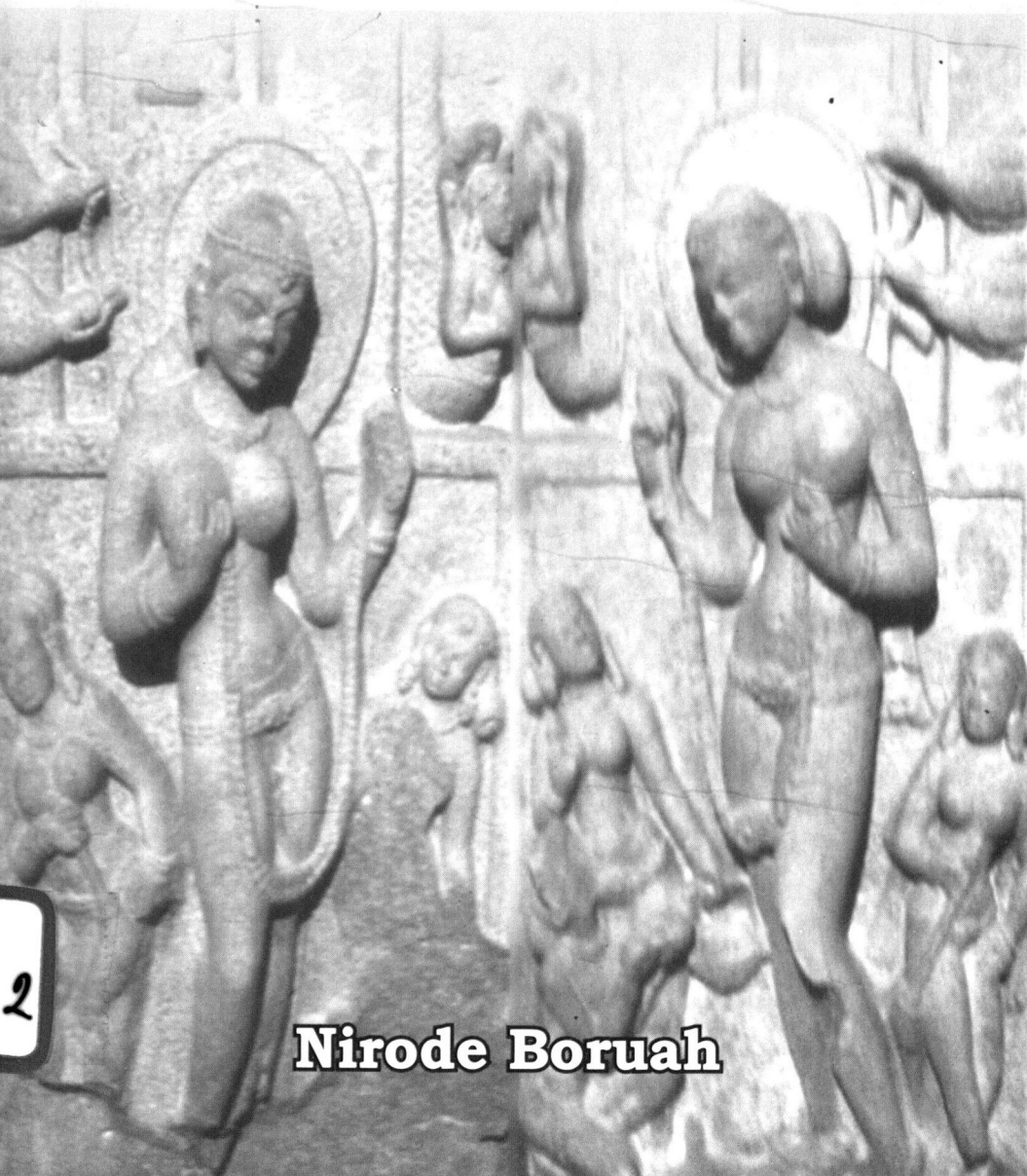


EARLY ASSAM

- state formation • political centres
- cultural zones



Nirode Boruah

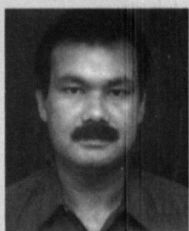
Early Assam, a book with some new approaches to the study of the early history of Assam, encompasses some specific areas like State formation, political centres and cultural zones. The book consists of six chapters, where the process of State formation in three different geographic spaces of 'Early Assam', are discussed. The history of the political centres and the cultural variations in the different zones have been thoroughly studied by using the information gathered from the inscriptions, literary sources and other archaeological remains. Every effort has been made throughout to keep the reader abreast of recent discoveries and to share reasons for all conclusions and inferences. It is expected that the work will earn recognition as a noteworthy addition to what has so far been written on 'Early Assam'.

*On the Cover: Ganga and Yamuna,
Door-Frame of Da-Parbatiya.*

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NIRODE BORUAH, born at Panitola, in Tinsukia district of Assam, obtained his M.A. Degree in History (specialization in Ancient Indian History) from the Dibrugarh University. He was awarded Ph.D. Degree by the Gauhati University on the subject *Major Political Centres and Cultural Zones of Ancient Assam (from the 4th to the 12th Century A.D.)* in 2004. Dr. Boruah is actively associated with a number of organizations including the Indian History Congress, North East India History Association and All India Oriental Conference. He has attended several Seminars and Conferences.

He is the co-author of two textbooks on history for the students of degree level and has also edited one book prior to this publication. He has to his credit several research papers and articles published in the *Proceedings of Indian History Congress, Proceedings of North East India History Association, Research Journals* of different Universities, souvenirs and magazines.

At present, he is teaching as a Lecturer in the Department of History of Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam.

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EARLY ASSAM

state formation, political centres, cultural zones



Dr. Nirode Boruah

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*Dedicated
to my Parents*

SHRI PHATICK CH. BORUAH
(MA, LLB, Ph.D.)
and
SMT. SHANTI BORUAH

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FOREWORD

In the present work that forms an enlarged and modified version of his Ph. D. thesis, Dr. Nirode Boruah makes a serious attempt to study 'Early Assam' with particular reference to State formation, political centres and cultural zones in the making, of which geographical and ethnological factors were primary contributors. By scanning the available inscriptional and other literary sources he portrays a picture of 'Early Assam' that sounds a somewhat discordant note from what has usually been given in the writings of earlier scholars. He attempts to put the early State formation on a conceptual framework as developed by well known scholars, both Indian and foreign. On the same theoretical perception, in place of a single polity covering the entire extent of the vast territory of 'Early Assam' he discovers at least seven major political centres viz. Pragjyotisapura, Karnasuvarna, Hatapessvara, Durjjaya, Kamarupanagara, Trivega-nagar (Davaka) and Barpathar-Duboroni, which existed either contemporaneously or at different times. These regional political centres must have had their origin due to human propensities and ethnological divergencies as well as topographical differences. The river Brahmaputra, no doubt, served as a lifeline of the valley dwellers, and at the same time it created a strong barrier, particularly during the rainy months, for easy communication between the people living on the two banks. In the growth of cultural zones either within the same political boundary or in a different political unit, the ethnological factor surely played a big role.

The rulers of different royal dynasties, either local or from outside, had been identified with legendary figures to give political legitimization and also higher status than their subjects as borne out by the epigraphs. However, 'Early Assam' was not totally isolated from the rest of India as evidenced from architectural remains found

in those zones. Rather, Aryan penetration occurred at an early date.

If the book stimulates some questions for scholars and readers, about 'Early Assam', that will be considered as a tribute to it.

Guwahati

J.N. Phukan

27/02/2005

PREFACE

The present work is an attempt to trace the process of State formation and study the major political centres and the cultural zones of 'Early Assam'. It is an updated, elaborate and modified form of my thesis submitted to the Gauhati University in 2002 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in history.

The task of reconstructing a full-fledged history of 'Early Assam' is not an easy one. The dearth of corroborative evidence, controversy on the historicity of some of the sources, lack of proper endeavour to bring the sources of information to light are some of the basic problems in the study of the early history of Assam. However, in this work, an attempt has been made to re-examine, re-assess and revise the old explanations and interpretations in the light of the sources recently discovered. Inscriptions, (more than thirty-eight), found in the copper-plates, stone tablets, rocks, pillars, caves, temples etc. belonging to the 2nd to the 13th century A.D. are extensively used in this work. Utmost efforts have been made to include all the inscriptions discovered so far, including those found in the Doiyang-Dhansiri valley recently. By taking cognizance of the inscriptions, some methods have been envisaged and applied for the study of geographic provenance and cultural variations in the zones. In case of literary sources, efforts are made to observe all the information, indications and possibilities relating to our study. However, historians are divided on the matter of historicity of some of the literary sources of the region. So, proper care has been taken at the time of utilizing the historical elements from the sources.

The scheme of the present work has been organized as follows: Chapter I is devoted to a survey on the scope, significance, problems, methods and the sources. It also discusses concisely the geographical, ecological and ethnological background of the region. Chapter II deals with the process of State formation and political framework of the Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa, the Davaka and the State of the Doiyang-Dhansiri valley. I have drawn a broad outline of the main trends and major political land-marks of 'Early Assam' and tried to analyze the nature of political power, its stability, extent and location of the

political centres. Taking cognizance of some historical sources I have also made an attempt, though introductory in nature, to prepare a political framework of the early States of Davaka and the Doiyang-Dhansiri valley. Chapter III attempts to determine the geographic provenance of the inscriptions and other archaeological remains and to mark out the major political centres and cultural zones of 'Early Assam'. Arranging the inscriptions in chronological order on the basis of their tentative dates and other archaeological remains region wise, the chapter points out the find spots, political centres from where the charters were issued and the actual location of the donated lands and other properties as well as the provenance of the architectures, sculptures and coins with their geographic locations and distributions and thereby attempt has been made to mark out the political centres and cultural zones. Chapter IV deals with the political centres i.e. Pragjyotisapura, Karnasuvarna, Hatappesvara, Durjjaya, Kamarupanagara, Trivega-nagar and Barpathar-Duboroni. Chapter V is the study of the cultural zones. It deals with the cultural developments by which the zones tended to give themselves their own cultural trait and entity by showing some regional variations. Chapter VI, i.e. the last Chapter, collates and reveals the connection between all other Chapters and attempts to present, as far as possible, the overall picture of the State formation, political centres and the cultural zones of 'Early Assam'.

My present work is a study with some micro level approaches which neither demands full credit for new discoveries nor is a major break-through in the study of history of 'Early Assam'. It is a humble effort to re-search the early history of Assam, which in some points is fully introductory in nature, and shows some scope of study in future. Constructive criticism in this respect is always welcome.

Owing to some technicalities we could not provide diacritical marks to the old terms and names used in this work. But such terms/ names with diacritical marks are shown in a list immediately after the Acknowledgements.

