

ASSAM - BENGAL

RELATIONS

PRATAP CHANDRA CHOUDHURY

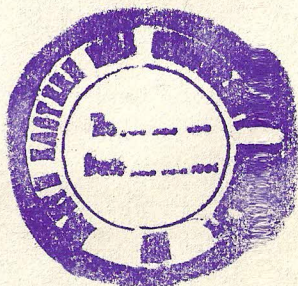
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# Assam-Bengal Relations

From the earliest times to the twelfth century A.D.

Pratap Chandra Choudhury

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## FOREWORD

Readers of books on history may well be struck by the diverse approaches and methods of analysis which range from works giving detailed descriptions of a single event or turning points, to broad, systematic efforts that seek to explain patterns of developments over a period of time. While all approaches have their value, it might seem ideal that one general work should try to combine a reasonable amount of detail with a wider purpose of making generalizations and showing how they can be explained. It is perhaps this approach which has led to making history one of the most synoptic and unifying of all studies. Considered in this light, the present work, I think, is interpretative as well as factual and has for its focus the entire range of Assam-Bengal relations from the earliest times to the end of the twelfth century. It furnishes both foreground and background and seeks to give a comprehensive study of the culture and civilisation of the concerned people in a given historical period.

It is an established fact, of the centuries-old history of India that have wave after wave of conquest might come and new kingdoms might rise in the way they did within the far-flung borders of India, but, then, the underlying unity of the country came to be preserved through the centuries beginning with the Mauryas. In response to the demands of the times there were occasions in Assam-Bengal relations when these were marked by conflict as also cooperation, at times unwittingly. But each of the regions maintained its distinctive identity thereby enriching the concept of unity in diversity. At certain periods the political frontiers of the regions of Assam and Bengal either criss-crossed or overlapped each other. But such has been the native genius of the people of India in different regions that, overcoming limitless vicissitudes, great contributions could be made to the cause of the fundamental cultural unity of India with all its recognised diversities. New evidence from archaeological finds would certainly be additive to the treasure-trove of source-materials. But even with existing materials it is still possible to reconstruct history and

interpret events for the benefit of the academic world and all concerned.

The author of the book, Dr Pratap Chandra Choudhury is a renowned historian and Indologist. He has to his credit many research works on the history and culture of Assam and the country's north-east. Dr Choudhury's work is the result of much painstaking research and bears the stamp of his profound knowledge and expertise in the subject. I think due care has been taken to make the book clear and accurate as also readable, and to provide it with appropriate and up-to-date source-materials. While the conclusions are the author's own, I commend this book to the scholarly world and the interested general readers.

Guwahati :  
12 January, 1987

Debo Prasad Barooah  
Vice-Chancellor,  
Gauhati University

## PREFACE

I have in this tiny volume discussed about Assam-Bengal Relations from the pre-historic times till the end of the twelfth Century A.D. in varied aspects bearing on both Political and Cultural saga of the people concerned, which in their facets at least are expected to depict a picture of the by-gone ages : facets because the historical data are not adequate enough to enable a researcher to arrive at a definite conclusion in respect of the life and conditions obtaining amongst the people of heterogeneous nature that evolved rather complex systems, though there was the under-current of unity, grounded on Indian Cultural heritage. Even so, the data has been interpreted to speak for themselves, divested of the subjective, rather biased element.

The nature of the treatment in the volume would be evident from the topics we have discussed under the heads : I-Assam-Bengal in Pre-historic times ; II-Assam-Bengal in Ethnological perspective; III-Political Geography of the Regions; IV-Legends and Proto-history; V-Political Relations : (1) From A.D. 320 to 750; and (2) A.D.750 to 1200; (3) Administrative set-up; VI-Cultural Relations : (1) Studies in Social life; (2) Studies in Educational and Literacy fields; (3) Studies in Economic Relations; (4) Religious tenets; and (5) Studies in Monuments : Art and Architecture. In dealing with the same a picture of the contemporary kingdoms in India including those of South-east Asia has been kept in view and conclusions on varied topics arrived at on an examination of the available data : archeological, literary and foreign accounts and of the works based on the original in the main, which have been appended to the textual matter along with an *Index* and a few select illustrations, bearing on pre-historic and historical archaeology, taken from different sources.

Interpretation of the data is in mine own, even though I have utilised some useful information from the pen of a few eminent Indologists on the allied topics, for which I would ever remain indebted to them. I may be excused for not mentioning their names here, which has, however, been done at places

and in the *References*, appearing at the end of each chapter. In discussing the varied topics we have shown both the similarities and differences that marked the two geographical regions of Gauda-Vanga and Prāgyjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa with reasons for such trends and their resultant reaction on the people at large. The burden of a historian is, however, to find out the missing links that at times bound together the people of the valleys of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra with those inhabiting the wide area watered by the confluence that had jointly fallen into the Bay of Bengal and not to emphasise on their subsequent cultural idiosyncracies, envolved through the ages by the varied people concerned; and we have interpreted the dried facts of history accordingly, making it lively at least for the researchers on allied topics to take a cue from the methodology, we have adopted here.

I crave the pardon of the readers for any act of omission and commission and for any error, printed or otherwise that may have crept into the volume, full of diacritical marks and quotations in Sanskrit, as it is.

