A CULTURAL HISTORY OF ASSAM

of the

EARLY PERIOD: 400 A.D. - 1200 A.D.

- by -

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Presented for the Degree of Ph.D. of

the University of London

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(Archaeology of Assam)
1947.

LOAN COPY.
ABSTRACT of a THESIS

- on -

A Cultural History of Assam of the Early Period, 6400 - 1200 A.D.

The Thesis submitted forms a part of a comprehensive work on the Cultural History of Assam, comprising the various aspects of the life of the people. The materials were collected in India as well as during the course of my study in England. The present volume contains an account of Assam from c. 400 A.D. to 1200 A.D., i.e., to the advent of the Ahoms.

Assam, known as Kamarūpa, figured during this period as a well-known Hindu kingdom. But so far no book has been written delineating the multifarious activities of the country. The present work strives to depict the life of the people of the period with special reference to their economic and social conditions, their religion and religious institutions, and finally, their achievements in the fields of art, literature and architecture. Since the cultural life of a country cannot properly be evaluated without a thorough understanding of its political history, a chapter on political history has also been included. In the treatment of this chapter, an endeavour has been made to bring new facts to notice and to study the known facts from a fresh viewpoint.
The work is divided into seven chapters. It opens with a general introduction, and deals with the physical background, including geographical divisions, population and terminology. It includes a sub-section on Early Geography: The Literary Tradition, in which all available references from early texts are collected and discussed. In the light of this information, a map of ancient Assam is reconstructed for the first time.

The second chapter is on Political History. The third chapter, on Administration, deals with the theory of kingship and systems of central and local administration. A sub-section is added on Military Organisation.

The fourth chapter is on Economic Conditions, in which the nature of village and town, the various aspects of the land-system and tenure, agriculture, crafts and industries, and trade and trade-routes to Magadha, Burma and China are discussed.

Chapter Five on Society deals with the various classes of people, their occupations and their different social institutions. It is completed with a survey of Learning and Literature of the period.

The next chapter traces the history and the spread of different religious creeds, such as Saivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism and Buddhism, along with their respective rites and rituals.

The closing chapter is devoted to Fine Art, which is
divided into three sections, namely, (i) Architecture, (ii) Sculpture and (iii) Iconography. Almost all the available materials relating to the archaeology of Assam of the period are systematised here for the first time. An attempt has also been made to throw light on the principles on which Assamese art is based, as well as upon the sources from which its aims and ideals are derived. Finally it ends with an assessment of Assamese art.

The chief sources of information of the author are the contemporary inscriptions, literary works, and accounts of foreign travellers. In respect to the first, the writer may say that he has thoroughly studied the inscriptions relating to Assam history, and has been able to extract even minute bits of information useful for his work. The literary source mainly centres round the Epics, Purāṇas, the works of Kautilya, Kālidāsa, Bāna and others. One of the foreign travellers who visited Assam during the period was Huen Tsang. His invaluable account is very critically examined.

In addition to these specific sources, the relevant modern publications, books written by eminent authorities, and their contributions in learned journals, have also been read and fully utilised. All sources quoted in the work are indicated in the foot-notes. The Thesis concludes with three appendices and a bibliography.
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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

I. Physical Background.
I. Location.

Assam is the frontier province of India on the north-east. The province comprises the whole of the valley of the Brahmaputra down to the point where that river emerges into the Bengal delta and takes a sudden southward curve. It also contains the greater portion of the valley of the Surma, that is to say, almost up to the junction of that stream with the Megna, together with the intervening range of hills which forms the watershed between them. The administrative changes of 1912 left the province in the form of a triangular wedge, thrust in between Bengal and Burma.

The boundaries of Assam lie between latitudes 28°18' and 24° North, and longitudes 90°46' and 97°4 East. It contains an area of 67,334 square miles, half of which consists of hilly or mountainous country. The total area of the province is about the same as that of England and Wales, plus a third of Scotland.(1)

On three sides, the province is shut in by great mountain ranges, inhabited by people, mostly of Mongolian stock. To the north lie the Himalayan regions of Bhutan and Tibet. Below the high mountains is a range of sub-Himalayan hills, inhabited

(1) Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam, Shillong, 1884, pp.1 ff; Census Report, Assam, 1931.
to the west by small races of Bhotia origin, and further eastward by Tibeto-Burman tribes, Akas, Daflas, Miris, Abors, and Mishmis. To the north-east lie the Mishmi Hills, curving round the head of the Brahmaputra Valley. With reference to these northern frontier tracts, it is noteworthy that the international boundary between Assam and Tibet has never been defined. However, in 1914 a tentative agreement was reached, embodying a line on the map called the McMahon Line. Continuing to the east is the Patkai range, which defines the western boundary of Ava, the intervening ranges being inhabited chiefly by various tribes of Nagas, and the native state of Manipur. Though the great natural boundary between Assam and Burma consists of a tangled mass of mountains whose summits rise to 12,000 ft, yet the geographical barriers are not insuperable; the passes crossing these mountainous regions are actually not very difficult, and inter-communication has been plentiful and constant. To the south lie the Lushai Hills, Hill Tippera, and the Bengal districts of Mymensing and Rangpur. Here, also, is the native state of Koch Behar, which was once an integral part of Kamrupa (Assam).

II. Geographical Divisions.

Assam is, therefore, divided physically into two main parts, the highlands of the frontier tracts to the north and

east, and the plains below. The plains consist of two great river valleys, that of the Brahmaputra, which is historically Assam proper, and that of the Surma, consisting of the modern administrative districts of Sylhet and Cachar. The area of the Brahmaputra Valley is 24,283 square miles, while that of the Surma Valley is about 7,506 square miles. Between these two valleys lie the broken hills of the Assam range comprising the administrative districts of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the North-Cachar Hills (sub-division), and the Naga Hills. The two river valleys and the central block of hills therefore occupy the arena formed by the high mountains.

The Southern Valley takes its name from the river Surma, which rises on the southern slopes of the Naga Hills district, and, thence, flows south through the Manipur Hills. The Surma comprises the two districts of Cachar and Sylhet, and is quite distinct from the Brahmaputra Valley, which is Assam proper. Geographically it is a part of the low-lying district of Mymensing of Bengal. Historically Sylhet was never a part of Assam; linguistically, it is predominantly Bengali-speaking district. Its existence as a district of Assam is primarily for administrative purposes and only dates from 1874.

(3) Census Report, Assam, 1931.
(4) E.I., XII, pp. 67 ff; Kāmarūpa Sāasanāvalī, pp. 4 ff; Gupta, however, contends that during the 700 A.D. Sylhet was included in Assam. Vide Identification of Brahmatara, 1 H.Q, vii, pp. 743 ff. Also Bhattacharji, J.A.S.B, 1935, p. 419 ff.
Caohar was originally an independent state. It came under the British possession in 1830, and was subsequently attached to Assam as an administrative unit. (6)

Through the heart of the main northern valley runs the great river called in Sanskrit the Brahmaputra or Sri Lauhitya. In Assamese it is called Lohit or Luit. It enters the northeastern corner of Assam through the Mishmi Hills and turning nearly due west passes through all the districts of the north Assam. It is the chief artery and highway of Assam. For generations the Assamese have watered their fields with its life-giving floods and drunk of its blessed water; their whole history and culture are intimately connected with the Brahmaputra, the son of Brahma. (8)

The Brahmaputra Valley comprises the modern districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, and the Frontier Tracts of Balipara and Sadiya. It consists of a wide alluvial plain, about 450 miles in length, with an average breadth of about 50 miles, lying almost east and west in its lower portion, but in its upper half trending somewhat to the


(8) The legendary account of the origin of the Brahmaputra is given at length in the Kālikā Purāṇa, Ch. 82.
north-east. The lower ranges of the Himalayas rise abruptly from the plain; to the south is the elevated plateau, or, rather, succession of plateaus, called the Assam range, irregularly broken at its eastern and western extremities, and along its northern face, but in its central portion, from the eastern border of the Garo Hills to the watershed of the Dibang, forming a region of table-land and rolling uplands. The broadest part of the valley is where the river divides the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, below which the isolated block of the Mikir Hills on the south (a mass of mountains over 3,000 square miles in area cut off from the main Assam range by the valley of the Dibang, Langpher and Jamuna rivers), and the projecting group of the Dafla Hills to the north, suddenly contract it. Forty miles lower down it widens out. At the lower end of the Nowgong district it is again restricted by the Khasi Hills, among the spurs of which the river makes its way through Guwahati. Once again, it is almost completely shut in just to the west of that town, below the temple-crowned hill of Nilachal or Kamakhya, where it is only some 800 yards broad. Beyond this point the hills recede again and the valley widens as far as Goalpara, situated on a spur of the Garo Hills. Here at its confluence with the Manah, between the rocks of Jogighopa and Pagla Tek is the "Gate of Assam". Immediately beyond this point the valley again widens, and at Dhubri finally opens out into the great delta of Bengal.\(^{(9)}\)

6.

The ethnological and social conditions of the three basic divisions of the province are as diverse as their physical characteristics. It has been already said that Sylhet, comprising the major part of the Surma valley, is geographically to be identified with the neighbouring districts of Eastern Bengal. Until the last century, it was always considered, even administratively, as part of Bengal. Not only do the people speak Bengali, but they differ in no way, either ethnically or culturally, from the people of Bengal. The people of the hill districts, on the other hand, are of Mongolian stock, speak their own tongues, believe in their own distinctive tribal cults, and have not as yet to any great extent turned to Hinduism.(10)

As has been pointed out, the Brahmaputra valley is a compact geographical unit. It will be seen in the next chapter that Assam proper, which at present is co-terminous only with the six districts of the great valley, in early times included the whole of Eastern Bengal down to the sea, as well as a part of Bihar, and the rugged mountains of Bhutan.(11)

Assam has always held a distinct and independent political existence, though her political frontiers have advanced or receded according to her prosperity, and at times her area

varied greatly from what it is today. It must, however, be noted that although the political boundaries of the country have changed from age to age, its geographical limits have been marked out by nature in such a manner as to ensure that it retained its cultural identity through the ages. The unbroken unity of its history is the result of the geographical unity of the area of the Brahmaputra Valley which is the heart of Assam.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Assam should be racially and linguistically homogenous; that is to say, its inhabitants form a distinct entity among the peoples of India, united by a common tongue, an Aryan dialect of great antiquity. Even in the early part of the seventh century, Hiuen Tsang was able to report that the language of Assam differed a little from that of Mid-India. (12)

III. Origin of the Name Assam.

The modern name of the province, Assam, is actually of quite recent origin. It is connected with the Shan invaders who entered the Brahmaputra Valley in the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D., and who were known as Āhoms. The tradition of the Āhoms, themselves, is that the present name is derived from Assama in the sense of "unequalled" or "peerless".

They say that this was the term applied to them at the time of their invasion of the valley by the local tribes, in token of their admiration of the way in which the Āhom king first conquered and then conciliated them. Kakati suggests that "Asama", "peerless", may be a latter-day Sanskritisation of an earlier form, "Āchām". In Tāi Chām means, "to be defeated". With the Assamese prefix ā, Āsām would mean "undefeated", "conquerors". If this is its origin, from the people, the name was subsequently applied to the country. However, another derivation has been suggested. "The name Assam (Āsām)", observed Baden-Powell, "is most probably traceable to (the Boro) Hā-com = the low or level country." In this case, it was the country which gave its name to the people.

IV. People.

Without going into debatable anthropological details, the present population of the province may be divided into three main linguistic groups. These three peoples speak Indo-Aryan, Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto Chinese, and Austro-Asiatic. When exactly the Aryan-speakers came to the valley of the Brahmaputra, we cannot say. But there is hardly any doubt

(15) The Indian Village Community, p.136.
that they arrived at a fairly early period, either as the result of invasion, or by means of peaceful penetration. Assam's early contact with Aryan India and its gradual development as an Aryan settlement will be discussed in the next chapter.

The oldest Indo-Chinese language spoken in Assam belongs to the Mon-Khmer sub-family, which has been named by Schmidt, the "Austro" family of languages. Schmidt claims that it extends from Assam across Further India to Cambodia, and thence through Polynesia and Micronesia to Eastern Island, on the coast of South America. It is worth noting, in passing, that Hindu dynasties once to have reigned over peoples of this race in the Further East, as well as in Assam. Gait, in his History of Assam, quotes the case of an Indian King, Samuda, who ruled in Upper Burma in A.D. 105, and also that of Hindus who led the Tchamps or Shans in their conquests of the mouths of the Mekong in A.D. 280. These Hindus, as Gait says, must have passed through Assam. It is possible that Mon-Khmer peoples invaded and gave their language temporarily to much of North-Eastern India, as well as to parts of Burma. But the only Mon-Khmer tongue surviving in Assam is that of the Khasias, now inhabiting and giving their name to the mountains.


(17) pp. 9-10.
between Kāmarūp and Sylhet. It is not easy to say how much
the Austric speaking peoples contributed to the racial make-up
of Assam. But it is clear that their culture still survives
in many existing Assamese institutions, customs and manners.
A glance at the map of Assam will show how many place and
river names bear witness to the Austric substratum.(18)

The next wave of Indo-Chinese invasion is represented by
the various peoples speaking Tibeto-Burmese languages.(19)
These have three main groups of dialects. The first of them
is Nāgā, spoken in and to the east of Nāgā hills. The second
is Kuki-Chin, spoken in Manipur, Cachar, the Lushai hills and
by the Mikirs. The third and most important group is that
known as "Bodos". They comprise the Mechus, the Kāchāris,
the Garos, Lālungs, Kābhās and the Chutiyās of Lakhimpur dis-
trict. The Ahoms were also Tibeto-Chinese speakers, they were
a branch of the great Tāi race, to which belong the Siamese,
and the Shans of Burma and the Upper Menon, and Mekong Valley.
They invaded the Brahmaputra Valley from the Shan kingdom of
Mogaung in the early part of the thirteenth century A.D.
These peoples, today, contribute the bulk of the population

(18) Assamese: Its Formation and Development,
(20) The Shans call themselves "Dai" and "Tai", meaning "ours-
selves", equivalent to the "we" group in meaning of
Dr. Li Chi's classification of peoples. The Formation
of the Chinese People.
of the province, valleys as well as hills. (21) Risely rightly remarks that the Assamese are unmistakably Mongoloid. (22)

The general picture which this survey leaves is the repercussion of intrusive cultures from the north and east upon the mixed Aryan and pre-Aryan culture of India proper. In this part of the sub-continent, it is clear that in spite of this intrusive element from the mountainous transverse routes of Burma, the vitality of the Aryan tongue has caused it to dominate throughout Assam. Economically this had to be so, for Assam belongs to India and must seek its markets there. It should also be noted that India is a true sub-continent, and its social patterns are many and complicated. But, in spite of this, from one end of the peninsular to the other, the main characteristics of the villages are constant. It is not possible to ascribe this feature or that feature to an Aryan or non-Aryan origin, and the attempt to do so is often a source of confusion. Yet the non-Aryan, whether it be the case of the hill people of Central or Northern India or of Assam, must be pictured as touching village India and not

(21) Hutton, however, also finds traces of a Negrito substratum in the population of the inaccessible areas between Assam and Burma, though it is not in Assam proper. Vide Census Report, India, 1931, p.443; A Negrito substratum in the population of Assam, Man in India, VII, pp.257-262; Races of Further India, Ibid, XII, pp.1-18.

(22) The People of India, Second Ed., p.42.
isolated from it. Tribal individuality is a very real thing, but it cannot resist the attraction of the cultural man in which it is embedded. The Indianisation or nationalisation of tribal India is not a new thing. Except in absolutely isolated areas it is a necessary process; the fact that Assamese is an Aryan dialect, whereas the people are mostly of Mongoloid extraction, is typical of the result of such contacts.
CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

(continued)

II. Early Geography: The Literary Tradition.
1. Prāgjyotisa.

Assam is a part of the country known in ancient time as Prāgjyotisa. The expression has been taken to mean the country of Eastern Astrology or Astronomy. The Kālikā Purāṇa, a work of the 10th century A.D., (1) says that "here Brahmā first created the stars and hence the city is called Pragjyotisapura, a city equal to the city of Indra". (Asya madhye sthito □ brahmā prān-nakastram saṣādjarha) tataḥ prāgjyotisā khyeyam purī sakra-purī samā ||) (2) By this name, the country was known in the great epics, the Rāmāyana and Mahā bhārata, as well as in some of the principal Purāṇas. The Mārkaṇḍeeya Purāṇa places Pragjyotisa on the face of the tortoise. (3) It is also mentioned in the list of the peoples of the east as given by Varāhamihira in the Brhat Samhitā. (4) The same statement is found in the Matsya (5) and the Brahmāṇda Purāṇas. (6) The Bhāgavata Purāṇa refers to Pragjyotisa when recounting the story of Naraka. (7) Bhārata

(1) R.G. Hayra holds that the present Kālikā Purāṇa is a work quite different from an earlier work of that name mentioned in the list of the eighteen Upanīṣads, which was compiled between 650 A.D. to 900 A.D. A.B.O.R. XXIX, p.1-23.

(2) Ch. 38, v 119. (3) Kurma-vibhāga, Ch. 58.

(4) Ch. XIV, V 6, and Ch. XVI. (5) Ch. 114, V 45.

(6) Bhā. 16. (7) Bk. XII.
also, while referring to the countries where the Odra-Māgadhī literary style was prevalent, mentions Prāgjyotisa with the adjoining countries of the east: prāgjyotīṣāḥ pulindāśca vaidehāstāmrā-liptakāḥ prācyā-prabhritayascaiva yujjanti hyodra-māgadhim ||(8)

It is, however, important to note that the country is not mentioned in the Vedic samhitās or in the early literature of the Buddhists. It is, therefore, urged by some scholars that the region had not come into contact with Aryan culture during the Vedic period, or even in early Buddhist times.(9) On the other hand, the Epics and the Purāṇas make it clear that the country was by then in full cultural contact with India proper.

In the Rāmayana, Visvāmitra gives Rāma an account of Magadha, and the countries near it. He says its old name was Vasu, Kuśa, a great king who was sprung from Brahmā, had four sons who established four kingdoms, Kuśasva at Kauśasī, Kauśanabha at Mahodaya or Kāanyakubja, Amūrtarajas at Prāgjyotīṣa and Vasu at Girivraja.(10) In connection with the search parties that were sent in quest of Sītā, the Epic says that "the city of Prāgjyotīṣa was built on a gold-crested mountain called Varāha, which was sixty-four yojanas in extent.

(8) Nātyaśāstra, Ch. XIV, V 45-47.
(9) Dikshitar: Aryanisation of East India (Assam), I.H.Q. XXI, pp.29-33.
(10) Ādi., XXXV, 1-10, 35.
and which stood or abutted on the sea." (11)

The Mahābhārata in the account of the conquest of Arjuna, also, refers to Prāgjyotisa. It states that after conquering all the kings who dwelt in Śakala-dvīpa and in the seven dvīpas, Arjuna advanced to Prāgjyotisa. Its king was then Bhagadatta, and Arjuna fought a great battle with him. (12) In his army were Kirātas, Cīnas, and many other soldiers who dwelt in the marshy regions near the sea. After a battle lasting eight days, Bhagadatta submitted amicably to Arjuna. Later Bhagadatta attended Yudhishthira’s rāja-sūya sacrifice, accompanied by all the Mlechchhas who lived in the marshy region contiguous to the sea. (13) In the Udyoga Parva, it is also, stated that Bhagadatta dwelt near the Eastern ocean. (14) Thus it is reasonably clear that Prāgjyotisa, during the epic period, stretched southward to the sea. This tract near the sea must have been the low land at the mouth of the Brahmaputra and which now comprises the modern districts of Dacca, Tippera, and Chittagong.

Again, in the Mahābhārata, Bhagadatta is called sāilālaya, "dwelling among the mountains". (15) His army, composed of Cīnas and Kirātas, glittered as with gold:

(11) Kis., xliii. Here Prāgjyotisa is mistakenly placed on the western region.
(12) Sabhā, XXV, 999-1012.
(13) Ibid., XXXIII, 1888-9.
(14) 111, 74.
(15) Strī P., XXIII, 644.
The Kirátas must have been the Himalayan tribes of Mongolian affinity, while the Cinas were certainly the Chinese; as they formed Bhagadatta's army, they were close neighbours. Hence it is clear that on the north-east Prágjyotisa touched the Himalayas.

The western boundary of Prágjyotisa is not so clearly defined. It may have extended to the river Kauśika (Kauśika) in Bihar. Amūrtarajas, who founded the Kingdom of Prágjyotisa close to Dharmāraṇya, was the grandfather of the famous rishi Visvāmitra, who performed his austerities on the banks of Kauśika. This suggests that the Kauśika served as the western boundary between Videha and Prágjyotisa. The fact that the Kauśika is in Videha, and Prágjyotisa is in the north-east of Bengal.

ADDENDA.

(16a) In the Purāṇas Kirátas are designated "foresters", "barbarians", "mountaineers" (Viṣṇu Purāṇa (Tr.) pp. 175, 190) appellations which are understood as referring to the inhabitants of the mountains of Eastern India. In the Brahmākanda Purāṇa, they are described as "shepherds living on hills to the north-east of Bengal". (Wilford's Essay on the Sacred Isles of the West, As. Res., VIII, p. 38) In the Mahābhārata, the Kirátas are placed around the Brahmaputra. They are undoubtedly the same people mentioned by Periplus, Ptolemy and other early writers as Cīrhrhadas. The Kirátas, who possess a tract of hilly country in the Morung, to the west of Sikkim, and situated between Nepal and Bhutan, appear to be descendants of the ancient Kirátas. Lassen takes them to belong to the Bhata tribe (Ind. Alt., I, pp. 185, 301, 441, 444, 448; Ancient India as described by Ptolemy, pp. 191-194; 219-221).

(17a) The main branch of the river is said to come from the hermitage of the sage Kauśika or Visvāmitra.
The Kiratas must have been the Himalayan tribes of Mongolian affinity, while the Cinas were certainly the Chinese; as they formed Bhagadatta's army, they were close neighbours. Hence it is clear that on the north-east Prâgjyotisa touched the Himalayas. (17)

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(16) Udyoga, XVIII, 594-5.
(18) Infra, Chap.II.
(19) Since the discovery of the Nîdhânpur Grant, a controversy is going on regarding the identification of the river Kauâika. Following contributions are worth mentioning:
believe that the western boundary of Prāgjyotīsa was that river.(20)

2. Kāmarūpa.

Assam, during mediaeval times came to be known as Kāmarūpa,(21) although its capital was still known as Prāgjyotīsa, and its kings designated themselves as Lords of Prāgjyotīsa down to the twelfth century. The name Kāmarūpa, according to the Purānic legends, is associated with Kāmadeva, the god of love. It is here that Kāma was sent by the gods to put an end to Śiva’s mourning after the death of his consort, and to awaken in him again the passion of creation. He was burnt to ashes by the angry glance of the great god, but later recovered his original form (rupa). Hence the name Kāmarūpa.(22) During the mediaeval period, Kāmarūpa

(20) The Kusi river to-day flows westward of the Bhagalpur district, Bihar. But it should be noted that the main channel of the Kusi river once oscillated over a vast tract of country, from the Brahmaputra to the Gandak river. Indeed, the river is remarkable for its constant westerly movement. Both Buchanan and Hunter are of the opinion that the Kusi of remote times went eastward to meet the Brahmaputra. Hunter further states that the Kusi formerly joined the Karatoya, and marked an ethnic frontier forming a natural barrier. Hunter: Statistical Account of Bengal, Purushah; Martin: Eastern India, III, p.15; Shillingford: On changes in the course of the Kusi river, and probable dangers arising from them J.A.S.B. L.XIV, Pt.I, pp.1-24.

(21) Kāmarūpa as Kāmrūp continues today to designate one of the districts of Assam.
became a centre of Tantric worship and came to be considered a most sacred place (prthivyām bhāratavarse kāmarūpam mahāphalaṁ), especially the temple of Kāmākhyā, where the Devi was adored. This worship of the goddess, and the very names of Kāmākhyā and Kāmarūpa have led some scholars to consider that the cult was probably derived from some pre-Aryan divinity. Kakati connects the name Kāmarūpa with such Austro formations as Kāmru or Kāmurut, which in Santali is a name for a lesser divinity, (24) but the attribution does not seem very clear.

The earliest epigraphic reference to Kāmarūpa is to be found in the well-known Allahabad Inscription of Samudragupta, where it is mentioned as a further kingdom. (25) In classical Sanskrit literature, both Prāgjyotisa and Kāmarūpa occur, for instance in Kālidāsa. In the story of Raghunāthe digvijaya, as given in the Raghuvamsa, the hero first came to Prāgjyotisa and then to Kāmarūpa after having crossed the Lauhitya. (26) "The king of Kāmarūpa worshipped Raghunāthe...

(22) sambhunetrāgni-nirdagdhaḥ kāmah sambhora- nigrabhāt |
|
| tatra rūpam yataḥ prāpya kāmarūpam tato- bhavat ||

Kālika Purāṇa, Ch.LVII, v.67.

(23) Pt.I, Ch.XV, v.52.

(24) Assamese, its Formation and Development, p.50.

(25) C.11, III.

(26) IV, 81, 83; VII, 17.
feet on a golden foot-stool as if they were his presiding deity, with presents of jewels instead of flowers."(27)

Yādavaprakāśa (c 1000 A.D.) in his Vaijayanti also mentions Prāgjyotisa and Kāmarūpa; prāgjyotisa – kāmarūpa – prāgjālika.(28) Rājasekhara (c 900 A.D.) refers to Prāgjyotisa as a country and Kāmarūpa as a mountain.(29) The Jaina lexicographer Hemachandra (c 1200 A.D.) says that "the Prāgjyotisas are the Kāmarūpas".(30) Purusottama, also, states that Prāgjyotisa is Kāmarūpa.(31) Yasodhara (c 1300 A.D.), the author of the Jayamangala commentary on the Kāmasūtra, places Kāmarūpa as a country of the eastern region: gauda-kāmarūpakāḥ prācyavisesāḥ.(32) The Kānjuśrīmūlakalpa puts it near the Himalayas.(33)

In some of the later Purāṇas, the name appears in a different context. The Śiva Purāṇa states that in Sahyādri there was a country named Kāmarūpa which was conquered by a Rākṣasa named Ehima.(34) Both Vāyu (35) and Brāhmaṇa Purāṇas(36), referring to the peaks of the mountain Devalaṇa and their dwellers, mention the Kāmarūpi rākṣasas.

(27) Ibid.
(28) D.C. Ganguly: Yādavaprakāśa on the Ancient Geography of India, I.H.G., XIX, pp. 844 ff.
(33) An Imperial History of India, p.
(34) Ch., XXXVIII. (35) Ch.XXX.
(36) Ch. XXXIV.
A fairly detailed account of the topography of the country is to be found in the Kālikā Purāṇa and the Yoginī Tantra (c. 1600 A.D.), both the works being devoted to the religious history of mediaeval Assam. The Kālikā Purāṇa says that Kāmarūpa is to the east of Karatoya river. According to the Yoginī Tantra the country lying to the east of Karatoya as far as Dīkka-ravasīnī is called Kāmarūpa. It is triangular in shape (trikonākārama), and a hundred yojanas in length, spreading over an area of three hundred yojanas (trimsādayojanavistirṇam dīrghena sata yojanam). The Viṣṇu Purāṇa also states that the country extended around the temple of Kāmarūpa (which was in the centre of Kāmarūpa), in all directions for 100 yojanas.

The Yoginī Tantra traces the frontiers of Kāmarūpa thus:

nepacāsya kāñcana-drim brahmputrasya saṃgamaṃ karatoyam samārabhyā ya’vad dīkka-ravasīnim uttarasyaṃ kañjagiriḥ karatoyā tu paścime tirthasvēsthā dīkṣunadī pūrvasyaṃ girikanyakak dakṣine brahmputrasya laṃkṣayāṃ saṃgamāvadhi kāmarūpa iti khyātaḥ sarvaśāstresu niścitah

(37) Kālikā Purāṇa, Ch. LXXVIII, v. 7. The Karatoya was once a large and sacred river which was known to have flowed through the northern part of modern Bengal, and is referred to in the Tirthayātra section of the Vanaparvan of the Mahābhārata. It is said that at the wedding of Śiva and Pārvatī, the water which was poured upon their hands, fell to the ground, and became a river Karatoya, from kara, the hand, and toya, water.
"From the mountains Kāñcana in Nepal up to the confluence of the Brahmaputra, from the Karatoya to Dikkaravāsimi, the northern limit is the mount Kāñja; in the west the Karatoya, in the east the Dikṣu (oh, daughter of the mountains), in the south the confluence of the Lakṣa with the Brahmaputra; this is the territory which all treatises call by the name of Kāmarūpa."

According to the Chinese pilgrim, Hieun Tsang, who visited the court of Bhāskarvarman, King of Kāmarūpa in 643 A.D., the country was more than a myriad li or 1667 miles in circuit. (41) The pilgrim travelled from Pun-na-fa-tan-na (Pundravardhana) on the east more than 900 li, or 150 miles, crossed a large river and reached Kia-mo-leu-po (Kāmarūpa). T'ang-Shu refers to this large river as Ka-lo-tu, by which was probably intended the Karatoya. (42) The pilgrim says that to the east of Kāmarūpa was a series of hills and hilllocks, without any principal city, stretching to south-western China.

In the T'ang-Shu, Kāmarūpa is described as being 1600 li to the west of Upper Burma, beyond the black mountains. (43) It was situated in Eastern India, 600 li to the south-east of Pundravardhana (North Bengal) with the river Kalatu between the two countries.

(42) Watters wrongly identifies it with the Brahmaputra.
CHAPTER II.

A Sketch of the Political History.
I. Traditional Kings.

The legendary account of the early history of Assam is mainly preserved in the Purāṇas. (1) The Kālikā Purāṇa records that the early inhabitants of Assam were the Kirātas and the Mlecohas. Their king was called Ghataka. He was followed by a prince from Videha named Naraka. (2) Naraka was born to Visnu by Bhumī (the earth), and was brought up by Janaka, King of Videha. At the age of sixteen, he was transferred to Kamarūpa by Visnu. He fought with Ghataka and defeated him. After having driven the Kirātas to the sea-shore, he was crowned King of Kamarūpa by Visnu. Naraka made Prāgjayotisapura his capital, and his rule extended from the Kara-toya to the west of Dikrong river on the east. He married Nāyā, the daughter of the king of Vidarbha, and was greatly favoured by Visnu, who taught him to worship the goddess, Kamākhya. At first Naraka was pious and ruled the country righteously. Later he became friendly with Bāña, king of Sonitpur, and grew irreligious and presumptuous. Visnu

(1) The legendary account is related, in more detail, in the Visnu purāṇa, Bhāgavata and Marivamśa; but still more fully narrated in the Kālikā Purāṇa.

(2) Kālikā Purāṇa, Ch. 37 ff. For an examination of Naraka’s episode see Nankad; Narakāsura episode in the Kālikā Purāṇa, J.A.R.S, X, pp.14-22; Mishra: Historical Notes on Narakāsura and Bhagadatta, Ibid, XI, pp.3-11.
then, in his incarnation as Krisna, came to Kamarupa, and having killed Naraka in battle, placed his son Bhagadatta on the throne.

Bhagadatta is frequently mentioned in the Mahābhārata as a powerful warrior. He is celebrated as a "warrior king" and "the mighty king of the mlecchas", (3) and is described as "the best wielder of the elephant-goad", among the kings assembled on the Kaurava’s side in the Great War, and as "skilful with the chariot." (4) Bhagadatta alone of the northern kings is famed for his long and equal contest with Arjuna. (5) He is dignified with the title "Śiva’s friend" and esteemed as being not inferior to Sakra in battle. (6) He is also specially named "the friend of Pāṇḍu", (7) and is referred to in terms of respect and kindliness by Krisna when addressing Yudhisthira: "Bhagadatta is thy father’s aged friend; he was noted for his deference to thy father in word and deed, and he is mentally bound by affection and devoted to thee like a father." (8) Bhagadatta was killed in the Mahābhārata war and was succeeded by his son Vajradatta (according to some inscriptions, Vajradatta is called his brother). (9)

(3) Sabhā. P. 1, 1834. (4) Udyoga. P. CLXVI, 5804.
The legendary account of the early kings of Assam is narrated in another Tantric-Sanskrit text known as Haragaurisamvāda. The work contains an account of kings and ruling dynasties of India in general and particularly of Kamārūpa. The names of the kings are generally indicated by the initial letters and the whole narration is in the form of a prediction in conformity with the method normally followed in the Purāṇas. The account of the early kings of Kamārūpa in Haragaurisamvāda begins with Bhagadatta, who, it is said, will reign righteously over all the four divisions (pithas) of Kamārūpa at the beginning of the Kali Age. After his death in the battle of the Kauravas, his son Dharmapāla will become king. He with his minister Sukṛiti will rule the country for 125 years. After him, there will be a number of rulers belonging to the dynasty of Naraka.

The rulers of Naraka's dynasty are given cryptically, evidently corresponding to the initial letter of their names. These are: Ja, Sa, Na, Ga, Eha, Ta, Ra, Je, Ha, Da, Pa.

(10) The manuscript is not dated. But the last king of Kamārūpa mentioned in the text is Kamala who died in Saka year 1731 (180 A.D.) Kamala is no doubt the Ahom king Kamalasvāra, who reigned from 1790 to 1810 A.D. (Vide Gait: A History of Assam, Second Edition, pp. 218-222). Dr. P.C. Bagchi edited the manuscript in I.H.Q. XVIII, pp. 231-260 under the title "A New Source of the Political History of Assam".
Ca, La, A, Ma, Sa, Sya, Ma, Ehu, Co, Dha, etc. The number is about 24 or 25. It is further stated that the descendants of Naraka ruled for nineteen generations and that the last kings of the dynasty were Subahu and Suparna. Subahu became an ascetic, abdicating in favour of his son Suparna, the last of the line. Though Haranaarisaamvāda furnishes us with the names of a host of rulers, most of them are, in fact, fictitious. It is not possible to build up a genealogy of the early kings of Kāmarūpa upon such uncertain material.

The Nidhanpur Grant of Bhāskaravarmān (7th century A.D.) records that a period of three thousand years elapsed between the death of Vajradatta and the accession of Pusyavarman (c. 4th century A.D.), the founder of the new line. (11) Huien Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim who visited Kāmarūpa in the seventh century, also records that there were a thousand generations between Viṣṇu, the progenitor of Naraka, and the birth of Bhāskaravarmān, the pilgrim's patron king. (12)

(11) The Nidhanpur Grant is the most important record of the contemporary history of India. It originally consisted of seven copper plates, but one is missing up till now. They were found in a village named Nidhanpur in Sylhet at different times. The object of the Grant is the gift of land to Brāhmānas. Noticed by Padmanath Bhattacharyya in I.A, XLIII, pp.95 ff. I.H.Q., 1927, p.839; by K.N. Dikshit, A.R.A.S.I, 1921-22, p.115. Edited by the former in E.I, XII, pp.73 ff, XIX, pp.113 ff, pp.846 ff and finally in the Kāmarūpa Sasanāvatī, pp.1-43.

II. Kings of the Pusyavarman Family.

A few centuries after the Christian era more acceptable historical material became available. Besides the contemporary epigraphical documents of the period, we have an invaluable account of the country from Hiuen Tsang, who visited Kāmārupa in 643 A.D. Further, the romantic but semi-historical Harṣa-carita composed by Bāna, furnishes considerable material relating to our period. Among the earliest documents, the Nīlhanpur copper-plate grant is an epigraph of unique importance. The original grant was made by Bhūtivarman, known also as Mahābhūtavarman (c 554 A.D.), the great-great-grandfather of Bhāskararvarman (c 600 A.D. - 650 A.D.), but was renewed by the latter owing to the destruction by fire of the original record. It was issued from the jaya-skandhavāra (victorious camp) at Karnasuvarṇa. It contains the names of thirteen kings (and of most of their queens also), all of them of the family of Pusyavarman. The Naraka-Visnu myth as recorded above was already current; that is to say, Pusyavarman's family traced their origin to Naraka, son of Visnu. The inscription says that "when the kings of the Naraka family, having enjoyed the position of rulers for three thousand years, had all attained the condition of gods, Pusyavarman became

(13) Nīlhanpur Grant.
the lord of the world". (14) The genealogy of the kings as described in the grant is given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puṣyavarman</td>
<td>4th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samudravarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balavarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalyana varman</td>
<td>5th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganapativarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahendravarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahābhūtavarman (15)</td>
<td>6th century (234 G.E.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandramukhavarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sthitavarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susthitavarman (16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alias</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hṛigānka</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supratisthitavarman (17)</td>
<td>7th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhāskaravarman (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(14) Vamśyesu tasya nṛpatiśu varsa-sahasratrayam padamavāpya Yāteśu devabhūyām keśīśvārah puṣyavarmābhūt v.7.

(15) Bhūtivarman in the Harsacarita.
(16) Sthitivarman in the Harsacarita.
(17) Probably did not reign.
(18) Bhāskaradyuti in the Harsacarita. Also known as Kumāra.
Fortunately for us, three clay seals relating to Bhāskaravarman have been discovered in Nālandā. The second seal gives a complete genealogy of the line of Pusyavarman. The Harasearita also mentions the names of the last five kings of the above list. Although small discrepancies appear in the names, the three lists in general corroborate one another. Of these kings, the date of Bhāskaravarman is firmly established from the Harasearita and the Si-yu-ki of Hiuen Tsang. Calculating four generations to a century in the usual way, P.N. Bhattacharyya places Pusyavarman, the first king of the line, in the middle of the fourth century A.D. The naming of Samudravarman, son of Pusyavarman, after the famous emperor of the Gupta dynasty, and of Dattavati (Dattadevi in the Nidhanpur Grant) after Dattadevi, queen of Samudragupta, led Bhattacharya to conclude that Pusyavarman was a contemporary of Samudragupta, probably a vassal of that great emperor, who took pleasure in making known his attachment to his liege-lord by naming his son and daughter-in-law after him and his queen.


(20) Ucchvāla, VII, pp.246 ff.


Bhattasali’s opinion, the naming of a son after one’s liege-lord, would hardly rank as a compliment. Bhattasali, therefore, considers that Pusyavarman was a contemporary, not of Samudragupta but of his father Chandragupta I, and named his son and daughter-in-law after the son and daughter-in-law of his friend, namely, Chandragupta I. Bhattasali accordingly places Pusyavarman in the early part of the 4th century A.D. (23) K.L. Barua, on the other hand, supports Bhattacharya’s view and considers Pusyavarman to be the frontier king (pratyanta mipati) of Kāmarūpa referred to in the Allahabad inscription, who was compelled by Samudragupta to enter into subordinate alliance with him by paying all kinds of tribute (sarva-kara-dāna), obedience to his commands (ajñākarana), and attendance at his court (pranāmāgamaṇa) (24) Pusyavarman was succeeded by his son Samudravarman, who is said to have been swift in single combat. (25) He is compared to a fifth samudra (ocean) as it were, but only with this difference, that unlike the ocean which is always disturbed by larger fish swallowing the smaller one, Samudravarman was free from the mātsyanyāya troubles. (26) The occurrence of the expression mātsyanyāya suggests that while

(23) New Lights on the History of Assam, I.H.Q, XXI, p.22.
(24) Early History of Kāmarūpa, p.42.
(26) Ibid.
during the reigns of Samudravarman's ancestors, the country witnessed disorder and anarchy, his own reign was peaceful.

Samudravarman was followed by Balavarman, who was a great warrior and "whose irresistible troops consisted his armour".(27) Next came his son Kalyanavarman and then Ganapati(varman), who was endowed with innumerable qualities, and according to the epigraph was born "to remove war and dissension from the country".(28) After him ruled his son, Mahendravarman, who was the repository of all sacrifices (yajnavidhnam-āspadam)(29) The second seal of Nalanda refers to him as the performer of two horse-sacrifices (dvih-turaga-medhāharto).(30) He appears to be the first among this line of kings to celebrate horse sacrifices, which is, no doubt, a fact of much political importance.(31) It would seem that, as Bhattasali suggests, as the Gupta empire declined, the Kamarupa kingdom began to flourish, and Mahendravarman became a paramount sovereign in Eastern India by performing two horse sacrifices.(32)

(27) Ibid., v.9.  
(28) Ibid., v.11.  
(29) Ibid., v.12.  
(31) Dr. D.G.Sircaar contends that the epithet dvih-turaga-medhāharto in line 5 of the Nalanda seal should refer, not to the preceding name Mahendravarman, but to the following name of Narayanavarman. Aśvamedha celebrated by the kings of Kamarupa, I.H.Q., XXI, pp.143-145.  
Mahendravarman was succeeded by his son Narayanaavarman, who was reputed to have possessed high knowledge in military and political affairs (abhigata samkhyārtha). Narayanaavarman was followed by his son Mahābhutavarman, who is referred to also as Bhūtivarman or Bhūtavarman. The Badāgangā Rock Inscription refers to Śri Bhūtivarman, who performed an Aśvamedha sacrifice, and it also gives the Gupta Era date 234, corresponding to 554 A.D. The value of the Badāgangā inscription, "which is the only dated one of the kings of the line of Pusyaavarman hitherto discovered", remarks Bhattasali, "can hardly be exaggerated." The date of this inscription, according to him, must be of the last part of Bhūtivarman's reign, as by that date, the king had already performed a horse sacrifice, and his Minister of State had founded a religious convent. Bhattasali, therefore, places Bhūtivarman's reign approximately between 520 and 560 A.D. It appears from the Nidhanpur Grant that Bhūtivarman had a circle of feudatory rulers and that he was able to capture the whole of Kāmarūpa by his benign glance (īkṣana-jīta-kāmarūpam).

(33) Nidhanpur Grant, v.13.
(34) The inscription is incised in three lines and a quarter on a rock near Dabaka in the Nowgong district. Edited by Bhattasali, J.A.R.S, VIII, pp.138-139.
(38) This is the interpretation of the second verse as given by Bhattacharyya, Kāmarūpa Śasatāvatī, p.27, F.n.8.
made gifts of land to a large number of Brāhmaṇas in the
Mayura-sālmala-grahāra in the Chandrapuri-visaya, near the
river Kauśiki.

After Bhūtivarmā, his son Chandramukhavarmā reigned
in Kāmarūpa, and he was followed by his son, Śrīśūtavarmā,
who, according to the Nalanda seal, is ascribed as the per­
former of two horse sacrifices (dvirāvamadhayājī). (39) He
was followed by his son Susūṭhitaśvarman, renowned as Śrī­
Kṛṣṇānka. The Hārṣa Charita asserts that Susūṭhitaśvarman was
a powerful monarch "who took away the conch-shells of the lords
of the armies, not their jewels; grasped the stability of the
earth, not its tribute; seized the majesty of monarchs, not
their hardness." It even gives to him the sovereign title of
Mahārājādhirāja. (39a) It appears from the Apsahad inscrip­
tion that the later Gupta monarch Mahāsenagupta led an expedition
against Susūṭhitaśvarman. It is recorded that Susūṭhitaśvarman
was defeated by Mahāsenagupta, "whose mighty fame, marked in
honour of victory over the illustrious Susūṭhitaśvarman, white
as a full-blown jasmine flower or water-lily, or as a pair

(39a) Cowell, p.117.
of necklaces of pearls pounded into little bits, is still constantly sung on the banks of the Lauhitya." (40) There is also a veiled reference in the Hidhanpur record itself to this defeat of Susthitavarman, wherein it is said that he (Susthitavarman) "gave away the goddess of royal fortune, like the earth, to suppliants." (41)

(40) C.L.L, III, pp.206 ff; J.A.S.B., NS, XXII, pp.321 ff. R.K. Moakeerji held that Susthitavarman belonged to the Maukhari dynasty (Harsha, p.25, fn.1). R.D. Banerji has, however, conclusively shown that he was a king of Kamarupa (J.B. O.R.S, XV, pp.352 ff). Pires takes Mahasenagupta to be a king of Malwa. Vide, Pires; The Maukharis, pp.95-102.

(41) v.19.
Susthitavarman had two sons, namely, Supratisthitavarman and Bhāskaravarman. It is not clear from the inscriptions if Supratisthitavarman ever ruled as a king of Kāmarūpa. Bhattacharya, however, thinks that he did reign for a few years. Basak, also, holds that Supratisthitavarman ruled for some time, but had to abdicate the throne in favour of his brother, who was preferred by the people for the kingship. "Had he not ruled in Kāmarūpa before his younger brother", says Basak, "though for a short time, the court poet of Bhāskaravarman would never have devoted two verses in his honour in the inscription." But we have no mention of him as a reigning king, either in the Nālandā seal of Bhāskaravarman, or in the Harṣacarita.

Bhāskaravarman was the greatest monarch of this family and one of the most remarkable rulers of mediaeval India. He was a contemporary of Harśavardhan, the limits of whose reign are known with more or less certainty as being 606 A.D. to 647 A.D. Bhāskaravarman, who outlived Harṣa by a few years, can therefore be placed with equal certainty between 600 A.D. and 650 A.D.