Guwahati, Assam,
January, 2006.

Nirode Boruah

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A research work is definitely an open ended academic voyage. A collective effort is always working as an inspiring factor behind the culmination of a positive result of the voyage. So one should acknowledge the support and assistance received from the different levels in the course of the journey. I have no words to express my deep gratitude and acknowledge my indebtedness to my revered Guide and Supervisor Dr. J.N. Phukan, Retd. Professor, Department of History, Gauhati University and former Professor, Department of History and Archaeology, Nagaland University, for his constant encouragement and able guidance and supervision all throughout the execution of the present work.

It is a pleasure to thank Dr.D. Nath, Professor of History, Dibrugarh University, Dr.Mignonette Momin, Professor of History, NEHU, Shillong and Dr.H.N. Dutta, Director, Directorate of Archaeology, Govt. of Assam, for their valuable suggestions on different occasions in respect of my research work.

I received immense help from the staff of National Library, Kolkata, Asiatic Society, Kolkata, Library of Visva- Bharati University, Santiniketan, K.K. Handique Library, Gauhati University, Library of ICHR, North-East Centre, Library of the Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Govt. of Assam, Assam State Museum, Guwahati, Directorate of Archaeology, Govt. of Assam, Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, Guwahati and the Library of R.G Baruah College. Hence I must thank all the staff of these Departments, Offices and Libraries.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam, Archaeological Survey of India and the Assam State Museum for some of the photographs of the different architectural remains and monuments published here.

I am grateful to the college authority of Radha Govinda Baruah College, Guwahati and all my former colleagues who inspired me all

along, while the research work was attaining the stage of completion. I am particularly grateful to Sri Hemanta Kumar Nath, Sr. Lecturer, Dept. of English, Sibsagar College, for going through the manuscript and for his valuable suggestions. I must also thank all the persons who helped me as local guides during field investigations. My thanks go to Ms. Shilpi Das, Head, Department of English, Dr. Jnanjyoti Sarma, Head, Department of Mathematics, Mr. Ajit Talukdar, Librarian of R.G. Baruah College, and Ms. Babita Das, Ms Dipika Bhuyan, Guwahati, and Shri Rajiv Chetia, Panitola, for their valuable suggestions and help.

I extend my deep sense of gratitude to my parents and all family members whose help and inspiration enabled me to finish the work in time. I also offer my deep appreciation to my wife Dr. Bonti Baruah for her inspiration and for bearing all the constraints and burdens of the family, while I was busy with my research work.

Finally, this work owes a lot to Mr. Krishan Kumar of Spectrum Publications, who has enthusiastically undertaken the task of publication.

Guwahati, Assam
January, 2006.

Nirode Boruah

List of Terms/Names with Diacritical Marks

Appearing in this Edition	To be Read as	Appearing in this Edition	To be Read as
Amalaka	Āmalakā	Nagara	Nāgara
Arthasastra	Arthasāstra	Narayan	Narāyan
Banabhatta	Bānabhatta	Nrpati	Nrpati
Bhaskaravarman	Bhāskaravarman	Mahabharata	Mahābhārata
Brahman	Brāhman	Mahesa	Mahesa
Brhadrava	Brhadrāvā	Mandapa	Mandapa
Brhatsamhita	Brhatsamhitā	Pala	Pāla
Daivajnas	Daivajnas	Pataka	Pātaka
Dasakumara- charita	Dasakumāra- charita	Pragjyotisa	Prāgjyotisa
Davaka	Davāka	Pusyavarman	Pusyavarman
Dijjina	Dijjiṇa	Rajtarangini	Rājtarangini
Durjjaya	Durjjayā	Ramayana	Rāmāyana
Ganesa	Ganesa	Rshabhanatha	Rshabhanātha
Garbhagrha	Garbhagrha	Rshi	Rshi
Gauda	Gauda	Saka	Saka
Hadappesvara	Hadappesvara	Sakta	Sākta
Hadi	Hādi	Sakti	Sakti
Hamsakonci	Hamsakonci	Sasanka	Sasānka
Harsa	Harsa	Satapatha	Satapatha
Hatappesvara	Hatappesvara	Sikhara	Sikhara
Hetuka-Sulin	Hetuka-Sūlin	Smrti	Smrti
Jivara	Jivarā	Siva	Siva
Jnan	Jnān	Srihatta	Srīhatta
KalikaPurana	KālikāPurāna	SriRajamala	SrīRajamala
Kalpavrksa	Kalpavrksa	Sruti	Sruti
Kamakhya	Kāmākhyā	Stupa	Stūpa
Kamakuta	Kāmakūta	Sudra	Sūdra
Kamarupa	Kāmarūpa	Surya	Sūrya
Kamarupa- sasnavali	Kāmarūpa- sāsnavālī	Tara	Tārā
Karnasuvarna	Karnasuvarna	Vanamala	Vanamāla
Krsna	Krsna	Visnu	Visnu
Kirata-Jana-	Kirāta-Jana-	Vrddha	Vrddha
Krti	Krti	Visaya	Visaya
		Yajna	Yajna
		Yortipitha	Yonipītha

ABBREVIATIONS

ABVA	Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam.
AP	Assam Plates.
ARASI	Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India.
AS	Arthasastra of Kautilya.
ASI	Ambari Stone Inscription.
ASM	Assam State Museum, Guwahati.
ASPI	Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription.
ASR	Asiatic Researches.
ATCS	Alichiga Tengani Clay Seal.
ATSI	Alichiga Tengani Stone Inscription.
BCPI	Bargaon Copper Plate Inscription.
Beal, Life.	Life of Hiuen Tsiang.
BRI	Barganga Rock Inscription.
BSII	Bronze Surya Image Inscription.
CBI	Copper Bell Inscription.
CCPI	Caratbari Copper Plate Inscription.
CHA	A Cultural History of Assam.
CII	Corpus Inscription Indicarum.
Compre.	The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol.I.
DCPI	Dubi Copper Plate Inscription.
DHAS	Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam.
DSSI	Duboroni Stone Slab Inscription.
DVII	Deopani Visnu Image Inscription.
EHK	Early History of Kamarupa, 3 rd edition.
EI	Epigraphia Indica.
EISMA	East Indian School of Mediaeval Art.
FCPI	Fragmentary Copper Plate Inscription.
GCPI	Guwahati Copper Plate Inscription.
GKCPi	Guwakuci Copper Plate Inscription.
GSPi	Gachtal Stone Pillar Inscription.
GTCPI	Gachtal Copper Plate Inscription.
HACA	Historical Archaeology of Central Assam (from earliest time to 12th Century A.D.)

HC	Harsacharita of Banabhatta.
HCPA	The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D., 3rd edition.
HCPI	Hayunthal Copper Plate Inscription.
HHSII	Hari-Hara Stone Image Inscription.
IAA	Inscriptions of Ancient Assam.
IHQ	Indian Historical Quarterly.
JAIIH	Journal of Ancient Indian History.
JARS	Journal of the Assam Research Society.
JASB	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
JBORS	Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society.
JIH	Journal of Indian History.
JRASB	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.
KBCPI	Kuruvabahi Copper Plate Inscription.
KCPI	Kamauli Copper Plate Inscription.
KDSII	Krsna Durga Stone Image Inscription.
KLCPI	Kaliabar Copper Plate Inscription.
KMCPI	Khanamukh Copper Plate Inscription.
KP	Kalika Purana.
KRI	Kanaibarashi Rock Inscription.
KS	Kamarupasasnavali.
NCPI	Nagaon Copper Plate Inscription.
NCS	Nalanda Clay Seal
NKSI	Nagajari Khanikargaon Stone Inscription.
NPCPI	Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription.
PBCPI	Pushpabhadra Copper Plate Inscription.
PCPI	Parbatiya Copper Plate Inscription.
Periplus	Periplus of the Erythrean Sea.
SCPI	Suwalkuchi Copper Plate Inscription.
SII	Surya Image Inscription.
SNSII	Sankar Narayan Stone Image Inscription.
SPCPI	Subhankarapataka Copper Plate Inscription.
TCPI	Tezpur Copper Plate Inscription.
TRI	Tezpur Rock Inscription.
UBCPI	Uttarbarbil Copper Plate Inscription.
UCPI	Ulubari Copper Plate Inscription.
URI	Umachal Rock Inscription.
Watters	On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, Thomas Watters.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The re-writing of history in the light of new sources of information is itself a historical process. Bearing the incessant flow of the evolution of human civilizations, this process provides new knowledge, theories and scientific ways for the progress of variegated human life. The study of the history of 'Early Assam' has now completed 100 years (as Gait's *A History of Assam*, published in 1905, is considered to be the first methodical and pioneering work in this respect) and during this period, has made remarkable progress. Nevertheless, it still suffers serious setbacks in some points either owing to lack of sufficient corroborative evidence or of proper approaches to the sources available for study. Earlier studies have created a general impression that the Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa was the only State that existed throughout the centuries of 'Early Assam'. However, historical evidence now goes on to substantiate the growth of two other States- one in the Kapili valley and the other in the Doiyang-Dhansiri valley, the antiquity of which can be traced back to the 1st and 2nd century A.D. respectively. Earlier, scholars made only incidental references to the State of Kapili valley while in the present study, an attempt, buttressed by different sources, has been made to show a cogent image of the kingdom. It existed almost for six centuries in the first part of the first millennium A.D. and was known by different names i.e. Davaka, Kapili and Trivega. Recent archaeological explorations¹ conducted in the Doiyang-Dhansiri valley have brought to light some historical evidence, which substantiates the growth of an early State that had flourished throughout the first millennium A.D.

In this study, the term 'Early Assam' is used to include the present Assam, part of sub-Himalayan regions, Northern and Eastern Bengal including Sylhet, and considered as one geographical unit. The dates shown against the reigning period of kings are still considered to be tentative, and the archaeological

remains are determined and agreed upon by the majority of scholars.

The basic objective of our present subject is to study the State formation, political centres and the cultural zones of 'Early Assam' with a view to contributing to the reconstruction of its history. The political history of 'Early Assam' bears witness to the growth of several political centres. These were usually capitals of the States at different times. However, sometimes, major political centres were also located in the different administrative divisions. A victory camp like Karnasuvarna was turned into a political centre. By analysing the nature and characteristic features and factors responsible for their development, it is intended to present a micro-study on the major political centres of 'Early Assam'.

