

## Some Newly Discovered Sources on the History and Culture of North-East India

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In the arena of research the presentation and delineation of subject-matter concerned presupposes a critical evaluation of all sources at our disposal. An investigation should not only be confined to those sources which have been adequately churned and copiously used rather repeated attempts should be made for discovering some new sources in the hope of bringing some new ideas, facts and data into focus. Every research should aim at reconstruction not reproduction. Most of the researches of today are regrettably merely repetitive, not qualitative or productive. The historical validity of all the conventional explanations should be fully and fairly tested before blindly supporting and quoting them. There should be an honest attempt to collect, as far as practicable, source-material available in different languages. Language, whichever it may be, should not be allowed to stand as a barrier in the way of discoverer of truth and seeker of knowledge. On the combined testimony of various sources containing variegated mosaic of information we can expect better result than the absolute dependence on isolated or fragmentary source-materials. The present paper is nothing more than a discovery of some of those sources which have not yet attracted the serious attention of scholars engaged in study or investigations of various aspects of history and culture of north-east India. The sources highlighted here, if properly exploited, will definitely go a long way in filling up some existing gaps in our knowledge about the subject concerned.

### Hindi

Jaychandra Vidyalkar's "*Bharatabhumi aur uske Nivasi*" (Bombay, 1925), which can be fairly considered as one of the valuable antiquarian records, provides a graphic picture of the origins, migration, settlements, antiquity, etc. of primitive Himalayan and Sub-Himalayan tribes of north-east India with little reference to their relations with contemporary rulers of various kingdoms

Ghataka and also cavalry, jewels, ornaments of women, costumes, state banner etc. After overthrowing the Mleccha King, Naraka unfurled the banner of victory over newly besieged kingdom of Pragjyotisha. After the death of Ghataka many of his Kirata subjects deserted the country and fled away eastwards to the sea-shore. Those who survived the massacre submitted to the invaders or surrendered at the feet of triumphant Naraka. After this historic war, which constituted a landmark in ancient history of North-East India, the Kiratas were pushed back to the hills from the plains. Naraka provided shelter to those who surrendered at his feet. Actually it was Lord Vishnu who asked Naraka to exterminate the Kiratas running away towards Dikkaravasini Devi and to protect those who have taken shelter. Naraka is stated to have pushed the Kiratas towards Dikkaravasini. Many Kiratas were driven towards the Sea or marshy region. The Kalika Purana<sup>4</sup> also furnishes clear evidence that the Kiratas were driven back in the eastern side lying at the end of marshy region.

After the annihilation of the Kiratas who did not recognise the authority of the Vedas and Sastras, the Dvija or twice born people-followers of Sanatana Dharma-were allowed to settle. The Vedic rites and rituals were revived. Naraka adopted Maya, daughter of the Raja of Videha as his queen and thereafter his Coronation Ceremony took place<sup>5</sup>. This ceremony was attended by his God-father and God-mother who came from Mithila to Pragjyotisha. Janaka, the Lord of Videha came with his queen and retinue, visited the conquered kingdom of Pragjyotisha, enjoyed his hospitality, blessed his enterprising foster child and left for Videha after some time. Janaka had certainly some affection for him otherwise he would not have visited the new kingdom. Actually, the visit of Janaka to Pragjyotisha constituted a milestone towards the beginning and growth of politico-cultural relations between Kamarupa and Videha<sup>6</sup>. The credibility of this ancient historical tradition has been fairly attested by one of the local scholars, R. M. Nath<sup>7</sup> who observes that "In imitation of the custom of the family of the God father, new king assumed the title Nara-Ka (protector of men) as Jana-Ka (protector of men) was the title of the royal family of Mithila. The capital was established near the present Gauhati town and its old name Prag-Zuh-this was rejoined as Pragjyotishpur." Pragjyotishpur looking like Indrapuri was regarded by Naraka as Amaravati.