I take this opportunity of expressing my sincere gratitude to the *Indian Council of Historical Research*, New Delhi for the kindness shown to me in awarding the *Fellowship* and permitting me to get the volume published. My grateful thanks are due to Professor D.P. Barooah, Vice-Chancellor of the Gauhati University for the "Foreword" to the Volume, he has so kindly written. No less thanks are due also to the Authorities of the *Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti*, Guwahati, for sponsoring the project, to those who helped me in the compilation work and in other ways, to Sri Pradip Sarma for typing out the volume, as to Sri Krishan Kumar of the Spectrum Publications for taking so much pain in printing the volume nicely in limited time.

Guwahati :  
16 January, 1987

Pratap Chandra Choudhury

## ABBREVIATIONS

- ABORI : Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona  
ACR : Assam Census Reports  
ARASI : Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India  
A.Res : Asiatique Researches  
A.Rev : Assam Review  
ASB : Archaeological Survey of Burma  
ASSP : Asam Sāhitya Sabhā Patrikā  
ASSS : Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series (Baroda)  
BCR : Bengal Census Reports  
BOS : Baroda Oriental Series  
BM : British Museum, London.  
BMFEA : Bulletin, Museum of the Far-Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm  
BRM : Bulletin of the Rafles Museum, Singapore  
BSOS : Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies, London  
BSSP : Vangīa Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā  
Cat (alogue): (Cordier, P)-Catalogue du fonde Tibetain de la Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, 1908.  
— : (Sastri, H.P.)-Descriptive Cat. of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Govt. Collection under the care of the ASB, Calcutta.  
CCBM : Catalogue of Coins in the British Museum, London  
CCIM : Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum, Calcutta  
CII : (Fleet)-Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum  
CR : Calcutta Review  
CRI : Census Reports of India  
DHAS : Deptt. of Historical & Antiquarian Studies, Gauhati  
DHNI : Dynastic History of Northern India  
EHK : Early History of Kāmarūpa  
EI : Epigraphia Indica  
EISMS : Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture  
E(P). Com : Epigraphia Comatica  
ERE : Encylopaedia of Religion and Ethics  
GJ (GRGS) : Geographical Journal, London  
GL : Gauḍalekhamāṭā  
GOS : Gaekwad Oriental Series  
GP : Gurjara-Pratihāras  
HC : Harṣacarita of Bānabhaṭṭa (Cowell & Thomas)  
HMHI : History of Medieval Hindu India

- HCA : The History of the Civilisation of the People of Assam to the 12th century A.D., DHAS, Gauhati
- IA : Indian Antiquary, Bombay
- IB : Inscriptions of Bengal III (Majumdar, N.G.)
- IC : Indian Culture, Calcutta.
- IHQ : Indian Historical Quarterly, Calcutta
- JA : Journal Asistique (Paris)
- JAH (R)S : Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society
- JAOS : Journal of the American Oriental Research Society, New Haven
- JARS : Journal of the Assam Research Society, Gauhati
- JASB : Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta
- JBORS : Journal of the Bihar & Orissa Research Society
- JBRAS : Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
- JDL : Journal of the Department of Letters (C.U.)
- JFMSM : Journal of the Federated Malaya States Museums, Singapore
- JGOS : Journal of the German Oriental Society
- JHR : Journal of Historical Research (D.U.)
- JIH : Journal of Indian History, Trivandrum
- JISOA : Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta
- JOR : Journal of Oriental Research, Madras
- JMBRAS: Journal of the Malaya Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Singapore
- JPAIO (Conf.) : Journal and Pros. of the All India Oriental Conference
- JPASB : Journal and Pros. of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta
- JRAI : Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London
- JRAS : Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland, London.
- JRASB : Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta
- JRSA : Journal of the Royal Society of Art, London
- JSA : Journal of the Society of Art
- JSS : Journal of the Siam Society, Bangkok
- JUPHS : Journal of the U.P. Historical Society
- JWAS : Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences
- JWCBRS : Journal of the West China Border Research Society
- KP : Kālikā Purāna
- KS : Kāmarūpa Śāsnāvalī
- LSI : Linguistic Survey of India (Grierson)
- MASB : Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
- MASI : Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India
- MR : Modern Review

## ABBREVIATIONS

xi

NIA	:	New Indian Antiquary
PASB	:	Pros of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
PB	:	Pālas of Bengal
PHAI	:	Political History of Ancient India (Raychaudhuri)
PRIA	:	Pros. of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin
RCSI	:	Records of the Geological Survey of India
RSPP	:	Rangpur Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā
RT	:	Rāṣṭrakūṭas and their Times (Altekar, A.S.)
SBE	:	Sacred Books of the East Series, Harward
TAPS	:	Trans. of the American Philosophical Society
VJ	:	Visheshvaranand Indological Journal, Hoshiarpur
VRS	:	Varendra Research Society, Rāṣhāhi
VSP	:	Vangīa Sāhitya Pariṣad
VSS	:	Vizianagram Sanskrit Series
YT	:	Yoginī Tantra.

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## CHAPTER-I

### ASSAM-BENGAL IN PRE-HISTORIC TIMES

Though not a homogeneous zone, due to different geographical conditions, pre-history any proto-history of Assam and Bengal including Bihar and Orissa have had marked affinities with the cultural life of India, as with the South-east Asiatic regions including the Isles in the Pacific, Burma and the mainland of China, facilitated by both land routes through Assam and the sea route via Bay of Bengal for the migration of people of diverse origin. This connection was more intimate with the Indo-Gangetic plain and Peninsular India, as with Nepal and Tibet.