A political centre is often co-terminous with a particular culture but a cultural region is not always limited to the boundaries of a political centre. The culture of Assam bears different traits from those of other States of India because of its complex and heterogeneous nature and character. The culture of Assam has its background in the culture of the mainland of India, South-Asia and the Pacific world, drawing its life giving force from the Austriac, Alpine, Aryan and the Mongoloid racial elements making it a kind of 'Anthropological Museum'.² Our aim is to study the cultural life of the people of 'Early Assam' by dividing it into cultural zones on the basis of regional cultural variations developed in different regions. This cultural development by embracing and assimilating various cultural elements into its fold led to the formation of basic foundation and structure of heterogeneous Assamese society and culture. It is needless to say that this study on the regional variations will usher in a new light to the cultural history of Assam.

i) The Scope and Significance

The scope and significance of study of the political centres and the cultural zones of 'Early Assam' is very wide and open ended. The historical importance of North-eastern India and the necessity of reconstructing its early history had been realised for the first time in 1835, when Captain Westernmacott had reported about the ancient temples at Charduar near Tezpur.³ The earliest mention of

early inscriptions of Assam appeared in 1840 in the *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*.⁴ Tremendous progress in historical studies was made at the instance of Sir Edward Gait in the last decade of the 19th century A.D. He published a very comprehensive catalogue of all the published materials of Assam in 1897 in his work *Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam* and made extensive use of the inscriptions in reconstructing the pre-Ahom history of the region in *A History of Assam*. The establishment of Kamarupa Anusandhana Samiti in 1912 further encouraged the investigation of the antiquities of Assam. The *Kamarupasasnavali* compiled and edited by P.N. Bhattacharya is a landmark in the reconstruction of early history of Assam. The subsequent decades witnessed similar attempts by other scholars as well. Among them, more prominent are K.L. Barua (*The Early History of Kamarupa*), R.M. Nath (*The Background of Assamese Culture*), B.K. Barua (*A Cultural History of Assam*), P.C. Choudhury (*The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*), R.D. Choudhury (*Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*) and others. Recent discoveries have further contributed towards the reconstruction of the early history of Assam. In recent years new inscriptions and other archaeological remains particularly in Doiyang-Dhansiri valley and Vadagokugiri (Bhaitbari), a nearby area of the Goalpara district have come to light. Scholars have given new interpretations to such discoveries. All these help study the process of State formation, major political centres and the cultural zones of the early period and in reconstructing the history of 'Early Assam'.

Pragiyotisa-Kamarupa had been under the rule of the three dynasties i.e. the Varman, the Salastambha and the Pala, from the middle of the 4th to the 12th century A.D. During this period, its capital had been shifted at least four times. The Varman kings had their capital at Pragiyotisapura upto the middle of the 7th century A.D. or a little later. But the rulers of the Salastambha dynasty had their capital at Hatappesvara which is identified with present Tezpur of the Sonitpur district of Assam. The inscriptions of Ratnapala and of Indrapala mention Durijaya as the capital city. Again, in the

PBCPI, it is found mentioned that Dharmapala ruled from Kamarupanagara, another capital. But Vaidyadeva, ruled from Hamsakonci.⁵ The ASPI of Samudragupta and other sources speak of the existence of the Davaka kingdom with its capital city of Trivega-nagara in the Kapili valley of Assam.⁶ Besides these, archaeological site covering an area of about four-square kilometres consisting of brick remains of temples and secular buildings together with sculptures, water tank, ramparts, water ditches and even watch towers are found at Duboroni within the small town Barpathar on the bank of river Dhansiri. H. N. Dutta thinks it to be the capital city of an early kingdom that existed in the region.⁷ The extant archaeological evidence show the existence of seven major political centres (including Hamsakonci- nothing is known about the capital city in details). In addition to these, Karnasuvarna⁸ a victory camp of Bhaskaravarman, was also an important centre. However, no attempt has so far been made to study in details of these political centres except some research articles published in different journals.

The period of our study witnessed the growth of several cultural zones. A cultural zone usually coincides with a political centre. Such cultural zones had been noticed at Guwahati, Tezpur, Nagaon-Davaka and in the Barpathar-Duboroni areas. But at times a cultural zone developed at some distance from the main political centre. This type of cultural zone is found in the Goalpara region.

ii) Some Problems

A major problem in this study is that the majority of the extant inscriptions which are mainly concerned with land and other property transfer are without dates and do not provide a clear picture of the political and cultural conditions of the region. These are panegyric in nature. Secondly, despite literary and epigraphic records testifying to the abundant sculptural and architectural materials in 'Early Assam', the surviving remains are masses of shapeless ruins strewn over many an ancient site. The causes of this utter denudation of ancient monuments are, political turmoil, climatic condition and the natural calamities. Thirdly, on the

historicity of some of the literary sources of the region, the historians are divided. Though we try to study all the extant sources, some evidence might have been left out and specifically in cases of architectural and sculptural remains, it is almost impossible to list all so far found in Assam. Therefore, only the representative pieces of artefacts have been included in our study.

iii) **Methodology**

The methodology followed in this study is historical and analytical. Micro-study has been done to make it more comprehensive so as to show specific points. They include:

Determining the Geographic Provenance of Inscriptions

Five different methods are being utilized to determine the geographic provenance of the inscriptions belonging to the 5th to the 13th century A.D. The first is the reported find spot of the inscriptions. No doubt the find spot of an inscription does not always indicate its original area of coverage, but it gives a direction to trace the geographic provenance. The second is the names of the administrative divisions, districts, villages etc. mentioned in the inscriptions within which the donated land lay. The knowledge of the approximate area of the administrative divisions helps us to determine the tentative location of the donated land. Thirdly, the proximity to one or more villages, hills, rivers etc. mentioned in the grant helps us to locate the donated land. A careful study of the early geography of Assam and neighbouring states helps to locate the villages, rivers etc. mentioned in the inscriptions. Fourthly, when other geographic information is not clear in the inscriptions, the name of the administrative centre of a political division, and the location of the donated land can be assumed in a nearby area. However, when the administrative centre is the capital of an extensive State, as was the case with the grants of the Salastambhas, being made from Hatappesvara or Hadappesvara, no such presumption of proximity can be made. Finally, the case of geographic provenance of the stone inscriptions, such as those inscribed on natural boulders or walls, presents no problem. In such cases, the find spots are to be determined as the geographic

provenance of the inscriptions.

Despite the presence of a number of names of hills, mountains, river, city, territory, administrative division contained in the epigraphs, determination of the exact location of the granted land or property has presented difficulty in many cases. In some , names of places are only partially legible and cannot be read with any confidence. A number of names are derived from language groups other than Indo-Aryan and lack of contemporaneous examples in other sources creates problems of deciphering. For example, the inscriptions of the rulers of the Salastambha dynasty mentioned the name of their capital city as Hatappesvara or Hadappesvara.⁹ But a controversy was generated when some scholars read it as Haruppesara or Harayesana or even Harapusvara.¹⁰ Further, in the subsequent centuries, the names of places, rivers, hills etc. and their geographic positions are partially or fully changed causing hindrance in finding the geographic provenance of the inscriptions.

As mentioned earlier, majority of the inscriptions of 'Early Assam' are not dated. Some inscriptions bear only the regnal year of the donor King in which the donation was made. Out of the thirty-eight inscriptions (Table enclosed) only four records are dated. They are dated in two eras viz. the *Saka* and the Gupta Era. The TRI is dated in Gupta Era and the other three, namely, the AP of Vallabhadeva, KRI and ASI are in the *Saka* Era. The dates of the remaining inscriptions are determined mainly on palaeographic grounds. Having tentatively resolved the major disputed or uncertain inscription dates, it is possible to group them by centuries as a preliminary to allotting the geographic distribution of the inscriptions in each century. In short, the number of plates dated for each century are: fifth century - 4, sixth and seventh centuries - 4, eighth century-6, ninth century-11, eleventh century -6 and twelfth and thirteenth centuries - 7.

Determining of the Cultural Elements in the Inscriptions

The inscriptions are used to study the cultural life of the people of the zones in the following ways: First, the identification

of geographic locations of the donated lands mentioned in the functional part of the inscriptions provide us information about the pattern of settlements, agrarian economy and other cultural elements of the regions. Secondly, the charters were generally issued from a particular political centre either directly by the King or by some royal officers on behalf of the former. In this respect, it can easily be presumed that the task of composing the charters were entrusted to the composers of the royal court or to a local composer. So their works were not free from the influence of local or regional culture. These cultural elements project an exclusive picture of that cultural zone, which developed centering around that political centre from where the concerned charter was issued. But at the same time, it should be kept in mind that the picture thus obtained may not always represent the society and culture of a particular zone. Depending upon the subject matter and circumstances, it may also represent other zones or the whole. This type of wider representation is sometimes overshadowed by the cultural elements bearing regional characters. So the exclusive picture derived from this method is more reliable than those conceived from wider representation.

iv) Sources

(A) Archaeological Sources 1) Inscriptions

Inscriptions of 'Early Assam' are engraved on metal plates usually of copper or stone tablets, on rocks, on pillars and outer parts of caves, temples and other buildings. A few are impressed on clay seals. The majority of the inscriptions were land grant documents to the Brahmanas. These will help us not only in determining the chronology of the concerned King but also the details of the donated lands, donees and contemporary social and political condition of the State.

Altogether thirty-eight inscriptions belonging to the period have so far been discovered. About half a century ago P.N. Bhattacharya edited twelve early inscriptions of Assam in his *Kamarupasasnavali*.¹¹ The scholars who engaged themselves in deciphering and editing the inscriptions in the subsequent years

INSCRIPTIONS OF EARLY ASSAM

Sl. No.	Name of the Ruler and Inscription	Date	Size	Language	Nature	Place of Discovery
1.	Surendravarman, Umachal Rock Inscription (URI)	5th Century A.D.	Letter Space 30 x 37.5 cm by 25 x 27.5 cm	Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative	Niliachala Hill, Guwahati
2.	Vasundharavarman, Nagajari Khanikargaon Stone Inscription (Part I)&(Part II) (NKSI)	5th Century A.D.	50 X 22 cm (Part II)	Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative cum Donative Commemorative cum Donative	Khanikargaon of Sarupathar area of Golaghat District Sarupathar Town
3.	Sri Ratnavarman, Alichiga-Tengani Stone Slab Inscription (ATS)	5th Century A.D.	79cm X 43cmX 13cm	Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative (?)	Alichiga-Tengani, Barpathar
4.	Vasundharavarman, Alichiga-Tengani Clay Seal (ATCS)	5th Century A.D.	Oval shaped	Sanskrit Prose	Commemorative cum Donative	Alichiga-Tengani, Barpathar
5.	Bhuitvarman, Barganga Rock Inscription (BRI)	6th Century A.D.	Letter space : 30x30 cm	Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative	Barganga river, 20km north-east of Davaka, Nagaon
6.	Bhaskarvarman, Dubi Copper Plates Inscription (DCPI) and Seal attached to it	7th Century A.D.	23 x 11.5 cm	Sanskrit, Prose	Eulogistic cum Commemorative cum Donative	Dubi Village in Kamrup District 5km. from Patsala Rly. Station
7.	Bhaskarvarman, Nidhanpur Copper Plates Inscription (NPCPI)	7th century A.D.	15 x 27.5 cm	Sanskrit Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Donative	Nidhanpur Village in Baniabazar Thana of Sylhet District Bangladesh
8.	Bhaskarvarman, Nalanda Clay Seal (NCS)	7th Century A.D.	Small size	Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative	Nalanda- Site No. 1 and Monastery No. 1
9.	Deopani Visnu Image Inscription (DVI)	8th Century A.D.	Height of the image 75 cm	Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative	Deopani
10.	Sri Jivara Sankar-Narayana Image Inscription (SNSI)	8th Century A.D.	67cm X 34cm X 18cm	Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative	Deopani

