Socio-Economic Linkages in the 'Decline' of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa

Mignonette Momin

Extant studies in the history of pre-Ahom Assam depicted the rulers of the Pāla dynasty as the last members of the Bhauma line of kings to have played a major role in enhancing the political fortunes of the kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. The writers had assumed that the kingdom's prosperity went down during the reign of the later Pāla kings and their immediate successors, as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the rise of a number of hitherto unknown ruling families whose origins could be traced to areas falling within the Lauhitya region and the adjoining areas. The period also witnessed intrusions of external social elements into the region from the direction of Bengal and Burma to establish their rule. Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī, Ghiyās-ud-dīn Iwāz Shāh, and Ikhtiyār-ud-dīn Yuzbak Tughril Khān were among the better-known intruders from Bengal. The Ahoms of the Shan ruling family crossed over from Burma to the eastern portion of the Brahmaputra valley. All these events ostensibly marked the 'decline' of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, since they resulted in a period of general instability in the region; moreover, the political authority over the whole region no longer emanated from a political centre associated with a single ruling family: This broad perspective has dominated writings on the history of 'Assam' right from the days of Edward Gait up to the present day.[1]

The dominant assumptions in the extant studies can be attributed to the persisting influence of Eurocentric writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when political history overshadowed all other historical themes.[2] In much of the modern and contemporary world such trends underlay historical writings on pre-modern happenings.[3] Their assumptions rested on the premises that events in history were shaped by the actions of persons in positions of power alone; that those persons' actions were solely the end product of their own efforts. Such assumptions could be traced to the interpretation of the documents available to them — i.e. the surviving records of the rulers whose personal 'achievements' were often blown out of proportion in contrast to those considered their rivals or subjects. Accordingly the writings gave only fleeting glimpses of the socio-economic milieu in which the events occurred; but even so most of the writers made no attempt to mark out identifiable phases of development in the region's history except in the sphere of dynastic history. Moreover, since the dominant theme was political history not always consistent with its social context, the focus of their study was the façade of the administrative machinery related to the individual rulers' political acumen or lack of the same. They glossed over the connection between political ideas/institutions and the material basis. For these reasons, studies in the history of pre-British 'Assam' neglected many elements of the period's social, political, economic and other developments. Thus, all in all, the writers tended to indulge in discussions on the rise and decline of kingdoms based on the evidence of the rulers' records that they accepted at face value.[4] Their most significant observation was that Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa had a territorially encompassing, long-lasting monarchical form of government ascribed to a specific line of kings (i.e. the Bhauma line), beginning with the Varmans (from about the fourth-fifth centuries) and ending with the Pālas (some time around the first half of the twelfth century): this, notwithstanding overtones of cyclical declines in her history within that period. As indicated earlier, the kingdom's seemingly precipitate fall in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries was attributed to the play of individual forces (e.g., the rulers' personalities), and 'major' events such as invasions from the western and eastern directions.

In this paper an attempt is made to contest the previous contentions that the 'fall' of the Bhauma kings was synonymous

with the 'decline' of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. The aim is to highlight the persistence of this regional concept even after the reign of the Pālas (who had claimed membership of the Bhauma family) had come to an end. Of primary concern is looking for the more fundamental reasons behind the continuity of its subsistence as a regional concept. The point is to inquire into the rise of several ruling families in the region during the post-twelfth century, with special reference to the Bhuyans, the Koches and the Chutiyas. The choice of these three families as the focus of attention is solely guided by considerations of illustration based on the available data; it is not intended to deny the contribution of other contemporaneous social elements to the making of the region's history and culture. In this undertaking — as in an earlier paper[5] — the purpose is to indicate the relationship between socio-political and socio-economic developments and the territorial organization, and to formulate the problem of what happened in the period that has been generally depicted as an era of the 'decline' of Kāmarūpa. Admittedly, this entire exercise has to draw on the evidence of scanty and scattered source-material, and even much of this evidence has to be collated from relevant portions of the chronicles and accounts left behind by the contemporaries of the subjects under investigation.[6] To complicate matters, many of the primary sources (literary and epigraphic) are yet to be translated into English in their complete form; and so fragments of information derived from the published works (in English) of modern historians dealing with the subject-matter — or with aspects related to it — have to be pieced together. Thus this paper also seeks to underline the significance of the absence of systematic/prodigious data generated for the period under study, to argue that this fact itself is indicative of certain developments in northeast India, which did not conform to the existing perspectives of its history.

The Background

As noted elsewhere,[7] the rise of a number of local and intruding ruling families in the region had become particularly evident from the middle and the close of the twelfth century. Approximately during that period certain inscriptions recorded the genealogy of rulers that did not claim symbolic association with

Naraka-Bhagadatta, the 'originators' of the Bhauma line of kings. One recorded the foundation of a Brāhmṇa dynasty by an invader from Gauḍa (in Bengal);[8] the other that of the Candra dynasty of Bhāskara's line.[9] In the former, Vaidyadeva is said to have established his rule in Prāgjyotiṣa that was likened to a *bhukti*, apparently in the sense of a provincial territory earmarked for his enjoyment, in the Kāmarūpa *maṇḍala*. Vaidyadeva's Kaṃauli grant recorded his conquest of Kāmarūpa at the behest of the 'lord of Gauḍa' (*Gauḍeśvareṇa*), Kumārapāla.[10] The grant indicates that the kingdom of Kāmarūpa had become virtually transformed into a *maṇḍala*, i.e., a subordinate political entity in relation to Gauḍa. In the latter, Vallabhadeva did not mention the name of the land over which he ruled, but his inscription recording his donation of land to an alms-house (*bhaktaśālā*) was recovered from Tezpur in central Assam. Nothing is known about the actual territorial extent of the domain of either of these two rulers[11] or about the legacy of their rule. Notably, though, the epigraphic evidence ascribed to these rulers shows that both depended on Brāhmaṇas — presumably already residing in the region — for their legitimacy to rule therein.[12]

By the second half of the eleventh century the region of Kāmarūpa seems to have comprised settlements scattered throughout the length of the Brahmaputra valley and the adjoining areas. The evidence of our sources shows that the process of acculturation of the tribes of the region was well underway thanks to the settlement of Brāhmaṇas in their midst through landgrants, a practice that seems to have started from about the fifth-sixth centuries. Over the next six hundred years or so the grantees received several fiscal privileges and administrative immunities from the king. The donees were furthermore empowered to augment production in the donated land by the terms and conditions of the grants.[13] It may be surmised that they employed more efficient methods of cultivation in the donated lands, and that the techniques were gradually adopted by those occupying the surrounding areas and beyond, thus boosting the emergence of permanent fields and residential areas. A point to note is that the notion of attachment to land among the inhabitants (*janapadān*) was strengthened, even despite growing evidence of inequities in the access to its resources. This may be deduced from the fact that the charters (*śāsanas*) recorded that the donor informed the people

about the transfer of land and urged them to serve the donees. We have suggested elsewhere that this practice was because of the problem of labour scarcity in the region of Kāmarūpa.[14] Such developments could have strengthened the territorial idea among the tribal groups that owned and managed the land under production. Simultaneously, this socio-economic/political phenomenon of the Brahmanically acculturated people on both sides of the main Brahmaputra river, in turn, seems to have provided the stimulus for the proliferation of local polities within itself and in certain areas drained by the river's tributaries, and also in other stretches of low-lying land in which those techniques of production could be applied.

Not surprisingly, the post-twelfth century saw the assertion of new social groups within the Valley and the adjoining areas. Such groups comprised both 'indigenous' and 'external' social elements. Both seem to have been preoccupied with the use and occupation of land commensurate with establishing their territorial identity on a firmer basis. From time to time they seem to have superimposed themselves on the local population within the land as members of the ruling groups. The discussion that follows will bear out these points.

The Bhuyans

Persian accounts of the events dating back to the first half of the thirteenth century give glimpses of the land and the people of the area to the east of Gauḍa.[15] The portions of the *Tabaqāt-i Nāsirī* that are of relevance to our area of study date back to the period of Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī, the first known Muslim ruler of Bengal to have led an invasion to the land that corresponds to Tibet (or eastern Bhutan?) through the region of Kāmarūpa. The source named the Kunc, Myj and Th'rw (= the Koch, Mech and Tharu respectively)[16] as the three important *qaum*s or tribes inhabiting the area between Lakhnauti (Lakhnāwatī or Gauḍa) and the Himalayas.[17] The Koch and Mech are said to have rendered Bakhtiyār Khaljī assistance on the occasion of the military offensive that the ruler (*rai*) of Kāmrū/Kānwrū/Kāmrud (corruption of Kāmarūpa?) launched against him.[18] The evidence indicates that the *rai* of Kāmarūpa had not secured the fidelity of those tribes. Most likely it was because of this fluid political situation that

Bakhtiyār Khaljī tried to gain control of the trade routes through the mountain passes between Kāmarūpa and Tibet along which horses were brought from the northern hilly tracts to Lakhnauti.[19] Notably, the territory mentioned as Kāmrū/Kānwrū/Kāmrud was adjacent to Gauḍa, indicating that the area denoted the western part of the region of Kāmarūpa.[20] It is significant that the evidence of a local inscription seems to complement the information on the Muslim intrusion into the land. The Kānāi-baraśī-bowā Rock Inscription, dated *Śaka* 1127 (=A.D. 1205),[21] located in North Guwahati close to the Manikarṇeśvara temple, commemorates the destruction of the Turuṣka (i.e. 'Turki'/Muslim) forces that had entered Kāmarūpa. The editors of the inscription have identified this event with Bakhtiyār Khaljī's ill-fated return journey from Tibet through Kāmarūpa.

After Bakhtiyār Khaljī's death other Muslim rulers seem to have persisted with the aggrandizement policy in Kāmarūpa. The *Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī* tells us that Kāmrud became tributary to Ghiyās-ud-dīn Iwāz Khaljī (*alias* Husam-ud-dīn Iwāz) following his invasion of the land in 1226-27.[22] However, the efforts of the Muslim rulers did not always achieve the desired result. This is known from the Gachtal Pillar Inscription (dated *Śaka* 1284 [= A.D. 1362])[23] recovered from the ruins of a Śiva temple at Gachtal (near Dabaka in the Kapili valley). As the inscription records, 3000 *'Yavana'*/ *'Mleccha'* intruders from Vangāla (Bengal) had crossed the boundary (of Kāmarūpa?) and reached Ḍavāka (identified with modern Nagaon); there they were encircled (by the local forces/ militia?) to prevent them from proceeding farther. The epigraph made no mention of the names of the people or their leaders who resisted the invaders; but it referred to a *jala-senā* (naval force?) that presumably stood by ready to drive the 'enemy' back westward beyond the waters (of the river Kapili?). Such a strategy implied that some sort of military organization was in place at Gachtal.

