

Society and Economy in North-East India

Volume 1

Editor

MIGNONETTE MOMIN

CECILE A. MAWLONG

During the last two decades or so researchers in different universities of Northeast India have revitalized inquiry into the region's pre-colonial history. No doubt they have contributed in varying degrees to the collation and organization of relevant data for their chosen topics and hence provided additional information on the same. But much of the focus of research has been on cultural and political history with hardly any consideration for the socio-economic context in which various institutions emerged and developed.

In this Volume, writers drawn from various parts of the region — both hills and plains, notwithstanding limitation of the areas covered — have tried to address themselves to the hitherto neglected aspects of study. The purpose is to work towards bringing about the integration of the socio-economic, cultural and political history of each area under study so as to arrive at a better understanding of (a) uneven developments within the region, and (b) how and why certain events and actions occurred during pre-British times. It is hoped that this overall effort will encourage further investigations into the intricacies of the peoples' contacts among themselves within the region and the region's interconnectedness with happenings in South Asia and beyond.

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VOLUME 1

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EDITORS

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and
Cecile A. Mawlong



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Foreword

The twentieth century has been remarkable for tremendous interest in the history of North-East India. Not only the scholars but also the administrators, the men in uniform, the media and, more than others, the public men — in and outside the region, showed keen interest in the region's past. The stresses and strains of time and circumstances drew the region to an extraordinary focus. The historians responded positively to the growing interests, individually and collectively. The earlier efforts of the amateurs — individuals, organizations and institutions — were progressively reinforced by the establishment of Universities with departments of history in the region after the independence of the country. Our department of history at the North-Eastern Hill University also contributed its share in exploring the source materials and systematizing and interpreting the information relating to the history of the region. The regional history of North-East India happens to be the main thrust area of our department from the beginning and we have been actively involved in creating and managing the North-East India History Association (NEIHA), which is a giant organization today.

To coincide with the Silver Jubilee of the department in 1999, we organized a symposium on trends in research in the history of North-East India. The survey of researches in that connection brought home that although the quantum of research output in the last fifty years has been phenomenal, a lot remains to be done to fill up the important gaps and to understand the process of development in the North-East as a region. In the meantime, the Special Assistance Programme (SAP) was renewed to our department by the University Grants Commission with 'Society and Economy in North-East India' as a thrust area. The SAP Advisory Committee approved our

proposal for financial support to hold seminars in the thrust areas and to publish the proceedings. Accordingly, we decided to hold a series of seminars on society and economy in North-East India from the earliest times to our contemporary period. Three seminars were planned for a thematic study of the Society and Economy in North-East India in a common historical perspective; the first to cover the period from pre-historic times to roughly about the thirteenth century AD, the second, thirteenth to eighteenth century, and the third, nineteenth-twentieth century. It was also decided to publish the papers accepted in the three seminars in three volumes.

The first seminar held on March 4–6, 2002 was an exciting experience in our endeavours to explore and analyse the extant source materials and to review the existing studies for projecting an integrated thematic view of the society and economy in North-East India till about the thirteenth century. The specialists in various aspects of the larger theme across the disciplines responded to our invitation and presented their serious studies, some of which are in the hitherto comparatively least researched pre- and proto- and early historical periods. *Society and Economy in North-East India, Volume 1* contains those studies. Our colleagues, Professor Mignonette Momin and Dr. Cecile Mawlong, who were conveners of the seminar, worked out the scheme of the seminar and have jointly edited the volume with remarkable zeal and care. We expect the volume to be appreciated by a wide circle of readership and to inspire further research in the history of North-East India.



NEHU, Shillong
The 25th March 2003

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Editors' Note

The land that now stands as India's northeast region was subsumed under the name 'Assam' in colonial writings from about the mid-nineteenth century. To writers of that period the region comprised, in its broadest sense, the areas corresponding to the present states of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, as well as contiguous portions within what now constitute North Bengal and Bangladesh. This categorization was essentially in the nature of a broad geographical unit, for it was impractical to consider that entire territory as even a loosely knit political unit at any stage of the region's history. The legacy survived upto the post-British times, except for the fact that the area that is now called Arunachal Pradesh (from 1972 onwards) had been named the North-East Frontier Agency (1954–1972) and had been added to the concept of North-East India.

As in other parts of India, it was British officials charged with the administration of different areas within the region, who were responsible for constructing the histories of its people. William Robinson penned a sort of prelude to historical writing on 'Assam' in his book, *A Descriptive Account of Assam* (London, 1841). The work suffered from limitations of source material, interpretation and coherent geographical/ethnographical knowledge, so the need for a 'proper' history was felt. Edward Gait met that need more than sixty years later when he brought out the first standard text on 'Assam' under the title, *A History of Assam* (London, 1905; 2nd edn. 1926). His book heralded modern history writing in the region.

The focus of Gait's work was political history primarily based on written documents and so the subjects of discussion were the ruling families of the plains where literacy was known.

It is obvious that Gait was influenced by the then-current historical methods prevalent in Europe, which emphasized upon the use of written sources as *the* central defining feature of History; hence the events that he narrated were in the context of those rulers. But even where the plains were the focus of his work he found it impossible to establish any uniformity of periodization for all the lowlands. This was because of the limited quantity of source material on the basis of which he had to construct the history of the region. There was also the problem of differentiations in the British attitude to the ruling families of the region, as is known, for instance, from the subjugation of the Ahom kings and the recognition of the right of other rulers in the region to govern areas under their own jurisdiction (such as Tripura) according to their own conventions. Moreover, Gait could provide only occasional glimpses of what was happening in the rest of the region wherever the rulers of the plains had to interact with the unlettered groups or when the rulers of the latter groups had succeeded in patronizing writers to record their eulogies. To that extent all other sections of the population of both the plains and the hills were by and large left out of the 'main' historical episodes. This sort of academic methods and attitude suited the prevailing imperialistic ideology. That ideology was commensurate with superinducing 'order' in:

- the plains that had — from the British point of view — experienced general insecurity because of internal communal dissensions, endemic raids from the direction of the adjacent hills and/or incursions from across Bengal and Burma from time to time;
- the hills where the welter of tribes had ostensibly been living in 'splendid isolation,' without the rule of law, had known only continual feuding among them and had conducted sporadic raids into the neighbouring settlements in the plains causing disorder, destruction and a recurring sense of insecurity among the victims.

It was supposedly for these reasons that the British found it necessary to intervene in the affairs of the peoples of the plains and hills: to put an end to the disturbances and ensure

the success of colonial policies in the entire region. The histories of the various communities of the hill areas could not be written in the conventional sense because they had not yet attained the literate stage. Hence these latter communities figured in colonial historiography only in the context of British expansion into the hill areas for the purpose of establishing administrative control over them. Alexander Mackenzie's *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes on the North East Frontier of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1884) best illustrates this point. The overall picture that emerged from British historical writings on the hill tribes of northeast India fitted in with the general studies on 'primitive survivals' located in various pockets of Asia, Africa and the Americas, which literary efforts had eventually culminated in the introduction of Anthropology as an academic discipline in 1850 at Oxford University, England. Not surprisingly the imperialistic brand of colonial historiography in India largely focused on the 'transformation' of the 'warlike'/'savage'/'backward' and 'stagnating' tribes (that had resisted the British but had eventually been overcome) into law-abiding subjects of the British Empire. There was no attempt to cloak the writers' sense of duty to introduce 'civilization' in areas that the Westerners had occupied. They projected their 'civilizing' role, which ostensibly aimed at upgrading the quality of life of the people brought under imperial rule, as especially desirable in the context of the various 'primitive' hill communities that could be nurtured to fall in line with the workings of modern institutions.

No doubt the experience of conflicts in mainland India, such as that of the 'Sepoy Mutiny' (1857), and pragmatic administrative exigencies necessitated deeper understanding of the cultures of the people of the country's northeast region. This compulsion seems to have been keenly realized, as even in the plains the majority of the population had not been fully 'acculturated' *vis-à-vis* the 'mainstream' Brahmanical society, while in the greater part of the hills the rule of 'law', from the colonial rulers' perspective, had yet to be implemented. To that end the British initiated ethnographical studies and sponsored publication of monographs on the major tribes of the region at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mapping out the land and its economic potential had already been done from about

half a century earlier. Such studies were meant to arm successive government servants with adequate knowledge about the land and the people in order to consolidate colonial rule. The studies also became the repository of data and observations of historical significance that could be built upon further or subjected to thorough investigation. Simultaneously, the opening of institutions of higher learning provided interested individuals from the region avenues for accessing sources bearing on their own histories and cultures.

When British rule came to an end, anthropological and historical researches in 'Assam' continued under the aegis of the new governments. In the post-British period most anthropologists aimed at understanding 'tribal' cultures on the latter's terms before revolutionary culture change could take place on account of the 'modernizing' process that had been set in motion by the introduction of Western education, medical care and Christian proselytization. The majority of historians sought to systematize and update writings primarily on dynastic, administrative and cultural history based on collation of data largely derived from literary sources. The sources ascribed to the colonial period were principally official documents. Those preceding that period were locally produced manuscripts, inscriptions, coins and other kinds of archaeological record, which finds had been edited, translated or/and annotated through the initiative of the colonial rulers and, later, that of the post-colonial officials/professionals. Post-colonial researchers in the history of northeast India were particularly motivated by the need to address themselves to understanding the 'identities' of the region's numerous communities in the context of the nascent concept of the 'nation-state' that India had come to concretize. The initial response to that quest was to place the identities as far back in time as possible. This was especially true in the case of the literate peoples of the plains, whose roots were often traced back to the beginnings of the 'greater' Indian tradition best embodied in ancient Brahmanical literature comprising the two epics and the *Purānas*. As expected, such attempts resulted in highlighting common meeting grounds for events purported to have taken place as part of some grand scheme in the 'pan-Indian' context. This kind of approach underlay the dynastic histories of northern India,

to which the valley kingdoms of the northeast region were 'attached'. Works to this effect can be ascribed to 'mainstream' writers influenced by the nationalist ideology, such as H.C.Raychaudhuri (*Political History of Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1923) and H.C.Ray (*The Dynastic History of Northern India*, II, Calcutta, 1931), as well as writers of regional histories, such as R.G.Easak (*The History of North Eastern India*, Calcutta, 1933) and R.C.Majumdar (*The History of Bengal*, I, Dacca, 1943), among others.

Paradoxically, the earliest history writers amongst the literate sections of northeast India (irrespective of the period under study — pre-British, British or post-British times) lapped up the recognition of the 'oneness' of the valley kingdoms with the more advanced Gangetic valley — chiefly at the cultural and political levels — through the 'common' links derived from Brahmanical tradition. By implication their 'identities' could be traced further back in time at least to the Vedic period, since the antecedents of the epic/Puranic traditions supposedly originated therein! Simultaneously, they tried to harp on the distinct identity of each of the kingdoms within the region and to place their rulers on par with their contemporaries in the Indian mainland. While doing so, they overlooked obvious factors underlying historical processes, i.e., those of geography and the material milieu. They missed out on the linkages between socio-economic conditions and the institutions that evolved in the region, choosing instead to almost indiscriminately apply the yardstick of developments that had taken place in the Gangetic basin to the northeast region even in the absence of substantiation. In the process the history writers overlooked questions of chronological differences, morphological diversities and the corresponding organizational variations as to the rise and development of cultures and their corresponding institutional organizations within the sub-continent including the northeast region. At the same time they highlighted the differences between the plains and the hills within the region and chose to view the peoples of the latter area (as did the earlier writers), as 'isolates'. They conceded contacts between the two culturally different groups only at the level of political relations and of trade, and even those communications were viewed from the perspectives of the

lettered groups. Thus many of the writers tended to persist with ruler-centred depiction of events, which trend they had inherited from the British.

Expectedly most of the works were in the nature of administrative studies and those of cultures pertaining to the period of British rule in the region and its aftermath. This was because of (a) constraints of historical methods that banked on written material to the near-exclusion of other sources (such as archaeological finds, oral traditions, etc.); (b) persistence of the approach initiated by writers of the colonial period, which was characterized by narration of events associated with the historical figures that had been in positions of political and economic power. As a result the histories of the region missed out on the broader social context of those events and generally lacked coherence, comprehensiveness and connectedness.