11.	Diglehavarman Hari-Hara Image Inscription (HHSII)	8th Century A.D.	35cmX20cmX5cm	Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative cum Donative	Deopani
12.	Sri Kumara, Copper Bell Inscription (CBI)	8th Century A.D.		Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative cum Donative	Guwahati
13.	Sri Jivaraja, Fragmentary Copper Plate Inscription (FCPI)	8th Century A.D.	21cm X 11cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Commemorative cum Donative	Nagaon
14.	Sri Jivara, Krishna Durga Stone Image Inscription (KDSII)	8th Century A.D.		Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative cum Donative	Bisrampur in Kasomaripathar
15.	Harijaravarman, Tezpur Rock Inscription (TRI)	830 A.D. (510 G.E.)	230 x 120 cm	Sanskrit, Prose	Royal Decree	Tezpur
16.	Harijaravarman, Hayunthal Copper Plate Inscription(HCPI)	9th Century A.D.	20 x 12.5 cm	Sanskrit, Verse and Prose	Eulogistic cum Donative	Hayunthal, Karbi-Anglong District
17.	Harijaravarman, Kuruvabahi Copper Plate Inscription	9th Century A.D.	24cm X 16cm	Sanskrit, Verse and Prose	Eulogistic cum Donative	Kuruvabahi Satra, Nagaon
18.	Vanamalavarmadeva, Surya Image Inscription(SII)	9th Century A.D.		Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative cum Donative	Kaki, Nagaon District
19.	Vanamalavarmadeva, Tezpur Copper Plate Inscription(TCPI)	9th Century A.D.		Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Commemorative cum Donative	Tezpur
20.	Vanamalavarmadeva, Parbatia Copper Plate Inscription (PCPI)	9th Century A.D.	25 x 15.5 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Commemorative cum Donative	Parbatia Village, 5km. from Tezpur
21.	Vanamalavarmadeva, Kaliabar Copper Plate Inscription (KLCPI)	9th Century A.D.	32 x 20 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Donative	Dighali Village, Nagaon District
22.	Bronze Surya Image Inscription (BSII)	9th Century A.D.		Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative	Amgurikhat in Titabar
23.	Balavarman III, Uttarbarbil Copper Plate Inscription (UBCPI)	9th Century A.D.	25 x 42 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Donative	Uttarbarbil Village of Howra-ghat area of Karbi-Anglong District.
24.	Balavarman III, Ulubari Copper Plate Inscription (UCPI)	9th Century A.D.	17 x 25.5 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Donative	Ulubari Village of Naharhahi
25.	Balavarman III, Nagaon Copper Plate Inscription (NCPI)	9th Century A.D.	30 x 17.5 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Donative	Mauja of Darrang District Sutargaon, 8km. east of Nagaon.

Introduction

26.	Ratnapala, Caratbari Copper Plate Inscription (CCPI)	11th Century A.D.	28x19.5 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Commemorative cum Donative	Caratbari, Nagaon District
27	Ratnapala, Bargaon Copper Plates Inscription (BCPI)	11th Century A.D.	25 x 17 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Commemorative cum Donative	Nahariabi Village of Bargaon Mauja of Tezpur
28.	Ratnapala, Suwalkuchi Copper Plate Inscription (SCPI)	11th Century A.D.	30 x 20.5 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Commemorative	Suwalkuchi, Kamrup District
29.	Indrapala, Guwahati Copper Plate Inscription (GCPI)	11th Century A.D.	25 x 15 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Commemorative cum Donative	Barpanara Vill. of Pati-Darrang Mauja of Guwahati
30.	Indrapala, Guwakuchi Copper Plates Inscription (GKCPi)	11th Century A.D.	10 X 6 inch	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Donative	Guwakuchi Village near to the Naibari Town.
31.	Gopalavarman, Gachital Copper Plate Inscription (GTCPi)	11th Century A.D.	24cm X 18 cms	Sanskrit Prose	Eulogistic cum Commemorative cum Donative.	Gachital Vill. near Davaka, Nagaon District
32.	Dharmapala, Khanamukh Copper Plate Inscription (KMCPi)	12th Century A.D.	22.5 x 15 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Commemorative	Khanamukh Village in Barbhagia Mauja of Nagaon District
33.	Dharmapala, Subhankarapataka Copper Plate Inscription (SPCPI)	12th Century A.D.	22.5 x 15.5 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Donative cum Commemorative	Area is not known
34.	Dharmapala, Puspabhadra Copper Plate Inscription (PBCPI)	12th Century A.D.		Sanskrit Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Donative	Dry bed of Pushpabhadra river of North-Guwahati
35	Vaidyadeva, Kamauli Copper Plate Inscription (KCPI)	12th Century A.D.	24.5 x 17.5 cm	Sanskrit, Prose and Verse	Eulogistic cum Commemorative cum Donative	Kamauli Vill. near confluence of Varuna and Ganga rivers, Varanasi
36	Vallabhadhava, Assam Plates (AP)	1107S.E = 1185 A.D.	20 x 14 cm	Sanskrit, Verse	Commemorative cum Donative	Tezpur
37.	Kanabarshi Rock Inscription (KRI)	1127S.E = 1206 A.D.		Sanskrit, Prose	Commemorative	North Guwahati
38	Ambari Stone Inscription (ASI)	1154 S.E. = 1232 A.D.		Old Assamese Prose	Commemorative	Guwahati

are D.C. Sircar, P.C. Choudhury, M.M. Sarma, Dharmeswar Chutia and others.

Since inscriptions are our primary sources, we have prepared a tabular list of early inscriptions showing appearance and nature, tentative date, language and the place of discovery.

Besides local epigraphs, some epigraphs from other parts of India throw light on the early history of Assam. Some of them are:

- a) The Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription (ASPI) of Samudragupta which mentions Davaka along with Kamarupa, Karttipura, Samatata etc. as frontier kingdom. (Ed. by J. B. Fleet, *CII*, III, p. 213)
- b) The Silimpur Grant of Praharsa (Bogra district of Bangladesh) which records *tulapurusa* gift by Jayapala, the last King of the Pala dynasty of Assam. (Ed. by R.G. Basak. *EL*, XIII pp. 289-95)
- c) The Pasupati Inscription of Nepal King Jayadeva II who married Rajyamati, the daughter of King Harsadeva- the conquerer of Gauda, Odra, Kalinga, Kosala etc. Here Rajyamati is depicted as *Bhagadattarajakulaja*. (Ed. by Bhagavanlal Indraji, *Indian Antiquary*, IX pp. 178f.)
- d) The Mandasor Inscription of Yasodharman which records the invasion of Yasodharman upto the neighbourhood of the Lauhitya, (Ed. by J. Fleet. *CII*, III, pp. 142f.)
- e) The Apsad Inscription of Adityasena which mentions the conflict between Mahasenagupta and Susthitavarman. (Ed. by J.B. Fleet. *CII*, III, pp. 200-08.)

Besides these, important information can be gathered from the Trippera Grant of Loknatha, the Samadgad Inscription of the Rastrakuta King Dantidurga, the Bhagalpur Grant of Narayanapala of Gauda, the Grant of the Ganga King Anantavarman, the Belva Grant of Bhojavarman, the Bhatera Plates of Govinda-Kesavadeva of Srihatta etc.

Some inscriptions of the Ahom period, i.e. the Gachtal Stone Pillar Inscription 1248 *Saka* (GSPI), the Rock Inscription of Ganesvara-Puskarini 1419 *Saka* of Dununtarai, the Rock Inscription of the Western gateway of the Guwahati city of the days of Siva

Simha and the Rock Inscription of the Navagraha temple, 1674 *Saka* of Rajeswar Simha, which help us ascertain the location of Pragjyotisapura, and are important primary sources in our study.

2) Architectural and Sculptural Remains

The architectural and sculptural remains beginning with the 1st century A.D. to the 12th century A.D. are found scattered over Assam. These consist of icons of various deities, sculptural designs, ruins of temples, stupas, ornamented caves, tanks, fortifications etc. A fairly large number of sculptures made of different materials belonging to the Saiva, Vaisnava, Sakti, Surya, Buddhist and Jaina pantheon have come to light. The sculptures of human figures, terracotta plaques of dancing figures, amorous figures, scenes from the epics and the contemporary life, animal figures have also been found in Assam. Literary and epigraphic evidence refer to activities of both secular and religious architectures in 'Early Assam'. The secular architectures include ramparts, tanks, forts etc. These architectural and sculptural remains are useful not only for their artistic value but also for the information they provide on the cultural life of the people of 'Early Assam'. Some of the important archaeological sites of Assam are: Da-Parbatiya, Bamunipahar, Majgaon, Tezpur in the district of Sonitpur; Davaka, Gasaijuri, Kawaimari, Jugijan, Kampur, Akasiganga, Barganga, Nagaon etc. in the district of Nagaon; Kamakhya, Vasistha, Urvashi, Narakasur Hill, Ambari, Hajo, North Guwahati in Kamrup district and Suryapahar, Mornoi, Jogighopa in the Goalpara district. A reference in this connection may be made to the archaeological finds of great value, discovered recently at Vadagokugiri (Bhaitbari) near Goalpara district, falling within West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya¹² and at Barpathar-Duboroni region of Golaghat district¹³

3) Coins

Till recent years the coinage of 'Early Assam' was a complete blank on the numismatic map. Only in the 1980's, very few coins attributable to the pre Ahom period have been discovered. There is however, evidence, both epigraphic and literary, of issuance of

coins by the rulers of 'Early Assam'.

Some gold coins of pre-Ahom times were discovered at Paglatek near Goalpara town in 1972. N.G. Rhodes and S.K. Bose¹⁴ have attempted to identify one of the gold coins from this hoard, bearing the name 'Sri Kumara', with the coin of Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa. On the basis of their identification, the gold coin can be regarded as the earliest numismatic evidence from the kingdom of Kamarupa as well as from Assam.