Though not easily accessible, it was through Assam or through north-eastern routes that most people migrated to other parts of India, and started their settlement firstly in the hilly areas and then in the plains. Geologists have divided Assam mainly into the Brahmaputra Valley, the Shillong plateau and the tertiary ranges and the smaller hills. There are *duars* along the mountains in the north as well as in North Bengal, linking this region with Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal. While the Valley is cut by the Brahmaputra and its tributaries surrounded by mountain ranges,<sup>1</sup> the Shillong plateau is the elevated tract in between the valley in the north and the plains of East Bengal in the south and is bordered along the southern edge by a fringe of tertiary rocks.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the plateau there are series of rocks of diverse character. In the Naga Hills in the north-east, bordering Burma are the Disang shales with sand in the lowest Eocene beds, and in the interior, separating Assam from Burma, the shales are hardened and slaty, and are associated with quartz veins and serpentine.<sup>3</sup> The Patkai, along with the Naga Hills, being a continuation of the Assam-Burma ranges, encloses the Manipur Plateau, the Mizo Hills in the south and then the Chittagong and Chin Hills. The low hills in the Assam ranges are occupied by the Garos, the Khasi-Syntengs, the Arlengs and the Hill Kacharis in its central zone, and are open to India. This distribution of the people was determined by both physical geography and

natural habits, and ethnology and material culture have contributed to the evolution of distinct socio-cultural life of the people concerned.<sup>4</sup> Even so, from pre-historic times there had been movement of people from the hills, due mainly to economic reasons, leading to the admixture between the hillmen and plains people, who had left their substratum in the processes and contributing to a composite culture-complex of the Indo-Aryan and pre-Aryan-Indo-Mongol strains, evidenced in the main by philology and material culture of the racial types concerned, including the presence of the pre-historic lithic culture in the valley; and both through the valley where lies the ancient capital Prāgyotisapura and the hills, Assam had links with India through Bengal, as with the South-east Asiatic mainland and the Isles in the Pacific.

On grounds of geo-physical factors, the Bengal region may be divided into North-West Bengal, where in lies ancient Varendra; North-east Bengal; South-west Bengal, with old alluvium, the most important part of the region. It is held that "the greater part of the districts of Bankura, Burdwan and western half of Midnapur is a continuation of the Chotanagpur Plateau to the east and the present surface of the region has been derived mainly by a process of degradation of the table land."<sup>5</sup> There are alluvial plains of different colour and rocks of varied nature in the region. Then is the South-east Bengal, that extends to the east of the Meghna with the river valleys of Surma, Gomati where fossil wood like that from Burma was found,<sup>6</sup> and Karnaphuli in Chittagang with rocks, covered by alluvial soil at places. In the region to the east of the Meghna lay ancient Samatata and Harikela, and in the triangular sector of N.E. Bengal in Madhupur lies Dacca and ancient Vikramapura; and South Bengal region which includes the Sundarbans. Here the combined waters of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra fall into the Bay of Bengal. There had been changes in the river beds, and the Deltaic region formed at a comparatively late period unlike N.Bengal and Assam.

For a complete picture of the pre-historic and proto-historic lithic culture of Eastern India we are to examine as well the physiographic factors of the Gangetic basin of Bihar,

the Bengal Deltaic region, like the hills and plains of Assam, the alluvium of Orissa including the Chotanagpur plateau, the habitat of pre-historic, primitive races including the Santals, the Godabas and the Baster Gonds, which on many grounds, have had affinities with the hill people of Assam, particularly the Khasis and the Nagas. The plateau runs "into the inner highlands of Orissa on the south-east, and through the Santal Parganās, as far as the bank of the Ganges on the north-east"<sup>7</sup>. The region consists of hills and valleys of varied description.<sup>8</sup> The mid-Ganges valley lies between the lower spurs of the Himalayas and the Chotanagpur plateau, divided into North and South Bihar, the former being noted for ancient Videha and Mithilā, and the latter for Magadha, having close affinities with both North Bengal and Assam from pre-historic times onwards. The coastal region of Orissa, consisting of marshy forest land, like that of the Sundarbans, is mostly an arable tract, lying between the sea-coast and the sub-mountain tract.

While the Geological formations of the western hills and the plains compare well with those of Bankura and Midnapur and Hooghly. In North Bengal, Darjeeling with Sikkim, constitutes a portion of the Himalayas, serving as highway between India and Tibet like the present Arunachal in the sub-mountainous region to the north of Assam valley. This region has revealed traces of the meeting ground of Indo-Tibetan culture with rich mineral deposits in the rocks and upper courses of the river system, inhabited in and around it and below by the tribes like the Akas, Dafalas, Miris, Mishimis, Abors, Galongs with numerous allied people at the foot of the Himalayas, with linguistic and class differences, though most of them belonged to Indo-Tibetan stock. They have had links with the plains people as well, contributing to both pre-historic and Indo-Aryan culture complexes. In these sub-Himalayan regions we have had traces of the existence of the Cacausic, Alpine-Aryan linguistic stock as well. Among these hilly regions of Bengal and Assam, as with the plains and those of Magadha-Videha and Orissa, Utkala there had been strong cultural links, as is evidenced, among others, by the stone tools and other archaeological deposits in the pre-historic period and literary evidence of the proto-historic one.

In fact, right from the Indo-Gangetic plain to Burma and South-east Asia in the east and to Peninsular India in the south there had been flow of cultural currents and cross-currents, introduced by the varied racial types including the Negritos, the Austro-Asiatic, the Alpine-Aryan, the Indo-Mongoloid and other oceanic elements, as is evidenced by the pre-historic finds and historical records of which these people were the authors, constituting a wide cultural zone, and it is from this perspective that the historical evolution of the culture complexes is required to be examined to find out the similarities and the differences in respect of the regions concerned, brought about by the inter-action of forces : indigenous and what may be called foreign.