There is no contemporaneous local source that provides direct evidence of the life/activities of the specific tribal communities named in the *Tabaqāt-i Nṛsirī*. Instead, relevant sources pertaining to the area under study[24] referred to social groups known as the Bhuyans or Bhuiyans who were spread over large portions of the Assam valley and the contiguous areas, i.e., (a) the land between the rivers Dikarai and Barnadi on the northern bank of the

Brahmaputra; (b) the Kapili valley, and the land corresponding to Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra; and (c) western Assam — then called Kāmatā — which stretched upto the river Karatoya, and included a part of North Bengal. The nomenclature 'Bhuyan' indicates that it was derived from the Sanskrit term *'Bhauma'* or *'Bhumi'*, literally, 'the earth'; by that token, whoever carried that title was a 'landholder'. In that sense, the Bhuyans perhaps assumed their status based on their membership of the (ruling?) landholding groups. The extant clues leave no doubt that the Bhuyans were of heterogeneous background; but it is obvious that all of them claimed a 'noble' status. They traced their social origins to respectable progenitors of either secular or religious background. They shared a common trait in that all of them were strongly attached to land. This last point may be inferred from the records left behind by their contemporaries — viz., the *Deodhai Asom Buranji*, *Kamarupar Buranji*, *Akbar-nāmah* and the *Āīn-i-Akbarī*.[25]

The evidence of the above-mentioned sources points to the emergence and development of the Bhuyans as a specific social category, in the capacity of landholding chiefs; they seem to have played an important role in the proliferation of local polities within Kāmarūpa and her neighbourhood from the thirteenth century onwards. In the area that lay to the west of the lower Brahmaputra valley extending to North Bengal, the Bhuyans asserted themselves especially from the period of the Sena dynasty.[26] They were territorially organized and maintained their own armies.[27] Records ascribed to the period between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries referred to a distinct social category called the *'Baro* (literally, 'twelve') *Bhuyans'*, who — along with the Pāṭhān rulers of Bengal — enjoyed either in full or in part the benefits accruing from the land they held as long as they paid their overlords in Delhi a fixed revenue for it.[28] It appears that when the rulers of Delhi extended their suzerainty over Bengal and, later, Assam, they followed the policy of — (a) assigning portions of the conquered area to their followers as territorial revenue assignments (*jagirs*) in lieu of salary, for administrative purpose and for personal support; and (b) 'allowing' the existing locally dominant individuals, who had been subordinated, to retain their 'traditional' authority in the lands under their jurisdiction, which were henceforth likened to *jagirs*. There are references

to the Bhuyans' categorizations according to their religious, professional, regional or local affiliations, such as Brāhmaṇa, Kāyastha, Muslim, Gaudīya, Vārendrī, Kāmatā, etc.[29]

Various categories of Bhuyans were found in the Brahmaputra valley as well. The *Darrang Rāja Vaṃsāvalī*,[30] which tells the history of the Koches, refers to the *Bar* (greater) *Bhuyans* and *Chota* (lesser) *Bhuyans* who were indiscriminately drawn from the ranks of different social/occupational groups and castes. The Daivajñas (professional astrologers) were included in their ranks. The Daivajñas' rise to a position of social importance can be ascribed to at least as early as the twelfth century, as may be inferred from the evidence of the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva,[31] even though there is no epigraphic or literary evidence of their actual landholdings for that period. It is clear however that over time some Daivajñas had certain areas under their control, and they assumed the designations of the greater and lesser Bhuyans whom the founder of the Koch dynasty, Biswa Singha, subjugated one after another in the sixteenth century.[32] Some Bhuyans are said to have submitted to Husam-ud-dīn Iwāz (who had been among Bakhtiyār Khaljī's close followers) following his invasion of Kāmarūpa in 1227.[33] Such Bhuyans included both Muslims and non-Muslims, as can be inferred from their names — Rupnarayan, Lachminarayan, Gosal Khan, etc.[34]

The Bhuyans were further ranked on the basis of the number of villages placed under them. Those in charge of an administrative unit (*chakla*) of twelve villages were known as *Baro*-Bhuyans. Others in charge of a *chakla* comprising less than twelve villages were called *Chota*- or *Saru*-Bhuyans. The situation was reflective of two broad developments in the region: (a) that land was the basis of the administrative organization; (b) that the Bhuyans were dispersed in the countryside, which seems to have comprised groups of villages. The office of the Bhuyan was coterminous with a local court or assembly called *karkhana*. Apparently such *karkhana*s were meant for meeting the needs of administration at the level of the territorial unit *chakla*, where incipient social divisions based on certain affiliations (as mentioned above) were emerging. Notably, in the Indian mainland between the period of the Delhi Sultanate and that of the Mughal rule, the *karkhana* meant a workshop of merchants who dealt in high-value commodities, such as jewellery, wound silk, etc.[35] It is tempting to suggest that in

parts of Kāmarūpa some Bhuyans may have earned some profit from commodity production, and they may have been responsible for providing advances to the artisans and craftsmen for procuring the raw material required for their specialized products. This suggestion may not be implausible given the fact that the level of contacts between Kāmrud and Gauḍa had been enhanced following the entry of the Muslim adventurers into the region. But the problem of carrying this speculation further lies in the woeful paucity of data pertaining to the highly skilled arts and crafts specific to the region (in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries), whose products could have catered to the demands of select customers whether internal or external. In fact, there is nothing to show that the craft sector had developed to the extent of generating division of labour within the *karkhana*, if it really meant a workshop as well. In that event, the ruling groups of the region must have depended on traders dealing in high-value goods to meet their demands for those prestige objects.

By and large the Bhuyans seem to have led an autonomous existence within the confines of their own territorial organization, each with its fighting contingents that were used for both defensive and offensive purposes. From time to time they entered into political alliances with the more powerful ruling families and paid tributes to mark their allegiance to the latter. They also rendered military assistance to the latter and performed administrative functions in the territories under their jurisdiction. Certain illustrations will suffice to bear out these points. The *Ahom Buranji* mentioned that a Kāyastha Bhuyan named Chandivara (who was stationed at Lengamaguri to the east of Hajo and south of the river Barnadi) fought against the Bhutiyas of Bhutan in his capacity as 'warden' of the Bhutan 'frontier'.[36] An Assamese work, the *Katha Guru Carit*, referred to Chandivara (who was portrayed as Śaṃkaradeva's great-great grandfather) as among the seven Kāyastha families from Gauḍa originally settled in Kāmatā (i.e. western Assam) following a treaty between the ruler of Kāmatā, Durlabhanārāyaṇa (c. 1330-1350) and the 'lord of Gauḍa' (Gauḍeśvara), Dharmanārāyaṇa (c. 1325-1330).[37] According to this source it was Durlabhnārāyaṇa who settled the Bhuyans at Lengamaguri. Later, five other Kāyastha families from Gauḍa are said to have joined Chandivara's group of seven, and the *Baro* Bhuyans came into being. Another Bhuyan, Paniya Bar Kath of

Ghilajhari (in Kamrup district), is said to have held 'rent-free' land estimated at 20,000 *bighas*, in lieu of maintaining law and order therein.[38] He too rendered the service in the name of Durlabhnārāyaṇa, 'lord of Kāmatāā (KāmateÉvara). Other sources indicate that there were Bhuyans in lower Assam even as early as a couple of generations earlier, prior to the fourteenth century. This is clear from a landgrant (dated 1329) ascribed to one Puruṣottama Dāsa, who donated a plot of rice-yielding land in the village (*grāma*) called Rāuttakoṇcī (identified with modern Ratkuchi close to Nalbari in Kamrup district) in favour of a Brāhmaṇa.[39] Interestingly, the grant spoke of Vāsudeva (of the Śāṇḍilya *gotra*) — Puruṣottama's grandfather — as the foremost among the *sat*-Śūdras and 'the right hand of the king' (*bhūpālasyāpasavyaḥ*), so that a thousand swordsmen always escorted him during his movements. This piece of information leaves no doubt that Vāsudeva's family was subsidiary to an authority more powerful than the contemporary Bhuyans, although the available sources do not refer to that authority's personal or family name. The Rāuttakoṇcī grant further mentioned that Vāsudeva's son (Jayadeva-Dāsa) and grandson (Puruṣottama) possessed great wealth (*bhūti/aiśvaryyavān*). This fact indicates that the personages belonging to three generations mentioned in the grant were members of the ruling groups of local origin, as is known from the social category of '*sat*-Śūdra' in which Vāsudeva's family was placed.

What is significant about the last point is that it tallied with a socio-political development similar to the emergence of the *sat*-Śūdras as a social stratum especially in eastern and southern India between the post-Gupta and the Sultanate period. In these two areas of the sub-continent the *sat*-Śūdras subsumed all non-Brāhmaṇas of high status, their status derived from their membership of the dominant landholding peasantry. The *sat*-Śūdras were differentiated from the ordinary/common peasants, and the culturally 'backward' tribes and artisans dependent on the landowning peasantry for their subsistence.[40] Thus the *sat*-Śūdras of the Rāuttakoṇcī grant may well have denoted the Bhuyans in the western portion of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. A fact that cannot be ignored is that they had attained their status of wealth-holders *before* the period the treaty was purportedly concluded between the Gauḍeśvara and the Kāmateśvara. Equally noteworthy is the place-name Rāuttakoṇcī-grāma. It seems to have been derived from

the designation '*rāuta*', a Prakrit version of *rājaputra*. In the records of other contemporaneous dynasties[41] the title was adopted by members of the substantial peasantry, and was sometimes mentioned along with the names of Brāhmaṇa donees. Perhaps this was true of the Bhuyans of Kāmarūpa as well. Rāuttakoṇcī could have become identified with a settlement of important landholding personages in the countryside, the word '*koṇcī*' (forerunner of the Assamese '*kuchi*') meaning a rural settlement. The term '*grāma*' (literally, 'village'), suffixed to the place-name, lends support to the plausibility of this assumption. The settlement's importance seems to have been commensurate with its access to substantial agricultural produce. The operative clauses of the Rāuttakoṇcī grant make it clear that the donated land was already yielding 3500 (*tritaya-sahaśrasya*) measures of paddy (*dhānya*); but there is no reference to the unit of measurement. Still, there is no denying the fact that the donated land was fertile, as is known from the word '*kṣetra*' used in the grant to describe it.

