

## The Archaeological and Strategic Significance of the Kalapahar Narakasur Hill Complex

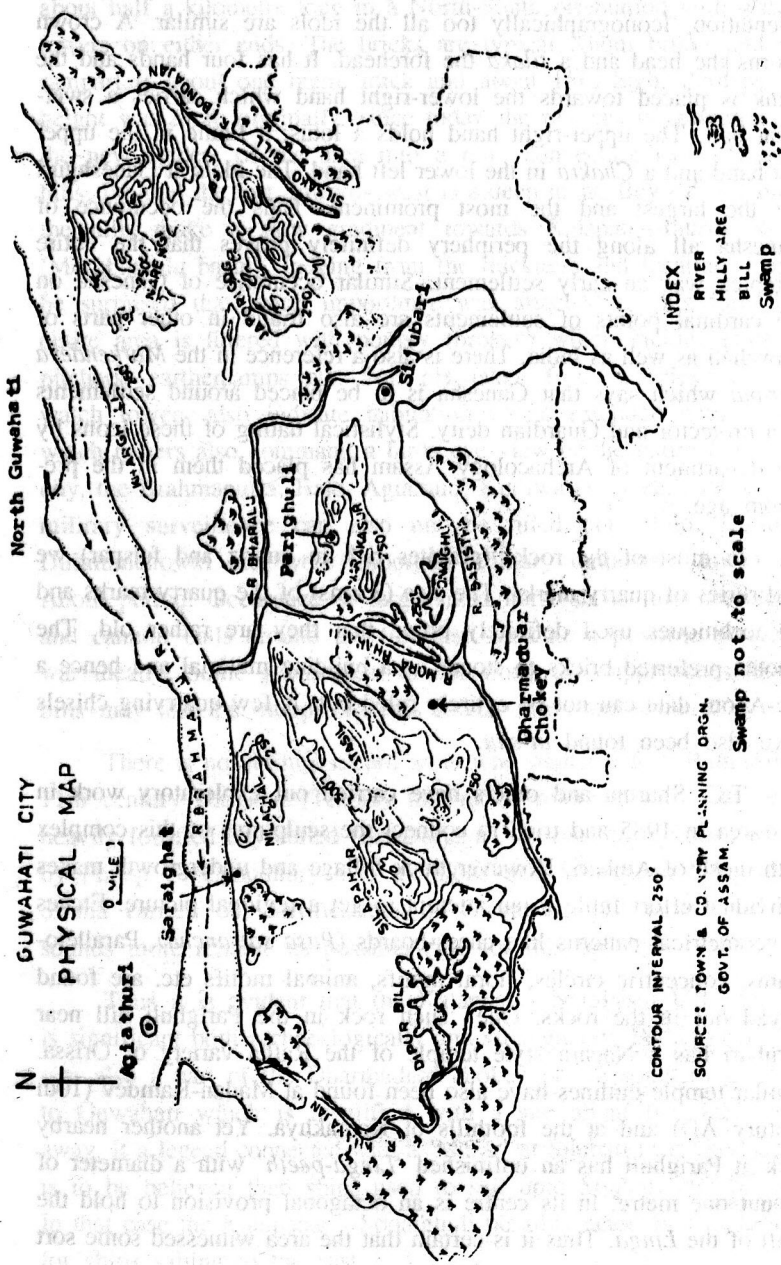
Tridib Sarma

Guwahati situated on the Brahmaputra between latitudes 26° - 27° N and longitude 91° - 92° E was a seat of ancient civilisation. A contour map or a satellite imagery will reveal that Guwahati can be topographically divided into two divisions - the hilly terrain's and the plain areas (including those of North Bank Guwahati). The prominent hilly complexes within the city limits may be grouped as (1) Sila-Fatasil hill complex (2) Nilachal hill complex (3) Sonaighuli complex (4) Kalaphar - Narakasur hill complex and (5) Japarigog - Narengi - Kharghuli hill complex. These hilly complexes are today separated from each other by narrow strips of land.

It may be mentioned that the present settlements of Guwahati are by and large reclaimed areas of what was originally a low-lying swampy area. Geo-morphological soil testing and palaeochannel identification carried out by the author have revealed that the drainage map of Guwahati presented a different picture in ancient times. The chain of ox-bow lakes or beels extending from Silsako in the east to Bar-cholabeel, Deeporbeel in the west was an old channel of the Brahmaputra. Hence settlement in ancient times was limited to the hilly uplands and inter-communication was mostly through these water-bodies. The Morabharalu as shown in the map is nothing but a choked up channel of the original waterflow.

Of the early settlements the Kalaphar - Narakasur complex appears to be an important and strategic one judging from its archaeological remains and fortifications. The entire complex has a circumference of roughly 20 Kms at the base which works out to a surface area of 31.77 Sq.Kms. It has its highest altitude of 870 ft. at Parighuli near Birubari. Prominent present-day localities included in this area are Ganeshguri, Kahilipara, Odalbakra, Lalganesh, Birubari, Kalapahar, Bhangagarh.