History writing in northeast India has been ridden therefore with problems of methods and approaches. It was to address these problems and to explore ways of reducing/overcoming them that the History faculty, North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong, organized a Seminar on Society and Economy in Pre-Colonial Northeast India on March 4-6, 2002. The Seminar was sponsored by the ICHR, New Delhi, the UGC-SAP-DRS of the Department of History, NEHU, Shillong, and the NERC-ICSSR, Shillong. The choice of the theme stemmed from the realization that the integration of political, economic and socio-cultural histories of the region had yet to be achieved. The idea was to take stock of the data used and interpreted by writers dealing with the history of the region or with that of specific areas within the region, to reevaluate existing assumptions, to present sources hitherto neglected, misunderstood or overlooked and to discuss possibilities of interpreting the evidence commensurate with the significant advances that have been made in Indian and non-Indian historiography during the last half-a-century. Towards this end the pre-colonial period was identified, keeping in mind the necessity of a broad-based conceptual framework within which the studies were to be fitted in, because of problems in following the generally accepted periodization of Indian history into 'ancient', 'medieval', 'modern' for northeast India. This, despite the nagging awareness that even the concept

'pre-colonial' was fraught with difficulties in terms of its practical application for the entire region. Nonetheless, for the purpose of delimitation, contributors dealing with the history of the people of the plains were requested not to stretch the discussion beyond the thirteenth century, so that the remaining chapters of the precolonial period (upto. about the eighteenth century) could be tackled later. This periodization was tentatively agreed upon considering the possibility of dating on the basis of the extant sources. However, this yardstick could not be applied to the hills of the region, because of the nature of the source-material available, and contributors handling their history were left to deal with topics before the advent of the British into the hill areas. At the very outset therefore the problem of periodization in the region's history became a glaring issue on which many of the participants had something to comment. Related to this was the debate on the use of 'pre-colonial' as a concept. As some rightly pointed out, there had been no uniformity in either the chronology of colonialism or the establishment of colonial economy for the entire region. Most of the participants felt the need for further discussions on such issues confronting history writing in the region and suggested holding follow-up Seminars broadly pertaining to the same theme but in the context of the Ahom, British and post-British period towards a connected history of the region. After all, the history of northeast India is the thrust area of most Departments of History in Universities located in the region. This Volume is the first in the series of academic exercises on the above-mentioned theme.

The essays in this Volume are the revised versions of papers that were presented at last year's Seminar and have been accepted for publication. Admittedly some of them reflect the constraints of constructing aspects of the socio-economic histories of different areas within the region based on the extant sources. This is particularly true of papers on the hills, where there were no written records pertaining to the history and culture of the 'highlanders' prior to the coming of the British, save for occasional references to certain tribal communities in the written sources mainly from the post-twelfth century onwards. The authors have tried therefore to demonstrate possibilities of using less conventional sources,

such as the oral traditions and objects of material culture. They have arranged relevant data from such sources in conjunction with the evidence of the pre-colonial and early colonial source material to indicate socio-economic linkages in the evolution of patterns in society and economy during pre-British times. In doing so some of them have also indicated avenues for combining the research techniques of History with those of related disciplines, particularly Archaeology and Anthropology. Some of the papers on the plains display a more critical use of both literary and epigraphical sources than attempted before. The authors' intention was to arrive at a more holistic picture of socio-economic developments instead of focusing on the actions and achievements of individual rulers, as had been typical of earlier writings. The authors have tried to crosscheck the authenticity of the evidence, wherever possible, with that of numismatics and archaeological remains. Some of the essays in this Volume have resorted to the comparative method in terms of handling sources and using concepts developed in the study of other societies. The authors have thus broadened the scope of probing into aspects of the socio-economic history of the hills and plains of the region by raising new questions and suggesting answers to them. So even in the event that their techniques and approaches are challenged by subsequent studies, their purpose — to present new and alternative sources of information, to reinterpret the evidence of conventional sources, to stimulate new lines of inquiry and reformulation of problems and ideas towards enhancing fruitful new understandings — would still be served.

The Volume begins with a discussion on issues of historiography to highlight the trends, problems and possibilities of studies in the region's society and economy prior to the Ahom period, the commencement of which period can be dated with absolute certainty to A.D. 1228. Thereafter the papers have been arranged area-wise, in the absence of a broad consensus of identical topics cutting across them. But not all areas within the region have been covered. There are three papers on the Khasi-Jaintia, two each on the Mizo and Naga, one on the Meitei, one on the Surma-Barak valley, two on the Brahmaputra valley and one in the context of Bakhtiyâr's invasion of Assam. Some papers have an overlapping of information, though not

necessarily of perspectives. Some other papers have focused on aspects of society more than those of economy. Our task is to present the views and priorities of the authors based on their understanding of the sources and interpretation of the evidence so that readers can draw their own inferences from them. We have provided diacritics in the last four papers, and that too only in the context of *early* (not contemporary) place-names, personal names and non-English common terms as gleaned from the sources written in scripts other than the Roman.

Most of the contributors are members of the History Faculty, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. The others are our colleagues in related disciplines within the University or in the same discipline from outstation academic institutions. We extend our thanks to all of them for meeting the methodological requirements and submitting their papers within the stipulated deadline. Professor David R.Syiemlieh, as Head of the Department of History, NEHU, took the trouble of maintaining communications with the publishers at every stage of the preparation of this Volume for publication. He and the other members of the editorial board — Professors J.B.Bhattacharjee and Manorama Sharma — gave us valuable advice in the course of editing this Volume. To them we extend our gratitude. Errors in editing, if any, are entirely of our own making.

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Acquisition and Distribution of 'Wealth'

An Inquiry into the Rise of

Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa

Mignonette Momin

The emergence and growth of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa as a kingdom has been the subject of a number of works on the history of 'early Assam'. Earlier writers had attributed it to overwhelmingly political reasons, but without inquiring into the social context, and had assigned individual kings, priests and their henchmen the most important role in deciding the fortunes of the kingdom.¹ Later writers² gradually started probing other variables too — socio-economic in particular — that went into shaping the political developments in Kāmarūpa. However, such attempts have yet to forge a link between socio-economic factors and the growth of various institutions or contribute to our understanding of the historical process of social formations and the rise of the 'early state' in the region.³ In fact, the vital questions remain: How did kingship emerge? What was the form of this political entity? Was it equally felt throughout the area included within the regional concept? Did it remain the same for the entire pre-Ahom period? Whatever the response to each of these interrogations may be, the next question is: Why?

This paper will try answering these queries. The attempt will start out on the assumption that a reassessment of the socio-economic base can best provide the index to the

emergence and nature of kingship and its implications for — as well as its reflection of — the social organization commensurate with the means and relations of production. Such an assumption is by no means novel. That there is interplay of and mutual influence between society and economy was already set forth in the works of Adam Smith, Alfred Marshall and Karl Marx.⁴ The practical relevance of this assumption was further highlighted by Cyril Belshaw's comparative study of several kinds of economy, or, more specifically, exchange systems, ranging from 'primitive' to 'modern'.⁵ In doing so Belshaw demonstrated common and divergent themes running through them and how these could be sorted out by combining economic, anthropological and sociological ideas.⁶ As he put it,

...the economy has to do with those actions and institutions which are related to the wealth of the society.⁷

Drawing on the discussions ascribed to the above-mentioned scholars, especially Belshaw, some definitions of 'wealth' — i.e., the factor common to economy and society — are in order. 'Wealth' is both material and non-material. It comprises visible objects of obvious value, such as land and its resources, and money or its equivalent in terms of exchangeability. 'Wealth' is also measured in terms of its utility and this relates to its holder's capacity to influence — and benefit from — the production and consumption activities. This pertains to the degree to which the wealth holder can exercise control over organization of resources in land and of labour as well as over distribution (i.e., dispersal among individuals or classes of consumers) or exchange of items of 'wealth,' and gain access to enhanced social ranking and attendant privileges. Correspondingly, it pertains to the degree to which others having difficulty acquiring forms of wealth experience social disabilities, as those engaged in actual production of the material items of consumption, and their denial — or the hurdles they have to overcome — to rise on the social scale or to attain privileges open only to holders of 'wealth'. This broad definition of 'wealth' therefore necessarily implies inquiring into the ways in which social groups or individuals in a given society enter into relations with one another to safeguard common interests

and to ensure production and reproduction of their social existence. It follows, then, that besides examining the process of dialectical interaction, researchers must familiarize themselves with the structure of that society at a given point of time.

It is against this backdrop of what constitutes 'wealth', its acquisition and distribution that this paper seeks to investigate into the rise of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa as a regional entity before the advent of the Ahoms. The discussion aims at marking out stages in economy and society in Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa so as to establish their relationship with and implications for the region's political institutions and territorial organization.

I

By about the fourth century A.D., records ascribed to the Gupta period attested the emergence of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa as a regional concept in the land dominated by the Lauhitya (i.e., the river Brahmaputra) as its most distinctive physical feature.⁸ The *Mahābhārata*⁹ located the Kirātas — hitherto identified with semi-nomadic tribes spread over the northern and eastern foothills of the Himalayas¹⁰ — in the Lauhitya region. This epic referred to the foundation of Prāgjyotiṣapura by Naraka, son of Bhūmi and Viṣṇu. It also mentioned the participation of Naraka's successor, Bhagadatta, in the Kurukṣetra battle as an ally of the Kauravas. It spoke of the men, equipments and valuable objects (including gold) that Bhagadatta brought in support of the Kauravas. Thereafter it referred to the northern expedition of the Pāṇḍava prince Arjuna, his entry into Kāmarūpa and subjugation of her king. The conflict purportedly stemmed from Bhagadatta's assistance to the Kauravas in the Kurukṣetra battle. Thus the evidence of the *Mahābhārata* indicates the existence of some amount of exchange of ideas and interaction between the Kirātas and the people of Magadha to the point that the Lauhitya region eventually fell within the scope of the Brahmanical tradition. It appears that such contacts facilitated the intrusion of Brahmanical elements from the Indian mainland into the region of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. Apparently such elements succeeded in making an impact on its *Mleccha* rulers, as the latter came under the influence of Brahmanical social ideals, at least by Gupta times. The epic drew on the 'evidence'

of supposedly 'older' Brahmanical tradition embedded in some of the *Mahāpurāṇas*¹¹ (a) to 'establish' the antiquity of the legendary Naraka-Bhagadatta's family (that Viṣṇu himself is said to have picked to 'consolidate' the Bhauma dynasty's primacy in the land) within that tradition, and (b) to provide for those political aspirants who subscribed to that tradition, and whose historicity was beyond doubt, the legitimacy to rule over the region of Kāmarūpa on the lines of *varṇa* ideals.¹²

Considering that both Bhagadatta and the epic battle were part of the 'greater' Brahmanical tradition of heroic deeds of honour and valour of legendary (rather than historical) figures drawn from various parts of the subcontinent that had been brought within the ambit of — or had come into contact with — Brahmanical culture, it could be inferred that it was during the Gupta period that Kāmarūpa's emergence as a regional concept caught the attention of the Brāhmaṇa writers. It is interesting to note that the Brahmanical sources dating from that period onwards equated its principal inhabitants, the Kirātas, with *Mlecchas* or non-speakers of Sanskrit, who were beyond the pale of Brahmanical culture and were culturally backward.¹³ This portrait was incorporated even in the regional tradition of the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, a literary work whose final composition has been ascribed to as late as about the tenth century.¹⁴

However, a close look at the evidence of the sources reveals that the Kirātas and other *Mleccha* inhabitants of the land were 'backward' only in relation to the cultural assumptions of the Brāhmaṇa and other *varṇa*-based writers. The writers had to come to terms with the *Mleccha* rulers' rise to power beyond the eastern fringes of Magadha in the context of the latter's territorial assertion. It was perhaps for this reason that the sources of the fourth century spoke of Kāmarūpa as a 'frontier kingdom' (*pratyanta rājya*) ruled over by a king (*nṛpa*).¹⁵ In that sense their authors recognized that the land was more than just a geographical location associated with the Kirātas and other *Mlecchas*: it had assumed a definite political identity with the establishment of the institution of kingship as the focal source of authority in the region. It implied, therefore, that the king's authority was based on governing the people as much as claiming protection of the land, which ethic seemed to have emerged — as elsewhere — from conflicts and conciliation.

Apparently the sustaining factor of that ethic was the legitimization of the various sources of authority within the 'regional' identity. Such legitimization was forthcoming from the custodians of the Brahmanical code, the Brāhmaṇas. This feature is borne out by the extant data bearing on the historical period of pre-Ahom times.