After Naraka came to power and rose to prominence, the name of the kingdom was changed from Pragjyotisha to Kamarupa,

“Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa, though very closely associated at one time, formed two distinct Janapads. Kamarupa in later time came to be regarded as the name of the kingdom or Janapad of which the Pura or headquarter had the name of Pragjyotisha”. The Aryans or Brahmins coming from Mithila and other parts of the Aryavarta to Pragjyotish were granted the royal patronage, which marked the beginning of the process of Aryanisation in North East India. R. M. Nath<sup>8</sup> has correctly stated that the “new kingdom was gradually extended and the people from Mithila were brought to man and administer the country”. This paved the way for the spread of Maithili language and culture in ancient Assam. Naraka is also believed to have introduced and popularised the cult of Saktism, which was very much associated with Austric elements. While supporting R. M. Nath and the pauranic evidence K. L. Barua<sup>9</sup> also states that Kamarupa known in ancient times as Pragjyotisha is very much associated with Naraka which goes back to the epoch of Mahabharata war. The Aryan name was “extended to the regions directly from Videha and Magadha long before central or lower Bengal became either habited or Aryanised.” In other source<sup>10</sup> also he mentions that after having killed the Kirata king Ghatak and conquered the Pragjyotisha, Naraka allowed the Aryans to settle in his new kingdom before the Bharat War. This fact has been also substantiated by E. Gait<sup>11</sup>. Naraka’s period is marked by the genesis of a synthetic culture—the Aryan and non-Aryan, Alpine Aryans, the Austric, the Bodos and the other Kiratas.

According to Robinson<sup>12</sup> the earliest tradition connecting history of Kamarupa is that it was given by Lord Krishna to Naraka. Lord Krishna appointed him guardian of the temple of Kamakhya. Being a great oppressor and worshipper of rival God Siva, he was put to death by Krishna. About the death of Naraka the pauranic tradition relates that Lord Krishna in one fierce battle fought in Pragjyotisha cut Naraka to pieces with his discus, a Celestial Missile.

It is of course very difficult to determine the antiquity of this historic event in the classical history of Assam. B. K. Kakati<sup>13</sup> suggests that the forward limit of Naraka’s time could not be later than the end of 4th century and backward limit can’t be earlier than the 3rd Century. Further he suggests that Naraka of Mithila established himself sometimes between 200-500 A. D. This is not a reasonable postulation. Hence, forward we can’t find ourselves in agreement with this chronology. Naraka’s episode in Pragjyotisha can be tentatively fixed about 3100 B. C. before which he had undoubtedly flourished and founded the kingdom.

## Notes & References

1. About Naraka's early life, genealogy, antiquity and migration from Videha or Mithila to Pragjyotisha, several traditional, mythological and historical accounts are available. According to *Kalika Purana* (herein after abbrev. as K. P. ; Barailley, 1973, Vol. I, Vs. 1-60, PP. 470-80, Vs. 1-98, pp. 481-497) this orphan boy was brought up in the court or family of Janaka, the king of Videha alongwith the royal princes till he attained sixteen years of age. We also can't preclude the possibility of Naraka being the son of king Janaka himself through maiden or midwife named Katyayani which can be clearly substantiated by the fact as stated in this Pauranic text that Naraka himself regarded Janaka his father and his wife Sumati his mother and Sita as his sister. Whatever may be the fact, Naraka was no doubt adopted or foster child of King Janaka. Upto the age of sixteen he was imparted training with other royal princes in the art of polity and war. As he grew up he was found to be surpassing and excelling all royal princes in valour, intelligence, prudence and so on. He gradually became ambitious and powerful. Consequently both King and Queen became perturbed to think that this helpless orphan would one day usurp the throne or wrest the whole kingdom of Mithila. Ultimately this Kshatriya prince was removed or banished from the Court of Videha by his god father and god mother. He came accompanied by Lord Vishnu to Pragjyotishpur. Here it must be made clear that he was the first Aryan Chief of Pragjyotisha completely different from other Naraka having the ephithet of 'Sura' belonging to Asura or Danava dynesty. In the *Kalika Purana* Naraka has nowhere been described as Naraka Sur. Some other *Puranas* like *Vishnu Purana* (Hindi Edn ; Gorakhpur, Magh, Vs. 2010, Jan. 1954, P. 767 ; H. H. Wilson, *Vishnu Purana*, English trans., Calcutta, 1961, Ch. XXIX, P. 459) and *Brahma Purana* (Hindi Edn., Gorakhpur, Magh. Vs. 2003, Jan 1947, PP. 518-19) also state that Naraka, adopted son of King Janaka, later became ruler of Pragjyotisha (stretching upto 100 *yojana* properly fenced round with iron palisades) after exterminating the Kiratas living near sites or shrines of *Devi-Dikkarvasini* and *Kamakhya*. The historicity of this pauranic account is beyond doubt. This pauranic evidence has been strongly supported by some local popular authorities, notably, B. K. Kakati (*The Mother Goddess Kama-*