The most memorable event in the career of Bhāskaravarman was his alliance with Harṣa, made at the beginning of his reign. The Harṣacarita refers to this friendship as ajaryyam saṅgaṁ,

(42) Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī, Intro., p.16.
(43) History of North-Eastern India, p.217.
that is to say, "undying association", and compares it with the traditionally famous alliance between Kuṣira and Śiva, Dasaratha and Indra, Dhananjaya and Krišna, and between Karna and Duryodhana. (44) This alliance was made when Harsa was marching (c. 606 A.D.) to take revenge against Saśānka, the ruler of Gauda, who had treacherously murdered his brother. Bhāskaravarman's confidential messenger Hamsavega met Harsa, when the latter had completed only one day's march from Kanauj, on the bank of the river Sarasvati. He delivered the following message from Bhāskaravarman: "The sovereign of Prāgjyotisa desires with your majesty an imperishable alliance .... Commission me to say that the sovereign of Prāgjyotisa may enjoy your majesty's hearty embrace as Mandāra Viṣṇu's ... If your majesty does not accept his love, command me what answer to report to this proposal". When he ceased speaking, the king, who from previous reports of the Prāgjyotisa king's great qualities had conceived a very high respect for him, gave immediate acquiescence to the proposal with the following words: "How could the mind of one like me possibly even in a dream show aversion, Hamsavega, when such a great and noble spirit, such a treasure of virtue and captain of the worthy, bestows his love as an absent

(44) Cowell, p.218.  
(45) Ibid.
friend upon me? The Kumara's design is excellent. Stout-armed himself, with me, a devotee of the bow, for his friend, to whom save Siva need he pay homage? This resolve of his increases my affection .... Therefore use your endeavours that my yearning to see the prince may not torment me long".(46)

This new alliance, R.D.Banerji suggests, proved fatal to the Gaudas,(47) But unfortunately there is no record to show that either Bhāskaravarman or Harṣa succeeded in conquering the Gauda kingdom during the life time of Sasānka. K.L.Barua, however, following Nagendranath Vasu, believes that after this alliance Sasānka was overthrown and was obliged to retire to the hilly country in the south; and consequently Gauda with Karnasuvarna came into the possession of Bhāskaravarman.(48)

On the other hand, relying upon Vincent Smith who held that the Gauda king Sasānka "escaped with little loss"(49) in the first attack of Harṣa, and was actually in power even in 619-20 A.D., Basak maintains that "Harṣa might have marched a second time against Sasānka's kingdom in the company of Bhāskara and wrested it either from his own hands or from those of his yet unknown successors some time after his death .... and made it over to his ally Bhāskaravarman, who might have annexed it to his own kingdom".(50)

(49) Early History of India, Third Ed, p.339.
From the Nidhanpur Grant, as well as from the account of the Chinese pilgrim, it is evident that Bhāskaravarman was in possession of Karnasuvarna and Gauda. For the Nidhanpur Grant was issued by Bhāskaravarman from his victorious camp (Jaya skandhavāra) at Karnasuvarna, which comprised the modern districts of Burdwan, Birbhum and Murahidabad. P.N. Bhattacharya is, therefore, right in asserting that in commemoration of his triumphant entry into the capital of Karnasuvarna, after having expelled the Gauda king, Bhāskaravarman made this grant of land to the Brāhmanas of the locality.(61) R.C. Majumdar, on the other hand, gives a later date for Bhāskaravarman’s occupation of Karnasuvarna. He considers that when Bhāskaravarman aided the Chinese expedition against the successor of Harsavardhana and the latter was defeated "he (Bhāskara) made himself master of Eastern India" and "pitched his victorious camp in the capital of his late rival, Śaśānka, and thus increased the power and prestige of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa to an extent never dreamt of before".(52) Tripathi following Majumdar remarks that "in spite of the 'imperishable alliance' there seems little likelihood that Hāsa would allow him to appropriate those fertile provinces to himself, and thus gain an immense accession of strength."(53)

(52) Ancient Indian History and Civilisation, p.348.
(53) History of Kanauj, p.103.
But that Gauda, and with it Karnasuvarna, came into the possession of Bhāskaravarman even during the life time of Harṣa may incidently be concluded from some incidents recorded in the Life of Hiuen Tsiang. It is recorded that when Hiuen Tsiang was at Nālandā monastery for the second time in 643 A.D., an invitation by letter through a messenger reached Silabhadra, the teacher of the monastery, from Bhāskaravarman, requesting the teacher to send the Chinese pilgrim to his court. But Silabhadra had to refuse the invitation because he had already arranged that the pilgrim should next visit the court of Harṣavarman. A second invitation was sent, but that also being refused, Bhāskaravarman was greatly enraged and sent yet another messenger to Silabhadra with the following message:

"Your disciple like a common man has followed the way of worldly pleasure and has not yet learnt the converting power residing in the law of Buddha. And now when I heard the name of the priest belonging to the outside country my body and soul were overjoyed; expecting the opening of the gem of religion (within me). But you, sir, have again refused to let him come here, as if you desired to cause the world to be for ever plunged in the dark night (of ignorance). Is this the way in which your Eminence hands down and transmits the bequeathed law for the deliverance and salvation of all the world? Having an invincible longing to think kindly of and
show respect to the Master I have again sent a messenger with a written request. If he does not come, your disciple will then let the evil position of himself prevail. In recent times Śaśānka rāja was equal still to the destruction of the law and uprooted the Bodhi tree. Do you, my Master, suppose that your disciple has no such power as this? If necessary then I will equip my army and elephant and, like the clouds, sweep down and trample to the very dust that monastery of Nālandā. These words are true as the sun, Master, it is better for you to examine and see what you will do." The threat had the desired effect, and the pilgrim left for Kāmarūpa. When Hsiuen Tsiang had been in Kāmarūpa for about a month, Harsavardhana heard of it on his way back home after his attack on Kongoda. He sent a note to Bhāskaravarma requesting him to send the pilgrim to his camp at once. Bhāskaravarma, however, replied that Harsa "can take my head, but he cannot take the Master of the Law yet". Harsa was annoyed, and he immediately sent the following message: "Send the head, that I may have it immediately by my messenger who is to bring it here". On receipt of this answer Bhāskaravarma got frightened and personally proceeded with a large troop of elephants and ships up the Ganges, taking the pilgrim along with him, and arrived at the country of Kie-ahu-ho-ki-lo (Kajangala, near modern Rajmahal). Here on the north bank
of the river he, together with his ministers, proceeded to meet Harṣa, who received him courteously and they were joyfully reconciled. (54)

It follows from the above account that Bhāskaravarman passed with a large army through the Gauda country without any opposition. Had Gauda been under the sway of any other king at this time, Bhāskaravarman would not have been allowed to proceed through the country with his army. D.C. Ganguli, therefore, rightly believes that about this time, i.e., in A.D. 642, when Bhāskaravarman met Harṣa at Kajangala, Gauda formed a part of Kāmarūpa. (55)

This episode and Bhāskara’s previous solicitation for alliance with Harṣa of his own accord, have led some scholars to believe that the King of Kāmarūpa had accepted Harṣa’s suzerainty. But "by no stretch of imagination", Tripathi remarks, "this conclusion of a treaty can be interpreted as offering allegiance of his own accord". (56)

Further, the circumstance of Bhāskaravarman’s attending both the assemblies at Kanauj and Prayāga, also, does not help us to determine the political relations of the two potentates. The Chinese pilgrim left for us a detailed account of these religious assemblies. According to him the Kāmarūpa king was received

(55) Political Condition of Bengal during Hiuen Tsang’s visit, I.H.C., XV, pp. 122-24.
(56) History of Kanauj, pp. 104-105.
with the highest honours by Harsavardhana. In the procession of the golden Buddha image at Kanauj "Śīlāditya-rāja, under the form of Lord Śakra, with a white chowrie in his hand, went on the right, and Kumāra-rāja, under the form of Brāhma-rāja, with a precious parasol in his hand, went to the left. They both wore tiaras like the Devas, with flower wreaths and jewelled ribbons." (57) After breaking up the assembly at Kanauj, Harsa arranged a religious convocation at Prayāga at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna. In this assembly Harsa's tent was pitched on the north bank of the Ganges, and that of Dṛuvabhaṭa, Harsa's son-in-law, the king of South India, was located to the west of the junction of the two rivers. The camp of the king of Kāmarūpa was on the south side of the river Yamunā, by the side of a flowering grove. The proceedings of this grand assembly lasted for seventy-five days, commencing with a military procession of the followers of Śīlāditya-rāja and of Kumāra-rāja. (Bhāskaravarman) embarked in ships, and the attendants of Dṛuvabhaṭa-rāja mounted on elephants, which proceeded in due state to the place of the appointed assembly. The kings of the eighteen countries joined the cortège according to arrangement. (58) These accounts, therefore, prove beyond doubt that Harsa treated Bhāskaravarman in every way as a respected

(57) Life of Hiuen-Tsang, p.177.
(58) Ibid, pp.185-186.
ally, and esteemed friend and not as a vassal king. (59)

The Chinese pilgrim's account throws some light on the personal character of Bhāskaravarman. He states that "the king was fond of learning" (60) and "men of high talents from distant regions aspiring after office visit his dominions as strangers" (61). The very fact of his inviting the Chinese pilgrim to his court is, in itself, a testimony to his love of learning. Though personally devoted to Saivism, he was tolerant to other faiths, in which it is evident he was deeply interested. The pilgrim himself says that though the "king had no faith in Buddha, yet he much respected Sramanas of learning." (62)

The eulogy of the Midhanpur Grant (prasāasti) describes him as being created by the Creator for the purpose of re-establishing the institutions of society which had for a long time past become confused. It is said that he propagated the light of the Āryyadharma by dispelling the darkness of the Kali Age, by means of a proper expenditure of his revenue. He caused the deep loyalty of his subjects to be heightened, on account of his power of keeping order, his display of modesty, and cultivation of close acquaintance with them. His

(59) Early History of Kāmarūpa, pp.78-79.
(61) Ibid.
(62) Ibid.
gifts were bounteous, and he could be compared with King Śivi for offering succour to the needy by self-sacrifice, and in the matter of timely application of the six political expedients, he was as skilful as Brihaspati himself. Free from the usual vices of kings, he was always given to performing virtuous deeds. He was, as it were, "the very life of Dharma, the abode of justice, the home of virtues, the treasury of suppliants, the shelter of the fearful, and the temple of plenty of Śri."(63)

Bhāskaravarman outlived Harṣa, and, according to the Chinese annals, after the latter's death, he became the supreme master of Eastern India. Immediately after the death of Harṣa (c. 647 or 648 A.D.), his minister Arjuna or Arunasāva usurped the deceased monarch's throne. At the same time, the Emperor of China sent a mission to India under Wang-heuen-tse "in order that the principles of humanity and justice which had been diffused in that country should have a protector and representative there."(64) But Arjuna ill-treated the members of the mission and even massacred some of them. Those of them who survived, led by Wang-heuen-tse, escaped to Nepal and sought the aid of the kings of Nepal and Tibet. With the help of their forces, Wang-heuen-tse succeeded in destroying

(63) Midhanpur Grant.
(64) J.A.S.B, VI, 1,69.
the city of Tirhut and, defeating Arjuna, took him as prisoner to China. It also appears that this campaign against Arjuna was assisted by Bhāskaravarman, who sent abundant supplies, including "thirty thousand oxen and horses, and provisions for all the army, to which added bows, scimitars, and collars of great value."(65)

Neither Bānabhaṭṭa nor Hiuen Tsang nor any of the contemporary records refers to any wife of Bhāskaravarman or to the fact of his marriage. It is therefore certain that he died childless. When it is remembered that he is often mentioned as Kumāra-rāja, one is inclined to believe that Bhāskaravarman was a celibate all through his life. It also appears that shortly after Bhāskaravarman's death, which must have occurred after the Chinese mission, that is to say, after 643 A.D., there appeared an anarchy which brought to an end the line of kings which owed its origin to Naraka. In its place, as will be seen, a new line of kings headed by Sālastambha ushered in. Bhāndarkar and Dāsgupta,(67) however, refer to one king, namely Devavarman, who according to them succeeded Bhāskaravarman. Their source of information is the record of a Corean priest. I-tsing in his Kāu-fā-

(67) The Occupation of Bengal by the Kings of Kāmarūpa, I.C.II, pp.37-45.
kao-säng-chüen, written sometime between 700 and 712 A.D., gives brief memoirs of fifty-six Buddhist monks who visited India and the neighbourhood from China after Hsiuen Ts'ang and before him. One of them, Hwül Lin, a native of Corea, in his memoir refers to "a king of Eastern India, whose name is Devavarman." (68)

III. Kings of the Śālastambha Family.(1)

The Bargāon copper-plate grant of Ratnapāla records that after the descendants of Naraka had ruled Kāmarūpa for several generations, a great chief of the mlechas, owing to a turn of adverse fortune, took possession of the kingdom (mlechā - dhīnātho vidhi - calana - vaśād - eva - jagrāha rājyam)(3). He was Śālastambha. According to the above epigraph, followed kings "altogether twice ten in number". Further it informs us that as the last king, the twenty-first of the dynasty, the illustrious Tyāgasimha, want to heaven without leaving any of his race to succeed him, his subjects

(1) As the kings of this line traced their descent from Bhagadatta, Bhandarkar calls them Bhauma of Kūrupasvarā.

(2) The record consists of three plates, and was found in the possession of a cultivator of the Thanu Bargāon, in the Tespur sub-division of Darrang district. The object of the grant is to record that King Ratnapāla gave the village Vāmadevapāṭaka, situated in the Trayodāśāgrāma-viśaya in the Uttarākula to the Brāhmaṇa Viradatta in the 25th year of his reign.

Edited by Hoernle in J.A.S.B, LXVII, pp.99 ff; and by Bhattacharyya in Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvati, pp.89-109.

(3) Although Śālastambha is referred to as mlecha in Ratnapāla's inscriptions, the kings of his line, however, claimed descent from Bhagadatta in their own records. K.L.Barua, therefore, is right in suggesting that Śālastambha was a governor of a Mech province before he usurped the throne. Mech, being a tribe in Assam, still surviving.

selected Brahmapāla, the father of Ratnapāla, to be their king on account of his relation to the Bhauma race, i.e., Naraka's family.

The Bargāon grant is not dated, it only gives the regnal era. On paleographic grounds, Hoernle was disposed to place the grant in the earlier half of the eleventh century A.D. (c 1010 - 1050 A.D.) As another grant of Ratnapāla, namely, the Suālkuchi Grant,(4) was made in the 26th year of his reign, one can reasonably refer Brahmapāla's reign to about 1000 A.D.

Now calculating back from this date and assigning a minimum of 16 years for the reign of each king, it is possible to place Sālastambha in the latter part of the 7th century A.D., that is, just after Bhāskaravarman.

We have a few other records of this family in which some other names appear. An odd plate of a grant of Harjjarā mentions seven princes, namely, Vijaya, Pālaka, Kumāra, Vajradeva, Harṣavarman, Balavarman and Harjjarādeva.(5) The Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla, son of Harjjarā mentions, besides

(4) Found in the village of Suālkuchi of Kamruph district. It originally consisted of three plates, but the first is missing. The object of the grant is to record the gift of land to the Brahmañña Kāmādeva. Edited by Hoernle in J.A.S.B., LXVII, pp.120-25; Kāmarupa Sasanāvati, pp.110-115.

(5) Found in the village of Hayāngthal in Nowgong district. Probably the middle plate, the other two being missing. The inscription was issued from Haruppesvara by Yuvāja Vanamāla. Noticed by P.N. Bhattacharyya in the I.H.Q, 1927, pp.838,841 and 844. Edited by him in Kāmarupa Sasanāvati, pp.44-53. English translation by the same author, J.A.R.S.I, pp.109-115, vide, "The Middle Plate of Harjaravarman's copper-plate inscription".
Harjjara and Sālālastambha, the name of King Prālambha. (6)

The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman, grandson of Vanamāla, refers to King Jayamāla. Thus from these references, we draw up the following list of the Sālālastambha family:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Approximate date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sālālastambha</td>
<td>Middle of the 7th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijaya (or Vīgraḥastambha)</td>
<td>Later part of the 7th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pālaka</td>
<td>do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumara</td>
<td>8th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vajradatta</td>
<td>do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hārsa (Sri Hariṣa)</td>
<td>do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balavarman</td>
<td>do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chakra and Arathi (7)</td>
<td>Did not reign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prālambha (8)</td>
<td>9th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harjjara</td>
<td>do. (G.E.510)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanamāla</td>
<td>do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayamāla (Virabahu)</td>
<td>do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balavarman</td>
<td>10th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyāgasimha (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(6) It consists of three plates found in Tezpur. Published in J.A.S.B, IX(1840), pp.766 ff. Revised by P.N.Bhattacharyya in Kāmarūp Sāsanāvatī, pp.54-70.

(7) Bhandarkar gives the names of Chakra and Arathi. But according to the inscriptions they did not rule. A list of inscriptions of Northern India in Brahmi and its derivative scripts, p.380.

(8) Bhandarkar identifies him with Balavarman.

(9) Only twelve kings after Sālālastambha are so far traceable but the Bargāon Grant speaks of twenty-one ending with Tyāgasimha.
The dates of some of these kings are known either from their own records or from other sources. For Śrī Harṣa has been identified by Kielhorn with Gaudodrādi-Kalinga-Kosalapati-Śrī-Harsadeva of the Padupati inscription of the Nepal Līcchāvī King Jayadeva (153 B.C. - 759 A.D.). Harsadeva gave his daughter Rājyamati in marriage to the Nepal King, and she is also referred to in the epigraph as Bhagadatta-rāja-kulajā.(10) Krishnaswami Ayengar(11) and following him K.L. Barua(12) surmise that the Harsadeva of our inscription and the lord of Gauda, Oḍinh, Kalinga and Kosala was the same Gaud ruler who was overthrown by Yaśovarman and whose defeat was the occasion for the glorification in the Gauda-vahō.

Besides the incomplete grant mentioned above, the Tespur Rock inscription also refers to Śrī Harjjaravarmanadeva. The inscription is dated 510, corresponding roughly to A.D.829(13).

(10) I.A, IX, p.179; J.R.A.S, 1898, pp.384-85; Le NépáI,II,p.171
From the occurrence of such imperial titles as Mahārājādhirāja-
paramāvara, it may be conjectured that Harjjaravarman wielded
great power. Harjjarara was succeeded by Vanamāla, who granted
land to a Brāhmaṇa near Chandrapuri, on the west of Trisṛṣṭā
crver (Tīstā). The Tezpur Grant refers to his territory as
extending as far as the seashore. (14) Vanamāla abdicated
his throne in favour of his son, Jayamāla. The Prāgjayotisā
king referred to in the Bhagalpur inscription of Nārayana, and
with whom Jayapāla, the brother and commander of Deva Pāla,
the Pāla king of Bengal, had friendly relations, is generally
identified with Jayamāla. (15)

The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman was issued from the
"ancestral camp" (of Hāruppesvara) (16). It appears that
Sālastambha on his succession transferred the capital from
Prāgjayotisapura to Hāruppesvara on the bank of the Brahmaputra.
No account is available of the successors of Balavarman. It
must, however, be surmised that a long period intervened bet-
ween Balavarman and Tyāgasimha, the last king of the family
of Sālastambha, as given in the Bargāon Grant.

(14) v.17.
(16) It consists of three plates and was found in the village
of Sutargāon in Nowgong district. First noticed in
Acām by Pandit Īhiresvara Kāviraṇa. Edited by Hoernle
in J.A.S.B, LXVI, Pt.I, pp.121, 285-97; and by
Bhattacharyya in Kāmarūpa Šasanāvatī, pp.71-88.
IV. Kings of the Family of Brahmapāla.

The family of Sālastambha being extinct, the kingdom passed into the hands of a new line. This is evident from the Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla, which says that when Tyāgasiṃha, the twenty-first king of the Sālastambha family, departed from this world without leaving any of his race to succeed him, "his subjects thinking it well that a Bhauma (i.e. of Naraka's race) should be appointed as their lord, chose Brahmapāla, a kinsman of the deceased ruler, on account of his fitness to undertake the government of the country". Thus Brahmapāla was elected by his people, an incident which finds a parallel in the history of Bengal. Brahmapāla, the founder of the family, apparently belonged to a collateral line of the same family as that of his Predecessors, both tracing their descent from Naraka.

We have no epigraphs of Brahmapāla, but from the records of his son Ratnapāla, it appears that he reigned about 1000 A.D. It is to be noted that in the records of his son, Brahmapāla is only called Mahārājādhirāja, while Ratnapāla has the full imperial title of Mahārājādhirāja. It may, therefore,

(2) v.10.
be surmised that Ratpāla was the first powerful monarch of the family who had imperial pretensions. That he had a long reign is evident from his Suālkuchi Grant, which was made in his 26th year. He removed his capital to Durjayā, the impregnable one, which "baffled and struck terror" into many kings. The Bargāon inscription, while emphasising the excellence of the fortification of the capital city Durjayā, states that its fortifications "were fit to cause discomfiture to the master of the Deccan country". The reference seems to suggest that some Deccan prince had led an expedition against Kāmarūpa. Katare suggests that this Deccan king was no other than the Chālukya prince Vikramāditya Kalyāṇi (Dāksinātya Klonîndrā).(4) Ratnapāla had a son named Purandarapāla, who married Durlabhā, and through her had a son named Indrapāla. It appears from the plates of Dharmapāla, a king of the same line, that Purandarapāla did not rule and died as Yuvarāja. Ratnapāla was accordingly succeeded by his grand-son Indrapāla.

Of Indrapāla, we have two charters, the Gauhati,(5) and Guālkuchi Grants,(6) recorded respectively in the 8th and 21st

(4) The Chalukyas of Kalyāṇi and their political relations with the contemporary northern states, I.C. IV, pp.43-52.
(5) Discovered in a field in course of cultivation in the village of Barpanara in the Darrang district. It consists of three plates and records a grant to the Brāhmaṇa Devapāla. Edited by Hoernle, J.A.S.B, LXVI, pp.113-32,1897; Kāmarūpa Sāsanavati, pp.116-129.
(6) Discovered in 1925 in the village of Guālkuchi in the Nalbari Police Station in the Kamrup district. It also consists of three plates and records the gift of land to Devadeva of Sāvathi. Referred to in I.H.Q, 1927, p.839. Edited by Bhattacharyya in Kāmarūpa Sāsanavati, pp.130-45.
year of his reign. Though not dated, Hoernle refers the Gauhati Grant "with some probability" to the middle of the 11th century A.D.(7)

There are, also, three charters of Dharmapala, great-grandson of Indrapala. Of these, the Khonamukhi(8) and Subhankarapataka(9) Grants were issued respectively in the first and third years of his reign. The Puṣpabhadra Grant(10) bears no date; Padmanath Bhattacharyya places it on paleographical grounds, as well as from consideration of its contents, towards the end of his reign.(11) Dharmapala in his inscriptions refers to his great-grandfather Indrapala, his grandfather Gapala and to his father Harṣapala. Gapala and his son Harṣapala, therefore, probably ruled towards the second part of the 11th century A.D.

Another Kāmarūpa king apparently of the Brahmapala family was Jayapaladeva, mentioned in the Śilimpur stone inscription of the Brāhmaṇa Prahāsa.(12) He has been taken as the

(9) The places where these three plates were found are not known. The land donated by the charter was in Subhankarapataka. Edited by Bhattacharyya in the Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvati, pp.146-167.
(10) Found in the dried bed of the Puṣpabhadra river on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. By this charter Dharmapala granted land to the Brāhmaṇa Madhusūdana. Edited by Bhattacharyya in the Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvati, pp.168-184.
(11) Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvati, p.170.
successor of Dharmapāla. (13) The Rāmacarita of Sandhyākara Nandi refers to the fact that Rāmapāla, king of Gauḍa, conquered Kāmarūpa. It is believed that the Kāmarūpa king conquered by Rāmapāla was Jayapāla. (14) If this is correct, the dynasty of Brahmāparāla came to an end towards the early part of the 18th century A.D. The names and approximate periods of these kings are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmāparāla</td>
<td>Later part of the 10th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratnapāla</td>
<td>Early part of the 11th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purandarapāla (died as Yuvarāja)</td>
<td>do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purandarapāla (died as Yuvarāja)</td>
<td>do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indrapāla</td>
<td>do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(12) The inscription is incised on a slab of blackstone and was found in the Mausa Sālimpur of the Bogra district in Bengal. The object is to record the erection of a temple by Prabhasā, wherein incidentally mentions that he (Prabhasa) "though excessively solicited, did not by any means accept 900 gold coins and a grant of land" from Jayapāla, king of Kāmarūpa. Edited by Basak, E.I, XIII, pp.283 ff.

(13) Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvatī, Intro, pp.36-37.

(14) Early History of Kāmarūpa, p.148. In the absence of a dated and accurate chronology of the kings of the family, it is impossible to say, with any degree of certainty, who was the king of Kāmarūpa at the time of Rāmapāla’s invasion. Hoernle assigned Ratnapāla to the first half of the 11th century A.D. (J.A.S.B., LXVII, pp.102 ff), and if this view is accepted, Dharmapāla may then be regarded as the vanquished king of Assam. Vide Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvatī, Intro, p.41.
Rāmapāla seems to have set up on the throne of Kāmarūpa a vassal named Tiṃgyadeva. This is known from the Kamāli Grant of Vaidyadeva, which on paleographic evidences has been placed by Venis about 1142 A.D.[15] In the inscription itself Tiṃgyadeva is not mentioned as the ruler of Kāmarūpa; he is only referred to as a prince who ruled to the east of the Pāla dominion. It states that Gauḍēśvara Kumārapāla (1120 A.D.) having heard of the disaffection (vikrītim) of Tiṃgyadeva, who had been formerly treated with high honour, appointed Vaidyadeva, his own minister, as a ruler in Tiṃgyadeva's place. The latter thereupon marched with his younger brother Budhadeva against Tiṃgyadeva, and after defeating and killing him occupied the throne. The Kamāli Grant was issued from Hamsākoṇāī,(16) and it records the gift of two villages, namely, Śāntipāṭaka and Mandarā, situated in the Visaya of Bāḍā in the Mandala of Kāmarūpa included in the

(15) It consists of three copper-plates, and is supposed to have been dug out in the course of cultivation, in the village of Kamāli, near the confluence of the Barnā and the Ganges at Benares in October 1892. Edited by Arthur Venis, E.I, II, pp.347-58; Gaudalekhamāla, pp.127-46.

(16) According to K.L.Barua, this place was within the modern district of Kāmrūp. Op. Cit, p.194.
Pragjyotisabhukti. Vaidyadeva did not long remain a feudatory of the Pālas of Bengal; for within a short time, possibly after the death of Kumārapāla, he became independent and assumed the imperial title of Mahārājādhirāja-Paramesvara Paramabhattarakas, and thus, though only for a short time, established a Brāhma dynasty in Kāmarupa.

Dr. H.C. Ray considers that Vaidyadeva was succeeded by his brother Budhadeva, who had ably assisted him in gaining the throne. Another inscription of the period, namely, the Assam Plates of the Vallabhadeva, refers to a new line of kings. The inscription consists of five copper-plates, and records the establishment of a Bhaktasālā (almshouse) in the Saka year 1107 (1184 or 1185 A.D.) by Vallabhadeva at the command of his father and for the spiritual welfare of his mother. Although the plates were discovered in Assam as early as in 1898, Gait takes no notice of them in his History of Assam. Padmanath Bhattacharya dismissed them, considering that they have nothing to do with Assam. According to K.L. Barua, the kings mentioned in the said epigraph "could

(17) Dynastic History of Northern India, I. p.258.
(19) In his review of Sir Edward Gait's History of Assam (I.H.Q,III,(1927), pp.837 ff) Bhattacharyya holds that the donor belonged to Eastern Bengal. Also Kāmarupa Sasanavatī, Intro, p.43, f.n.5,
not have been rulers of Kāmarūpa for the simple reason that there is no room for them between Vaidyadeva and 1185 A.D., the date of Vallabhadeva's inscription.(20) Ray, Vasu and Bhattasali,(21) on the other hand, take them to be the immediate successors of Vaidyadeva's descendants. The Assam Plates trace the genealogy of Vallabhadeva from Bhāskara, whom Bhattasali wants to identify with Bhāskaravarman.(22) The genealogy is given as follows:

Rāyārideva, known also as Trailakyasimha

Udayakarna, known also as Nihāsaṅkasiṃha

Vallabhadeva

Rāyārideva, "the frontal ornament of the kings of Bhāskara's race" is said to have defeated the king of Vanga. Bhattasali finds here a reference to Rāyārideva's encounter with Vijayasena of Bengal.(23) Vallabhadeva was also a powerful king, being eulogised as a great hero "who sportively overcame hostile princes, as if they were courtesans".(24) Ray and Bhattasali hold that the campaign led by Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar in 1202 A.D. to Tibet(25) was annihilated in Assam.

(22) Ibid. (23) Ibid,p.10. (24) v.10.
(25) The Tabaqāt-i-Nāṣiri, the almost contemporary history of the time, gives an interesting account of the expedition. Raverty's translation, I, pp.560 ff. Also Riyāz-ussalātin, translated by Abdus Salam, pp.65-68. For a critical account see Bhattasali; Muhammad Bakhtiyar's Expedition to Tibet, I.H.Q. IX, pp.50-62.
either by Vallabhadeva or his successor. (26) This victorious incident was recorded on a stone boulder at Kānai-badaśī-east of northern Gauhati, in the following words:

Śake turaṇe jugamēśa madhumāśa trayodaśe
Kāmarūpaṁ samāgatyā turuskāḥ khyayanāyayuḥ

"On the thirteenth of Chaitra, in the Śaka year 1127 (corresponding to the 7th March 1206 A.D.) the Turks coming into Kāmarūpha were destroyed." (27)

The name of another king of the period is preserved on a pillar inscription from Gāchtal in the Nowgong district. (28) Though the inscription is in a very unsatisfactory condition, Bhattasali has, however, been able to make out that the inscription was issued in the Śaka year 1149 (1227 A.D.) and that it refers to King Viśva-sundara-deva who ordered one Candrākānta to repair the damage done by the Mlecchas to the temple of Śiva. (29) Bhattasali further believes that the Mlecchas of the inscription were the Muhammadans who accompanied Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaj on his expedition into "Kamrūd

(26) K.L. Barua holds that the Kāmarūpha king who defeated Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar was one Prithu. Early History of Kāmarūpha. Bhattasali has ably controverted the suggestion. New Lights on the History of Assam, I.H.Q., XXII, pp.4—6.


(28) The inscription was recovered by the author during his exploration work in the Kapili-Jamunā valley in the Nowgong district in 1932. The inscription is incised on one of the sides of an octagonal pillar of stone, above 2'6" in height. There are altogether 24 lines of writing, each line containing on an average about 5 letters, each letter being 1⁄8" to 3⁄8" long.
and Bang" in 6244 which began on December 22nd, 1226 A.D. (30)
The next Mahommadan invasion was that of Ikhtiyār-uddin Yusbak Tughril Khan, about 1257 A.D. (31) Soon after these invasions the old kingdom of Kāmarūpa seems to have split up into very many independent principalities. At the same time, the Ahoms also penetrated into the Brahmaputra valley, and ushered in a new era in Assam's history, with which we are not concerned here.


(31) Ibid, p.263.
CHAPTER III.
ADMINISTRATION.

I. General Administration.
1. Preliminary Remarks.

In this Chapter an attempt will be made to describe the government and the administrative system that prevailed in the province from the accession of Pusyavarman to the time of Dharmapāla, that is to say, from the fourth to the twelfth century A.D. It should, however, be noted at the very beginning that such a description must necessarily be very imperfect, as it is based upon scanty data scattered over the entire period. The available materials mainly consist of land-grant copper-plates, which only incidentally provide information as to the system of government, and policy of the kings implicated, or as to innovations made by any one individual king. The impression which the records give is that government was traditional and that changes were few and of minor importance.\(^{(1)}\) To a certain degree, however, they do supplement one another as regards the information they provide. At any rate, one must make the best use of this material until more satisfactory sources of information are available.

2. The King.

Succession: In our period, there was only one form of government, that is to say, monarchy. Kingship was hereditary, and generally the law of primogeniture prevailed. But Harjjaravarman's Plate mentions that as King Balavarman's two sons Chakra and Arathi lacked in princely qualities, the crown was offered to Chakra's son, that is, to the late king's younger son's son: 

Makrāratho jagati hoddhata rājaputrau rājyambabhāra tanayo hi kaniyasta.(2)

The Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla refers to a question of some considerable constitutional importance. The epigraph records the circumstances in which Brahmapāla, the founder of the dynasty, came to the throne. It says that as the last king of the Śālastambha dynasty died without issue the prakṛti "thinking it well that a Bhauma (that is, one of Naraka's race) should be appointed as lord, chose Brahmapāla, from among his kindred, to be king on account of his fitness to undertake the government of the country (nivamsam nripam - ekavimśati - tamam śrī - tyāgasimh - āsidhan - tesam - viksya divaṇ - gatam punar - a-ho bhaumo hi no yujyate | svāmīti pravicintya tat - prakṛitayo bhūbhāra - raksāksamam sāgandhyāt - paricakire narapatin śrī - brahmapālam hi ḥam ||) (3)

(2) v.8. (3) v.10.
The expression prakriti is generally used in the sense of prajā, the people, and it may therefore be assumed that Brahmapāla was elected king by his subjects. The Arthaśāstra gives the name prakriti to each of the elements of government, that is to say, the king, the ministers, the country, the fortress, the treasury, the army, and the ally (svāmy - amātya - janapada - durga - kosa - danda - mitrāṇi prakritayaḥ), the aggregate of which constituted the monarchical state. (4)

This theory of the constituent elements of the state is also known to the author of the Kamsulī Grant, which refers to saptāṅga - ksitipādhītvam. (5) It may therefore be inferred that after the death of the last king of the Śālastambha dynasty, the ministers and the army with the consent of the people elected Brahmapāla to be their king. There were, however, other reasons for electing Brahmapāla as king, for it is said that he was a warrior who could single-handedly overcome the enemy in battle: ekō - sau jītavān - ripun. (6)

Coronation: From ancient times in India, the abhiśeka (coronation) of the king was an important ceremony. Apart from its mystic value, the rite of coronation conferred upon the king the legal title to govern. Though the records do

(4) See also the Matsya Purāṇa, Chap.220, v.19.
(6) Bargāon Grant, v.11.
not give a detailed account of the abhiseka ceremony of the Kāmarūpa kings we can, however, glean a little information about it from them. The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman says that Virabāhu put his son on the throne in the prescribed form (vidhi-vat) on the auspicious day (punye hani)(7) The Plate of Harjjjaravarman reveals the central rite of the abhiseka, which consisted of the pouring of sacred water on the king's head. This record states that Harjjara was crowned king by sprinkling water on him drawn from all the sacred pilgrimage places, in auspicious silver vessels (sarvva - tīrthārṇmāh sampurṇmai rājatāh kalaseh śubheḥ | simhāsana samārudo marudviriva vāsavaḥ ||) (8) Reference is again made in the same inscription to a special court which was held to celebrate the rājyabhiseka and which was attended by the subordinate rulers and feudatory princes (śrīmān Harjjjaravarmanīrājabhīb pranataivrīrtah | ā bhisikto vanik - pūrvve rājaputreb kulodrateḥ) (9) The Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla says that when "Indrapāla sat on the throne, the gold-strewn floor of his audience-hall looked like a fruit-covered tree by reason of the jewels that fell from the crowns of the princes as they stood reverently bowing (before him) with joined hands."(10)

(7) v.23. (8) v.13-14. (9) Ibid. (10) v.15. The term used does not indicate that the floor was gilded, but strewn with gold, as drawn in the Ajanta painting.
The symbol of royalty, according to the grant of Balavarman was "the royal umbrella of moon-like whiteness, together with the chowries" (chattram saśadhara - dhavalam camarā - yugala .. ) (11) The royal umbrella of the Kāmarūpa kings was known as Vārunacchatttra, which is said to have been first handed over to Bhagadatta by Kriṣṇa.(12)

Abhisēka-nāma: The practice of conferring a new name on the king, at the time of the coronation, seems to have been prevalent. For instance, on his accession Susthitavarmān took the name Mrigāṅka (Susthitavarmā yah khyātah śrī - mrigāṅka-itī)(13). Bhāskaravarman's earlier name, according to the Harṣacarita, was Bhāskaradyuti.(14) On the other hand, Brajadatta is said to have been given his name by the poets(15) and Ratnapāla by his subjects, respectively.(16)

Abdication: Instances of abdication are not rare, especially when a king abdicates in favour of a younger prince and retires to spend the rest of his life in pious meditation. This renunciation is not merely part of the Indian esoteric tradition, but was undoubtedly a common practice. The nowgong Grant of Balavarman relates that Vanamāla abdicated in favour

(15) Grant of Balavarman, v.8.
(16) Bargāon Grant, v.13. 

of his son Jayamāla "having observed that his son had finished his education and attained adolescence". (17) Jayamāla, likewise, in his old age handed on the crown to his son, Bala- varman. (18) An even more interesting case of abdication is that of Brahmapāla, who is said to have abdicated in favour of his son Ratnapāla out of a sense of duty. (19)

**Imperial titles:** The working of a monarchical form of government depends largely on the personal qualities of the sovereign. Mighty empires in India have risen under strong kings only to fall under a weak ruler. The Kāmarūpa kingdom was no exception to this. It was founded and strengthened by the arms of Puṣyavarman and Mahendravarmāṇ, and its administration was stabilised by a long list of energetic and powerful monarchs. In Kāmarūpa, as in other Indian kingdoms, the king was the head of the administration, and occupied the commanding position in the state. His chief title was Mahārājādhirāja (supreme king of kings). The Badaghāṇa Rock inscription also mentions two religious titles: Śrī - parama - daivata and parama - bhāgavata. (20) Subsequent rulers, in addition to these titles, like the Imperial Guptas, delighted in designating themselves by such high-sounding honorifics as paramaśvāra (supreme lord), paramabhaṭṭāraka (one who is

(17) v.16.  
(19) v.15.  
(20) Ibid. cit
supremely entitled to reverence or homage) which are evidently more than mere symbols of earthly paramountcy. Apart from these imperial titles, the kings used special personal titles (bildudas). Indrapâla, for instance, caused thirty-two bildudas to be inscribed in his records. From the use of such titles it may be concluded that the king, at least in theory, was regarded as being of divine origin. He was, in fact, addressed as deva and his queen as devī or maha devī.

In their prāṣastis, the king was frequently compared with Hari, Hara, Viśnu, Indra, Yama, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Bhāskara, Kuvera, Agni, etc. The Grant of Vanamāla relates that Laksmaī forsaking Viṣṇu "came down to Harjjara with all the personal beauty of her sex" and determining in her mind that "because this conqueror (Harjjara) is possessed of all the personal beauty, as well as the noble qualities of my consort (Viṣṇu) who has matchless might and a chariot-wheel on his hand, I shall surely become his chief queen. Thereby I shall not undergo any degradation." Valdyadeva is compared with Vṛihaspati as regards his knowledge, and the sun as regards his energies, and Viṣṇu as regards his good actions, and Varuṇa as regards his stability, and Kuvera as regards his wealth, and the king of Champā (Karna) as regards his liberality.

(21) Kāmarūp Śāsanāvatī, pp.139-40.  
(22) For interpretation see Hocart: Kingship, p.10.  
(23) v.13-14.  
(24) Kamauli Grant, v.19.
These comparisons are derived from the traditional ideas of kingship mentioned in the earlier textbooks, such as Manu. The Šukranīiti says that, like Indra, the god of gods, the king protects; like Vāyu, the spreader of scents, he generates kind and harsh actions; like the sun, the destroyer of darkness, he crushes unorthodoxy and establishes the true faith; like Yama, the god of death, he punishes offences; like Agni or fire, he purifies and enjoys all gifts; like the delightful moon, he pleases everybody by his virtues and activities; like Kuvera, the god of wealth, he protects the treasure and possession of the State. It should, however, be borne in mind that in spite of these claims to divinity, the king was never an autocratic ruler. He was considered to be an incarnation of God on earth, functioning for the welfare of his subjects by ruling over them righteously and in accordance with the sacred laws laid down in the Vedas, smāritis and Dharmaśāstras.

**Personal qualities:** The epigraphs provide us with numerous references to the personal qualities necessary for kingship. It is said that in physical beauty the king even outdid Manmatha or Cupid (manmath - maṁathī - rūpam).(25) Vanamāla was described as being "broad in the chest, slender and round in the waist, with a thick-set neck and club-like arms."(26) The same record says that Balavarman was "endowed

(25) Bargāon Grant, line 47. (26) Grant of Balavarman, v.12.
with eyes resembling the undulating flowers of the blue lotus, with a thick-set neck and well-formed arms, and with a figure like a fresh lotus flower just opened under the touch of the rising sun." (27) The terms used are reminiscent of those used to describe the beneficent form of the gods in the Śilpa-śastras.

Almost down to our time, war was the sport of kings, and success in war and valour in battle was the rulers' highest ambition. The strength and valour of the king were such as to surpass Skanda (god of war). He was an Arjuna in fame, Bhīmasena in war, Kṛitānta (god of death) in wrath, a forest conflagration in destroying his adversaries (dāvānalo vipakṣavīrodhi). (28) Single-handed he overcame his enemies in battles; (29) and gathered fame by raids on his enemies. (30) He gave extraordinary proofs of heroism by the way in which he captured hostile kings; (31) and equalled the prowess of the whole circle of his feudatories by the strength of his own arm. (32)

**Moral qualities:** The king was endowed with innumerable good qualities, emulating the renowned good deeds of Rāma or

(27) v.20. (28) Bargāon Grant, line 49.
(31) Grant of Vanamāla, v.21-22.
Krisna. (33) His face was never disfigured by anger, nor was any low word ever heard from him; he never used improper words, and his disposition was always noble. (34) He was foremost amongst the just and the righteous, (35) like the sweet breeze of the Malaya mountains. (36) He possessed a sense of duty, forbearance, gentleness towards religious preceptors, liberality like King Sivi, truthfulness like Yudhishthira, modesty, affability and all embracing compassion towards his subjects. (37)

Learning and Culture: He was the supporter of learning and of fine arts, and the patron of poets and learned men. (38) He is described as the moon in the sky of learning (śaśadharo vidyā - nabhaṣi), (39) and was accomplished in all the sixty-four arts. (40) His profundity was such as to put into shade the ocean; his intelligence such as to be a guarantee of the conquest of the world. (41) "He dived deep into, and passed across, the deep and broad streams of all sciences, the dash­ing waves of which are the pada-vākya-tarka-tantra", i.e., rhetoric, philosophy, logic, and religion. (42) These titles,

(33) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v.9.
(34) Grant of Balavarman, v.13.
(35) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v.15.
(36) Bargāon Grant, lines 49-50.
(37) Nidhanpur Grant. (38) Ibid.
(39) Bargāon Grant, line 49. (40) Nidhanpur Grant.
(41) Bargāon Grant, lines 47-48.
(42) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v.16.
no doubt, are conventional, but they embody a very real ideal. They are literary in origin and reflect the culture of the age. They therefore cannot be passed over as mere verbal adulation or servility.

Administrative ability: The inscriptions lay down certain ideal standards for royal administration, although it is difficult to state whether or not they were actually observed in practice. The Grant of Varnamālā states that the first and foremost duty of the king was to afford protection to all his subjects and to look to their general well-being. The king was accustomed to gratify the desire of all classes of his people. According to the Midhanpur Grant, the king devised many ways of increasing the enjoyment of his hereditary subjects. He was the repository of the principles of statecraft (sāmkhyārthābhijñā) (43) and knew well the six-fold measures of royal policy. (44) The Kāmarūpa kings evidently realised that material wealth was indispensable for the well-being of the people. In the Subhāṅkarapātaka Grant the king Dharmapāla, though specified as "Defender of the Faith", nevertheless protected the wealth of his subjects (Kāmarūpa Sāasanāvatī, p.32, f.n.2). (45) As the following passage shows, the king judiciously applied the revenue for the welfare of the

(43) Midhanpur Grant.
(44) Kāmarūpa Sāasanāvatī, p.32, f.n.2.
(45) v.12.
people: yathāyathāmucita - karaniṣka - vītaraṇa.(46) It is thus clear that the general good was set before personal enrichment or enjoyment.

**Religious activities:** More important than these elementary duties of the ruler was the preservation of the social solidarity of the people by enforcing on them the duty of the observance of the ārya-dharma, based on immemorial custom and the authority of the sacred texts. India, during our period, saw the decline of Buddhism and the resuscitation of the Hindu way of life. In Kāmarūpa this was accomplished by a revival of the ancient ārya-dharma, modified to some extent by the history. In the Nidhanpur Grant, it is clearly stated that King Bhāskaravarman revealed the light of the ārya-dharma by dispelling the accumulated darkness of the Kāli age (ākulita - kali - tīmira - sāncayataya - prakāsitārya - dharma - lokāḥ)(47)

The Hindu conception of dharma is derived from the idea of established right. It works the whole field of human activities, as well as the established social order with its attributes of law, conduct and worship. Society, according to the Hindus, exists for the maintenance of dharma, that is, the doing of that which is good and conducive to the attainment of the ultimate object of existence. The State is embodied in society to enable those constituting society to pursue this

(46) Nidhanpur Grant, line 36.
(47) Lines 36-37.
Dharma unhampered by those with whom their lot in life may be cast. (48) This idea of Dharma provides the motive of all social life, and the duty of a government, as an organ of society, is to provide for the undisturbed maintenance of Dharma on earth. (49) In order to do so, it must establish the social orders (varṇa) and the stations in life's progress which are known as Āśrama. Manu, who is our main authority on the subject, says: "The king has been created (to be) the protector of the classes (varṇa) and orders, who, all according to their rank, discharge their social duties". (50) In obedience to this ancient tradition and its textual embodiments, Bhāskaravarman is said to have "properly organised the duties of the various classes and stages of life that had become confused." (51) The grant of Agrahāras to a large number of Brahmans, and the erection and maintenance of numerous temples, indicate fully the vigour with which the early kings of Kāmarūpa pursued religious activities. (52) That the Vedic religion was assiduously practised by the kings is proved by the reference to aṣvamedha sacrifices. (53) Numerous references are also available to kings, who studded the kingdom with "white-washed temples" and "sacrificial courtyards.

(48) Manu, IV, p.176.  
(49) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v.18.  
(50) Manu, VII, p.221.  (51) Nidhanpur Grant, line 35.  
(52) See infra.  (53) See supra, Chap.II.
with immolating posts", as well as to the skies being dark with smoke of offerings.(54)
3. Central Administration.

We have seen that since the time of Mahendravarman, who performed two horse sacrifices, the Kamarūpa kingdom ceased to be a small state and developed imperial dimensions. The empire was built up by defeating in battles the rulers and chieftains of the neighbouring territories. This is clearly indicated by the incomplete set of copper-plates of Harijara, which states that the frontier kings, unable to fight, sued for peace with the Kamarūpa king (raĵyärtham vijīglśavo giridari-prantesu yastā sthitāh / sandhyarthaṃ saranāngatā nṛpa-sutān sthāne yama dhyāsate). The problem of administration therefore, in this age of conquests and increasing empire, was not a simple matter. Throughout our period, as shown by the epigraphs, there was an elaborate system of government both central and local.

Among the officers of the central administration, the most important were the Sāmantas, Yuvarāja, Mahāsenāpalī and the Amātyas. The Sāmantas, or feudatory chiefs, were the king's immediate subordinates. Writers like Manu have laid it down that even when an enemy king is conquered or killed in war, the conqueror should not annex his state, but should appoint a near relative of the former ruler as his own nominee to the vacant throne, imposing conditions of vassalship upon him. The Kamarūpa kings followed this principle, and,

as a result, their territory included a large number of feudatory states. The rulers of these feudatory states enjoyed the title of Sāmanta, but they were also known as Rāja. These vassal chiefs assisted the emperor in military undertakings and waited upon him whenever required. The inscriptions state that the Sāmantas constantly came to the capital, mounted on elephants and horses, or riding in litters, to pay due respect to the sovereign. The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva shows that the sovereign sometimes displaced disloyal feudatory chiefs and established loyal ones in their place. From these loyal feudatory chiefs were recruited the highest officers of the state. The chief of the Sāmantas, the Mahāsāmanta, was probably appointed to exercise some sort of control over them, or possibly as their chamberlain. The Nidhanpur Grant mentions that Mahāsāmanta Divākaraprabha was in charge of the bhāndāgāda, royal storehouse. The royal storehouse is universally said to be the support of the king (kośomilohi rājeti pravadaḥ sarvalaukikah), so it was natural to entrust the office to a high official. His business was to see that all necessary articles were kept in readiness or distributed in accordance with the king's orders. The Kālikāpurāṇa recommends that for each of the established departments of the treasury, local administration, and judicial, a

(58) Grant of Vanamāla.
(59) Ibid. of cit
group of officers should be appointed. Further, it enjoins that they should not be allowed to hold office permanently. The Tezpur Rock inscription speaks of a Mahāsāṃmanta who was a senādhakṣaya, a general.

The king's eldest son was heir-apparent (yuvarāja), but no detailed information is available as to his duties and functions. That his share in the public administration consisted in the promulgation of royal orders is known from the Grant of Harjjaravarman, for this epigraph was issued under the orders of the Yuvarāja Vanamāla (yuvarāja śrī-vanamālāḥ samajñāpayanti). The epithet Kumāra was applied to a son of the king and usually he was appointed to a high administrative office, such as a provincial governorship or viceroyalty. But strangely enough, the Harṣacarita and the accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Huien Tsang, mention Kumāra as the title of a reigning king, namely, Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa.

In the stereotyped lists of persons to whom commands were issued, appear the titles of Rājā, Rājñī and Rājaputra. Rājā, evidently does not refer to the sovereign who issued the grant. Both the expressions, Rājā and Rājñī, must, therefore, refer to feudatory rulers and their queens. The term Rājaputra, likewise, may mean either a prince of the royal family, that

(60) Kośe Janapade dande caikaikatra trayam-trayam | prastādviniyunjita rakṣennaikam-statastimān // Ch.84, v.54.
(61) Ibid. (62) Harjjaravarman’s Plate; Subhankarapātaka Grant, v.6.
(65) Watters, II, p.186.
is to say, a younger son or nephew, or it may possibly be used in a more general sense with the same meaning as the modern "Rājput". The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman, also, mentions the office of Rānaka, and subsequent records refer to still another office, the Rājanyaka. In the lists, Rānaka precedes Rājanyaka, and both are preceded by Rājñī. This indicates an order of precedence and that the office of Rājanyaka was inferior to that of Rānaka. A similar term, namely, Rājanaka, which is probably only a corrupted form of Rājanyaka, occurs in the Chamba inscriptions. This title, as Vogel suggests, corresponded to Rāñā and was applied to the vassals of the local Rājās. However, the Rājatarangini, as quoted by him, suggests that the word Rājanaka used to be used in Kashmir in the sense of minister. It is, therefore, probable that the title Rājanyaka originated from Rājanya, signifying a minor officer.