Of the pre-historic finds, the lithic tools, found in Assam, the number is possibly the highest among those found in East India zone, and besides those preserved in the Museums of Oxford, Cambridge, London and Calcutta there are a large number kept as heir-looms, particularly in the hills for generations. These are but surface finds. Evidence of caves, if not of cavemen, as in Peninsular India, is reported from K&J.Hills, Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills. We have traditions that remnants of a pre-historic Negrito race were blocked into a cave near Haflong by a Kachari king. These Negritos are believed to have left a large number of stone celts, which were found on or just below the surface in different regions of Assam.<sup>9</sup> But then, these traditions are not supported by human remains and lithic implements in the graves, and in no case these are palaeoliths. Those from Garo Hills and Haflong areas have not definitely been classified. These may be at best mezoliths and microliths.

Besides Peninsular India, palaeoliths are, however, reported from some places of Eastern India including the Chotanagpur plateau.<sup>10</sup> Similar finds were found from Gopinathpur (Bankura) and Raniganj coal-field (Burdwan).<sup>11</sup> Such finds are also reported from Manbhum and Singbhum including Mayurbhanj.<sup>12</sup>

As regards microliths, chert flakes have been found at

Chaibasa and Chakradharpur in Singbhum; Ranchi, near Durgapur, Dalbhum, Bāngarh (manbhum); Santal Parganās; Bankura and near Birbhanpur in Burdwan.<sup>13</sup> So these finds cover an area from Chotanagpur to west Bengal. With some of these sites are associated copper mines, as those from the palaeolithic and neolithic sites from Chotanagpur.<sup>14</sup> With reference to the Birbhanpur site in particular it is held that the industry is "essentially non-geometric." There is the absence of pottery and 'crested ridge', so characteristic of the "microlithic industries of the chalcolithic period" B.B.Lal calls this industry as pre-pottery and pre-chalcolithic.<sup>15</sup>

Though these tools have not been reported from the Assam regions like N.Bihar, Orissa and East Bengal, due to their occurrence in Burma, Malaya and other regions of S.E.A., it is not improbable that the spade of an archaeologist may bring to light such tools from this region as well, and proper examination of the Garo Hills and Haflong finds is expected to yield results linking the specimens with those from West Bengal, though it is wrongly held by some writers that these types from Burma in particular have had no or little connection with the East-Indian varieties.

We are on firmer grounds in respect of the neoliths from Assam, ascribable to both the pre-historic and proto-historic period. Both the stone material and the types are varied in nature: one such type is long, narrow and triangular; the other more or less rectangular; and the third one is shouldered. The first one is comparable to those found in Southern India; the second one is similar to the Polynesian type; and the third type is said to have been derived from the Mon-Khmer-Irrawady variety. The adze specimen, found also in the Gangetic plains, is taken to have been brought by the emigrants from the east.<sup>16</sup> Shouldered type was found in Visvanath (Tezpur Zone) and Kanarpara (Cachar), resembling the Burmese type, as was examined by Theobald, who noticed adzes of the same type from Singbhum.<sup>17</sup> On grounds of rock formations of the Cachar and Mikir Hills, lying not very far from the finds at Visvanath, it is held that the Assam specimens were made locally. The rock materials are also

similar to those from Khasi and Sylhet trap, suggesting a link between the Khasis, people of Pegu and the Mundas.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the area of the monoliths from N.Cachar adzes were found. In some cases these resemble iron hoes. One specimen is the shouldered type, another an axe, flat and triangular, differing from that of the Naga Hills, which is thick and roughly shouldered, but not so polished as that from Cachar; and the shouldered types from the latter region resemble the developed celts from Burma. The presence of fossil wood implements makes the link far more marked with Burma.

On the basis of the tools from the Naga Hills, it is held that the commonest type is the roughly shouldered triangular one, the cutting edge being polished. The reddish stone adze from Bapugwema is shouldered; the second type from Kamehu is smaller with cutting edges, made of stone with pale green veins. The shouldered type from here is compared with those of the Mon-khmers of Burma, Malaya and Chotanagpur, indicating that a branch of such people passed through the Naga Hills before it learnt the use of iron. It is shown, however, that these types were found from the Sadiya and Cachar tracts as well with distinctive features, but having affinities with those from the Hukawang valley and Yunnan. The rock material from Sadiya including Mishimi Hills is jadeite, and a few of lime stone, bone, gneiss and dolerite. Most tools from this region have had links with those from Yunnan. Most of the tools from the Khasi Hills are of slate, said to have been derived possibly from the Cachar types. With reference to the Chotanagpur pre-historic graves and copper celts of the shouldered type found there, which may be compared with the similar implements, both of stone and iron hoes, used by the Nagas and the Khasis like the Mundas, it is surmised that their use is either an intrusion from Oceania, or a development which started in Eastern India, and then spread to the Isles. Reference in this connection is made to the Irrawady shouldered type, found also in the Naga Hills, in Bapugwema, Waichang, and Kobak and Bolasan in N.Cachar, where stone urns containing ashes of the dead including adzes and axes were noticed. It is therefore suspected that stone celts of the shouldered type may have

been derived from the metal original, and that if the use of copper is later than that of stone, the shouldered type may be an intrusion from Indonesia; if, however, copper was the original, the stone substitute may have reached Oceania from the West.<sup>19</sup>

But then, independent development of the industry inside and outside India cannot also be ruled out, whatever the similarities may be found among the ethnic groups or the authors of the celts, both of stone and metal, between the Assam tribes, the Mundas or Burmese of the Mon-khmer, Austro-Asiatic stock or the primitive, pre-historic culture of what is called the broad Indonesian zone.