It is also significant that Vāsudeva's family assumed the Brahmanical *gotra* of Śāṇḍilya. This shows that the family was next only to the Brāhmaṇas by birth in a high-ranking social order, and that 'Śūdra' as a *varṇa* category no longer necessarily implied a low social status. The upgradation of the Śūdra status in this case seems to have run parallel to the family's patronage of the Brāhmaṇas and their institutions. The grant eulogized Vāsudeva as one devoted to the gods, *gurus* and Brāhmaṇas, before describing him as the foremost among the *sat*-Śūdras (read '*important* Śūdras'). Apparently the idea of the Śūdra having been born to serve the *dvijas* (= the 'twice-born' that traditionally denoted members of the three higher *varṇas*) had been modified to carry the sense of the (affluent) *sat*-Śūdras in the service of (i.e. patronizing) the Brāhmaṇas, who comprised the only distinct *varṇa* category in Kāmarūpa apart from the Śūdra *varṇa*. By then the nomenclature '*dvija*' practically stood for only members of the Brāhmaṇa *varṇa*. The development could be linked to the fact that the idea of the *uttamasaṃkara* or high mixed caste of the Śūdra *varṇa*, which idea was rooted in the *varṇasaṃkara* theory (i.e. the theory of mixed social orders), entitled the *sat*-Śūdras to priestly services from the '*rotriya* Brāhmaṇas (i.e. Brāhmaṇas learned in the *Vedas*, proficient in teaching and sacrificing, and most worthy of receiving *dāna* or gifts from the rulers).[42] It is obvious that the *sat*-Śūdras were differentiated from the ordinary Śūdras (*asat*-Śūdraṣ).[43] The surname

'Dāsa' associated with Jayadeva and Puruṣottama is also indicative of the rise of Vāsudeva's family to a high-ranking position of the *uttama* (high) *saṃkaras* (mixed castes). Presumably the family had the capacity to exercise control over organizing resources in land where the principal occupation was agriculture (*kṛṣi karma*). To that extent the Dāsa, supposedly born of the union of a Śūdra man and a Kṣatriya woman, as given in the Puranic tradition,[44] seems to have come to denote a member of the substantial peasantry by the thirteenth century. It is likely that the broad social category of *sat*-Śūdras coincided with the emergence of 'prosperous' agriculturists whose social status was based on land tenure or their superior rights in land. Apparently the force of that economic factor made such agriculturists band together under a political authority, to safeguard common interests. Durlabhnārāyaṇa (perhaps the most dominant Bhuyan of his times?) is said to have relocated the Bhuyans of Lengamaguri following the Bhutiya intrusion into the place. According to an Assamese work, the *Bordowa-Guru Carit*, it was he who settled the Lengamaguri Bhuyans at Bordowa (in modern Nagaon district) by donating lands and labourers.[45] No doubt the factor of trade was behind the conflict between Durlabhnārāyaṇa and the Bhutiyas. If this assumption is correct, it implies that the attempt to control the trade from the northern mountainous tracts continued to hold the attention of the non-Muslim rulers as well.

The extant evidence provides further clues to the Bhuyans' genealogies and the names of their 'ancestors'. Some of them claimed descent from Arimatta, a powerful Bhuyan, whom they portrayed as the son of the Brahmaputra by a wife of Ram Chandra, ruler of a part of lower Assam. Some writers have identified Arimatta with Vaidyadeva, who issued the Kamauli grant.[46] In the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley the designation 'Bhuyan'/'Bhuiyan' seems to have been synonymous with administrative functionaries primarily of local origin, who maintained law and order, and had superior rights in the land under their jurisdiction. They traced their origins to one Samudra, whom they depicted as Arimatta's minister.[47] Presumably the idea was to forge a connection between the Bhuyans of upper Assam and the 'established' ruling families of lower Assam.

It appears from the history of the Bhuyans that a significant feature of socio-political developments in the post-twelfth century was the *jagir* or the large territorial holding. The Bhuyans derived

their wealth from land and, presumably, from their control of its labour. But it is obvious that the labour was never in such a plentiful supply to allow them to experiment with novel ways of facilitating economic expansion beyond fulfilling the basic requisites of administration. In the available sources the Bhuyans have not even been associated with undertakings of any major structural activities usually attested for the region in the form of palatial buildings (which could have been used by the Bhuyan's family or by members of his retinue) or religious establishments of permanent materials. But apparently some of the Bhuyans had become patrons of Brāhmaṇas and settled them in their domains with grants of land. It appears that over time the Bhuyans diversified their activities and were engaged in trade besides advanced methods of agriculture.[48] This point may be qualified in the course of the discussion that follows.

The Koches

The events mentioned above are noteworthy in that they point to the rise of Kāmatā as a new political entity within the region of Kāmarūpa by the fourteenth century. The Ghilajhari grant of Durlabhnārāyaṇa (referred to earlier) shows that Kāmatā, which covered the area approximating the present-day Kamrup-Hajo, was the home of landholding chiefs. Over time they seem to have become subordinated by the Koches. Subsequently Kāmatā was known as Koch Hajo, which is indicative of the convergence of the identity of the dominant tribe (Koch) and its territorial identity. The Koch rulers eventually established their main political base in the land on both sides of the river Manas extending to the river Sonkosh on the west, Dhavalagiri or the Himalayan range on the north, and the Brahmaputra on the south. This entire area was known as Koch Behar. Notably, the genealogical records of the Koch ruling family provide clues to its rise to political importance in the region. It clearly traced its ancestry to the Mech and Koch. As noted earlier, Muslim records dating to the period of Bakhtiyār Khaljī had located these two tribes (along with the Tharu) in the land between Lakhnauti and the Himalayas.[49] These tribes seem to have emerged from 'obscurity' to assert themselves in the post-thirteenth century. Their geographical locale initially corresponded to the western portion of the erstwhile kingdom of Kāmarūpa, and

gradually stretched upto North Bengal in the west and north, and to the Mangaldai area (within central Assam) in the east. These developments can be ascertained from their early history as pieced together from the evidence of their literary and epigraphic records, supplemented by that of certain archaeological remains ascribed to their rulers.

The Koch rulers maintained a chronicle, the *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī*, to record their genealogical table. This source, ascribed to a Daivajña named Surjyakhari on the direction of Samudranārāyaṇa, *rāja* of Darrang (1791–1806),[50] atttributes the rise of the Koches to one Bisu. Bisu is said to have descended from Hariya Mandal, chief of twelve 'leading' Mech families settled in Cikangrāma (at Khuntaghat pargana in Goalpara district),[51] and Hira, daughter of a Koch chief named Hajo who ruled over Rangpur and Kamrup.[52] Bisu is said to have risen to power upon inheriting the domain of his father and maternal grandfather[53] in about 1515; but he had to fight with many contemporary chiefs[54] before he was able to establish his dynastic line in 1527. It was then that he took the name Biswa Singha[55] (which name was obviously a corruption of the Sanskrit Viśva Siṃha [i.e., "lion of the whole world"/universal ruler?]). That 'event' marked the beginning of the influence of Brahmanical culture on some of the ruling groups among the Koches and their allies, the Meches. In fact it indicated the fusion of the two separate tribal groups into the Koch identity at some point of time before the sixteenth century. Biswa Singha's acceptance of the Brahmanical ideals of polity was effected through the intermedium of some Brāhmaṇas whose ancestral homes were traced to certain areas falling within the Indian mainland. As the evidence of the *Asam Buranji* demonstrates, Biswa Singha induced Brāhmaṇas from Kanauj, Mithila, Navadvip, Gauda and Banaras with grants of land to settle down in the kingdom of Koch Behar.[56] It was these Brāhmaṇas who invented the myth of the divine origins of the Koch ruling family: they depicted Bisu as the son of Śiva (who had assumed the form of Hariya Mandal) and Parvati (who had incarnated herself as Hira), and provided the explanation of how his kith and kin attained the status of Koches who were henceforth categorized as *Rajbamsi*, evidently the Prakritised version of the Sanskrit '*rājavaṃśi*' (literally, 'of the family of rulers'). This 'Kṣatriyaization' of the Koch kings seems to have attained some success in

assimilating other social elements into the Koch identity through marriage alliances.[57]

During the next fifty years or so the 'hegemony' of the Koches culminated in the eastward extension of their rule to Darrang, roughly corresponding to the Mangaldai area. By the period of the Koch prince, Dharmanārāyaṇa (*alias* Balinārāyaṇa, brother of the ruler of Koch Hajo, Parikṣitanārāyaṇa), who had been charged with the administration of this easternmost territory of the Koches, the Ahoms (under their king, Pratap Singha [1603-1641]) are said to have reduced the Darangī-*rājya* (the Koch domain of Darrang) to a tributary status.[58] From the period of Sundaranārāyaṇa (Dharmanārāyaṇa's son), the Koch rulers (*rājas*) of Darrang were obliged to take cognizance of the authority of a high official called the Barphukan, who was in the service of the Ahom monarchs. Thenceforth, the Darangī *rājas* functioned as "wardens of the marches appointed by the Ahoms."[59] These events find mention in the chronicles of the Ahom period.[60] By then the Ahoms had succeeded in establishing themselves as the paramount rulers in the upper Brahmaputra valley, having subdued a welter of ruling groups and locally dominant elements, including the Chutiyas, and had extended their rule to the central Brahmaputra valley having reduced its Bhuyans to submission.