*khya*, Gauhati, 1967, pp. 26 f.X), R. M. Nath (*The Background of Assamese Culture*, Shillong, 1948, pp. 26 f), and E. Gait (*History of Assam*, Calcutta, 1926, P. 13). Dr. P. Gogoi (*Journal of the Assam Research Society*, Vol. XVI, 1964, pp. 54-55) has also correctly stated that Naraka of *Kalika Purana* was 'a historical figure.' In the *Kishkindha Kanda* of *Valmiki Ramayana* (Edtd. by Pt. Akhilananda, Amritsar, 1st edn., Samvat, 2021, Vs. 30-31, P. 915) also it is clearly stated that in the sea-coast, 64 *yojana* in length and breadth there was a Varaha Mountain near which golden coloured Pragjyotisha was ruled by Naraka. Epigraphy also confirms this truth. See, A. F. Rudolf Hooernle, "*Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapala of Pragjyotisha in Assam and the Nowgong Grant*", J. A. S. B., 1897, Vol. XVI, Nos. 1 to IV, pt. 1, pp. 117-20 ; "*Two Copper Plate Grants of Ratnopala of Pragjyotisha and Bergaon Grant*," J. A. S. B., 1898, Vol. LXVII, pt. 1 Nos. 1 to 4 Text 1, 1st plate, Line, L. Vs. 3 pp. 113, 114, 163. These epigraphical records also testify to the truth that this Mleccha king conquered the ancient country of Kamarupa and took his residence in the town (Pura) of Pragjyotisha and was ultimately slain by Lord Krishna. However, the theory of his divine origin can be outrightly rejected. The other theories connected with the probabilities of the Dravidian or phoenician origin as profounded by K. L. Barua [*Early History of Kamarupa* (E. H. K.), Shillong, 1933, pp. 20-21] and N. N. Vasu (*Social History of Kamarupa*, Calcutta, 1926, Vol. I PP. 211-22) and the Alpine origin as indicated by P. C. Choudhury (*The History of civilisation of the people of Assam*, Gauhati 1959, pp. 107, 113, 121, 123) also do not appear tenable or very much convincing as the suggested facts have neither been widely accepted nor do we have any corroborative evidence to uphold this contention. P. C. Choudhury (op. cit. p. 123) seems to be correct to a considerable extent in suggesting that Naraka might have taken his birth in some hilly region to the north of Videha or Assam and he probably flourished during the Epic Age. In the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Vol. VI. p. 24) also Naraka has been mentioned as a reputed founder of the ancient and famous city of Pragjyotishpur (modern Gauhati). According to popular tradition he ruled from the Karatoya river to the extreme east of the Brahmaputra. "The Kalika Purana and Yogini Tantra present the name of several kings whose titles Danava or Asura betray their aboriginal descent."

roughly upto the seventh century A.D. Equally important is "*Pra-  
chin Bharatiya Parampara awa Itihasa* by Dr. R. Raghava (Delhi,  
1953), which deals, to a considerable degree, with ethnological,  
socio-economic, religious and cultural aspects of various tribes of  
this region in pre-historic, proto-historic and historic times.  
"*Bharata Ka Mukti Sangrama*" by Ayodhya Sing (2 vols.) is of  
inestimable value from the standpoint of exhaustive description  
which it provides about the anti-British Resistance movements and  
liberation struggles of the Khasis, Jaintias, Garos, Nagas, Lushais,  
Singphos, Akas and other tribes during eighteenth, nineteenth and  
first half of the twentieth century. "*Sanskriti Ke Char Adhayaya*,"  
(Delhi 1956) one of the monumental works of the National poet  
Ramdhar Singh Dinkar is a very dependable source for tracing out  
the various stages in the contribution of the non-Aryans of this  
region to the evolution of Indian religion, culture and philosophy.