In May 1977, some copper coins, attributable to the early period, were discovered at Dhulapadung Tea Estate near Tezpur of which 33 are available for study.¹⁵ In the subsequent years, similar coins were found at Tulip Tea Estate and Bargaon of the Kamrup district, Neogpara and Kaligaon of Mangaldoi subdivision of the Darrang district and at Patrabari village of the Marigaon district of Assam. The obverse of the coins have a single letter while the reverses are blank. These letters are either *Ha*, *Va* or *Ta*. It has now been accepted that *Ha* represents Harjaravarman, *Va* probably indicates the names of Vanamalavarman, Balavarman and perhaps Virabahu while *Ta* stands for Tyagasimha of the Salastambha dynasty of Kamarupa.

(B) Literary Sources

Ancient literature, which makes reference to the political and cultural life of the people of 'Early Assam' in different ways and contexts has contributed to the reconstruction of the history of 'Early Assam', and can be classified under the following headings:

- (a) Brahmanical Literature: The *Satapatha Brahmana*, the *Aiteraya Brahmana*, the *Gopatha Brahmana*, the *Samkhyayana Grihasamgraha* etc. and the two great epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.
- (b) Classical Literature: Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa*, *Dasakumaracharita* of Dandin, *Harsacharita* of Banabhatta, Bilhana's *Vikramankadeva Charita*, Sandhyakaranandi's *Ramacharita*, Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, *Brhatsamhita* of Varahamihira, *Kathasaritasagara* of

Samadeva etc.

- (c) Puranas: *Garuda, Markendeya, Naradiya Brahmana, Skanda, Agni, Visnu, Kalika Purana* etc.
- (d) Buddhist Literature: The *Digha Nikaya* and *Samyutta Nikaya* mention the Lauhitya as 'Lohicca'. Buddhist literatures of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan.
- (e) Tantrict Buddhist Literature: *Kamarupa-Tikkha-Kalpa, Kamakhya-Tantra, Yogini Tantra, Pag-Som-Zon-Zan, Kahgyur, Tangur, Kamakhya-Guhyasiddhi, Goraksha-Samhita, Kamaratna Tantra* and *Sadhanamala*.
- (f) Chronicles: *Haragauri Sambada, Sri Rajamala, Sabdakalpadruma, Kulaji* texts of the North Bengal, Minhajuddin's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri, Riyaz-us-Salatin* etc.
- (g) Foreign Records: Chinese sources like the accounts of Chang-Kien of the 2nd century B.C. and the accounts of Shung-Shu (A.D. 420-79) have testified to cultural and political contacts between China and India (Assam). The famous Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang also left valuable accounts of the land. Besides these, the account of I-Tsing and Wang-Hieuen-tse throw a flood of light on the period of Bhaskaravarman and the subsequent years.

Greek, Roman and other sources like the accounts of Megasthenese, Strabo mention some names of places and rivers of North-eastern India. Pliny in his *Natural History* refers to a number of people of the frontier and trans-Himalayan regions, which can be identified with some Tibeto-Burman tribes of North-east India. The other important classical sources mentioning people and places of 'Early Assam', are the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* and Ptolemy's *Geography*.

Land and People

i) Geographical Background

The present Assam, one of the important States in North-east India, lies between latitudes 28°-18'-24° North and longitudes 89°-46-97 East, covering an area of 78,523 sq. km.¹⁶ But 'Early

Assam' as we defined earlier, comprised the sub-Himalayan regions in the North reaching the foot hills of the border of Tibet inhabited by the Bhutia. Aka, Dafla (*now* known as Nyishi), Abor (*now* Adi) Miri (Mishing) and Mishmi; the Patkai Hills and the so called Assam range in the East and South-east, the natural boundary between Assam and Burma, inhabited chiefly by the various Naga tribes and Manipur; Sylhet and Cachar, inhabited by the Hajongs and Garos in the South and Northern and Eastern Bengal in the West. The middle portion of 'Early Assam' is a plateau through which the mighty Brahmaputra flows. To the South of the plain plateau there stand broken hills of the Assam range of the Karbi-Anglong district (erstwhile Mikir Hills) and slightly below, the North Cachar Hills. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills can also be considered as broken hills of the Assam range. The actual area of 'Early Assam', which consists of the greater part of North-east India, is not known. According to the *Kalika Purana* (Ch.51/50) the Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa kingdom scattered over the land with the length of 100 *yojanas* and in breadth 30 *yojanas* with its triangle shape. As recorded by Hiuen-Tsiang, the country was about 10,000 *li* in circumference and the capital town was 30 *li*.¹⁷

Assam was a junction of various routes¹⁸ linked up with neighbouring countries. A route through Cachar-Manipur to Burma helped to penetrate the racial elements from South-east-Asia. Another was the Patkai route through which the Tibeto-Burmans from the North-east and later, the Ahoms migrated to Assam. Other routes for the Tibeto-Burmans were the hill passes of Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal. The route, which linked up Assam and the North of Central India, was probably the most frequented route through which the Aryans penetrated into this land.

The physical variations of the land led to the emergence of two distinct ethnic inhabitants of the plains who were brought under the process of Aryanisation. Though Brahmanical art and architecture belonging to the early period have been found in the hills of Karbi Anglong, and North Cachar and even in Arunachal Pradesh, the majority of the hill tribes remained out of touch from the process of Aryanisation and they continued to maintain their

identity in speech, traditional customs, usages, institutions and religious beliefs. In spite of this cultural distinction, the passes and river routes promoted an economic intercourse between the people of the hills and plains. The hill tribes depended on the plains mainly for their foodstuff and other necessities. Some of the hill tribes, because of economic factors, came down to the plains or foothills and preferred to settle there. The Daflas, Miris and Abors are still slowly pressing Southward and their settlements in or on the verge of the plains of Assam are slowly increasing in number and population.¹⁹ This phenomenon has also been observed in the case of Singphos, Khamtis and Mikirs (Karbis).²⁰ Naturally this accelerated the process of assimilation between the people of the hills and plains.

The Khasi Hills which continue towards the North Cachar Hills form the watershed between the two valleys i.e. the Brahmaputra and the Barak or Surma valley. The latter in the South comprises the region of Cachar and Sylhet with the character of flat plains interspersed by isolated low hills and ridges.

Throughout the centuries, the valley of Brahmaputra or Assam proper has remained the primary focus of historical events in North-east India. As the major political centres and the cultural zones of 'Early Assam' are situated along the Brahmaputra valley here we lay more emphasis on the geography and ecology of the valley. The Brahmaputra valley physically consists of a wide alluvial plain with very little slope (12 cm/km) about 729 km. in length with an average breadth of 80 km. The largest group of hills within the valley is that of the Mikir Hills (*now* Karbi Anglong). The hills from Guwahati to Nagaon form another considerable interruption of the flat plain. It is an extension of spurs from the Khasi chain. There are several hilly areas such as the hills of Singori, Hajia, Sialkuchi, Garo etc. in the valley.

The river Brahmaputra intersecting the whole length of the valley and flowing from East to West with a number of affluents descending down from the hills of North and South, has been serving as the cultural and economic lifeline of the region. A few of its tributaries are snowfed but the majority of them depend on

the moonsoons for their volume. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries have shifted course from time to time. It is believed that earlier the Brahmaputra in the Sadiya region ran much nearer to the Northern mountains.²¹ L.W.Shakespeare has suggested that earlier, the river below Guwahati ran Southwards not less than 70 km.²² This old course is said to have dried up in the 18th century when it started to flow further East and joined the Meghna near Bhairab in the district of Mymensingh, now in Bangladesh.²³ The changes of the course of the river obviously affected the civilization growing along its banks.

References to the Brahmaputra or Lauhitya as it was formerly called are numerous in pre-Ahom inscriptions. Benedicitions in the name of Lauhitya are found in the TCPI of Vanamala, BCPI and GCPI of Ratnapala and the GTCPI of Indrapala. Lauhitya is also mentioned in the *Raghuvamsa* of Kalidasa and in some inscriptions outside Assam. (Mandasor Stone Pillar Inscription, Aphsad Stone Inscription etc.) The early cities like Pragjyotisapura, Durjaya, Hatappesvara, Kamarupanagara had been established along both its banks.

The Brahmaputra and its main tributaries, i.e. the Dihang, Disang, Dikhou, Jhanji and Dhansiri on the South bank and the Subansiri, Bharali, Barnadi, Manas on the North, carrying down a mass of silt and other materials from the Himalayas and the Assam range greatly contributed to form the character of the soil at its basin. However the quality of the soil over the length of the valley is varied but it is well suited to agriculture. The most part composed of a rich black loam, reposing on a grey sandy clay, though occasionally consisting of a light yellow clayey texture. The physiography of the North bank of the Brahmaputra is different from the South. The innumerable tributaries running down from Arunachal Pradesh and the Bhutan-Himalayas create ox-bow lakes, *bils* and marshy tracts that lead to form semi-marshy or semi-terai conditions with a dense forest cover. The valley in the South is less wide and uneven. More meandering tributaries are found only in the Eastern part of the Southern section of the valley. The Dhansiri and Kapili have almost isolated the Mikir and Rengma

Hills from the main mass of the Meghalaya plateau. In the epigraphs of 'Early Assam', the whole region had been divided along the two banks i.e. the *Uttarakula*²⁴ (the North bank) and the *Dakshinakula*²⁵ (the South bank).

The valley is very rich because of its natural resources. The forests of this region can roughly be classified into two groups — the tropical evergreen forests and the miscellaneous forests. Minor variations in the climatic condition and the quality of soil in the different parts of the valley are the main factors for the growth of various vegetations. The vegetation such as *Hollong*, *Nahor*, *Sam*, *Amri*, *Sopa* etc. are the tropical evergreen forest generally found in Upper Assam while the climate has helped in the growth of mixed deciduous forests characterised by *Sal* trees in Lower Assam. The pre-Ahom inscriptions refer to many natural products such as fruit trees, timber trees, cash crops and flowering trees, which will be discussed in detail elsewhere in this study.

Sources are meagre for studying the climatic conditions of 'Early Assam'. Hiuen Tsiang records that the country was "low and damp."²⁶ Shihabuddin Talish tells us that it rained (in Assam) for eight months in the year, and even the four winter months were not free from rain."²⁷ These sources appear to be accurate as the overall climatic condition of Assam is almost similar to that found in these records. The region is earth-quake-prone and frequent past occurrences resulted in complete denudation of earlier structural monuments of the region.

ii) **Ethnological Background**

The ethnological background of 'Early Assam' was formed by the interfusion of different human races migrated to the land in different waves since very early times. These races are the Negritos, the Australoids, the Mongoloids, the Caucasoids, the Alpines and the Indo-Aryans. The outcome of their interfusion is the evolution of Assamese society and culture with distinct characteristics.