The evidence of the earliest local inscriptions demonstrates the advent of Brahmanical culture into Kāmarūpa. The panegyrics of her rulers and events and actions pertaining to their rule were recorded in Sanskrit in a style characteristic of the inscriptions of the Gupta period.¹⁶ The Nagājarī-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Stone Inscription,¹⁷ found in the Sarupathar area of upper Assam and dated about the fifth century, is heavily damaged and only five incomplete lines have survived. However, the general opinion of the editors of the inscription is that (a) it recorded the donation of land in favour of someone and that a *mahattara* (which word is legible in the second line) was named as a witness of the grant or as a marker of the boundaries of the donated land. Or it could have been that (b) the *mahattara* held land on one side of the boundaries of the donated land. In any case, if M.M. Sharma's translation of the *mahattara* as the village headman¹⁸ (local chief?) is correct, the evidence seems to indicate patrilineal leadership at the village level asserting access to management of land. It was perhaps in this capacity that he was named in the land charter. Inscriptions of the fifth century from the neighbouring areas of Bengal and Bihar spoke of *mahattara* as the head of a village or a village elder whose consent had to be obtained before land could be transferred for any purpose.¹⁹ This suggests that the *mahattara* was involved in the management of the village land and its affairs and hence he could not be ignored in the event of land transfers. Such a functionary seems to have been present in the case of upper Assam too by the period of the first recorded land transfer in the area. If this assumption were correct, it would imply that by the fifth century the territorial notion was already established among the inhabitants of the area, and that sedentary agriculture had become the mainstay of their livelihood; otherwise, demarcation of the boundaries of the donated land would have been of no relevance. Presumably, therefore, laws governing the occupation and use of land were

already in place together with some degree of social stratification, thus formalizing the distinction between (a) the handful of individuals that had the power of exercising control over organization of resources, and (b) the general population engaged in primary production and in various other activities as members of the landholding community. It is clear that the *mahattara*; Brahmadata, was a local personage. To state the obvious, he bore a Sanskrit name or a Sanskritised version of his local name, which seems to indicate his importance in the existing social order. It appears that the tried and tested method of winning over the support of locally dominant elements for facilitating the diffusion of Brahmanical culture had attained some success in upper Assam, although no other inscription ascribed to pre-Ahom times has been recovered from that area. The extant data cannot throw light on whether the area had come under the rule of the Varmans of Puṣyavarman's line or of any other family at that point of time. Nothing is known for certain about the reigning king under whose rule the Nagājarī-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Stone Inscription was recorded. Recently one Vasundharavarman, mentioned in a supposedly constituent fragment of the same inscription, has been named as the donor of the grant.²⁰ This name, however, does not figure in the king-list of the Varmans as given in their own inscriptions.

Epigraphical evidence shows that the rulers of the lower Brahmaputra valley had come under the influence of Brahmanical ideals by the fifth century, if not earlier. The Umācala Rock Inscription, found on the northeastern slope of the Kāmākhya hill and dated the fifth century, records that a *mahārājādhirāja* ('the great king of kings') named Surendravarman, constructed a cave (*guhā*) (-shrine?) for installing the deity Balabhadrasvāmin.²¹ The name of Surendravarman is missing from the king-list of Puṣyavarman's line. But scholars have opined that this ruler was synonymous with Mahendravarman, the fifth ruler in Puṣyavarman's line, whose reign has been placed in the fifth century.²² The Baḍagaṅgā Rock Inscription, found by the rivulet Baragaṅgā, within twenty miles of Dabaka Bazar in Nagaon district, and dated the sixth century, records the setting up of an *āśrama* (religious asylum) by a *viṣayāmātya* (an official charged with

the administration of a *viṣaya*, i.e., a large territorial division in Kāmarūpa) during the reign of the supreme lord (*śrī-paramadaivat paramabhaṭṭāraka mahārājādhirājāśvamedhayājīn*) *śrī*-Bhūti-varman.²³ These two inscriptions bear testimony to the emergence of actual Brahmanical establishments (i.e., *guhā* and *āśrama*) and Brahmanical influence on socio-political and religious developments on conspicuous lines in the lower Brahmaputra valley and the adjoining Kapili valley. The title *mahārājādhirāja* suggests the presence of other rulers (*rājās*) who considered one among them — i.e., the title-bearer — the greatest. The titles *paramadaivat*, *paramabhaṭṭāraka* and *āśvamedhayājīn* point to Bhūti-varman's support for Brahmanical religion (the first two titles showing his devotion to Brahmanical gods) and performance of a Vedic ritual (the *āśvamedha* or horse sacrifice) to establish his claim to rule over the Kapili valley in addition to his political base in the lower Brahmaputra valley. Such developments presupposed extension of patronage to Brāhmaṇas by the local rulers because it was mutually advantageous. The most powerful of those rulers adopted the grandiloquent titles signifying his political paramountcy in the region of Kāmarūpa that evidently subsumed a large territorial area: Presumably the area under his actual administrative control was restricted to only a part of the region, and lesser rulers governed the rest of the territory. Thus the *viṣayāmātya* most likely governed the Ḍavāka area that had become an administrative unit (*viṣaya*) within the kingdom of Bhūti-varman. This feature of political developments resembled that of northern India during the Gupta period, among rulers who had only lately adopted the Brahmanical culture.²⁴ It indicated the influence of the administrative structure of Magadha on that of Kāmarūpa, as even the designation *amātya* had been frequently used only from the Gupta period onwards.²⁵ In the Indian mainland the material milieu in most cases comprised areas that were then being brought under new techniques of agriculture facilitating wet rice cultivation, which phenomenon corresponded to the practice of landgrants (mainly among the 'feudatories' of the Guptas) in favour of religious beneficiaries. In Kāmarūpa, however, although landgrants were made to Brāhmaṇas particularly from the sixth-seventh centuries, no such production techniques are accounted for the region under the Varmans, except in those areas that

were outside their actual political base. In fact, the extant data ascribed to the Varman kings shows that their landgrants were made in the peripheral areas of Kāmarūpa. Even so, the evidence of the epigraphical sources of that period indicates that locally dominant elements asserted their superior rights in land, which obviously was the chief means of production, so as to exercise control over the organization of its resources including labour.

The last points derive substantiation from the evidence of the seventh century Nidhanpur grant of Bhāskaravarman, which is the earliest of the landgrants to have been recovered in almost complete form.²⁶ The grant was a renewal of a charter that had been issued about a century earlier by Bhūtiavarman, Bhāskaravarman's great grandfather. It was made in favour of over two hundred Brāhmaṇas of Mayūrasālmalāgrahāra, which place was in Candrapuri *viṣaya*, located in deltaic Bengal.²⁷ The list of important persons²⁸ called upon as witnesses or those associated with the execution of the land charter (*śāsana*) included the *prāptapañcamahāśabda* (Śrīgopāla); the *sīmāpradātā* (Candrapuri's *nāyaka* Śrīkṣikuṇḍa); the *nyāyakaraṇika* (Janārdasvāmī); the *vyavahāra* (Haradatta); the *Kāyastha* (Dundhunātha); the *śāsayitā* and *lekhayitā* (Vasuvārṇṇa); the *bhāṇḍāgārādhikṛta* (the *mahāsāmanta* Divākaraprabha); the *utkhetayitā* (Dattakārapūrṇṇa); and the *sekyakāra* (Kāliyā).

No doubt these were functionaries whose presence in the issuing of the charter was considered necessary. The translation of these designations is as follows:

prāptapañcamahāśabda = an important functionary entitled to holding five offices, as in Kashmir²⁹ and Gujarat³⁰ in post-Gupta times; at any rate a high functionary with special privileges not open to every functionary;³¹

sīmāpradātā = a marker of boundaries, in this instance, the *nāyaka* (i.e., chief military official?);³²

nyāyakaraṇika = an adjudicator/a judge (?);³³

vyavahāra = a legal expert;³⁴

kāyastha = a scribe/a clerk;³⁵

śāsayitā and *lekhayitā* = "the composer and writer of the grant";³⁶

bhāṇḍāgārādhikṛta = "Master of the treasury",³⁷ who held the title *mahāsāmanta*, signifying his attainment of superior rights in land or privileged access to income-generating resources;³⁸

utkhetayitā = collector of *utkhetana*, a land revenue;³⁹
sekyakāra = engraver or one that inscribed the record in the
 copper-plate.⁴⁰

The Nidhanpur grant thus provides an insight into the local administration within Candrapuri *viṣaya*. The local administration comprised (a) the *viṣayapati* (officer-in-charge of the *viṣaya*), who presided over the execution of the grant in the *viṣayadhikaraṇa* (the 'district' court of justice)⁴¹; and his assistants: (b) the leading men of the locality, who were connected in one way or the other with land or donations, so that the administrative set-up required the cognizance of resultant changes for the purpose of administration, revenue collection or documentation, as the case may have been; (c) certain functionaries charged with the composition and recording of charters, revenue collection, etc. At the level of the *viṣayadhikaraṇa* a system of hierarchy was already in place, with local elements subject to the authority of (a) the *prāptapañcāmahāśabda*, who executed the charter on behalf of the king; (b) the *nāyaka*, who undertook the operational aspect of the land charter by ratifying the demarcation of the boundaries of the donated land; and (c) the *mahāsāmanta*, who seems to have been the principal official in charge of the 'royal' storehouse, the designation *bhāṇḍāgārādhikṛta* perhaps alluding to his jurisdiction over a large territory (of which Candrapuri *viṣaya* was a part) that yielded substantial revenue. In neighbouring Tripura during the seventh century, *sāmantas* and *mahāsāmantas* were autonomous rulers powerful enough to issue commands to the *adhikaraṇas*, *viṣayapatīs*, etc. when making landgrants without seeking permission from any 'imperial' authority.⁴²

The first few extant epigraphical records of the Sālastambha kings show that features of the administrative organization of the Varmans prevailed within the Brahmaputra valley for about a couple of centuries. The Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjjaravarmadeva,⁴³ dated the ninth century, and issued from Harupeśvarapura (i.e., the 'city' of Haḍapeśvara in the Tezpur area),⁴⁴ recorded the settlement of a dispute between local fishermen and boatmen in 'royal' service over the use of waterways for the purpose of carrying on their activities. Those whom the

king called upon to settle the dispute included the following: the *mahāsāmanta*, who bore the designation of an army official (*senādhyakṣa*), and whose name was Sucitta; the *sāmanta*, who was a *baladhyakṣa* or a military functionary named (or of) Śilākuṭṭa, who was perhaps subordinate in rank to Sucitta; others, *viz.*, Sāvārṇi, Śrīcitradharadakṣa, Bhaṭṭajīu, Dinajī Lāhilī Jhā, Dalākavavā, etc., living on the south [of the Brahmaputra?]; Somadeva and others [including] — the son of Śankarabhaṭṭa of the *pañcakula* [Brāhmaṇas?]. Notably, the majority of them were of Brāhmaṇa background.

In the case of a landgrant, *i.e.*, the Hāyunthal grant issued by the same king,⁴⁵ but executed by the crown-prince (*yuvarāja*) Vanamālā in the 'victorious' capital (*jayaskandhāvāra*) Haṭṭapeśvara, the following were called upon as witnesses⁴⁶:

the *mahasainyapati* (*i.e.*, *mahāsenapati*) Śrīgaṇa, obviously, the commander-in-chief of forces;⁴⁷

the *mahādvārādhipati* Śrījayadeva, probably charged with collection of customs duties at — or with superintending the work of the officials of — the main gates or passes of the 'city' or kingdom;⁴⁸

the *mahāpratīhāra* Janārdana, variously translated as the head chamberlain, the royal gatekeeper or the chief collector of tolls at the city-gates;⁴⁹

the *mahāmātya* Śrīgovinda, probably the chief administrative official;⁵⁰

Madhusūdana, the *Brāhmaṇādhipikāri Bhaṭṭa Śrīka*[ṇṭha?], probably the principal figure in the Brāhmaṇa community associated with the area in which the land transfer took place.⁵¹

The presence of witnesses whose designations were prefixed with '*mahā*' suggests that high officials charged with both civil and military functions were involved in the administration of the kingdom in which land was transferred to Brāhmaṇa recipients. In other parts of post-Gupta India, officials whose designations began with '*mahā*' were high functionaries placed in recognized hierarchical categories; all were invariably autonomous rulers and were associated with graded rights in land.⁵² Such high-sounding titles had become

equated with those of the *mahāsāmanta* and *sāmanta*, which nomenclatures virtually disappeared after the ninth century. In Kāmarūpa, holders of various designations prefixed with *rāja* replaced the *sāmantas* and *mahāsāmantas*.