### Travellers' Accounts

Ibn Battuta<sup>1</sup> a celebrated Arabian traveller who visited  
India in the 14th century has left behind an interesting account  
about the subject concerned based on his personal experience. While  
dealing with Indian Archipelago, Bengal, China and Thubbat  
(Tibet) he has made a passing reference to the origins of Indo-  
Chinese population of this region with Monogolian characteristics  
as well as the religious and magical practices of the people of  
'Kamaru' corresponding to Kamrupa or modern Assam. For  
further verification, corroboration and examination of the correct-  
ness of this statement the graphic description of Sir Henry  
Yule<sup>2</sup> (a popular authority on the Travels of Marco Polo, a  
venetian traveller who visited India during 13th century), can be  
safely and profitably relied upon.

The rare and curious narratives of European travellers are also  
worthy of attention for our purpose. Ralph Fitch<sup>3</sup>, the first Eng-  
lish traveller, who came to India on political mission in 1584 during  
Akbar's reign, fifteen years before the East India Company procured  
the first Charter from Queen Elizabeth of blessed memory, and re-  
mained here upto 1590-91, has shed considerable light on Tripura's  
war with the Mughals in the 16th Century. Rev. Samuel Purchas  
(1575-1626) who published in the year 1626 first famous collection  
of voyages and travels undertaken by various English travellers  
under the caption *Samuel purchas's pilgrimage*<sup>4</sup>, has also made  
incidental references to Tippara's War with Mogors (Mughals) in  
the 16th and 17th Century within a reasonable compass. His  
'*pilgrimage*' - a trustworthy historical document also records the

brief political history of Cooch Behar, Bengal, Tipperah, Bhutan, etc.

Remonstrantie or Report of Francisco pel-Saert<sup>5</sup> a faithful Dutch record based on his seven years' (1620-27) experiences in India is also of some value from the point of view of little light it throws on the developments in north-east India during Jehangir's time. The narratives of another Dutch Sailor Glanius<sup>6</sup> definitely merits our attention for the description it provides about Mirjumla's War in Assam during the reign of Aurangzeb. The Accounts of two Portuguese travellers Father Stephen Cacella and Father John Cabral<sup>7</sup>, who visited Assam between 1626 and 1630, are important only for trade relations of Assam with South Bihar. *Six voyages en perseet Aux Indes* pub. in 1676 by J. B. Tavernier, a 17th century French traveller provides a glimpse into trade relations of Tripura with contemporary Eastern Kingdoms.

### Portuguese Sources

The Map of Bengal compiled in 1660 by Mattheus Vanden Broucke<sup>8</sup>, governor of Choromandal (1658-1664) and *History of the most memorable things that took place in the East Indies and the countries discovered by the portuguese* written by portuguese Father Pierre du Jarric<sup>9</sup> based on the account of Father Monserrats Relacam "de Equebar Roi des Mogares" (1580) can also be of some help for Mughal relations with Tripura during 16th and 17th centuries.

### Classical (Graeco-Roman) Sources

Ammianus Mercellinus' 'Resgestae'<sup>10</sup> "Remark on the Sequel to the periplus of the Erythraean sea and on the Country of the Seres as discovered by Ammianus Marcellinus by James Tylor (Calcutta 1847), 'Le periple de la Mer Erythec'<sup>11</sup> and 'Arriani utferture periplus Maris Erythraei'" by anonymous writer translated into another text "Geographi Grocoi Minores"<sup>12</sup> are some of those dependable classical records which can be of great help regarding the origins, identifications, ethnography, arts and crafts and other economic institutions of the tribal people of north-east India, only when we use them in all seriousness and with meticulous regards for the truth.

### French

Sylvain Levi's "Le Nepal etude historique d'un Royaume Hindou"<sup>13</sup> characterised by all its precision and accuracy can definitely be taken as reliable treatise on the origins of Indo-Mongoloid tribes of the Himalayan region of north-east India, their migrations to Nepal in post-Bharata War period (3100 BC.), invasion of Nepal by the Kiratas of Assam of great antiquity, their political and cultural

triumphs over indigenous Austro-Asiatic tribes and Indo-Aryans of Nepal in ancient times anterior to 6th century BC. etc.

### German

W. Schmidt's '*Die Monkhmer Volker*', (1906) and "*Die Gliederung der australischen sprachen*" (1919) also contain some kernel of historical truth about the origin of the Khasis based on the comparative analysis of linguistic structures.

### References

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