The implements from the Garo Hills are mostly of sand stone, though rock like lime stone, black basalt and cherts are also detected, and most of the types from this region have close parallel with those from the Cachar zone.

Of the plains, a large number have been found at the Tezpur region, which are of sand stone, different from those from Sibsagar and Dibrugarh areas. A number of them are of quartzite and slate and what is called of "decomposed volcanic ash".<sup>20</sup> There are also wedge types as from Naga Hills and shouldered ones, as from Cachar. Of the other types, six grooved hammers from Visvanath in quartzite are of significance, which are "perhaps the rarest of numerous neolithic implements recorded from eastern Asia".<sup>21</sup> Some such specimens of a less perfect form were found in N-W.Provinces.<sup>22</sup> Similar types are reported also from Banda, Bellary and Baroda.<sup>23</sup> Except one such type from Anam, another from Shantung,<sup>24</sup> and still another from the southern shores of Sakhelin,<sup>25</sup> described by Jeguina, such hammers have not been reported from Burma, Malaya, Borneo, Yunnan and Indo-China. In the foot-hills of the Himalayas throughout present Arunachal, stone tools of varied materials and types have also been reported.

Besides these, a very large numbers were found in the scattered regions of Assam, associated with the cult of fertility

and good fortune, believed by the people concerned as possessing charms, and the wide distribution of the tools points to the prevalence of a vigorous pre-historic neolithic culture in the region, and the types hold link with S-E Asia including Burma and Yunnan on the one side and the eastern zone of India on the other, whether or not chronology of this culture is to be associated with the developed neoliths from the south-east Asiatic region including southern China, as may be seen from the existence of more or less common material culture of their authours concerned.

These features will be evident on an examination of the tools from Bengal and other regions of Eastern India. Slightly different from Assam, neolithic culture of this region is chiefly marked by ground tools, pottery and cultivation,<sup>26</sup> as those from the Sadiya and Dibrugarh regions. E.F.O.Murray connects pottery with burial urns of the late historical period and with the use of copper and iron,<sup>27</sup> while D.H.Gordon calls this complex a chalolithic one.<sup>28</sup> The Bāngarh site has revealed the existence of the people of the late neolithic age, as at Bhita, with an advanced socio-economic system, of even the Śūnga-Kuṣāna period.<sup>29</sup> From the lowest level in Tamluk (Midnapur) faceted tools with specimens of half burnt pottery have been found, above which were noticed copper coins and terra cotta figurins of what is called the Śūnga style, the lower age limit of which is said to have been placed at the 3rd-2nd century B.C.<sup>30</sup> While the type from Bāngarh is but-axe, that of Sitakund is of polished fossil wood. The British Museum specimens from Bengal suggest that this zone belongs to Assam culture complex. The eastern boundry of the sites extends from the Santal Parganās to Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura, Tamluk and Midnapur; and besides the sites within Dinajpur, another centre lies in Darjeeling. The tools from this wide area are varied in nature: axe, wedge, chisel, perforated stone tools, and hammers which are found polished.<sup>31</sup>

According to some experts, the axe-type is S.E.-Asiatic, while the faceted one is East-Asiatic, found in Assam, unlike the Bengal and Orissa types. Again, the rounded but axe-type from Assam is rare in S.E.Asia, though present in

Yunnan and Szuchuan.<sup>32</sup> While in India, the axe type is predominant, both axes and adzes are common in S.E. Asia. The chisel type from Bengal-Biher-Orissa complex differs, however, from the south Indian, the former being more or less rectangular; the perforated type differs from those of Malaya and Burma. The Darjeeling collections reveal types like hammer, but axe, wedge-type axe and chisel, while from Ranchi these, including perforated and faceted tools, have been traced.<sup>33</sup> The Santal Parganā broad axe type was found in large numbers from Garo Hills. It is held that rounded but axe-type from Assam, though found in small numbers, is indicative of a counter influence from the main neolithic centres of India. The faceted triangular variety is not reported from Assam, except some elongated variety from Dibrugarh as well as from Burma, Siam and Malaya and except one from Indo-China. The rectangular variety is common in Orissa and South Bihar including Darjeeling, like Assam. The splayed axe type, found in Assam, has been traced from Bengal and Bihar; some such types were found in the Santal Parganās and Mayurbhanj, as from Burma, Yunnan and Malaya. As has been noted, the shouldered variety, both regular and irregular, was found in Assam, Cachar, Naga Hills, Khasi and Jayantia Hills, Garo Hills and Darrang Regions, except in the Sadiya tract and Yunnan, but not in Bengal, though reported from Santal Parganās<sup>34</sup> and a few from Manbhum and Dalbhum.<sup>35</sup>

As from Burma, the shouldered type of regular variety is reported from Southern India, and while the regular one is confined to Cachar and Naga Hills, it is more or less irregular from the Khasi-Garo Hills and the Assam Plains. From this it is suggested that the South India type may have been derived from the Burmese specimens, as those from Cachar and Naga Hills. But then, the existence of some kinds of this Eastern Asiatic variety in Tamluk and N. Bihar may suggest also their connection with Yunnan through Assam. In other parts of India again, including Orissa, most finds of the shouldered type are of regular variety.