Kāmarūpa thus seems to have kept pace with the general trend of developments in post-Gupta India insofar as the emergence of landed groups and various functionaries associated with appropriation of revenues and maintenance of law and order was concerned. However, from about the late-ninth century onwards, the successors of the Varmans (i.e., kings of the Sālastambha line) seem to have succeeded in consolidating the revenue system commensurate with systematizing the socio-political organization in the kingdom. Henceforth the landgrants of Kāmarūpa's rulers gave a more or less uniform list of personages who were informed about the donation of land.⁵³ The evidence of the Nowgong grant shows that at the level of the *viṣaya* the addressees began with the legal expert (*vyavahārika*) and the important people of the locality (*pramukh janapadān*), viz., the *rāja*, *rājñi*, *rāṇaka*, *rājanyaka*, *rājaputra*, *rājavallabha* and others, like the *mahallakapraudhika*, followed by the *hastibandhika*, *naukabandhika*, *cauroddharanika*, *dāṇḍika*, *dāṇḍapāsika*, *auparikarika*, *autkheṭika*, and the *cchatravāsā*.⁵⁴ Evidently the *pramukh janapadān* had become synonymous with the ruling group, as may be inferred from the prefix '*rāja*' attached to their titles. '*Rāja*' seems to have been a generic term for the most important among the local rulers. Local inscriptions dating from the seventh century onwards had mentioned *rājas* in the sense of defeated or tributary chiefs who paid homage to the kings of Kāmarūpa.⁵⁵ The *rājñi* might have denoted a female member of the *rāja's* family, or one associated with mother-rights.⁵⁶ The *rāṇaka* perhaps stood for a local dignitary next only to the *rāja* and *rājñi* in importance. In northern India during the twelfth century, *rāṇakas* were feudatories of the Kalacuri kings.⁵⁷ The *rājanyaka*, *rājaputra* and *rājavallabha*, mentioned in order of precedence in the inscriptions issued by the kings of Kāmarūpa between the late-ninth and eleventh centuries, seem to have variously denoted hierarchical chiefs at the level of a village or localities within a village, in the sense of clan-chief, lineage-chief, custodian of clan — /lineage-land, etc. In other parts of India at approximately the same period, these were

designations of different grades of local/village chiefs that functioned as subordinate rulers in the realm of an overlord in various capacities, as in Chamba, Kashmir and Bengal.⁵⁸ In any case all of them were substantial land-holders.⁵⁹

The second rung of personages, apparently outside the membership of the ruling group, but nonetheless armed with certain rights of exercising judicial power and prerogatives of procuring certain kinds of service from members of the populace comprised the *mahallakapraudhika*, which word has been translated as eunuchs, "grand ladies" in attendance on the *rajñīs* or an old lady in charge of the royal harem;⁶⁰ the *hastibandhika*, charged with the tethering of elephants or with collecting dues on the catching of elephants;⁶¹ the *naukabandhika*, who had to look after the mooring of boats or to collect dues on the use of waterways by boats;⁶² the *cauroddharaṇika* or official who collected the 'police-tax' (*cauroddharaṇa*);⁶³ the *daṇḍika* or enforcer of authority;⁶⁴ the *daṇḍapaśika* or official that actually executed the punishment of the offender/criminal;⁶⁵ the *uparikarika* or collector of the revenue *uparikara*;⁶⁶ the *utkheṭika* or collector of *utkheṭana*;⁶⁷ and the *chatravāsā* or bearer of the royal umbrella.⁶⁸ It is evident that Kāmarūpa's dignitaries, whose titles were prefixed with 'rāja', were inextricably connected with the use of land and organization of its resources. Apparently such local personages, as well as other higher and lesser functionaries informed about the transfer of land had graded rights in land besides/or the power of exercising various forms of authority over its people. The Nowgong grant explicitly stated that such personages and functionaries were prohibited from setting foot in the donated land because they

may cause trouble on account of the fastening of elephants, the fastening of boats, the searching for thieves, the exercise of authority, the infliction of punishments, the realizing of tenants' [*sic*] taxes and imposts, the providing of room for the royal umbrella, etc...⁶⁹

The denial of entry of the above-mentioned functionaries to the donated land gives rise to certain speculations. Perhaps they placed undesirable burdens on a given village in the event of their billeting on the strength of their superior rights in land, as their concomitant expenses had to be met locally. Or, they might

have used certain methods — which the village folk regarded as oppressive — of collecting revenue and exercising administrative authority including judicial civil power. Either way, the terms and conditions of the landgrants protected the donated land from State interference through such agents/officials, and the donor enjoined upon the inhabitants of the land to obey the donee. The operational clauses of the landgrants issued between the latter part of the ninth and the close of the twelfth centuries more or less tallied with those of the Nowgong grant and indicated the broad trends in the administrative organization pertaining to the greater part of the Brahmaputra valley. The implications of the overall development were that: (a) in the donated land the donee was henceforth empowered with the right to exercise the same authority hitherto vested in the ruling groups and various administrative functionaries, including the managerial role, so as to enjoy fiscal privileges to the fullest; (b) outside the area of donated land the local rulers and various officials working for the king divided among themselves the role of managing the land, organizing its resources (presumably to extract maximum benefit for themselves), maintaining law and order, etc. It is apparent that in both instances it was the populace that was subjected to various types of exaction and social discriminations.

The evidence of inscriptions ascribed to the twelfth century furnishes further clues to the disadvantages of the ruled. On the one hand, there was the gradation of the rural folk as peasants based on their use and occupation of land. For the first time in the 12th century Kamauli grant,⁷⁰ the inhabitants (*janapadān*) of two villages (*viz.*, Śāntibaḍa and Mandarā in Baḍā viṣaya, which were donated to a Brāhmaṇa) were addressed in order of their superiority and importance (*pradhānaprativāsi*), as *caṭṭa*, *bhaṭṭa*, *viṣayillaka* and *karṣaka*. This is the first of the extant grants of Kāmarūpa to have made specific mention of *karṣakas*. In the context of the Indian mainland, *karṣakas* comprised small landholding cultivators who owned the means of production. It appears, however, that their rights of access to the resources, processes and fruits of production were gradually restricted as the locally dominant groups increasingly asserted their authority to exercise administrative powers in the land, often in connivance with the regional states that had

emerged during the post-Gupta period. In Kāmarūpa the *karṣakas* probably belonged to local descent groups that functioned as resource owning and managing units, since the landgrants referred to social groupings bordering the sides of the donated land. The general picture provided by the landgrants shows the prevalence of communal holdings in land.⁷¹ But there were a few instances of the beginnings of the idea of individual landholdings, mainly among personages of non-local origins. In fact one Bhaṭṭa Gangādhara had held the two villages of Śāntibada and Mandarā before the king, Vaidyadeva, made them over to a new donee named Guggulī Śrī-Śridharaśarmman. Moreover, the precedence that the Kamauli grant gave to the title-holders *caṭṭa*, *bhaṭṭa* and *viṣayillaka* over the *karṣakas* left no doubt that the latter were definitely a 'class' below the former. According to some scholars the *caṭṭas* and *bhaṭṭas* were partly policemen or military personnel (or 'regular'/'irregular' soldiers) charged with the arrest of robbers and 'traitors' to the State.⁷² The *caṭṭa* and *bhaṭṭa* could have been the same as the *caṭṭas* and *bhaṭṭas* mentioned in early medieval inscriptions of other rulers within the Indian sub-continent, in which case they performed police and military functions.⁷³ In D.C. Sircar's view, the *bhaṭṭa* was a "constable" or a "*paik*" or "*piada*", and the *caṭṭa* "seems to have been the leader of a group of them."⁷⁴ But in our opinion, the *caṭṭas* and *bhaṭṭas* more likely comprised a privileged group in the villages and had superior rights in land in a graded fashion. It could even be speculated that the *caṭṭas* and *bhaṭṭas* of the Kamauli grant were agents of the king and might have been of Brāhmaṇa background, considering that an earlier inscription (the Nowgong grant) had mentioned the *chatravāsā*, and that the landgrants addressed most of the Brāhmaṇa donees as *Bhaṭṭas*, whose chief duty was to perform priestly and educational functions. The *viṣayallaka* perhaps denoted an official of the *viṣaya* administration,⁷⁵ who worked in close association with the first two functionaries (*caṭṭa* and *bhaṭṭas*). Apparently the operational clauses of the landgrants empowering the donees to manage the affairs of the donated land and to organize its resources facilitated their rise to a level where they might have succeeded, over time, in reducing the ordinary peasant family to a position of servility in its own land.

By the last quarter of the twelfth century a land charter even recorded the assignment of the services of five helpers (*pañca sahaya*) and their families in favour of an almshouse to which the king, Vallabhadeva, gifted certain villages near Kirtipura in the Hapyaca *maṇḍala*.⁷⁶ The *sahaya* comprised the land's occupants who did not figure in the list of the *janapadān* whom the king addressed while formalizing the transfer of land to the almshouse. This probably meant that they did not belong to any local descent group and so had no rights whatsoever in the donated land. Most likely they were hired labourers. This would explain why they could be made over to any beneficiary that the king chose. In that case *karṣakas* were above the *sahaya*, if only because the former perhaps still owned the means of production, despite indications of the gradual erosion of their 'traditional' rights in the donated land.⁷⁷ It appears that those who did not have access to — or had completely lost — those rights in land had only their labour to offer to anyone capable of organizing it. The *sahaya*, therefore, seem to have emerged to meet the needs of production where labour was scarce in relation to the area of cultivable land. The development was commensurate with land that was being brought under the management of elements that obviously had no previous attachment to it. By that logic it could be surmised that such instances of dependent agricultural labourers might not have been unknown even before the practice of landgrants had become fairly common in Kāmarūpa. It follows, then, that the mechanism of landgrants did not necessarily or always constitute the principal mode of agrarian exploitation, contrary to some of the earlier assumptions.⁷⁸ This point becomes all the more crucial to our understanding of the social processes that were unfolding in the region of Kāmarūpa, from the rise of local elements in rural expansion to the emergence of a fairly impressive 'coterie' of ruling groups, whose designations were prefixed with *rājā*, and who owed allegiance to the king.

II

The information on the various dignitaries, lesser functionaries and the general population of settlements within the Brahmaputra region and its adjoining areas thus makes it clear

that the administrative organization centred round the use and occupation of land. The extant epigraphical evidence of the fifth and sixth centuries does not indicate anything explicit about how the local 'big men' appropriated socio-economic power. But something may be inferred from the data regarding the persons associated with the functions of revenue collection and its distribution. Within the Valley itself, local elements seem to have played a significant role in the management of village affairs and maintenance of law and order, while they seem to have been subjected to the authority of religious beneficiaries in the donated lands. Some mechanism of social control seems to have been in operation at the village level based perhaps on local customary laws and norms of corporate life; but the actual manner in which the ruling groups asserted their authority at any level — local, village or a bigger administrative unit — is open to conjecture. Most likely it was control over the organization of resources that was the key to acquisition and circulation of wealth. As mentioned earlier, land was the chief means of production in the region. It follows then that the quest for control over the organization of its resources underlay the forms of socio-political arrangements evident in the landgrants.

It is the evidence of the seventh-century Nidhanpur grant that highlighted, for the first time, the nexus between the king (Bhāskaravarman) and the *sāmanta* and Brāhmaṇa elements, on the one hand, and the leading men of the locality, on the other, in the role of administering and regulating resources. It provided details on the land's components and human habitations⁷⁹ thereby showing that the land offered tremendous scope for augmenting production. The grant specified the *amśāh* or shares (of paddy) accruing from the donated land to the two hundred odd Brāhmaṇa donees (as individuals or groups), and listed the *utkhetayitā* as a witness of the grant (thereby indicating the levy of the revenue *utkhetana*). Interestingly, however, the terms and conditions of the grant did not preclude the donees' right to extend the scope of production beyond the shares that had been specified. In fact, the donees received the land according to *bhūmicchidraṇyāya*,⁸⁰ i.e., the principle of land brought under cultivation for the first time. By that logic they had the right to enjoy the land's resources and the fruits of production that only the first colonizers of land were entitled to. The terms of the

land transfer must have taken cognizance of the customary laws that were already in place, so that — at least in principle — no drastic change could be brought about in the relations of production in the donated land, which, as noted above, was not uninhabited. Still, in the event that the donees introduced higher yielding techniques of production there was bound to have been some shift in the relations of production as well within the donated land. But it is not known for certain how such relations of production were established. In any case, to ensure the donees' enjoyment of the stipulated rights and privileges in an apparently inhabited area it would have necessitated security of the donees' persons and their worldly possessions. Since the donees were (unarmed) priests, not warriors, their interests had to be protected by those in positions of political authority backed by coercive power. That probably accounted for the military designations of the personages who had witnessed the land transfer. Their presence implied their obligation to extend protection to the donees.