Interestingly the entire complex is bounded by idols of Lord Ganesha in a sitting posture (*padmasana*). All these idols are in a



**GUWAHATI CITY  
PHYSICAL MAP**

0 MILE

**INDEX**

- RIVER
- HILLY AREA
- BILL
- Swamp

CONTOUR INTERVAL 250'

SOURCE: TOWN & CO. NTRY PLANNING ORGN.  
GOVT. OF ASSAM.

Swamp not to scale

group of three or four and generally placed in a Northwest Southeast orientation. Iconographically too all the idols are similar. A crown adorns the head and a *tilaka* the forehead. It has four hands and the trunk is placed towards the lower-right hand which carries a sweetmeat ball. The upper-right hand holds a lotus, a flame in the upper left hand and a *Chakra* in the lower left hand. The idols at Ganeshguri are the largest and the most prominent. Thus the occurrence of Ganesha all along the periphery definitely proves that the entire complex was an early settlement. Similar occurrence of Ganesha on the cardinal points of settlements are also found in other parts of Guwahati as well as India. There is also a reference in the *Markendeya Purana* which says that Ganesha is to be placed around settlements as a protector and Guardian deity. Stylistical dating of these icons by the department of Archaeology Assam has placed them in the pre-Ahom age.

In most of the rocks (granites rich in quartz and felspar) we find series of quarry marks. The size (3 cms) of the quarry marks and the techniques used definitely prove that they are rather old. The Ahoms preferred bricks to stones as a building material and hence a pre-Ahom date can not be entirely ruled out. A few quarrying chisels have also been found *in-situ*.

T.C. Sharma and others have carried out exploratory work in this area in 1985 and tried to connect the sculptures of this complex with those of Ambari. However thick foliage and undergrowth makes individual effort futile in an attempt to get a regional picture. Etches of geometrical patterns like chess-boards (*Pasa satrancha*), Parallelograms, concentric circles, floral motifs, animal motifs etc. are found spread out in the rocks. One such rock in the Parighuli hill near Birubari has a Nagara style temple of the Ratha variety of Orissa. Similar temple outlines have also been found at Madan-Kamdev (10th century AD) and at the foothills of Kamakhya. Yet another nearby rock at Parighuli has an unfinished '*Linga-peeth*' with a diameter of about one metre. In its centre is an octagonal provision to hold the shaft of the *Linga*. Thus it is certain that the area witnessed some sort of quarrying and manufacturing activity in the past.

Atop Parighuli, at about an altitude of 850 ft. is a brick rampart about half a kilometre long in a North-South orientation with watch-towers on either ends. The bricks are typical Ahom bricks and the rampart is about one metre thick and about 15ft. high. Perhaps the height was more originally, since today the rampart is converted by the new settlers of the area into a road connecting two adjoining hills. Beyond the fort, towards west is a deep moat. Beyond this moat the hills make a slow gradient towards Kalapahar-fatasil plains (Morabharalu basin). Judging from the thickness and location it may be surmised that much importance was attached to this fort. The entire area is littered with pottery (broken) which include parts of pitchers, earthen lamps etc. Soil pH taken from samples of these watch towers also indicate habitation of an extended nature. The watch towers also command a birds eye view of the entire Guwahati city, the Brahmaputra, Hajo, Agiathuti, Kuruwa etc. Hence its use for military surveillance can also not be ruled out. Hajo, Kuruwa, Duimunichowki etc. were important military outposts during the Ahom period. Occurrence of large sized horse-shoes (arabian breed) and cannon balls around the fort also indicate a possible medieval war theatre. Some geometrical motifs along the approaches to the hills may also be interpreted as secret codes and signs.

There is no definite record as to who built the fort. Ratnapala's 11th century Bargaon (Tezpur) inscription refers to Guwahati as a heavily fortified city called "Sri Durjaya". *Assam Buranji Sara* edited by Pratap C. Choudhury also mentions that Swargadeo Udayaditya Simha carried out fortifications of Guwahati. The latter evidence sounds more reliable as possible date for this fort.

Thus it is evident that the Kalapahar - Narakasur hill complex is significant both archaeologically and strategically. Perhaps this fort was also a part of the Dharmaduar chokey or the southern gateway to Guwahati which is identified with a site about two kilometres away. If a legend connected with a 'Mazar' at Sijubari near Ganeshguri is to be believed then ships used to sail upto Sijubari and beyond. In that case the Kalapahar - Sonaighuli possibly acted as a hinterland for ships sailing to the east.

This paper is merely exploratory in nature and only further research can throw a clearer picture.

### References

1. P.C. Choudhury, *Assam Buranji Sara - 1228 to 1833*, Kasinath Tamuli Phukan., pp. 34-35.
2. Maheshwar Neog 'Gauhati Town in Retrospect' *'The Comon Quest'* DIPR, Assam, 1976. pp. 104-111.
3. *Markendya Purana*.
4. D.C. Goswami, Assam Remote Sensing department, Uday path, Zoo Road, Guwahati.