The shouldered specimens have been associated with

the Austro-Asiatics like the Mundas.<sup>36</sup> Haimendorf associates the stone tools with the eastern type of the megalithic ritual.<sup>37</sup> This is not supported by some writers who think that the megalithic association of Eastern Indian and S.E.-Asiatic neolithis, is yet to be proved. On the basis of the findings, ascribable to proto-historic period, discovered from the Bengal-Assam regions, it is also held that the opinion that these tools came to India in about 2000 B.C. or earlier or before the migration of the Aryan speaking people, is open to doubt. It is true, however, that iron implements and other articles found along with the megalithic burial of Peninsular India survived till the historical period.<sup>38</sup> This does not in any case disprove the views that there had been close relationship between the neolithic and megalithic culture complexes, as proved by such sites at the Chotanagpur plateau, Orissa and hilly areas of Assam, as those from S.E.Asia and Oceania including Peninsular India.

For a further comparative study of the tools from Eastern India with those from S.E.Asia, we are to examine also the salient features and types from the latter region. Neolithic culture in general is marked by domestication of animals, use of pottery, cultivation and the use of polished stone tools.<sup>39</sup> But, in the areas from this wide region in general we have no definite evidence of these except pottery. Some writers have called the culture of this region palaeolithic or atleast mezolithic.<sup>40</sup> In some sites, as in Indo-China, bronze articles have been found. In certain sites pebbles and bone tools along with pottery have been noticed. Palaeolithic tools are reported from Siam,<sup>41</sup> which is doubtful.<sup>42</sup> These tools of varied types including the shouldered one, have been placed between 2500-1500 B.C.,<sup>43</sup> but, as in the case of the East-Indian finds, including those from Assam, the finds seem to cover a wide period ranging from the pre-historic-protoc-historic periods to the historical one.

From Burma stone tools have been found with cord-marked pottery.<sup>44</sup> It may be noted that potsherds of brown colour with cord marks were discovered from an excavated site at Kachuani at a depth of 30 C.m., located at a distance of

about 20 km. east of Dibrugarh, where from irregular rectangular-triangular neoliths were also brought to light. These antiquities hold a link with the Burmese types in particular. As from Indo-China, Siam and Malaya, the types from Burma are of varied nature, including the shouldered and faceted ones, some showing specimens of fossil wood. While these tools are common in S.E.Asia, the chipped one forms a different group, though a few of this type is found from Siam and Indo-China. With regional differences, the ground tools from Burma resemble those from Assam. To speak in general terms, neoliths from India seem to have been derived from the eastern direction or Eastern Indian types belong to S.E.Asia which in early times included portions of Burma, South China, and subsequently these were confined to Eastern India with expansion to include parts of North-South China.<sup>45</sup> The other theory of the intrusion of the shouldered type along with the migration of the Austro-Asiatics, though disputed,<sup>46</sup> cannot be easily set aside. That there are broad similarities of the tools from Eastern India and S.E.Asia, including, Burma, Yunnan, Laos, Siam and Malaya cannot also be set aside. The shouldered and the gouge-adze types are absent in Yunnan, though common in Laos, Malaya and Siam like Burma. The shouldered and the faceted types as have been stated, were found in Assam, and while the shouldered type is known from other parts of India as well, the faceted and the splayed axe type are limited to Eastern India only. It is held that square-cut tools, common in S.W.China, Fukien and Hongkong,<sup>47</sup> might have come down to the south, to the river valleys and the coastal plains in S.E.Asia, to develop as neolithic culture. It is also surmised that the foreign specimens appearing in India, are traceable to secondary sources in Burma, Yunnan and Malaya, datable to the proto-historic period, the earliest date for those from S.E.Asia, including Indo-China, Hongkong, Malaya, Siam, etc. being ascribable to the second half of the first millennium B.C. Whatever may be the chronology that may be fixed for the finds from Assam including those from the other areas of the Eastern Zone, right from Chotanagpur Plateau to the Assam-Burma borders, it may be confirmed that this pre-historic lithic cultural centre with varied scales of salient

features bearing on domestication of animals, terraced cultivation and other socio-economic group life, as may be traced from the nature of the celts, used by the ethnic groups concerned, had links with Peninsular India on the one side and with the broad S.E. Asiatic region on the other, which included also the mainland of China and the Isles in the Pacific, and that megalithic culture complex, allied material culture, along with the racial types may have to be considered for finding out the missing links of those who manufactured the tools. It is wrong, however, to hold that East Indian tools themselves are to be classified into two types: Assam zone and Bihar-Orissa-Bengal zone, though it is true that Assam specimens have had more in common with those from Burma and other S.E. Asiatic sites than with those from other parts of India or Eastern India in the light of our examination of the tools from the said region.

As has been stated earlier, pre-historic lithic culture of the region cannot be studied apart from ethnological, ethnographical studies and the megalith builders. And, if this culture extended to proto-historic and even historical period, when we find extensive use of metal utensils along with pottery and lithic implements by the people concerned, determination of their authors becomes more evident from examination of their megalithic practices.