Certain inscriptions make it plain that in the general administration of the State, and especially in the initiation of state policy, the sovereign was assisted by a council of ministers (sacīva-samāja). In the Life of Hiuen Tsang, it is reported that when Bhāskaravarman accompanied by his

(66) Antiquities of Chamba, pp.110; 121.
(67) It should be noted here that the suffix -ka in Sanskrit is used to signify diminutive form.
(68) Kamauli Grant.
ministers went to meet Hārśa on the bank of the Ganges, the king, before actually meeting Hārśa, held a conference with his ministers. The Harjjara Plates refer to the Mahāmātya Govinda who probably was the Prime Minister of the Council. Ministers are referred to as mantrīn, amātya and śaciva. In the Arthaśāstra, amātya is used in a general sense, including both śacivas and mantrīns. The Kāmandakiya Nīti, however, makes distinctions between the three officers. According to it, a mantrīn is one who should consider, make a decision, and report to the king about the use of the four means of government: peace, corruption, dissensions and force, when, where and how to be brought about; also about their respective results, good, bad and middling. An amātya, on the other hand, is spoken of as being a councillor, who should report to the king about the cities, villages, hamlets, and forests in his dominion, the arable land, the cultivated land, the cultivator, the revenue due from them, the actual receipts and the balance due; the forest lands, the barren lands, the fertile ones not actually under cultivation; the receipts for the year from fines, taxes, mines and treasure troves, the ownerless, lost and stolen property. The Amātya was, therefore, obviously concerned with revenue matters. The Badagangā Rock inscription

(69) p. 172.
(70) Kāmarūpa Śāasanāvalī, p. 51.
refers to one Aryaguna, who was a Viṣayāmātya during the reign of Bhūtivarman.\(^{(71)}\) The saivā was a war minister: he had to examine carefully and report to the king the previous stock, the fresh supply, the balance due, the useful and the useless among elephants, horses, chariots, camels and infantry, in addition to many other duties connected with the king's militia. Vaidyadeva, who was subsequently appointed ruler of Kāmarūpa, is mentioned as having originally served as saivā under Gaúḍāśeva Kumārapāla. He is described as a sharp-rayed sun in the midst of the lotus of the assembly of the śacivas (śaciva - samāja - saroja - tīmpabhān).\(^{(72)}\) Prior to his appointment as the ruler of Kāmarūpa, he possibly won the victory in a naval battle.\(^{(73)}\) He had given further proof of his pre-eminence as an able general by defeating Timgyadeva.\(^{(74)}\)

The Kamauli Grant indicates that the offices of ministers were hereditary and were held by Brāhmaṇas. The Kālikā Purāṇa enjoins the appointment of wise and well educated Brāhmaṇas as ministers.\(^{(75)}\) In the case of Vaidyadeva, according to the Kamauli Grant, the office of the Mantri descended from father to son for no less than four generations.

\(^{(71)}\) Op. Cit.
\(^{(72)}\) v.10.
\(^{(73)}\) Ibid, v.11.
\(^{(75)}\) mantriṇastu nṛjñah kuryyād - viprān vidyāviśāradān%
vinayaśān kulinaṁśāṁ dharmārthakusālāṁ rājūn ||
Ch.84, v.105.
The maintenance of foreign relations formed a very important department of the state. Kāmarūpa kings were able to establish diplomatic relations with the various ruling dynasties of India, doing so, in certain cases by intermarriage. (76) The Harsacarita describes the eternal alliance between Bhāskararvarman and Harṣa.(77) The officer appointed to maintain proper relations with foreign powers was known as Duta, ambassador or envoy. The office was obviously one of great trust and responsibility, and was accordingly given only to a man of noble descent. The Harsacarita, referring to Hamsavega, the confidential Duta of Bhāskararvarman, who was sent to wait upon Harṣa, says that Hamsavega's "very exterior, delighting the eye with graceful curves, belied the weight of his qualities." (78) The poet describes his reception at Harṣa's court. After the Chamberlain had announced the Kāmarūpa ambassador, Hamsavega, King Harṣa commanded that he should be immediately admitted. While still at some distance from the throne, Hamsavega, who was escorted in person by the Chamberlain", embraced the courtyard with his five limbs in homage." (79)

(76) Harṣadeva gave his daughter Rājyamati in marriage with the Nepal king Jayadeva. See supra. It is mentioned in the Rājatarangini that Meghavāhana of Kashmir married a princess of Prāgjyotishā named Amritaprabhā. Bk.II, pp.148-150; Bk.III, p.9.

(77) Cowell, p.218.

(78) Ibid, p.211

(79) Ibid.
At the king's gracious summons to draw near, he approached him at a run and buried his forehead in the footstool; and when the king laid a hand on his back, he once more bowed down. Finally, he assumed a position not far away, indicated by a kindly glance from the king. Turning his body a little to one side, he sent away his chowrie-bearer, who stood between him and the ambassador. He then inquired familiarly, "Hamsavega, is the noble prince well?" This introduction was followed by an exchange of gifts between the two courts. Hamsavega laid before Harsa the presents he had brought from his master. These presents were accepted in a friendly manner and the ambassador was dismissed from the presence and sent to the Chamberlain's house. Again, at the hour of dinner, King Harsa despatched to Hamsavega the remains of his toilet sandal enclosed in a polished coconut covered with a white cloth, a pair of robes, touched by his person, a waistband wrought of pearls, a ruby and a plentiful repast. Later, Harsa heard the ambassador in private. Then, his mission fulfilled, he was permitted to return to Kāmarūpa with all honours due to an official of his rank. Hamsavega was sent away by Harsa, "laden with answering gifts in charge of eminent envoys."(81)

(80) Ibid.
(81) Ibid, pp.211-223.
In this connection, mention may be made of the household establishment of the king, which was a large one. It included the Rajaballabhas, Rajaguru, Bhesaja, and the court poets. The character and functions of the Rajaballabhas are not clearly stated in the epigraphs; the word means "royal favourites" and may have corresponded to some kind of Privy Council. The Bhesaja, more commonly known as Raja-vaidya, was the royal physician, and looked after the health of the king, as well as being in charge of the public health department. Among the other officers of the palace were door-keepers, uahers, chowrie-bearers, body-guards, chamberlains and so forth. That the office of the chief door-keeper carried a certain dignity is apparent from the use of the epithet Mahâdvarâdhpati. Persons seeking audience with the king or entrance into the palace had to obtain the approval of this officer, who appointed the dvârapatis who actually guarded the palace-gates. Along with these officers is mentioned another official called Mahâpratihâra, who was also connected with the routine of court life. In our records the title is applied to both military and civil administrative officers, as well as feudatories. (82) It is, therefore, likely that the Mahâpratihâra was a high official in the police and military departments. The apartments of the royal women were commonly styled antâpura. It appears that the keeper of the door of the seraglio was an old lady, for she is designated (82) Harîjaravarman's Plate.
Here a reference must be made to a group of officers known as Dutaka, Lekhaharaka, and Dirgadvagaha, who communicated the royal commands to officials, as well as to the people. They, also, performed the duties of couriers. As will be seen in Chapter IV, there appears to have been a system of communication by means of couriers (Dirgadvagaha). These couriers not only carried letters and messages but also served as guides or escorts. Huien Tsang was granted such as escort at the special order of Bhaskaravarman.

Before closing this list of officers, it is necessary to consider an expression in the Nidhanpur Grant. It relates to an officer issuing a hundred commands, who was qualified with the five great sounds (prapta - pañca - mahā - śabda). The term prapta - pañca - mahā - śabda is somewhat obscure, but it is often met with in early inscriptions and grants from other parts of India. It also occurs in the Rājatarangini.

One explanation of the expression, as first suggested by Sir W. Elliot, refers to the privilege of using certain musical instruments conferred on vassals as a mark of honour. But Bühler, Kielhorn, Fleet, Stein and others have explained it as denoting any five titles commencing with mahā (great).

Here a reference must be made to a group of officers known as Dutaka, Lekhaháraaka, and Dirgadvagáha, who communicated the royal commands to officials, as well as to the people. They, also, performed the duties of couriers. As will be seen in Chapter IV, there appears to have been a system of communication by means of couriers (Dirgadvagáha). These couriers not only carried letters and messages but also served as guides or escorts. Híuen Tsiang was granted such an escort at the special order of Bháskaravarmána.(84)

Before closing this list of officers, it is necessary to consider an expression in the Nídhánpur Grant. It relates to an officer issuing a hundred commands, who was qualified with the five great sounds (prápta - pañca - mahá - śabda). The term prápta - pañca - mahá - śabda is somewhat obscure, but it is often met with in early inscriptions and grants from other parts of India.(85) It also occurs in the Rájarangini. One explanation of the expression, as first suggested by Sir W. Elliot,(87) refers to the privilege of using certain musical instruments conferred on vassals as a mark of honour. But Bühler, Kielhorn, Fleet, Stein and others have explained it as denoting any five titles commencing with mahá (great).

(83) Grant of Balavarman, line 37.
(84) Life of Híuen Tsiang, p.167.
Strangely enough, besides other lesser offices mentioned in Kāmarūpa inscriptions references do occur to five high offices styled Mahā. These are Mahā - sāmanta, Mahāmātya, Mahā-sainyapati, Mahā - prātihāra, and Mahā-dvārapati. This fact naturally lends support to the view that in Kāmarūpa, the expression prāpta - pañca - mahā - śabda was possibly used to denote an official who had successively held these five offices, having been promoted from one to the other. Such capable and meritorious officials being rare, the title undoubtedly signified a very distinguished official.(88)

(88) Barua, Administrative System of Kāmarūpa, Op. Cit. Dr. Ghoashal suggests that the group of titles prefixed by Mahā evidently show an attempt to create a superior grade of officers over and above the ordinary ones. He further remarks that we have here an indication of deliberate effort to introduce more efficient and systematic organisation of the administrative machinery. A Note on some Administrative Terms in Ancient India, K.A.C, V, pp.30-32.
4. Local Administration.

Before going on to discuss the nature and duties of local officials, it is necessary to say a few words on the administrative divisions of the country. The terms rājya, deśa and occasionally, mandala, were employed to denote the kingdom as a whole. It consisted of a series of well defined administrative units. The biggest division was the bhūkti or province. In the Kamauli Grant Prāgjyotisa itself is called a bhūkti.\(^{(89)}\) As the country was then annexed to Gauda, it was legitimately so named. The next unit was the Viśaya or district; though the exact expanse of territory covered by the term cannot be ascertained from the epigraphs. It is, however, certain that a Viśaya consisted of a number of villages or grāmas, for a grāma is usually described in the inscriptions as situated in a particular Viśaya. The Viśaya was furthermore often named after its chief town. Our knowledge of the Viśayas of the kingdom is by no means complete. However, the following are recorded in the inscriptions:

Chandrapuri,\(^{(90)}\) Dijjinā,\(^{(91)}\) Kalangā,\(^{(92)}\) Pūrajī,\(^{(93)}\)

\(^{(89)}\) E.I, II, p.353. \(^{(90)}\) Midhanpur Grant.
\(^{(91)}\) Grant of Balavarman, line 33; Subhaṅkarapātaka Grant, line 31.
\(^{(92)}\) Suālkuchi Grant of Ratnapāla.
\(^{(93)}\) Puṣpabhadrā Grant; Khonāmukhi Grant.
Trayodasaagrâma, (94) Hâpyomâ, (95), Mandî, (96) Vâdâ. (97)

In early times the term mandala does not appear to have been used as an administrative unit in the technical sense. It was a general, more or less corresponding to desa or râstrâ, in fact, a region. The Kamauli plate, however, does refer to Kâmarûpa mandala, which was in the Vâdâvisaya within the bhukti of Prâgjyotisa (ârî - prâgjyotisa - bhuktau kâmarûpa mandale vâdâvisaye ...). The Grant of Vallabhadeva, stated to have been issued in the saka year 1107, refers to the territory Hâpyachâ as a mandala. (98) The Mandala, therefore, appears to have included several visayás or districts. In addition to these broad divisions, there were the smaller units, pura and grâma, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Regarding the general administration of these units, a fairly clear idea can be obtained from the records. The district or Viśaya was administered by a Viśayapati. He had an

(94) Bargâon Grant. (95) Guhati Grant of Indrapâla.
(96) Guâkuchî Grant of Indrapâla.
(97) Kamauli Grant.
(98) Ibid. It is also to be noted that the eastern Ganga copper-plate of Anantavarman (c 8th century A.D) refers to a learned Brâhman (donor of the grant) who hailed from Śrîngâtika Agrahâra in the Kâmarûpa Viśaya (Kâmarûpa - viśaya - śrîngâtikâgrahâra). E.II, XXVI, 1941, pp.62-68.
adhikarana (office) at headquarters (adhiṣṭhāna). The office of the Vīsāyapati included some of the following officers: Nyāya - karanika, Vyavahārika, Simāpradātā, Kāyastha, Nāyaka, Kosthāgārika, Uparika, Uṭhūhitayita, Lekhaka, Śāsayitrī, Sekyakāra and others. It appears that there was no real separation of civil and military, or executive and judicial functions, for we find a Vīsāyapati, also, at the head of the revenue administration. This is evident from the fact that Vīsāyapatis are invariably included among the officers who are directed not to interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of rents, free lands and villages granted by the crown. There were, nevertheless, officers who were occupied predominantly with one side of the administration or the other.

The Nidhanpur Grant mentions the Nāyaka Śrīkṣikunda. Nāyaka, according to the Arthasastra, sometimes stands for Nāgarika, the chief (Mayor) of a town or district; (100) but generally it is taken to mean a headman of a village. The Sukranīti, however, defines it as "lord of ten villages: adhikrito daśagrāme nāyakah sarva kiritah."

Before discussion the functions of the different departments of the Vīsāyādhiparana (district administration) we

(99) Cf. Monier Williams, Dictionary, p.20. According to him adhikarana means an act of placing at the head or subordinating government, supremacy, magistrate, court of justice, etc. Also see E.I. VIII, p.46, note 7.

(100) Arthasastra, Bk.I, Chap.XII, and Bk.II, Chap.XXXVI.
should take notice of one of the most striking features of the constitution of a district adhikarana, namely, the non-official element. In most of the records, it is stated that the subject of the grant was to be communicated not only to the state officials and to the Brāhmaṇas, but also to the leading men of the districts (jyeṣṭhabhadrāṇ; pramukhyajanapadān). Whether these terms refer to a popular representative body, or merely to the elder members of the society, is not clear, nor is it clear how the communication was made. These repeated passages in the grants, however, do suggest that the Visayapati was in close touch with representative local bodies, who, perhaps, acted as a council of elders. (101)

Justice was administered according to the Vedas, Aṅgas, Dharmaśāstras and Purāṇas. The sources of law were the code of sacred laws (Dharmaśāstras), case-law (Vyavahāra), customs and tradition (Caritam) and the king's orders (Sāśana). The laws were generally expounded by the Brāhmaṇas. The chief officer of justice, as recorded in the Midhanpur Grant, was the Nyāya Karanīka. The circumstances of the Midhanpur Grant, further lead us to presume that the Nyāya Karanīka was also an "adjudicator who had to inspect and decide if the boundaries of lands were properly marked out or not, and to settle all cases of dispute arising out of land." Another official

(101) There is, however, no indication of a janapada institution as described by Jayaswal in the Hindu Polity. Chaps.XXVII and XVIII.
closely associated with him was the Vyavahāra or Vyavahārika. The term Vyavahāra has been defined in the Arthaśāstra as "judicial administration and procedures in accordance with established conventions." The Vyavahāri would, therefore, mean an official who conducted judicial proceedings. The Vyavahāri mentioned in the list of officials in the Nidhanpur Grant, has been taken by K.L. Barua to mean a lawyer either engaged by the Brāhmaṇa donees to plead their case against the revenue officer assessing the land, or he was the king's lawyer responsible for the correct drafting of the grant. Kayastha was another official attached to the judiciary in the capacity of a clerk or secretary.

It is now necessary to consider the evidence regarding the sources of revenue and fiscal administration. The principal sources of revenue may be classed under six heads:

1. Regular taxes.
2. Occasional taxes.
3. Commercial taxes.
4. Fines.
5. Income from state properties.
6. Tribute from feudatories.

(102) Early History of Kāmarūpa. Vyavahārika has been taken by some scholars to mean representative representing industrial and commercial interest of the district.

(103) Both in the Mricchakaṭṭīka and in the Damodarpur Plates Kayastha is used to denote an official.
Among the regular taxes fall the kara and uparikara. (104) Under occasional taxes mention may be made of utkhetana, impost levied on special occasions, and "chātabhatapravesam" or "exactions at the time of the arrival of regular and irregular military and police forces." (105) Cauroddharana is also mentioned in a list of oppressions (pīdanas) from which exemptions were granted to the donees in the inscriptions of Ratnapāla, and Indrapāla, while the inscription of Balavarman specifies that the land assigned to the donee is not to be entered by a number of oppressors among whom are included the cauroddharanāka.

Ghosal (106) takes the expression to mean a tax for maintenance of the village police, which, in the case of the land granted, was assigned to the donee, along with the land itself.

The Tespur Rock inscription refers to the collection of taxes on merchandise carried in keeled boats. (107) It further mentions levying of sulka (toll) and the imposition of fines. (108) The Bargāon Grant tells us that the state derived considerable revenue from copper mines (kamalākara). (109)

We have also references to separate classes of officers who were responsible for collecting revenue from special sources. In the first instance, the revenue from agricultural

(104) Infra. chāf IV  (105) Infra. chāf. IV
(109) The expression may, however, mean a lotus pond.
land must have been collected through the heads of the territorial units, such as Vissayapati, Nāyaka, and Grāmika. The chief officer of the revenue department was the Auparika or Uparika, an officer primarily entrusted with the recovery of the uparika tax, described in Chapter IV. The duty of the Autkhetika was to collect utkhetana impost. The epigraphs further mention two more officers who must have belonged to this department, namely, Bhāndāgārādhikṛita, (110) and Kosthagārīka. (111) The former was employed to administer the affairs of the district treasury, and the latter was entrusted with the charge of the royal granary or store in the village, where kara in kind of dhānya was collected. Another officer mentioned in the Nidhanpur Grant was the Śimāpradātā, one whose duties appear to have been to mark the boundaries of holdings. (112)

Next in importance to the civil department and judiciary was the police department. The chief officials of this department were the Dāndika, Dandapāśika and Cauroddharanīka. Literally speaking, Dāndika was the officer in charge of a court, or sitting magistrate, responsible for judging and punishing criminals. The actual infliction of punishment, after the delivery of the judgment, was carried out by the Dandapāśika. He was so named either because he inflicted corporal

(110) A large part of the Government revenue was collected in kind and so this title given to the officer in charge of the treasury is significant.

(111) The word Kostha occurs in the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, which Hoernle takes to mean "granary".

(112) Nidhanpur Grant.
punishment by using a noose or because he dragged the culprit in bonds to jail. (113) The Caurodharianaka was the highest officer concerned with the apprehension of thieves. (114) robbers and brigands; his functions being the same as those of the Cauroddhartar or Cauragrāha of the Hindu law-books. (115) Among the police officers are included certain semi-military officers, Cāṭa and Bhāṭa. Vogel thinks that Cāṭa is equivalent to the modern sār or "head of a pargana responsible for the internal management of a district for the collection of revenue and the apprehension of criminals". According to the same scholar Bhāṭa, which is usually compounded with Cāṭa, should be taken to mean "an official, subordinate to the head of a pargana." (116) Dr. Pran Nath, on the other hand, takes the term to mean "policemen and soldiers". (117)

From the inscriptions, it is evident that the adhikarana had a well organised record department with scribes and clerks, who took down documents and preserved the archives. (118)

(113) The expression is derived from daṇḍa-pāṭa, that is to say, "rod and rope". Beni Prasad takes them to mean "judicial officers who are invested with the power of punishment."
The State in India, p.406.
(115) Jolly: Recht und Sitte (translated by B.K. Ghose), p.271
(118) In the Kamuli Grant, Kovidonandana is described as engaged in the post of Dharmādikāra. It also appears
The writers were designated Lekhakas, and the documents (karana) were kept in the custody of the registrar (karanika). The officer who drafted the document was called Śásayitri. (119)

The Lekhaka was writer to the Bench. According to the Matsy Purāṇa he should be well versed in different languages, learned in laws and should write a neat and good hand, should possess presence of mind, express thoughts concisely and clearly, anticipate the intention of the speaker and know how to rule by means of subtly dividing parties, and be capable of dispensing justice equally between friends and foes, and should be loyal. (120)

The Gaḍura Purāṇa enumerates the following qualifications of a Lekhaka: memory, eloquence, wisdom, truthfulness, control over passions, and knowledge of the Śāstras.

It is plain that only men of high (118 cont.) that the department was connected with the issue of grants; for the king is stated to have delivered the sasana to the Brāhmaṇa through Gonandana. v. 34.

(119) Vasuvarṇa and Kāliyā were respectively the Śásayitri and Sekyakāra of the Nīdhapur Grant.

(120) sarva-desāksara-bhijāṇaḥ sarvaśāstra-viśāradah lekhakah kathito rājñāḥ sarvādhikaraṇesuvalaḥ śisupetān suṣampurṇān samārṇigatān-samān antarān-vai likhādayastu lekhakah sa varāḥsmṛtāh upāya-vākyā-kusalaḥ sarva-śāstra-viśāradah vahvartavaktā cālpena lekhakah syābhā guttama vaktrabhībrahmatvajño desakalavibhāgavit anāsakto nripabhakto lekhakah syādbhīrgūḍvaha

Chap. 189.

(121) Chap. 12.
qualifications could aspire to the position of Lekhaka.

The royal orders sanctioning grants of lands were as a rule engraved on copper-plates by Sekyakāra or Takṣakāra (engravers). In most cases, conforming to the prescription of the law-books, these documents specify the following details:

1. the place where they were drawn up,
2. the donor and his ancestors,
3. the witnesses to the grant,
4. the purpose of the grant,
5. the exact bounds of the estate dealt with,
6. the recipient,
7. the duration of the grant,
8. the inheritance thereof,
9. the inalienability thereof,
10. any guaranteed immunity from taxation etc.,
11. testification to future rulers,
12. corroboration from law-books,
13. the king's name and title,
14. the names of the composer of the document and its engraver,
15. the date.

The plates were held together by a copper ring. Attached to the ring is a massive seal, generally heart-shaped. Its area is divided into two parts, by a ledge running across it. In the triangular space above this ledge, is placed the figure of an elephant (Plate IX/), showing in high relief every line and feature of its great bulk en face. In the semi-circular

(122) Vinita was the Taksakara of the Puṣpabhadra Grant.
(123) This corroboration is found only in the Midhanpur Grant, Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvatī, pp.10-11.
(124) Antiquities of India, p.129.
compartment, below the ridge, is incised the king's name in letters of a size slightly larger than those of the grant. Round the edge of the seal runs a raised rim, nearly one inch in height, which protects the figure of the elephant. "The whole", in the words of Hoernle, "looks just like a heart-shaped box, without a lid". (125)

It is, therefore, plain that the administration consisted of civil, judicial, police, revenue and military departments. But whether or not there existed in our period a department to look after religious institutions is not quite clear. In the Kamaulī Grant (126) reference has been made to the Brāhmaṇa rājaguru kurārī, but whether he was the chief of all the religious officers of the state cannot be said with any certainty, though his close association with the king and his importance in the state ceremonies must have naturally given him a prominent place. The record of Harjjaravarman (127) mentions the office of the Brāhmaṇā-dhikārī, which also suggests that religious institutions were in some way or other, controlled by state officials.

(125) J.A.S.B., LXVI, 1897, p.114.
CHAPTER III (continued)

II. Military Organisation.
1. Officers.

There was hardly a king of our period who had not to undertake either a foreign expedition or to fight an enemy aggressor. The military organisation of the empire must, therefore, have been strong and efficient. It has been stated in a previous chapter that most of the emperors were themselves distinguished soldiers, and as such they ordinarily marched with the army as commander-in-chief. Under them were various grades of officers as well as the feudatory chiefs, who presumably commanded their own detachments. The commander-in-chief was known as Senādhakṣya.(1) Sometimes he is given the title of Sāmanta or Mahāsāmanta but this is presumably only when he is in his own right a feudatory chief.(2) Under the Senādhakṣyas were other lesser officers such as Senāpati, Nāyaka, Rānaka, etc. Besides these, there were special officers in charge of elephants, horses and the navy.

The army was regarded as an important service to be organised and maintained in a condition of efficiency. It is often referred to as the "victorious" army (vijaya śrī). During our time, however, the ancient Indian conception of the army as consisting of four divisions (caturanga balaṃ) with chariots as an indispensable unit, had evidently ceased

(2) Ibid. The same inscription refers to Mahāsāmanta Senadhakṣya Śrisucitta.
to exist. For in the epigraphs we find no reference to the chariot as a fighting arm. The Nidhanpur Grant is conclusive on this point; it mentions specifically elephants, horses, foot-soldiers and navy (mahā-nau hastyaśvapatti). The inscriptions, however, present no definite information as to the composition and recruitment of the several branches of the army. The personelle of the army seems to have extended to all classes; even Brāhmaṇas were to be found in the fighting forces. The Subhaṅkarapāṭaka and the Kamauli Grants both prove that Brāhmaṇas were experts in warfare. Vaidyadeva, as a general, is credited with having won two notable victories; one in the southern part of Vanga and the other "in the East". As against the home contingents, foreigners were also employed.

The Mahābhārata refers to the recruitment of the people of the bordering Mongoloid tribes. It says that Bhagadatta's army consisted of Kirātas, Cīnas and many other soldiers dwelling on the marshy region near the sea.

(3) v.2.
(5) Sabha P., XXV, XXXIII, Udyoga P, XVIII.

Nonnos refers to the Kirātas (Cirradoi) as a people used to naval warfare (McGrindle, p.199).
2. Navy.

History is said to be largely the creation of geographical environment. The peculiarities of the terrain certainly have a great influence on the growth of national and regional characteristics. It is natural that a people living along the sea-coast, or in inland territories intersected by large and navigable rivers, should develop an aptitude in the art of handling shipping. It is obvious that her waterways were of vital importance to Assam. Besides the sea-coast, to which the empire of Kāmarūpa once extended, Assam is largely dependent on her rivers for communication. Even today they form the main trade routes, both internal and external.

The inscriptions refer many times to the royal navy (ārī nau) maintained by the Kāmarūpa kings. The Apahad inscriptions allude to a naval engagement which took place between Susthitavaran of Kāmarūpa and the later Gupta king Mahāsena Gupta. The incident, says the epigraph, "is still constantly hymned on the banks of the river Lauhitya". The scene of the engagement was obviously the Brahmaputra river. The Nidhanpur Grant also refers incidentally to a naval engagement, which was probably fought between Bhāskararvarman and Sasānka, King of Bengal. The Kamauli Grant records a glorious naval victory which Vaidyadeva won over his enemy of south Vanga, near the mouth of the Ganges.

(6) Supra, Chap. II. (7) Supra, Chap. II. (8) E.I.II, p.351.
Hiuen Tsiang throws some light on these naval activities. Bhāskaravarman, according to this account, had a flotilla of 30,000 ships. When he became alarmed at having enraged Hārṣa by refusing to part with Hiuen Tsiang, "embarking with the Master of the Law they passed up the Ganges together in order to reach the place where Śilāditya Rāja (Hārṣa) was residing."

When Bhāskaravarman arrived at the country of Kie-shu-ho-ki-lo (Kajūrgira, Rajmahal) from Kāmarūpa, he held a conference there and "first ordered some men to construct on the north bank of the Ganges a pavilion of travel, and then on a certain day he passed over the river and coming to the pavilion, he there placed the Master of the Law, after which he himself with his ministers went to meet Śilāditya-rāja on the north bank of the river."(9) Again, when Hārṣa convened the great Assembly to receive gifts at Prayāga, "on the morrow the military followers of Śilāditya-rāja, and of Kumāra-rāja (Bhāskaravarman), embarked in ships, and the attendants of Dhruvabhatta-rāja mounted their elephants, and so, arranged in an imposing order, they proceeded to the place of the appointed assembly."(10)

That Bhāskaravarman's flotilla of boats not only sailed in the Ganges, but had access to the "southern sea" (Indian Ocean) is also evident. When Hiuen Tsiang decided to return to China, Bhāskaravarman, desiring to help him on the way, said, "I leave the Master to his choice, to go or to stay; but I know not,

(9) Life of Hiuen Tsiang, p.172.
(10) Ibid, p.186.
if you prefer to go, by what route you propose to return. If you select the southern sea route then I will send official attendants to accompany you.” (10)a.

Vamanāla’s inscription provides a fine description of the royal ships that were berthed on both banks of the river, near the capital city of Hāruppoeśvara. The boats were well carved and provided with various devices which made their movements fast and swift. (11) The officers in charge of them were the Nau-vandhaka, officers responsible for mooring, and Nau-rajjaka. Naurajjaka occurs in the Rock inscription of Harjjarā and may mean a class of officers who were responsible for towing the boats by means of rope from the bank. (12)

The naval power of Assam persisted under the Ahoms, who in several naval engagements brought utter disaster to the Mughal army. Shihabuddin gives a detailed account of Assam’s flotilla. He writes, “they (the Assamese) build war-boats like the kosahs (rowing boats for towing ghurabs or floating batteries, J.A.S.B, 1872, p.57) of Bengal, and call them bacharis. There is no other difference between the two than this, that the prow and stern of the kosah have two (projecting) horns, while the head and base of the bachari consist of only one levelled plank; and as, aiming (solely) at strength, they build these boats with the heart of the timber (gali-dar), they (10a) Ibid, p.188.

(11) v.30.
(12) The Dynastic History of Northern India, I, p.243, f.n.2.
are slower than kosahs. So numerous are the boats, large and small, in the country that on one occasion the news-writer of Gauhati reported in the month of Ramzan that up to the date of his writing, 32,000 bachari and kosah boats had reached that place or passed it." Further, he says, "that the people build most of their boats with the chambal wood; and such vessels, however heavily they may be loaded, on being swamped do not sink in the water." (13) Besides this account, Mahommedan historians have left to us immense materials concerning the naval power maintained by the Ahom and Koch kings in the later periods. (14)

3. War Elephants.

From the epic period, elephants had an important rank in Indian armies. As Assam is noted for well-bred elephants, (15) elephant squadrons (gajabala) naturally formed an important division of the Kāmarūpa army. It is noted in the Sānti-Parva of the Mahābhārata that the distinguishing characteristic of the easterners was that they could fight skilfully with elephants (prācyamātanga - yuddheṣu - kauśālāḥ). (16) This was well illustrated by Bhagadatta, who fought bravely in the epic war with his elephant force. (17) The Nidhanpur Grant mentions elephants in the royal army of Bhāskaravarman (sa - gajasya supratisthita katakasya). (18) Hsüen Tsang says that it consisted of 20,000 elephants. (19) The pilgrim further observes that there were "wild elephants (in Kāmarūpa) which ravaged in herds, and so there was a good supply of elephants for war purpose". (20) Shihabuddin, who accompanied Mirjumla in his Assam invasion (1662 A.D.) reports that "large, high-spirited and well-proportioned elephants abound in the hills and wilderness (of Assam)." (21)

(15) "Elephants bred in countries such as Kaliṅga, Aṅga, Karūsa and the East", says Kautalya "are the best." By east, he no doubt means Kāmarūpa. Shamasastry, Tr. p.54.
(16) 101, 4.
(17) Sūtra, f, 23 ff
(18) v.12.
That the chiefs of the neighbouring hill-tribes used to supply the Kamarupa monarchs with elephants is clear from the Bargan Grant. Herein it is recorded, though the terms are somewhat quaint, that in Ratnapala's capital "the heat of the weather was relieved by the copious showers of ruttlsh water flowing from the temples of his troops of lusty (war) elephants which had been presented to him by hundreds of kings conquered by the power of his arm..." (22)

As the tiger was to the Colas, the boar to the Calukyas, the bull to the Pallavas, so the elephant was the natural symbol of Kamarupa. (23) Almost all the copper-plates, as well as the seals of Bhaskaravarman found at Nalanda, bear its impress. (Figs. 21 & 22).

(22) Lines 29 ff.

(23) Jenkins wrongly identifies the figure on the seal of Vanamala's Grant to be of Ganesa. It is actually an elephant head. J.A.S.B, Vol. IX, p. 766. Kamauli Grant, however, bears the figure of Ganesa, This was because Vaidyadeva was a foreigner not directly descended from the line of the Kamarupa kings.
4. Cavalry.

On the other hand, Cavalry do not seem to have occupied an important place in the army. This was probably due to want of good horses. The Mahābhārata, however, mentions that Bhagadatta presented Yuddhisthira with "horses of noble breed, swift as the wind (ājāneyān hayān ērīghān)." According to the Viṣṇupuruṣa, Kiśna took away twenty-one lakhs of Kāmboja horses belonging to Naraka. From Vallabhadeva's Plates also we know that horses were imported from Kāmboja, which has, indeed, always been famous for its breed. Kāmboja is generally identified with the North-Western Frontier. There is another Kāmboja which has been identified with Cambay in the Bombay Presidency by N. Vasu and J.C. Ghose. Dr. B.R. Chatterji suggests its identification with modern Cambodia in Indo-China. R.P. Chanda took Kāmboja to mean Tibet. The Tibetan chronicle Pag Sam Jon Zang locates a country called Kam-po-tsa (Kāmboja) in the Upper and Eastern Lushai Hill tracts lying between Burma and Assam. Horses in large numbers

(26) v. 12.
(27) Vaṅger Jātiya Itihāsa (in Bengali) p.172.
(28) E.I, XXIV, 46.
(29) Indian Cultural Influence in Cambodia, pp.278-279.
appear to have been imported into Bengal and Assam from a certain town Karbattan, Kar-pattam or Karambatan in Tibet. For the Tabaqät-i-Násirî writes: "Every morning in the market of that city, about fifteen hundred horses are sold. All the saddle horses which come into the territory of Lakhnauti are brought from that country. Their roads pass through the ravines of the mountains, as is quite common in that part of the country. Between Kāmrūp and Tibet there are thirty-five mountain passes through which horses are brought to Lakhnauti". (31) Watt says that the pure ponies of Manipur are the best of all Indian ponies, being possessed of wonderful powers of endurance and weight carrying capabilities. (32)

The Muhammadan writers of the later period also noted, however, that cavalry was not in use in Assam. According to them the "Assamese are greatly frightened by horses, and if they catch one they hamstring it. If a single trooper charges a hundred well-armed Assamese, they all throw their hands up to be chained (as prisoners). But if one of them encounters ten Musalman infantry men, he fearlessly tries to slay them and succeeds in defeating them". (33)

4. Forts.

Writers on Nitiśāstra attach great importance to the construction of forts (durga). Kauṭalya considers the fort as one of the seven constituent elements of the state. He further classifies forts according to their location into four types, namely, pārvata (hill-fort), audaka (water-fort), dhānvana (desert fort), and vanadurga (forest fort). Of these different varieties, Kauṭalya gives the preference to hill-forts and considers them as unassailable. (34) The Kālikā Purāṇa, also, lays much stress on the construction of forts and besides the above four, mentions two more types of fort, namely, Bhūmi (earth-fort) and Vriksa (tree-fort). A fortified town, according to the Kālikā Purāṇa, should be triangular in shape or circular or square-sized: दुर्गम कुर्ववन पुराम कुर्यात्रिकोभम धनुराक्रिति | वर्तुलांका कत्रुकावम् नान्याथान नागरम् कारत। (35) The geography of Kāmarūpa afforded ideal opportunity for the construction of hill-forts. Judging from the location of the great cities, Prāgjyotiṣa, Hāruppesvara and Durjayā, it is clear that the Kāmarūpa kings understood the necessity of fortifying the capital as a defensive measure. The Mahābhārata speaks of the strong fortress of Prāgjyotiṣa. "The environs of Prāgjyotiṣa" says the Viṣṇupurāṇa, "were

(34) Śatamātrasth (tr.), Ch. III, 54-55.
(35) Ch. LXXIV, v. 112 ff.
defended by nooses, constructed by the Muru (architect), the edges of which were as sharp as razors." (36) The Bargaon Grant of Ratnapāla says that the impregnable city of Durjaya was encompassed by a rampart, furnished with a strong fence which defended it, like the cloth which protected the king's broad chest. (37)

Remains of old fortresses have been unearthed by Colonel Hannay and Captain Dalton at different places in the province. One of the most interesting ruins of an ancient fortress is to be found at the foot of the Duffla hills, where the Burol river debouches into the plain. The fortification consisted of two stone walls, one on each side of the river. The walls were some 10 feet in thickness, their inside being constructed from ordinary river stones, the outside being built of hewn stones ranging from 12 to 14 inches in breadth. These bear distinct builders' marks on them. Behind the walls, there were deep ditches, and the river being inside, there was plenty of good water within the defences. (38)

Regarding siegecraft, the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī furnishes us with a very interesting account of the methods of warfare of the Assamese people. It states that after his Tibetan

(36) Loc. Cit.
campaign, when Muhammad-i-Bakhtyar retreated towards Kāmarūpa, throughout the whole route, not a blade of grass nor a stick of firewood remained, as the inhabitants of the mountain passes had set fire to the whole of it. During their march, which lasted for fifteen days, not a pound of food nor a blade of grass could be found for the cattle and horses, and the men had to kill their horses and eat them. Also, when they reached the stone bridge near the Brahmaputra, to their surprise they found arches of the bridge destroyed. Muhammad-i-Bakhtyar was, therefore, compelled to take shelter in a temple, as no boats or rafts were available to enable them to cross the river. As soon as the king (Rāg) of Kāmarūpa became aware of the helpless state of Muhammad and his army, and that they had sought shelter in the great idol temple, he gave orders for his people to assemble. They came in hosts and began to form a stockade all round it, by planting, at a certain distance, bamboos spikes after the usual fashion of making stockades in the country, and afterwards weaving them strongly together with other canes. When the Muhammadan troops beheld what they had done, they made representations to Muhammad, saying, "If we remain like this, we shall all have fallen into the trap of these infidels". Making a rush all at once, coming out from the temple and attacking one point in the stockade, they made
a way for themselves, and reached the open plan. However, the Kāmarūpa soldiers followed in pursuit and succeeded in annihilating the whole force. (39)

(39) Raverty, pp.569-571; Riyasu-s-salāṭīn (Tr.), pp.65-68.
6. Weapons of War.

It appears from the epigraphs that the chief weapons of war were asi (sword), paraśu (axe), khatvāṅga (spear), gadā (mace) as well as the bow and arrow. The Plates of Vallabhadeva refer to the use of churikā (dagger) as a weapon of war. The bow was the special weapon of heroes from early times and Khamurdhara was a title of much distinction. In the Guākuchi Grant it is enumerated as one of the thirty-two bidudas of King Indrapāla; and the Brahmaṇa Himānka, as stated in the Subhaṇkarapatāka Grant, earned royal patronage for skill in archery. Vallabhadeva in his epigraph is credited with having mastered the science of archery.

Words like kavaca and varman occur in the sense of warlike protections for the body of warriors. The Bargāon

(40) Even now the spears and bows used by the tribes of Assam are the finest of their kinds. British Museum Handbook to the Ethnographical Collections, 1910, pp.51 & 85.

(41) During the Ahom period, Bartop and Hilai, large and small guns, were largely used in war. "It is believed", remarked Travernier, "that this people (Assamese) in ancient times, first discovered gun-powder and guns, which passed from Assam to Pegu, and from Pegu to China; this is the reason why the discovery is generally ascribed to the Chinese." He further mentions that "the gun-powder made in that country is excellent." Travel, II, p.217.

(42) Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvati, p.139.

(43) v.20.

(44) v.12.

(45) It is interesting to note that "varman" appears to be a part of the name of many kings of the Puṣyavarn family.
Grant refers to "the cloth which protects the king's broad chest." Dhvajā (flags) and patāka (banners) were used in the battlefield. The names of the instruments of war music are not given in the inscriptions, although we have the expression pañca - mahā - sabda, which according to some, denote five different musical sounds. (46)

(46) Proceedings and transactions of the Seventh All India Oriental Conference, pp.653 ff.
CHAPTER IV.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.
1. Gráma.

From early times, in India the village has been the backbone of the economic life of the people, that is to say, that as now the people lived a rustic life with agriculture as their main occupation. Dhánya or rice cultivation was their chief employment, and since it required co-operation in ploughing, irrigation, harvesting and cattle grazing, it necessarily demanded the concentration and grouping of dwellings and so led to the formation of compact villages. (1) This compact form was convenient also for defence. Where, however, defence was not an issue, where plant culture was all important, we often find scattered villages. The physical features, soil and climate, have also encouraged the aggregation of social units, apart from the ancient tribal ties or the strong Indian sense of family which underlies the social organisation of all Indian village life.

The usual name for a village was gráma, (2) and the inscriptions plentifully record the existence of such grámas as abhíśūravātaka, (3) Dīgdolavriddha, (4) Chādi, (5) Khyātipali, (6)

(1) R. Mookerji: Man and His Habitat, p.64.
(2) Pran Nath: A Study in the Economic Condition of Ancient India, pp. 26 ff.
(3) Grant of Vanamāla, v.33.
(4) Puṣpabhadrā Grant, v.21, 23. (5) Vallabhadeva's Plates.
(6) Ibid. Pali or Palli means a row, i.e., a row of houses.
Devunikonchi(7) and so forth. The term grāma, however, was not used quite in the same sense as the English word "village", but would correspond more properly to parish. Grāma meant, not merely the inhabited locality with its cluster of dwelling houses with gardens attached, but comprised the whole area within the village boundaries including not only the residential part, but also the cultivable fields (kṣetra), land under pasturage (go-śara), the waste land that remained untilled, streams, canals, cattle-paths (go-mārga), roads and temples. The size of these grāmas varied. A large grāma included several wards called pātaka or pāta. Keilhorn has explained the term pātaka as meaning "grāma-kadesa, a part of a village"; had "outlying portion of a village", or "a kind of hamlet which has a name of its own, but really belonged to a larger village."(8) According to the Abhidhāna Cintāmani a pātaka is a half of a village: pāṭakastu tadardhesyat.(9) That the pātaka was a smaller unit than the grāma is apparent from the Grant of Vallabhadeva, where along with five grāmas mention is made of two pātakas, Dosripāṭaka and Sonchīpāṭaka.(10) The confirmed nature of ancient Indian society is indicated by the fact that each pāṭaka was not merely a collection of houses; it was a group of persons closely knit together by blood relationship.

(7) Puspa bhadrā Grant, v.9.
(8) I.A, XVIII, p.135.
(10) E.I, V.
social intercourse, and economic co-operation. Sometimes these wards were divided from one another by lanes, plantations of fruit trees or bamboo groves. This division of a village into caste wards was on a parallel with the existence of guild wards, that is to say, wards occupied by persons following the same occupation, forming corporations organised to regulate their professional business. The Subhankarapūṭaka Grant refers to the different domicile of weavers (caturvīṃati tantrāṃ bhūṣimni and orangi tantrāṃ bhūṣimni). Furthermore, the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla and the Puṣpabhadrā Grant of Dharmapāla both mention villages exclusively inhabited by Brāhmanas. The king and the state officials frequently made land endowments to create separate villages for the occupation of Brāhmanas, known as elsewhere in India as Agraḥāras.

As the chief pursuit of the people was agriculture, the village site was generally placed along the river banks which made irrigation easy and the raising of crops more secure. In fact, most of the settlements mentioned in the epigraphs were on the bank of rivers like the Brahmmaputra, Kauśikī, Trisrōtā, Digurmā, Jaugalla and so forth. Speaking generally in terms of agriculture, it also appears that, like

(11) Ibid. (12) Midhanpur Grant.
(13) Grant of Vanamāla
(14) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.
(15) Puṣpabhadrā Grant.
all agricultural settlements in ancient India, Assam villages were divided into three parts: the village proper, arable land and pasture. Around the agricultural unit (vāstubbhūmi) or habitat, lay the waste lands and wood lands consisting of belts of fruit and other trees, shrubs and bamboo thickets, which might extend for some distance before the sphere of another village was reached. This waste was well demarcated as between village and village, but was held corporately and used severally, as the wood and fuel-wood and fruits in their season, and it played a great part in the life of the village. The Kṣetrabhūmi or arable land was usually a huge open field without any fencing. Each cultivator had one or more strip allotments in it which were demarcated from his neighbours' holdings either by kṣetrālīs, long narrow banks so engineered as to keep the precious water in high lying fields, or by nalās, drains or furrows made by the turn of the plough in order to carry off the water from the lowlands. That the go-pracāra, pasture land, was located along the village boundaries is evident from the set expression: vāstukēdāra-sthala-jala-go-pracārāvakārādyupeta ... which occurs in the inscriptions.(16) Thus go-cara-bhūmi was a very early institution. According to Kautilya an enclosure (for pasturage) at a distance of 100 (16) Grant of Balavarman, line 36; Bargāon Grant, line 56, etc.
dhanus (400 cubits) should be made around a village. (17) In the Dharmaśāstras too, we come across the same injunction (600 feet wide in the smaller communities according to Manu). (18) The pasture land, like the waste, was considered to be the common and undivided property of the village.

(17) p. 172.
Although people lived mainly in villages, cities known by the common names pura, ṇaṭaka, and nagara, were by no means rare. They were the seats of the adhikarana (government) skandhāvāra (royal camp), or of dūrgā (fort). Religious as well as commercial factors too, were responsible for the creation of new cities or for the growth of a village into a town. Since the town found its existence in trade, it had to be favourably located for transportation and communication, and if it was well situated, it grew large and prosperous. Our information regarding towns and cities that rose to importance during the period under review is that they were on a river and most conveniently located. The cities mentioned are Prāgjyotisapura, Durrjaya, Ḍurupesvara, and Kāmarūpa-nagara. Of these, Prāgjyotisapura was the ancient city. References to it are found in the Mahābhārata and the Harivamsa in connection with Krishna’s killing of Naraka. In the Sabha-parva, Krishna says, "Śiśupāla, knowing that we had gone to the Prāgjyotisa city, set fire to Dwārakā." In the Vana-parva, Arjuna in praise of Krishna says, "Thou didst destroy’s Muru’s fetters, (19) Grant of Balavarman, v.5. (20) Bargāon Grant, line 40; Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v.19. (21) Grant of Vanamāla, v.30. (22) Puṣpabhadrā Grant, v.20. (23) xlviI, 1569."
and slay Nisunda and Naraka; thou didst render the path to
the Prāgjyotisa city safe again". (24) In the Udyoga-parva
Arjuna refers to Ehauma Naraka who carried off Aditi's two
jewelled ear-rings to a very strong fortress city called Prāg-
jyotisa belonging to the Asuras. (25) The Śānti-parva refers
to the "charming Prāgjyotisa city filled with all kinds of
wealth". (26) In the Harivamśa, Krisna's exploits in Prāg-
jyotispura are described at great length. (27) These refer-
ences to the chief city of ancient Assam leave no very clear
picture of its history but they undoubtedly make it clear that
Prāgjyotisa city was great and prosperous.

Coming back to our epigraphs, we are informed by the Bar-
gāon Grant of Ratnapāla that the boundaries of the capital city
Durjjayā "were encompassed by ramparts, furnished with a fence"
and was "provided with brilliant troops of warriors." (28)
However, it is plain that the cities were extensive in size
and studded with magnificent buildings. The said record
further says that in the city of Durjjayā, the impregnable
one, "the disc of the sun was hid from view by the thousands
of plastered turrets which were rendered still whiter by the
nectar-like smiles of the love drunk fair damsels standing on

(26) ccxxi, 12954-6.  (27) cxxi to cxxiii.
(28) Ibid.
Civilisation is often identified with the city. Within its walls were sheltered artists and philosophers, teachers and priests, nobles and merchants. Our cities were frequented by many hundred well-to-do people, and adorned by religious preceptors and poets. Women of many kinds with beautiful faces, and courtesans, well adorned, were to be met with in the streets. Along the streets, which were of considerable width, passed the eminent and wealthy, mounted on stately elephants or horses, or carried in various kinds of litters. Between the cities, roads ran throughout the country. Hsiuen Tsang refers to the great road to the east leading to China.