To trace the emergence and development of the Koch polity, it is necessary to take a fresh look at the evidence of the available sources. According to the *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī*, Biswa Singha's ancestral home was Cikangrāma. The place-name itself offers scope for historically meaningful interpretations. The literal translation of the word '*cikan*' is 'muslin' (i.e. fine cloth woven of cotton). And, as noted earlier, '*grāma*' means 'village.' It could be surmised that the place had emerged as a dominant settlement over a wide territory occupied by the Meches and Koches. Perhaps the Koches reached a stage where they gained control of the trade in cotton fabric or in cotton itself; their chronicle refers to the cultivation of cotton in the highlands of the Cikangrāma area. In fact, this source mentions that Hariya Mandal himself had grown cotton there.[61] The veracity of this information on the growth of cotton in the hills bordering modern Goalpara can be confirmed from the early British records that especially identified the Garo hills as the main source of cotton for the weekly markets. There are also references to the cultivation of cotton in the highlands bordering Bhutan.[62]

The name 'Mandal' suffixed to Hariya could well have been derived from his function as a petty revenue officer associated with cotton production and trade. Interestingly, the *Deodhai Asom Buranji* refers to Bisu's father as Sandia Maral, the surname pointing to Sandia (softened to Hanḍia in Assamese?) as the head of (a guild of?) weavers.[63] The production of cotton cloth seems to have assumed more importance in the subsequent times. The *Katha Guru Carit*[64] mentions that Naranārāyaṇa organized the guild of weavers at Tantikuci (literally, 'settlement of weavers', in Barpeta) where different kinds of cotton fabric were manufactured. Other sources refer to places such as Narayanpur, Hajo, and a number of markets within the kingdom, including those on the foothills, such as Ranihat and Gobhahat, where trade in cotton was significant.[65]

Obviously trade in cotton was highly lucrative and must have played a role in the establishment of the kingdom's political centre at a place called Kāmatāpur[66] (identified with Kantanagar about four miles southeast of the modern Koch Behar town). According to the *Rajopakhyana*, a Bengali chronicle of the Koch kings upto the period of *rāja* Harendranārāyaṇa, Kāmatāpur was chosen as the seat of authority of the Koch ruling family in deference to the wishes of Biswa Singha's mother.[67] But it is more likely that the logistics of establishing the family's rule from a more strategically located place accounted for the shift from Cikangrāma to Kāmatāpur. The latter place seems to have commanded the trade routes from the Koch kingdom to Tibet and Gauḍa, and the fertile plains adjoining the foothills. Moreover, if Kāmatāpur was named after its role as the centre of *kāmadāni* or embroidered (cloth) work, the Koches had succeeded in diversifying their activities into certain sectors of trade and in extending the scope of trade, while simultaneously strengthening their control over organization of resources in the land that came under their rule.

In any case, the development marked the growing complexity of the socio-political organization of the Koches, and brought them into conflicts and conciliations with the contemporaneous political entities and various social groups. To deal with the emerging situation the Koch rulers organized the administration of their kingdom aimed at exploiting the services of the existing population. This followed the pattern associated with the Muslim rulers who had occupied Kāmatā under Alā-ud-dīn Hussain Shah's

leadership (between 1498 and 1515?).[68] Around the first quarter of the sixteenth century the Koch rulers (apparently with the help of the Meches and some of the Bhuyans) had succeeded in throwing off the yoke of Muslim suzerainty over Kāmatā, and they tried to organize the administration of the Koch kingdom drawing on the resources of manpower so necessary for military efficiency and management of revenues. According to the *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī*, it was during the reign of Biswa Singha that the *paik* system was introduced into Kāmarūpa. The *paik* stood for an able-bodied man who could bear arms. The chronicle mentioned that as many as 52,25,000 *paik*s figured in the census prepared under Biswa Singha's direction. The *paik*s were organized in groups placed under the control of officials, whose designations were based on the number of such men assigned to them. Thus the *Ṭhākurīā*, *Śaikiā*, *Hājārikā*, and *Omrā* were placed in charge of twenty, one hundred, one thousand, and three thousand *paik*s respectively.[69] The *paik* system therefore seems to have achieved the purpose of forging a unique blending of the tribal militia and the hierarchical organization of a standing army. It was reflective of the necessity of waging frequent wars to maintain — and possibly enhance/ ensure — the socio-political existence of the Koch rulers. This policy also presupposed the availability of revenues to defray the cost of equipments used in the battles and of remunerating those who provided the manpower, to 'buy' their loyalty on a long-term basis. Towards that end Biswa Singha claimed from all the primary producers a part of the produce of the land under cultivation. He also received tributes from the various landholding chiefs within the Koch kingdom. The sources do not shed proper light on the revenue administration during his times; but a part of the revenues must have gone into building up the mechanisms of defence and protection of the kingdom against its foes. The ruins of the *Biswa Singhar Killah* (i.e., the fort of Biswa Singha), about ten-twelve miles from Cikangrāma stand as testimony to the Koch king's attempt to ward off Bhutiya intrusions into the kingdom.

By the period of Biswa Singha's successor, Naranārāyaṇa (from about the mid-sixteenth to the third quarter of the sixteenth century), each soldier was assigned three *pura*s of revenue-free land (*jaigir*) in lieu of salary.[70] A *pura* was the equivalent of four *bighas*;[71] so a soldier was entitled to revenue accruing from twelve *bigha*s of land as long as he was in service. Such assigned lands

were meant for the *paiks'* maintenance during their tenure of military service, and were not heritable. The Koch king reserved the right to transfer a *jaigir* to another *paik* when the holder's services were no longer required. Outside the area of the *jaigirs*, the *paiks* cultivated the land as members of the landowning/landholding communities or their dependents/servants. The *paiks* seem to have largely depended on familial labour in their fields. It is said that under Naranārāyaṇa's order a census of the whole Koch kingdom was taken to fix the count of each man as *powā* (=quarter) *paik*. The *paiks* were obliged to render manual service and military service on the demand of the royal officials under whose charge they were placed. In addition the *paiks* had to surrender to the royal officials a part of whatever they produced. Initially, revenues were realised at a nominal rate fixed at a few cowries for every plough that was used in production.[72] During the 16th–17th centuries each peasant household paid one-fourth (*powā*) of its produce as the royal grain-share (*asal*).[73] From time to time it had to pay an extra cess called *abooab;*[74] but the exact nature of this type of revenue is not known.

The last point indicates that the Koch rulers realized revenues from land under cultivation on a regular basis. They seem to have followed certain principles of assessment and collection of revenues from land, although there is no direct evidence to support this assumption. They classified land under different heads: (a) *rupit* or the low land used for cultivating transplanted paddy called *śālī*, a winter (*kharif*) crop; (b) *bao tali* or the low land used for cultivating a form of paddy called *bao*, grown in autumn; (c) *maghua tali* or the land for cultivating a form of paddy called *maghua*, a spring (*rabī*) crop; (d) *ahu tali* or land used for growing the spring paddy called *ahu*, a less high-yielding rice crop.[75] The *Rajopakhyana* provides stray references to the levy of land revenues based on certain factors such as the quality of the soil, the tools of production (e.g. whether ploughs or hoes were used), the quantity of the produce, and so on.[76] This whole evidence indicates the adoption of more advanced techniques of plough-based agriculture in land wherever possible, and the prevalence of sedentary agriculture even in areas where ploughs were not used.

The extent to which the Koch kings came to depend on the role of the *paiks* in their overall administrative organization may be discerned from the nature of their institutions and royal

undertakings, and the relationship between: (a) the Koch kings and the administrative functionaries; (b) the latter and the common population; (c) the king and the populace. The available sources make it clear that the king was at the apex of the socio-political organization. Theoretically, he was the upholder of the kingdom's political integrity and the social order, the protector of the lives and properties of its inhabitants, the biggest patron of Brāhmaṇas and their institutions, the supreme arbiter of justice in case there were inconclusive or major legal issues to be settled, and the chief promoter of learning and education, public welfare measures, etc.[77] By virtue of these multifold duties that he had to perform he claimed the right to levy taxes on the people, and to control the organization of various resources and activities within the kingdom. Towards this end, he appointed high functionaries and made them directly answerable to him in matters of administrative policy. Biswa Singha is said to have appointed twelve *Qāzis* (*Kāryīs*) from the ranks of the ruling aristocracy that included his kinsmen, politically influential Brāhmaṇas, Kāyasthas, and the locally dominant landed 'gentry'. The *Qāzis* served the king as ministers and advisers (*mantrins/amatyas*), as commanders of the armed forces (*patras*), as ambassadors (*katakis*), as treasurer/chief collector of revenue (*Dewan*), and as the royal priest (*rāja-purohita*). The next rung of important functionaries comprised the *Daivajṇa* (royal astrologer), the *Vaidya* (royal physician), the *Supkar* (in-charge-of the royal kitchen), the *Dvari* (royal gate-keeper), the *Majumdar/Majinder* (the king's personal assistant), and the *Senapati* (probably the head of a small army stationed in the political centre). These second-rung functionaries were generally from the non-aristocratic section of the population. Then there were other officials charged with the collection of revenue from the peasants under their direct control (such as the *Laskars*, *Bhuyans* and *Caudhuris*), and with the command of different wings of the army (such as the *Baruas*). The arrangements seem to have continued more or less on the same lines during the period of Biswa Singha's successors. But the constant interaction with external forces, especially from the direction of Bengal, resulted in the introduction of certain innovations in the administrative organization.

As noticed earlier,[78] the Koch kingdom had been organized into broad administrative units called *chaklas* (groups of villages), placed under the charge of the *Bhuyans*. Sometime during the

second half of the sixteenth century the Koch rulers introduced seemingly more effective mechanisms to ensure the pooling of revenues directly into the royal treasury. The administrative functionaries were made responsible for collection of revenues and depositing them with the *Dewan*. The kingdom was divided into two parts for this purpose, viz., the *Bar-Dewani* and the *Chota-* or *Saru-Dewani*. The former covered Koch Behar, and the latter, Koch Hajo. They were under Naranārāyaṇa and his brother Chilarai respectively,[79] indicating thereby that the Koch ruling family kept close watch over revenue administration. Between the period of Biswa Singha and that of Naranārāyaṇa, the Koch kings also made arrangements for the administration of urban centers, evidently in keeping with the rise of towns and markets in the Koch kingdom.

