981-82, pp. 46-52.