Though the country was pre-eminently agricultural, it nevertheless, possessed a wealthy trading and industrial class among the inhabitants of its towns. Frequent mention is made in the records of towns having various kinds of vihanis, or shops, including jewellery shops. These attracted merchants of various sorts to the towns.

Besides the towns possessed pleasure amenities such as ārāma and upavāna or pleasure groves, where musk-deer were kept. In the inscriptions, for roads, we have such expressions as rājamārga (Vānāmāla's Grant), catuṣpatha, rathyā, vīthi (Puspabhadra Grant) etc. Rājamārga is a public road. Rathyā is used in a technical sense.
(39 contd.)

It refers to a street in which cars, chariots or other conveyances can ply, i.e., a vehicular street. It also means a junction of two roads. Vīthi carries two imports; it means a larger street with rows of houses and buildings alongside; it also signifies a narrow shopping lane, five cubits wide according to Sukrasāryya.
and peacocks moved about freely, and numerous lotus-covered lakes with "prattling flocks of love-drunk females of the kala-
hamsa ducks." (37) Flower gardens and orchards of various sorts were elaborately laid out. The Aphaad stone inscription
of Ādityasena, attributed to the seventh century A.D., reveals how siddhas in pairs, woke up after sleeping in the shade of
the vines in the betel-gardens which bloomed on the banks of
the river Lohitya: Lahityasya - tateśu sītalatalesu - utphulla
nāgadruma chhāya supta. (38) The city of Prāgjyotisa, according
to the Grant of Balavarman, was adorned with groves of
areca palms wreathed in betel-vines and by orchards of black
aloes-wood hung with cardamom creepers (tāmbulavallī parina -
dupugam kṛiṣṇā - guru - skandha - nivesita - tīlām). (39)
These orchards were irrigated by channels drawn from rivers
or tanks. Hiuen Tsang noticed that "water led from the river
or from banked-up lakes (reservoirs) flowed round the towns." (40)
of Kāmarūpa.

(37) Bargāon Grant.
(40) Buddhist Records of the Western World, II, p.196.
3. The Land System.

(1) Ownership and Types of Land.

In matters of land, the Kāmarūpa kings, following the general Northern Indian tradition, claimed that all land belonged to the crown. Not only did the king exercise this right over lands, cultivated or waste, but he extended his prerogative of ownership over all woods, forests, ferries, mines, etc. But the recorded procedure of granting land to the Brāhmaṇas, as described in the copper-plates, raises a very important issue regarding the Indian theory of crown ownership. In certain cases, the king, when giving away land, communicates the order not only to the state officials concerned, but to the Brāhmaṇas and to leading men of the district (sampasthita - brāhmaṇādi - pramukho - jānapadān .... yathākāla - bhāvinopi sarvān sammānanā purvam - mānayati - bodhayati samādiśati ca).

In view of the theory of crown ownership, it is difficult to explain why in alienating land, the king should notify the Brāhmaṇas as well as the leading men (pramukha - jānapadān).

Some scholars have seen in it, as noted before, an indication of the fact that the villagers, either individually and corporately possessed some kind of rights over the unoccupied lands within the accepted jurisdiction of their village. However, the bulk of the evidence proves the contrary, that is to say,

(41) Grant of Balavarman.
that the king was the sole owner of the soil. He could alienate land at will. Moreover, it appears that he could resume at will land so given, even if it had been given originally as a perpetual grant. For this reason, in the Midhanpur Grant redemption is expressly forbidden with dire imprecations.

The recorded grants have to do with two main types of land, cultivable and uncultivable or waste land. The Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla also contains the expression apakṛṣṭa-bhūmi, which Hoernle takes to mean "inferior land". There is also another class of high-lying land called vāstu or bhitti-bhūmi, building ground land, which was set apart for the dwellings of the villages, and that lay within the accepted village area.

(11) Land Tenure.

The inscriptions do not give much information as to the system of land tenure prevalent in the period. Most of the epigraphs record only transactions of a religious character, and it is therefore not easy to say how far the conditions described in them are representative of the general features of private tenure. It is, however, certain that the major part of the cultivable land was held by the agriculturists who farmed it; as now in the greater part of India the independent peasant proprietor (rāiyatīvarī) enjoyed small holdings.

sufficient for his wants. The right of occupation was hereditary, subject to the payment of dues and taxes to the king's officers or representatives.

The set terms occurring in the land-grants, though applied in a different context, do illustrate to some extent the conditions of individual land-tenure. In laying out the conditions of the grant, the Nichanpur Grant says: "Let it be known to you (all) that the land of the mayurasalmalagrahāra granted by issuing a copper-plate charter by King Bhūtivarman has become liable to revenue on account of the loss of copper-plate... having issued orders for making a copper-plate grant the land has been awarded to the Brāhmaṇas who had been enjoying the grant already in the manner of bhūmicchidra so that no tax is levied on it."(43) This suggests that there were many nyāyas or regulations relating to land tenure besides bhūmicchidra. This bhūmicchidra system is known from the time of Kautālya; he states that in conformity with this law land was given by the state for making pasture grounds and cultivable tracts, forest-plots for Brāhmaṇas for raising soma-plantations, game-preserves or forests, manufactories for preparing commodities from forest-produce and collecting raw materials from the forest.(44) It was obviously a very wide term, but it occurs constantly in the Yādavaprapakāśa's Vaijayanti and in the

(43) Line 53.
Vaiśyādhyāya, where it is explained as "kriṣya yogya bhūḥ", implying a fissure (furrow) of the soil. (45) As used in the Nidhanpur Grant, it has been taken by Bhattacharya to mean uncultivated lands, or such land as was deemed useless for cultivation, where, in fact, no corn would grow. (46) In the Kamsuli Grant of Vaidyadeva, we have also the expression: bhūṣcchidrābhaukīntkaragrāhyam, meaning, "bhūṣcchidrā (uncultivable) land from which no revenue is to be realised." (47) Hence the bhūmi or bhūṣcchidranāya suggests that no assessment is to be made on the land covered by the grant, "just as if it remained waste land", which was not assessable. Dr. Ghosal, endorsing this interpretation, remarks that under this nyāya land was granted with such right of ownership as was acquired by a person making barren land cultivable for the first time. (48) Dr. Barnett, however, interprets the expression to mean that the grantees holding lands became merely tenants at will. (49) But as the Nidhanpur Grant clearly shows that the lands granted under this tenure were given in perpetuity, not only to one person, but to his heirs, "as long as the moon, sun and earth shall endure" (ā - sandrārka - kṣitisamakālam), (50) Dr. Barnett's

(45) E.I, IV, p.138, f.n.2; also JIA. I, p.46.
(46) Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvatī, p.33, f.n.1. See also K.M. Gupta's Note of Bhūmīchidra-nyāya in I.A, LI, pp.77-79.
(47) E.I, II, p.349.
(49) J.R.A.S, 1951, pp.165-66.
(50) Line 53.
interpretation does not seem tenable. It should be noted that in these grants donees were guaranteed relief from specified taxes and the ownership of the mineral resources(51) of the area granted. A further guarantee was also given, that state officers were neither allowed to interfere with the enjoyment of the land thus granted, nor to confiscate it.

The other important system of land tenure was nūḍādharmā or apradādharma, as we find in the Damodarpur Plate.(52) It was a peculiar kind of tenure by which the purchaser, or the person or institution on whose behalf the land was acquired by purchase, obtained the right of perpetual personal enjoyment, but not the further right of alienation by sale or mortgage. In other words, the state, although it granted plots of land from the unappropriated waste, still reserved to itself certain rights over the property, and the purchaser or the donee was allowed only personal rights over the land. The value to the state of such grants is evident, for they increased the cultivated area without permanently depriving the revenue of the increased value of the land.

(iii) Special Land Tenure.

A special kind of beneficiary tenure was connected with brahmadāyā or lands granted to Brāhmaṇas for religious purposes. Such grants were governed by special rules laid down in set

(51) Subhankarapāṭaka Grant, line 35. (52) E.I, XV, pp.130 ff.
terms in the epigraphs. 

Brahmadāya is defined as "a grant or perquisite appropriated to Brāhmaṇas." (53) Such grants usually took the form of land, either small fields or whole villages. The latter were generally known as agrahāras or śrotiyas, which were granted to Brāhmaṇas either as a reward for their learning or to enable them to impart religious and secular knowledge to the younger members of the community. If the donee happened to be a single individual, the village granted was called ekabhoga or the "individual enjoyment". If, on the other hand, the donees were several, the village granted was known as ganabhoga, or the land enjoyed by a group or corporation.

The age-old tradition of the country has been to regard these pious endowments as rent-free. They were given in perpetuity and were furthermore accompanied by the assignment of other revenues accruing to the crown. Resumption was expressly forbidden with dire imprecations. The Nidhanpur Grant records that Bhūtivārman granted the Mayura-sālmala agrahāra which owing to the subsequent loss of the inscribed plates, became liable to revenue (karada). Therefore his great-great-grandson Bhāskaravarman issued a fresh charter re-granting the land to the families of the original donees. The circumstances under which the Nidhanpur Grant was made shows that the loss of charter which registered endowments was a serious matter and could invalidate the intended freedom from taxation, unless, of

course, a fresh charter was granted renewing the privilege. There must, therefore, have been a periodic inspection of grants and titles.

It is not always clear in these grants whether the donee received only the state-share of the produce and other state-rights in the land granted or the real proprietorship of the land itself, that is, an out and out gift of both the soil and the revenue. It is, however, probable that the bulk of these grants conveyed already existing villages, and merely transferred to the grantees the right to receive the revenue, that is to say, the royal share of the produce. They did not deprive any existing individual landholder of his rights or make him suffer in any way. Where, however, the grant was to colonise uninhabited land, the proprietary title was in fact conceded, as there were no antecedent private rights to interfere. Succeeding generations had therefore double title to such land, not only as inheriting specifically granted land, but as the heirs of those who came into possession of these lands by rights of first cultivation.

Besides grants made to Brähmanas, the epigraphs record gifts of land to temples and for various special religious purposes, by kings, queens and state-officials. Though there are no references to the rights attached to such grants, such grants probably resemble the Brahmadāna (grants made to Brähmanas) noted above. These institutional grants were managed by the
authorities of the temple concerned, subject to the supervision and control of the state. The Tespur Grant of Vanamāla mentions that the king repaired the temple of Hātakṣesvara Siva, and made a gift to it consisting of villages, men, prostitutes, and elephants. (54) Vallabhadeva’s Plates record the establishment of a bhaktaśālā, almshouse, in the proximity of a temple of Mahādeva, situated in the Hāpyachā-mandala, to the east of Kirtipura. For the support of this widely famous almshouse Vallabhadeva, in the Saka year 1107, granted seven villages, namely, Chāḍi, Devunikunchi, Sajjāprīga, Vangaka, Samara-hikonchikā, Dosnipāṭaka and Sonchipāṭaka “with their woods and thickets, with the people in them, with their water and land” (sa-jhāta vitapā - grāmān sa - janām sa - jala - sathān dadau). (55)

(iv) Land Revenue and Burdens on Land.

The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva lays down, among other things, that the two villages Sāntipāṭaka and Mandara, which were granted to a Brāhmaṇa, were “to be held according to the law of the uncultivated land (bhūcchidranāyena), “to be provided with all sources of revenue (sarvvaayopāya - saṃyuktam) and to be immune from taxes and their contingencies (karopaskara vajjitaṃ”). (56) This obviously points out that there were several types of imposts and burdens on the land. The exact

(54) v.24.  
(55) Ibid.  
(56) E.I, II, p.353.
nature of these different sources of revenue is not known, but they are referred to in the epigraphs in general terms as kara, uparikara, utkhetana.

The Midhanpur Grant, noticed above, refers to the taxation of the Mayura-sālmala-agrāhara subsequent to the loss of the royal charter: tāmrapāṭṭa-bhāvāt karadam-iti.(57) Kara, therefore, stands for the general tax levied on land periodically. It is synonymous with the bhāga-kara, land-tax, of the smritis,(58) generally referred to as one-sixth of the produce in the inscriptions of the Gupta period. The fiscal term uparikara, according to Fleet, means "a tax levied on cultivators who have no proprietary rights in the soil".(59) Dr. Barnett considers it to be a counterpart of the Tamil expression mel-vāram, that is, the Crown's share of the produce.(60) Dr. Ghosal, on the other hand, objects to this interpretation on the ground that the ancient Indian land grants have other and distinct terms to signify "the Crown's share of the produce"; the most common of these being bhāga-bhoga-kara and hiranśa. Furthermore, he points out that in the grants of Balavarman and Ratnapāla the officers charged with the collection of uparikara and utkhetaṇḍa are treated among the list of oppressors (upadravakārin) who were forbidden to enter the

(57) Line 51.
(58) Gautama, X, 24-27; Manu, VIII, 130, 276; Kautalya, Bk.V, Chap. 2, 271.
donated land. Dr. Ghosal contends, therefore, that "the uparikara was not a regular item of revenue like the crown's share of produce", but was "an irregular tax which bore harshly on the cultivator". However, Fleet's view seems more plausible on account of its literal interpretation of the term. The word uparikara appears to be a combination of the two words upari and kara. The word upari as a preposition means above or over, and it obviously implies that it was a charge imposed on those cultivators who were tenants at will and had no proprietary rights in the soil, viz., those who were literally above the obligation of hereditary proprietorship, and as such they would pay a higher rate of tax. In this connection, it should be noted that the revenue thus arising from upari-kara must have been very great, for a separate officer known as Auparika or Uparika was entrusted with the recovery of this revenue.

The nature of some of the other kinds of burdens attached to lands can be ascertained from the inscriptions of Balavarman and Ratnapāla. As has been noted, the Nowgong Plates of Balavarman contain the clause that the land granted was not to be disturbed by a number of possible oppressors, comprising, among others, the queen, the princes, the royal favourites, the chamberlain-matron, persons tethering elephants and mooring

boats, trackers of thieves, police officers and so forth.

(rajñirājputra-rānaka-rājavallabha-mahallakapraudikā-
hastibanchika-naukābandhika-cauro-dvaranika-dândika-danda-
pāṣika-auparika-aukthetika-ochatravāsā-dyupadrava-kārinām-
pravesā...). (63) It therefore shows that besides the regular
taxes, there were a number of customary burdens upon agricul-
tural lands. Such burdens were concerned not only with the
supply of food on the occasion of members of the royal family
and royal officers' visiting and camping (chatravāsa) in the
locality, but also with the grazing of animals, the tethering
of elephants and the mooring of boats, apparently in the course
of state service. (64)

(v) Survey of Land.

The Nidhanpur Grant points clearly to the existence of
an organised system of inspection and survey of revenue and
land. The system of measuring land and demarcating holdings
was done by officials of the state revenue department. The
epigraphs reveal that the endowed lands were measured in the
presence of the state officials; and whenever any plot of
land was given away, accurate details had to be furnished not
merely as to the boundaries concerned, but as to all matters
relating to the economic use and value of the land, most of
the grants definitely stating the amount of dhānya (paddy)
yielded by the land granted. This proves that the revenue
(63) Ibid.
(64) Ibid; Bargāon Grant.
department not only surveyed and measured the land, but compiled and kept current records of the produce and revenue derived from each field of every cultivated holding (prataya). Therefore the ownership of a holding involved the registration of titles and tenures. Each prataya was marked on eight sides (aṣṭa-simā - paricchadam). The details of such boundary surveys are indicated in the same Midhanpur Plate wherein the Mayura-sālmala-agrāhāra had "on the east, the dried Kauśika, on the south-east, that very Kauśika marked by a pillar of hewn fig tree, on the south a pillar of hewn fig tree, on the south-west the dried river-bed marked by a cut down fig tree, on the west now the boundary of the dried river-bed, on the north-west a potter's pit and the said dried river-bed, bent eastward, on the north a large jātali tree (i.e. Bignonia suaveolens), on the north-east the pond of the tradesman Khasaka and the aforesaid dried Kauśika." (65) These demarcating marks were essentially the same as recommended by the Dharmasāstra. (66) A careful analysis of the epigraphs will show that the boundaries generally included: (1) mounds, anthills, (ii) trees of different kinds, (iii) pits and trenches, (iv) ponds, tanks, channels, (v) river-banks and river-beds, (vi) wells, (vii) temples, (viii) enclosure and such other permanent objects. Where, however, no natural boundary mark existed, the new holdings were

(65) Lines 126-132.
(66) Manu, viii, 246-248.
delineated by planting trees or setting up wooden or bamboo pillars. The Subhanarkapāṭaka Grant mentions the planting of a sālmali tree (rapita - sālmalāvriksah) and vamsa-vriktih (bamboo post) as a boundary mark in the Subhanarkapāṭaka.(67) It may be noticed here that the custom of naming fields seems to have been prevalent in early times as it still is in many villages of the province. Some of the fields that were distinguished by their proper names are Bhavisābhūmi,(68) Pandarībhūmi,(69) Olandābhūmi,(70) Kaṇjiyabhūmi,(71) etc.

(vi) Measure of Land.

The system of land measurement was probably based on Drona and Nala measure. Both these systems are still the common way of measurement of land in Assam. Drona or Dronavāpa was the area on which one drona of seeds could be sown; a Nala was the length of a reed. The Śilimpur Grant of the time of Jayapāladeva uses the two terms pāṭaka and drona in giving the measurements of land, and mentions that a certain landed property yielded an income of 1,000 coins (daśa-śat-odayaśāsanam cha).(72) Pāṭaka seems to be the largest unit of area as is evident from the reference in the Gunaighar Grant

(67) Ibid. (68) Bargāon Grant.
(69) Guākuchi Grant.
(70) & (71) Subhanarkapāṭaka Grant.
(72) Op. Cit., v.22.
of Vainyagupta (507 A.D.) which states that pāṭaka was equivalent to forty dronas or dronavāpas in area. (73) In modern Assam, a Nala is equal to fifteen feet, and a Drona, or more commonly, Dona, to one Bighā of land.

(73) I.H.Q. VI (1930). The plates are found at Gunaighar, about eighteen miles to the north-west of Gāmilla, Bengal. It records a grant of land by Mahārāja Vaunagupta from the victorious camp of Kripura in the year 188 (507-8 A.D.)
4. Agriculture.

(i) Food Crops.

The major part of the cultivated land of the village was devoted to rice, which is still one of the staple food crops of the province. It has previously been noticed that the revenue of the land was estimated in measures of dhānya, or rice yielded by it. This obviously points to the general prevalence of payment of the revenue in kind. Rice was and even today is the chief means of barter in the villages. The Bargāon Plates of Ratnapāla mention the gift of a lābukutikelkṣetra, which according to Hoernle was "a field with clusters ('hills') of gourds."(74) Gourds are still largely grown on the river banks of Assam.(75) Sugar-cane was another food crop. The sugar-cane of Assam, says Casimir, "excels in softness and sweetness, and is of three colours, red, black and white."(76)

Besides rice growing, the cultivation of fruit trees is specially prominent in the inscriptions as it is, also, in the contemporary literary records. Hiuen Tsiang mentions that the people of Kāmarūpa cultivated jack-fruit and the coconut.(77)

References:
(74) ibid, p.118.
(75) Harṣacarita refers to gourds used to hold paints, Cowell, p.214.
Among the precious articles presented to Harsha by Bhaskara-varman was included the "thick bamboo tubes containing mangoe sap (sahakāra-latārasānām)". Among the fruits which this country produced, wrote Casim, "are mangoes, plantains, jacks, oranges, citrons, limes, pineapples, and punialeh, a species of amleh, which has such an excellence of flavour that every person who tastes it, prefers it to the plum. There are also cocoanut trees, pepper-vines, areca trees, and sadij (mala-bothrum) in great plenty." As stated above, the Aphsad inscription and the Nowgong Grant of Balavarman refer to the areca palms and betel vines which were extensively grown in the country. Among the presents to Harsha were included "the luscious milky betel-nut fruit, hanging from its sprays and green as young hārita doves." Plantain trees are still very common, and Tavernier mentions extraction of salt from the leaves of this tree, and the making of a bleaching mixture from its ashes in which to boil silk, which made it as white as snow.

(11) Forest Products.

From the earliest times, the forest tracts were regarded as "no man's land", and every householder exercised the right of Common over them. They served the purpose of natural

(79) Asiatick Researches, II, p.173. Āin-I-Ākbari (Tr.II, pp.117-118) mentions that in Kāmrup "grows a mango tree that has no trunk; it trails like a climbing vine, over a tree and produces fruit." This, as Dr. King suggests, probably is Latl Am (a kind of creeper).
pastures, burial places, cremation grounds etc. But with the rise of centralised government, the forests and their products appear to have been regarded as state property, and were organised under a superintendent of forests. Kauṭalya lays it down that forest tracts would be granted to Brāhmaṇas for religious purposes. (83) From the Kamauli Grant it appears that such gifts were, also, made in Assam. (84) The system of forest reservation and practice, as laid down in the Arthaśāstra was also well established.

The forests produced many valuable articles; scents and toilet preparations are given special prominence. Assam, in this period as also in the preceding centuries, was an important source of supply of aromatic woods, resins, etc. to the rest of India. The aromatics seem to have been fairly costly, as these, along with certain precious materials, formed a part of the presents consisting mostly of the products of the country, which the Kāmarūpa king offered to the Pāṇḍava brothers. Thus Bhīmasena, after the conquest of Assam, received sandalwood and aloeswood (agaru) as presents. (85) Duryodhana, while describing the presents made to Yudhiṣṭhira at the time of the Rājasūya sacrifice by the Kīrātas living in Assam, mention along with the precious jewels, skins, gold, sandalwood, aloeswood, loads of seedary (bhārān kālīyaagasya) and heaps of

aromatics (gandhānām caivarāsayaḥ).(86)

In the list of royal presents to Nārga from Bhāskaravarman was included the Gosīrṣa(87) sandal, "stealing the fiercest inflammation away".(88) That sandalwood was produced in Kāmarūpa in abundance is also borne out by the references in the Arthasastra to such varieties as Jongaka, Grāmeruka, Jāpaka and Taurūpa,(89) which were, according to the commentary, definitely of Assam.(90) Of these, Jongaka and Taurūpa were red or dark red, soft in structure and fragrant like lotus, Grāmeruka was also red or dark red but smelt like goat's urine, and Jāpaka was red colour, and scented like lotus flower. According to the same commentary all these were considered to be the best qualities of sandalwood. Another variety, Nāgoparvataka, product of the mountain of the same name, which Mati Chand identifies with the Naga Hills of Assam,(91) was rough and had the colour of śāivala (vallineria).

Agaru or aloe-wood, which is used as incense and also for perfumes, is even today a valuable product of Assam forests. According to Roxbourough this much prized wood is obtained from Eastern India and from the forests to the south and south-east of Sylhet extending through Manipur, Chittagong, Arakan to Mergui and Sumatra. From India it finds its way to China, and

(86) Ibid, 52, 10.
(87) It is mentioned in the Divyāvadāna as a very costly sandalwood, pp.30, 31.
from Cochín China it was first re-exported to Europe. As has been pointed out this plant, since the Epic period, was fabulously associated with Assam. Kālidāsa in describing the military expedition of Raghu, says that after crossing the river Lauhitya, Raghu came into the country of Prāgījyotisa, where he saw black agaru trees (kālāgurudrūmāḥ) which served as posts for tethering his elephants. The Grant of Balavarman, also, mentions Kṛṣṇāguru trees abundantly grown in the city of Prāgījyotisa. Bhāskaravarman's royal presents to Harsa consisted of "black aloe oil" (kṛṣṇāguru taila). According to the commentary, two best varieties of Agaru mentioned in the Arthaśāstra, namely Jōngaka and Dōngaka were products of Kāmarūpa (tadubhayam kāmarūpajām). Another variety, namely, Pārasamudraka, is described as having variegated colours and the smell of cascus or jasmine. The commentator takes it also to be a product of Assam. From the bark of Agaru were prepared the sāṅcīpāts, which were used for writing purposes. The Hārṣaśārītī refers to "volumes of fine writing with leaves made from aloe bark and of the hue of the ripe pink cucumber" sent as presents from Bhāskaravarman. (92) Raghunāma, IV, l. (93) v. 5. (94) Cowell, p. 214. (95) Op. Cit, p. 36. (96) Ibid. (97) Op. Cit.
many varieties come from Assam. These are: Asokagragamika, the product of Asokagrama, was of the colour of meat and smelt like a lotus flower; Jongaka was reddish yellow and smelt like a blue lotus flower or like the urine of a cow; Grameruka was greasy and smelt like cow's urine; Suvarnakudya, the product of the country of Suvarnakudya, was reddish yellow and smelt like Matulunga (the fruit of the citron tree or sweet lime); Puradvipa, the product of the island Puradvipa, smelt like lotus flowers or like butter; Bhadraasriya and Puralauhityaka were of the colour of nutmeg; Antarvatya was of the colour of cascus (costus speciousus); Kaleyaka, which was a product of Suvarnabhumi, gold-producing land, was yellow and greasy; and Auttaraparvata, a product of the north mountain, was reddish yellow. Most of these varieties of Tailaparnikas, according to the commentary, were products of Kamarupa. 

Tejpat, which has been identified by Adams and other writers as the malabothrum of the Greeks and of the Romans, was traded and exported from India for many centuries. This evergreen tree with aromatic leaves is rare from the Indus to Sutlej but is common in Assam and Burma. Periplus refers

(98) Shamasastry, Tr. p.87.
(99) Bhattasvami's Commentary, J.B.O.R.S, 1925, p.40; Sriamla Commentary, pp.189-90. According to Bhattasvami all these places mentioned in the Arthasastra were located in Kamarupa. See also N.N.Dasgupta: Kamarupa and Kautiliya, J.A.R.S, VII, pp.28-34, I.C, V, pp.339-41; K.L.Barua, J.A.R.S, VII, pp.29-34; H.V.Trivedi; Geography of Kautalya, IC., I.
(100) Commercial Products of India, pp.310 ff.
ADDENDUM.

(100a) The people called Sesatae in Periplus are identified with the Besadai (or Tiladai) of Ptolemy. Ptolemy places them above the Maiandros, and from this as well as his other indications, McCrindle (Ancient India, p.218) takes them to be the hill people in the vicinity of Sylhet, where, as Yule remarks, the plains break into an infinity of hillocks, which are especially known as tilâ. Gerini takes them to mean the population of Bisa and Sadiya, probably the Mishmis of the adjoining hills (Researches on Ptolemy's Geography of Eastern India, p.830). Lassen (Ind. Alt, III, 38), however, derives the Beseidae from the sanskrit vaisâda, i.e., "very stupid", and regards them as a tribe of Sikkim. Schoff and Taylor take them to be the people of the bordering tribes of Assam (Schoff, pp.278-279; Taylor: Remarks on the sequel to the Periplus of Erythrean Sea, and on the country of the Seres, as described by Ammianus Marcellinus, J.A.S.B, XVI, 1847, pp.1 ff). Periplus gives us the following interesting story about a festival of the Sesatae: Every year this tribe held a yearly festival at a certain place bordering on their own country and that of Thina, and, accompanied by their wives and children they travelled to this spot (associated with some deity of local tradition), carrying the leaves of the cinnamomum tamala of their native mountains to be used as mats to sleep on. Then after their festival was over and they had departed, certain men (merchants on their travels?) who had noticed this annual ritual went to the place and collected the leaves. Extracting the fibres (i.e. stems or stalks) from the reeds, i.e., leaves, they rolled the leaves into balls and strung them on the stems (Whiteley, Ibid, p.578). Taylor here finds a description of the manner of marketing malabathrum by the hill people of Assam.
to the 

Esasataes (Bantuas) who traded with the leaves of these trees. (101) From the account of Periplus it appears that this trade was carried through Assam.

Black pepper or long pepper, (102) and lac are two characteristic products of the Assam forests. (103) Watt, though somewhat doubtfully, states that black pepper or pippali is indigenous to the forests of Assam, and Casim speaks of the pepper vines as one of the products of the country. "The country (Assam) also produces" writes Tavernier, "an abundance of shellac, of which there are two kinds. That formed on trees is of a red colour, with it they dye their calicoes and other stuffs, and when they have extracted the red colour they use the lac to lacquer cabinets and other objects of that kind, and to make Spanish wax. A large quantity of it is exported to China and Japan, to be used in the manufacture of cabinets; it is the best lac in the whole of Asia for these purposes." (104)

This trade is continued up to the present time; during the last five years of the nineteenth century exports of lac from Assam averaged over 16,000 maunds a year. (105)

(101) Schoff, pp. 48-49.
(103) Basu: Note on the Cultivation of Black Pepper in Assam, Shillong, 1898.
(105) Basu: Note on the Lac Industry of Assam, Shillong, 1900.

For use of lac as dyes see Duncan's Monograph on Dyes and Dyeing in Assam.
Kautalya in his list of forest products includes the skins of wild beasts, bones, teeth, horses' tails, etc., as well as wild animals, birds, and many other articles. (106) The account in the Hārṣa-carita provides us with a list of such products found in Assam. It mentions " heaps of black and white chowries; curious pairs of kinnaras, apes (vana-māmusa), jīvaṇājāvaka birds, and mermen, with necks bound in golden fetters; musk deer scenting the space all round them with their perfume; tame female cāmara deer; parrots, sārikās, and other birds enclosed in gold-painted bamboo cages, and partridges in cages of coral. (107)"
There were craftsmen of many kinds in Kamarupa. We have in our records references to weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters and workers in ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane. From remote antiquity, Assam enjoyed a high reputation as producing silk of a high degree of perfection. (108) The antiquity of the silk industry in India is uncertain, but the weight of evidence seems to be in favour of its importation from China. Schoff considers that it was imported by way of the Brahmaputra valley, and this seems very likely. (109) Pliny shows some knowledge of the silk trade that was carried through Assam. (110) The Mahomedian historian noticed that the silks of Assam were excellent and resembled those of China. Tavernier writes of Assam silk "produced on trees" and adds that "the stuffs made of them were very brilliant." (111) The royal presents which Hamsavega carried to Harsa included "silken cloths (kṣāumāṇi) pure as the moon's light", "soft loin cloths (jātipattikāh) smooth as birch bark", "sacks of woven silk", "wrappers of white bark-silk" and various kinds of smooth figured textiles. (112)

The Arthasastra, while mentioning the varieties of textile commodities known as dukula, says "that which is the product of the country Suvarnakudya is as red as the sun (bālarka - pravaṃ), as soft as the surface of a gem, being woven while the threads are very wet (mani-smigdhādaka vānam), of uniform (chaturaśra) or mixed texture (vyā-miśravāna)." (113) Kautalya also refers to the varieties of fibrous garments known as patrorna, and remarks that which is produced in the country of Suvarnakudya was the best: tāsām sauvarnakudyaka śreṣṭhā. (114)

The three varieties of Indian silk generally known as Pāt, Endi and Mugā are specially associated with Assam. The names Pāt (Pattaja) and Endi (Eranda) no doubt originated from Sanskrit, but Mugā seems to be a characteristically Assamese name. It is said to be derived from the amber colour of the silk of the wild cocoon (palu). The rearing of silkworms, even today, is a main occupation of many castes of Assam. (115) Assam was probably known even in the time of the Ramayana as a country of "cocoon rearers". In the Kiskindhyā Kanda, for instance, while mentioning the countries one passes through going to the east, the poet refers to Magadha, Anga, Paṇḍra, and "the country of the cocoon-rearers", (kosa - kārānām bhūmi), which must be Assam.

(113) Shamaasastry, Tr, p.90.
(114) Arthaśāstra, p.195.
Gold-washing and jewellery.

Another important ancient industry was gold-washing and manufacture of jewellery. Gold was found in abundance in many of the rivers of Assam, and there is an indication in the Periplus, as Schoff supposes, of Assam gold being brought to a market place near the Ganges delta. The Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla states that the river Lauhitya carried down gold-dust from the legendary gold-bearing boulders of the sacred Kailāsa mountain. According to the Śilimpur inscription, King Jayapāla offered a gift of gold equal to his own weight (tulyapuruṣadāna) to a learned Brāhmaṇa, over and above nine hundred gold coins. Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri says that numerous idols both of gold and silver, and a huge image of beaten gold weighing two or three thousand mans (maunds) stood in a temple in Kāmarūpa. Even in later times, during the Ahom rule in Assam, gold-washing was done on an elaborate scale by a class of people known as Sonowals and the state derived considerable income from the yearly tax levied.


(116) Supra, Chap.II.

(117) Raverty, p.569; Riyas-us-salatin, Tr.p.67.
on gold-washing. Fathiya-i-Ibriyak says that about ten thousand people were employed in the washings, and each man made on average a tolah of gold per annum and handed it to the king. (121)

An idea of the variety and excellence of the ancient jewellers' skill may be derived from a perusal of the list of presents from Bhāskaravarman as described by the court poet Bāna. He mentions the exquisite ornamented Ābhoga umbrella with jewelled ribs: ornaments which crimsoned the heavenly spaces with the light of the finest gems: shining crest jewels; pearl necklaces which seemed the source of the milk ocean's whiteness: quantities of pearls, shell, sapphire and other drinking vessels embellished by skilful artists (kusāla-silpikollikhitānam): cages of coral and rings of ivory, encrusted with rows of huge pearls from the brows of elephants. (122)

The list further suggests a number of different types of craftsmen such as basket-makers, wood-workers and painters. The presents included "baskets of variously coloured reeds", gold painted bamboo cages", "cane stools (123) with the bark yellow as the ear of millet", "carved boxes of panels for painting with brushes and gourds attached." (124) Even at a

(122) Ibid. pp.214-215. (124) Ibid. of cit
(123) Assam even today produces the varieties of best canes. Vide, Jacob: The Forest Resources of Assam, 1940, pp.55 ff. Taylor maintains that the unexplored country to the east of Serica, mentioned by Ptolemy, that grew large canes and used them for bridges, was Assam. J.A.S.B., XVI (1847) pp.52-53.
much later period, speaking of the wood-work of the province, Pathiya-i-Ibriyah states that boxes, trays, stools and chairs are cleverly and neatly made of one piece of wood.\(^{125}\) The description of the artistically carved, painted and decorated boats in Vanamala's copper-plate itself bears ample testimony to the high proficiency of the early wood-carvers in their craft.\(^{126}\)

(iii) Other Crafts.

Of the other important crafts mention may be made of engraving, with special reference to royal charters either on stone or copper-plates, brick-making\(^{127}\) and stone-carving. As revealed in the buranjis, the chronicles of the Ahom kings, the art of brick-making was continued with all perfection down to our own age. The bricks were burnt almost to the consistency of tiles. It is recorded in the buranjis that in making bricks white of eggs were mixed to render them harder and smooth.\(^{128}\) The references in the inscriptions to several storeyed palaces, and the discovery of a large number of stone images, and remnants of old stone structures clearly prove the attainment of the architects and sculptors of the period. An outstanding example of the engineering skill of the people of Assam in ancient times was the construction of stone bridges. There was an ancient stone bridge over a channel of Barnadi

\(^{125}\) Ibid of. cit. \(^{126}\) Ibid of. cit. \(^{127}\) Suālkucī Grant of Ratnapāla. \(^{128}\) Gazetteer of Assam.
over which Muhammad-i-Bukhtiyar and his Turkish cavalry passed in the year 1206 A.D. Considering the design and style of architecture of the bridge, Hannay, who saw a part of the structure in 1851, remarked that the bridge evidently belonged to a remote period in the annals of Kamarūpa and its original structure at least must be coeval with the erection of the ancient Hindu temples. The bridge is of solid masonry, built without lime or mortar. There are no arches, the superstructure being a platform with a slight curve 140 feet long and 8 feet in breadth, composed of slabs of stone, six feet nine inches long and ten inches thick, numbering five in the whole breadth, resting on an understructure of sixteen pillars, three in a row, equally divided by three large solid buttresses; with a half buttress projecting from a circular mass of masonry forming the abutments at each end of the road, there being in the whole length 21 passages for the water. The buttresses are all after the same model, those in the centre measuring about sixteen feet ten inches in breadth by eight feet ten inches in thickness, tapering in regular layers of masonry with rounded corners to 3 feet thick and 8 feet broad at the top; on which is laid a slab of the same breadth supporting those of the platform. The pillars spring from a base of very massive material and measure at a line with the water twelve feet four inches in breadth by four feet four inches in thickness, gradually diminishing in receding layers to the height of
three feet four inches, from which rises the abasement of each pillar, the first stone being a squared block of 2½ feet, upon which rests another block two feet square; the average thickness of the shaft, the remaining portion of which is octagonal shaped. The two first octagonal blocks have a large slab across them, and upon this rise two, three and four blocks according to their size and the difference in height towards the centre of the bridge, the upper one being formed into a round capital, and over the whole is placed a slab similar to that which covers the buttresses. The height at the centre of the bridge by measurement with a line to the level of the water is nearly 20 feet, there being a difference of two feet between this measurement and that of the spring of the platform at each end (Plate XXIV. From a fracture in one of the pillars, Hannay observed that the upper blocks were kept in their places, by means of iron pins, firmly wedged into the lower ones; the slabs of the platform were also marked with clamping holes, and on the edge of the outside slabs are three square holes, which were no doubt intended for the wooden support of a balustrade. (129)

The Kamauli and Midhanpur Grants refer respectively to Kumbhakāra (potter) (130) and kumbhakāragarta (the potter's pit) (131)

(130) Ibid. cf. cit
(131) Ibid. cf. cit
and it is obvious that pottery was also an important village craft as it still is. (132) The Harsacarita refers to leather-workers and distillers of wine. It mentions Kārdaranga and Samuruka leather and speaks of "cups of ullaka, diffusing a fragrance of sweetest wine". (133)

(132) The discovery of terracotta figures, belonging to our period, leads us to believe that the village potter, besides his normal duty of vase-making, was engaged also in toy-making.

(133) Ibid. Re. CIt
6. Trade Routes.

(1) Route to Magadha.

A careful examination of the facts enumerated above leaves no room for doubt that from very early times Assam was noted for her textiles and various valuable forest and mineral products. Many of these articles were not only exported to neighbouring provinces but found their way into Tibet, Burma and China. The trade with the neighbouring provinces was mainly carried by river transport. The excellence of Assam's water-communications is evident, and certainly facilitated her trade in every direction. (134) The main route from Kāmarūpa to Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was by the rivers Brahmaputra and Ganges. In the middle of the seventh century, when Bhāskaravarman invited Hiuen Tsiang who was then at the Nālandā monastery to Assam, the pilgrim started from Magadha, passed by Champā (modern Bhagalpur), Kajāngala (Rajmahal), and Pundravardhana (Rangpur) and so going eastward reached Kāmarūpa. (135) This must have been the usual route from Magadha. When Bhāskaravarman was alarmed at having angered Harṣa by refusing to part with the great Chinese teacher, he hurriedly availed himself of this route to meet Harṣa on the bank of the Ganges near Kie-Shu-ho-


The communication between Kāmarūpa and Nālandā was obviously speedy, for as we have noticed previously, a courier dispatched by Bhāskaravarman from Kāmarūpa presented a letter at Nālandā after only two days. Harsa, also, sent a messenger from Kongyodha (Ganjam) to Kāmarūpa. From these incidents it may be seen that there were regular routes to Kāmarūpa from Nālandā and Orissa; they further suggest the organisation of swift postal communication through these provinces, probably by means of the usual Indian system of post-services.

Beal, in his introduction to the Life of Huien Tsiang, maintains that Bhāskaravarman and the former kings of Kāmarūpa had the sea-route to China under their special protection. That there were well known routes to China from Kāmarūpa can be proved from the account of the great Chinese pilgrim Huien Tsiang. For example, when he told Bhāskaravarman that he would like to return to China, the king replied, "But I know not, if you prefer to go, by what route you propose to return; if you select the Southern sea route, then I will send some officials to accompany you". It is therefore evident

(136) Life of Huien Tsiang, p.86.
(137) Ibid, 169.
(138) Ibid.
(139) Ibid, Intro, XXVI.
(140) Ibid, p.188.
that there existed sea routes by which seafarers returned to
China from the neighbourhood of Kāmarūpa in the seventh century
A.D., and that shipping could be controlled. Besides this
water-way, there was also a land route to China, through the
northern mountains of Assam. When Hiuen Tsiang came to
Kāmarūpa he was told of the existence of a route leading to
south-west China. "To the east of Kāmarūpa", he says, "the
country is a series of hills and hillocks without any principal
city, and one can reach the south-west barbarians (of China);
hence the inhabitants were akin to Man and the Lao."(141)
The pilgrim further learnt from the people of Kāmarūpa that the
south-west borders of Sse-chouan were distant about two months'
journey, "but the mountains were hard to pass; there were
pestilential vapours and poisonous snakes and herbs."(142)
That this route was in use is proved by the following account:
When Bhāskaravarman learnt from the pilgrim that the latter's
country was Mahā-Chīna he enquired about a song which came from
China but was very popular in Assam at that time. The song
referred to was the song of the victory of the second son of
the T'ang Emperor Kao-tszou, Prince of Ts'in, over the rebel
general Liu Jou-Cheou in 619 A.D.(143) This points to the
intimate intercourse that existed between China and Assam at
the time, and it is even more surprising when we take into
consideration the fact that a Chinese musical piece composed

(141) Buddhist Records of the Western World, pp.198-199.
(142) Ibid.
(143) Ibid, pp.197-98.
after 619 A.D. had penetrated the region of Kāmarūpa and become popular by 638 A.D. when Hiuen Tsiang visited the country. It may be assumed the northern mountain road was plentifully supplied with trade and well-trodden.

But the existence of this route is attested at an even earlier date. Pelliot has shown that from early times, at least from the second century B.C., there was a regular trade-route by land between Eastern India and China through Upper Burma and Yunnan. This is testified to by the report which Chang-Kien, the famous Chinese ambassador to the Yue-chi country, submitted in 126 B.C. When he was in Bactria he was surprised to find silk and bamboo which came from the Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Szechwan. On enquiry he was told of the rich and powerful country of India across which the caravans carried these products from southern China to Afghanistan. It is too often assumed that the Gobi routes were China's only means of contact with India and the west, but the evidence summarised here shows that neither the sea routes nor the Assam-Burma routes can be neglected.

In point of fact an itinerary preserved in Kla-tan of the end of the 8th century A.D. described in detail the latter route. Starting from Tonkin, the southernmost of the commercial centres of China, the route passed by Yunnansen, Yunnan-fou and Ta-li-fou. Going westwards it crossed the Salouen at

(144) Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, 1904, pp.142 ff.
Yong Chang (Young Chang fou) on the west of the river. Still going westward it reached the town of Chou-ko-leang (to the east of Momein, between the Shiweli and the Salouen). The route bifurcated there, the principal one descending by the valley of the Shiweli to join the Irawaddy on the south-west, and the other continuing directly to the west. Starting from Chou-ko-leang, the principal route crossed the frontier of P’iao (Burma) near Lo, the frontier town of Nan-Chao, and, passing through the country of mountain tribes, it reached Si-li midway between Ta-gaung and Mandalay. The route then passed by Tou-min (Pagan) and reached the capital of Burma, Srihkhetra (Prome). Leaving Prome it crossed a range of black-mountains to the west (the modern Arakan range) and so reached Kamarupa. The second route, starting from Chou-ko-leang, went right westwards to Teng Ch'ong (Momein); then crossing the Mi mountains, it reached Li-Shousi, on the Irawaddy (Bhamo or near about to the north). Then crossing the river Long-taiuan (Mogaung) it passed the town of Ngan-si, and going westwards, crossed the river Min-no (Chindwin) and the mountains between it and reached Kamarupa. (145)

Tucci refers to Buddhagupta, a sixteenth century Indian Buddhist monk who in his biography points out the existence of a well-known land route connecting Kamarupa with Burma. The monk himself followed this route in his itinerary from Gaujeti
(iii) Trade-Routes in Later Times.

McCosh refers to no less than five roads leading from Sadiya, the frontier station of the Brahmaputra Valley into Tibet or China proper. They are: the Pass of the Dihong, the Mishmi route, the Phungan Pass to Manchhee and China, the route by Manipur to the Irawadi, and the Patkai Pass to Bhamo on the Irawadi. The most important and easy route was on the north-eastern side over the Patkai to the upper districts of Burma and thence to China. Through this route Shan invaders came to the Brahmaputra valley. In 1816, during the Burmese invasion, some 6,000 Burmese troops, and 8,000 auxiliaries crossed Patkai into Assam. In former days the Burmese


(148) Through the Manipur route the bulk of the Indian refugees from Burma and the retreating British Army found their way into Assam in 1941-42. Two other routes, followed by the Indian refugees, were the Hukawang Valley and the Chaukan Pass. The Hukawang Valley route took them across the mountains from Myitkyina in Upper Burma to the railhead in Assam at Tipang near Margherita. Vide Robert Reid: Assam, J.R.S.A., XCII, pp.241-247.
government took care that there should be a village, or rather a military settlement, every twelve or fifteen miles along the route, and it was the business of the people to cut the jungles and to remove all other obstructions from the path. (149)

Numerous passes and ways, known as Duars, still exist between Assam and Tibet through Bhutan. The route to Tibet runs across the Himalayan mountains parallel with the course of the Brahmaputra. The Tabaqat-i-Nasirī says that between Kāmrūp and Tibet there are thirty five mountain passes through which horses are brought to Lakhnauti. (150) Lieutenant Rutherford stated that the Khampha Bhoateas or Lhassa merchants, just before the Burmese invasion, had unreserved commercial intercourse with Assam. The commercial transaction between the two countries was carried on in the following manner. At a place called Chouna, two months' journey from Lhassa, on the


(150) Sir Arthur Phayre in his History of Burma, (p.15) observes that early communication between Gangetic India and Tagaung was in existence through Manipur (Assam).
confines of the two states, there was a mart established, and on the Assam side there was a similar mart at Gegunshur, distant four miles from Chouna. An annual caravan would repair from Lhassa to Chouna, conducted by about twenty persons, conveying silver bullion to the amount of about one lac of rupees, and a considerable quantity of rock salt, for sale to the Assam merchants; the latter brought rice, which was imported into Tibet from Assam in large quantities, Assam silk, iron, lac, otter skins, buffalo horns, pearls, etc.

That the route from Lhassa was convenient and safe can be inferred from the small number of persons who composed the caravan, and which even carried silver bullion to the amount of a lac of rupees.(151)

Through Bhutan along the mountains was also a trade route to Kabul. Tavernier mentions that in his time merchants travelled through Bhutan to Kabul to avoid paying the duty that was levied on merchandise passing into India via Gorakhpur. He describes the journey as extending over deserts and mountains covered with snow, tedious and troublesome as far as Kabul, where the caravans part, some for Great Tartary, others for Balk. At the latter place merchants of Bhutan bartered their goods. The

account indicates that the merchandise brought from Assam to Bactria was purchased thereby merchants who were proceeding or who were on their way to India, and who afterwards sailed down the Indus to Gujarat, where they took shipping for the Red Sea. (151a)


Before concluding the section a few observations are to be made regarding the currency of the period. Unfortunately no coins belonging to the period have yet been discovered. We have, however, a reference to the use of gold coins. According to the Silimpur inscription (11th century A.D.) a Brāhmaṇa of Bengal (Varendrī) was offered by King Jayapāla of Kāmarūpa, hemnām satāni nava, which Basak takes to mean "nine hundred gold coins". (152) Bhattasvāmin, while explaining the term Gaudıkam or Gaulikam mentioned in the Arthāśāstra in the context of silver coin, says that Gaudıkam was the silver from Kāmarūpa. (153) As noted above, the inscription of Ratnapāla mentions the existence of a copper mine; evidently copper was used for coinage also. Cowrie shells also served as the medium of exchange. The Tespur Rock inscription refers to a penalty of a hundred cowries (pānca vuttikā) for the infringement of a certain state regulation. (154)

(152) E.I, XIII, pp.292, 295.
(154) Loc. Cit.
CHAPTER V.