To substantiate the last point, foreign accounts bearing on developments in the Koch kingdom in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries — complemented by local and regional source material — speak of the region of Kāmarūpa as a land of great trading potential. This was on account of its abundant natural resources, strategic location and geographical features. The growth of — and the trade in — cotton hardly need to be repeated. Other commercially viable items of the Koch kingdom that found mention in the foreign accounts were the bay leaf, long pepper, yellow gum resin (gamboge or *Garcinia*), spikenard, and lac.[80] These articles were in demand in the region of Bengal during the reign of the Mughals. The Koch kingdom also exported huge quantities of aloe wood, musk, and varieties of silk and cotton textiles.[81] In exchange for these articles, the Koch kingdom received many items of both luxury and necessity: Chinese silk, woolen fabrics, ponies, rock salt, yak tails and gold dust from Tibet and Bhutan;[82] salt, saltpetre, sulphur, and a variety of jewellery and decorative pieces of metals and precious and semi-precious stones from Bengal and other parts of the Indian mainland.[83] The Brahmaputra was the main artery of communications between the Koch kingdom and (a) Gauḍa and the land further west and south; (b) upper Assam. Large boats made of *chambal* wood, and canoes hollowed out of trees, were the means of transport over water.[84] Overland routes connected the Hajo area with Bengal (a) through the western part of Goalpara, Bagwa, Rangpur Dinajpur, Malda and Murshidabad; from there the route extended westward to Banaras; (b) through Singimari and Jamalpur to Dacca. There were also overland routes from Hajo

to Gauhati, Cachar, Sylhet, and the Jayantiya and Manipur kingdoms. Besides, as noted earlier, there were the routes from the Koch kingdom through the mountain passes to Bhutan and Tibet.[85] Porters, elephants and ponies were used for the purpose of transporting goods over land.[86] Curiously there is no information on the use of wheeled vehicles for transport.

The volume of trade was certainly not inconsiderable and prompted the Koch rulers to adopt measures for the purpose of encouraging commercial enterprises and transactions. Their main concern was to ensure the generation of revenues. In the third quarter of the sixteenth century, Naranārāyaṇa is said to have caused the division of the bigger urban centres into wards called *mahals*.[87] A *mahal* was placed under an official called *Mahaliya* who was charged with the duty of protecting it and reporting everything that was happening therein to the king. Groups (guild?) of professional weavers (*tantis*), oil-pressers (*telis*), potters (*kumars*/*hiras*), and other specialist craftsmen/artisans (e.g. workers in gold, iron, ivory, bell-metal, stone, etc.) were placed under the supervision of officials called *Gomasthas* (or *Mukaddams*), who were appointed by the king.[88] All these developments indicate that the Koch rulers regulated trade and artisanal works. The success of their measures can be gauged from the more or less uniform list of taxes mentioned during their times: *hat-kar* (tax for the use of the market), *ghat-kar* (tolls realized at the river outposts), *jal-kar* (tax on fishing), *dan* (sales tax).[89] An important post was that of the *Chokiyal*/*Chokidar*. His duty was to guard the outpost and collect tolls.[90]

For the first time in the history of Kāmarūpa, the Koch kings introduced some amount of coined money for the purpose of trade and taxation. They minted silver coins called *Narayani* of one-rupee and half-rupee, and a small amount of gold *mohars*.[91] Some taxes were realized in cash. For instance, professional weavers paid a yearly tax of rupees two to the treasury.[92] Perhaps a part of the revenues that were collected in kind was converted into cash for depositing in the *Dewan*; but concrete instances are not forthcoming. In any case the use of coined money seems to have been less important than the barter system and the use of cowries, although there is no doubt that the whole region of northeastern India witnessed the minting of metal coins by the ruling families between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Obviously, the

need to import the metals and the prevalence of subsistence economy inhibited the process of large-scale monetization in the region.

Still, the Koch rulers acquired sufficient wealth to enable them to patronize various socio-cultural activities. Admittedly, whatever information is available for the socio-economic and political developments in the Koch kingdom is largely derived from literary sources. Corroborative information by way of epigraphic material is negligible. The Koch kings issued a few inscriptions to record the construction and rebuilding of temples dedicated to certain Brahmanical deities. The Rock Inscription of the Nīlācala Kāmākhyā Temple, dated 1487 *Śaka* (= A.D. 1565), records that Naranārāyaṇa, king of Koch Behar, and his brother Śukladhvaja (*alias* Chilārāi) caused the rebuilding of the Kāmākhyā-*mandira* over the basement of the original temple on the Nīlācala (in modern Guwahati).[93] The Rock Inscription of the Hayagrīva-Mādhava Temple, dated 1505 *Śaka* (= A.D. 1583), found on the Maṇikūṭa hillock at Hajo, records that Raghudevanārāyaṇa, lord of Kāmarūpa (*Kāmarūpeśvara*), who was tributary to Malladeva (*alias* Naranārāyaṇa) of Koch Behar, had the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava rebuilt.[94] The Rock Inscription of the Pāṇḍunātha-Hari Temple, dated 1507 *Śaka* (= A.D. 1585), found on the Pāṇḍunātha hill to the west of the Nīlācala, records that Raghudevanārāyaṇa caused the construction of the Pāṇḍunātha temple.[95] The Rock Inscription of the Kāmateśvarī Temple, dated 1587 *Śaka* (= A.D. 1665), found at Gosānimāri, within Kāmatāpur, records that Prāṇanārāyaṇa, king of Koch Behar, caused the building of a temple dedicated to Bhavānī (Kāmateśvarī).[96]

The monuments of these religious establishments that have survived in dilapidated condition or in the form of ruins point to the level of organization of manpower and resources that the Koch rulers had attained. Besides, there were other royal undertakings, such as the construction of embankments and roads linking Kāmatāpur with various parts of the kingdom. The most well known was the Gohāin Kamalarāli along the northern bank of the Brahmaputra up to Narayanpur (named after Naranārāyaṇa, who caused the construction of the road) located within the Lakhimpur district in upper Assam. The same king is said to have straightened the course of the Brahmaputra near Hajo by causing the sand to be dug up from the bottom of the river. This was done to facilitate easy movement of boats.[97] Such structural activities attributed to

the Koch kings demonstrate their ability to organize the requisite labour and to pay the specialist masons, craftsmen and architects, among others. What must also be remembered is that the temples would have been placed in the care of the priest-custodians, who, in turn, would have required the services of certain personnel for the upkeep of the establishments. This implies that the Koch kings made certain provisions for their maintenance. As yet no inscription recording a landgrant ascribed to any of the Koch kings has been recovered or reported; but literary sources spoke of the donation of village lands, money and the services of servants and slaves in favour of religious beneficiaries.[98]

That the Koches had developed a practical solution to the problem of labour scarcity and the constant threat of dissensions was not lost on their contemporaries, the Mughals and the Ahoms. Both adopted the same system when they extended their rule over parts of the Brahmaputra valley and the contiguous areas. In time they improvised on the *paik* system and the territorial organization. But these developments fall beyond the scope of this discussion.

The Chutiyas

In contrast to the Koches whose territories were dispersed over a wide area, the Chutiyas seem to have assumed political power in a more or less compact territory — the Sadiya area in upper Assam and the contiguous area falling within Arunachal Pradesh — at some point of time before the entry of the Ahoms thereto. On the basis of a study by Ney Elias,[99] it has been suggested that the history of the Chutiyas could be pushed back to about the seventh century.[100] As far as the extant documents are concerned, the only epigraphic evidence of this area's Brahmanical connection in pre-Ahom times was in the Nagājarī-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Rock Inscription variously dated to the fifth century or a later period;[101] but this source provides no information on the name/names of the people inhabiting the land. Based on the evidence of this inscription we had suggested earlier[102] that in the Sadiya area, (a) sedentary agriculture had become a feature consistent with the emergence of the territorial notion; (b) social stratification had become evident, local 'big men' were set apart from the populace, and customary laws governed the use and occupation of land; and (c) locally dominant elements had come under the influence of

Brahmanical ideals to the extent that they had started adopting — or were mentioned by — Sankritised names. Whether the rulers of the area managed to sustain the diffusion of Brahmanical culture on a continual basis or not is an open question, considering the woeful paucity of source-material. What appears probable, however, is that Brahmanical culture in association with its symbolism for economic/political development had not been erased, especially when set against the backdrop of developments that had been taking place in the territory to the west of Sadiya.

To dilate on the last point, in the lower and central Brahmaputra valley the growing number of inscriptions issued by the kings of pre-Ahom times between the fifth-sixth and twelfth centuries — no matter how widely scattered in space and time — indicated the steady progress of Brahmanical culture. Local elements — aware of the productive potential of the low-lying land in the region — could have collaborated with the descendants of the earliest Brāhmaṇa settlers in the land to promote the use of more advanced techniques of agriculture that seem to have become prevalent in the central and lower Brahmaputra valley in pre-Ahom times. Such techniques necessarily involved the use of drainage technology and iron implements that called for efficient organization of labour and of the land's resources. The evidence of the landgrants demonstrates that the rulers of these portions of the Valley had, to a certain extent, succeeded in achieving this objective. This is known from the more or less uniform list of revenues and of administrative functionaries/political authorities mentioned in the inscriptions assigned to the period between the ninth and the twelfth centuries. [103]

It is obvious that the Chutiyas were influenced by the developments taking place in their neighbourhood. Their tradition, as incorporated in the *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, ascribes their origins to a legendary hero, Bhismak, through a chief named Birpal, who founded the Chutiya dynasty. The Chutiyas trace their movements from the Sonagiri hill (within the proximity of the source of the river Subansiri) to the area corresponding to the modern Lakhimpur district or Majuli within Sibsagar district, and thence to the bank of the river Kundil. This whole area roughly corresponds to the Sadiya area in the present-day Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, a large part of the present Dhemaji and Tinsukia districts, and portions of Dibrugarh in upper Assam.[104]

The Chutiya occupation of the area around the Kundil finds corroboration in two of their inscriptions. The Dhenukhana Copper-plate Inscription,[105] dated Śaka Era 1314 (= A.D.1392), records that (a) Satyanārāyaṇa, son of *nṛpa* (king) Nandi, gifted 600 *puṭis* (*purās*) of land (inclusive of its waters [*bīls*] and two *kuṇḍāvalas* earmarked for mooring boats) by the river Dhavali along with its workers and artisans in the village of Goṭāparā to the son of a Brāhmaṇa named Nārāyaṇa of the Kāśyapa *gotra*; and (b) by Satyanārāyaṇa's order, Pratyakṣanārāyaṇa (a prince/a member of Nandi's family?) also donated, in the same village, 600 *puṭis* of land in the field called Vyaghramari. The inscription seems to have recorded yet another grant to the tune of 200 *puṭis* in favour of a Brāhmaṇa of the Bhārgava *gotra*; but the names of the donee and the donor are not absolutely legible because of the damaged condition of the last lines. All the places mentioned in the inscription have been located in Lakhimpur, around the river Dhal.[106] The Ghilāmarā Copper-plate Inscription of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa,[107] dated Śaka Era 1323 (=A.D. 1401) records his donation of 200 *puṭis* of land in the Bakhanā *grāma* to a Brāhmaṇa. The land was by the Svarnadī, which river has been identified with the Subansiri.[108] The evidence of these two inscriptions shows that the Chutiyas patronized Brāhmaṇas and facilitated their maintenance by grants of land in large areas. Many Brāhmaṇas with their specific *gotras* were mentioned in the list of individuals informed about the grants,[109] thereby indicating conspicuous Brāhmaṇa presence in the vicinity of the transferred land. The donated areas were measured in *puṭis*, which measurement is thought to have been synonymous with *purās*. According to Edward Gait, 2 *purās* are the equivalent of 3 acres.[110] Thus 600 *puṭis* would have comprised an area measuring 900 acres.