So far as Assam is concerned, this practice belongs to both pre-historic and historical times. It is a living faith among some tribes like the Khasis, Nagas and the Arlengs, etc.<sup>48</sup> Some of them are of very old age<sup>49</sup> and some early remains have been traced from N. Cachar Hills, Khasi and Naga Hills, associated with the Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burma speaking people, having links with their authors from S.E. Asia and from the Oceanic world, as with those from Chotanagpur and Peninsular India.<sup>50</sup> The origin of this culture-complex is attributed to the Mon-Khmer intrusion from the east in the main.<sup>51</sup> According to experts, "megalithic culture of the South-east Asiatic type which still flourishes among the Godabas and Bondos and Baster Gonds reached Peninsular India in late neolithic times from an eastern direction. Its centre of diffusion

though not necessarily origin,.. lay some where in Eastern Assam, North Burma or South West China and "far stronger branch stretched southwards into Indonesia and oceania."<sup>52</sup> The salient features of this culture consist of cultivation, both shifting and terraced, rearing of cattle, sacrifices, etc. These are common in S.E.Asia, and the Pacific area along with the use of neoliths.including shouldered types, found in Assam, central and Southern India, as in Burma. It may be noted in this connection that the shouldered type is associated with the Mon-Khmers and the quadrangular one with the Austronesians. The fact that parallel culture-details exist between the Assam tribes and those from Orissa and Chotanagpur though not from Bengal, is indicative of a "close connection between all these manifestations of megalithic culture."<sup>53</sup> What distinguishes this culture in the two regions: Assam-Orissa and S.E.Asia, is its intimate connection with the living faith of the people of this broad area, as with those from the Oceanic world, and some common ethnic origin is believed to have been proved.<sup>54</sup> The parallel suggests that a strong megalithic wave entered the Assam region from the Oceanic world and their authors had their common ethnic culture origin. Speaking of the Khasi-synteng monuments, P.R.T.Gurdon remarks: "It is remarkable that the shape of the stone should be so similar to those which exist in England, Brittany, and I believe also in Denmark and Scandinavia."<sup>55</sup> While the older megaliths consist of dolmen and menhirs, stone-cists, terraces, etc.,<sup>56</sup> the recent one shows evidence of the use of metal and pottery.<sup>57</sup> Referring to the Khasi-Synteng monoliths, it is held that their authors learnt its use from some pre-historic race who occupied their present habitat. Most of them are memorials, and only a few of the dolmens contain human remains.<sup>58</sup>

There are a large number of megalithic sites from N.Cachar Hill, and their authors were either Khasi Syntengs and Mikirs (Arlengs),<sup>59</sup> linking them with the Mon-Khmer group of people. The monoliths from Dimapur, Kasomari-Jamuguri, and others from the Dhansiri valley and that of Dayang, show traces of Arya-non-Arya practices and evidence of mixed designs, showing phallic symbols, associated with

the cult of fertility of the historical period, not so different from those of the Khasi-Mundas, and even Naga and other Tibeto-Burman practices. The hollowed monoliths from N.Cachar in the main "must represent a rather specialised development of a phallic ancestor cult, typical of Assam, widely spread in South-east Asia and extending over even to Oceania and Madagascar."<sup>60</sup> This is more true of the cylindrical and forked monuments from Dimapur.<sup>61</sup>

The megalithic practices as such certainly belong to the lithic stage of culture, ascribable in its origin to the palaeolithic stage.<sup>62</sup> The practices hold link between their authors from Assam with those from S.E.Asia and other parts of India, Orissa in particular. The study of the practices indicates fusion of the racial elements like the Austro-Asiatic on the one hand and the Tibeto-Burman and Alpine-Aryan on the other at a later stage. This is also indicative of the inter-tribal movements taking place in the pre-historic and proto-historic periods. At least one current spread out from Assam to the West. Some of the artistic motifs like the lotus, occurring on some of them suggest that not only the Mon-Khmer Khasis and the Tibeto-Burmans of the Indo-Mongoloid stock, but also the Alpine-Aryans contributed to the art of the megalithic constructions. Non-Aryan foundation of Assam's culture like those of the other regions of Eastern India have been due both to the neolithic and megalithic practices, marked by the common essential features of material culture. The origin of Saktism and Tantric-Buddhist cults, common to Assam, Bengal and Orissa is to be attributed to the phallic cult, magic and charms, centering round this lithic culture or what is called fetishism. The significance of this becomes evident from the racial strains and the substratum left by them in this wide cultural Zone, extending from Bihar to South-east Asia, including the mainland of China and Tibet, having links as well with the Peninsular India.

It has been shown that the lithic culture with its salient features continued to prevail not only in the proto-historic period but also in the historical one. Side by side with the use of metallic implements, as shown by the excavated sites from