Notably, the Nidhanpur grant was issued on the occasion of Bhāskaravarman's occupation of Karṇasuvarṇa (the capital of Gauḍa, which was till then under the reign of Śaśānka). It described Karṇasuvarṇa as Bhāskaravarman's victorious camp (*jayaśavdā rihskandhāvara*).⁸¹ Perhaps this conquest alluded to his raids into areas beyond the Brahmaputra valley (i.e., outside the Varmans' core domains) for extending his family's suzerainty thereto, as well as for procuring loot and booty that must have been counted as forms of wealth. This point underlined the significance of warfare in the process of acquiring wealth, and of forging alliances towards that end; hence, the presence of so many personages on the occasion of the land transfer. Such alliances seem to have been reaffirmed from time to time. As mentioned earlier, the Nidhanpur grant attributed the original charter granting land in the Candrapuri *viṣaya* to Bhāskaravarman's great grandfather, Bhūti-varman. Notably, the high-sounding titles ascribed to personages within the same territorial context are indicative of the arrangement of the ruling groups in a graded fashion, with the Varmans at the pivot. Apparently the bigger personages such as the *prāpta-pañcamahāśabda*, *mahāsāmanta*, etc. had acquired the grand epithets on the strength of their authority. In that sense their

socio-political statuses and administrative functions did not depend on the overlord, Bhutivarman or Bhāskaravarman. Instead, the latter seems to have extended his suzerainty to Candrapuri *viṣaya* (over which he had no direct administrative control) through such allies and 'friends', who rendered him military service as and when the need arose. And, as we have indicated before, it was these functionaries who were also responsible for maintaining law and order in the *viṣaya* at different levels. The whole situation suggests the emergence of a type of political authority characterized by some sort of a tributary system in the regional context of Kāmarūpa that covered a large territory, i.e., the lower Brahmaputra valley, the Kapili valley, and contiguous areas including a part of Sylhet in the sixth-seventh centuries. During the mid-fifth to seventh centuries deltaic Bengal was clearly undergoing significant socio-economic change with the practice of landgrants in favour of religious beneficiaries⁸² and the resultant change in the relations of production, notions of land holding, among other things. New political ideas and institutions seem to have emerged to cater to the needs of the times and these must have involved alliances and allegiances among those contending for greater access to resources and consolidation of control over their distribution. The Nidhanpur grant offers a clue to the king's ability to win over the allegiance of the locally dominant elements scattered across a large territory: it recorded that Bhāskaravarman "surpassed the whole ring of his feudatories by the strength of his own arms."⁸³ The same source⁸⁴ recorded that Bhāskaravarman encamped at Karṇasuvārṇa at the head of an array of ships, elephants, horses and foot soldiers. According to Yuan Chwang, Bhāskaravarman's military force comprised, at the time of his meeting with Harṣavardhana at Kājangala, 20,000 elephants and 30,000 ships.⁸⁵ Such an impressive display of force could hardly have been possible from within Bhāskaravarman's core domain alone, and must have involved the supply of fighting men and animals by his allies.

It is obvious that the political process had started further back in time. Notably the process was intricately linked with the diffusion of Brahmanical culture into southeast Bengal from the direction of Mithilā. In the sixth century Bhūivarman had facilitated the first known large-scale settlement of Brāhmaṇas

(the *Mayūrasālmalāgrahāra*) from Mithilā on the periphery of Kāmarūpa. An *agrahāra* carried exemption from payment of every form of revenue to any political authority, so the Brāhmaṇa beneficiaries would have had the freedom of exercising their fiscal rights effectively therein. Surely the donor regarded the services of the Brāhmaṇa donees as so important that he deemed it fit that they should be among those who benefited from the distribution of wealth accruing from revenue producing land. The Nidhanpur grant recorded the renewal of Bhūivarman's grant, as the original charter had been damaged therefore putting the Brāhmaṇa residents in the *agrahāra* at risk of becoming liable to revenue payment. The stated purpose of the Nidhanpur grant was the maintenance of the donees and their progeny in perpetuity, and for worship, oblation and hospitality (*bali-caru-satra*).⁸⁶ All this indicates the availability of sufficient resources in the *agrahāra*. If the Brāhmaṇa donees had indeed succeeded in augmenting production therein by applying more advanced methods of agriculture, it would have been expected that the technology would eventually spread to areas surrounding the donated land and thus enlarge the scope of acquiring wealth by those with the power of establishing control over the productive forces. In that respect creating the *agrahāra* had motives other than religious. This last point thus indicates that the practice of landgrants in Kāmarūpa was part of the rulers' policy to consolidate their economic base and political power. Its purpose was to extend the area of cultivation, as much as to establish the legitimacy of the rulers' claim to political paramountcy over ever-expanding territory, although the records cited religious motives behind the grant. In fact the practice of granting land in favour of religious beneficiaries with usufructuary rights seems to have become widespread in post-Gupta times, particularly in areas that were peripheral to the erstwhile Magadhan Empire, such as Kāmarūpa, Gauḍa,⁸⁷ etc., which had been outside the actual ambit of the "classical empire" of the Guptas. The Brāhmaṇas accorded legitimation to the locally dominant elements of such areas, who (by the close of the Gupta period) asserted their hegemony to rule within the framework of the *varṇāśramadharmā*. The Nidhanpur grant referred to the *agrahāra*'s exemption from *kara*,⁸⁸ but made no mention of the exemption from *utkheṭana*,

although the *utkheṭayitā*⁸⁹ was called upon as one of the witnesses of the grant. The term *kara* has been variously interpreted as a synonym of the royal grain-share (*bhāga*), or a periodical tax over and above the *bhāga*, or a land-tax that 'proprietors' paid the king for retaining their tenurial rights.⁹⁰ The *utkheṭayitā* has been described as the collector of *utkheṭana*, another form of revenue from land, though probably not tenurial. The *utkheṭana* seems to have been a charge on entire settlements, perhaps inclusive of manual service that had to be rendered any time on demand, as well as payment (perhaps in the form of occasional tithes) that the village-folk had to make for the use of land resources (e.g., pastures, ponds, forest products, water sources).⁹¹

Apparently the monarchical system first ascribed to the Varmans had an impact on the central Brahmaputra valley. The inscriptions of their successors (i.e., the Sālastambha kings) offer enough data to show that the new rulers managed to build up a sound economic base in the central and lower Brahmaputra region with Haḍapeśvara as their political centre, and to apply a largely uniform revenue system in the kingdom in the post-eighth century. As in the previous regime, land was the focus of socio-political organization. To highlight the importance of land as the basis of social organization and its institutional ramifications, it would be worthwhile to examine certain portions of the operational clauses of the landgrants dated from the ninth to eleventh centuries. The grants categorized land on the basis of (a) its quality, as may be inferred from the components of land listed as homesteads (*vāstu*), paddy fields (*kedāra*), dry lands (*sthala*), waters (*jala*), pasture grounds (*gopracāra*), wastelands (*avaskarādhyu*); (b) the prevailing tenures, whether land was (i) communally owned and allotted to familial units, or (ii) held by individuals in their own right, or (iii) was liable to payment of revenues or earmarked for enjoyment of usufructuary rights on a permanent basis subject to certain terms and conditions. Related to the second category was the list of revenues or superior rights accruing from the production process and organization of resources, i.e., levies imposed on the use of elephants (*hastibandha*) and boats (*naukabandha*), fines realized from 'thieves' (*cauroddharāṇa*), conviction of offenders (*daṇḍapāśa*), realization of the *uparikara* (or 'extra cess' /

surplus produce/contributions in the shape of articles and provisions)⁹² and *utkheṭaṇa*, and dues from grazing of elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep.⁹³

Clearly, land was a significant item of possession and source of wealth for individuals and groups of individuals. By that logic the larger the area of land that the rulers could extend their sphere of authority over, the greater would be the scope of increasing their access to wealth. But the onus of production was on the labour engaged in agriculture and the rulers' ability to establish first claims to anything accruing from dry land, water, pasture ground, forest, etc. and to claim a part of the fruits of production, besides enjoyment of certain privileges at the expense of the village folk. It appears, therefore, that organization of resources in land was even more important than actual proprietorship of land. In the event of territorial aggrandizement, then, the rulers' access to 'wealth' must have called for establishing mutually acceptable relations of production between the rulers and the ruled. Not for nothing did upholding *varṇāśramadharmā* become explicitly mentioned as the most important of the king's duties from Bhāskaravarman's times onwards.⁹⁴ The concept pertained to the maintenance of social order and regulation of norms of conduct and socio-economic activities based on Brahmanical ideals. Primarily it sought to rationalize the differences between the rulers and the ruled. It implied a certain degree of royal power over the forces engaged in the organization of resources in land in the manner ascribed to a 'first' colonizer. It was the sum-total of various rights and privileges hitherto associated with the king's prerogative, which was made over to the Brāhmaṇa donees, as known from the Nidhanpur grant. Although the grant was heritable and perpetual,⁹⁵ it did not specify the transfer of proprietary rights that seem to have remained in the hands of the primary producers. The heredity and perpetuity of the grants issued by the kings of Kāmarūpa became a matter of convention thereafter, as all other grants declared the devolution of the same privileges on the descendants of the original donees for all times to come. Such superior privileges could have placed the donees in a position where they could have appropriated administrative power and eventually control of land to deprive the cultivators of their 'traditional' rights over time, particularly in the

context of whole villages and the contiguous areas that they had received from the king. A pointer to the mounting disadvantage of the ruled is the suffixing of the term *sarvapiḍā* (literally, 'all [other] forms [of income]') to the list of revenues specified in the operational clauses of the landgrants dating from the last quarter of the ninth century onwards.⁹⁶ It implied the donees' privilege to raise unspecified revenues as well — whether in kind or in labour — in the donated land if required. Presumably such a privilege was extended to the donees as a matter of formality upon the same having become a prerogative of Kāmarūpa's ruling groups. In that case it was reflective of the growing social stratification in the Brahmaputra valley and must have manifested itself in the use and occupation of land.

The evidence of the landgrants shows that access to resources in land was not uniform among various groups of people. In fact, as indicated earlier, the operational clauses of the landgrants dating from the post-eighth century onwards seem to have preempted problems arising from the prevalence of hierarchical rights in land; otherwise recording the prohibition of various parties/individuals from entering into the donated land would not have served any purpose. This inference also stems from the fact that such a stricture was imposed even in the case of grants of small plots of land. It implied that the personages who were banned from entering into the donated land had superior rights in land or the authority to realize revenues in kind and service from the 'populace'. Perhaps they had the first claims to the choicest land, the use of valuable assets (such as elephants), etc., thus transcending the notion of commonly held resources in the village, where each individual had shared all things as the need had arisen. By the same reasoning it could be surmised that the ordinary folks owed their rights of occupation and use of land to membership of the larger community to which the ruling groups belonged; but even though they must have had access to resources that ensured their survival, there seem to have been marked differences in land rights and in wealth items between the rulers and the ruled. When superior rights were transferred to the donees, the local personages effectively withdrew any hurdles that would have come in the way of the former's enjoyment of their

fiscal privileges and administrative immunities. Thereafter the donees seem to have joined the ranks of the ruling groups in the countryside. The common folk in turn seem to have shifted their fidelity from the local rulers to the recipients of the land grants. This implied that in areas outside the donated land, local personages and functionaries perhaps claimed the sanction of customary laws to exercise their right to enjoy the various privileges and to impose on the rural folk certain obligations that had become customary in course of time.

The clue to what such superior rights entailed first appeared in the Nowgong grant⁹⁷ dated the last quarter of the ninth century. The individuals prohibited from entering the donated land had the prerogatives of *hastibandha*, *naukābandha*, *cauroddharāṇa*, *dāṇḍa*, *dāṇḍapāśa*, *au(u)parikara*, *au(u)tkheṭana* and *chatravāsa*.⁹⁸ This portion of the terms of the grant was repeated almost verbatim in all subsequent landgrants upto the close of the eleventh century. It indicated that within the region there had developed some definite patterns of social inequality and social rankings based on power and wealth, with those holding property and controlling the means of production in an advantageous position *vis-à-vis* the greater bulk of the village community whose members shared things in common. The whole scenario presupposed some amount of competition among individuals and groups of people for enhanced socio-economic status and some kind of an effective military organization/coercive machinery towards that end. The 'supreme lord' who succeeded in winning over the support and allegiance of the major players in the political arena seems to have become identified as the ultimate source of coercive authority (including the exercise of military and judicial [civil and criminal] powers), the acquirer and distributor of revenues, the upholder of the *varṇa*-based social order, and so on. Inscriptional evidence and corroborative literary evidence depicted the 'supreme lord' as the foremost among the ruling groups and functionaries of the administrative and coercive machinery to reside in a political centre that was strategically located in the midst of the countryside. The capital city of each dynasty was invariably situated on the bank of the Lauhitya and/or was naturally endowed with the prerequisites of a fortified settlement surrounded by hills and interspersed by jungles.⁹⁹

However, his position seems to have been inherently tenuous, all the more so as larger areas of land were brought under wet rice cultivation in the lower and central Brahmaputra valley, and the resultant access of various social groups to permanent tenurial rights. Most likely, locally dominant groups that had the managerial role in land sometimes came into conflict with one another and with the 'supreme lord' in matters of revenue payment, as all of them sought to broaden the base of revenue collection in communally held land. It appears that the king assumed the role of the supreme arbiter of justice and ultimate enforcer of the coercive authority to ensure monarchical rule.¹⁰⁰ But even in the face of limited data, it is obvious that no king or ruling family was able to maintain the *status quo* throughout the pre-Ahom period.