Birpal's son and successor, Ratnadhvajpal/Gaurīnārāyaṇa is said to have moved the political centre of the Chutiyas from Sonagiri to Ratanpur/Ratnapur.[111] Some writers have located this place on the northern bank of the Subansiri in Lakhimpur district or in Majuli within Sibsagar district.[112] The same king is said to have built another political headquarters at Sindhukṣetra/Sindhukhetra,[113] on the bank of the river Kundil. According to local tradition it was at this place that one of his sons who had died at Gauḍa was cremated; thenceforth the land became known as Sadiya (from *sa* = corpse; *diya* = given/cremated).[114]

The epigraphic evidence of the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries shows that the political centre of the Chutiyas was Sadhayapuri/ Svadhayapuri. This place has been identified with Kundilnagar (supposedly so called because of its location by the river Kundil) or Bhismaknagar (ostensibly named after the legendary hero, Bhismak).[115] It is said that their kingdom derived its name accordingly. It must be noted however that there is no consensus of opinion regarding the origin of the Chutiyas. The present-day Deori (priestly)-Chutiyas trace their original home to the northwestern portion of the Dibang valley, which they claim to have left because of the recurrent disturbances caused by the Mishmis and the Abors.[116] But some modern writers[117] mentioned two main views on the origin of the Chutiyas: (a) that the Chutiyas were so called because they had originally occupied the *chut* or mountaintop; (b) that the local people had also called the Chutiyas 'Svatis' after the area lying by the Svata lake, the latter's ancestral home. In any case it is clear that the Chutiyas moved down from the mountainous areas on the north of the Brahmaputra to the plains of the Sadiya region. They had definitely come under Brahmanical influence during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, as is borne out by the evidence of their landgrants in favour of Brāhmaṇa beneficiaries. The transfer of workers (including artisans) to the donee, and the demarcation of the boundaries of the donated land both point to the settlement of Brāhmaṇas in land where there was scarcity of labour. This suggestion assumes significance in the absence of references to any land-holdings on the boundaries of the donated land. It indicates that the Chutiya rulers established Brahmanical settlements to facilitate the process of productive exploitation in tracts of virgin territory.

It appears that the Chutiyas, like the rulers of the lower and central Brahmaputra valley, resorted to the mechanism of conflicts and conciliations to assert their political authority and to meet the needs of administration in that part of upper Assam and the adjoining areas over which they claimed suzerainty with varying degrees of success. The relevant portions of the *Deodhai Asam Buranji* bear out the applicability of this policy of the Chutiyas. The evidence indicates that Birpal, the founder of the Chutiya kingdom, began his career as head of sixty families. Under his leadership the Chutiyas seem to have extended the boundaries of

their area of settlement and control in the neighbourhood of the river Subansiri. The same source refers to the relations of the Chutiyas under Birpal's successors with the contemporaneous neighbouring chiefs, viz., those of Rangalugiri, Kalagiri, Nilagiri, Dhavalgiri, Chandangiri and, finally, Svetagiri. It records that a huge army overwhelmed Svetagiri, and those taken captive —such as Brāhmaṇas, weavers (*tantis*), goldsmiths (*sonaris*), carpenters (*sutars*), *kamars* (blacksmiths), and potters (*kumars*) — were settled in various parts of the kingdom. Svetagiri became tributary to the Chutiya king, Gaurīnārāyaṇa (*alias* Ratnadhvajpal), son of Birpal (*alias* Gayapal). Nothing specific is mentioned about the other surrounding areas; whether they shared the same fate as Svetagiri or not is not known. What is obvious, however, is that their allegiance could not have been taken for granted, and the Chutiyas had to take certain precautionary measures to inhibit the hill tribes' likely incursions into the kingdom. One was by constructing a line of forts backed by roads along the foothills, as seems to be attested by the ruins of fortifications that lie at the foot of the hills of Arunachal Pradesh.[118] It was probably on account of the state of political flux engendered by the tribes on the fringes of the Sadiya region that the scene of activity of the Chutiya rulers eventually shifted to the south. Gaurīnārāyaṇa built Ratnapur on the north bank of the Brahmaputra as another political centre, and assumed the name Ratnadhvajpal after establishing it as his capital. It is also obvious that the quest for control of specialist priests who were adept at reading the agricultural calendar, and of specialist artisans capable of catering to the needs of agriculture associated with the use of iron tools underlay the policy of aggrandizement that the Chutiyas pursued. However, their political aspirations in the region seem to have been kept in check by the Ahoms. The latter achieved the objective of maintaining socio-political relations with the various local/sub-regional polities to their own advantage until their complete domination of the entire region. The Chutiyas, on their part, seem to have lost the struggle for political recognition at the regional level, despite concluding matrimonial alliances and diplomatic relations with some of their contemporaries in their neighbourhood and with the rulers of Kamata and Gauḍa.[119] In the mid-fourteenth century the Chutiyas established political relations with the Ahoms who had occupied the area between the rivers Dihing and Dikhu, to the southwest of the Chutiya

kingdom,[120] but they finally capitulated to the growing Ahom suzerainty.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing discussion shows that the post-Pāla period witnessed a surge in multifaceted developments. It saw the rise of new social groups based on their attachment to land. There was the diffusion of the conjoining of the tribal and the territorial identities of the region. There was also the diffusion of locally dominant elements that sought to strengthen their relationship with the primary producers, on the one hand, and with the handful of militarily and ideologically better equipped 'imperial' rulers, on the other. It was a period of economic growth in the sphere of several activities: primary production, cottage industry, and trade. It was the competition for controlling such activities that manifested itself in the aggrandizement policy of the ruling families from different directions, both internal and external. This brought them into conflict with one another. The relevant sources indicate that they tried to resolve the conflicts in different ways. One was by entering into marriage pacts and diplomatic relations, implying that the requisite of upholding their common interests was not lost on them. But in the face of the limited scope for productive exploitation of resources, the competition seems to have been fierce; presumably it was this factor that inhibited political stability, so that it was not possible for any single ruling family to hold on to the reins of authority beyond a brief term.

The sources indicate that the main problem was that of generating the manpower required for productive exploitation. It appears that at no point of time was there sufficient labour — a prerequisite for effectively augmenting production on a conspicuous scale — in Kāmarūpa, even if the technology (such as the plough associated with many of the Bhuyans) for increasing agricultural output was available. In fact, as late as the early twentieth century, Assam was described as a culturable wasteland,[121] i.e. the area of land available for productive exploitation was very large, but since the population was comparatively small it could not be utilized to its full potential. There is nothing to show that the population of the region was denser before the twentieth century. Rather, scarcity of labour in

relation to the area available for production seems to have had a bearing on the evolution of socio-political institutions in the region, which, unlike those of the greater part of the Indian mainland, inhibited the emergence of a truly caste-based society even up to the advent of the British into the land. There were certain instances of rulers resorting to keeping slaves to enhance the level of their material comfort, as happened among the three ruling families under study; but apparently slaves did not play a substantial role in the economy of the region, and so they have been left out of the discussion.

Under the circumstances discussed above, Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa experienced some sort of continual reinvention in terms of the socio-political order consistent with the evolving socio-economic exigencies between roughly the thirteenth and the seventeenth centuries. In fact, this is the recurring theme that is reflected in the surviving documents ascribed to the ruling families of the region, hence the depiction of the ground realities is by and large incidental. The process of the region's reinvention was very gradual, and the period was certainly nothing that could be justifiably described as signaling the 'decline' and sudden 'fall' of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. Perhaps a more in-depth investigation into the mode of production characterizing the period would increase our understanding of the overall developments in the region. This exercise is best left to future researchers.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See Edward Gait, *History of Assam* (London, 1905; revised edn. 1926 [References cited in this paper are from the latter edn.]). Cf., among other recent works, S.L.Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam* (Delhi, 1985; reprint 1997), especially Chapters 8 and 11; Jahnabi Gogoi (Nath), *Agrarian System of Medieval Assam* (New Delhi, 2002), especially pp. 17–24.
   In historical studies early 'Assam' is used in the context of areas that cover much of the present-day northeastern region of India, and include portions of North Bengal and Bangladesh. Cf. the papers in Jadunath Sarkar (ed.), *History of Bengal, Vol. II* (Dacca, 1948; reprint 1973, Patna); see also R.C. Majumdar, *History of Medieval Bengal* (Calcutta, 1973).
2. See, among useful works dealing with historiography, A. Momigliano, *Studies in Historiography* (London, 1966); idem, *The Classical Foundations of Modern History* (Berkeley, 1990); Anna Green and Kathy Troup (eds.), *The Houses of History* (Manchester, 1999).
   Notably, the Rankean approach continues to exert considerable influence on historical studies in Northeast India down to the present day, as though

the writers learnt the craft from his work: See Leopold von Ranke, *The Secret of World History: Selected Writings on the Art and Science of History*, ed. R. Wines (New York, 1981).