Eastern India and pottery, that of stone tools has been found throughout the region even as surface finds, irrespective of the fact that their authors were pre-Aryans or Aryans. Even in the age when socio-economic groups made significant advancement and political institutions were founded, this legacy of a mixed culture-complexes continued to dominate the life of the people, and this was more true of Eastern India, proved more by literary evidence than by archaeological finds which describes this region as a land of the *vṛātyas*, *asuras*, *niṣādas* or *mlecchas*, even after the Aryanisation of most parts of the region starting from Magadha-Videha to Utkala, Gauḍa-Vaṅga, Prāgijyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa or ancient Assam at least from the time of the *Brāhmaṇas*, if not earlier. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* itself mentions the Puṇḍras of N.Bengal as *dasyus*, and the *Baudhāyana-Dharmasūtra* refers to them and the Vangas as impure. The same reference is found in the Epics that mention the people of S.E.Bengal as *Kirātas*, allied to the *Cīnas*; so were the *Gauḍas*, the *Suhmas* and the like, and rulers of these places are also classed among the non-Aryans. So was the case with the earliest rulers of Prāgijyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, but, the traditional history of the dynasties founded in both Bengal and Assam are confusing. Even non-Aryan or degraded Aryan foundation of the Dynasties in Magadha-Videha is referred to, which is disputed by writers. It may be noted that, even the internal evidence of the Vedic texts proves that some composers of the hymns hailed from Eastern India. The *Brāhmaṇas* (A.B., S.E.) do preserve traditions of the Aryanisation of at least N.Bengal not to speak of Magadha-Videha, upto *Karatoyā*, the Western boundary of ancient Assam. The Buddhist literatures (*Nikāyas*), including the Epics point to the migration and settlement of the Aryan speaking people in the east. That a wave entered the region during the Maurya times, is known from *Kauṭilya*. It is also true, as corroborated by anthropometry, that the higher classes of Bengal and Assam, marked by the B.L.factor as against the Vedic Aryans with a strong D.L.factor, came to this region of outer India long before the coming of the later, speaking the Indo-Aryan speech of the outer band like Bengali, Assamese, Bihari and Oriya, as is held by eminent writers like B.S.Guha, Dixon, Grierson, Hoernle, Hutton and others. The

reference to Eastern India as the land of the *Vrātyas*, *mlecchas*, etc., may find justification in the non-Vedic-Alpine origin of the people of this region, who migrated long before the coming of the Rig Vedic Aryans. The Mediterranean-Aryan culture of the Punjab and *Madhyadeśa*, after the intrusion of the Aryans, it is held, got mixed up with the Alpine-Aryan culture of Eastern India, and the result was what is called neo-Aryanism or their distinct cultural trends became in course of time indistinguishable. In fact, the origin of this so-called *Vrātya* culture has been traced to the Iranians or Magians, allied to the Alpine.<sup>63</sup> This racial problem has been examined in detail in the next chapter.

**Conclusion :** In conclusion, it may be held that the so-called *Niśādas* (mlecchas) of the Austro-Asiatic stock, who introduced the use of agriculture, cattle rearing, etc., in the neolithic period no doubt laid the foundation of the culture of Eastern India in particular, and the Alpines constituting the main element of the first wave of the Indo-Iranian Cacausic stock possessed the higher degree of civilization in the region, including their good specimens of material culture, speech, religious beliefs, etc. The groups of people like the *Prāgyjyotiṣas*-*Kāmarūpas*, *Vangas*, *Suhmas*, *Pulindas*, *Savaras* of ancient Indian literature, constituting an admixture of Pre-Aryan and Alpine-Aryan stock, who laid the foundation of a number of principalities, as known from the *Manusamhitā*, the Epics, the *Purānas* and other ancient Indian literature, were eventually included in the *Kṣatriya* clan. Except perhaps the early rulers of Videha and Magadha, as evidenced among others by the Buddhist and Jain sources, we have but traditions about the families ruling over *Gauḍa*-*Vanga*, *Puṇḍra* as in *Prāgyjyotiṣa*-*Kāmarūpa*, recorded in the Epics and *Purānas* in particular, and whatever the historicity of their fighting in the *Kuruṣetra* war, we are not certain about their chronology, and therefore their period is to be ascribed to the proto-historic age of undated events. Historians have, however, found clues to the dating of the events, taking place even in the pre-Buddistic period. But, we are not as yet on firmer grounds in respect of their chronology.

We have already stated that lithic culture of Eastern

India continued till the Maurya-Kuṣāna-Sūnga period, and along with the use of pottery and metallic implements, use of stone tools for domestic and other purposes had been in vogue. In fact, human cultural evolution being a continuous process, there were but different stages in its development, and only the spade of an archaeologist is expected to reveal the strata of civilisation, as was done in the case of the chalcolithic civilisation of the valley of the Indus. Though chronology is determined on the nature of the geological formations of the stone material and on the basis of the types in respect of pre-historic Archaeology including pottery, bone tools, fossil wood, etc., palaeography is another factor of importance at least in respect of those materials where inscribed alphabets occur, as in case of the Indus valley seals. But, as in the case of the Pre-historic archaeological sites, even though other evidence for finds of the proto-historic, and some early historical ones have been found in Eastern India in particular, already referred to, dated specimens of the periods concerned have been rarely brought out, and therefore, till new finds, ascribable to a definite period are found, based on palaeographic evidence, historians would take the period between pre-history and dated historical age as proto-historic or the period of Traditional accounts, as those of a few principalities of Bengal, like the historic Prāgyotisa-Kāmarūpa, not to speak of those, founded in the other regions of N.E.Assam.

It may stated again that, included in the cultural zone of Eastern India, Assam-Bengal in Pre-historic and proto-historic times, as in evidenced by pre-historic archaeology, had intimate contact in so far as their authors: the Negritos, the Austro-Asiatic, the Alpine-Aryan and the Tibeto-Burman of the Indo-Chinese stock were concerned, though magalithic practices have been mainly confined to the hilly areas of Assam, and inter racial-cum-inter-tribal movement of population accounted for this. The spade of an archaeologist is expected to throw more light on this topic, revealing aspects of common material culture. associated with the lithic, the metallic and the clay-made art complexes, linking this region with the Indo-Gangetic plain on the one hand and with

Peninsular India on the other. An examination of the racial types together with the historical archaeology of both the regions (Assam-Bengal) is expected to throw light on this problem.

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