Negritos

On the basis of hair form and some cultural elements scholars

like Hutton,²⁸ Mills,²⁹ S.K.Chatterjee³⁰ and P.C.Choudhury³¹ pointed to the existence of a Negrito strain mainly among a handful of Naga people. The practice of hanging combs and wasps in the entrance to homes of some Nagas, blowguns used by the Thados, and the exposure of the dead or tree-burial in cases of unnatural death among some Nagas may be survivals of Negroid cults among them, but the modern concepts of human biology and research does not suggest one to accept this view. G.O.Liver has declared that among the Nagas "none of the subjects showed any Negrito characteristics."³²

Australoids

The dolichocephalic head, marked broad nose, dark brown skin colour, short stature and curly hair are the general physical features of the Australoid people. Considering these, we have strong ground to believe that Australoid elements are present among various tribes of North-East India. The Khasi-Syntengs speaking the Mon-Khmer dialect are considered as representative of the Australoid people in the region. A careful observation on the physical features of the Wanchoo tribe of Arunachal Pradesh indicates the presence of Australoid racial elements among them. However, B.M. Das opines that "it might have happened that the Austric speakers passed through the present day habitat of the Wanchos leaving behind certain cultural and ethnic traits in that area."³³ He further shows that some of the individual tribes of the Bodo group i.e. Rabha, Garo and Mikir bear certain Australoid ethnic traits.³⁴ Flatz and others after a genetic survey in the population of Assam opine that "the entire area of Assam, Northern Bengal and possibly part of Nepal were inhabited in pre-historic times by a contingent population of matrilineal Australoid tribes."³⁵

Mongoloids

The great bulk of the population of Assam, both plains and hills are predominantly Mongoloid. In spite of some variations among them, linguistically, they are grouped under a broad category- the Tibeto-Burman. The people with the characteristic features of a yellow or yellowish brown skin, stretched on flat wavy

coarse head hair, broad face, scanty hair on the body and face, Mongolian fold in the eyes etc., coming down from the upper courses of the Yangtse-Kiang and the Hoang-Ho in North-west China, entered Assam mainly from the side of Bhutan, Tibet, Nepal and North-eastern Burma in successive waves. They occupied the hilly regions and gradually spread over the plains of Assam.³⁶

The Tibeto-Burmans, linguistically, are broadly divided into two groups- North-Assam and Assam-Burmese. The first group consists of the various tribes of the present Arunachal Pradesh i.e. Abors, Akas, Daflas, Miris and Mishings. The second group includes three groups of the Bodos, Nagas and Kuki-Chins. The term Bodo represents all the Bodo speaking people i.e. the Garo, Rabha, Kachari, Koch, Mech, Hajong, Lalung etc. "Not a very distant past the Bodos proved themselves to be very powerful occupying almost the entire Brahmaputra valley. They extended their area of occupation even to North Bengal. In the South they not only occupied the Garo hills but also spread over Northern Mymensingh where the Hajongs are of Bodo origin."³⁷

The term 'Naga' is also used to include a large number of tribes- Angami, Sema, Rengma, Kezoma, Ao, Lhota, Tengsa, Banpara, Assiringia, Namsangia, Konyak etc. inhabiting the Eastern part of Assam (Nagaland). Anthropological studies show that the Nagas do not form a homogeneous group. They have many heterogeneous elements in physical features, customs and dialects.

The Kuki-Chin tribes were inhabitants of the Southern region of Assam. They consisted of the Hrangkul, Halam, Chaw, Langreng, Thado, Sokte, Ralte, Raite, Lakhera etc. Except two groups i.e. the Thado and the Puram Kuki, anthropometric data on the other groups are not available.³⁸

These Mongoloid tribes have a close affinity with the Kiratas of early Indian literature. The *Mahabharata*³⁹ refers to the army of Bhagadatta, the King of Pragjyotisa, which consisted of Kiratas and Chinas who appeared to be in gold, which means they were yellow skinned. The *Ramayana* also describes them as shining in gold.⁴⁰ The *Kalika Purana*⁴¹ describes the Kiratas as yellow skinned, strong, ferocious and addicted to meat and drink. The geographical

distribution of the Kiratas is shown by the *Visnu Purana* in the East of India.⁴² The *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* speaks of the Kirrhadae people in the hilly area of Assam and Burma, who were none other than the Kiratas.⁴³ In traditional accounts, Mahirangadanava, the Danava or non-Aryan ruler of Assam, is said to have ruled over Kirata subjects.⁴⁴

Caucasiods

It is believed that at one time a branch of Caucasiod people migrated from the Eastern Mediterranean region to South-east Asia and subsequently they came down to the river valleys of Assam and Burma. Caucasian elements are noticed all over the region from Tibet to Cochin-China.⁴⁵ Haddon observes such elements among the Nagas.⁴⁶ The Caucasian strain is found specially among the Angami Nagas⁴⁷ and the Ao Nagas.⁴⁸ The Manipuris are descended from an Indo-Chinese stock with some admixture of Aryan blood.⁴⁹ The Caucasian strain is also found in some of the Mishmis.⁵⁰

Alpines

The Alpine elements might have penetrated into Assam along with other Mediterranean races. K.L.Barua⁵¹ and P.C. Choudhury⁵² observing from linguistic, cultural, historical and anthropological points of view, opined that the Alpines made a significant contribution to the culture and civilization of Eastern India prior to the advent of the Vedic-Aryans. They suggest that the cultural traits connected with disposal of the dead, uncleanness of a women during menses etc. of the Assamese Hindus are of Alpine origin.⁵³ But the general physical features of the Alpines i.e. brachycephalic head with leptorrhine noses is insignificant among the present day people of Assam. "It can be reasonably said that in the physical features of the present day Assamese population, Alpinoid strains along with the Mediterranean elements are traceable, the latter being more conspicuous than the former."⁵⁴

The Kalitas of Assam were supposed to have been of Alpine origin and had early settlements in the Sadiya region.⁵⁵ P.C. Choudhury identifies the 'Kakataiai' of Hecataeus, 'Kalataiai' of Herodotus, users of the gold coin 'Kalits' mentioned in the *Perplus*

of the Erythrean Sea, 'Kodutai' of Ptolemy's *Geography*, Kolutas of the Epics, *Puranas* and *Mudrarakshasha* with them but opines that they stand for "ethnic type rather than a caste."⁵⁶ In anthropological study⁵⁷, B.M. Das shows that "the Alpine people are characterized by a brachycephalic head with flat occiput, whereas the Kalitas by and large are mesocephalic. Most of the Kalitas have mesorrhine noses, while the Alpine nose is leptorrhine. It is therefore unreasonable to hold the view that the Kalitas represent an Alpine ethnic type. However, admixture with the Alpines cannot be totally ruled out."⁵⁷ Scholars propounding their theories, admit that the origin of the Kalitas is still a subject of speculation.

Indo-Aryans

The Indo-Aryans were the last major race to migrate into Assam till the period of our study. They were dolichocephalic with some distinct physical features i.e. taller in stature, robustly built, bigger head, brighter skin, eyes, hair and higher cranial capacity than that of their predecessors. They had possessed a culture of their own which was different from the Australoids and Mongoloids. Due to the hybridization, ecological changes and other biological causes, the physical features of all the Indo-Aryans living in the different parts of India are not the same.

Brahmanaical literature like the *Aitariya Brahmana* and the *Satapatha Brahmana*, the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the *Visnu Purana* and the *Bhagabata Purana* prove the earlier contact and migration of the Aryans towards Eastern India. The *Kalika Purana* records that Aryan settlements were made by Naraka and Bhagadatta, the legendary rulers of Pragjyotisa. Inscriptional evidence also shows that the granting of *agraharas* to the Brahmanas became a systematic policy of the rulers of 'Early Assam' since the 5th century A.D.

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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The focal point of the foregoing chapters has been formed on the basis of the early inscriptions, literary works and other archaeological remains in perspective together. The term 'early Assam' denotes a region that includes the present Assam, parts of sub-Himalayan regions, Northern and Eastern Bengal, which dominates the scene in the early epigraphs and literary works.

The geographical, ecological and ethnological background of the region had a great contribution in moulding the character and destiny of the people. The multiple nature of the physiography greatly influenced the pattern of human settlement and the progress of society, polity and economy of 'Early Assam'. The river Brahmaputra that flows through the entire valley has, throughout the centuries, been the lifeline of the people of the region. The valley had remained a melting pot of ethnic, linguistic and cultural elements, as a result of which a distinct 'cultural region' came into existence. It is the land where the Aryan and non-Aryan elements had been blended together. The main factor for the assimilation is that the land lay at the juncture of the great migration routes to and from South East Asia.

The region was the home of the three major races, the Caucasoid, the Mongoloid and the Australoid. The Mongoloids of Tibeto-Burman stock settled in the hilly regions of North-East India and gradually spread over the plains of Assam. The tall-statured dolichocephalic Indo-Aryans having leptorrhine noses seem to be the last to have entered Assam before the 12th century A.D. The assimilation taking place among these major races throughout the centuries greatly contributed to the formation of the basis of Assamese society and culture

As to the State formation, a new area of study in India, scholars have propounded some hypotheses and theories regarding the formation of the 'Early State'. Friedrich Engels, who for the first time (in 1884

A.D.), has shown the concept of emergence of 'Early States' as a historical process, is considered to be the forerunner in this field. Among the modern scholars, Henry J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalník have made great headway in their path-breaking work *The Early State*, which is considered to be a model of analysis in the field of State formation studies in recent times. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, a book on polity, generally assigned to the period of the Mauryas, also defines the State as consisting of seven elements or *saptanga*. Our study of State formation in 'Early Assam' (Chapter II) has been made by applying the theories and hypotheses propounded in the different levels. This study includes three geographic spaces i.e., Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa, Davaka or Kapili and the present Doiyang-Dhansiri valley region. It has been found in the study that the Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa State and the Davaka or Kapili State fulfilled the requirements of an 'Early State' as envisaged in the theoretical framework. The States founded by Pusyavarman, Salastambha and Brahmapala in the 4th, 7th and 10th century A.D. respectively in the same geographic space were undoubtedly 'Early States'. Pratarddana, hailed from the Sundarban region of South Bengal by way of conquest, founded the Davaka State. The archaeological and literary sources show that the Davaka kingdom had existed with its separate and independent political entity from the 1st century A.D. to the 6th century A.D. by showing some characteristics of an 'Early State'. Both the States (Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa and Davaka) emerged from the indigenous social base through a process of social stratification and categorization. The Governments of these States were centralized with sovereign power for the maintenance of law and order, through the use of authority and force. They were independent, the productivity was large enough to generate regular surplus and a common ideology existed among the rulers on which the legitimacy of the ruling stratum was based. The ideology of both the States emerged from the legends imported from elsewhere. The rulers of Kamarupa claimed themselves as descendants of Naraka, the son of Boar incarnation of Visnu and Prithivi while Pratarddana and his successors of Davaka claimed their ancestry from the King Druhyo, the third son of Yayati of the great epic *Mahabharata*. The archaeological discoveries in the region of

Doiyang–Dhansiri valley of Upper Assam tend to give us an impression on the basis of which the emergence of an 'Early State' in the valley can be presumed. The sources are not sufficient for a full-fledged study on the State formation in the valley; however, some of the basic factors required for 'Early State' formation may be observed from the extant sources. It will be worth mentioning in this context that no republican type of State had emerged (along with these kingdoms) in 'Early Assam' - what was a common phenomena in case of North and North-western India in the mid of the first millennium B.C. It was probably, because of the fact that in the process of State formation in 'Early Assam', legends had played a predominant role, which inclined the process more towards the establishment of monarchical States.