To illustrate the veracity of the last-mentioned point we may turn to the broad socio-economic and political developments in pre-Ahom Kāmarūpa. The Varmans' political base was the western part of the Brahmaputra valley. Their political centre has not been named in the extant source material whether literary or epigraphical; presumably it was Prāḡjyotiṣapura, identified with the Dispur-Jatiya areas subsumed under present-day Guwahati.¹⁰¹ Whatever information is available on Prāḡjyotiṣapura makes it clear that it was at most an urban settlement that had developed as the nodal point in the network of redistributive economic integration primarily drawing on the rulers' ability to organize resources in land, and served as the focal centre of administration and of craft specialization.¹⁰² It was also the nodal point in the network of trade. Evidently it commanded the trade route to deltaic Bengal and North Bengal through the network of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries,¹⁰³ and necessitated extending the sphere of suzerainty beyond the lower Brahmaputra valley, which inference can be drawn from the aggrandizement policy of the Varmans. The evidence of the *Harṣacarita* indicates that Kāmarūpa's rulers during the seventh century patronized trade in luxury items, some of which they must have procured from outside the region (e.g., cups of sapphire, crest jewels and precious stones) and others from within the region (e.g., musk perfumes, black aloe oil and sandal scent).¹⁰⁴ Perhaps they paid for these high value goods imported from outside the region in kind (such as valuable wood, animal hides and horns, items of

non-farming crops)¹⁰⁵ or in high denomination coins issued by their contemporaries, for no coins have been ascribed to any of the Varman kings. Presumably such coins were acquired through wars and tributes. This inference is borne out by the recovery of gold coins from Paglatek, ascribed to the post-seventh century.¹⁰⁶ Trade in items of daily necessity or common use — like salt, iron implements (for agricultural/household use) and wheel-thrown pots that were not locally available or manufactured — was in all probability based on the barter system, although it is not possible to pinpoint the articles that were used to pay for them. The inhabitants of the region must have procured such items from specialized craftsmen or mobile traders that had no attachment to rural settlements; hence they did not figure in the references to various social groups associated with land that was the object of landgrants. The only exception was the community of potters, who found mention in a few inscriptions as landholders next to areas that had been made over to religious beneficiaries.¹⁰⁷ This indicates that most items of local consumption were produced at the level of the households and that the volume of trade was small. But by the period of the Sālastambha kings there seems to have been a systematic attempt to levy revenues from all trading activities, as the designations *mahādvārādhipati* and *māhāpratihāra* conferred on certain functionaries during the ninth century indicate.¹⁰⁸ At that point of time the term *śulka* (in the sense of revenue from trade)¹⁰⁹ made an appearance, pointing to a chief's attempt to impose trade tax on the Kaivarttas settled near the capital Haḍapeśvara, and to regulate the movement of their boats. That move created so much tension that the 'supreme lord', Harjjaravarman, along with the leading members of the Brāhmaṇa community from the locality had to intervene to settle the dispute. Henceforth the Kaivarttas' and the chief's boats were bound by law to ply within the boundaries of the waterways earmarked for them; any transgression of the legal settlement was to entail payment of 100 cowries as fine.¹¹⁰ The use of cowries as currency in and around the capital of the Sālastambha kings and their striking (a limited quantity) of copper coins¹¹¹ indicate that they attained some success in streamlining control over trading activities. Obviously the metal coins were not used for the purpose of transactions but had political value.

The territorial expansion that the Varmans initiated seems to have contributed to the assertion of the Śālastambha kings (in the post-seventh century), whose political base was in the central Brahmaputra valley with their capital at Haḍapeśvara (roughly, modern Tezpur).¹¹² The latter seem to have built upon the socio-economic foundation laid by the Varmans by extending the network of communications further east to link the kingdom with the area around Sadiya and the Himalayan foothills on the north-east, the Patkai mountain range on the south-east, and the area around Guwahati in the west. The name of the capital itself suggests that it owed its origin to its role as a core exchange centre (*haṭa*) in the web of trade linking various village settlements and that it developed into an urban centre which the Śālastambha kings made their capital.¹¹³ Their inscriptions reveal that the urban settlement of Haḍapeśvara represented an important phase of pre-Ahom history in strengthening the political and cultural integration of the kingdom. It saw the expansion of the agrarian economy in the kingdom, especially within the central Brahmaputra valley through the mechanism of landgrants on a scale unprecedented in the preceding period, and the beginnings of a systematically organized revenue system that touched upon all socio-economic activities: the use of waterways by boats, the use of elephants, and, most important, the use and occupation of land and the compulsion of primary producers to give regular grain-shares and periodical tithes, to render manual service on the rulers' demand and pay fines in the event of transgressing the rule of law. The period coincided with the organization of society into two broad categories — the *dvija* and the Śūdra¹¹⁴ — with only the latter and the Brāhmaṇa as distinct *varṇa* categories. All members of the common population and those without the right or power to exercise control over organizing resources were ranked as Śūdras; most of them were given the status of peasants, thereby indicating their association with land as their major source of livelihood. The two other *varṇa* categories (*viz.*, Kṣatriya and Vaiśya) of the Brahmanical tradition were not mentioned, although members of the ruling dynasty were accorded a Kṣatriya ranking. We have already mentioned that members of the ruling groups were called by various titles prefixed with *rāja*. Interestingly, *vaṇiks* or (affluent) merchants also ranked

as *rājaputras*, who were given pride of place in the *rājasuya* or coronation ceremony of Harjjaravarman.¹¹⁵ It implies that economically powerful social elements that supplied the king and members of his retinue with prestige goods and contributed to the wealth of the rulers were ranked alongside those who drew on the wealth accruing from management of land and its resources. Accordingly, they seem to have been included in the category of the *dvijas*, formalizing their differentiation from the common members of the population in that they were entitled to the rights, privileges and powers of controlling the organization of resources denied to the latter. Thus the latter were effectively debarred from rising on the social scale. The Śūdras' social disadvantages extended to the larger sections of the female population as well; the latter were ranked alongside the Śūdras.¹¹⁶ The development indicated the rulers' dependence on the support of all categories of wealth-holders for recognition of their legitimacy to rule. That legitimacy was reinforced by the stamp of approval given by the legal preceptors in the persons of the priestly order, the Brāhmaṇas. This recognition was crucial to the enhancement of the rulers' social status vis-à-vis that of the contemporaneous rulers of mainland India, especially when placed in the context of the region's predominantly tribal social organization and the germinal character of ordering the tribal population on *varṇa* lines.¹¹⁷ The whole situation was consistent with the diffusion of Brahmanical elements in the kingdom, the extension of the agrarian economy to new areas along the banks of the Brahmaputra and the adjacent areas, and the acculturation of the various tribal groups by Brāhmaṇas with the backing of the locally dominant elements. Apart from the introduction of the concept of *varṇa-dharma* for regulating social relationships based on the Brahmanical code in a monarchical system, Brāhmaṇas were instrumental in bringing about the synthesis of local cults and forms of worship with those of the Brahmanical religion in harmony with the Puranic tradition.¹¹⁸ By the tenth century the process had culminated in the final composition of the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, which work assumed the character of a regional tradition in the context of Kāmarūpa.¹¹⁹

In course of these developments the Śālastambha kings lost out to the Pāla kings in the competition for political paramountcy in the kingdom. The Pālas seem to have consolidated the revenue system of their predecessors; they could specify the amount of grain-shares accruing from plots of land even more accurately than in the period of the Śālastambha kings. But such productive units — although indicative of more intensive use of agricultural land — were scattered over a large territory. The Pālas therefore seem to have resorted to hitherto untried mechanisms to assert their hold over the greater part of the Valley: they set up a few political headquarters, *viz.*, Haḍapyaka, Durjjaya and Kāmarūpanāgara¹²⁰ that evidently served as armed garrisons, each of which was surrounded by a number of village settlements. Perhaps the goal was to (a) keep a check on the locally dominant elements aspiring for political power and having access to the wealth accruing from bringing land under wet rice cultivation, and (b) to secure the foundation of social position based on the management and use of available resources consistent with the rise of permanent settlements. Such developments are comparable with the situation in some other contemporaneous areas, such as Bengal and Orissa.¹²¹ Even so, it appears that the notion of a large territorial state under a single ruling family was no longer tenable in the region of Kāmarūpa by the latter half of the twelfth century as more and more locally dominant elements aspiring for a share in the fruits of the new agrarian economy asserted themselves. The agrarian economy of the region sometimes attracted adventurers from Bengal to set up their rule, as happened in the case of Vaidyadeva, who is known from his Kamauli grant. All the political potentates adopted the same ethic of the 'imperial' rulers to legitimize their authority to govern the people and protect their land by hiring the services of Brāhmaṇas willing to provide that legitimacy — based on the Brahmanical code — in return for adequate patronage. Admittedly, the territory under their rule was considerably reduced. Nevertheless, the twelfth-thirteenth centuries saw the rise of sub-regional and local polities within the region of Kāmarūpa, as is known from the evidence of Vallabhadeva's grant, and that of the sources ascribed to the Chutiyas, the Bhuiyans and the Koches, among others.¹²²

III

In examining the stages in the history of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa it is difficult not to recognize the primacy of the material conditions of life as the foundation upon which a semblance of an integrated system subsuming the principal aspects of social life arose. The study indicates that the existing/evolving mode of material production underlay the socio-economic relations and their corresponding manifestations in the superstructure: kingship, socio-political organization and institutions, etc. It shows that the kingdom emerged in response to the need for (a) resolving internal contradictions arising from differential access to resources in land, and (b) preparing the ground for what was regarded as a more progressive way of life, specifically in the face of the internal contradictions and of external influences from the direction of northern India. Such contradictions were rooted in the material production at different levels of development in Kāmarūpa. Briefly put, this development was associated with the appearance of some amount of surplus product with the expansion of the agrarian economy. The expansion of the agrarian economy effected an increase in labour productivity, trade, private property and exploitation commensurate with growing social inequalities and antagonisms.¹²³ The sum-total of the preceding discussion therefore indicates that under conditions of labour scarcity, social wealth assumed the form of value, in the sense of certain individuals' power to control the labour of the producing majority for their own private use. That form of wealth was embodied in material products and prestige objects forthcoming mainly from agriculture and trade. Such products and objects became the chief symbols of socio-economic power and were monopolized by the ruling groups. These things became the aim of social development transcending the need to create humane conditions of existence or to promote the development/interests of the kingdom's population as a whole. In the process, the majority of the population became just a means of attaining those social forms in which they were actually subordinated by their own products. Thus the main stimulus of the monarchical system was control over the avenues of material wealth, and its acquisition and accumulation by a non-producing minority.

However, the actual historical process of gearing human activity towards increasing the potential of social development impelled the monarchical system to adapt itself to new tasks whose achievement involved (a) more efficient use of the existing modes of activity, and (b) establishing new forms and discarding them in the event of their becoming socially irrelevant. As such the same system neither reproduced itself in an absolutely uniform or identical pattern in all parts of the kingdom at the same time nor persisted throughout the pre-Ahom period. To that extent, the notion of stagnation implied in the earlier works on the political and socio-economic history of the region of Kāmarūpa stands disproved.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. This trend in history writing on 'Assam' started during the first three decades of the 20th century. See E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam* (London, 1905; 2nd edn. 1926). See also H.C. Ray, *The Dynastic History of Northern India, I* (Calcutta University, 1931); R.G. Basak, *The History of North-Eastern India* (Calcutta, 1933); K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa* (Shillong, 1933).
2. See, especially, B.K. Barua, *Cultural History of Assam* (Gauhati, 1951); P.C. Choudhury, *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century* (hereafter, *HCPA*), (Gauhati, 1959; 3rd edn., New Delhi, 1987).
3. For a discussion on modern perspectives of the early history of Assam, see Mignonette Momin, "Studies in the Political and Socio-Economic History of Pre-Ahom Assam: Perspectives and Prospects," *North-Eastern Hill University, Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vol. I, No. 1* (Shillong, 1998), pp. 1-20; also idem, "Interpreting Epigraphic Sources of North-east India," *Proceedings of North East India History Association* (hereafter, *PNEIHA*), Twentieth Session, Dibrugarh (Shillong, 2000), pp. 50-59.
4. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (ed. E.G. Wakefield, London, 1835); Karl Marx, *Capital* (ed. F. Engels, Moscow, 1887), Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (London, 1898). The major focus of their inquiry was the modern period.
5. C.S. Belshaw, *Traditional Exchange and Modern Markets* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965).
6. Belshaw stated this at the very outset of his work. See *ibid.*, Preface, p. v.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 2, for the definition of 'wealth'.
8. See the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta (J.F. Fleet [ed. & trans.] in *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. III*, Calcutta, 1888). It named Kāmarūpa as one of the frontier kingdoms that Samudragupta subjugated in the course of his *digvijaya* (i.e., policy of territorial aggrandizement). But it was in the *Raghuvamśa* (G.R. Nandargikar [ed.