I. SOCIETY.
1. Varnāśramadharma.

The most striking feature of ancient Indian society was the varnāśrama system, the classes (varṇa) and the four stages (āśrama) into which the law-books divide the life of men. The Kāmarūpa kings seem to take special care to preserve the traditional divisions of society, namely, Brāhmaṇas, Ksatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śudras. In the inscriptions they are frequently referred to as the protector of the varnāśramadharma, upholder of the duties of all classes. In the Nidhanpur Grant Bhāskaravarman is described as "being created for the purpose of re-establishing the institutions of classes and orders, which had for a long time past become confused" (avakīrṇavarnāśrama-dharma-pravibhāgāya nirmitito). (1) It is said of King Indrapāla that during his reign "the earth was happy and greatly flourishing, and became the cow that yields all desires to me, as in the time of Prithu, because the laws of the four Āśramas and of the four Varnas were observed in their proper divisions." (Yasmin nyāpe vinaya-vikrama-bhāji ... nga samyag-anandinā vibhakta-eatur-āśrama-varṇa-dharmā anandinā śakala-kāmadughā prajānaṁ prithvi prithvih punar-iva prathitodayāsi). (2)

It should however be noted that varṇa (colour) had by this time lost its original significance and become synonymous with jāti, the system which laid emphasis on birth and heredity.

(1) Line 35.
(2) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v.18.
Consequently the original division of the people into four varnas had been submerged and numerous new castes(3) and subcastes had been evolved, mainly by the development of different arts, crafts and professions. As Risley suggests, tribal, racial and religious factors were also at work in gradually adding to their number.(4) But unfortunately, except in a few cases, the epigraphs tell us very little about social organisation.

As portrayed in the inscriptions, however, the four stages (āśrama) into which man's span of life itself was classified provided the pattern of life of the period. As stated in Manu, the first state of man's life is brahmacārya, in which he studies at his teacher's house. After he has finished his studies, in the second part of his life he marries and becomes a householder (grihastha) and discharges his debt to his ancestors by begetting sons and to the gods by performing sacrifices. When he sees that his head is turning grey and that there are wrinkles on his body he resorts to the forest and becomes a Vānaprastha. After spending the third part of his life in the forest, he spends the rest of his life as a yati or saṁyāsin.(5) But this was only an ideal; and it is doubtful if ever it was observed in our period.

(3) It is worth remembering that the word "caste" is Portuguese, not Indian.
(4) Risley; The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, 1, pp.xv ff.
(5) Manu, IV, 1, V.169, VI, 1-2, 33.
Even among the classical writers, there were different views with reference to the four āśramas. Gautama\(^{(6)}\) and Baudhāyana\(^{(7)}\) hold that there is really only one āśrama, viz., that of the householder (brahmaçarya being only preparatory to it); the other āśramas are inferior to that of the householder. On the whole the tendency of most of the Dharmasastras seem to glorify the status of the householder and to push into the background the two āśramas of Vānaprastha and Yati, so much so that certain works say that these are forbidden in the Kali age.\(^{(8)}\) We have, however, definite evidence that it was normal for the Brāhmaṇas of our period to enter upon the life of a householder after going through their noviciate.\(^{(9)}\) Nevertheless there is constant evidence of the abdication of kings, who embraced a life of renunciation.\(^{(10)}\)

\(^{(6)}\) III, 1, 35.  
\(^{(7)}\) II, 5, 29.  
\(^{(9)}\) Infra, Chap. V, Sect.II.  
\(^{(10)}\) Supra, Chap.II.
The influence of Kāmarūpa over north-eastern India, after the fall of the imperial power of the Guptas in the latter part of the 5th century A.D. caused the migration of a large number of Brāhmaṇas to Kāmarūpa. It is evident that the patronage which the Kāmarūpa kings extended to learned men and religious teachers attracted a large number of learned men to the country. The Nidhanpur Plates alone reveal that the kings adopted a systematic policy of settling Brāhmaṇas in the kingdom. The Khonāmukhi Plates record a gift of land by King Dharmapāla to a learned Brāhmaṇa, who hailed from Madhyadesa, "the well-known place of residence of Brāhmaṇas who constantly performed sacrifices and were reluctant to accumulate riches." (11) According to the Śilimpur Grant, King Jayapāla persistently pressed the Brāhmaṇa Prahāsa of Pundra to accept nine hundred gold coins in cash and a grant of land yielding an income of 1,000 coins. (12) According to the Kamauli Grant, "gifts and donations to Brāhmaṇas were regarded as the good fruits and fresh sprouts." (13) In fact, on account of this constant royal patronage, Kāmarūpa seems to have become a resort of the Brāhmaṇas of the neighbouring provinces. Moreover, as the tide of Buddhism began to subside in Northern India, the Brāhmaṇas of Kāmarūpa began to migrate westward; Bhattacharyya rightly

observes that most of the Brāhmaṇa families of modern Bengal are the descendants of Brāhmaṇas of Kāmarūpa.(14)

The social organisation of the Brāhmaṇas was distinguished by gotras and veda-śākhās. Both were of supreme importance fundamentally in matters relating to inheritance, marriage, worship, sacrifice, the performance of daily samādhya prayers and so forth. The general idea of the gotra is that it denotes all persons who trace descent in an unbroken male line from a common ancestor; that is to say, when a person says, "I am a Jamadagni gotra" he means that he traces his descent from the ancient sage Jamadagni by unbroken male descent. As stated by Baudhāyana, in ancient times these progenitors or founders of gotras were supposed to be eight. Subsequently the numbers increased to several hundreds. But the mass of materials on the subject is so vast and conflicting that it is hardly possible to enumerate gotras ancient and modern. This power of amplifying the list of gotras was already far advanced in our period. In the Nidhanpur Grant alone the following fifty-six gotras are set out:-(15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gotra</th>
<th>Veda-Śākhā</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Āgnivesya</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi Yojur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ārīgirasa</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alamvāyana</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(14) E.I, XIX, p.246.
(15) For an explanation see Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvali, p.3, f.n.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Veda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aślāyana</td>
<td>Chandoga(sāma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bārhapatiya</td>
<td>Bāhvricya(Rik)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhārgava</td>
<td>Bāhvricya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhāradvāja</td>
<td>Chandoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhāradvāja</td>
<td>Bāhvricya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhāradvāja</td>
<td>Chandoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhāradvāja</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhāradvāja</td>
<td>Taittirīya(Yajur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gautama</td>
<td>Bāhvricya</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gautama</td>
<td>Chandoga</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gautama</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gauratreyya</td>
<td>Bāhvricya</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gārgya</td>
<td>Gārakya</td>
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<td>Gārgya</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
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<td>Jātukarṇa</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
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<td>Kauśika</td>
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<td>Kauśika</td>
<td>Chandoga</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kauṭilya</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaundinya</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kautsa</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kāśyapa</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kāśyapa</td>
<td>Bāhvricya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kāśyapa</td>
<td>Vājasaneyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kāśyapa</td>
<td>Taittirīya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kavestara
Kātyāyana
Kātyāyana
Kātyāyana
Krishnatreya
Māndavya
Maudgalya
Maudgalya
Pārāsaryya
Pārāsaryya
Pautrimāṣya
Paurna
Pāṅgkalya
Prācetasā
Saunaka
Saubhaka
Sandilya
Sālangkāyana
Sāvarnika
Sākatayana
Sangkṛityayana
Vārāha
Vātsa
Vātsya
Vājasaneyī
Cārakya
Chāndoga
Bāhuvricya
Vājasaneyī
Vājasaneyī
Cārakya
Vājasaneyī
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Cārakya
Bāhuvricya
Cārakya
Bāhuvricya
Vāsistha  Bāhvriṣṭya
Vaisnavāridhi  Chāndoga
Yāska  Bāhvriṣṭya
Yāska  Vājasaneyi

In the Grant of Vanamāla there is a Brāhmaṇa of the Śāndilya gotra of the Yajurveda also referred to. (16) The Grant of Balavarman mentions a section belonging to the Kāṇvasākhā of Kāpila gotra. (17) The Bargāon Grant indicates the existence of a Kāṇvasākhā of the Parāśara gotra, (18) and his Suālkūchī Grant also mentions the Bhāradvāja gotra. (19) Both the Indrāpāla Grants refer to Brāhmaṇas of the Kāśyapa gotra. (20) The copper-plates of Dharmapāla refer to Brāhmaṇas of the Kauthumāsākhā (21) as well as to the Suḍdha Maudgalya (22) and Kāśnāyasa gotras. (23) It also mentions the Āṅgirasa pravara. (24)

The conception of the pravara is closely interwoven with that of the gotra. "Pravara" literally means "choosing" or "invoking" (prārthana). As Agni was invoked to carry the sacrificer's offering to the gods in the names of the illustrious risis (his remote ancestors) who in former times had successfully invoked Agni, the word pravara came to denote one or more

(18) v.16. (19) v.16.
(20) Gauhatī Grant, v.20 and Guākūchī, v.21.
(21) Subhankārāpātaka, v.17. (22) Puspabhadrā Grant, v.12.
(24) Puspabhadrā Grant, v.12.
illustrious ríśis, who were claimed as ancestors by the sac-
rificeer. The two systems are, in a sense, contradictory, but the gotra has come to be associated with one, two, three or five sages (but never four, or more than five) that constitute the ārya of that gotra.\footnote{Apastambha Srauta, 24, 6, 7.}

The title given to most of the Brāhmaṇas of the Nidhanpur Grant is svāmi. Their names generally end in Bhaṭṭa, Dāma, Deva, Dhara, Dāsa, Datta, Ghosa, Kara, Kunda, Mitra, Nāga, Nandi, Pālita, Sena, Soma and so forth. It is, however, not possible to say whether these name-endings were real hereditary family names. Many of them are still used as surnames by the Kāśyapins of Assam and Bengal, but it is interesting to note that they are not in use among Brāhmaṇas now. These titles are similar to those of the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas who are supposed to have originally migrated from Nagarkot in the Punjab to various places in India. This has led some scholars to think \textit{"that the Brāhmaṇas to whom Bhūtivarmśa granted the land in about 500 A.D. were of the same stock as the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas who are said to have migrated to Gujarat about the same time with the rise of the Valabhi kings".}\footnote{I.H.Q, VI, p.67.}

The Brāhmaṇas of Kāmarūpa seem to have lived, on the whole, in conformity with the canonical texts. At any rate, in the inscriptions they are credited with living a holy and righteous
life. They are said to have assiduously practised the sixfold duties, (27) yajana, yājana, adhyayana, adhyāpana, dāna and pratigraha. They daily performed the ritual of the snāna (bath). Six kinds of snāna are mentioned in the smṛitis, (28) namely, nitya (daily bath), naimittika (due to some cause), kāmya (bath for some desired object), kriyānga (bath as a part of religious rite), malāpakarsana (a bath solely for cleaning the body), and kriyā snāna (ritualistic bathing at a sacred place). The Grant of Balavarman indicates the prevalence of kriyānga snāna. (29) The Brāhmaṇas observed three samādhyaśas (30) as enjoined by Atri, who says "a twice born person possessed of the knowledge of the self should perform three samādhyā adorations." With samādhyā is associated japa (the muttering of the Gāyatri and other holy mantras) which it is recorded the Kāmarūpa Brāhmaṇas repeated in the three prescribed ways. (31)

The first and foremost duty of the Brāhmaṇas was obviously to pursue the study of the Vedas. The inscriptions mention the

(27) Bargāon Grant and in others.
(28) Śaṅkha Smṛiti, VIII, 1-11.
(29) v.32.
(30) Puspabhadrā Grant, VII. The word "samādhyā" literally means "twilight", but also indicates the action of prayer performed in the morning and evening twilight. As stated, the three samādhyās are performed at daybreak, at noon, and at sunset.
(31) Puspabhadrā Grant, ibid.
three Vedas. Among the Vedic sākhās as noted above they specify the Vājasenaya, Carakya, Bāhruiycya, Taittreya, Mādhyandina, Kāṇva and Chāndogya. The Grant of Vanamāla states that Bhījata studied the Yajurveda with all its accessories (sāngayajurvedamadhītvān).(32) Devadatta, according to the Bargāon Grant, was the chief of Vedic scholars, and the Vedas had their aims fulfilled in him (devadattabhāṃ kāṇvo - agrajovājasaneyakāgryaḥ|āsādyayamvedavīdāmbarādvaryamtrayākritārthāyitamāvyasyamayak).(33) It is particularly interesting to note that the most orthodox school of Vedic theology, the Mīmāṃsā, was carefully studied.(34)

Besides Vedic studies, the Brāhmaṇas cultivated various sciences and arts. The Puspaḥhadra Grant of Dharmapāla describes the grandfather of the donee as having possessed, like the donor, a knowledge of the fine arts (samyak kalabhairyutah), which were generally acquired by Kṣatriyas alone. An epithet of this Brāhmaṇa is cāṇakyamāṇikyabhu, which may mean, as suggested by Bhattacharyya, that he was, as it were, the source of the jewels (i.e. the moral maxims) of Cāṇakya.(36) This may possibly refer to the Arthasastra and indicate that it was studied. Further, the inscriptions record academic titles such as śrutidhara, pandita and kathāniṣṭha, usually borne by Brāhmaṇas.(37)

It has been shown elsewhere that besides their scriptural duties, the Brāhmanas also held high administrative offices. Ministers, administrators and court poets were mostly members of their class. A few words must be said about Brāhmanas following the profession of arms. From very ancient times Brāhmanas appear to have wielded arms. Kautalya quotes the view of earlier writers that when there are armies composed of brāhmanas, ksatriyas, vaisyas and sudras each preceding one is better for enlistment than each subsequent one. (38) Something of this tradition seems to have existed in Kamarūpa. The Śubhaṅkarapāta. Grant of Dharmapāla refers to the Brāhma Himāṅga, who was not only skilled in archery, but also an expert in reading the omens implied in the movement and fall of other people's arrows (nārāca - mokhya - gati - pāta - guna - pravīna). (39) Further, he was well skilled in different methods of attack and defence (abhyasta - citra - drida duskara - karma - mārga). (40)

We have stated above that the Brāhmanas of Kamarūpa migrated to neighbouring provinces where they were honoured with Brahma-deya grants. In the copper-plate inscription of Ananta-varman, the Ganga king of Kalinga (c.922 A.D.) mention is made of a Brāhma from Kamarūpa named Visnusomacārya, to whom the king's brother Jayavarman made a gift of land at the time of giving away his daughter in marriage (kanyā-dāna samaye). The

(38) Chap. IX, 2. (39) v.20. (40) Ibid.
A charter of the Paramāra king Vākpatirāja of Mālwa (c.981 A.D.) records the gift of land to twenty-six Brāhmanas. It appears that some of these Brāhmanas hailed from Eastern India. One of them, Vāmanasvāmi by name, was from Paundarika in Uttarakuladesa. This Uttarakuladesa has been identified by K.L.Barua with Uttar-kul of Assam, that is to say, the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. The Silimpur inscription also proves that Brāhmanas from Assam migrated to other provinces. It states categorically that the Brāhmana Prahasas ancestors migrated to Balagrama in Pundra from a place in Kāmarūpa.

(42) E.I, Vol.XXIII, Pt.IV.
3. Other Castes.

Not much information is available about the non-Brahmana castes. Chief of them were the Karana and the Kāyastha. Both are, however, noticed in the epigraphs as denoting state officials. Karana occurs as the name of a caste in the old Śūtras and Smritis, and perhaps also in the Mahābhārata. But Kaśirasvāmi on Amarakosa says that Karana also denotes a group of officers like Kāyasthas and Adhyaksas (superintendents). The lexicographer Vaijayanti seems to take Kāyastha and Karana as synonymous and explains them as denoting a scribe. It therefore appears that the Karana caste, whose members performed the same vocations as the Kāyasthas, was gradually absorbed by the latter, ultimately forming one Kāyastha caste. The nyāyakarāniśka Janardana Svāmī of the Nidhanpur Grant appears, however, to be a Brāhmaṇa.

The Kāyastha is mentioned as a royal official in the Viṣṇu and Yājñavalkya Smritis. According to the Viṣṇu Smriti, he wrote the public documents (rājasākaṣika) and the commentary

(45) History of Dharmaśāstra, II, Pt. I, p. 74
(46) The Rabhasokosa dictionary gives the following eight different meanings of Karana: cause (kārana), body (deha), devotion (sādhāna), organs (indriya), kāyastha, binding of hair (kaça vandha), and offspring of a śudra mother by Vaiṣya father (śudra-visāmsute).
(47) Pargiter observes that the term karanika is not a classical sanskrit, but evidently a word formed from karana, J.A.S.B., 1911, p. 501.
(48) Viṣṇu Dharma Sūtra, VII, 3.
on the latter explains that his office was that of an accountant and scribe. The term is used in the same sense in the inscriptions of our period.

The existence of the Kāyastha caste as early as the 9th century A.D., is also known from inscriptions discovered in other parts of India. The record of Amoghavarṣa refers to a Kāyastha caste in Western India (valabha - kāyastha - vamsa). While Northern Indian inscriptions refer to Gauḍa-Kāyastha-vamsa, (50) Kāyastha-vamsa, (51) Mathurāvaya-Kāyastha etc., (52) the inscriptions being dated respectively A.D.999, 1183(?) and 1328 A.D. Two later Smrītis, Uśanas and Vedavyāsa, also refer to the Kāyastha caste. The Uśanas gives an uncomplimentary derivation of the name by saying that it is compounded of the first letters of kāka (crow) yama and śhapati, to convey the three attributes of greed, cruelty and the spoliation (or paring characteristic of the three. The Veda-Vyāsa Smrīti includes the Kāyastha among śāndras along with barbers, potters, and others.(53)

Among modern writers Dr. D.R.Bhandarkar(54) and following him Ghose(55) and others hold that the Kāyasthas were descended from the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas, because of the likeness of their

(49) E.I., XVIII, p.251  (50) E.I., XII, p.61.  
(51) Pro.A.S.B, 1880, p.78  (52) E.I., XII, p.46.  
(54) I.A., LXI, p.48.  
(55) I.H.Q, VI, pp.60 ff.
surname. Vasu, however, opposes this theory and says that "excepting some agreement in respect of surnames, we have got nothing to prove any connexion between these Nāgar Brāhmanas and Kāyasthas. There is no tradition even among the Kāyastha aristocracy of Gauda or their kinsmen of the Kāyasthas of Kāmarūpa, nor is there any testimony in the genealogies to the effect that there ever existed between them and the Nāgar Brāhmāns or the Brāhmans in general any caste link. Rather, the traditions current among them for generations and their genealogical records testify to their affiliation with the Kshatriyas."(56)

Lekhaka in our inscriptions is clearly a scribe. Sumantu, who is quoted in the Parāśara Mādhaviya, considers the food of a lekhaka along with that of oilmen and other low castes as unfit for a Brāhmaṇa.(57) Lekhaka is, therefore, obviously a caste in the modern sense, but whether it is identical with the Kāyastha caste is doubtful. Brihaspati as quoted in the Smṛiti sandrikā speaks of the ganaka and lekhaka as two persons to be associated with a judge in a court of justice and definitely says they were dvijas.(58) Therefore they were officers and not members of a particular caste. The term is clearly used in this sense in our inscriptions.

The term vaidya occurs in the Subhaṅkarapātaka Grant, which was composed by Prāsthāna Kalasa, who described himself

(56) Social History of Kāmarūpa, III, p.167.
as a vaidya (prasthāna-kalasa nāmnā kavinā guvarā-māna vaidyena raftā praśasti).(59) Bhattacharyya points out that it is not likely that the term was used in so early a time to denote caste.(60) But Vaidya as a district social group occurs in three South Indian inscriptions of the eighth century A.D. The members of this group occupied very high positions in state and society; and according to Dr. Krishna Sastris interpretation, one of them at any rate was regarded as a Brāhmaṇa.(61)

The Grant of Balavarman refers to Bhīṣaka or physician.(62) Bhīṣaka, according to Usanas, was the offspring of a clandestine union between a Brāhmaṇa and a Kṣatriya girl and designated also as Vaidyaka. A Bhīṣaka maintained himself by studying the Āryurveda in its eight parts, or astronomy, astrology and mathematics. According to the Brahma Purāṇa (quoted by Apar-ārka)(63) he lived by surgery and by attending upon patients.

At the present time, next to the Kāyastha the Kalitās(64) are the predominant caste of the province. "They are now looked on as the purest of the old Hindu people of Assam" and "the only Śūdra caste in the valley from whose hands the higher caste will take water."(65) They claim to be regarded as Kāyasthas and actually rank next only to Brāhmaṇas.(66).

(62) v.21. (63) p.1171
(64) The name occurs in other parts of India besides Assam, namely, in the Sambalpur district of Orissa, and in Cuttak and Chota Nagpur. In the Tons valley and Jaunsar Barwar in Nepal, there is a class of people called Kalitas. Dalton: Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, p.321-22; Indian Forester, LX, pp.663-799.
Martin holds that they were formerly the priests of the Koch, and remarks: "They (the Kalitās) no doubt had some science and continued long to be the only spiritual guides of the Koch and indeed in some places still retain by far the chief authority over that people". (67) He further mentions that in Assam there were several religious instructors (gurus) of this class. Here probably, the author refers to the Sudra teachers of the Vaisnavite faith of Assam founded by Śankaradeva (1449-1569 A.D.) who, though he himself was a Kāyasthā, gave sarana to Brāhmaṇas. (68) The Kalitās are now distributed all over the province and have increased in numerical strength. This was obviously known to the author of the Fatiyah-i-Ibriyāh, who accompanied Mir Jumla throughout his expedition to Assam in 1662 A.D. He states categorically that the inhabitants of the province belonged to two nations, the Āhoms and the Kalitās. (69)

There seem to be two views regarding the original home of the Kalitās. In a biography of Bhavānipuriyā Gopāl Ātā (1541-1611 A.D.), a disciple of Śankaradeva, written in Assamese, it is said that Gopāl with his mother came to Acamadesa from Kalitā-desa. The same text records that the Kalitā country

(65) Descriptive Enthology of Bengal, p.79.
(68) Gait, pp.58 ff.
was to the North-east of Acama and near the regions inhabited by hill-tribes, such as Miris and Abora. (70) This account is corroborated by other writers. Capt. John Bryan Neufville writing on the Geography and Population of Assam in 1823, states: "The country to the eastward of Bhot and the northward of Sadiya, extending on the plan beyond the mountains is said to be possessed by a powerful nation called Kalitas or Kultas, who are described as having attained to a high degree of advancement and civilisation equal to any of the nations of the East. The power, dominion and resources of the Kulta Raja are stated to exceed by far those of Assam, under its most flourishing circumstances, and in former times a communication appears to have been kept up between the estates, now long discontinued. To this nation are attributed the implements of husbandry and domestic life, washed down by the flood of the Dihong." (71) Capt. Neufville gives a detailed account of the flood that swept away the Kalitadesa.

According to the orthodox tradition, the Kalitās were Kṣatriyas, who fled from the wrath of Paraśu Rāma, who was determined to exterminate the Kṣatriyas. They fled from home and concealed themselves in the forests of Assam. So they are "kula" (caste) "lupta" (gone) or Kalitā (degraded of their caste).

(70) Kākati: Kalitā Jatir Itivrita (Assamese) pp. 4 ff.
(71) Asiatic Researches, XVI, pp. 344-346.
The general belief is that the Kalitās came to Assam from outside. In this connection, it is interesting to note that among the peoples inhabiting the north of India, the Mārkandeya Purāṇa mentions Kulatā along with Darada, Gana, etc. (72) Dalton considers them to be Aryans of pure descent, who came to the province before the formation of the existing professional castes. (73) Baden Powell is of opinion that they were formerly Buddhists, and were dispersed from mid-India by the subsequent Brāhmānic revival. He refers to the tradition that the oppressed Buddhists sought refuge in the hills, and remarks that "there are scattered remnants of these once ruling houses still existing under the name of Kulta or Kulita caste." (74)

The Kalitās of present day Assam, however, are good Hindus, and, as said before, rank as a high caste. Martin, on the other hand, refers to their un-orthodox character, and says that they are independent of the Brāhmāna priests. (75) Their un-orthodox character is revealed in their custom of widow remarriage and marriage of grown-up girls, both being contrary to orthodox Hindu practice. It should also be noted that caste differences of sub-caste among the different sub-divisions of the Kalitās are neither well marked nor rigid. Gait points out that this appears to be the result of the levelling influence of Buddhism. (76)

Bastian seeks to connect the name Kalitā with Moggalāna Kolika. (77) It is clear that as a designation of the Maudgāyanaputra Huien Tsang refers to the name Kolika or Kalitā. The name Koliya, also, appears as one of the names of the ten republican states of the Vrijjian confederacy. The Koliyas of Rāmagrāma were Kṣatriyas and were related to Buddha. By tradition they were agriculturists. If Koliya may be equalled with Kalitā, it may, therefore, be suggested that the Kalitās whom Dalton praises as excellent cultivators, having extensive holdings, well-stocked farmyards, and comfortable houses, are the descendants of the Buddhist Kṣatriyas of the Koliya tribe. (78)

The references to Kaivarttas in several inscriptions lead us to believe that they were once prominent in the population of the country. Kaivartta, according to Medhātithi or Manu, was a mixed caste. (79) Manu tells us that the inhabitants of Āryāvarta employ the name Kaivartta to denote the offspring of a niśāda from an āyogava woman, who is also called mārgava and dāsa, and who subsists by plying boats. (80) According to the Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa, a Kaivartta is born of a Kṣatriya.

(77) Kolita war der Name Mugalanan's, des zu der Linken Buddhas stehenden Lieblingsjüngers. Vide A. Bastian; Völkerstämme Am Brahmaputra und Verwandtschaftliche Nachbarn (1883) p. 45.
(78) Kalita jātir itivṛita, p. 43. This note is mainly based on Dr. E. Kakati's book on Kalita jātir Itivṛita.
(79) Ch. X, 4.
(80) Ch. X, 34.
father and a Vaisya mother. Pick notes that fishermen, who
work with nets and baskets were called in the Jātakas "Kevatta". (81)
From our epigraphs, it appears that at least some Kaivarttas
owned land and lived by agriculture. This agrees with the
present divisions of the Kaivartta caste, namely, Hālowā (one
who works with the hāl or plough) and Jālowā (one who works
with the jāl or throw net). (82) During our period their
standing was good, and they seem to have held office in the
state. The Tespur Rock inscription refers to a Kaivartta,
who was in charge of collecting state-toll on the rivers. (83)

Of the other professional castes, we have references to
Kumbhakāra (potters), Tantuvāya (weavers), Naukī (boatmen),
and Dandi (trade servants). According to the Uṣanāsas the
Kumbhakāras were the offspring of the clandestine union of a
Brāhmaṇa with a Vaisya female. Vaikhānasa agrees with Uṣanasa
and adds that the offspring becomes either a Kumbhakāra or a
barber who shaves parts of the body above the navel. Vedavyāsa
and Devala include the Kumbhakāras among śūdras. (84) In Assam,
at present, there are two classes of potters: Kumār and Hirā.
(85) The Kumārs are really potters of the Kalitā and Kewat/castes.

(81) Sociale Gliederung. Tr. p.302.
(82) Census of India, 1901, Assam, Pt.I, p.132. Jāl is
usually the circular net common throughout the east, and
specially attributed in India to the Mahratta Bhois and
the Telegu Bostars.
(85) In Assam Kewat ranks as a superior śūdra caste and is
not ranked along with the Kaivarttas as in Bengal and
Central Provinces.
The Hirās are a degraded caste (antyaja) and they are frequently spoken of as a sub-caste of Chandāla, but they will not eat with the latter, and their occupation is, of course, quite distinct. They differ from the potters of other castes in that their women, also, work, and that they shape their vessels entirely by hand, instead of by means of a wheel. They make them in four stages, each of which, forming a separate ring, is partially dried before the next is added. When the whole is complete they pile the vessels in a heap, with grass between each, to which they then set light, and thus bake the clay.\(^{(86)}\)

The Tantuvāyas are regarded as sudras by the Mahābhāṣya of Pāṇini, and, as such, excluded from sacrificial rites.\(^{(87)}\) As noted elsewhere, we have several references to Tantuvāyas in the epigraphs; but, strangely enough, their descendants are not to be found nowadays in the province.

We have a single reference to the antyajas (low castes) in the Puṣpabhadra Grant of Dharmapāla. In describing the boundary marks of the land granted, the epigraph refers to Dījja-rati-hadi, whose land marked the east-south boundary.\(^{(88)}\) Hadi may mean here the Hari caste of today. The Haris, as antyajas, are connected with the Doma and the Candāla. In Assam their position has of late years much improved; they have

\(^{(87)}\) History of Dharmasāstra, p.63.
\(^{(88)}\) Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvali, p.181, f.n.3.
taken largely to trade and to working in gold. Many of them
now describe themselves by euphemistic terms expressive of
these occupations, such as Brittiyāl and Sonārī.(89)


(1) Family.

The smallest unit of society was probably the joint family or large household, comprising the patriarch of the family, his wife, his unmarried daughters, and his sons with their wives and descendants. This is clear from the Nidhanpur Grant where half or more shares of land were granted jointly to several brothers of a family (bhātri-trayena ekamsa: bhātrā sahārddhā-māh etc.)(1) Nevertheless, cases of separation of property were also, not rare. In the Subhankarapātaka Grant of Dharmapāla, separate shares of a pātaka are assigned to two brothers, Himānga and Trilokana, indicating that they were no longer members of a joint family,(2) and probably had separate residences.

(ii) Marriage.

Among social institutions that of marriage is, in many ways, the most important. The Hindu śāstras recognised eight modes of marriage. They are (1) rāksasa or ksātra vivāha, where the bride is carried off by force; (ii) paisāca, a secret elopement; (iii) gāndharva, a secret informal union by copulation; (iv) āsura, acquirement by purchase; (v) brāhma, where the bride is freely given to a worthy bridegroom with due ceremony; (vi) daiva, where she is married to a priest; (vii) ārṣa.

(2) v.22.
in which the bride's father, in giving her away, receives from
the bridegroom a formal gift of a pair of oxen; and (viii)
kāya or prajāpatya, in which the proposal comes from the side
of the bridegroom. In the law-books the first three of these
modes are recognised as peculiarly appropriate to ksatriyas,
and the fourth is allowed only to vaisyās and śūdras. The
remaining four modes are regarded as particularly suitable to
Brāhmaṇas. The brāhma form was wide-spread among the Brāhma-
ṇas of our period. The Puspabhadrā Grant throws some light
on the actual rites with which this form of marriage was
attended. It records the marriage of Bhāskara to Jīva in the
following words: tasyāh kareṇa sa karaṁ jagrīhe grihasya
dharmāya kaṅkana-dharam dhṛita-kaṅkanena.(3) This is a clear
reference to pāni-grahana, a rite which is performed either be-
fore or after the ceremony of satpadi, in which the bride,
accompanied by the bridegroom, takes seven steps towards the
north-east. In this rite, while the bride sits looking to-
wards the east, the bridegroom, facing the north, takes her
hand, uttering the verse, "I clasp thy hand for happiness, that
thou mayst reach old age with me, thy husband" etc. (Rig Veda,
x, 85, 36).(4) It is furthermore made clear that girls were
given away in marriage only when they were physically fit to be

(3) v.15.
(4) Barnett: Antiquities of India, pp.115-116; 143-144.
married. From this it may be surmised that the practice of child-marriage had not yet arisen. Marriage within the varna and kula was the prevailing custom, for there social units are defined by their endogamy.

Another equally important fact recorded concerns the Brāhma youths. As has been said, it was their duty to marry and enter household life after their return from the guru-griha on the completion of the samāvantana rites. After samāvantana, in some cases, at any rate, the young Brāhma used to proceed to the royal court, where he was received by the king and was provided with means to enable him to marry and settle down as a householder. This is quite in agreement with the current theory that a person should not remain without an Āśrama even for a single moment; if a snātaka (would-be household) was not immediately married, for some days he would be neither a Brahmačarin nor a Grihastha. Mediaeval writers like Mitramiśra even advocated that the samāvantana should be performed only when the marriage of the youth was already settled.

(5) Grant of Balavarman, v.31
(6) Ibid.
(7) Altekar: Education in ancient India, p.39.
(8) p.575.
5. Women.

There are references in the praśastis to queens, women officers in the royal palace, and to the wives of the Brāhmaṇa donees. From the fact that the copper-plates, in their set lists of the officials, included the name of rājū, it seems that the queen held a position of some responsibility in the state. The inscriptions make it plain that they were cultured and pious women. Queen Jivadā, the mother of Harjjaravarman, like prabhāta-sandhyā (morning twilight) was worshipped by many, and was considered to be the source of great spiritual force.\(^{(9)}\) In Harjjaras own record she is compared with Kuntī and Subhadra.\(^{(10)}\) Nayānā, wife of Gpāla, was a queen of wide fame (mahāsiyakirtīḥ).\(^{(11)}\) King Dharmpāla's mother, Ratnā, was well reputed for her works of piety and charity.\(^{(12)}\)

Chastity and devotion to their husbands were the main qualities of Brāhmaṇa women who are mentioned in the epigraphs. Ratnapāla's Bargāon Grant speaks of Syāmayika, wife of the Brāhmaṇa Sadgargādatta, who was devoted to her husband and endowed with every virtue, and shone like the streak (crescent or quarter) of the moon, pure in form and dispelling the

\(^{(9)}\) Grant of Vanamāla, v.10.
\(^{(10)}\) v.11.
\(^{(11)}\) Puṣpabhadrā Grant, v.5.
\(^{(12)}\) Subhaṅkarapātaka Grant, v.11.
darkness. The second grant of the same king says of Cēheppāyikā that she was a woman charming and true in faith, and that her beauty was her own ornament. Indrapāla’s Grant mentions Saulkhāyika and Anurādhā as being well conducted, virtuous, chaste and according pleasure to their husbands by steadfast devotion. Widowhood was considered to be the highest calamity of women, but there is no mention of satī.

Some details of the life of town women as well as of the secular and sacred courtesans, can be gleaned from the epigraphs. Capriciousness is said to be a trait of the women of the town. The Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla refers to the sensual excesses of the city damsels and to their indulgence in intoxicating spirits. The purda system was obviously unknown, and women used to bathe openly in rivers.

The Bargāon Grant further mentions the veśyā and vārastrī, both meaning courtesans, who generally resided in the best streets of the city. The custom of appointing women as dancers and courtesans in connection with temple services which probably came into vogue in India about the 3rd century A.D. became quite common in Assam during our period. Vanamāla in his Tespur Grant made gifts of veśyās to the temple of Hāta-keśvara Śiva. These women dedicated to temple services

(13) Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva, v.4.
were usually known as Natī and Daluhanganā. Dr. Kakati considers the expression Daluhanganā to be an Austric formation from daluha (temple) and anganā (women). The duties of the Natīs or dancing girls were to fan the idol with câmara or Tibetan ox-tails, to prepare garlands, and to sing and dance before the god. They seem to live a life of cultured ease and pleasure. They were beautiful and "attractive to all minds" and they adorned themselves with various ornaments.

In connection with the story of the dancing girl Rūpinika, employed in a temple at Mathurā, Penser has discussed in detail the institution of sacred prostitution in India and elsewhere. However, while giving a full account of the practice of Devadāsis in Central and South India, he finds "practically no mention of temples or sacred prostitution in Northern India."

Contrary to this observation of Penser's, the custom was prevalent in Assam up to the modern period. In most of the Siva temples there was a class of people known as Nat, who provided the temple with dancing girls and singers. That even in later times the Natīs held a privileged position is known from the fact that the Ahom king Siva Singha (1714-1744 A.D.) not only married Phulesvarī, a Natī attached to a Siva temple, but also married Natīs as wives.

(20) New Indian Antiquary, IV, p.390.
(21) Grant of Vanamāla. (22) Ibid.
(23) The Ocean of Story, I, Appendix IV, p.239.
(25) Puranī Asama Buranji (Assamese), pp.82-83.
but subsequently made her the "Bar Rājā" or Chief Queen, and caused coins to be struck jointly in her name and his.(26)
In this connection passing reference may here be made to the virgin-worship, kūmārī-pujā, which was once so prevalent in the province.(27)

Lastly, as a side light upon the education of women, the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva informs us that its prāśasti was composed by Manoratha, son of the Brāhmaṇa rājāguru Muraśi, and Padmā, his wife.(28) It appears that many of the women, specially of the Brāhmaṇa caste, were not only educated, but skilled in the arts of poetry and rhetoric.

6. Food.

Rice, fish, meat, fruits and vegetables constituted the chief articles of food of the people. The Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla, however, states that in Durjayā, flesh was eaten only by wild beasts (piṣitāsitā śvāpadeṣu).(29) This may be interpreted as evidence that meat was not universally eaten in the province, but the Yoginī Tantra recommends in most emphatic words the eating of meat and fish in Kāmarūpa: kāmarūpa na tyajet sāmiṣam.(30) Among the animals whose flesh it recommends are ducks, pigeons, tortoises and hogs: hamsa - pārāvatam bhaksyam kūrman varāhamo 'kāmarūpe parityāgaddur-gatistasya sambhavah ||(31) It is also noteworthy that in Assam today, unlike the other provinces of India, the Brāhmaṇas and the Vaiṣṇavas eat both meat and fish without any social bar or comment.

(31) Ibid, v.16.
7. Articles of Luxury.

In an earlier chapter, it has been noticed that agaru, sandal, and musk were well-known products of Assam. It is, therefore, apparent that perfumes and cosmetics were used by the people, especially by the wealthy classes. They also played an important part in rituals. "With perfume" says the Kālikā Purāṇa, "one meets his desire. It also increases merit, begats wealth and brings liberation."(32) The same text distinguishes the following five kinds of perfumes that were in common use, classified according to their different kinds and the mode of their preparation: cūrnikīrtta (powder), ghrīṣṭa (paste), dāhākarṣita (ashes), samarddaja rasa (juice), prāṇyaṅgodbhava (e.g. musk).(33)

Anointing the body with scented oil before the bath was, and still is, a common practice. One inscription states that women used perfumes and anointed their breasts with odorous substances.(34) Sandal-paste seems to have been the favourite material used. Harṣa is said to have sent to Hamsavega, the Assamese ambassador to his court, the remains of his toilet-sandal enclosed in a polished coconut, wrapped in a white cloth. (35) A rich perfume was prepared with kṛṣṇā-agaru oil, which was generally preserved in bamboo-tubes, "wrapped round with sheaths of kāpotikā leaves".(36) Ānjana (eye-salve) was also used.

(34) Grant of Vanamāla, v. 30.
Karpūra (camphor) which was "coal, pure and white as bits of ice" was also in use. (37) Musk was used to a very considerable extent in the preparation of cosmetics, but many substances were used. Hamsavega brought to the court of Harṣa sacks of woven silk (pattasūtra - sevarkār - pitānśca), containing jet-black pieces of black aloe wood, gosīrṣa sandana (camphor), kastūrikākoṣa (musk), kakkola sprays. (38)

Much attention was paid to the beautification of the face. Huien Tsiang records that the people of India stained their teeth red or black. (39) This custom of reddening or darkening the teeth as a mode of prasādhana (ornamentation) is testified to by the Yoginī Tantra and was largely prevalent among the women of Assam. (40)

Among other articles of luxury were the hand-fans, garlands and "jewelled mirrors (manimaya darpana) used by women in their coquetries". (41) Vallabhadeva's Plates refer to sandals with straps and decorated with jewels. (42) Umbrellas were also in use and it is stated in the Kālikā Purāṇa that they were made of woven cloth. (43) We have already referred to the Ābhoga umbrella, the family heirloom of the Kāmarūpā kings, which manifested many wonder-moving miracles. (44)

(37) Ibid. (38) Ibid.
Spirituous liquors of various kinds were used. One of these alcoholic drinks was known as ullaka; Bhāskaravarman sent to Harsa as a royal present "cups of ullaka diffusing the fragrance of sweet wine."(45) The expression madhumada in the Bargāon Grant, which Hoernle takes to mean "intoxication with wine" also indicates the use of alcohol.(46) Another common practice, still in use today, was the eating and chewing of tambula (areca-nut), both ripe and unripe, together with betel-leaf and lime. In India, the custom of chewing unripe betel-nut exists only in Assam; this has been recorded both in the Harṣacarita as well as in the accounts of the Mahomedan historians. The Fathiyā-i-Ibriyāh states that the people of Assam ate pān in large quantities with unripe "supari", unshelled.(47) The Yoginī Tantra says that the women of Assam would always be chewing betel-nut: tambulāsā sadā bhavet.(48) Areca-nut and betel-leaf, {tāmol-pān}, as they are called in Assamese, have a definite place in many religious and ceremonial functions. They are the first thing offered to a visitor; to receive it from a prince or a priest is considered a special honour.(49)

(49) It is generally believed that tambula was originally used by the Austro-Asiatic people. Assam being the seat of these people, it is natural that tambula should be in common use in the province: Bagchi; Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian, pp.16-19.
8. Dress and Ornaments.

Textile materials, according to the Kālikā Purāṇa, are divided into the following four classes: karpāsa (cotton), kambala (wool), bālka (bark) and koṣaja (silk from cocoons).(1) Cotton cloth was extensively used, and there was a special class of weavers (tantuvāyas). Kambala was a texture of fine wool (sheep's wool or goat's hair); most probably it was imported from Bhutan or Tibet. In the Life of Hiuen Tsiang Bhāskaravarman is said to have made a gift of a cap to the pilgrim. It was called ho-la-li, and was made out of coarse skin lined with soft down, and was designed to protect the pilgrim from rain whilst on the road.(2) Ho-la-li, whose sanskrit equivalent is suggested as "ral" by Watters(3) is perhaps the same as the "rallaka" of the Amarakoṣa(4), used for a variety of woollen cloths. With lomaja may be mentioned skins and hides which were also used for clothing purposes, for in the list of royal presents to Harṣa were loads of Pariveśa(5) made of Kārdaraṅga leather with charming borders, and also pillows made of samuraka (deer) leather.(5)

Vālka denotes fibres and fibre-made fabrics in general. Kāsidāsa(6) the author of the Bengali version of

(1) Chap.69, v.2. (2) p.189.
the Mahābhārata, describes how the Kirātās, forming the army of Bhagadatta, tied their loin cloths with sīri,(6) which is evidently derived from srinkhala on account of the climbing habit of the plant. But of the bark fibres fit for weaving into cloth Kṣauma was by far the most important in ancient times. According to the commentator, Kulluka, (15th century A.D.) kṣauma was a cloth made of atasi fibre. From the references in both the epics, we gather that kṣauma was either regarded specially fit to be worn on festive occasions, or was itself so finely woven that it was a fit raiment for queens.(7) That kṣauma was highly valued in ancient days, is also evident from the Mahābhārata, in which it is stated that Arjuna brought away valuable kṣauma cloths from his conquest of Uttarakuru beyond the Himalayas on the west.(8) Also, Bhāskaravarman sent as presents to Hārṣa kṣauma cloths "pure as the autumn moon's light".(9) Dukūla was the usual name for the finest kṣauma and it is referred to in the Bargāon Grant as being used for flags.(10) Bāna too mentions that the Ābhoga umbrella sent to Hārṣa by Bhāskaravarman was wrapped in dukūla (dukūla - kalpitaaccha nicolakā-dakosīt).(11) The Arthasastra in the chapter on the Royal Treasury, mentions the places of manufacture of the best kinds of dukūla. It states that dukūla that

(6) Sabhā Parva.
(7) For these references see Ray: Textile Industry in Ancient India, J.B.O.R.S, III, p.192.
was produced in Suvarṇakudya (Assam) was "as red as the sun, as soft as the surface of the gem, woven while the threads were very wet, and of uniform or mixed texture", and was considered as the best.\(^{(12)}\) It is, therefore, evident that Assam, in the 4th century B.C., was celebrated for dukūla fit to be kept in the Royal Treasury.\(^{(13)}\)

The Kālikā Purāṇa refers to hemp cloth (śāṇavastram) which was probably worn by ordinary people.\(^{(14)}\) The use of hemp fabrics is also known from the account of Hiuen Tsang. He mentions śāṇaka as a dark red cloth made of the fibre of the śāṇaka plant (a kind of hemp) and used by the bhikkhus.\(^{(15)}\)

Koṣaja or kauṣeya seems to be the silk obtained from the cocoons of various kinds of silk-worms. Commercially silk is of two kinds: wild silk and true silk. Wild silk, as the name implies, is the product of silkworms which feed on the leaves of various trees and plants growing in the forests. True silk is the product of the mulberry silkworm. The wild silks of Assam are derived mainly from two species of worms: Eri or Erandi (Attacus ricini) and Muga (Antheroea Assamoea). Eri cloth is of a drab colour, and, though often coarse in texture,

\(^{(12)}\) Shamasastry, Tr., p.82.
\(^{(14)}\) Op. Cit.
\(^{(15)}\) Watters, I, p.120.
is very durable. It is light but warm; the ordinary cold-
season wrap of the Assamese villager is generally made of this
cloth.(16) J.C. Ray wants to identify it with patrorna men-
tioned in the Arthasastra.(17) Kautalya says that of all
patronas those obtained from Suvarpakudya (in Assam) were the
best.(18) Ksirasvāmī, a commentator on the Amarakosa, calls
it (patrorna) silk spun by the insects feeding on the leaves
of banyan and "lukua" (a kind of bread or fruit tree, Arto-
carpus lakuchá).(19)
The present-day scientific name of the muga silkworm
(Antheroea Assamoea) denotes its peculiar connection with
Assam, and it is, in fact, found in no other part of India
except Dehra Dun, where it occurs sparingly.(20) Its Assamese
name is said to have been derived from the amber colour of the
silk resembling the colour of the yellow flower of the muga
pulse (Phasealous radiatus). There is a variety of muga
called Champā muga; its worm feeds on the leaves of the Champā
tree (Michella champaka). Watts tells us that this "was the
fine white silk worn by the Ahom kings and nobles of Assam in
former times." Another kind of muga is known as Mezaṅkari,
the worms feeding on Mezaṅkari or Adākari trees (Tetranthera

(16) Stack: Silk in Assam (Notes on Some Industries of Assam,
1894-1895) pp.6-12; Darrah: Eri Silk of Assam (do),
pp.77-111.
(20) B.C.Allen: Monograph on the Silk Cloths of Assam, 1899.
polyantha).(21) The Mesanukari silk, as reported by Hamilton, constituted the dress of the higher ranks, most of it being dyed red with lac.(22)

True silk, the modern Assamese white pat silk, is called patta, and is the product of Bombyx textor and Bombyx ecesi, which feed on the mulberry plant. In the Harṣacarita, in the context given above, reference is made to saeka woven out of patta-sūtra (silk yarn) (patta-sūtra-sevakārpiṇā). (23)

The art of dyeing, both yarn and cloth, was well-known; and four primary colours, namely, white, red, yellow, and black or blue were recognised. As regards the coloured garments, red and yellow seem to have been regarded as auspicious, (24) though the Kalikā Purāna forbids the use of garments of blue and red (nīlī-raktantu yadvastraṃ tat sarvatra vivarjītaṃ). (25)

(22) Francis Hamilton: An account of Assam (first compiled in 1807-1814), ed. by S.K.Bhuyan, p.62.
(24) raktam kauśeyavastranca mahādaivyai prasasyate /
    pītāṃ tathāiva kauśeyam vāsudevāya caturījet

    Kalikā Purāna, Chap.69, v.8.
(25) Ibid. In this connection it may be pointed out that dyeing is very common even among the hill tribes of Assam. The wearing of white or fawn-coloured cloths is as much the exception in the hills as it is the rule in the plains. All the tribes in the hills surrounding the province affect coloured raiment. The dominant colours are usually either black or dark blue or red. Some of the Naga tribes in particular are very expert dyers and produce extremely brilliant and handsome colours. The Manipurs have also long been known as skilful and artistic dyers, and they still maintain their reputation in this respect. The late Major Trotter made very careful enquiries as to the materials they use for dyeing, and it was found that some of the
Embroidered (vicitra) cloth was manufactured, and the gift of such cloths to gods and goddesses was considered meritorious (vicitrāṃ sarva-devabhya devībhya āśuṃ nivedayet). The presents sent by Bāskararavam to Harṣa included pieces as smooth as birch bark (bhūrjatvāk-komalāḥ jātī - pattikāḥ) or smooth painted silks (citrapatānām ca madrīyaśaṃ). The "jātī-pattikāḥ" does not mean loin-cloths as suggested by Cowell. It may mean, as its literal meaning suggests (jātī, jasmine, pattikāḥ, silken strips), long strips of silk (kamarabandha) in which the patterns of jasmine flowers were interwoven. Its comparison with the birch bark indicates that perhaps it was "mugā" silk which is very soft and tawny in colour like birch bark.