An analysis of the political framework of Pragjyotisa–Kamarupa shows that the real political history of the kingdom begins from the 4th century A.D. with the Varman dynasty founded by Pusyavarman and it continued upto the middle of the 7th century A.D. Next come the Salastambha and the Pala dynasties. After the Palas, some independent rulers exercised political power till the 1st half of the 13th century A.D.

The process of political consolidation and expansion of Pragjyotisa were started only since the 1st half of the sixth century A.D. under the rule of Bhutivarman and it reached its zenith in the time of Bhaskaravarman (1st half of the 7th century A. D.). The political link between Pragjyotisa and other parts of India is amply substantiated by the activities of the Varman rulers. Bhaskara's participation in the North Indian politics and his right steps and actions in the scramble for power in North India not only resulted in territorial gains but also brought a good reputation to Pragjyotisa, on the basis of which the Chinese sources probably applied the epithet 'the King of Eastern India' to Bhaskaravarman.

Salastambha had established a new dynasty in Pragjyotisa after the reign of Bhaskaravarman. Sri Harsa, Sri Harjara and Vanamalavarman were some of the important rulers of this dynasty, under whom Pragjyotisa witnessed considerable progress in political aggrandizement and socio-religious activities. After the death of Tyagasimha, the last King of the Salastambha dynasty, without any

heir, Brahmapala, the founder of the Pala dynasty, was nominated as King by 'the subjects'. Ratnapala, Indrapala and Dharmapala were the prominent rulers in this dynasty. They could maintain the regional integrity and political stability of Pragjyotisa very efficiently and perhaps, consolidated the possessions of Pragjyotisa in the Pundravardhana area of North Bengal. Between the 4th and the 13th century A. D., Pragjyotisa saw a number of invasions mainly from the kings of Bengal, and most of the kings of Pragjyotisa were able to repulse the attacks and some times remained successful in territorial aggrandizement in the West. Inscriptional evidence shows that there were some kind of contacts between Pragjyotisa and certain other regions of the country during the rule of the Salastambhas and the Palas. The inscriptions of these two dynasties contain a number of references to the people, kings and kingdoms of Karnata, Sakas, Gurjjaras, Kerala, Bahika, Tayika, etc. (*supra*, Ch. II).

Sources show that the Davaka kingdom in the Kapili valley of Assam was known by different names — Davaka, Kapili and Trivega. A political framework can be prepared with the help of *Sri Rajamala*, the history of Tripura. It provides us names of sixteen kings in chronological order who had ruled over the Trivega kingdom from the 1st century A. D. to the 6th century A. D. (The date is tentative and based on the studies made by K. L. Barua, *supra*, Chapter II). The kingdom comprised the regions of the Kapili valley, the North Cachar Hills district and the Cachar district of Assam, Eastern parts of present-day Meghalaya, the East and North-eastern part of Tripura and even the Sundarban region of South Bengal. A political dissension, during the reign of Mitrari, led to the secession of the Sundarban region from the kingdom.

The extant sources are silent about the political activities of the rulers and name of the kingdom of the Doiyang–Dhansiri valley but these help us to conjecture its extent. It was comprised mainly of the Golaghat, Jorhat and a part of Nagaon and the Karbi-Anglong districts of Assam. The process of State formation in the valley might have been started by the ancestors of Sri Ratnavarman some time before the 2nd century A.D. Inscriptions provide us the names of only four kings of whom two belong to the 4th/5th century A. D. and the other

two to the 8th century A.D. The study also gives us a proper link to place the names of the kings Sri Jivara and Diglekhavarman in the genealogy of the rulers of this kingdom.

The investigation made on the physical appearance and the internal organization of the charters reveal that in the earlier centuries, only the stone tablets, rocks, stone slabs and clay seals were used to promulgate the Royal charters. All the donations, even the lands to the Brahmanas had been made through these stone inscriptions, which are generally not seen in the later centuries of the period of our study. The use of copper plates probably came into practice during the time of Bhutivarman (1st half of the 6th century A. D.).

The higher officials of the Royal court were also entrusted some powers to promulgate the orders on behalf of the royal authority and issue the charters relating to transfer of some properties. But in case of land grants, the King was the sole and supreme authority. The properties transferred during the period of our study were the temples, *asramas*, lands, images, etc. The donated lands can be classified into two broad groups: settled and unsettled. While the former include the villages, the latter consists of cultivable, cultivated, forest, ponds or marshy and homestead lands.

Studies show that the rulers of 'Early Assam' had made *agrahara* settlements and other kinds of gifts throughout the centuries in the different spots of a vast tract of land which covered North Lakhimpur in the North, Golaghat in the North-east, Sylhet in the South, Silchar in the South-east and North Bengal in the West. The provenance of the donated lands shows that all lands were granted in the plains of the rural areas where the agricultural extension could easily be made. Not a single incident of donation of land in the urban areas has been found. The tentative locations of the donated lands determined by us are still in the rural areas. Moreover, a majority of the donated lands were situated in the riverine areas or in the areas where streams and rivulets were frequently found. Thus the donated lands were generally situated in those areas, which were naturally fertile and more conducive for agricultural production and extension. The *agrahara* settlements and their geographic locations give us a tentative idea on the changing agrarian system and its impact on the

society and culture of 'Early Assam'.

Another remarkable feature of the land grants of 'Early Assam' was that the charters generally did not directly mention the name of the place from where these were issued, but it is reasonable to believe that the name of the capital city or the political centre found mentioned immediately before the functional part of almost all the charters related to land grants, was the place of issuance. In absence of this, the political centre under which periphery the charters were issued may be assumed.

The following major political centres of 'Early Assam' are projected:

Pragjyotisapura

The name, origin, antiquity and description of the city can be traced in the two great Epics, the *Puranas*, other Sanskrit literature, records of Hieun Tsiang and in the epigraphs. The description of the city in the *Ramayana* is vague and misleading, however, it can safely be said that the city became a part of the Ramayanic traditions prevailing in those days. So the antiquity of the city goes back to the period of the composition of the two great Epics. Observation on the chronology of the sources which mention the name of the city, reveal that the it might have been a nomenclature by the people outside Assam, who had considered this part of the land as an Eastern country and as a country of astrological study. Inscriptional evidence shows that the city remained the capital of the kingdom of Pragjyotisa till the middle of the 7th century A. D. The location of the city can finally be determined in the areas of Dispur, Jatia and Narakasur Gaon of present East Guwahati with the help of three inscriptions of the post 12th century A.D., i.e. the Rock Inscription of Ganesara–Puskarini, 1419 *Saka*, the Rock Inscription of the Western gateway of Guwahati city, 1654 *Saka* and the Rock Inscription of the Navagraha Temple, 1674 *Saka*. It may be surmised that Pragjyotisapura had played an important role as a capital city as well as a great political centre of the kingdom of Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa. Its 'sphere of influence' was not limited to the kingdom, and it occupied an unique place in the Indian political scenario from the epic ages. Probably, it was the earliest, largest and

busiest political centre in comparison to other political centres that ever developed in North-eastern India.

Karnasuvarna

Karnasuvarna became an integral part of the polity of Pragjyotisa–Kamarupa for a long time in the 7th century A.D. Though the city was founded sometime before the meteoric appearance of Sasanka as the overlord of Gauda in the last part of the 6th or the beginning of the 7th century A. D., it was he who transformed it into a magnificent city and a great political centre of Eastern India. Later it was occupied by Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa who made it an additional seat of government from where he issued the NPCPI. From the records of Hiuen Tsiang, *Sabdakalpadruma*, *Kulaji* texts and inscription found at Rajbaridanga near Berhampur of West Bengal, the antiquity of the locations of Karnasuvarna can be confirmed. Study shows that Sasanka was driven out by Bhaskaravarman from Karnasuvarna most probably before 612 A. D. and it had remained a part of the kingdom of Kamarupa as late as 643 A. D. or even later.

Hatappesvara

The name of Hatappesvara or Hadappesvara does not appear in any early Indian literature and inscription except in some of the epigraphs of the 9th century A.D. of Assam. The name of the city was not Haruppesvara as mentioned by some scholars. Haruppesvara, the widespread word is an outcome of wrong decipherment and misrepresentation of some scholars. The real form of the word is Hatappesvara which later came to be known as Hadappesvara. It has been shown in our study that the city of Hatappesvara or Hadappesvara was the capital city of the rulers of the Salastambha dynasty. Salastambha the founder King of this dynasty most probably established the capital and it remained as capital till the early part of the reign of Ratnapala of the Pala dynasty, which is evident from the CCPI of the same King. Its location cannot be other than the present Tezpur region of the Sonitpur district of Assam.

Durjjaya

The inscriptional evidences reveal that Ratnapala (c. 1010 – 1040 A. D.) the son and successor of Brahmapala of the Pala dynasty of Pragjyotisa had established a new capital city called Durjjaya. The BCPI of Ratnapala is the sole source of information for the study about the city. The information gathered from the CCPI and BCPI of Ratnapala lead us to presume that the shifting of the capital from Hadappesvara to Durjjaya took place some time between c.1022 to 1035 A.D. and it continued till the reign of Dharmapala (c. 1095 to 1120 A.D.) Ratnapala, who, probably considering the old capital of Hadappesvara to be either unsafe in the face of continued tribal inroads from the Northern hill sides or for the need of protection of the kingdom from the invasions led by the rulers of Bengal, thought out a plan to build a defensive capital in place from where it was comparatively easy to look after the affairs of the State. The grandeur, strength of the fortifications, natural beauty of the city and the nature of its inhabitants were depicted in a very glowing account by the inscription. The location of the city is still a matter of controversy. However, it can only be conjectured that the present Uzan Bazar–Ambari area of the Guwahati city was the city of Durjjaya, the identification of which is corroborated by the archaeological findings of the area.

Kamarupanagara

The name of the city has been found only in the third grant of Dharmapala, i.e. the PBCPI. Scholars have attempted to locate it in different places. Some scholars even doubted whether the word Kamarupanagara is used in the inscription to indicate merely the capital city of Kamarupa country or a new city. We may accept the view of K.L. Barua, who identified the city with the North Guwahati area till further concrete evidence comes to light.