3. A well-known collection of papers representing modern historical research on the problem of the cycles of the destiny of empires is found in S.N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *The Decline of Empires* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967).
4. In the context of pre-Ahom Kāmarūpa these points have been raised elsewhere. See Mignonette Momin, "Studies in the Political and Socio-Economic History of Pre-Ahom Assam," *North-Eastern Hill University Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, I, 1 (New Delhi, 1998), pp. 1-20; also idem, "Interpreting Epigraphic Sources of Northeast India," *Proceedings of North-East India History Association* (hereafter, *PNEIHA*), 20th Session, Dibrugarh (Shillong, 2000), especially, pp. 50–53.
5. See Mignonette Momin, "Acquisition and Distribution of 'Wealth': An Inquiry into the Rise of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa," in Mignonette Momin and Cecile A. Mawlong (eds.), *Society and Economy in North-East India, Volume 1* (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 196–233.
6. This point will be qualified in *infra*.
7. For the reference, *supra*, 5n. Significant secondary sources of information on the pre-Ahom period include, among others, the works of K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa* (Shillong, 1933); 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* (Gauhati, 1959; 3rd edn. 1987, New Delhi. The references cited in this paper are from the 3rd edn).
8. The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva (ed. Arthur Venis, *Epigraphia Indica* [hereafter, *EI*], II, pp. 347–358; ed. M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Gauhati University, 1978, pp. 273–290). See ll. 3, 6, 12 & also vv. 3–5 of the grant.
9. The Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva (ed. F. Kielhorn, *EI*, V, pp. 181–188; ed. M.M. Sharma, op. cit., pp. 291–301), vv. 3–10.
10. The Kamauli grant (v. 9) mentioned that Vaidyadeva had served as a minister (*saciva*) under Kumārapāla, 'lord of Gauḍa' (ibid., vv. 12–13), and that the latter had appointed the former ruler over Prāgjyotiṣabhukti in Kāmarūpamaṇḍala (ibid., also v. 28, ll. 47–50).
    For the historical geography of Gauḍa, see R.C. Majumdar (ed.), *The History of Bengal, Vol. I* (Calcutta, 1943; reprint 1971, Delhi), Chapter IV, especially pp. 55–58, and footnotes for ready references. The boundaries of Gauḍa kept fluctuating between the late-Gupta period and the sixteenth century, but for the greater part of her history the land more or less corresponded to the northern and western portions of Bengal. Also see *idem*, *History of Mediaeval Bengal* (loc. cit.), relevant portions.
11. D. Sarma (ed. *Kāmarūpaśāsanāvalī*, Gauhati, 1981, Part I, pp. 88–90), however, thought that Vaidyadeva later became known as Arimatta, who, according to the chronicles of Assam, erected many fortifications in Kāmarūpa upto Majuli in upper Assam. Based on this identification, Sarma believed that Vaidyadeva ruled over the entire northern bank of the Brahmaputra upto Majuli in the east.
    There are divergent opinions regarding the ruling status and territorial affiliation of Vallabhadeva. See, among other works, those of Padmanath Bhattacharya, *Kāmarūpāśāsanāvalī* (Rangpur Sahitya Parishad, 1931), p. 43, also n.; K.L. Barua, op. cit., pp. 128f.; P.C. Choudhury, op. cit., pp. 254f.

12. See Mignonette Momin, "Contextualizing Origin Myths of Northeast India," *PNEIHA*, 22nd Session, Tezpur (Shillong, 2002), Section II; also idem, "Rethinking *Varnasramadharma* in Kamarupa," *PNEIHA*, 21st Session, Imphal (Shillong, 2001).
13. *Supra*, 5n., for references to these points.
14. Ibid.
15. *Supra*, 10n. on Gauḍa.
16. See H.G. Raverty's edition and English translation of Minhāj-ud-dīn Sirāj's *Tabaqāt-i Nāsirī* (London, 1881; reprint 1970, New Delhi), p. 560. According to this source, these tribes had "Turki countenances" and spoke a "different idiom" from the languages of India proper.
17. Bakhtiyār Khaljī's expedition to Tibet via Kāmarūpa, and the disaster that befell him in Kāmarūpa as he was trying to return to Bengal, has been described in ibid. See also Ghulam Hussain Salim's *Riyāz-us-Salātin*, tr. and ed. Abdus Salam (Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1902; reprint 1975, Delhi). This latter work, ascribed to about the eighteenth century, drew its evidence from the earlier mediaeval Muslim records for the study of the history of Bengal. Significantly, the evidence of the Kānāi-barasī-bowā Rock Inscription dated Śaka 1127/A.D. 1205 (in K.L. Barua, op. cit., pp. 211–213; ed. Maheswar Neog, *Prāchya-Śāsanāvalī*, Gauhati University, 1974, p. 141; ed. D. Sarma, op. cit., Part II, pp. 140f. & Part III, p. 226) is taken to be a corroboration of this event. For further details, see F.A. Qadri, "Society and Economy in Kāmarūpa in the Early 13th Century as Reflected in the Context of Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyār Khaljīs Invasion," in Mignonette Momin and Cecile A. Mawlong (eds.), op. cit., pp. 60–68.
18. *Tabaqāt-i Nāsirī* (loc. cit.). For the name of the region, see ibid., passim; also, *Riyāz-us-Salātin* (loc. cit.), passim.
19. Based on the evidence of the *Tabaqāt-i Nāsirī*, H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson (in their work, *The History of Muhammadan India, II*, Aligarh edn. [with the Introduction by M. Habib], 1952, pp. 311f.) spoke of thirty-five mountain passes between Kamarupa and Tibet, which were used for the horse trade. Cf. other writers who mentioned the mountain passes of Bhutan and Tibet that were in use upto the British period: R.B. Pemberton, *Report on Bootan* (Calcutta, 1839), p. 144; W. Hamilton, *Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of Hindoostan and the Adjacent Countries, II* (London, 1920), pp. 743f.; V. Ball (tr.), *Tavernier's Travels in India, II* (reprint 1975, Delhi), p. 221. T.S. Murty (in his paper, "Early History of Mon-Tawang," in *Himalaya Frontier in Historical Perspective* [Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1986], p.56) referred to Karmapa Rangchung Dorjee's founding of the earliest Buddhist shrines in Tawang (in the western portion of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering Bhutan) in the twelfth century. On the basis of this evidence Nicholas Rhodes (in his paper, "The Trade Routes of Early Assam — the Light shed by Coinages," *PNEIHA*, 24th Session, Guwahati [Shillong, 2004], pp. 53f., also 21n.) suggests that a relatively easy route had been established from Guwahati to Tibet through Tawang and the area now corresponding to eastern Bhutan, thus prompting Bakhtiyār Khaljī to try and control the trade passing through that route.
20. Interestingly, in the *Riyāz-us-Salātin* (loc. cit.) only the Rangpur-Rangamati areas (of modern Goalpara district) and Sylhet were located within the broad territory named Kāmrū/Kānwrū/Kāmrud, while the territory to its east was called Asham. Presumably the place derived its name from the Ahoms

(softened version of Asom/Ashoṃ). Significantly, this evidence shows that the name of the Ahom kingdom predates the British. The British Anglicised 'Asham' into 'Assam'.

21. *Supra*, 17n. for references to this inscription.
22. *Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī* (loc. cit.), pp. 571, 587–589, 595.
23. Ed. P.C. Choudhury, in the *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal, IX*, I, March 1971; ed. D. Sarma, op. cit., Part II, p. 146 & Part III, p. 228. The latter has essentially reproduced the former's text reading and translation of the inscription.
24. *Deodhai Asom Buranji*, ed. S.K. Bhuyan (Gauhati, 1932; reprint 1962, Gauhati); *Kamarupar Buranji*, ed.
S.K. Bhuyan (Gauhati, 1930; 2nd edn. 1958, Gauhati); Shaikh Abu-'l Fāzl Allami, *Akbar-nāmah*, Vols. I–III, tr. H. Beveridge, (Bibliotheca Indica Series, Calcutta, 1927–1939; reprint Delhi, 1973); idem, *Āīn-i-Akbarī*, Vols. I–III (tr. H. Blochmann, Vol. I; revised D.C. Phillot, Calcutta, 1927; tr. H.S. Jareet, Vols. II–III; revised J.N. Sarkar, 1948–49, Calcutta).
25. *Supra*, 24n. for references. *Infra*, for illustrations on the heterogeneous background of the Bhuyans.
26. For the chronology of the Sena rulers, see R.C. Majumdar (ed.), *The History of Bengal, Vol. I* (Dacca, 1943; reprint 1971, Delhi), Chapter VIII.
27. Ibid., see also S.L. Baruah, op. cit., p. 196.
28. The *Baro Bhuyans* of Bengal find mention in R.C. Majumdar, *History of Mediaeval Bengal*, pp. 87, 168f. Majumdar (see ibid., p.168) thought that the *Baro Bhuyans* "did not represent any of the well established families of the land and they fought only for the protection of what they possessed." However, he did not quite substantiate this statement. Cf. Jadunath Sarkar (ed.), op. cit., p. 226.
29. Drawing on the evidence of the local and Mughal sources that mentioned both 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' Bhuyans, D. Nath (in his book, *History of the Koch Kingdom 1515–1615*, Delhi, 1989, p. 21) categorized the Bhuyans as "a class rather than a caste of people." Cf. R.C. Majumdar op. cit., p. 168.
30. The *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī* was also called *Samudranārāyaṇar Vaṃśāvalī*, because the history of the Koches was written (between 1791 and 1806) under orders from Samudranārāyaṇa, *Rāja* of Darrang: ed. N.C. Sarmah in Assamese (Pathsala, 1973).
31. The Kamauli grant, loc. cit., v. 9.
32. See *infra*, under The Koches, for more references.
33. Husam-ud-dīn Iwāz, *jagirdar* (i.e. recipient of a territorial revenue assignment in lieu of salary) of Ganguri, took the name Ghiyās-ud-dīn Iwāz Khaljī (F.A. Qadri, op. cit., p. 262, reads the name as Ghiyath al-Dīn Iwaz Khalji) on ascending the throne of Lakhnauti in 1213 with the support of the Khaljī *amīrs*. In 1227, while on an expedition to Kāmarūpa he lost his throne to the Sultan of Delhi, Nāsir-ud-dīn Mahmūd, son of Iltutmish. In the battle that followed the same year for the recovery of his throne, Ghiyās-ud-dīn lost his life. (For references, *supra*, 22n. For details, see R.C. Majumdar, op. cit., pp. 4–5). Whether the Bhuyans of Kāmarūpa transferred their allegiance thereafter to Nāsir-ud-dīn or not remains unknown.
34. *Riyāz-us-Salātin* (loc. cit.), pp. 132f.
35. For a fairly detailed account of the *karkhana*, see M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb* (Bombay, 1966), pp. 157f.
36. *Ahom Buranji*, tr. G.C. Barua (Calcutta, 1930), p. 42.

