

The Pauranic Account of Naraka's Conquest of Ancient Kingdom of Pragjyotisha and the Kiratas in North East India.

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The present paper aims at portraying a vivid picture of Naraka's conquest of the ancient kingdom of Pragjyotisha, situated on the extreme eastern fringe of Bharatavarsha, and its earliest inhabitants popularly known as the Kiratas as depicted in the pauranic texts with new interpretation of facts. This interesting episode occurred in Pre-Yudhisthira period. The subject under review still stands as one of the most obscure aspects of the political history of ancient Assam.

Naraka¹, generally known as mytho-historical figure, (the ancestor of Bhagadatta) came from Videha to Pragjyotisha as a political adventurer in pre-Bharata war period (roughly ascribed to 3100 B. C.) before the commencement of Kali-Yuga or Iron Age and after having inflicted a crushing defeat on the Kiratas² in a fierce battle conquered the land, installed himself on the throne of Pragjyotisha (later known as Kamarupa), proclaimed his political supremacy, laid the foundation of first Aryan kingdom and paved the way for the spread of Aryan culture which gradually led to the evolution of synthesis of the Aryan and non-Aryan culture in North East India.

According to Kalika Purana³, before the advent of Naraka the Pragjyotisha was under the political sway of the famous Kirata Chief named Ghataka. Lord Vishnu found him very majestic ruler and famous for his glory and splendour. After having got firmly convinced that Naraka's purpose is to usurp his throne, Ghataka marched with his army and started showering arrows after arrows on his political adversary. The war started between the Kirata king and Naraka. Naraka, being redoubtable warrior fought gallantly with arrows, bows and other weapons. In this war all the chiefs of the Kiratas, their commander-in-chief and other prominent soldiers were killed. Their most beloved king Ghataka was beheaded. Naraka captured twenty five hundred elephants of

2. The appellation 'Kirata' has been profusely referred to in numerous sources mainly the literary and classical, but the problem relating to their identification with special reference to the tribes of North East India still remain unsolved. Here we are faced with one baffling question as to who were the Kirata people who fought with Naraka ? The earlier recorded allusion to the appellation Kirata occur in the Vedic literature (*Atharva Veda*, Brailley, 1975, Vol. I Ch. X, Sukta - 4 Vs. 14, pp. 530 f ; *Yajurveda*, Brailley, 1974, Vs- 16 pp. 481 f), but nothing is explicitly expounded. It is true that sometimes no clear picture emerges from the twilight of early history. But, however, on the basis of some faithful records *Kiskindha Kanda of Valmiki Ramayana*. ch. 40, Vs. 27, 28 p.906 ; *Mahabharata, Sabha Parva*, Hindi edn. ch. 26 Vs. 8-10. p. 743, ch. 30, Vs. 1, 4, 23 27, p. 753 ; *Bhisma Parva*, ch. IX. Vs. 51, 57, 69 pp. 2565-66 ; H. H. Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, BK III. ch. III, pp. 156-58, 162 ; Pargiter, *Markandeya Purana*, Eng. trans. *Bibliotheca Indica*, Vol. II pt. II. Canto LVII, pp. 282-84, 322 ; *Vishnu Purana*, Hindi edn. p. 671 ; *Markandeya Purana*, Hindi edn. pp. 154-55 ; *Brahma Purana*, Hindi edn. pp. 308 f ; Pargiter, J. A. S. B., 1897, Vol. LXVI, Pt, I, pp. 85, 105, 108-10 ; S. N. Majumdar Sastri, J. B. O. R. S. 1922, Vol. VIII, pp. 41-42 ; E. T. Atkinson, *The Himalayan Gazetteer*, Vol. II pt. I. P. 357 ff ; H. C. Chakadar. *The Geography of Kalidasa*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 23-24 ; D. C. Sircar, *The Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, pp. 160-61) we can safely presume that the Kiratas were the dwellers of Eastern Himalayas in the marshy region near the sea-coast known as Sagararupa-Vasin which in all its probabilities comprised whole of North and South-East Bengal and the hills of Assam. They have been also described as the Himalayan tribes inhabiting the Eastern extremity of the Bharatavarsha that was Pragjyotisha. Pargiter opines that the centre of the country of Kamakhya were inhabited by the Kiratas. However, in none of the above mentioned sources, the Kiratas have been properly identified with the tribes of Assam or the people of Pragjyotisha. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (*Kirata-Jana-krti*, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 26-38) has also frequently referred to the Kiratas of Assam as Indo-Mongoloids or Tibeto-Burmans but no clear identification has been given. Moreover his findings is not based on the dispassionate investigations of all the relevant sources. Most of the views established by him can be fairly disputed and

disposed off. Hence, for the purpose of identification we shall have to place our exclusive reliance on the trustworthy accounts of the classical authors. On the basis of some valuable classical treatises (W. H. Schoff. *The periplus of the Erythraean sea*, London, 1912, pp. 253 ff; McCrindle's *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, edtdo by R. C. Jain, Delhi, 1972, pp. 80, 177-78, App. 4, pp. 230-33; MC Crindle, *Ancient India as described by Ptolemy*, Calcutta, 1927, pp. 191-94; Gerini. *Researches on Ptolemy's Geography*, London, 1909 pp. 28 ff; Lessen, *Zeitschr Kundel Morgini*, II, 40; Accounts of St. Martin) the Scyritae or Airrhadoi or Kirrhadia (Kiratas) have been identified with the Khasis, the Jaintias, the Garos, the Nagas, the people who settled in the neighbourhood of the Lauhitya or Brahmaputra and the people of Kachar, Tipperah, Sylhet, Burma and Arakan. The accounts of the early Greek and Roman geographers, particularly, Ptolemy, Arrian and Pliny have been strongly supported by E. T. Atkinson, (op. cit. pp. 357, 361, 363-66).

However, depending on the combined testimony of all the sources in general and classical in particular we can reasonably suggest that the Kiratas of Pragjyotisha can be identified with the Khasis, the Jaintias, the Garos, the Kacharis, the Chutias, the Tipperahs, the Nagas and other neighbouring tribes of North East India living during the time of Naraka. This finding will carry some weight, if we quote R. M. Nath (op. cit, pp. 20-21) who puts forth that the Austrics (the Khasis and the Jaintias) and the Bodos (the Garos, the Kacharis, the the Chutias and Hill-Tipperahes) were termed as Nishadas, Kiratas and Dasyus in the same way as the Dravidians were termed as the Danavas and Daityas and Negroids as the Vanaras. Another local authority of great iminence and distinction K. L. Barua (op. cit. p. 8) has also identified them more or less in the same manner. Thus here we can prove that the above stated Kirata people living in and around Pragjyotisha after being subjugated by Naraka in this war deserted the country, got dispersed in different groups and settled in different Himalayan and sub-Himalayan regions as autochthones or aboriginals.

3. K. P., pp. 497-504.
4. K. P. Vs., 100-116, 125-26, pp. 497-501.
5. K. P. Vs., 128-133, p. 502.

6. For details see G. P. Singh's article in Proceedings of the N. E. I. History Association, Dibrugarh, 1981, pp. 63 ff.
7. Op. Cit. p. 26
8. Op. Cit. p. 27.
9. J. I. H. 1933, Vol. XII. pt. 1 to II P. 303.
10. E. H. K. pp. 20-21, 27-30.
11. Op. Cit. p. 13.
12. *A Descriptife Account of Assam* (Delhi 1975), pp. 146-48.
13. Op. Cit. p. 29 ; see also Farquhar, *Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, 1920, pp. 122 ff.