Trivega-nagar

The name of Trivega-nagar, the capital of the kingdom of Trivega, is found in *Sri Rajamala*, the history of Tripura. Trivega-nagar can be identified with Cha-po-ho-lo, the capital city of the Kia-pi-li(Kapili) State, the name is found in the *Shung-shu History* of the first Sung

dynasty of China .Both the sources speak of the location of the city on the bank of the river Kapili. In the absence of concrete evidence regarding the location of the capital city, it can only be conjectured that it was situated somewhere in the present Davaka area of the Nagaon district of Assam. After its annexation to the Kamarupa kingdom in the first half of the 6th century A.D., the Davaka area might have been transformed into a *Visaya* (district).

Barpathar-Duboroni

Some remains of brick temples, secular buildings, together with sculptures, water tank, ramparts, water ditches and even watchtowers are found at Duboroni within the small town of Barpathar of the Golaghat district of Assam. This planned and well-protected area is identified with the capital city of the early kingdom that grew in the Doiyang-Dhansiri Valley. With the help of the inscribed stone pieces and stone plates found at Duboroni, the antiquity of the city and earliest evidence of the urban life led by the inhabitants of Borpathar-Duborani can be traced back to the 2nd century A.D. The urbanization was goaded with the activities of trade and commerce in the capital as well as in the neighbouring areas.

The study of the cultural zones reveals that the basic structure and overall trend of changes of the society and culture were more or less the same in the cultural zones. The process of Aryanisation which was supposed to have started from the time of Naraka, the legendary King of Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa , was going on at the initiative of the Royal court and the Brahmanas, where the indigenous tribes were absorbed into Sudravama under the *Varnasrama* system in the period of our study . However, the implementation of the full-fledged *varnasramadharma* has not been observed in the Aryanised society of 'Early Assam'. A liberal attitude and 'give and take' policies were seen in the process of Aryanisation in the region. The earliest evidence of granting *agraharas* to the Brahmanas by the rulers of 'Early Assam' has been noticed in the NKSI of the 5th century A.D. The practice of granting *agrahara* to the Brahmanas brought remarkable changes in the agrarian system of the land. Epigraphic records of the period witnessed the gradual proliferation of some social groups based on

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their professions and occupations. A network of the rural and urban economy had also been developed in different zones according to their potentiality. Brahmanism, more appropriately 'Aryanism', with a modified aspect by incorporating the non-Aryan cults was developed in the zones. Saivism, Vaisnavism, Saktism and Tantrik Buddhism etc. were the popular faiths in the zones. In the field of temple architecture all the zones adopted the North Indian Nagara style.

In spite of all these common features, minute observations on the cultural development reveal that the zones tended to give themselves their own cultural traits and entities by showing some regional variations. Some of the distinct variations were: Social categorization and stratification were more prominent in the Guwahati, Tezpur and Nagaon-Davaka zones. Majority of the land grants to the Brahmanas were made in the different areas of the three zones. Three major political centres as well as capital cities, i.e. Pragjyotisapura, Hatappesvara and Trivega-nagar were situated in the three zones. Urban population growth and urban economic activities might have given a cosmopolitan character to the capital cities (mainly to Pragjyotisapura). The proliferation of social groups based on professions and occupations were also more distinct in these three zones. The urban centres became nodal points in the network of redistributive economic integration. The rapid growth of urban life in the aforesaid cities (mainly in the Pragjyotisapura and Hatappesvara) created more demands for surplus products as a result of which some centres of different professional groups emerged in neighbouring areas. The patronization of Aryanism, appointments of Brahmanas in the Royal court, spiritual and religious activities of the kings and their family members (personal and social) within and outside the Royal court and *agrahara* settlements were some of the factors which led to the social stratification being more prominent in these three zones. It is no doubt that the autochthonous and some of the occupational groups were incorporated in the Sudra class of the Aryan fold in 'Early Assam'. The term 'Sudra' as a caste is found only in an inscription (DVII), geographic provenance of which is determined in the Deopani area of the Doiyang-Dhansiri valley. Like that, only few inscriptions (TRI, GCPI, PBCPI), geographic provenance of which are determined in

the Tezpur, Changsari and Barpeta regions, mention about the Kaivartta people, one of the bigger occupational base social groups of 'Early Assam'.

The economy of the Barpathar-Duboroni zone had witnessed a great turn towards further growth along with the development of indigenous smelting technology of iron. It had a great contribution towards the progress of agriculture, defensive systems and material culture of the people of the zone. The discovery of similar gold coins in the Goalpara zone (gold coins were not found in the other zones) and its adjoining areas of Bangladesh, lead us to a tentative conclusion that the zone played an important role from the side of the Pragjyotisa kingdom in carrying on the external trade link with North India, and the sea ports of Chittagong and the Arakan. The Nagaon-Davaka area had also played a significant role in maintenance of external trade links with Burma (*now* Myanmar) and China while the Tezpur zone had links with the Himalayan countries. The medium of exchange in the external trade maintained by these two zones is not known. The copper coins and the *cowries* discovered in these two zones might have been used only in the internal trade. Inscriptional and literary evidence substantiate the fact that Pragjyotisapura (of the Guwahati zone) and Hatappesvara (of the Tezpur zone), the two important urban centres, had played a key role in this respect.

The Guwahati and Tezpur zones witnessed a remarkable progress in the field of literature, education and philosophy. Sources are available to prove that the studies of Vedic literature and its auxiliary branches, Philosophy, Tantric and other literatures including secular and vocational, were made in these two zones. Pragjyotisapura, the capital city and its neighbouring areas had been a great centre of astrological and astronomical studies since time immemorial. However, the Tezpur and Nagaon-Davaka zones also marked considerable progress in this respect. The archaeological remains of *graha* worship including the Sun God have been found in the two zones. The *Ravikshetra* of the *Kalika Purana*, which is identified with the present Surya Pahar of Goalpara was also a centre of worship of the Sun God in the Goalpara zone. From the information gathered from the extant

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literary and archaeological sources it seems that the Guwahati zone had made better progress in the field of astrological and astronomical studies in comparison to the other zones.

In the sphere of religion, the Goalpara zone acquired a special reputation because of the fact that it was a meeting place of three-religions, viz. Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. It will be worth mentioning that the Goalpara zone had witnessed the development of three different forms of Buddhism in three phases of time—the Hiriyaana in the early centuries of Christian era, the Mahayana in the Pala period and the Tantric form of Buddhism in the later part of the Pala period. Jainism, which was never found in other cultural zones of 'Early Assam', penetrated into the Goalpara zone from nearby Bengal. It was a small branch of the ramified Jainism of Bengal of the 9th century A.D.

The cult of *nama-samkirtana* and syncretism appear to be a socio-religious character of the Barpathar-Duboroni zone. The SNSII from Deopani clearly shows the prevalence of the cult of *nama-samkirtana* (chanting of *nama* in honour of Sankar and Narayan) in the zone. Discovery of composite figures of Hari-Hara (Visnu and Siva) in the different parts of the Doiyang-Dhansiri valley reveal that syncretism appears to have become a predominant religious cult in the zone. This syncretism was an outcome of the social assimilation and synthesis which occurred in the zone. The geographic seclusion (*supra*, Chapter II) might also be one of the factors for the growth of regionalism in the zone. Sculptures and architectural remains of 'Early Assam' substantiate the fact that the Saivism was a predominant religious cult in all the cultural zones. However, on the basis of the inscriptional evidence, the practice of gifting Devadasis to the Saiva temple had been observed only in the Guwahati and Tezpur zone.

In the field of temple architecture, the zones, keeping themselves within the framework of the North Indian *nagara* style, show some regional variations. The Guwahati zone shows the application of certain geometry of planning of the ground plan of a temple in North Guwahati. The ground plan of temples were generally modelled out on a square, and the plan did not include triangles as a major component, but the plinth of the Manikarneswar temple of North Guwahati is standing on

two concentric equilateral triangles. This is a rare phenomenon in the temple architecture of 'Early Assam'. The use of *angasikharas* in the Madan Kamdeva temple and use of friezes depicting bracket figures with ornamentation in the temple of Pingaleswar of the Guwahati zone were some of the regional variations which were not seen anywhere in 'Early Assam'. Another regional variation of the zone is reflected in the use of caverns in order to place the main deity in the *garbhagriha* of the temple. This uncommon feature has been observed in the case of Kamakhya, Dirgheswari, Bhubaneswari and some of the other temples of the Guwahati zone. One of the regional features of the Guwahati and Goalpara zones is the creation of partial architectural structures on the natural rocks. In both the zones, the natural rocks along the Brahmaputra river were mainly used for this purpose. A regional feature reflected in the temple architecture of the Tezpur zone is that the construction of systematic structural architecture from the low-lying areas to the top of the hill or higher places was in chronological order. The process of construction of the temples, starting in the low lying plains of Da-Parvatiya, and gradually being expanded towards higher land via Baralimara, Majgaon, and the present D.C. Court area, had been completed on the top of the hill of Bamunipahar throughout the centuries from the 5th to the 10th century A.D. in the zone. The use of *Kalpavrksha* motif on the door lintels and doorsills, and *darasirapatti* studded with profuse ornamentation were most popular styles in the zone. The Nagaon-Davaka zone acquired a reputation for the construction of a group of nine temples at one place in its different parts. The reason behind this peculiar feature is conjectured with the idea of worshipping of nine planets or *navagrahas*.

The sculptures of the zones generally exhibited various Indian Classical characteristics, however the incorporation of local ideas and features was also remarkable. This incorporation led the Barpathar-Duboroni zone to such an extent that it enabled develop a regional art form of it's own. Scholars describe it as the Deopani or Duboroni School of Art (*supra*, Ch.v). In addition to the Classical characteristics, some special features were reflected in the sculptures of the zone, which appear to be purely native creations and born of local spirit.

The sculptures of three religious faiths, noticed in a compact

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manner, helped the Goalpara zone to form its own cultural entity. The Buddhist *stupas* and the sculptures of two Jain *Tirthankaras* found in the Goalpara zone were uncommon in the other parts of Assam. Amorous figures found in Changchowki of the Nagaon-Davaka zone and in the ruins of Madan Kamdev and the Pingaleswar temple of Guwahati zone reflect the influence of Tantricism on sculpture. These sculptures showing sensuousness as a new aesthetic idea reflect the trend of the changing society in the two zones.

Minute observation shows that the assimilation and sythesization of different cultural elements had played a vital role in the process of cultural development in the zones. The zones had shown some varied reactions and results whenever they received new cultural elements from outside. The process of assimilation and sythesization of the cultural elements depended upon the basic nature and the character of the zone. In this study, a broad outline of the main trend of cultural variations in the zones has been drawn. The regional variations developed within 'Early Assam', (including those, outside the purview of our study) in the later period, (i.e. the Ahom period) and contributed cultural elements to the growth of a greater heterogeneous Assamese society and culture.

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