Clothes in general were known by the names, vastra and āchāḍāṇā. They were both uncut and tailored or stitched (sucīviddham). The dress of the people, as revealed in the sculptures of the period, consisted of a single unstitched undergarment (paridhāna) like the present day "dhoti". This

(25 contd.) plants used were not previously known to yield dyes at all, while one or two of them were absolutely new to science. Duncan: Monograph on dyes and dyeing in Assam, (1896), pp.6-7.


(30) Ibid. The art of tailoring was well-known in the time of the Guptas. Vatsayoyana includes sucīvāyokarma (tailoring) among the sixty-four kalās. According to Yasodhara tailoring is of three kinds, namely, sīvan (sewing of coats, etc.), ūtana (darning of torn cloths), and viracana (making of bed-sheets etc.) P.K. Acharya: Fine Arts, I.H.Q, V, p.200.
was worn wrapped round the waist, and hardly reached below the knee. It was held tight at the waist by a girdle (parivesa) consisting of three or more bands, fastened together by means of a knob in the centre, just below the navel. Sometimes one end of the garment was allowed to hang in graceful folds in the front (Fig. 85). The use of the parivesa, waist-band, is known also from the Harṣacarīta, for Bāna records that Harṣa gave one to Hamsavega, whereof one part had clusters of clear pearls. (31) The same authority mentions a Parivesa made of leather. Besides under-garments, the people of higher social status dressed in upper robes such as uttariya and uttariyāsaṅga. (32) Women too, appear to have worn two garments, the upper and the lower. The lower garment descended from the stomach to the ankles and was fastened by means of the nivibandha. (Fig. 86). The Bargāon Grant mentions vakṣah-kavāta-paṭa, a garment generally worn by kings and nobles to protect the chest, possibly some kind of armour.

For the use of headgear, we have to go to the sculptures. The Chinese writer Hwui Li, however, informs us that Bhāskara-varman wore a tiara in the religious convocation held at Kanauj. (33)

The ornaments worn by men and women on different parts of their bodies were of different designs. The Kālikā Purāṇa

names the following forty different types: kirīta, śiroratna, kundala, laḷāṭikā, talapatra, hāra, graivayaka, urmnīka, prālam-vikā, ratnasūtra, uttaṅga, aksamālikā, pārsvadyota, nakhadyota, aṅguli echādaka, kuṭumvaka, mānavaka, mūrddhatārā, khalantikā, aṅgada, vāhavalaya, śīkābhūsana, ingikā, praganda vandha, udbhāsa, nābhipūra, mālikā, saptakī, śrīnīkhalā, dantapatra, karnaka, urusūtra, nīvī, mustivandha, prakīrnaka, pāḍāṅgada, hamsaka, nūpūra, ksudraghantikā and mukhapatta. (34) These were made both of gold and silver. The Kālikā Purāṇa, however, forbids the wearing of silver ornaments above the neck (grīvord-dhadesa raupyantu na kadaeleoa bhūsanam). It also enjoins that ornaments made of other metals, except iron and bell-metal (kāmsya), should be worn on the lower part of the body. (35) In our period, as at present in some places, men also adorned their necks with ornaments. Most of the neck-ornaments (hāra) seen in the sculptures were made of beads. Some strings were very long and reached the navel. The neck-ornament of Fig. appears as a broad crescent-shaped plate or torque decorated with an embossed design. Sometimes pendants were hung from the middle of necklaces, which in Assamese are called dugdugias. (36)

(34) Chap.69, v.17-23. (35) Ibid. (36) It is a heart-shaped pendant very graceful in form, and usually tastefully decorated with an elaborate gold wire pattern set in enamel. One side only (that which rests on the bosom) is enamelled, the other being usually set with stones, at the centre of which is a diamond or emerald. At the upper end there is a ring attached to it, by means of which it is threaded together with gold or gold and coral beads to form a set.
The neck-ornament seen in Figs. 84/ resembles very much the modern galpata; so named because the broad band lies flat on the neck. The angada and keyura were worn on the upper arm. In our sculptures, we find the angada type of armlet, which is a circular band, often ornamented with some designs. (37) Unlike an armlet, a bracelet or kankaṇa was seldom worn single. Bracelets, as seen on the sculptures, were heavy, and the rings piled one above the other reached more than half-way up the wrist and the arm. (38) The figure 86 (Plate XXXII) wears a bangle that looks like a modern kħaru. (39) An ornament worn by both men and women, especially on the wedding day. It is a long and wide ring-like ornament of gold or silver, made in two halves, formed by means of two pins, one pin being the hinge, and the other the fastening. Ornaments of various kinds, like kundalā, were used for the ears. (40) Anklets were worn on the feet, mainly by women. Big anklets shaped like twisted ropes were known as nūpura. The kinkini type was a chain base fringed with little bells round the feet, on a hollow metal tube filled with shot to make a jingling sound when in motion (kinkini khudra ghantikā). (41) A forehead ornament (tilaka or lalātikā) was generally worn by women just below the parting of the hair on the top of the forehead.

(37) Plate Fig. 54. (38) Plate Fig. 54.
(39) Henniker: The Gold and Silver Wares of Assam, Shillong, 1905.
(40) Plate Fig. 54.
(41) Kinkini was more generally worn by young girls. For in Vanamāla's Grant we have: vālakumārikābhīrīva kvanat kinkinibhiḥ.
An idea of the arrangement of hair and the decoration of the head can be had from the sculpture of the period. But as most of the figures are represented wearing head-dresses, it is not possible to give an exhaustive description of the various ways of arranging the hair. The simplest and common coiffure is seen in Fig. 17 (Plate VII). This method of arranging hair is still in use, and to swell the chignon women even now put padding or borrowed hair inside it. Fig. 88 XXXIII (Plate 7) from the wall of the Kamakhya temple, in which the coiffure is raised to the left side. This style differs in no way from the present-day method of dressing hair by the village women of Assam.

The commonest children's game, according to the Kālika Purāṇa, was playing with dolls: pañcaālikā - vihārādyah sisun ām kautukaitathā. Among the general indoor games, dice seem to have been very popular. Hunting was a favourite pastime. Vallabhadeva's Plates mention buffalo hunting and the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla hints at the method of catching tigers by nets. "Being passionately fond of the chase", says the record, "(Purandarapāla) gave more than once extraordinary proofs of it by the way in which he captured hostile kings, like tigers, in nettings of arrows improvised for the occasion." This practice still survives in the province.

Dancing and music were popular amusements. Besides the inscriptions and the literary evidence, there are many sculptural representations of men and women, gods and godlings, in dancing postures, and of musicians playing upon different instruments.

(42) Chap. 86, v. 134.
(43) Ibid, Chap. 84.
(44) v. 12.
(45) Plate Fig. 13.
10. Conveyances.

Conveyances generally consisted of bullock carts, carriages (ratha) (46) drawn by horses (vicitra gaja turaga śīkā) and boats. Boats of various types were used. Vanamāla's Grant gives a beautiful description of the swift-moving royal boats, adorned with various ornaments, sonorous kinkini (small bells) and chāmaras. (47) Besides, horses, bullocks and elephants were also used for travelling.

(46) Grant of Vanamāla.
(47) v.30.
11. General Character of the People.

It is not possible to give a complete picture of the social life of the people of our period, but in these pages an attempt is made to throw light on some important aspects of social life. As to the general character of the people, the Chinese pilgrim's account is invaluable. The manners of the people, says, Hsiuen Ts'iang, "were simple and honest". The men were of small stature, and their complexion a dark yellow. Their language differed a little from that of Mid-India. Their nature was very impetuous and wild; their memories were retentive, and they were earnest in study. (48)

(48) Buddhist Records of the Western Countries, p.196.
CHAPTER V.

(continued)

II. EDUCATION AND LEARNING.
1. General Education.

It is clear that education in the sense of book-learning was not so widely diffused as it is today. The learned class of the day was, of course, the Brāhmaṇas, but the common people were also not wholly illiterate. It is obvious that the vyavahāris (lawyers), lekhakas (scribes) and other officials who copied books, made up accounts, and drew up deeds were all educated. Even the copper-smiths and masons, who engraved the epigraphs, must have been able to read and write. From the occurrence of such names as Śani, Dhani, Ani,(1) names usually borne by common people, among the engravers of the epigraphs, as well as from the corrupt and colloquial forms of certain words and phrases used, it may be concluded that the engraving was generally entrusted not to scholars or specialists, but to ordinary workmen.

Education was centred round the guru-grīha,(2) schools maintained by private individuals, or at village schools provided by the Brāhmaṇas of an Agrahāra village. The Brāhmaṇa donees, the recipients of royal grants, are described as being zealous in discharging their six-fold traditional duties,(3) of which adhyāpana (teaching) was the most important. From

(1) Guukuchi Grant. Bhattasali also remarks that the Gachhal inscription is the handiwork of some stone mason and not of a good scribe. I.H.Q, XXII, p.12.
(2) Grant of Balavarman, v.31.
(3) Supra.
the references in the inscriptions, it is clear that the Brāhmaṇa villages were responsible for the teaching of Sanskrit; here, the Vedas, the systems of philosophy, and various other branches of learning were taught to those in the schools.

The village school sometimes used to be held in the porch of a temple. But, whether used as a school or not, the village temple was a centre of popular education through the constant recitation and exposition of the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. Occasionally the priests or the leaders of the religious sects used to expound the principles and philosophy of their own sects in the temple precincts. The temples were also the scene of festive gatherings and communal rejoicings. These festivals took various forms, but they always included music, dancing, recitation, play and pantomime. In this way, the temples played a remarkable part in the cultural life of the people.

The Grant of Balavarman refers to the samāvartana ceremony which was performed at the end of the Brāhmaṇacarya period. The most elaborate ceremonies are prescribed in the various sūtra and smṛiti texts. An auspicious day for the ceremony was selected and the student was required to shut himself up in a room throughout the morning. At mid-day, he came out, cleansed his mouth, and shaved his head and beard. He then relinquished his girdle (mekhala), deer-skin (ajīna), etc., the insignia of the students' order. The Guru then bathed him in fragrant
water. The bath was followed by a gift of new clothes, consisting of ornaments, garlands, callyrium, turban, umbrella and shoes, the use of all of which had been taboo to him during the period of studentship. These were now to be formally and officially offered to him by his preceptor with the recitation of the proper mantras. It was expected that the parents or guardians, who were well off, would furnish a double set of the above articles, one for the guru and the other for his pupil. A Homa sacrifice followed and the hope was expressed that the snātaka would get plenty of students to teach. The teacher then offered him madhuparka. Dressed in his new dress, the student proceeded to the assembly of the learned men of the locality. He was there formally introduced as a competent scholar by his teacher. Returning home, he would bid farewell to his teacher, after paying him such fees as he could afford. (4)

It is obvious that the kings were keenly interested in the spread of learning and education, and made large grants for that purpose. Writing of Bhāskaravarman, the Chinese pilgrim remarks that the king was fond of learning and the people imitated him. "Men of high talent", he wrote, "visited the kingdom". (5) The pilgrim specially mentions the visit of a learned Brāhmaṇa who informed Bhāskaravarman as to "the high qualities of the Master of the Law (Huien Tsang)". This Brāhmaṇa was

formerly a heretic of the Lokātiya sect, who came to Nalanda monastery to dispute with the monks. But being defeated in discussion, he was converted by the Chinese pilgrim to Buddhism.

The very fact that Bhāskararavarmān showed a commendable anxiety to profit by the learned company of the Chinese monk is itself a testimony to the standing of learning in the province.

2. Curriculum of Study.

A little information exists as to the curriculum. The epigraphs mention both the cultivation of vidyā and kalā. The distinction between the two as explained by the texts is that the former is literary study, and the latter is professional activity. Under vidyā is included the four Vedas, the four Upa-vedas, described as Āyurveda, Dhamurveda, Gandharvaveda, and the Tantras,(7) the six Vedāngas, Itihāsa, Purāṇas, Smritis, Arthaśāstra, Kāmasāstra, Śilpaśāstra, Alamkāra, Kāvyā, etc. The Puspabhadrā Grant refers to a Brāhmaṇa well versed in Śrutis, Smritis, Nīmaṇsā, and Cānakya (Arthaśāstra.) (8) Jyotίṣa-vedānga, the science which measures time by studying the movements of the planets and the stars, was extensively studied, and the king maintained Daivajñās at his court(9), who were required to make forecasts of coming events, celestial and terrestrial. Āyurveda, the science of medicine, was also carefully studied. There was a state medical department with the royal physician at its head. Veterinary science was an important side development of the state medicine. A well-known treatise on the ailments peculiar to elephants entitled Hastya Āyurveda or Gaja Čikitsā was compiled in our period by a sage known as Pālakāpya

(7) Tantra as a subject of study is specially referred to in the Gauhatī Grant of Indrapāla, v.16.
(9) Kamauli Grant, v.8.
"in the region where the river Lauhitya (Brahmaputra) flows from Himalayas to the sea." (10) This treatise on elephant science is an extensive compilation of 160 chapters, divided into four sthanas or sections, namely, mahāroga (principal diseases, 16 chapters), sālya (surgery, 34 chapters), and uttara (therapy, 36 chapters). (11)

The science of music, associated not only with singing and playing on instruments, but also with dramatic performances and dancing, was well cultivated. Hiuen Tsiang records the custom of singing and dancing at the court of Bhāskaravarman. An interesting manual on dancing, of the same type as Bharata's Nātyaśāstra, was compiled under the name Hasta-muktāvalī, to serve the peculiar dramatic requirements of the province. (12)

Several passages in our inscriptions indicate that the Kāmarūpa kings took a personal interest in Sanskrit literature. In the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, his father, Purandarapāla, is described as su-kavi. (13) King Dharmapāla was also a poet of considerable merit. It is said in the epigraph that in his speech resided Bhagavatī and Sarasvatī, and he was regarded as Kavicakrālacudāmanī, "chief of the circle of poets." (14)

(11) Published in Ānandārāma Sanskrit Series No. 26. An Assamese version was made in 1734 under the orders of the Ahom king Siva Singh. The Assamese manuscript is profusely illustrated. Goswami: Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts, p. 65-67


(13) v. 11.

(14) v. 8.
is said to have composed the first eight verses of his Puspaprabhadra Grant. The anthology of Saduktikarnamrita contains ten verses by one named Dharmapala, who, according to N. N. Dasgupta, is none but the king, Dharmapala of Kamarupa.(15)

The literary activity of the period further becomes clear from the highly ornate and poetic prasastis of the epigraphs. Many of these prasastis may be classed among the best specimens of the literature of the period. Their stately diction, the easy flow of the verse, and the animated narration of its historical incidents put them into a class of secular literature by themselves. The various metres used in them are handled with very great skill. From a study of these prasastis, it appears that their composers were not only well acquainted with the classical authors but also were greatly influenced by the classical kavya style. This is evinced by their adoption of many passages from the works of Kalidasa, Banabhatta and others. As an instance, the following passages from the Raghuvamsa of Kalidasa are found in the Nowgong Grant of Balavarman:(16)

(1) tambula - valli - parinadha - puga, from Raghuv, sarga VI, sloka 64.

(ii) praja - rañjana - labdha - varna, from sarga VI, slaka 21.

(15) King Dharmapala of Kamarupa as Poet, J.A.R.S. IV, pp.56-57. It is also to be noted that Dharmapala's records mention the names of two court poets, namely, Prasthana Kalasa and Aniruddha.

(16) These plagiarisms were first discovered and published by M.M.P. Dhirisvara Bhattacharyya in the Asam, an Assamese paper. Also, J.A.S.B. 66, Pt. I, pp.288-289.
Likewise, the following passages from the Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla may be compared to the similar passages in the Harsacaritā of Bāna:

(I) gurjjara - ādirāja - prajvärena etc.
Compare hūna- harina - ksārī - sindhu - rāja - jvaro etc. in the Harsacaritā, p.132.

(II) vāsav - āvāsa - spardhini.
Compare vāsav - āvāsa - iva (adhivāsah), in the Harsacaritā, pl04

(III) arjjuno - yasasi bhīmaseno yuddhi (or Śūālkuchi Grant Bhīmo dhanusi) etc.
Compare arjuno yasasi bhīmo dhanusi etc. in the Harsacaritā, p.110.

The author of the Bargāon Grant seems to imitate the ornate prose style of Bāna. The fact that about one half of the royal genealogy in Bargāon's Grant is in prose, led Hoernle to remark that "the writer's literary powers were not equal to the task of versifying the whole". Hoernle, however, seems to forget the fact that the composer here is only resorting to a well-known Sanskrit literary form known as "campu", a form

where verse is combined with rhetorical prose.

The above, in broad outline, is a general account of the learning and literature of the period. Under the present circumstances, it is hardly possible to give a detailed account of contemporary poets and their works. Without wide investigation, a general survey of the literary activity of the period comprising several centuries can hardly be attempted. (18)

(18) In his contribution on some noted mediaeval Kāmarūpī authors and their works in J.A.R.S, VI, pp.75-86, K.L. Barua first made an attempt in this direction.
CHAPTER VI.

RELIGION.
1. Introduction of Brāhmaṇical Creeds.

It has been stated in the introductory chapter that the province finds no mention in any of the early Vedic texts. The country was first referred to in the epics, and in this connection the story of Amurtajas in the Rāmayāṇa is very significant as it seems to refer to the Aryanisation of the country by a prince of Madyadeśa. No less important is the account of the Vīdēha Prince Naraka who established himself as the King and conqueror of Kāmarūpa. In the Epics and the Purāṇas, the country is said to have been originally inhabited by Mlechas and Kirātās, who were driven by Naraka to the hills and the marshy region near the sea (vidrāvitāh kirātāste sāgarāntam samāśritah; sarvān kirātān pūrvasayām sāgārānte nyavesayat).(1) Naraka is further said to have established in his kingdom a large number of learned Brāhmaṇas well versed in the Vedas: tasmāt kirātānusāryya vedasāstratīgān vahūn | dvijātin vāsaya-māsa tatra vṛṇān sanātanān.(2) The Haragaurl - samvāda alludes to Bhagadatta who would bring a hundred Brāhmaṇas from Kanauj for performance of the Vedic sacrifices: satu - viprān samāṇīya kanyakubjādi - desātāḥ | yajñakarma svayam kurvan sva-prajā pālayāisyatī.(3)

(1) Kālikā Purāṇa, Chap.38, V.112, V.121.
(2) Ibid, v.124.
The inscriptions also, as noted previously, (Chapter V) contain references to immigration of Brāhmanas to Assam from Madhyadeśa (Middle Country), as well as emigration of Assamese Brāhmanas to other provinces. The system of settling Brāhmanas in Assam was continued right up to our period. The incomplete set of Nidhanpur copper-plate alone bears the names of no less than two hundred and five Brāhmanas of various gotras and Vedas, to whose families King Bhūtivarman (600 A.D.) granted land in the Mayurasālmala Agrahāra. Such Brāhma settlers doubtless spread the Vedic culture in the province; and with the support of the kings, the movement received a great impetus from the 6th till the 12th century A.D. The process by which Vedic culture was introduced into the country and by which the non-Aryan tribes were converted to Hinduism was probably the same as that which we find adopted by the Brāhmanas of the subsequent periods. Thus, the Koch kings (1500 A.D.) who were without doubt of non-Aryan descent, had been recognised by the Brāhmanas as sprung from Siva, the god having taken the form of one of their ancestors and visited the queen, who was herself none other than an incarnation of his divine spouse Pārvatī. The Kāchari kings were similarly converted, and after their ancestry had been satisfactorily traced back to Bhima, one of the Pāndava princes of the Mahābhārata.(4) Likewise, for the Ahoms, Indra was selected as the progenitor of their kings.(5)

(4) Census Report of Assam, 1892, p.93; Gait, pp.48-49.
(5) Yogini Tantra, Pt.I, Chap.XIV.
With the impact with the non-Aryan peoples, the Vedic religion underwent radical changes, mainly under two ways: first, by the creation, chiefly illustrated by the Epics and Purānic literatures, of a gallery of deified personages; secondly, by the adoption of deities, religious myths, and cults derived from the races beyond the Brāhmanic pale. Some of these gods and goddesses developed into special cults along sectarian lines. We will in the following pages briefly indicate the main outline of the development of some of the important cults associated with gods like Śiva, Viṣṇu and Sūrya.
9. (1) Śaivism.

Śaivism, or, at least, the worship of Śiva prevailed in Assam from a remote period. Tradition says that King Jalpeśvara first introduced the cult. (6) The Kālikā Purāṇa relates that before the coming of Naraka, who is said to have introduced the Śakti cult into Kāmarūpa, Śiva was regarded as the guardian deity of the province. (7) Even during the time of Naraka, Śiva was worshipped privately (sambhurantar guptaḥ same pure). (8) An analysis of the names of the sacred places of Assam as given in the Kālikā Purāṇa, clearly shows that the number of sacred places connected with Śiva worship is larger than that of places associated with Viṣṇu or Devī worship. (9) It appears, therefore, that Śaivism clearly dominated in Kāmarūpa.

The inscriptions also contain definite references to the worship of Śiva. The Grant of Vanamāla, while recording the incident of Kṛṣṇa's bestowal of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa on Bhagadatta, states that Bhagadatta worshipped Śiva with great humility and penances. (10) His successor, Brajadatta, was devoted to Śiva. (11) In the initial verse of the Nidhanpur Grant, Bhāskararvarman invokes Śiva, who has the crescent on

(7) Chap.XXXVIII, v.96. (8) Ibid.
(9) Number of places associated with Śiva, Viṣṇu and Devī are respectively fifteen, four and five.
his crown, who is the holder of the pinākā, and who is besmeared with ashes. The Kamauli Grant records that "Śiva was propitiated by the Brāhmana Śridhara through penances of eating once either by day or by night, and living on alms without begging, and fastings."(12) The Harṣacarita mentions that Bhaṣkaravarman from his childhood firmly resolved "never to do homage to any being except the lotus feet of Śiva."(13) The preeminence of Śiva worship is clearly indicated by the prāṣastis found in many of the copper-plates of the period. Besides, the kings in these records described themselves as Parama Barāha and Parama Māhesvara, which clearly illustrates that they were unquestionably great champions of Śiva.

Some of these prāṣastis commence with a distinct Saivite symbol - S, called Āṇji. According to Bhattacharyya, this sign is the form of the snake-shaped kula-kunda-lini that resides in susūmā ( ).(14) This kulakundalini is the Sakti or Śiva that remains coiling round the svayambhū (self-begotten) linga at mūlādhāra (the lower nervous system of Indian anatomy.)

That the Śaivism of the period was a fully developed religion with various sub-cults can be seen from the various names by which Śiva is invoked in the prāṣastis. He is invoked as Paramesvara(15) (the supreme lord), Māhesvara(16) (the great

(14) Bhattacharya: Mahādeva, the Istadevatā of the Kings of Kāmarūpa, J.A.R.S, II, pp.1-6.
(15) Nidhanpur Grant. (16) Grant of Balavarman.
lord), Isvara(17) (the lord), Mahāvarāha(18) (the great Boar), Ādideva(19) (the first god); all these names denote Śiva's position of supremacy over all other gods. His beneficent nature is indicated by the names of Śambhū(20) (the benign one), Śaṅkara(21) (the beneficent), and Prajādhinātha(22) (lord of the people). Rudra(23) is his name which signifies his destructive or fierce character. The names Hātakaśūlīn,(24) Hara,(25) Kāmeśvara,(26) Kitava,(27) Ardha-yuvatīśvāra,(28) Pasūpati,(29) Gaurīpati,(30) and Somanātha(31) are connected with various Śaiva mythology.

These various names attributed to Śiva alone convey a fair idea of the popular conception of the god. But fortunately the prasastis contain further details of the cult of the god prevalent at the time. Śiva is referred to as prime deity (Ādideva) and great god (Prama Mahēśvara) whose feet were

(17) Grant of Vanamāla (18) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.
(19) Śubhaṅkarapāṭaka Grant. (20) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.
(21) Bargāon Grant. (22) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.
(23) Grant of Balavarman. (24) Grant of Vanamāla.
(25) Bargāon Grant.
(26) Grant of Vanamāla; Guākuchi Grant of Indrapāla.
(27) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.
(28) Subhaṅkarapāṭaka, and Khonāmukhi Grants.
(29) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.
(30) Vallabhadeva's Plates.
worshipped "by the chiefs of deities bowed down in devotion." (32)
In the prāśasti of the Bargāon Grant, he is invoked as the supreme self, who "becomes many through his multifarious attributes due to omni-presence, and thus shines in the world." (33)

But Śiva is not conceived in the abstract alone. As has been said, he appears as a concrete divine figure with familiar myths and legends clustering round him. In the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, in the opening verse, there is a reference to Śiva and Gaurī in a very amusing way. It says: "The club, axe, bull crescent and the rest, everything that is your own, O Kitava (gambler) has been won today by me (but) given back to you: only let Gangā remain as my water-bearer"; at this speech of Gaurī, "the bent down head of Sambhu, (who was) vanquished in a feat of gambling, be victorious!" Both in the Subhaṅkarapāṭakā and Khonāmikhi Grants, he is conceived as having half his form as woman (ardha-yuvatiśvara) and "having on (one side of) the neck a blue lotus, (on the other side) a jewelled hood of serpent attached; (on one side) a lofty breast painted with saffron, (the other side) besmeared with ashes: who thus appears as it were an amalgamated creation of the amorous and the dreadful sentiments." The Nīdhanpur Grant alludes to his overcoming Kāma (Cupid) by mere sight. (34)

(33) v.1.
(34) v.2.
and sūla. His vehicle is the bull, īśāśīklā shines on his forehead, (35) and he has a girdle of the lord of snakes. (36) He resides on the peak of the mountain Kailāsā. (37) He is the lord of Gaurī, having the Ganges on his head. (38)

Śiva was also worshipped in linga form. Although iconographic representations of Śiva in his various forms are discovered in Assam, it appears that he was chiefly worshipped in the form of lingam, an upright pillar or rod of stone erected on a pedestal called yoni. The Yoginī Tantra states that the number of lingam in Kāmarūpa exceeds a million. (39) The inscriptions refer also to temples dedicated to Śiva. The Grant of Vanamāla states that "by the king was borne the burden of Nahusa, by reverentially reconstructing anew the temple that had fallen down in course of time, of the trident-holder Haṭaka-Śiva ... (making it) high like the summit of the Himalayas, and endowed with incomparable (numbers of) villages, people, elephants and prostitutes." (40) Hiuem Tsiang, also records that during his visit to Kāmarūpa, there were hundreds of deva-temples, many of which were probably dedicated to Śiva. (41)

The ruins of a Śaiva temple, dating from 600 A.D., resembling the Gupta temples at Bhumra, Nachna-Kuthara and Deogarh, have been unearthed at Tespur. (42)

(ii) Śaktism.

Śaktism, the worship of the divine female active principle (prakṛti) as manifested in one or other of the forms of the consort of Śiva is closely associated with Śaivism. (43) The Devī Purāṇa, a work composed about the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century A.D., states that the Devī was worshipped in her different forms in different places, for instance in Kāmārūpa, Kāmākhyā, Bhattadesa etc. (44) Wilson, in the Preface to his translation of Viṣṇu Purāṇa, remarks that Assam, or at least the north-east of Bengal (Kāmārūpa), seems to have been the source from which the Tāntric and Śākta corruption of the religion of the Vedas and the Purāṇas

(42) A.R.A.S.I., 1924-25, 798 ff. R. D. Banerji: Imperial History of the Gupta, pp. 194 ff. On the bank of the river Brahmaputra, near Dhenukhana Hill, are the ruins of two Śiva temples, which Dikshit considers to be contemporary with the date of Harjjara’s Tespur Inscription (829 A.D.), A.R.A.S.I., Bengal Circle, 1920-21, p. 56.

(43) Śaktism, according to some scholars, originated from various non-Aryan cults. For this view see Chanda: Indo-Aryan Races, pp. 122-161; Payne: The Śāktas, pp. 61-74; E.R.E., VI, pp. 705 ff.

proceeded. "Sāktism", says Eliot, "in the sense of a definite sect with scriptures of its own, if not confined to the north-east corner, at least has its headquarters there." (45) Traditionally the Śākta cult is considered to have its centre in Kāmārūpa with its chief temple at Kāmākhyā. (46) But strangely enough, in the inscriptions there is no trace of Śākti worship, except the veiled references in the inscriptions of Vanamāla and Indrapāla to the temples of Kāmeśvara Mahā-gaurī, and Mahā-gaurī Kāmeśvara. The silence may, however, be explained by the fact that Śāktism represents a particular phase of religion which was in the main personal and esoteric. Consequently it had no connection with any public religious order or establishment. Personal in origin, its tenets and history were preserved in a special class of magical and sacramental literature, commonly known as Tantra.

Throughout the mediaeval period, even down to the eighteenth century, the leading religion of Assam, however, seems to

(46) Kāmākhyā seems to be a new name of the goddess and she does not appear, at least by this name in the early literature. Kakati gives evidence for thinking that the word is non-Sanskritic in origin. He has equated the word with some similar Austric formations, which mean ghosts or dead body. He further suggests that Kāmākhyā was formerly a goddess of ghosts and spirits, who was worshipped in a śmaśāna or cremation ground. Assamese, its Formation and Development, p. 535. About the importance of the temple of Kāmākhyā, see Eliot: Hinduism and Buddhism, II, pp.288-290.
be Śāktism. (47) Kāmākhyā is the most holy and famous shrine of the sect, and with its worship was associated the various rites, mantras, mudrās and sacrifices. (48) Accounts of these rites, together with their cults are described at some length in the Kālikā Purāṇa and the Yoginī Tantra.

(47) For Śāktism in Mediaeval Assam, see Census Reports, Assam, 1891, p.1, 80; and 1901, i, 39 ff; Eliot: Hinduism in Assam, J.R.A.S, 1904, pp.1155-1186.

3. Vaisnavism.

The worship of Vismu was evidently prevalent in Assam from early times, for as has been said before, the kings of Kamarupa traced their lineage to Vismu through Naraka.(1) Bana in his Harasararita describes Bhaskaravarma as a descendant of the Vaisnava family (vaisnavavamsah).(2) The earliest recorded reference to the worship of Vismu in Kamarupa occurs in the Bagaganga Rock inscription (554 A.D.).(3) It hails King Bhuitivarman as Parama-daivata Parama-Bhagavata. It appears, however, that during the subsequent centuries Vaisnavism occupied only a subordinate position. It again, with state support, came into prominence during the time of Dharmapala (1200 A.D.). For, unlike the other epigraphs, the prasasti in the Pupebhadra Grant of Dharmapala begins with an adoration of the Boar-incarnation of Vismu; and in the record itself the donee is referred to, as a Brahmana, who was "from his birth a worshipper of the lotus-like feet of Madhava: yo balyatah prabhriti - madhavapadapatma - pujā - prapanca - racanam suciram sakāra."(4) This epigraph is doubly significant as the king himself composed its prasasti. Bhattacharyya is therefore right in suggesting that Dharmapala, at the time of issuing this grant, embraced the Vaisnava faith.(5)

(1) It is interesting to note here that in the Santi Parva of the Mahabharata Vismu is called Pragyotisa-jyestha.
(4) v.18. (5) Kamarupa Sasanaval, p.170.
The adoption of Viṣṇu’s name as a personal name became common during our time. In the Grant of Balavarman, Vanamāla is referred to as devoted to the faith of Bhava (Śiva), but his name Vanamāla, an epithet of Viṣṇu, indicates his devotion to that god. If personal names are any guide to the common deities of popular worship, as seems very likely from what we know of the custom prevailing today, the names of persons we find in these records are significant. From the occurrences of such personal names of Brahmāṇas as Saṁkarṣana, Mādhava, Govardhana, Gopāla, Sudarśana, Kesava, Janārddana, etc., it may be safely inferred that whatever deities might have been evoked on special occasions, these deities reigned supreme in the daily life of the people; and the legends and mythology associated with these names were well-known. Moreover, of the thousand names of Viṣṇu, some at least became very popular. They are Acyuta/(unfallen, imperishable), Nārayana (who moves in the water), Purusottama (the highest of men, the supreme spirit), Hari, Uпendra, Vāsudeva, Kṛśna. But for want of sufficient materials, it is now difficult to define the nature of early Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. It is, however,

(6) Nidhanpur Grant.  (7) Guākuchi Grant.
(8) Nidhanpur Grant.  (9) Guākuchi Grant.
(10) Ibid.  (11) Grant of Balavarman.
(12) Grant of Vanamāla, v.4.
certain that it corresponded to the Bhāgavatism of the Gupta period, which was a syncretism of various cults of Viṣṇu, namely, Viṣṇu of Vedic Brāhmaṇism, Nārāyana of the Pāncarātras, Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva of Sātvants, Gopāla of the Ābhira tribe of shepherds.

The worship of avatāra or incarnation is, of course, a notable feature of Vaiṣṇavism of our period. (13) The extant epigraphic evidences show that the avatāra theory was current in Assam. The inscriptions of Vanamāla, Balavarman, Ratnapāla, Indrapāla and Dharmapāla mention the Boar-incarnation in which Viṣṇu "lifted up the earth from the depths of the lower region."

The Kamauli Grant begins with an invocation of Hari in the form of Vāraha. (14) Other avatāras which we come across in these epigraphs, are Jamadagnya Rāma, "who washed his blood-stained axe in the water of Lauhitya," (15) and Narasimha Rāma (16) who "crossing the ocean killed Rāvana." (17) The most important avatāra in the later Vaiṣṇava cult of the province is Kṛṣṇa, whose account became the main theme of early Assamese literature. The Kṛṣṇa-legend seems to have formed an essential element of Vaiṣṇavism in Kāmarūpa as early at least as the 7th century A.D. References have been made to Kṛṣṇa's sportive childhood as Gopāla, who though born of Devakī was brought up

(15) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.
(16) Guākuchi Grant.
(17) Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v.9; Kamauli Grant, v.4.
by Yaśodā, (18) and was the delight of the Gopīs. (19) (gopī- janānanditamānasā).

Another avatāra of Viṣṇu is Hayagrīva (Viṣṇu with horsehead). Under this name, he is especially worshipped in Assam even today (20) in the Hayagrīva Mādhava temple (21) at Hājo, a place fourteen miles north-west of Gauhatī (Plate x Fig. 24). As regards the origin of the avatāra the Mahābhārata (22) relates that at one time, while Viṣṇu was sleeping and Brahmā was on the lotus, issued out of the navel of Viṣṇu, two demons Madhu and Kaitabha, who took away the Vedas from Brahmā and went to Rāsātala. Brahmā, being much aggrieved at this, awoke Viṣṇu, and prayed for the recovery of the Vedas. Viṣṇu assumed the Hayagrīva form and recovered the Vedas and gave them to Brahmā. He then went to sleep in the north-east corner of the great sea in his Hayagrīva form. The demons came to him and invited him to fight, in which they were killed. According to other accounts, it was the Asura Hayagrīva who stole away the Vedas, which were subsequently recovered by Viṣṇu. According to the Matsya Purāṇa, (23) the Hayagrīva avatāra of Viṣṇu preceded the Matsya; when the worlds were burnt down, Viṣṇu in the form of a horse re-compiled the four Vedas, Vedāṅgas, etc. The Devī-

(21) The antiquity of this temple is assumed from its reference in the Kālikā Purāṇa, Chap. 76 ff. According to Dr. Block, it is one of the existing pre-Ahom temples in Assam: A.R.A.S, Bengal Circle, 1903, p. 18.
(22) Śānti Parva, Chap. 349. (23) Chap. 53.
Bhāgavata and the Skandha Purāṇa in its Dharmāranya-Khaṇḍa, however, allude to two different accounts on the origin of the Hayagrīva form of Viṣṇu.

Another remarkable feature of Vaishnavism of the period is the enthronement of Lākṣmī besides Nārāyaṇa as the centre of Viṣṇu worship. The perpetual abode of Lākṣmī is the bosom of Nārāyaṇa. She is the goddess of wealth and splendour. She is praised in the records as Lākṣmī Śrī and Kamalanivāsini. The Subhāṇkarapāṭaka Grant alludes to the quarrel between Kamalayā and Bhārati, a story so common in Hindu folk-tradition.

That Vaishnavism prospered fairly well from the 7th century onwards can also be learnt from the sculptural representations discovered in the province. K.N. Dikshit has drawn our attention to an inscribed Viṣṇu image of the 9th century A.D. The inscription, though greatly mutilated, refers to the setting up of this stone image of divine Nārāyaṇa: bhaga - vato - nārāyaṇa (aya) śaili pratima bhaktyantam (bhaktānām). The same authority has proved the existence of a fairly large Viṣṇu temple, dating approximately from the 10th or 11th century A.D., on the evidence of images and sculptural fragments collected from ruins in the neighbourhood of the Sibsagar town. The Varāha Purāṇa mentions that in the Himalayas was a temple of

(24) Nidhanpur Grant; Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla.
(25) Harjjaravarman's Plates.
(26) Subhāṇkarapāṭaka Grant, v.9.
Kokāmikhasvāmin, the favourite residence of Visṇu, and it contained his best image. The reference to the Kauśikī and Trisrotā rivers as being in its neighbourhood puts the site within the ancient boundary of Kāmarūpa. (28)
4. Other Sects.

Besides these major sects, we get some references to other Purānic gods and goddesses whose sculptural representations are also found in the province. We have images of such gods as Ganesha, Kārtikeya, Indra, Agni, Kuvera, Sūrya etc., from the 6th century onwards, but we have no definite knowledge of their cults. In the next chapter, it will be shown that sculptures of Ganesha are met with in almost all temples, but there is not sufficient evidence to prove the prevalence of Gānapatya in Assam. We have, however, a copper-plate of a later period (1392 A.D.) which opens its prāsasti with the adoration of Gānapati: namo gānapataye vande(1) Vallabhadeva's Grant also invokes him as Lambodara,(2) and Vaidyadeva's Grant bears his seal.(3) The Kālikā Purāṇa, also, refers to the worship of most of these gods, and describes in detail the procedure of their worship.(4) As lord of the yaksas and kinnaras, Kuvera seems to be very popular among the semi-Hinduised peoples of the province. As a village deity, he is even today worshipped under different names, such as Jal Kuber, (the lord of water), Thal Kuber (the lord of earth) and so forth.(5)

(2) v.l. (3) Op. Cit.
(4) Chap.79 gives description of the sacred places in Assam connected with the worship of various gods and goddesses.
(5) Endle: The Kacharīs, p. 375f
Sūryya also seems to have received special reverence; although there is no definite indication in the epigraphs regarding sun-worship in Assam. In the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, however, occurs an expression Āditya-bhattāraka, which Hoernle takes to mean "Holy Āditya", or in other words, the sun-god. But though the epigraphical evidence is meagre, a widespread of Sūrya-cult is attested to by the remains of early temples and images discovered in the province. Amongst the ruins of Tezpur belonging to about the sixth century A.D. are remnants, according to Banerji, "of a gigantic temple dedicated to Sūrya." The prevalence of the sun-cult has further been confirmed by the evidence in the Kālikā Purāṇa and in other texts. For instance, in connection with Sākkara Vrata, the Samkhya Grihya Samgraha ordains that the student should visit the sacred country of Prāgjyotisa before sun-rise: tato niskamya prāgjyotisaṃ punyadesam-upāgamyā anudita āditye.(6) The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa refers to the sun-temple of Kāmarūpa, whose fame was spread far and wide. In narrating the account of King Rājayavardhana, the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa states that, when this king began to grow old, he retired to the forest to perform austerities. Seeing this, the Brāhmanas of his kingdom, who were very much attached to him, resolved to propitiate the sun in order to restore the

(6) J.A.S.B, OpCit. For a different view see Kāmarūpa Sasanāvalī, p.129, f.n.3.
(7) A.R.A.S.I,1925, 25. In Goalpara, there is a hill locally known as Sūrya Pāhār, which is believed to be associated with sun-worship.
(8) Chap.11,p.38.
king to youth. Accordingly, they started to do penance. While they were striving to propitiate the sun, a gandharva named Sudāman came and spoke thus to them: "If ye desire, o dvijas, to propitiate the sun let this be done, whereby the sun will be well pleased. There is a forest named Guru-Visāla, frequented by Siddhas, in the very mountains Kāmarūpa; go there verily in haste. There perform your propitiation of the sun with minds completely composed; the Siddhas' friendly region is there, there ye shall obtain all your desires." Having heard this, the Brāhmaṇas proceeded to that forest in Kāmarūpa and beheld there the sacred and beautiful shrine of the sun. The Brāhmaṇas, by continued austerities, succeeded in propitiating the sun and obtained from him a boon, prolonging the life of Rajyavardhana.(9)

Tārānath also mentions that sun-worship enjoyed a special favour in Assam. He refers to the fact that the people of Kāmarūpa were worshipers of the sun prior to the advent of the Buddhist monk Dhitika, who came there to convert them from sun-worship to Buddhism. In order to persuade the sun-worshippers to listen to him, Dhitika started by pretending that he was an envoy of the sun-god; and having attracted their attention in this way, he there revealed the Buddhist gospel.(10)

There are, however, at the present time, no distinct sects who reverence the sun and bear his name. The essentials of his worship are present everywhere and in many sects, more or less avowedly, or in disguise; and his practical and decisive influence on daily life, especially of the Brāhmans, is universally recognised. The same conception may perhaps be recognised in the rites observed with the Bihu festivals of the province. Among the non-Aryan peoples of the province and the tribes, who may be described as on the borders of Hinduism, sun-worship is much more open and confused. By these people the sun is widely invoked under the name of Sūrūj-devatā and is worshipped with prayer and sacrifice. (11)

(11) Das: Sun-worship amongst the Aboriginal Tribes of Eastern India, J.D.L, XI, pp.90-91.
5. Rites and Rituals.

A distinctive feature of the orthodox Hindu society is the series of rites and rituals known as śrāuta, those that are in accordance with Śruti or scriptural revelation, and smṛta, those based only on religious tradition, Smṛiti, concerning almost every stage of a man's life. We know in a general way that these śrāuta and smṛta rites were performed since the sixth century A.D., when Brāhmaṇas, learned in the Vedas, began to settle in Assam in large numbers. Our epigraphs also offer us some information about the life and conduct of the people, especially of the Brāhmaṇas, which were regulated by the rites and ceremonies enjoined by these dharmaśāstras.

Among the domestic rites (grihya), the Smṛitis enjoin the performance of the paṇca-mahā-yajña or five great sacrifices, namely, (1) deva-yajña, or offering to the gods, in which food was offered to five various deities; (ii) the bhūta-yajña, or bali-harana, an offering of different foods, which were laid on carefully purified places for certain gods and spirits; (iii) the pitiṇ-yajña, or offering to the fathers (deceased ancestors), to whom was given the residue left over from the last rite; (iv) the brahma-yajña, or offering to Brahma, i.e., the study of the Vedas; and (v) manuṣya-yajña, the offering to mankind, namely, the entertainment of guests.(1)

(1) Antiquities of India, pp.145-146, 151.
Most of the Brāhmaṇas of our records are described as having performed these sacrifices. It is noticed earlier that in the Nidhanpur Grant endowments of land were specially made towards bali, caru and sattras. Sattras are sacrificial sessions, which are to be performed by many as sacrificers, and only Brāhmaṇas who have consecrated the three Vedic fires can engage in sattras except in the Sārasvata sattras. Their duration varies from twelve days to a year or more, and accordingly they are known as Rātrisattras and Sāmvatsarika (carried on for a year or more).

Among other śrauta ceremonies, the Agnihotra, a form of haviryajñas, was fairly common. It was performed every morning and evening either by the yojamāna himself or by an Adhvaryu priest. This rite was obligatory on Brāhmaṇas, and was in the nature of a sattras, because it ended only with old age or death. The Grant of Bālapurman relates that Devadhara, in his capacity of Adhvaryu priest, performed the Vaitānika rites (rites relating to three sacrificial fires) in due order without any confusion (advaryyunā yena kṛitāṃ vibhajya vaitānikāṃ karma nirākulena).

According to the texts, the Adhvaryu priest had to measure the ground, to build the altar, to prepare the

(2) Op.Cit.
(3) History of Dharmasāstra, pp.1239-1246.
(4) The Bargaon Grant, verse 17, refers to Devadatta, whose son was a regular performer of Agnihotra.
(5) v.27.
sacrificial vessels, to fetch wood and water, to light the fire, to perform the homa (sacrifice), and whilst engaged in these duties, he had to repeat the appropriate hymns of the Yayurveda. In Agnihotra, the homa was performed with cow's milk for him who performed it as a sacred duty and not for any particular reward in view, but one who desired to secure a village or plenty of food, or strength or brilliance, employed respectively yavāgu (gruel), cooked rice, curds, or clarified butter. Elaborate rules are laid down in the Brāhmaṇas and Sūtras for milking the cow, boiling the milk and offering the same to the gārhapatiya and āhvāṇīya fires.

The Khonāmukhi Grant refers to a Brāhmaṇa who was a performer of the Agniṣṭoma and other sacrifices. Agniṣṭoma is one of the seven soma sacrifices, and it is a ekāha or aikāhika (one day sacrifice). It is so called because in it Agni is praised or because the last chant is addressed to Agni. It is to be performed in Vasanta (spring) every year, and on the New Moon or Full Moon day.

The Kṣatriyas appear, also, to have performed elaborate sacrifices. As noted previously, the great sacrifices, such as the Āsvamedha, were performed by several kings of our period.

(8) For detailed description, see Ibid. pp.1133-1203.
(9) Apart from the Vedic texts, the Āsvamedhāparva of the Mahābhārata describes it at great length.
They are also said to have performed certain other sacrifices, but little is known of them.(10)

As recommended by Atri(11) and Vyāsa(12), the Brāhmaṇas recited Sandhya thrice a day.(13) They also took three baths daily(14); and observed various fasts and vratas, or austere ceremonies. The epigraphs refer to such practices as being observed both by kings and Brāhmaṇas. In the Nowgong Grant, there is a hint that the King Balavarman took a vow to absorb himself in the spirit of Mehesvara by means of fast: *anāśana-vidhinā vīrastejasi māhesvare-līnaḥ.(15) Such acts of self-sacrifice are met with in the contemporary epigraphic records of other provinces also. The Apshad inscription refers to Kumāra Gupta who burnt himself in fire at Prayāga.(16) Another inscription from Banikapur mentions the Ganga king Harasimha II, who took the vow to fast for three days and attained rest (died). Related with the Vedic idea of religion was the ascetic outlook on life. Tapas or ascetic practices formed an important part of the religious life of the Brāhmaṇas.(18)

(10) Grant of Vanamāla, v.28; Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, v.10; Subhankarapātaka Grant, v.7.
(11) Ādāramayūkha, p.39.  (12) Ibid.
(13) Puṣpabhadrā Grant, v.11.  (14) Ibid.
(15) v.17. Also verse 15 of the Bargāon Grant leads us to think that Brahmapāla committed religious suicide.
Pilgrimages were popular during the period. References are met with to Brāhmaṇas making pilgrimage to various sacred places (tīrthas). The ultra-sacredness, where the two holy rivers, the Ganges and the Yamuna, united, was already well known. It appears that the Lauhitya (Brahmaputra) had also attained religious sanctity.