37. The *Katha Guru Carit*, ed. U.C. Lekharu (Nalbari, 1952), is part of the Vaiṣṇava literature that provides otherwise unknown information on aspects of the political and socio-economic situation in pre-British Assam.
38. See M. Neog, op. cit., pp. 51f.
39. Ibid., pp. 138–141 (under Introduction, English translation of the Rāuttakoṇcī grant from the Sanskrit text). Neog admitted to reproducing the Sanskrit lines of the epigraph from N.N. Vasu, *Social History of Kāmarūpa, Vol. I* (Calcutta, 1922), pp. 24–49, and also the latter's rendering of those lines in English. Still, Neog deserves credit for making suggestions for improving upon Vasu's readings of the original record and English translation of the text.
40. For such developments in Bengal, see R.C. Majumdar, D.C. Ganguly and R.C. Hazra in R.C. Majumdar (ed.), *The History of Bengal, Vol. I*, loc. cit., Chapter XV, especially, pp. 569f. Cf. for developments in South India, R. Narasimha Rao, *Corporate Life in Medieval Āndhradeśa* (Secunderabad, 1967), p. 34; Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi, 1980), pp. 85, 103.
41. Instances of Brāhmaṇa donees designated as *rājaputras* in northern India have been cited in R.S. Tripathi, *History of Kanauj* (Banaras, 1937), p. 358.
42. The situation is parallel to that of Bengal in the case of the *rājaputras*: see R.C. Majumdar (ed.), op. cit., p. 570. Majumdar *et al.* drew on the evidence of the *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa* and the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* to make some pointed statements on the development of the mixed castes in Bengal.
43. There are no actual references to the social category of the *asat*-Śūdras in the available sources of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. But this category became frequently mentioned in the records ascribed to other parts of India particularly from the post-eleventh century onwards: See, for illustrations, P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. II* (Poona, 1931), Part 1, pp. 121f; Burton Stein, op. cit.
44. *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*, Chapter 13: See R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas, Vol. II* (Calcutta, 1963), pp. 437ff.
45. *Bordowa-Guru Carit*, ed. M. Neog (Gauhati, 1977), cited in idem, op. cit. Cf. Ramcharan Thakur's *Guru Carit*, ed. H.N. Datta Baruah (3rd edn. 1978, Nalbari), vv. 2585–2588, cited in D.Nath, op. cit., p. 22 [25n].
46. *Supra*, 11n.
47. Edward Gait (*op. cit.*, pp. 38–40) first referred to the origins of the Bhuyans of Assam. Since Gait's times there has been little additional information: *Supra*, 36n–38n. & 45n.
48. D. Nath (op. cit., p. 21) noted that in lower Assam, the Bhuyans were mostly the Kayasthas, who "monopolised" the high administrative functions, and the Kalitas, "who monopolized trade and commerce." This point compels further investigation, if only to increase our understanding of the socio-economic developments of the period under study.
49. *Supra*, 16n, 18n.
50. For references to this source, *supra*, 30n.
51. See v. 51 of the chronicle.
52. *Kamrupar Buranji*, ed S.K. Bhuyan [in Assamese] (3rd edn. 1958 Gauhati); F.B. Buchanon, *An Account of Assam*, ed. S.K. Bhuyan (2nd edn. 1963 Gauhati). According to this version Bisu inherited his father's and maternal grandfather's entire domain.
53. Ibid.

54. *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī*, loc. cit., vv. 90–122.
55. Ibid., v. 144.
56. G. Barua, *Asam Buranji* (Gauhati, 1972 reprint), p. 41: Quoted in S.L. Baruah, op. cit., p. 204.
57. For instance, Biswa Singha is said to have taken eighteen wives from different places within and outside his kingdom: see the *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī*, vv. 230–235.
58. For details on the political events and the struggle for territorial control in the region interlinking the Koches, the Mughals and the Ahoms between the last quarter of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries, see especially D. Nath (op. cit., Chapter 4); S.L. Barua (op. cit., pp. 212–219).
59. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 131.
60. See J.P. Wade, *An Account of Assam*, ed. Benudhar Sarma (North Lakhimpur, 1927). Based on the English translation of two chronicles in Assamese and Tai-Ahom respectively, this work gives the history of the Koch kings from the earliest times upto the establishment of their tributary relations with the British.
61. *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī* (loc. cit.), vv. 53–54.
62. Ibid.
63. S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), op. cit., p. 37: quoted in D. Nath, op. cit., p. 40, 7n.
64. *Katha Guru Carit* (loc. cit.), p. 208.
65. See C. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia* (The Hague, 1924), pp. 122f., 128.
66. *Deodhai Asom Buranji* (loc. cit.), v. 209; *Ahom Buranji* (loc. cit.), p. 40.
67. J.N. Ghosh, *Rajopakhyana* (Calcutta, 1974), tr. William Robinson (*ms.*, DHAS, Gauhati): quoted in D. Nath, op. cit., pp. 36, 43, and 91n.
68. The conquest and occupation of Kāmatā (in Kāmarūpa) by the Sultan of Bengal is recorded in the *Riyāz-us-Salātin*, loc. cit. The chronicles of the Ahoms provide corroborative evidence for the occurrence of the event.
69. The organization of the *paiks* is mentioned in the *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī*, vv. 196–197, 315–316, 548.
70. Amanatullah Ahmed Khan Choudhury, *Koch Beharer Itihas* [in Bengali] (Koch Behar, 1936), passim: cited in M. Neog, op. cit., p. 222; D. Nath, op. cit. See also S.C. Ghoshal (tr.), *A History of Cooch Behar* [the English translation of Amanatullah Ahmed Khan Choudhury's work] (Cooch Behar, 1942), p. 157.
71. *Katha Guru Charit* (loc. cit.), p. 658.
72. S.C. Ghoshal (tr.), op. cit., p. 70.
73. *Katha Guru Carit* (loc. cit.), p. 237. Cf. H.N. Choudhury, *The Koch Behar State and Its Land Revenue Settlement* (Cooch Behar, 1903), p. 442.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., pp. 489, 549. Cf. *Katha Guru Carit* (loc. cit.), p. 95.
76. William Robinson (tr.), op. cit., p. 206.
77. See the *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī* (loc. cit.), vv. 128–130, 140, 312.
78. *Supra*, under the section, The Bhuyans.
79. *Katha Guru Carit* (loc. cit.) p. 137; *Bordowa Guru Carit* (loc. cit.), p. 166.
80. References to these articles native to Koch Bihar abound in C. Wessels, op. cit., passim. See also H. Blochmann, "Koch Bihar, Koch Hajo and Assam in the 16th and 17th centuries according to the Akbarnamah, the Padishahnamah and the Fathiya-i-Ibriyah," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1872, Vol. LXI, Part I.

81. For references, *supra*, 78n., 79n.
82. R.B. Pemberton, *Report on Bootan* (loc. cit.), pp. 49f., 142, 144, 181f.
83. See Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration* (Patna, 1921; reprint 1972 Calcutta), pp. 17f., 45.
84. Based on Shihāb-ud-dīn Tālish's *Fathiya-i-Ibriyah*, H. Blochman (op. cit.) referred to the quality of boats produced in the region of Kāmarūpa. See also U.N. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms* (Jorhat, 1942), p. 202.
85. Some of these overland routes are mentioned in William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam* (Calcutta, 1841; reprint 1975 Delhi), pp. 245f. (of the reprint). For more detailed references, see C. Wessels, op. cit., pp. 128f.
86. *Katha Guru Carit* (loc. cit.), passim.
87. Ramcharan Thakur, *Guru Carit* (loc. cit.), v. 3606: cited in D. Nath, op. cit., pp. 128, 132 (108n).
88. *Katha Guru Carit* (loc. cit.), pp. 86, 103, 123, 250, 267, 307, 331. The reference to the *Mukkadam* as a sort of superintendent of artisans occurs in the *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī* (loc. cit.), v. 537.
89. *Katha Guru Carit* (loc. cit.), pp. 107f.
90. Ibid., p. 582.
91. Ibid., pp. 58, 79, 128, 188.
92. Ibid., p. 58.
93. Ed. M. Neog, op. cit., p. 142.
94. Ibid., p. 143.
95. Ibid., pp. 143f.
96. Ibid., p. 145.
97. *Darrang Rāja Vaṃśāvalī*, vv. 450–451.
98. Ibid., vv.548-552, 681–684; for further references, H.N. Choudhury, op. cit., p.441.
99. Ney Elias, *Introductory Sketch of the History of the Shans in Upper Burma and Western Yunnan* (Calcutta, 1876). Elias had used the evidence of the Assamese chronicle, *Deodhai Asam Buranji* (loc. cit.).
100. Based on ibid., S.L. Baruah (op. cit., p. 184) suggested that the history of the Chutiyas could be traced back to "at least the middle of the 7th century A.D., but unless sufficient materials of the earlier times come to light, their history cannot be traced beyond [*sic*] the fall of the Palas towards the close of the 12th century."
101. The Nagājarī-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Stone Inscription, ed. P.C. Choudhury, in *Journal of Assam Research Society* (hereafter *JARS*), XX, 1972–73, pp. 3–5; ed. D.C. Sircar, in *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, VII, 1973–74; ed. M.M. Sharma, op. cit., pp. 303–305.
102. For the reference, *supra*, 5n.
103. Ibid.
104. See S.K. Bhuyan, op. cit.
105. Maheswar Neog (ed.), *Prāchya-Śāsanāvalī*, loc. cit., pp. 186–188.
106. For this identification, see Sarveswar Barua, "Some Ancient Relics Found in North Lakhimpur," *JARS*, III, p. 2.
107. Maheswar Neog (ed.), op. cit., pp. 188f.
108. Sarveswar Barua (op. cit.). He also identified Bakhanāgrāma with Bakhamukh on the right bank of the river Subansiri.

109. See the Dhenukhanā grant of Satyanārāyaṇa and Pratyakṣanārāyaṇa; the Ghilāmarā grant of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa.
110. Edward Gait, op. cit., p. 240.
111. See S.L. Baruah, op. cit., p. 183.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid., p. 185.
115. Sarveswar Barua, op. cit.
116. P.C. Saikia, *The Dibongiyas* (Delhi, 1976), p. 12.
117. R.M. Nath, *The Background of Assamese Culture* (Gauhati, 1948), p. 64; S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society* (Nagaon, 1988), p. 59.
118. Local traditions attribute these archaeological remains to the Chutiyas. Unfortunately, nobody has taken up systematic exploration of the remains.
119. See S.L. Baruah, op. cit., pp. 184f.
120. Ibid., p. 186.
121. Edward Gait (op. cit., pp. 360-362) wrote that since there was labour scarcity in Assam in the mid-19th century, tea garden labourers had to be imported from elsewhere, i.e. from Bengal, and especially from Chota Nagpur and its 'neighbourhood.' He also mentioned that many of those immigrant labourers stayed on in the land as cultivators.