- & trans.], 3rd edn., Bombay, 1897), (IV, 66, 84) that Kālidāsa first spoke about the location of Kāmarūpa in the region of the Lauhitya.
9. The *Mahābhārata* included the land of Kāmarūpa and its people in the 'greater' Brahmanical tradition. See relevant portions, i.e., Sabhaparvan (F. Edgerton [ed.], Poona, 1943-44), 23.10; *ibid.*, 26.7-16; *ibid.*, 30.26-27; Droṇaparvan, 4.11; *ibid.*, 25.37 and 42, 52; Udyogaparvan (S.K. De [ed.], Poona, 1937-40), 48.80.
 10. See the evidence of some of the later Vedic texts, *viz.*, the Vajasaneyi Saṃhitā (W.L. Shastri Pansikar [ed.], Bombay, 1912) of the *Yajurveda*, 30.16; the *Atharvaveda* (Saunaka), (Vishva Bandhu [ed.], Vishveshvarananda Vedic Research Institute, Hoshiarpur, 1961), 10.4.14.
 11. See, for instance, the *Mārkāṇḍeya Purāṇa* (K.M. Banerjea [ed.], *Bibliotheca Indica*, Calcutta, 1862; F.E. Pargiter [trans.], Calcutta, 1904), 57.44; 58.13; 66.8; 109.57; *Vāyū Purāṇa* (R. Mitra [ed.], *Bibliotheca Indica*, 2 vols. Calcutta, 1880-88; ed. Anandasrama Sanskrit Series, Poona, 1905), 77-95; *Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa* (Pub. Venkatesvara Press, Bombay, 1913), 59; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (H.H. Wilson [trans.], 5 vols., London, 1864-70; M.N. Dutt [trans.], Calcutta, 1894), 5.29; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Gita Press, Gorakhpur, Samvat 2010), 10. For the probable dates of some of the main *Purāṇas*, see R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs* (Dacca, 1940), Chapters II-IV.
 12. This point on the socio-political implications of the origin myth of the historical rulers of pre-Ahom Assam has been discussed elsewhere. See Mignonette Momin, "Rethinking *Varnasramadharma* in Kamarupa," in *PNEIHA*, Twenty-first Session, Imphal (Shillong, 2001), especially pp. 11-12; *idem*, "Contextualizing Origin Myths of Northeast India," in *PNEIHA*, Twenty-second Session, Tezpur (Shillong, 2002), specifically pp. 37-44.
 13. For references, *supra*, 9n, 11n (relevant portions).
 14. *Kālikā Purāṇa* (Pub. Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, Banaras, 1953). R.C. Hazra (*op.cit.*, Chapters II-IV; *idem*, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, Vol. II, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 243-257) has dealt with the dating of the *Kālikā Purāṇa* in detail. The Brahmanical tradition in the context of the pre-Ahom rulers assumed concrete form in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, which work focused on the foundation of the Bhauma dynasty in Kāmarūpa: See Mignonette Momin's paper in *PNEIHA*, Twenty-first Session, pp. 11 and 23, 7n; also *idem*, "Witnessing History: The *Kālikā Purāṇa* Examined," in *PNEIHA*, Twentythird Session, Agartala (Shillong, 2003 [Forthcoming]), pp. 33-40.
 15. For references, *supra*, 8n.
 16. *Infra*, 17n, 20n, 21n, for references to the earliest known epigraphs of Kāmarūpa. These are inscribed in Eastern Gupta character ascribed to the period between the fourth and sixth centuries. Cf. the views of individual editors of the first local inscriptions regarding the dates, language, script and content analysis.
 17. The Nagājarī-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Stone Inscription, ed. P.C. Choudhury, *Journal of the Assam Research Society* [hereafter, JARS], XX, 1972-73, pp. 3-5; ed. D.C. Sircar, *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, Vol. VII, 1973-74, p. 245; ed. M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam* (Gauhati University, 1978), pp. 303-305.

18. See *ibid.*, p. 305. M.M. Sharma thought that the "village Headman Brahmadata" together with a person named Vaji "were officials or witnesses connected with the donation or demarcation of the plot of land concerned..."
19. D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization* (hereafter, *Select Inscriptions*), I (Calcutta, 1942), nos. 42, 46.
20. A part of an inscription, purportedly the second fragment of the Nagajari-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Rock Inscription, has been recovered from Golaghat district and deciphered: See D. Chutia, "A Note on the Fragmentary Stone Inscription from Golaghat District (Nagajari-Khanikargaon Fragmentary Stone Inscription: Second Fragment)," *JARS*, XXXIII, No. 1, 1993, pp. 32-40 and plates.
21. The Umācala Rock Inscription of Surendravarman, ed. D.C. Sircar and P.D. Chaudhury, *Epigraphia Indica* [hereafter, *EI*], XXXI, Part II, 1957; ed. M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-2; ed. D. Sarma, *Kāmarūpaśāsanāvali* (Publication Board, Assam, Gauhati, 1981), Part II, pp. 1-2 and Part III, p. 149.
22. For references, see *supra*, 21n. The editors' suggestion stems from the fact that the letters *sa* and *ma* in the Devnagari script resemble one another.
23. The Baḍagangā Rock Inscription, ed. N.K. Bhattasali, *JARS*, VIII, no. 4, 1941; *idem*, *EI*, XXVII, 1947-48, pp. 18-23; ed. D.C. Sircar, *JARS*, X, nos. 3 and 4; ed. M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, 4-9; ed. D. Sarma, *op. cit.*, Part II, p. 4 and Part III, p. 150.
24. For an idea of the high-sounding titles that rulers of the Gupta and post-Gupta period adopted and their socio-political implications, see, among others, B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad, 1973), R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism c. A.D. 300-1200* (hereafter, *IF*) (2nd edn. 1980; 1990 [reprint], Madras).
25. For the definition and functions of the *amātya*, see, among others, V.R.R. Dikshitar, *The Gupta Polity* (Madras, 1952), pp. 149-150; R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalker (eds.), *History and Culture of the Indian People, III, The Classical Age* (Bombay, 1953), pp. 350f; H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (7th edn. Calcutta, 1972), pp. 249f., 331, 455, 460f.
26. The Nidhanpur grant, ed. Padmanath Bhattacharyya in *EI*, Vol. XII, no. 13; Vol. XIX, no. 19 and Vol. XIX, no. 40; *idem*, *Kāmarūpaśāsanāvali* (hereafter, *KŚ*) (Rangpur Sahitya Parisad, 1931), pp. 1-43; ed. K.K. Gupta, *Copper-Plates of Sylhet* (Sylhet, 1967); ed. M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 38-81; D. Sarma, *op.cit.*, pp. There were in all seven plates, of which one is still missing.
27. For the identification of these places, see, among other works, P.L. Paul, *Early History of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1939), p. 26; K.K. Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56; B.M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Culture Regions in Early Bengal* (Arizona, 1970), p. 98. For different views, see K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, pp. 32-34.
28. Nidhanpur grant, ll. 126-136.
29. See Beni Prasad, *The State in Ancient India* (Allahabad, 1928), pp. 384, 430. He sourced this information from the *Lingayata Vivekacintāmaṇi*. Cf. *Mānasollāsa*, III, v. 1336. See also B.N.S. Yadava, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

30. In Gujarat during the late sixth century the *prāptapañcamahāśabda* held "five feudal titles." See R.S. Tripathi, *History of Kanauj* (Banaras, 1937), p. 339.
31. According to R.S. Sharma (*op.cit.*, p. 18), the *prāptapañcamahāśabda* was a "vassal" or an official who had earned special "feudal" privileges from his overlord because of "certain remarkable services" that he had rendered the latter. Such privileges signified, apart from his prerogative of holding five offices at a time, the use of five musical instruments, viz., *śṛṅga* (horn), *śankha* (conch), *tammaṭa* (cymbal), *bherī* (drum), and *jayaghaṅṭā* (bell of victory). The discussion was an enlarged version of Beni Prasad's pioneer work (see idem, *op. cit.*, pp. 384, 430). Prasad's findings have been repeated by other writers too: e.g. Padmanath Bhattacharya, *KS*, p. 42; D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary* (hereafter, *Glossary*) (Delhi, 1966), pp. 230-231. Cf. A.S. Altekar, *The Rāṣṭrakūtas and their Times* (Poona, 1934).
32. Most editors of the Nidhanpur grant translated *nāyaka* as "headman." However, considering that the functionary in this case was identified with the Candrapuri *viṣaya* (a large administrative unit) and not a *grāma* (literally, village), this translation appears inappropriate. Accordingly, it would be useful to draw comparisons to what was happening in other parts of India during the same or a later period. During the reign of the Ganga rulers of Orissa (11th century), *nāyakas* were military functionaries who received grants of land for their services to the state. See, for instance, R.S. Sharma, *IF*, Appendix I. B.K. Barua (in his paper, "The Administrative System of Kamarupa," *JARS*, III, p. 31) thought that the *nāyaka* was a 'lord' over villages, because Candrapuri *viṣaya* must have comprised at least ten villages. This interpretation appears more plausible.
33. See Padmanath Bhattacharyya, in *El*, XII, no. 13, in the translation of v. 27 of the Nidhanpur grant. In pre-medieval India the *karaṅika* seems to have discharged some judicial functions: see A.S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India* (Banaras, 1946), p. 152. M.M. Sharma (*op. cit.*, p. 54) translated *nyāyakaraṅika* as "dispute-settler".
34. The *vyavahāra* has been translated as "controlling officer" (*Ibid.*, p. 54). In the demarcation of the boundaries of the donated land, the Nidhanpur grant (ll. 131-132) mentioned the pond of a *vyavahārika* named Khasoka. Padmanath Bhattacharyya (for references, *supra*, 26n.) translated this *vyavahārika* as "the controlling tradesman" (see *ibid.*, p. 53), obviously after the original translation of the term as "trader"/"businessman". Bhattacharyya seems to have derived the translation from his predecessors, notably, U.N. Ghoshal, *Contributions to the History of the Hindu Revenue System* (Calcutta, 1929), pp. 205f., 213f. (of *ibid.*, 2nd edn. Calcutta, 1972), based on the evidence of the *Arthaśāstra* 3.1. For translation of *vyavahāra* as a legal expert in local customary laws, see Mignonette Momin in *PNEIHA*, Twentyfirst Session, p. 18; also idem, "Urbanization in the Brahmaputra Valley, circa 600-1200", in Jai Prakash Singh and Gautam Sengupta (eds.), *Archaeology of North-Eastern India* (New Delhi, 1991), p. 277, f.n. 53a.
35. There is a consensus among all writers on this translation.

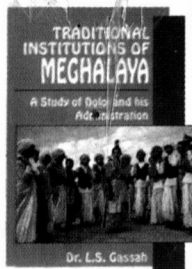
36. This is the translation given by M.M. Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 54. See also *ibid.*, p. 75.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
38. The title *mahāsāmanta* denoted the office of a high functionary who exercised the authority of a landholder. According to Bhāskaravarman's Doobi grant (ed. D.C. Sircar, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, XXVI, pp. 241-246; ed. P.D. Chaudhury, *JARS*, XI [1944], pp. 32-40; ed. M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-32; ed. D. Sarma, *op.cit.*, Part II, pp. 7-18, Part III, pp. 152-160), v. 48, Sthitavarman's feet turned red because of the radiance of the gems from the crowns of the *sāmantas* bowing down to him. This seems to indicate that the *sāmantas* were in a subordinate position to the Varman kings.
39. U.N. Ghoshal (*op.cit.*, pp. 329, 391, 424) first translated this revenue term culled from epigraphical sources dating back to post-Gupta times, as an emergency tax, since the exact nature of the revenue could not be determined.
40. According to M.M. Sharma (*op.cit.*, p. 75), the *sekyakāra* was a copper-smith who probably had to make the slabs of copper and engrave the letters that had been drawn up by the composer of the charter.
41. For this translation, see B.K. Barua in *JARS*, III, p. 29. The *viṣayādhikaraṇa*, being the 'district' headquarters, it must have been responsible for justice, and also for revenue and other aspects of administration.
42. See the Tipperah grant (*El*, XV, no. 19, pp. 301-315) and the Kalapur grant (ed. K.K. Gupta, *op.cit.*, pp. 68-80).
43. The Tezpur Rock Inscription, ed. R. Hoernle, *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, III (1917), pp. 508-514; ed. Padmanath Bhattacharyya, *KS*, pp. 185-192; ed. M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 82-88; ed. D. Sarma, *op. cit.*, Pt.II, pp. 40-42 and Pt. III, pp. 170-172.
44. The variations in the spellings of the political centre of the Śālastambha kings, as found in different inscriptions, were probably because the letters forming the words were inscribed as a matter of convenience.
45. The Hāyunthal grant, ed. Padmanath Bhattacharyya, *JARS*, I (1933), pp. 109-112; *idem*, *KS*, pp. 44-53; M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*; D. Sarma, *op.cit.*
46. Hāyunthal grant, II: 27-28.
47. Padmanath Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, pp. 109f. Cf. D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, II, no. 87, l.4.
48. D. Sarma, *op.cit.*, Part I, C., p. 112 (including f.n. *). Cf. Padmanath Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, p. 111; P.C. Choudhury, *HCPA*, pp. 268f.
49. See Padmanath Bhattacharyya, *JARS*, I, p. 110; D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 375; P.C. Choudhury, *HCPA*, p. 269; R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (revised edn. 1968, Delhi), pp. 328-241; *idem*, *IF*, p. 27; D. Sarma, *op.cit.*, Part I, C., p. 112.
50. For references, *supra*, 49n. However, in certain cases there might be some differences in the page numberings.
51. B.K. Barua (in *JARS*, III, p. 31) thought that the *Brāhmaṇādhikari* was the leader of the Brāhmaṇas or the chief priest of the king and must have played an important role in the *abhiṣeka* of Harjjaravarman. He pointed out that even in contemporary Assam, *adhikari* means spiritual head.