The earning of merit through charity, as enjoined by the Smṛitis and the Purāṇas, was a common practice. The epigraphs themselves are witness to this, for they are mainly deeds of benefaction. In the religious texts, gifts of certain kinds are called Mahādāna. According to the Agnipurāṇa, the Mahādāna were ten, namely, gifts of gold, horses, sesame, elephants, maids, chariots, land, house, a bride, and a dark brown cow (kanakāsvatīlā nāgā dāsi-rathamahigrīhāḥ | kanyā ca kapilār-dhenumahādānāni vai dāsa ||). In some Purāṇas, they are, however, enumerated as sixteen, of which Tulāpurūsa is the chief.

In the Śilimpur Grant, as noted above, king Jayapāla of Kamarūpa is said to have made a tulāpurūsa gift, which consisted of giving away a quantity of gold equivalent to one's own weight. Hemādri in dānakhaṇḍa devotes a long passage to the method of carrying out the tulādāna. The rite was

(19) Kamaulli Grant.  (20) Puṣpaḥadrā Grant.
(24) p.166, p.345.
accompanied by a homa sacrifice and was performed with elaborate ceremonies. At the end of the homa, the donor stepped into one of the pans of the balance and the other pan was filled up with pure gold. After the ceremony, half of the gold was given to the guru, and the other half was distributed among Brāhmaṇas. From the Grant of Vanamāla, it also appears that during the period, besides others, the gifts of elephants, horses and women were common. (25) But of all these gifts, the gift of land, both bhūmi and Agrahāra, was regarded as the most meritorious. For it was laid down that the donor of a piece of land resides in heaven for sixty thousand years in happiness. (26) It is interesting to note that there is evidence of the gift of land by kings to young Brāhmaṇas after their Samāvartana (completion of study) to enable them to marry and settle down as householders. (27) The manner of such Naivēśikadāna as quoted by Aparārka from the Kālikā Purāṇa is as follows: "The donor should choose eleven Brāhmaṇas of śrotiya families (devoted to the study of the Veda) and of good character and conduct, should build eleven houses for them, should get them married at his expense, should furnish the houses with stores of corn, with cattle and maid servants, beds, seats, vessels of clay and copper and other utensils for taking food, and with garments, and having thus furnished the houses, should settle

(25) v.29. (26) Nidhanpur Grant, v.27. (27) Grant of Balavarma, v.31.
the eleven Brāhmaṇas in the eleven houses and for their main­
tenance bestow upon each one hundred nivartanas of land or a
hamlet, or half a village; he should induce the Brāhmaṇas to
be Agnihotrins. By so doing he secures all the merits that
are secured by the performance of sacrifices, vrata, various
dānas or pilgrimages to sacred places and enjoys in heaven all
pleasures."(28)

As to the general procedure and proper times of gifts, it
seems that the rules laid down in the Dharmaśāstras were follow­
owed; according to which gifts made on certain occasions were
more meritorious than at other times. The donor used to make
gifts after taking a bath.(29) Some of the grants have been
made on the monthly saṁkrāntis, the sanctity of which has been
recognised by the Laghu - satātapa Smṛiti.(30) The Nowgong
Grant of Balavarman was issued on the Viṣuvat 1īthī, which
probably corresponds with the Chaitra saṁkrānti.(31) The
Gauhati Grant of Ratnapāla was made on the Viṣnupadi saṁkrānti.
(32) Both these days are even today considered holy and auspicious
for making donations to the Brāhmaṇas. These days are still
observed in Assam as festival days and are commonly known as
Bihus.(33) The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva was made on the

(30) v.147. (31) Kāmarūpa Śāasanāvali, p.87, f.n.7.
(32) v.20.
(33) Barua: Bahāg Bihu, Hindusthan Standard, Puja Special, 1939;
Fertility Festival in Assam, Ibid, 1st May 1945; Bihu
and Its Probable Relation with Fire Festivals, J.A.R.S, IX, pp.73 ff.
Ekadaśī day of Viṣṇuvatī in Vaisākha.(34) Vallabhadeva made his gift in the śaka year 1107, at the sun's auspicious progress to the north at an auspicious moment, and under a happy sign of the zodiac (śaka naga - nabho - rudraḥ samkhyaṁ oh-attarājane subhe subhe ksanā rasau rāṣau saste).(35)

A word is to be said about the object of these grants. The ostensible object in all such land grants is no doubt the enhancement of the fame and religious merit of the donor and his parents. Considering the fact that such acts of charity with a religious motive or with a view to social or public welfare was deemed to be commendable thing because it would bring in its train not merely religious merit but public applause, that is, fame and renown for the donor and his parents, we may well infer that at the back of such endowments there was also the desire to encourage others to follow such examples of charity. This has been clearly suggested in the Vallabhadeva's Grant, where, in setting up an almshouse, it is recorded:

"People who, religious by nature and with their minds solely directed to acts of religion, do anything whatever herein regard to this almshouse, may they with their children and children's children enjoy prosperity in this world, and in the life to come obtain the manifold delights of everlasting glorious heaven."(36)

We may therefore treat these grants to some extent as being utilitarian, that is to say, as being prompted by a motive to move the public mind towards some noble object or object of public good.

(34) Op.Cit.  (35) v.16.  (36) v.27.
6. Buddhism.

The expressions "dharma" and "tathāgata" which occur respectively in Bhāskaravarman's and Indrapāla's Grants have led some scholars to believe that Buddhism did exist in Assam at an early period. But except for surmise on these terms, the epigraphs are not very expressive, neither has archaeology produced any evidence of importance. In his account of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa, the Chinese pilgrim Huen Tsang remarked that the people had no faith in Buddha, and hence from the time when Buddha appeared in the world to the present time (7th century A.D.) there had never, as yet, been built one saṅghārāma as a place for priests to assemble.

The Tibetan historian Tārānātha, in his History of Buddhism, compiled in the year 1608, however, refers to the


(2) In his Early History of Kāmarūpa, Barua refers to some sculptural representations of Buddha on stone and terracotta plaques. Besides being portable in nature, so that they might have been imported from outside, they are so few that nothing can definitely be ascertained from them. It is, however, curious to note that the Buddhists of Tibet and Bhutan believe that the death of Buddha happened in a town west of Assam, and they identify it with the modern temple of Hajo. And in this belief, even today, Buddhist pilgrims from all parts of Bhutan, Tibet and even from Ladak and south-western China, visit this spot.

(3) Watters, II, p. 186.
introduction and prevalence of Buddhism in Kāmarūpa in later years. We have already mentioned the Buddhist teacher Dhītika, who according to Tārānātha, was responsible for converting the people of Kāmarūpa from sun-worship to Buddhism. Among Dhītika’s converts in Kāmarūpa was a Siddha, who organised a great feast for all the priests of the four regions in order to diffuse the Buddhist gospel. Tārānātha further refers to one Asvabhava, who preached the Mahāyāna doctrine in Kāmarūpa. It is narrated that once, when Asvabhava was in Kāmarūpa making converts and teaching pupils, among the upāsakas, a great sensation was caused by an incident with a poisonous serpent. The serpent attacked some of his pupils and they were immediately struck down, but as soon as some holy water was sprinkled over them, they recovered. This incident is significant, for it throws some light, though vaguely, on the nature of the Buddhist teachings prevalent in the province during the period. From the latter part of the seventh century A.D., Buddhism underwent radical changes, developing into several forms of mystic cults known as Mantrayāna, Vajrayāna and Tantrayāna. We have evidence to show that these systems gained ground in Assam, which was already noted for the esoteric doctrines of Tāntric

(4) Loc. Cit.
Sāktism. Both the Indian and Tibetan sources provide us with materials regarding the prevalence of later Buddhism in the form of Vajrayāna in Assam. (7)

The monks who were responsible for spreading the various systems associated with Vajrayāna were known as Siddhas, and according to the tradition, they were eighty-four in number. The general belief among scholars is that some of the prominent Siddhas of this traditional list, such as Saraha, (8) Nāgarjuna and Luipā, either hailed from or propounded their doctrine in Kāmarūpa. The Pag Sam Zon Jang (1747 A.D.) refers to Saraha or Rāhulabhadra as having been born of a Brāhmaṇa and a Dākini in the city of Rājñī in the eastern country. This city of Rājñī was probably the small principality of Rānī (in the Kāmarūpa-Goālpārā district, Assam) which was in the later period a feudatory of the Ahoms. (9) Grünwedel and Tucci both hold that Saraha was a Śūdra from Kāmarūpa. (10) The disciple of Saraha was Nāgarjuna, who was well-known in "Kāmarūpa, Nepāl and Bhutan." Luipā, known as Mīnanātha or Matsyendranātha, according to the Tibetan tradition, was also from Assam. (11)

(7) Bhattacharyya: Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism, p.46.
(8) Cordier suggests that there were several Siddhas with the name Saraha, p.232.
(10) J.P.A.S.B.(NS), XXVI, pp.133-141.
(11) In the Pag Sam Zon Jang Luipā is said to have been a fisherman of Oddiyāna who rose to be a writer in the employ of the King of Oddiyāna known as Samantasubha (Sādhanamālā, II, p.xlvii). In the Tibetan works Urub to'b and Bka-ababs-bdan-ldan, however, it is stated that Siddha named Mīnanath
In his introduction to the Kaulajñāna-nirṇaya, Dr. Bagohi holds that Mānātha was born on a sea-coast on an island called Chandradvīpa, in eastern India. He was the originator of the doctrine of Kula, a form of Buddhist mysticism developed out of the fusion of the Śāktism. Jayaratha in his commentary on the celebrated Tantraloka of Abhinavagupta, refers to the story of the origin of Kaulism. He quotes a verse, presumably from an original Tantra work, which states that originally the doctrine was acquired by Bhairavī, the goddess, from Bhairava, the terrifying god, and then from her by Mīna, the Macchana, the great-souled Siddha, in the Mahāpītha of Kāmarūpa: bhairavyā bhairavat prāptam yogam Vyapya priye tat - sakāsātu siddhena mīnakhyena varānane Kāmarūpe mahāpīthe macchandena mahātmanā. (12)

Thus Mānātha is credited with the promulgation of the doctrine was from Kāmarūpa. J.P.A.S.B, Ibid. Various legends are associated with the name of Matsyendranath. See: Chaknavartī; Some New Facts about Matsyendranath, I.H.Q.V, pp.178-81; Ghose: Some Additional Notes on Matsyendranath, I.H.Q, Ibid, pp.562-564. There are also different views regarding identification of Luipa with Matsyendra or Mānātha. Majority, however, holds the above view. His date is also uncertain. Taranath and Levi would place him in the seventh century, while Bagohi and others assigned him to the eleventh century.

Following Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, some scholars incline to locate Oddiyana and Lankāpuri, two places connected with Vajrayāna, in Assam, J.B.O.R.S, 1928, p.34. For criticism of this view see Bagohi’s Review to Sādhānasmālā II, I.H.Q, VI, pp.576-587.

(12) Tantraloka, pp.24-25.
known as Yogini-kaula which became popular in Kamarupa:
kāmākhye giyate nāthe mahāmatsyodarasthitih. (13) Rāhula
Śaṅkṛityayana refers to the fact that a work of Miñanātha,
namely, Bāhyantara - bodhicitta - bandho - padeśa, was composed
by Miñanātha in a language which is very much similar to old
Assamese.

In this connection mention may be made of the vast mass
of writings in early Assamese known as Mantrap, which bear the
distinct stamp of Vajrayāna tenets. These Mantraputhris
(books on magical charms) composed in mystic words and syllables
contain magic formulae against snake-bite, demons, evil doers,
etc., and various spells for the healing of diseases, and the
winning of good fortune and desired ends. Most of these
Mantras bear the impress of the Buddhistic Dhārani Suttas.

(13) Kaula - jñāna - nirnaya, p.55.
7. General Review.

Speaking about the prevailing religion and diverse sects of the country, Hiuen Tsiang remarks that there were as many as a hundred Deva temples in Kāmarūpa, as well as the shrines of other sects to the number of several myriads. Both from the epigraphs and images, we have also shown that various Brāhmaṇical cults were prevalent during our period. But it should be noted that the religious temper of the period was by no means sectarian, and there seems to have been complete harmony among the followers of the different religions. Not only did kings establish toleration, but they often patronised all sects in equal measure. Of Bhāskaravarman, the Chinese monk remarks that though the king had no faith in Buddha, yet he respected the learned Śrāmanas. When the king first heard that a Śrāmana (Hiuen Tsiang) from China had come to the Nālandā Saṅghārāma to study with diligence the profound law of Buddha, he sent for him by a special messenger with a letter for Śīlabhadra, abbot of Nālandā, which was delivered to him after two days’ journey from Assam. His request not being responded to, it was renewed through another messenger.

(1) Watters, II, p.196.  
(2) Ibid.  
(3) The Seals of Bhāskaravarman discovered at Nālandā might have been the very seal accompanying this letter, as suggested by K.N. Dikshit, J.B.O.R.S, 1920, p.161.  
(4) Life of Hiuen Tsiang, pp.170-171.
Silabhadra having received the letter, addressed the Master of the Law thus: "With regard to that king, his better mind (or, virtuous mind) is fast bound and weak; within his territories the law of Buddha has not widely extended; since the time that he heard your honourable name, he has formed a deep attachment for you; perhaps you are destined to be in this period of your existence his "good friend". Use your best diligence then and go. You have become a disciple in order to benefit the world, this then is perhaps your just opportunity: and as when you destroy a tree you have only to cut through the root, and the branches will of themselves wither away, so when you arrive in that country only cause the heart of the king to open (to the truth), and then the people will also be converted. But if you refuse and do not go, then perhaps there will be evil deeds done. Do not shrink from this slight trouble". (5)

Hsiuen Tsiang then went with the envoy and arrived in Kāmarūpa. Bhāskaravarman seeing him was greatly rejoiced, and met him with his great officers, and paying him reverence with much ceremony, conducted him within his palace. Every day he arranged music and banquets, with religious offerings of flowers and incense, and requested him to follow the ordinary rules of religious fast days. (6) The Chinese pilgrim stayed at the capital for more than a month, after which he went with Bhāskaravarman to meet Harsa. Both of them attended the Assembly

(5) Ibid, p.171.  
at Kanauj and the Mahā-mokṣa Parisad at Prayāga. The Assembly at Kanauj was a Buddhist convocation, and was held to give the utmost publicity to and exhibit the refinements of the doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The proceedings of the Assembly were opened by a huge and solemn procession starting from Harṣa's resting-hall (palace of travel), constructed for the occasion, and the main object of attraction was a golden statue of the Buddha, about three feet high, which was carried on a gorgeously caparisoned elephant. This was accompanied by Harṣa in person, who/attired as the god Sakra, with a white chowrie in his hand, whilst his friend and ally, Bhāskaravarman, was also in attendance with a precious parasol in his hand and in the guise of the god Brahmā.(7)

The proceedings of the Mahā-mokṣa Parisad lasted for seventy five days, and the religious services associated with the ceremony were of a curiously eclectic kind. In this assembly, beside Buddha, the images of Ādityadeva (Sun) and Iśvaradeva (Śiva) were worshipped with various rites.(8) This account of Bhāskaravarman’s relation with the Chinese traveller and his active participation in the religious ceremonies organised by Harṣa is most illuminating in regard to the spirit of toleration maintained by the kings of this period. The Chinese author Ādui-li, further informs us that after the termination of the proceedings of the Prayāga convocation, when Hiuen Tsiiang desired to leave for China, Bhāskaravarman, proposing to build 100

Buddhist monasteries in his kingdom, said, "If the master is able to dwell in my dominions and receive my religious offerings, I will undertake to found 100 monasteries on the master's behalf."(9)

Still more interesting are the instances in which a king openly declares his devotion to more than one religious faith. It has been noted that Dharmapāla paid reverence both to Śiva and Viṣṇu.(10) Vaidyadeva described himself both Parama-māheśvara and Parama-vaiṣṇava.(11) Vallabhadeva invoked both Bhagavata Vasudeva and Lambodara.(12) The toleration of the Kāmarūpa rulers can be determined even from their names as well. Thus, though the name Vanamāla suggests that he might have been a Vaiṣṇava, it has been shown already that he was an ardent devotee of Śiva. The Gauḍakūśi Grant of Indrapāla may be considered to be a landmark in the history of toleration in our period. Although in the prasasti of the epigraph, Indrapāla invokes Paśupati Prajādhinātha, the plate also bears the figures of Vaiṣṇavite symbols such as saṅkha, cakra, padma and Cādura. (13)

(Plate XL Fig. 109)

In this connection it is also remarkable to note that the

(11) Kamaulli Grant.
(13) Bhaṭṭaṭhāryya, Abhūṭa-tāmra-sāsana, Hara-Prāṣada-saṃvartdhana - leḍhāmālā (Bengali), pp.164-166.
Kālika Purāṇa, though a text solely devoted to the worship of the Devī, contains sections eulogising the worship of Śiva, Viṣṇu, and other gods.
CHAPTER VII.

FINE ARTS.

I. ARCHITECTURE.
I. Architecture.


The erection of temples in Assam goes back to an early century; at any rate, the existence of numerous shrines dedicated to Śiva, Sūryya, Viṣṇu, Dēvī and other deities is fully attested, both by inscriptions and the contemporary literature. The Grant of Vanamāla relates that the king re-erected the lofty temple of Hātaka Śiva (like a peak of the Himalayas) which had fallen down. (1) The king is further said to have erected a huge palace consisting of many rooms with decorative carvings. (2) The inscription of Indrapāla states that Ratnapāla, throughout his kingdom, constructed numerous white temples. (3) Hiuen Tsiang, in his account, mentions the existence of hundreds of Deva temples in Kāmarūpa. (4)

But today not one of these early edifices exists, and the only memorials of ancient times consist of jungle-clad mounds scattered in such places as Gauhati, (5) Tezpur, (6) Nowgong, (7) Sibsagar, (8) Sadiya, (9) and a few brick-built temples belonging

to a comparatively late period. (Plate I. Fig.1). The reason for this total obliteration of old sites, as given by Gait, is that nature has vied with man in destroying them. The Brahmaputra valley is an alluvial country, and the impetuous, snow-fed rivers which debouch from the Himalayas find so little resistance in its friable soil that they are constantly carving out new channels and cutting away their banks; consequently, no buildings erected in their neighbourhood can be expected to remain for more than a limited time, except at a few points like Gauhati, Tezpur, where the solid rock pierces through the alluvium. Further, though occurring at distant intervals, violent earthquakes are, in Assam, quite as great a cause of destruction as fluvial action. A less sudden, but almost equally potent, cause of damage is found in the luxuriant vegetation of the country. Along with the natural causes, there was the human element. Instances are not wanting where religious zeal led the early Mahomedan invaders to raze the temples to the ground. (10)

We have, therefore, very little material at our disposal for writing the history of the early architecture of the province. All that we can do is to piece together some information from other sources, such, for example, as inscriptions and the iconography of the extant stone reliefs. It should further be noted that the knowledge that we may gather from illustrations on stone is almost all of religious buildings, and we have

thus no information of the secular architecture of the period. In this connection, we should also like to make clear the fact that in Assam, up till now, no systematic excavation nor any exploration work has been undertaken. The small number of architectural and sculptural specimens that we find today are due to chance findings. On account of the paucity of specimens, naturally, our observation on the art and sculpture of the period would be inadequate.


Before passing over this account of the architecture of the province, we should like to draw attention to a few early remains that are worthy of notice. One of these earliest remains (c. 600 A.D.), of a stone temple is seen in a small village called Dah Parbatia near the town of Tezpur in the Darrang district. The ruins, besides other architectural stone carvings, consist of an exquisite door-frame (Plate II Fig. 2), which, according to R.D. Banerji, belongs to the Pataliputra school. The door-frame, though not connected with any dated inscription, is, in the opinion of the same scholar, undoubtedly of the Gupta, because of its use of:

(1) trefoil medallions in caitya-windows on the lintel,
(2) the use of the figures of river goddesses on the lower part of jambs,

(3) the false recessed angles of the lintel,
(4) the flying figure in high relief in the centre of the lower part of the lintel, and
(5) the particularly expressive figures of ganas on the arms of the cruciform bracket capitals of the pilasters.(13)

This beautiful lintel is one of the best specimens of its class of the Gupta period. The carving on the jambs is continued overhead in four out of five bands. The lower part of the jambs consists of single panels, in very high relief against which are figures of the river goddesses with female attendants on each side. The river goddesses exceed the limits of the panel but the attendant figurines have been kept very well within bounds. There are three attendants in the case of Gangā on the right, but two only in that of Yamunā to the left. Behind the back of each figure appear two flying geese pecking at the halo of the goddess, a new feature in the Gupta art.

There are five bands of ornaments on each jamb:

(1) A meandering creeper rising above the head of a Nāga.
(2) The body of the Nāga and the Nāgī rising from the top of the square panel at the bottom of each jamb and continued between the first and second bands on the lintel. The tails of these two serpents are held by the figures of Garuḍā in high relief against the lower part of the lintel, and

(13) Ibid.
(3) Ornamental foliage consisting of a straight stem with amorini clinging to it. These three bands are continued overhead on the lintel as its lowermost bands of ornaments.

(4) A pilaster, square in section bearing on it square bosses covered with arabesque as projections, which acts as supports to a number of human or divine figures and ends in a cruciform bracket capital.

(5) A double intertwined creeper forming conventional rosettes which is continued on the side projection of the lintel.

The lintel consists of a separate piece in which the lower part bears the first three bands of the jambs. The fourth band, the pilaster appears to support an architrave bearing on it five caitya-windows of two different types: (a) a trefoil in which all three arcs are of the same size; there are three caitya-windows with such medallions, one in the centre and two near the ends; (b) also trefoils in which the upper arc is larger than the two arcs on the sides. The central medallion of these five contains a seated figure of Siva as Lakulisa.(14)

Among the architectural remains of another temple (c.1000 A.D.), discovered near Tezpur, which is worth mentioning, are two remarkable shafts of pillars (Plate II Fig. 3). The shaft of one of these pillars is sixteen sided, the upper end being ornamented with a broad band having kirtimukhas at the top and

(14) Ibid.
the lower with dentils. Over this band the shaft is round and appears to be lathe-turned like the upper parts of the Western Chalukya columns of the Bombay Presidency. In the second pillar, the upper part of the shaft is dodecagonal and near the top is divided into three raised horizontal bands two of which contain kirtimukhas and the third a series of diamond-shaped rosettes. In style, both of them belong to the same period and appear to have come from one and the same building. (16)

Architectural remains belonging to different periods and ranging from the sixth century A.D., are further noticed in Kāmākhyā, Hājo, Dabakā, Nunaligarh, Sibsagar and Sadiya. But on the present state of our knowledge, it is hardly possible to offer any description on these ruins.

CHAPTER VII (continued)

II. SCULPTURE.
II. Sculpture.

1. Introduction.

The majority of sculptures that have hitherto been found in the province are of gods, goddesses and other semi-divine figures which served as an ornament to architecture. These figures were executed in conformity with the canons laid down in the Śilpa Śāstras, and as such they resemble in form, proportion, and features, similar sculptures of North-eastern India of the period. Like Indian sculpture in general, (1) our sculptures may also be divided into three classes:

(i) sculpture of human forms including gods and goddesses,
(ii) sculpture of animal forms,
(iii) sculpture of designs.

The sculpture of human forms falls into two further classes:

(a) representation of gods and goddesses,
(b) representation of human figures.

2. Sculpture of Human Forms.

(1) Figures of yakṣa, yakṣinī, vidyādharas, etc.

Representation of human forms other than those of gods and goddesses is limited to a few persons. The most common form of this type are the figures of yakṣa, yakṣinī, vidyādharas, etc., which seem to be more human than divine in form. (2) Representations of yakṣa, vidyādharas, gandharva, apsarā, kinnara occur in all early architecture. They are usually made to serve as special attendants to the deities sculptured on the walls of a temple, and sometimes as chowrie-bearers. They are generally depicted with two hands, two eyes, and a karandamakuta. Figures with more than two hands are also occasionally met with. Such is the figure in Plate III Fig. 4, where a kinnari is seen with a bow in hand, the charm and elegance surviving even through the mutilated figure. The ceiling slab from the Śiva temple, Deo Parbat, bears the carving of an embossed lotus (viśva padma). (3) The second vessel of the viśva padma bears in relief the figure of a vidyādharaholding a scarf or a necklace with both hands and hovering in the sky as if to make obeisance to the deity below. His legs are so arranged as to be symmetrical with the circular course of the

(2) For origin and description of these groups of semi-divine figures, see W.J. Wilkins' Hindu Mythology, Chap. XI.


X (2) contd. J.N. Banerjee: Vādyādharā, J.I.S.O.A, IV, pp. 52-56
seed-vessel, a feature generally met with in Gupta and Pāla sculptures of Bengal. While the facial type is local, the decorative and anatomical details of the vidyādhara recall late Gupta and Pāla features. A high crown (kirti-makuta) with a frontal coronet adorns his head, perforated patra-kundala are seen in the ears while his under-garments reaching the ankles has an elegant central tassel. Dvārapāla and dvārapālikā are seen at the entrance of almost every temple. The Śilpa Samgraha states that in form, the dvārapālas are like bhūtas with two big hands, and in one of which they hold a club. Usually, in their hands they hold symbols representing the deity of the temple over which they keep guard. The doorkeepers of the Śaiva temple at Gaichtal, Nowgong, for instance, are seen holding Śaivite symbols, such as Śūla and pāṣa.

Figures in Illustration 5 (Plate III) are from a Viṣṇu temple, North Gauhati. The dvārapālas are standing on both legs, and thus signifying the idea of alertness and firmness. The standing figure in Illustration 6 (Plate IV) is of a dvārapālikā from a tenth century Viṣṇu temple, Sibsagar. The figure is slightly bent, and in folded hands indicating the attitude of devotion. She is wearing a pair of khāru, a form of

(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid, p.56. In the Śilpaśāstra the dvārapālas of Śiva temples are stated to be Nandi and Mahākāla at the eastern entrance; Bhringi and Viṇāyaka at the southern entrance; the sacred Bull and Skanda at the western entrance, and Chandi at the northern entrance.
bracelets, with several annulets arranged in a tapering form, and round her waist are three girdles. She has a necklace and patra-kundala in her ears. Illustration 7 (Plate IV) is another richly adorned dvārapālikā in tribhanga pose with her right leg resting on the left. She wears a circular ear-ornament, and a number of hāras. Her girdle and the folds of the lower garment are gracefully designed.

The earliest representation of a human being is found on some terracotta plaques recovered in 1926 from the ruins at Dah Parbatia, "which according to the moulding of the torso and the general technique", remarks R.D.Banerji, "proves beyond doubt that these plaques cannot be later in date than the sixth century A.D." (Plate IV Fig. 8). They show the nice poise and the naturalism of the human figure.

(ii) Mithuna Figures.

By far the most interesting of the human figures are the scenes of the mithuna couple, which can be seen, for instance, on the panels of the Śaiva and Śākta shrines. An oft quoted Sanskrit verse represents Śiva as saying: maithunena mahāyogi mama tulyo na sansayah. It is also a fact that the left-hand

(6) The image was recently acquired by the A.F.M.
Sākta rites are connected with the performance of five ma-kāras, namely, mātsya, mūdrā, madya, māmsa and maithuna. The occurrence of these figures mainly in Śaiva and Śākta temples, as suggested by Sir Rathensteln, was "a part of the tantric attitude which was characteristic of Indian religious philosophy between the 10th and 12th centuries." (9) It appears that these erotic sculptures have the support of the traditional practices of centuries of temple building, and have been enjoined by the sacred texts such as the Kāmasūtra. In fact, the Agni Purāṇa enjoins that the doorway of a shrine should be decorated with mithunas: mithunair bibhusayed. (10)

Illustrations 9-10 (Plate V) are specimens of such erotic sculpture from the Śākta temple at Kāmakāyā. Godwin-Austen, referring to the ruins of a temple at Numaligarh, observed that its panel figures are "most obscene in character." (11) Not only men and women, but even animals are shown in amorous poses. Such is Illustration 11 (Plate VI), a terracotta plaque bearing a pair of peacocks found in the Śākta shrine at Sadiya. Another frieze, from the Śiva temple at Deo Parbat, shows a royal archer shooting a deer couple when in coition. The scene seems to represent, according to T.N. Ramachandran, the Mahābhārata story of Pāṇdu, the father of the Pāṇḍavas, who was cursed to die with his sexual desires ungratified as a result of his

(10) O.C. Gangoly: The Mithuna in Indian Art, Rupam, No. 22 and 23, 1925, pp. 54-6; Tarapada Bhattacharyya: Some Notes on the Mithuna in Indian Art, Rupam, No. 1, 1926, pp. 22-24.
having shot a deer couple (really a sage and his wife in the guise of deer) in coition. (12) Illustration 12 (Plate VI) from the same place, which portrays an amorous scene.

(iii) Dancing Figures.

Another set of sculpture, that formed the integral part of the temple decorations, is of dancing figures. From the earliest times, dancing, which can express so much that is necessary in the act of worship, thanksgiving, praise, supplication and humiliation, has been associated with the ceremonial functions of the temples. It is therefore no wonder that dancing figures should profusely decorate the walls of temples. We have the earliest dancing scene in a slab recovered from Tezpur. The slab (Plate VI Fig.13) is divided into a number of sunken panels by means of circular pilasters, each containing a male or female, two females, or two males. Beginning from the right we find a man fighting with a lion, a male playing on a flute, and a female dancing by his side, one male playing on a pipe, another on a drum, a male playing on a drum and a female dancing, a man playing on cymbals and a woman dancing, a male playing on a lyre and another dancing to his right, a male playing on a drum and another dancing to his left. (13) The whole composition seems to be natural, full of action, and lively, and is represented with considerable success. A more interesting and complicated dancing figure of the time

is recovered from the Deo Parbat ruins (Plate VI Fig. 14). Here is shown a śikhaṇa of foliage with āmalaka and lotus-bud filial flanked by a god and goddess both dancing with their legs resting on elephants in turn supported by lotuses. Both the gods and goddesses have four hands holding bow, arrow, rosary and sword (staff) and with perforated patra-kundala in the ears and a kirīṭa-makūṭa on the head with a frontal tiara.\(^{(14)}\)

Besides group scenes, independent figures are also represented in different dancing poses. In Illustration 15 (Plate VII) a male figure from Kāmālchyā (c. 800 A.D.) is executed with geometrical precision, gracefully portraying the curve of the body. The head is inclined towards the right shoulder, the left hand is moved round the head so as to touch the fingers of the right hand, the arm of which is stretched upward in a straight line. In spite of the mutilated face, the figure seems remarkable for its elegance of pose.

\(^{(14)}\) Scenes from Epics and Contemporary Life.

The temple walls were generally decorated with sculptures depicting various scenes from the Epics. We have already noticed a frieze from the Deo Parbat Ruins which illustrates the Mahābhārata story of Pāṇḍu. Another frieze (Plate VII Fig. 16) from the same ruins, having five panels, shows Rāma and Laksmana seated, the latter behind the former, while Sugrīva is kneeling before Rāma in supplication, and Hanumān

\(^{(14)}\) A.R.A.S.I., 1936-37, p.58.
and another monkey are watching the scene with reverence. The scene portrayed evidently relates to the incident from the Rāmāyana, in which Hanumān succeeded in securing the friendship of Rāma for the protection of Sugrīva. Illustration 29/represents a well-known scene from the Mahābhārata, namely, the Garuda-garva-bhanga, or the extermination of Garuḍa's pride.

But more important than this infinite variety of mythological decorations was the portrayal of contemporary life. A study of the various scenes from life represented in the panels of the temple-walls may give us some glimpse of the social and domestic life led by the people of the period. But the diversities of scenes of these sculptural depictions are so numerous that it is hardly possible here to do more than point out a few leading characteristic varieties. We will refer only to a few representations that may give us some idea of the entire series. The earlier carvings recovered from the Kāmakhyā temple, which possibly dates back to the seventh century A.D., bear some very suggestive panels. Among many other panels on the west gateway of the temple is seen a householder doing his daily worship, while his wife is engaged in suckling her child. (Plate VII Fig.17) This "mother and child" portrait is not only lively and natural, but also of singular beauty. On another frieze are observed two other carvings; one shows a woman worshipper kneeling and pouring water from a spouted vessel into the mouth of an animal, and the other represents a
conch-blower in profile with an usnīsa on the head and a conch held to his mouth, the cheeks bulging out as in the act of blowing the conch (Plate VIII Fig. 17a and Fig. 18). Another frieze from Deo Parbat belonging to the tenth century A.D. and consisting of three panels, illustrates (1) a woman in her toilet, (2) a man dragging a fallen woman from a scene where another is about to thrash her, while another woman is dissuading him, and (3) a man advancing with a raised mace. (15)

A second frieze from the same place, which is divided into four panels, contains the following scenes from left to right: (a) an ascetic pushing a goat before him, (b) another ascetic dancing with sūla and ḍhakkā in his hands and kamandalu hanging from his right arm, and (c) a seated woman in an ecstatic mood. (Plate VIII Fig. 19) Yet another frieze divided into two big panels illustrates a combat between two warriors. The actual combat is shown in one panel, while in the other, one of the warriors marches off in triumph with the severed head of the other held in his hands, the headless trunk staggering behind. (Plate IX Fig. 21).


Next come the animal figures. The animal carvings which adorn the walls and ceilings of temples may be broadly classified under three groups:--

(1) Animals studied from nature,

(ii) Animals of symbolism,

(iii) Grotesque animals.

Among the familiar animals, elephants are very common, and they were carved and chiselled with greatest skill. It has been pointed out earlier (16) that elephant-head was used as a royal seal in Assam (Plate IX Fig.22). In many temples a row of elephants, gajathara, appears as a basement moulding. On a moulding in the Hajo temple, of about two feet above the plinth a row of caparisoned elephants in high relief encircles the building, and appears to support the edifice (Plate XI Fig.24). The elephants, all tuskers, are facing outwards, and standing each 16" in height, and are finely designed and executed showing only their tusks, trunks and front legs. Fragments of sandstone with elegantly sculptured elephant-heads in the attitude of supporting the superstructure of a temple are also found amidst the ruins of an eleventh century (?) Siva temple at Deo Parbat. (17) (Plate XI Fig.25) Similar pieces, showing elephants in profile where each pair has only a single head are also seen. Round the base, above the plinth of a temple at Seessee has a row of elephants showing the fore-legs, in high relief. (18)

(16) Chap. IV
(17) A.R.A.S.I., 1936-37, p.59
(18) J.A.S.B., No.1, 1855, p.22.
The lion became conventional in Assam. According to R.D. Banerji, "the conventional representation of the lion shows that the inhabitants of the Assam valley were not very familiar with the king of beasts."(19) Stone slabs bearing huge lions standing on couchant and vanquished elephants are seen in the ruins of Tespur(20) and Gachtal, Nowgong.(21) Among the remains at Bamuni Hill were discovered two large stones with this "lion on elephant motif" bearing affinities to the work of the Pāla period of Bengal. (Illustration.26(Plate XI ) is from a carving from Numaligarh, showing a lion sejant (vyāla). The representations of a pair of lions shown running from each other with their heads bent towards the mangala kalasa (auspicious jar) are a very common decorative motif in early Assamese art (Plate XI Fig.27).(22)

On the west side of the Kamākhya temple is a modern shrine, known as Ghantākarna, into the basement of which stone fragments of older temples have been built. On one of these fragments, as described by K.N.Dikshit, "is a beautifully carved frieze in which the band represents a series of garlands and the lower scroll-work, in which some very spirited representations of animals occur. Only four animal figures of these series, viz., a buffalo, a deer, a lion and a tiger are extant, but the

(22) See No.1088 in the Annual Report, Eastern Circle,1913-14.
quality of the art manifested in them is unsurpassed in Assam." (23) Figures of bulls were sculptured especially in Saiva shrines.
The bull, as vahana of Siva in Illustration 44 is worthy of notice as a specimen of well-finished early animal carving.
Except for geese and peacocks, birds are rare. The most beautiful figure of a pair of peacocks are seen in the terracotta plaque noticed before. The flying geese on the door-jamb of the Dah Parbatiya with their long necks stretched forward are remarkable for their naturalness of pose.

Animals as symbolism play a great part in Hindu plastic art. According to the texts, various animals symbolise different gods and goddesses. The animals used as symbols were always conventional, and conventionalisation was always welcome to the designers of decorative art. The artists, therefore, even in dealing with animals with whose real habits they were familiar, did not hesitate to follow the texts and traditions so as to make their work look symbolical rather than real. For this very reason, symbolical figures very quickly became grotesque or mythical. Among these grotesque or mythical figures the Kirtimukha (lit. Glory face) is very common. (Plate XIL Fig.28) The motif, however, occurs throughout the whole history of Indian art, first as a sacred symbol, then as mere artistic device, and latterly as an architecture sine qua non in a class of temple architecture. (24) The origin of Kirtimukha is narrated in a

(23) A.R.A.S.I, 1923-24, pp.80-81
legend in the Skanda Purāna. Jallandara, the king of daityas (demons), having acquired the sovereignty of the Three Worlds, sent Rāhu as a messenger to the great Lord Siva, who was about to wed Parvati, the daughter of Himalaya, to tell the great god that the "beggar Siva" was not a worthy spouse for the beautiful princess, who was only destined to be the queen of Jallandara. As soon as Rāhu had delivered his impertinent message, there shot forth from between the eyebrows of Siva a terrible being roaring like thunder, with a face like that of the lion, a protruding tongue, eyes burning with fire, with its hairs flying upwards; it had a thin emaciated body but in its strength seemed to be a second Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu. As this terrible being ran to eat him up, Rāhu fled in horror and began to pray to Siva for protection. Siva dissuaded the terrible being from eating up Rāhu. Upon that the former complained to Siva of a very painful hunger and asked Siva for the means of appeasing it. Siva ordered him to eat up the flesh of his own hands and feet which the being forthwith did, leaving only its face intact as the only remnant of its body. Siva was greatly pleased at this and thus addressed the terrible face: "You will be known henceforth as Kirtimukha, and I ordain you shall remain always at my doorway. He who fails to worship you shall never acquire my grace." (85)

Since then Kirtimukha has had a permanent place on the doorway of Śiva’s temple.

The Kirtimukha is, however, a very ancient motif, and is also found in China under the name of T‘ao’ T‘ieh, “monster face”, and in the Far East under Banaspati (lit. king of the woods). H. Marshall following M. Chavannes considers that the origin of this motif might be in the human skull fixed as a kind of war trophy with clearly prophylactic purpose by Polynesian tribes above the entrances of their dwellings. Subsequently it was introduced in Hindu art, and interpreted under Brāhmanic influence as a terrible emanation of Śiva and became Kirtimukha. In rendering this skull motif in the hands of the Indian artists, a commingling took place with the head of the lion, the king of beasts. The Kirtimukha figures were greatly profusely illustrated in the early temples of the province. They were to be found everywhere on walls, basement, pillars, and on door-lintels above entrances. In Assam, the motif had undergone various types of stylisation with a profusion of decorative elements. In most of the Assam figures, the lower jaw is absent, which naturally reminds us of their close affinity with the Khmer motif of Java. The Kirtimukhas occurring on the coping piece of Deo Parbat are remarkably akin to the Javanese figures and provided, like the latter, with eyes having horn-like sockets. (26)

(For 25a see over)

Figures of makara, whose mouth is that of an alligator or crocodile with a tail resembling that of an animal, suparna, the mythical deity half man and half bird (27), and Gadura (Plate XII Fig.29) are generally met with in temple architecture.


It has previously been indicated that the ordinances of the Śilpa Śāstras, which claimed a sanctity next to the Veda itself, hemmed the artists on every side, and left little room for the play of their imagination in the representations of divine and semi-divine figures. Fortunately, however, ornamentation, a major branch of the art, was left entirely to their fancy; and here they found an opportunity to give vent to their artistic faculty leading to the development of an endless variety of decorative designs. These decorative designs may conveniently be grouped under three classes:-(28)

(i) architectural

(ii) geometric

(iii) floral

The caitya-window ornament, generally marked by the hollow portion of a temple wall, may be called an architectural design. The caitya-windows of two different types are seen on a lintel at Dah Parbatiya, which belonged to the sixth century A.D. One of these patterns is a trefoil in which all three arcs are of the same size, the other in which the upper arc is larger than the two arcs on the sides.(29) The interior of the sunken panels is entirely covered with geometrical patterns with a half rosette in the centre. Slabs bearing similar designs,

carved around a decorative figure, for which the figure looks as if enshrined within a pyramidal temple, are discovered throughout the province. Gavakṣa-type, (circular window) (Plate XII Fig. 30), and perforated window and śikhara, are other favourite architectural designs. (30) Illustration 31 (Plate XII) is a design of śikhara formed by a kīrtimukha and a foliage issuing from it. Fig. 32 (Plate XIII) shows a śikhara of foliage with āmalaka. Pillar and vedikā or the rail-ornament were also used as decoration (Plate XIII Fig. 33).

Geometrical designs are found on ceilings of shrines as well as in pillars. In his sketch of the ceiling decoration of an early temple at Tespur, Dalton has shown the technique of this type of decoration, which is fashioned mainly by carving circles within circles. (31) Various geometrical designs are seen in the Dimāpur and Kāchamāri pillars (See Appendices I and II).

In the delineation of vegetable life the artist was in the height of his form. Combined with a considerable amount of faithful representation and integrity there is an amount of luxuriance of decoration and of picturesque arrangement. As floral ornament could be used for any decorative purpose and any vacant space could be filled up with such devices, naturally it became varied in form and numerous in numbers. Of the floral designs, the lotus was by far the greatest favourite,

(30) A.R.A.S.I., 1936-37, pp. 54 ff.
and it was carved in various forms, in bud in a half-open state, and in full-blown flowers. Pedestals of statues and footstools for gods and goddesses are often formed of large multipetalled lotus (padmásana). Even ceilings of shrines bore the carving of visvapadma. Illustration 36 (Plate XIV) from Deo Parbat is a beautiful representation of a cluster of lotus in full bloom, the whole appears to be issuing from a pond. Another illustration (Plate XIV Fig. 37) from the same place exhibits a row of busts with hands holding lotuses; their patra-kundalas were also designed like full-blown lotuses.

The great strength of the artists, however, lay in the most sumptuous floral scrolls which they designed on all their leading bands. Most of these, as we find them today, are winding and undulating scrolls having flowers and foliages of various kinds. Attention has previously been drawn to the scroll-work on the door-frame of Dah Parbatiya. Illustration 38 (Plate XV) is a specimen of three scrolls used in combination. The extreme left scroll, in its loops formed by the stalk, encloses animals of various kinds, such as swans, horse, hog, etc. The other two scrolls are without any foliage. Illustration 39 (Plate XV) discarded the creeper altogether, and was formed by a series of lotuses and lozenge-shaped flowers. A splendid florid example is in the trefoil arc

on black schist from Tespur (Plate XV Fig. 40). Besides the kirtimukha at the top and a rosette in the centre, it bears several meandering creepers, which are well marked for their diversities of style and arrangement.
CHAPTER VII (continued)

III. ICONOGRAPHY.
III. Iconography.

1. Śaiva Images.

Speaking about the Śaiva cults, in the previous chapter mention has been made of the existence of numerous Śaiva temples. But unfortunately a sufficient number of Śaiva images has not hitherto been found in those sites. One of the reasons for the paucity of Śaiva images is that the central object of worship in a Śaiva temple is invariably the phallic emblem or the linga.

The earliest representation of Śiva is seen on a panel of the sun temple at Tespur. (1) This is a two-handed image of the Isāna aspect of Śiva standing in the samāpada-sthānaka pose, with an attendant in each of the side niches. (Plate XVI Fig. 41). Figure 42 (Plate XVI) is another sthānaka mūrti of Śiva in yogi pose. Śiva has four arms and is standing upon an apasmāra purusa with one of the left hands in varada mudrā. He has a garland reaching below the knees, and wears various ornaments, namely, necklace, armlets and girdle. A sandstone image of Śiva identified by Chaudhury as indicating the Mahesā aspect of the deity is in the A.P.M. (2) The image is within a full-blown lotus in the vajrāsana pose. It has ten arms and five heads, the faces of four of which alone are visible. Two of his hands are held in varadā and abhaya poses. Nandi is

The graceful image of Uma-Mahesvara (Plate XVI Fig. 45) represents a type of composite Siva icon. This form of Siva is particularly associated with some form of Tāntric worship where worshippers are to concentrate their minds on the Devī as sitting on the lap of Siva in the mahāpadmavāna. Here Siva is seated on the right, with the right leg pendant. It appears that Siva is four-armed, though two arms are not visible. One of the right hands embraces the chin of Uma and the other holds a trident. His hair is dressed in high loops (jaṭā-makurtā) and the ears patra-kundala. Uma is seated by Siva's side, in a corresponding position with her left leg pendant. Another image of Uma-Mahesvara is found in the ruins of Badagangā, Nowgong district. The image is richly decorated, and the hair of Uma is dressed in a peculiar way. Her "hair is tied upwards into a thin knot and then again flattened at the top and tied round like a big ball." (5)

One of the excellent nṛityamartī of Siva was found near Gauhati, on the bank of the river Brahmaputra and is now in the collection of the Assam Provincial Museum. (Plate XVI Fig. 44).

(3) Seated image of Siva with four hands and in yoga pose was unearthed in the ruins of Gachtaia, Nowgong district. A.R.A.S.I, 1936-37, pp. 55 ff.

(4) Saundarya Lahari, v. 40 ff.


The image is carved on a big stone with a circular border having floral designs. Siva as Natarāja is dancing on his bull. The face is mutilated; the figure appears to have ten hands. (7) Such dancing image of Siva endowed with ten hands closely follows the description given in the Matsya Purāṇa, which lays down that khadga, śakti, danda, and triśūla should be placed in the right hands, while khetaka, kapāla, nāga and khatvānga are in the left hands of the god shown on the back of his bull (vaiśākha athānaka), one of the two remaining hands being in the varadā pose and the other holding a rosary. (8) In this image the left foot of Siva rests on Nandi and the right is raised in dance. The bull is very graphically represented with the ghanta hanging from the neck.

Another early type of Natarāja mūrti having six hands was noticed by Banerji in the ruins at Bamuni Hill. (9) A four-armed image of Siva as Tripurārī and in dancing pose, found at Deo-Parbat, is now at the A.P.M. The image, in its two main hands, holds bow and arrow. A tiara is seen on the head while circular patra-kundalas adorn the ears. (10) (Plate XVII Fig. 45)

(7) Bikahit notice a ten-handed Siva on a stone slab in a private residence at Gauhati (Annual Report Eastern Circle, 1917-18, p. 50), and an interesting image of a four-handed Siva holding a damaru, trident, gadā and rosary by his hands and flanked by female attendants, Ibid. 1920-21, pp. 37-38.


(10) Ibid, p. 56.
An interesting figure of Siva as Lakulisa is found carved on a caitya-window in the ruins of Dah Parbatiy, Tezpur. (11) Lakulisa is usually represented as seated on padmāsana, with penis erect, and a mātulinga (citron fruit) in the right hand and a staff in the left. (12) Our Lakulisa is a seated figure with a rope tied round his leg. A female is holding a cup to his left while another stands to his right.

The composite image of Siva-Viṣṇu (Marhara) which suggests the cordial relation between the Saiva and Viṣṇu cults, from North Guhati, and now in the A.P.M., is a unique piece of sculpture. (Plate XVII Fig. 46) The figure has two attendants, one on each side. The right part of the deity has the emblem of Siva, namely the trisūla, and the damaru. The left side represents Viṣṇu with his karana-makuta, and holding the gādā and eakra| in his two hands. The image is lavishly ornamented.