52. See, for instance, the Pascimbhag and Rampal grants of Śrīcandra of Sylhet; the Pāla inscriptions of Bengal (*EI*, XVII, no. 17, ll. 26–33; *ibid.*, XXIX, no. 18, ll. 31–34).
53. The first to mention such a list was Balavarman III's Uttarbarbil/Howraghat grant (ed. D.C. Sircar, *EI*, XXXII, no. 33, pp. 283–292; M.M. Sharma, *IAA*, pp. 127–141; D. Sarma, *Kāmarūpa*, II, pp. 65–70 and III, pp. 186–189), ll. 38–39.
54. See Balavarman III's Nowgong grant (ed. R. Hoernle, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* [hereafter, *JASB*], LXVI, 1, pp. 285–297; ed. Padmanath Bhattacharyya, *KŚ*, pp. 71–88; ed. M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 142–151; ed. D. Sarma, *op.cit.*, Part II, pp. 71–77, Part III, pp. 182–185), ll. 34–38. Note the elaboration of functionaries in this grant as compared with the list of addressees provided by the Uttarbarbil grant.
55. For example, the seventh century Doobi grant (vv. 32–34) recorded that *rājās* were among the important persons who were present on the occasion of Candramukhavarman's ascension to the throne. The ninth century Hāyūnthar grant (ll. 18–20) mentioned that *rājās* and *rājāputras* filled Harjaravarman's court, as they came to pay him homage and give him tributes. The Gauhati grant (ed. R. Hoernle, *JASB*, LXVI, I, pp. 113f.; ed. Padmanath Bhattacharyya, *KŚ*, pp. 116–129; ed. M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 179–192; ed. D. Sarma, *op.cit.*, Part II, pp. 91–98, Part III, pp. 199–202), v. 15, made an almost identical reference to the obeisance that *rājās* and *rājāputras* showed Indrapāla in the eleventh century.
56. Cf. R.S. Sharma, *IF*, Appendix I, p. 277, for reference to *rājnis* in the kingdom of the Bhaumakara rulers of Orissa.
57. This observation was made for the first time by H.C. Ray, *Dynastic History of Northern India*, II (Calcutta, 1931), p. 794.
58. For interpretations of *rājanyaka*, see J.Ph. Vogel, *Antiquities of Chamba*, Introduction; B.N.S. Yadava, *op.cit.*, p. 161, 317n. For discussion on the *rājaputras* and *rājavallabhas*, see, among others, M.N. Dutt (tr.), *Agni Purāṇa* (Calcutta, 1904), p. 196; Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1951).
59. *Supra*, 55–57ns., for references.
60. See R. Hoernle's translation of the Nowgong grant (*JASB*, LXVI, 1, 1897), p. 285. Cf. Padmanath Bhattacharyya, *KŚ*, pp. 75f.
61. For the first part of the translation, see R. Hoernle, *op.cit.*, pp. 99f. The second part of the translation is mine, considering that elephants might have been an important source of income for the rulers of Kāmarūpa and might normally have been used for transportation.
62. Apparently the *naukabandhika* was the same as the *naurajjaka* of the Tezpur Rock Inscription (I.5), and the *naurajju* (*ibid.*) with *naubandha* of the post-ninth century inscriptions of Kāmarūpa. According to B.K. Barua (*JARS*, I, p. 514), the *naurajjaka* was charged with the towing of boats with ropes, but not with the collection of tolls.
63. The term *cauroddharaṇa* found reference in the landgrants of India only from about the 10th century onwards. See U.N. Ghoshal, *op.cit.*, p. 379.
64. The *dandika* mentioned in the Nowgong grant, Bargaon grant, Gauhati grant, Subhankarapataka grant, Khonamukh grant and Puspabhadrā grant has been interpreted as a sort of magistrate in charge of passing judgment on and spelling out punishment to criminals/offenders.

65. The *daṇḍapāśika* was the official who actually inflicted the punishment on the offender (after the judge had pronounced the verdict) by dragging the latter in fetters to jail. See R. Hoernle, *op.cit.*
66. R. Hoernle had translated this revenue term as "tenants' taxes," apparently influenced by early Western assumptions on ancient Indian history that all land belonged to the king.
67. Most editors of the local grants translated *utkheṭana* simply as "duties".
68. Perhaps the term denoted a royal 'servant'.
69. See the Nowgong grant, ll. 37–38. The translation is R. Hoernle's.
70. The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva (ed. Arthur Venis in *EI*, II, pp. 347–358; M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 273–290), ll. 49–50.
71. I have mentioned this point elsewhere. See M. Momin, "Urbanization in the Brahmaputra Valley, circa A.D. 600–1200," in Jai Prakash Singh and Gautam Sengupta (eds.), *op.cit.*, pp. 260–279; *idem*, "Rethinking *Varnasramadharmā* in Kamarupa," PNEIHA, 21st Session, Imphal (Shillong, 2001), pp. 9–29; *idem*, "Contextualizing Origin Myths of Northeast India," PNEIHA, 22nd Session, Tezpur (Shillong, 2002), specifically Section II, pp. 37–44 and 46f.
72. For translation of *caṭas* and *bhaṭas* in the overall ancient Indian context, see U.N. Ghoshal, *op.cit.*, p. 379. Subsequently almost all writers accepted Ghoshal's translation. For different views on the functional titles, see Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala* (Calicut University, 1978), Appendix II, pp. 102–115.
73. U.N. Ghoshal, *op.cit.*, p. 379.
74. D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 361.
75. See M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, p. 289.
76. See the Assam (or Tezpur) Plates of Vallabhadeva (ed. F. Kielhorn in *EI*, V, pp. 181–188; ed. M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 291–301), ll. 3, 6 and 12 and vv. 3–5.
77. *Infra*, Section II, for some more discussion on this point.
78. See, for instance, R.S. Sharma, *IF*.
79. The large Brāhmaṇa settlement comprising the land called Mayūrasālmalāgrahāra had the suffix *kṣetra*, i.e., arable land (*vide* Nidhanpur grant, ll. 50–51). The same term was used to describe the dry beds of the rivers Kauśika and Gangiṇikā (*ibid.*, ll. 126–128), which were two of the eight boundaries of the donated land. The boundary was also marked on one side by the *kumbhakāragaritta* or potters' pit (*ibid.*, l. 131), and on another side by a pond (*puṣkarinī*) that belonged to a *vyavahāra*, Khāsoka (*ibid.*, l. 132).
80. Nidhanpur grant, l. 53.
81. *Ibid.*, ll. 2–3.
82. See Pushpa Niyogi, *Brahmanic Settlements in Different Subdivisions of Ancient Bengal* (Calcutta, 1967), pp. 4–6.
83. For this translation, see M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, p. 52.
84. Nidhanpur grant, ll. 2–3.
85. Samuel Beal (tr.), *The Life of Hiuen Tsiang* (London, 1971, 1st edn.), pp. 171f.
86. Nidhanpur grant, l. 126.
87. Samudragupta's Allahabad Pillar Inscription mentioned Kāmarūpa as one of the kingdoms that accepted Gupta overlordship; but there is no hard

- evidence to support this claim. The Harāhā Inscription of A.D. 554 (*vide EI*, XIV, pp. 110ff.) recorded that Īśānavarman of the Maukhari dynasty conquered the Gauḍa country. If the record is to be believed, Gauḍa formed a part of the Gupta Empire in the mid-sixth century, but only because the Maukharis had accepted Gupta suzerainty.
88. Nidhanpur grant, l. 52.
 89. *Ibid.*, l. 135.
 90. For translations of the *kara*, see U.N. Ghoshal, *op.cit.*, pp. 36f., 64f.; D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 394; B.K. Barua, *CHA*, p. 81; P.C. Choudhury, *HCPA*, p. 271.
 91. Scholars have given different interpretations of the *utkhetana*. See, among other works, those of U.N. Ghoshal, *op.cit.*, pp. 329, 391, 424; D.C. Sircar, *Glossary*, p. 354; B.K. Barua, *op.cit.*, p. 91; P.C. Choudhury, *op.cit.*, p. 275.
 92. This revenue term has been variously interpreted. See, among others, D.C. Sircar, *Landlordism and Tenancy*, p. 62; *idem*, *Select Inscriptions*, p. 266; P.C. Choudhury, *op.cit.*, p. 275. Cf. A.S. Altekar, *The Rāṣṭrakūṭas and their Times* (Poona, 1934), p. 216; D.N. Jha, *Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times* (Calcutta, 1967), p. 205; Cf. Amalendu Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam Society, Polity, Economy* (Calcutta, 1991).
 93. Ratnapāla's Bargaon grant (ed. R. Hoernle, *JASB*, Vol. LXVII, 1898; ed. M.M. Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp. 152–172; ed. D. Sarma, *op.cit.*, Pt. II, pp. 78–87 and Pt. III, pp. 190–196), ll. 57–58 actually mentioned these animals.
 94. Nidhanpur grant, l. 35. For a discussion on the working of the concept of *varṇāśramadharmā* in Kāmarūpa, see my paper in PNEIHA, 21st Session, Imphal, pp. 9–29.
 95. In the Nidhanpur grant (l.53), Bhāskaravarman decreed that the grant was valid for "as long as the sun, the moon and the earth would last." (This translation is mine).
 96. The earliest known reference to *sarvapīḍā* is in Balavarman III's Uttarbarbil grant, l. 43.
 97. L I. 37–38.
 98. *Supra*, Section I, for translation of the terms.
 99. M. Momin, "Urbanization in the Brahmaputra Valley, circa A.D. 600–1200," *op.cit.*
 100. P.C. Choudhury, *op.cit.*, p. 27, f.n. 19a.
 101. See M. Momin's paper in Jai Prakash Singh and Gautam Sengupta (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 270.
 102. S. Beal (tr.), *Life of Hiuen Tsiang* (London, 1911), pp. 86, 169, 188.
 103. *Harṣacarita*, T. Cowell (tr.), pp. 212f.
 104. During the 17th century these were some of the items of export from the Ahom kingdom. See E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam* (2nd edn., 1926, London), p. 274.
 105. Reports on these coins have been published in *JARS*, Vol. XX, 1972, pp. 56ff.; *Journal of Numismatic Society of India*, XXV, 1973, pp. 171–174.
 106. Nidhanpur grant, l. 131; Puṣpabhadra grant, l. 50; Kamauli grant, l. 60.
 107. *Supra*, Section II, for references to these title-holders.
 108. Tezpur Rock Inscription.
 109. Tezpur Rock Inscription, ll. 7–9.

111. See D.C. Sircar's paper in Jai Prakash Singh and Nisar Ahmed (eds.), *Coinage and Economy of North-Eastern States of India*, Memoirs Series, no. 7, pp. 4f.; R.D. Choudhury in *ibid.*, pp. 9f.
112. There is unanimity among all the editors of the Tezpur Rock Inscription (I. 1, where the capital was first named) that Haḍapeśvara stands for Tezpur.
113. M.M. Sharma (*op.cit.*, pp. 88, 219) thought that the place got its name after a deity was installed in some central market-place (*haṭṭa*).
114. See the Deopani Viṣṇu Image Inscription, I.3.
115. Hayunthal grant, v. 14.
116. PNEIHA, 21st Session, especially pp. 15f.
117. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 11f., 18f., 22.
118. I have discussed these points elsewhere: Mignonette Momin in *ibid.*, pp. 9–29; PNEIHA, 22nd Session, pp. 37–44.
119. See Mignonette Momin, "Witnessing History: The *Kalika Purana* Examined," PNEIHA, 23rd Session, Tripura University (Shillong, 2003), pp. 33–40.
120. These places have been identified with Tezpur, modern Guwahati and North Guwahati respectively.
121. See R.S. Sharma, *IF*, pp. 227ff.
122. Mignonette Momin, "Socio-Economic Linkages in the 'Decline' of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa," in F.A. Qadri (ed.), *Society and Economy in North East India*, Vol. II (Forthcoming).
123. The situation is reminiscent of what Karl Marx had noted in connection with the rise of civilization, that every civilization was founded on the antagonisms of orders, estates and classes. See Karl Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy," in Karl Marx and Frederich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 132.



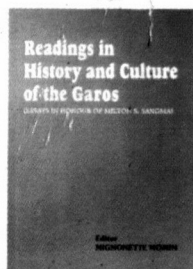
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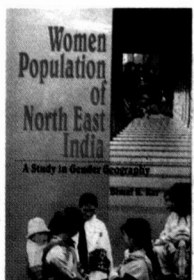
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