In his ugra (terrible) aspect, Siva is usually known as Bhairava. Hemādri describes him as possessing a grim face with teeth, a pot-belly, and garland of skulls and serpents as ornaments. He has plaited hair and several hands. (13) The four-armed image of Bhairava in the A.P.M. (Plate XVII Fig. 47) is shown without garments, with a flabby belly, long skull-garland and flames issuing out of his head. He is standing on a prostrated body. All these attributes give the god a ferocious

terrible form and under which he is worshipped by a sect of devotees known as Aghora-panthi.

So far we have been discussing the various forms of Śiva under which he is worshipped by the devotees. But there have been found sculptural representations illustrating some mythological episodes associated with Śiva. Figure 48 (Plate XVIII) depicts the story of Śiva’s killing the demon Andhakāsura. Andhakāsura by his penance obtained several boons from Brahmā, and thus becoming very powerful, he harassed the gods. The gods requested Śiva to rescue them from the tyranny of this powerful demon. Śiva thereupon fought with the Asura and wounded him with his trisūla. But each drop of blood that fell from the body of the demon assumed new shape, and thus there arose thousands of Andhakāsura to fight against Śiva. But Śiva, realising this, immediately thrust his trisūla through the body of the real Andhakāsura, and held a skull to collect the blood flowing down the Asura’s body. The whole theme is well illustrated in the image. Śiva is shown with four hands, in two of which he bears a trisūla at the end of which is pinned the body of Andhakāsura, the left lower hand holds the kapāla. The third eye is prominent.

The images of Ganeśa and Kārtika, as both of these gods are intimately associated with Śiva, are to be discussed along with the Śaiva icons. Though a son of Śiva and a member of the Śaiva group of deities, Ganeśa has become almost non-
sectarian and all sects agree in doing him honour as "the best-
ower of success" (siddhi-dātā) and "the remover of obstacles"
(vignesvara). It is one of the reasons why his figure stands
over the house doors and on niches and entrances of temples.
He is also considered to be the guardian deity of the village,
and as such, his image is installed in one of the four quarters
of almost every village. Many rock-cut figures of Ganesa are
to be seen on the bank of the Brahmaputra, particularly near
the bathing-ghats (Plate XVIII Fig.49).(14)

There are various types of Ganesa images such as seated,
standing and dancing. In most cases the god is usually sculp-
tured as four-handed, holding in his hands a lotus, his own
tusk, a battle-axe and a ball of rice-cake, and having three
eyes. The figure of Ganesa carved in a shallow niche at
Vasundhari, Nowgong district, is rather interesting. (Plate XVIII
Fig.50). Over the top is a kārtimukha with the pearl necklace
issuing out of its mouth. The head of the god is adorned with
a matted hair dress (jātā-jūta), he has placed lotus buds on his
ears as ornaments, and holds in his hands a blue lotus (utpala),
axe, rosary, and eatables, swallowing the last with his trunk.
The mouse, his vāhana, is depicted below the foot.(15) The

The legend connected with Vignesvara are summarised by Gell in
Ganesa: 45-9.

(14) Dikshit places the rock-cut figure of Ganesa at the land-
ing-ghat between Chummary and the Mission mounds at Tespur

dancing Ganesa is a fairly popular theme in the Eastern Indian school of architecture. The figure of the four-armed Ganesa on the wall of the Kamakhya temple, standing or dancing on his rat, which looks up to the god, is a well known and popular representation of the deity. (Plate XIX Fig. 51).

Kumāra or Kārtikeya is another son of Śiva. Being brought up by the six mothers, the Kirtikās (Pleiads) he is called Kārtikeya. He is also regarded as a guardian deity, and an annual festival, Kārtikeya Puja, is celebrated in his honour both in Assam and Bengal. Images of the god, however, are rare. Illustration 52 (Plate XIX) shows him on his usual vāhana, the mayura (peacock), holding in his hands a staff and a bow.

2. Sakti Images.

Assam was the centre of Sakti worship, and various forms of Tantrism were prevalent in the province during the closing of our period. Naturally there evolved a variety of Devi images associated with different Sakti cults.

One of the early finds of Devī images is the Deopani image of Durgā noticed by Block in his Annual Report for 1905.\(^1\) It is a large figure (5 feet 10 inches high) of a standing four-armed Chandī. The goddess has four hands, the two lower arms are in varadā-mudrā. Of the two upper ones, the right hand holds a trident, and the left one a mirror. On each side of the goddess stands a small worshipping female, holding the hands with the palms joined together in front of the breast, the usual attitude of supplication. Above these are small figures of Ganesa and Kārtikeya. Figures of Pārvatī are found on many temple walls. A fine sculpture in a private residence at Guwahati represents Pārvatī with a sword in her right hand and a mirror in her left.\(^2\)

The commonest variety of the Devī image is the Mahisamardini group. In most of the Devī temples erected during the Ahom rule, the goddess is worshipped under this popular iconic form. A large figure of Mahisamardini is seen in the idol of

\(^1\) Also A.R.A.S.I, 1923-24, pp.61-82.
Hātimurā temple, Nowgong (Plate XX Fig.53). (3) The goddess is represented with a slender waist, broad breasts, ten hands, and holding different weapons in each hand. She is seen placing her right foot on the lion, and pressing the shoulder of the buffalo-demon with her left. She pierces the trident through the body of the demon, and has fastened his arm with a noose. To put her weight on the Asura, and goddess is slightly bent on the left. The lion is also represented attacking the demon. The whole composition corresponds fairly well to the description of the goddess given in the texts. (4)

Another fierce form (ugra) of the Devī, popular among a certain sect of the Tantric worshippers, is of Chāmūndā. Here the figure of Chāmūndā from Kāmākhyā is described. She is fearful with protruding teeth, long tongue, erect hair, emaciated body, sunken eyes, and withered belly. Her pedestal is carved with ghosts, riding on whose shoulders she roams over the earth. She holds a trident (?) in one hand, and a skull or a cup in the other (Plate XXII Fig.56). Another terrible figure of Chāmūndā is from Na-Bhāngā, Nowgong (Plate XXII Fig.57). The image is terrible to look at; the appearance is grim, the

(3) The present Hātimurā temple, Silghat, was probably built on old ruins in the Saka year 1657 (1745-6 A.D.) in the reign of King Pramatta Sinha.

figure is emaciated; the bones of the chest are exposed, the
eyes are sunken into their sockets, the abdomen is shrivelled
and the mouth is wide agape. Human skulls are laced round
the matted hair-lock, waist and neck. The goddess is seated
on a corpse; on the right side is a vulture and on the left
is a jackal. Further below are a skull and a few bones.(5)
This uncanny figure is iconographically remarkable and interesting as it is a rare type.

3. Images of Brahmā.

Although he was a member of the Hindu Trinity, no independent religious cult evolved out of Brahmā, and no temple was set up exclusively for his worship. Nevertheless, images of Brahmā adorn the walls, ceilings and niches of many Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite temples. Rao mentions that Brahmā should have four arms. But the illustration in Fig.56 (PlateXXII) shows eight hands. Brahmā is seen seated on a padmāsana in a yogāsana posture. A swan below the seat is shown paying him homage. The palm of one of the lower left hands exhibits the varadā mudrā, while one of the right hands indicates abhaya. One right hand holds the sacrificial ladle and the other left holds the sacrificial spoon. The panel from the Sun temple, Tezpur, also bears a standing figure of Brahmā with an attendant on each side. He has a long beard and wears a long conical cap (Plate XVI Fig. 41) (1).

Illustration 59 (PlateXXIII) is from Guwahati and is now in the A.P.M. Brahmā is standing on a pedestal decorated with lotus buds, and a swan. He has jatā-makuta and the yanjopavita. He has four faces, of which three are seen in the icon, and four hands; the two lower hands are broken. The upper right hand holds a śrūk, and the left a śruva. On both

sides of the image stand two female figures, and at the top there is a kirtimukha. Flying viyādharas are also seen on the two sides.(2)

(2) Vide S. Kataki: The Discovery of Three Stone Images at Gauhati; J.A.R.S, IX, 1942, pp.88-92. According to Dikshit, this is one of the best known images of Brahmā. Block in his Annual Reports of the Archaeological Department, Bengal Circle, for the year 1903 to 1905, also refers to a statue of Brahmā.
4. Images of Sūrya.

The prevalence of the Sūrya cult in the province has already been noted. From the evidence of the Mārkendaya Purāṇa it may be said that Sūrya was worshipped not only for attainment of welfare and desire, but also for removal of disease. (1) Several images of Sūrya have been unearthed in different parts of the province. The earliest of these images is seen in the ruins of the Sūrya temple at Teapur. The central panel of an enormous lintel (10'3" x 1'8") at Teapur is occupied by a figure of Sūrya with two attendants. The date of the icon may possibly go back to the 8th century A.D., if not earlier. (2)

Illustration 60 (Plate XIII) presents more or less similar features to the Sukresvara Sūrya, Gauhati (Fig. 61). The deity is standing and carries a full blown lotus with stalk in each of his two hands. He has as ornaments kirīṭa-makula, kuṇḍalas, hāras, girdle, and uttaraiyavastra in the form of a long garment. He wears boots, and the sacred thread is very prominent. But the horses and the chariot are absent. It is, however, not easy to say whether the female figures at his sides should be regarded as his consorts, (Saṅgā and Chāya), or attendants.

(1) Supra, Chap. VI.
In point of style and execution these images appear to date in the 9th century A.D., having general resemblance to the Sūrya image found in a field near Sundia, in the 24 Pargana district in Bengal. (3)

A naïve carved image of Sūrya was found near Sadiya. Here the deity is seen in a chariot drawn by seven horses. (Plate XXII Fig. 62). (4)

It appears that Visnu is the most popular god of the Hindu Triad. Visnu in his various forms is not only worshipped in temples especially set up for him, but he also finds an important place even in the Śaiva and Śākta shrines. The four-handed sthānaka images of Visnu are the commonest among those discovered in the province. As a cult image, it carries in its hands sāmkha, cakra, gada and padma. These images of Visnu are differentiated into twenty-four forms by the varying order in which the four hands hold these four attributes. (1)

The earliest image of Visnu was the standing sculpture of Deopani now in the A.P.M. and first noticed by Block in the Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1904-5. (Plate XXIV) The pedestal inscription tells us that it is an image of Nārāyaṇa. On palaeographic ground as well as in consideration of its execution, Dikshit considers it to be of the 9th century A.D. He further observes that the expression of the face and the treatment of the lower lip and the crown are characteristic of the late Gupta sculpture. The right hand and the feet of the image are broken, and the halo behind the head is lost. The left upper hand holds the conch and the left lower the mace. Visnu has all the usual ornaments, the kaustubha and ārīvasta symbols, yajñopavita, and vanamālā.

reaching to the knees. Another Vīṣṇu image of the same period is the black basalt mutilated standing figure now in the A.P.M. (Plate XXIV Fig. 64). In the back right hand it holds gada, the back left hand cakra (?), and in the front right and left hands padma and samkha respectively. Vīṣṇu carrying attributes in this manner is considered to be a special form of Trivikrama.

A standing Vīṣṇu in samabhanga pose is noticed among the ruins of Gosain-Juri, Nowgong district. The image wears a high kīrīṭa-makuta on the head, flattened pātra-kundalas in the ears, and two necklaces, one with the kaustubha pendant attached to it on the neck. The upper hands are missing, as is also the lower left hand; while the lower right is in the varada pose holding a lotus. Vanamālā is arranged as in the Deopani image, with which, both in decorative arrangement and facial type, the present image seems to be related and coeval. Śrī and Sarasvatī stand on tribhanga, the former to the right and the latter to his left, both wearing conical kīrīṭa-makutas, flattened pātra-kundalas, a single necklace with pendant between the breasts, angadas, and wristlets. Śrī holds rosaries in her hands while Sarasvatī indicates abhaya or protection with her right hand and holds in her left a lyre. (Plate XXV Fig. 65)

Another fragmentary sculpture of standing Vīṣṇu is seen in the same ruins. The figure has a halo with a dentil edge which

bears a carving of a hovering Vidyādhara with scarf held in hands in the ethereal region indicated by a circle with indented edges as in Pāla sculptures of Bengal. (3)

The standing four-handed bronze figure of Viṣṇu (Plate XXV Fig. 66) originally hailing from Mbruugarah and now in the A.P.M. is of unique iconographic interest. The image is peculiar in that there is no object held in any of the four hands, all of which are in the tribhanga pose (bent at the elbow and wrist joints) and the kartari-mudrā (the attitude in which the index and little fingers point outwards and the middle and ring fingers are tucked in). The throne on which the god stands has parrots at the four corners (technically called a bhadrāsana). The deity wears a close fitting loin cloth, crocodile shaped ear-ornaments (makara-kundala), a makuta and sandals. Of the two female attendants, the one on the right holds a bud and a dagger (?) and the one on the left has her hands in a peculiar dancing mode. Probably the former was intended to represent Laksāmi and the latter Sarasvatī. But the absence of any of the other regular attributes of Viṣṇu makes it difficult to hazard this identification with confidence. The image is a fine specimen of the Assamese bronze art of the 11th-12th century A.D. (4)

The āsana and śayana images of Viṣṇu are also not rare. The black basalt partially damaged composite figure of Viṣṇu in

yogāsana pose is an excellent piece of sculpture and is perhaps the only known specimen of this particular type of yogāsana-mūrti of Viṣṇu. According to the text yogāsana variety of Viṣṇu is a seated figure on a padmāsana with four hands, and a karanda-makuta on the head. (5) The front hands of the image are in yuga-mudrā, and the eyes are slightly closed. The hands of the present figure are damaged; so it is not possible to ascertain what were the attributes in them. But in other details the icon conforms to the description of the yogāsana variety of Viṣṇu. The image is surrounded by a prabhāmandala with flaming rays (which resemble creepers or ornamentations) proceeding outwards. Outside the prabhāmandala, on the four corners, are the figures of āvarana devatās, namely, Mahiṣa-mardini, Karuṭikeya (?), Ganeśa and a cross-legged purusa, Gaḍura is seen sculptured below the padmāsana. The presence of Ganeśa and Mahiṣa-mardini on the right leads to the inference that the idea was to depict Viṣṇu in the centre of the five gods (pañca devatā). (6)

The rock-cut sculptures on the cliff of the Brahmaputra behind the Sukresvara temple, Gauhati, with Viṣṇu as the central figure, deserve to be known better. (Plate xxvii Fig. 68). This colossal image (height 5'5") is locally known as Viṣṇu Janārdana, though the disposition of the attributes in the

hands indicate that the Narāyana form of the image was intended. The deity is represented here seated with crossed legs in vajra-paryanka mudrā. The images of Sūrya and Ganeśa to the right and the figures of Śiva in the ascetic form and the ten-handed Dūrgā to the left form a pañcāyatana (group of five principal deities) with the presiding central image of Viṣṇu. The sculptures carved on the rocks at the Urbasi Island also show that the worshippers there followed all the principal Hindu Gods, as we find representations there of Sūrya, Ganeśa, Śiva and Devī (with a scorpion as emblem) in addition to those of Viṣṇu and his ten incarnations.(7) Fig.69 from Numaligarh shows Viṣṇu seated in rājalilā pose on a padmāsana, having four hands, the upper hands with mace and conch, and the lower right in upadeśa-mudrā, while the lower left holds a rosary. Ring-like kundalas adorn his ears.

Another interesting variety of Viṣṇu is Vāsudeva seated upon the serpent Ādiśeṣa (Plate XXVII Fig.70). The deity is made to stand under a canopy of eight serpent hoods. Both the legs of the deity are folded, and made to rest on the coiled body of the serpent. The back hands hold gada and padma and the front hands eakra and samkha.

The Anantasayin Viṣṇu in the Asvākranta temple, North Guahati, is a reclining statue of the deity of wonderful workmanship (Plate Fig.71).(8) As laid down in the texts, (7) Annual Reports, Eastern Circle, 1917-18, p.51; 1920-21,p.37; (8) Gardon: Asvākranta, near Guahati, J.R.A.S, Vol.XXXII, 1900, pp.25-27.
a tortoise, a frog, and a piece of water weed are shown supporting the Ananta upon which Viṣṇu is seen reclining. Of his four arms, the lower left is thrown on the body of the serpent, while the lower right is stretched along the right thigh. The four-faced Brahmā is depicted as sitting on the lotus which has sprung out from the navel of Viṣṇu. Devī or Mahāmāyā and the two demons, Madhu and Kaitabha, are standing on one corner. Two rows of Nāga-kanyās, one on the space between the coil of the serpent, are seen kneeling down on his feet with folded hands. The scene is surrounded by an arch-typed prabhāmandala, and the entire carvings appear to be sculptures of high artistic excellence. (9)

Images of different incarnations of Viṣṇu have been discovered from various parts of the province. The figures of avatāras are usually depicted on stone slabs decorating the walls of temples. Among these independent figures, generally met with are those of Varāha and Naarasimha. (10) The best specimen of the Bhu-varāha incarnation is in the A.P.M. In the figure (Plate XXIX Fig. 72) Viṣṇu appears with the face of a boar and the body of a man. The boar face is slightly raised up.


(10) Among the carvings in the outside walls of the shrine of Hayagriva at Hajo, is a figure which Block believes to be of Buddha avatāra of Viṣṇu. Annual Report, Bengal Circle, 1903, p.18.
The right leg is bent a little, and probably made to rest on the head of the serpent Ādiśeṣa.

The Narasimha incarnations are depicted in several forms, of which yoga and ugra are the main. Illustration 75 (Plate XXIX) shows an ugra type. The long manes of the lion-head and profuse ornamentations are worthy of notice. It has four hands; two back ones are thrown up almost vertically; the front one piercing Hiranyakāśipu who is lying on his thigh. In another figure, partially damaged, the deity is shown standing on a padmāsana; the demon is being disembowelled on his thigh. (11)

Besides sculptural representations on temple walls, a few independent images of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa have also been found. (12)

It may be noted that the cult of Rāma was established in the province at an early age. (13) The entire Rāmāyaṇa was translated into Assamese as early as in the thirteenth century A.D.

Unlike other avatāras, Rāma is represented in sculpture as a royal personage of bewitching beauty. The figure of Rāma now

(11) The principal image of the Hayagriva temple, Hajo, is a statue of the Man-Lion incarnation of Viṣṇu. It is now worshipped as Mahāmuni or Buddha by the Buddhists coming from Bhutan and Tibet. Annual Report, Bengal Circle, 1903, p.18; Westmacott noticed an image of Matsya Avatāra in the ruins at Tespur. Vide, Description of Ancient Temples and Ruins at Chārdwār in Assam, J.A.S.B, IV (1935), p.195.


(13) P. K. Banerji: Assamese Literature, p.12.
in the A.P.M. (Plate XXX Fig.74) is a specimen of the type. He is represented with natural graces and in tribhanga pose. The body is slightly bent forward; his hand holds a bow, which is his usual symbol. The long kirita-makuta signifies high respectability of birth and status. A frieze from Deeparbat ruins, Golaghat, having five panels shows Rāma and Lakṣmana seated, the latter behind the former, while Sugrīva is kneeling before Rāma in supplication, and Hanumān and another monkey are watching the scene with reverence, as indicated by their hands in anjali. The scene, evidently relates to the episode of the Rāmāyana in which Hanumān succeeded in securing the friendship of Rāma for the protection of Sugrīva.(14)

An excellent representation of Murali-dhara or Veṇugopāla Krisna is seen on the western gateway of the Kāmakhya temple. (Plate XXX Fig.75) A single necklace of manis and an undergarment with central and lateral tassels adorn his body. He wears a conical cape, which is in the shape of flames. The figure seems to be a rare specimen of anatomical perfection.(15) Another early figure of Muralidhara Krisna playing on a flute and flanked by two damsels is noticed by Westmacott in the temple ruins of Chardwar.(16)

(15) Ibid., pp.60-61.
Of the goddesses associated with Vīṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa cult, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are the most important ones. They are generally depicted as chief attendants of the sthānaka Vīṣṇu images. But separate images are also found in several localities of the province. Of the eight different forms of Lakṣmī known as Asta Mahālakṣmī, the Gaja-lakṣmī form is the very popular motif in Assam. In this form, she is described as "the goddess of prosperity, standing on the lotus flower, slightly bent on account of the weight of her breast, having high hips, broad lotus-like eyes, and deep navel pit, dressed in white cloth, and bathed by heavenly elephants from golden pots which are bedecked with a variety of jewels, and holding lotuses in her hands." (17) An image of Gaja-lakṣmī conforming to this description is at present in the collections of the A.P.M. But the earliest representation of the Devī known locally as Kamala Kāmīni is discovered in the niche of a stone slab from Tezpur, in which two elephants pour water over the head of the goddess from vases held in their trunks. (18)

A figure of Vīṇāhasta Sarasvatī as described in the Agni Purāṇa is seen in a niche of a stone slab found at Tezpur (Plate XXX Fig. 76). (19) Another figure of the goddess in tribhaṅga attitude was recovered from Sibsagar. She wears a ratna

(19) Ibid.
kundala, hāra, girdles and anklets. (Plate XXX Fig. 77). The simplicity of the figure and the delightfully done drapery, flowing round her body, mark it out as one of the graceful specimens of early art of Assam. (20)

(20) A crude figure of Sarasvatī was recovered from the ruins of the Tāmresāvari temple, Sadiya, by Block. Annual Report, Eastern Circle, 1905, p.4.
6. Miscellaneous Divinities.

Of the miscellaneous deities, frequently depicted though not as generally worshipped, are the Dikpālas, "the lord of the quarters." Among the Dikpālas, the figures of Indra, Agni, and Kuvera are usually seen adorning the walls and niches of temples. Indra, the lord of the east, is the chief of the Dikpālas. A large rock-cut image of Indra is seen near Pāndu-gāt, Kāmrūp. He is a two-armed deity in samabhanga pose with two female attendants by his side, and his vāhana Airāvata, the celestial elephant below. The objects in his hands are not clearly discernible, but the right hand probably holds the thunderbolt, and the left seems to hold a lotus. A unique figure of Indra with unusual attributes was recently discovered by Kataki, while digging a slit trench at Gauhati, near Chatrakār temple. The image stands on a pedestal with the figure of an elephant below. Of the two hands, the right is in varadā and the left in abhaya mudrā. On the head of the deity is a canopy of five snake-hoods, and above it is the kirtimukha. Below the kirtimukha are two figures of flying vidyādharas, one on each side. On each side is an attendant, a female on the right and a male on the left. As regards this extraordinary image, Dikshit remarks, "A five

(1) A.R.A.S.I., 1923-24, p. 30
hooded ornament or accompaniment is not associated either with Siva or with Indra. The elephant on the pedestal certainly indicates the figure as Indra, and it is possible that an attempt has been made to identify Indra with Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna, who is always represented with such snake hoods. In fact, the appellation Upendra given to Visnu indicates Indra as an elder brother of Visnu and thus identifiable with Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna. The general idea which associates the attributes of Indra and Balarama in this figure is hinted ...."(3)

The Assam Provincial Museum possesses a sculpture of Agni representing him with a long beard, which suggests that he is the oldest of all gods. (Plate Fig. 79) He is in standing erect pose and holds a kamandalu and tridanda in his two hands. He has his long sacred thread and wears a kaupina, the symbol of Brahmana, the performer of srauta sacrifices and smartha ceremonies.

Kuvera is the lord of the north as well as the master of the spirits. As such, he is a popular village deity, and even today is worshipped under various local names. (4) He is generally represented as having a pot-belly and a vessel in his hand. (Plate Fig. 80). (5)

(3) Ibid, p.92.
(4) Supra, Ch.VI.
(5) In the collection of the A.P.M.
We may now note a few sculptures which represent some minor goddesses associated with both the principal religious cults and folk-beliefs. Like the Dikpālas, these figures are also generally represented on walls, lintels and door-jambs of Śiva and Viṣṇu temples. The beautiful door-frame from Dāh Farbatiya, Tespur, bears the figure of the river goddesses Ganga and Yamunā.(6) The divine nature of the figures is indicated by the halo behind their heads. Each goddess stands with a garland in her hands in an elegant erect posture. On the right of Ganga (Plate XXII Fig.81) are two females, one standing with a càmara, and the other kneeling in front, with a flat receptacle containing flowers. A third female figure is seen with a càmara behind. To the left of the halo is seen a Nāgi kneeling and to the right two flying geese pecking at the halo of the goddess, "a new feature in the Gupta art". In the case of Yamunā (Plate XXII Fig.82) there are only two attendants on the left. Both these figures are elegantly and gracefully carved, and are fine specimens of the sculptures of the period.(6a)

An interesting figure of the local goddess Vasundhāri (Mother earth) comes from Vasundhāri-thān, Nowgong. The image has four hands, one of which is perhaps in the varadā pose, and another holds a lotus, while the other two hands hold uncertain

(6a) About the worship of Ganga in Eastern India see A.K.Kaitra: The River Goddess of Ganga, Rupam, No.6, 1931, pp.2-10.
objects. The goddess stands on what looks like a squatting male figure with folded hands and stretched legs. (7)

The goddess Manasā is still worshipped in connection with the Manasā Puja. She is generally identified with the sister of the serpent king Vāsuki who was married to the hermit Jarat-Kāru and became the mother of Āstika, and according to the Mahābhārata was to save the Nāgas from being exterminated at the serpent sacrifice of Janamejaya. (8) The worship of Manasā, the snake-goddess, however, seems to occupy a somewhat indefinite position in the Brāhmanical pantheon. Although serpent-worship was associated with Brāhmanic religion from a remote time, (9) the name of the goddess Manasā does not seem to appear in the early literature. It therefore leads to the belief that Manasā is not a goddess with a Vedic and Pauranic past, but an assimilation from outside. Professor Kṣitimañjana Sen suggests that Manasā obtained her semi-sanskritised name from the south Indian snake goddess Maṇḍhāmmā. On this ground, Bhattasali concludes that the cult of Manasā was imported to Eastern India from the South. (10) He, however, seems to forget the fact that snake-worship is more widely distributed and developed in more

(8) Ādi, xlv-xlvi.
(9) Several writers like Fergusson (Tree and Serpent Worship) have put forward the opinion that Indian snake-worship was un-Aryan in its origin, and the Aryans adopted it from the Daśyus or the aboriginal peoples. Vogel, however, in the Introduction to his Indian Serpent-lore establishes the fact that serpent-worship was associated with the early Indian
interesting forms, even among the various tribes of Assam.

Among the Khasis of Assam the most remarkable form of serpent-worship is that of Uphlen, a gigantic snake which demands to be appeased by the sacrifice of human victims, and for whose sake, even in recent times, murders have been committed. (11) In Manipur, which preserves the Mahābhārata tradition of being the seat of the Nāga king Chitravāhana, whose daughter Chitra-rangadā was married to Arjuna, even at the present day, the ancestral god of the royal family is a snake called Pākhangba. (12) The Rābhās worship a serpent-god which once dwelt in a cave and was propitiated by the annual sacrifice of a boy and a girl. (13)

The Hindus, however, worship it under the iconographical form of Manasā or Viṣahari, remover of poison. (14) In this form, the goddess is represented as a handsome female of golden colour with a snake as her vāhana, as well as a hood of kings of serpents over her head and body clothed in snakes. (15) But the standing figure in Illustration 83 (Plate XXXII) recovered from Nowgong is of an unusual type. Here, the goddess is

(9) contd. religion, and it was unambiguously referred to in the Yajur and Atharva Vedas. (Ibid, p.6)

(10) Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures in the Baccia Museum, pp.221 ff.

(11) Gurdon: The Khasis, pp.98 ff, 175 ff; Census of India, 1901, Assam, Pt.I, p.49.

(12) Hodson: The Meitheiis, pp.100 ff.


(14) An Alphabetical List of Feasts and Holidays of the Hindus and Muhammadans, p.57.

(15) Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures in the Baccia Museum, pp.212-227.
depicted on an elephant (Nāgendra). The prescribed number of
snakes in an image of Manasā is usually eight. From our illus-
tration, it is not possible to count the snake-heads, but
several huge snakes are seen coiling round and spreading their
hoods over her head like a canopy.

The Manasā Puja, which is celebrated during the rainy
months, Jaiṣṭha, Āśāda, Śrāvana and Bhādra,(16) is a popular
festival in Assam, especially in the districts of Kāmrūp and
Darrang. In these festivals, offerings are generally made to
her without any image being made. The festival lasts for two
or three days, in which songs connected with Chand Sadāgar are
recited.(17)

(16) Another Chapter on Assam, G.R., XXI, p.413. It is to be
noted that during these rainy months, the snakes, driven
out of their holes by the water, seek a refuge in the
dwellings of men. At that time of the year the danger
of snakes is greatest, so it is natural that the rite
should be performed in these months. See Vogel, p.11.

(17) This long poem, which is popular both in Eastern Bengal
and Assam, preserves in a somewhat legendary form, the
account of the spread of Manasā cult in Eastern India.
Chānd Sadāgar was a merchant who refused to worship the
snake-goddess Manasā, for which he lost all his sons,
being bitten by snakes, except the youngest son Lakhindar.
He got Lakhindar married to Beulā; but on the very night
after the wedding, Lakhindar was bitten by a snake, in
spite of all precautions taken by Chānd. Beulā, however,
did not allow her father-in-law to burn the dead body of
her husband. She procured a raft and, placing the body
on it, got into it herself and had it cast adrift on the
river. After many vicissitudes, she propitiated Śiva,
and through his mediation persuaded her father-in-law to
make offerings to Manasā, whereupon Manasā restored her
husband to life.

The above review gives an idea of the aesthetic achievement which the people of Assam attained during our period. It should, however, be borne in mind that under the present circumstances, due to paucity of available specimens, it is hardly possible to write a complete and chronological history of Assamese sculpture except in its barest outline. Further, as we have no dated image, when exactly fine art began in Assam is also not easy to determine. We may, of course, say with some certainty that it began at a fairly early period. In the carvings of Tespur, archaeologists have traced definite early Gupta influence. The exquisite door-frame of Dah Farbatiya, a best specimen of the Pātaliputra school, though not connected with any dated inscription, has been unambiguously proved by Banerji as of Gupta. Other stone sculptures and rock-carvings that have been discovered at different places not only indicate the geographical limit of the circulation of art specimens and the spread of Hindu culture into the remotest corner of the province, but also fully reveal how closely Assam followed the general art tradition and motif of Northern India. Bikshit, therefore, rightly observes that "the affinity of Assamese art would seem to lie more with the schools of Bihar and Orissa than with the contemporary Pāla art of Bengal." (1)

This, of course, is not unnatural, as of the streams of influence that have moulded the culture of Assam, the strongest current has always been from Mid-India.

It is true that in comparison with the number of sculptures discovered in other parts of India, the art specimens from Assam are few. But even the few that have come down to us as chance finds are sufficient to convince us of the beauty, dignity and grace of the Assamese art, and thus give them a distinctive place in the art history of India.

From the thirteenth century, however, there seems to appear marked provincial characteristics in Assamese art. During this period, the Tāntric rituals began to dominate the Brāhmanic religion, and the Mongoloid infiltration influenced the culture of the population. The Tāntric influence is best seen in the horrid figures of Bhairava (Plate XVI, Fig. 47) and Gāmunda (Plate XXII, Fig. 57). The other influence can be traced in the figures having high cheek-bones and flat noses, both being the Mongoloid ethnic peculiarities. Herein, however, for the first time, we find the rebirth of the provincial or national art language, arising out of the traditional Indian and indigenous local conceptions. This fusion does not necessarily lead to senseless, accidental results, but represents a selection of those elements from the old traditional art that can serve as the expression of things already living in the artists, and which can satisfy the requirements of a new national soul.
Of all the ruins in Assam that have excited the interest of archaeologists, the old fort at Dimapur, on the bank of the river Dhanáiri stands pre-eminently first; not so much from the fort itself as from the remarkable carved stone monoliths which stand within its area. Ferguson remarks that these monoliths and carvings are unlike any other known to exist anywhere else, and as for their carving, the only things the least like them, so far as in India, are the pillars in the temple at Mudabidri, and in other places in Kanara, but there the pillars are actual supporters of roofs, but the Dimapur pillars were never intended for any utilitarian purpose. (2)

The flourishing time of Dimapur seems to have been the fifteenth century A.D., for according to Gait, the Kachari


deserted their capital at Dimapur after its invasion by the Ahoms, in 1836 A.D., and established a new capital at Maibong. (3) The style of the gateway in the eastern wall of the ancient city of Dimapur, as suggested by Dr. Block, points to the same period, for in its curved battlement, its narrow, pointed arch over the entrance, and its octagonal corner turrets, it exhibits all the characteristic elements of that style of Muhammadan brick architecture in Bengal, which flourished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries A.D.

The total length of the city wall, which appears to consist of earth, raised upon an underlying brick structure, which is about 4,250 yards or about 2-4 miles in circuit, including the broken portion along the Manasiri river. The principal remains stand close to the gate, in the eastern part of the city. They consist of two groups of stone pillars, running parallel to each other from north to south. Each of those two groups is again divided into two rows of pillars. The cylindrical pillars in the first two rows, nearest to the gate, are named as "Chessman columns" by Major Godwin Austen on account of their shape, which somewhat resembles that of chessmen figures (Plate 8/Figs. 91, 92). The ornamentation of these columns is entirely floral or geometrical, and remarkable for the absence of any animal figures whatever. Sometimes the ornamental bands, hanging down the columns, have swords or

daggers carved upon them. The most striking feature, however, apart from the hemispherical capital, is the band, tied around the neck of the column.

Major Godwin-Austen, likewise, is responsible for the name of "V-shaped columns" for the bifurcating stone pillars, which make up the third and fourth rows from the entrance to Dimapur city. Unfortunately, very few of them are at present erect; however, half of a V-column may be seen on Plate Fig.93. On the V-Columns, animal designs are frequently met with between the three rosettes, which divide each half of the V into two separate fields of ornamentation. Thus, we find on the broken half, shown in Plate Fig.93, below two figures of birds, perhaps peacocks, the well-known Indian design of a lion, overpowering an elephant. The figure is purely conventional, and the design, especially of the mane and tail, is peculiarly local.

A third type of stone monument, found at Dimapur, will be seen in Plate / Fig.83. It differs from the V-columns only in so far as the two bifurcating stone beams have been slightly curved, so as to resemble in shape somewhat the horns of a buffalo; thus: 🦌 Not a single one of this "buffalo-horn column" is now erect. Their ornamentation, however, is remarkable for the groups of three rosettes shown on Plate Fig.93. A dagger or sword, and a few animal figures, are generally placed between the triangular bands, which develop,
as it were, out of the three spirals that encircle the rosettes on the upper end.

Before entering into the question of the significance and date of the pillars at Dimapur, it is worth while to mention briefly a group of similar remains at Kachamari Pathar, close to the bank of the Dayang river about seven miles south of the Jumguri Railway Station on the present Bengal and Assam Railway. As in Dimapur, the remains here also are found within the area of an old city. The earthen ramparts and moats are still visible, and inside are several mounds of earth, which may contain the remains of some buildings. The monoliths face west instead of east as at Dimapur, but both at Dimapur and here the pillars face the adjacent river, here the Dayang, at Dimapur the Brahmapuri. At Kachamari, we have an isolated "chessman column" 9' high with a circumference of 2'6" at its base at a slight distance from the slabs. In the main, it is identical in style with the Dimapur Chessman pillars. But the dome of the Kachamari pillar is more elaborate than the Dimapur ones, is carved with rays in relief, and has a slightly protuberance at the centre, with a shallow vertical groove at one side, possibly to give verisimilitude. It is carved round the base with elephants, which at Dimapur appear only on V-shaped pillars. (5)

At a distance of 55' from this column is a double row of stones, 24 altogether. It looks as if each line consisted of 12 stones. The distance between the stones is about 10'. The two lines run from north to south. The stones in the western line appear to have been larger than those in the eastern line. There are also some indications of the height of the stones gradually decreasing from the centre towards each side, as in the Dāmāpur pillars. The position of these stones is such that the first, or lowest, stands near the northern end, the third, or highest, almost in the centre, while the remaining two are more or less close to it. The average breadth is 2'6" in circumference.

Only a few stones are still erect. The remaining stones all lie prostrate on the ground, some broken and some complete, some upside down, and others with their carved faces turned upwards. These stones, pointed in shape, narrowing a little towards the base, somewhat resemble the blade of a sword or dagger, and accordingly Block has named them as "sword-blade" or "dagger-columns" to distinguish them from the Chessman and V-columns. On these carved slabs the main design is a sort of plant bearing sometimes two but mostly four of the "petaliform pattern" circles, two on each side of what may be called the trunk of the plant, which is topped by a large pointed lotus bud. Below the base is a panel containing a pair of

elephants on lions, (7) while there are also formal designs cut in the centre, what may be called the trunk of the plant. In the centre of one of the slabs still erect is the design which Godwin-Austen suggests may represent a spear-head, and which is very frequent on the Chessman pillars at Dimapur.

The most noticeable difference between the Kachamari and the Dimapur monoliths is the entire absence among the former, as far as can be seen of the V-shaped form. Button remarks that the Kachamari represents a decadent later development, and was influenced by extraneous art, the conventional tiger suggests it, and seems to indicate Shan influence. (8)

So far as their ornamentation is concerned, there is very little that connects the Dimapur and Kachamari carvings with the ordinary class of Northern Indian works of art. In studying the designs exhibited on these columns, one certainly feels a slight touch of mediaeval Northern Indian art here and there, namely, in the rosettes so common on the pillars, (9) and especially in animal groups, such as the lion rampant over an elephant, to which allusion has been made above. But in as

(7) Button speaks of them as "tigers". Carved Monoliths at Jiranguri in Assam, J.R.A.I., LIII, p.153, f.n.1.
(8) Button further holds that the peacock, which is very prevalent in the Dimapur carvings, and which is used in Burma as a symbol of the sun, is also due to Shan influence. Ibid, p.152.
(9) Button, however, thinks that in its original form this pattern represented the sun or moon, and not the lotus at all. Ibid, p.152.
such as the general shape of those columns, including the patterns of ornamentation employed in their carvings, bear such a marked un-Aryan appearance, the suggestion offers itself that the people, to whom we owe their erection, came from a foreign stock, and that we have to look into the religious or social customs of the many aboriginal tribes inhabiting the Assam border-lands, in order to grasp the true meaning of these curious stone monuments.

The earlier writers considered these pillars as parts of a stone structure. But subsequent investigation led them to discard this theory.\(^\text{(10)}\) It has now been suggested by various scholars that these columns were memorial stones, put up in honour of some great man or event, or commemorating some meritorious act such as the killing of a "mithun" or bison, or the feasting of a village. Marshall remarks that these Chesaman columns were originally phallic monuments, for it is suggested by the fact that in the non-Aryan districts of the south the custom still obtains, or did so until recently, of

erecting "lingas" on the graves of local heroes.(11) Hutton, however, makes it clear that the erection of cylindrical and forked posts as a memorial of feasts is still practised by several tribes of Assam.(12)

(11) Mahenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization, I, p.60.
(12) Carved Monoliths at Dimapur and an Angami Naga ceremony (with Plates), J.R.A.S, LIII, pp.55-70; The Meaning and Method of the Erection of Monoliths by the Naga Tribes (with Plates), Ibid, pp.242-249.
APPENDIX II.

Terracotta Plaques from Sadiya.

Closely connected with the remains at Dimapur are the ruins of the so-called "Copper Temple" near Sadiya. (1) The temple, commonly known as Tamresvarī, itself has become famous owing to the fact that almost down to the memory of the present generation, human sacrifices have been offered there to some form of Durga, evidently worshipped under the name of Tamresvarī or Kečhāi-khātī, "eater of raw flesh". (2) The temple stands within a large circuit wall, the inner side of which was adorned with a series of carved tiles originally exceeding a hundred in number. Sixteen of these tiles have now been recovered; some of them being found in situ, others buried beneath the debris. The figures carved upon them represent men, animals, birds, flowers and geometrical patterns. These carvings resemble very much the figures at Dimapur. For instance, we may refer to the figure of a lion (Plate / Fig. 96) which is very similar in treatment to the figure of a lion mounting on an elephant, seen on the broken V-column from Dimapur. The peacocks, of which two are represented on another


(2) A History of Assam, p.42.
tile (Plate VI Fig.11) with their bodies twisted around each other, are also a favourite device on the Lāmāpur columns; and the ornamental pattern of the tile No. 7 in the following list occurs again on some of the V-columns at Lāmāpur.

Another link which connects these ruins with Lāmāpur is to be found in the base and capital of a stone pillar closely analogous to the Chessman column at that site.

Below we give a descriptive list of the carvings represented on the tiles:

(1) Bearded man, dancing, holding staff in right hand, and unknown object in uplifted left hand (Plate / Fig. 97)

(2) Beardless man, with conical cap, running, holding spear in right hand; dagger fastened to left side of girdle.

(3) Pair of dancers; their uplifted right hands hold some sort of musical instrument (?); the left hands, holding a stick, rest on the hip; perforated ears; eyes and mouths wide open; small noses; and hair arranged in strands ending in spirals (Plate / Fig. 99)

(4) Two peacocks, with their bodies twisted around each other; small tree or flower on each side (Plate VI Fig. 11)

(5) Lion, standing against tree, with forelegs uplifted; tongue protruding from mouth; tail ending in a cluster of five bunches of hair. (Plate / Fig. 96)

(6) Horse, with saddle and bridle (Plate / Fig. 100)
(7) Circle, formed by two lines, with dots between; inside ornament, formed by twisting a rope or cord into four larger and many smaller irregular circles. (Plate / Fig. 101)

(8) Plant, with five long, pointed leaves. (Plate / Fig. 102)

(9) Two squares, laid crosswise into each other; corners filled with ornamental sprigs; in inner square, ornamental flower, with four small and four large petals. (Plate / Fig. 103)

(10) Group of four flowers; the largest one is cup-shaped with four leaves or petals on each side; two small flowers below, and a bud, rising over larger flowers.

(11) Lotus-shaped ornament, with eight petals arranged around circle in centre, having cluster of nine drops. (Plate / Fig. 104)

(12) Falcon carrying heron. (Plate / Fig. 105)

(13) Dancing figure; right hand uplifted, left hand resting on hip; head resembles those of dancers in tile No.3; broken (Plate / Fig. 106)

(14) Five fragments, making up half the original tile, which evidently had a bird, resembling a cock, as ornament.

(15) Fabulous bird, with pointed crest; two pieces; corner missing. (Plate / Fig. 107)

(16) Three pieces; lotus shaped ornament, similar to that in tile No.11; inside, circle formed by two lines. (Plate / Fig. 108)
Musical Instruments as depicted on some Early Carvings.

Music, both vocal and instrumental, has always played an important part in the secular and religious life of the Assamese people. We have already made reference to the institution of Nāṭīs, the dancers, who were attached to temples. Besides, there were the instrumental musicians, whose duty was to play the instruments before temples at different praharas (periods) of the day.

Music was developed greatly in Assam, as in other parts of India, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of our era. During this period, we have witnessed a new religious revival in Assam associated with the Bhakti movement, and connected with the worship of Kriana. This revival was broadcasted from one end of the province to the other by songs, music and plays. (1) Sankara Deva and Mādhava Deva, two of the Vaisnava apostles of the new movement, were responsible for establishing in Assam various Sattras (2) similar to early Buddhist monasteries, and Nam-ghara or common prayer houses in villages. Each Nāmeghar has even this day, a band of Gāyan-Bāyan, an orchestral party, formed by the musical minded people

of the village. The head of the party, known as Gāyan, generally coaches the young boys of the village so that their service may be available for the village Gāyan-Bāyan party when occasion arises.

Besides the religious music, there is also the secular music associated with the social ceremonies like Biya (marriage) and Bihu (popular festivals). The party which provides instrumental music on such occasions is known as Dhuliya-Khuliya.

Many of the musical instruments that we see today seem to have come down from early times. This is revealed from the very many sculptural carvings of our period. A study of the instruments seen depicted in the monuments brings up a number of interesting points about their use, and also about the ideas of music in general of the Assamese people of the period.

Indian musical instruments are usually classified under the following designations:

1. Tata-yantra, comprising all stringed instruments.
2. Susira-yantra, comprising cymbals, gongs, bells, etc.
3. Ghana-yantra, comprising all instruments covered with skins, such as drums, tabors, etc.
4. Anuddha-yantra, comprising wind instruments of all kinds.

Among the Tata-yantras, vīnā seems to be very popular. Vīnā seen in the hands of Sarasvatī (Plate /Figs.76-77), as well as in the figure in the panel from Tespur (Plate V/Fig.13) is a one-stringed instrument. Such vīnā or biṅ is nowadays
seen played by the Bairagis, the wandering mendicants, who sing with it Deh-Bicharar git, the mystical songs that express the deepest spiritual truths in simple appealing words. (3)

In the same Tezpur panel we see the playing of cymbals. Cymbals of various types are even in use. The small sized cymbals known as Manjari or Khuti-tāl, are generally played in popular music. They are slightly bell-shaped, rising to a knob which is held in the fingers and to which is attached a cord. The larger and thinner, the dinner type variety, is known as Bar (big) or Bhāttāl, a reminder of its association with Bhūtan. They are chiefly used in connection with music of a religious character, and they form an integral part of the Gāyan-Bāyan party.

Bell or ghanta is another musical instrument which has long association with Hindu worship. It is a hollow metal sphere with a loose pellet within it. Associated with it is the gong or kāh, usually made of hammered malleable metal, flat or approximately flat in form, and is struck by hand with a soft mallet. Here also should be mentioned the little ankle-bells known as kinkini, tied by dancers round the ankles.

(3) It would be interesting to note that the use of the Jew's harp, which is a primitive stringed instrument, is very common among the Assamese village-folk. Young mentions that the most elaborately made and best-sounding Jew's harps have been found in Sadiya, Assam. A.W. Young: The Jew's Harp in Assam, J.Pro.A.S.B., IV. (N.S.) pp. 233-237.
They produce a faint clashing sound as the feet move in steps, which mingle not unmusically with the dance music or songs which accompany the dance; and they not only serve to mark the time, but to keep the dancer or singer in perfect accord with the musicians.

Among the Ghana yantra, drums take the first rank; and it is one of our most important musical instruments. Rowbotham, in formulating the stages through which instrumental music has passed, according to a development theory as applied to music, considers the drum first responded to the nascent conception of music in the pre-historic man, and has since been tenaciously preserved as an adjunct to religious service. The types of drums used in Assam are of many varieties, and consequently it has many names corresponding to its size, shape and the material with which it is made.

Labā or the kettle-drum is the largest drum, and is used in the service of temples and Nam-ghars. It has sometimes two sides and looks like a big casket. Such drums are beaten with two sticks. The Labā of a temple or Nam-ghar, even today, serves many purposes of the village. Primarily it is sounded to bespeak of the time of prayer and to summon the devotees to service. It also works as a time-marker like the church-bell. It is generally believed that its sound has beneficent power, which drives away evil spirits. During natural disturbances, such as hail-storm, earthquake, fire and so forth, Labā is sounded to make the villagers alert.
Mridanga is one of the most ancient of India's Ghana-yantra. As its name suggests, its body was originally made of clay. At present, it consists of a hollow shell of wood, larger at one end than the other, and upon which are stretched two heads of skin, fastened to wooden hoops and strained by leather braces interlaced and passing the length of the Mridanga. It is beaten by the hands and finger-tips. Mridanga forms the main part of a band of Gāyan-Bāyan. (Plate XLIII, Fig. 111.)

The drums seen being played in the Tezpurl panel are shorter drums, commonly known as ḍhol. It is an inferior instrument, generally used in folk-music and by the Anliyas-Khuliya orchestral party. ḍhol is played either by hands or with sticks or by both. (Plate XLIII, Fig. 112.)

The earliest wind-instrument used by the people was probably the horn, commonly known as śingā. The horn is blown not only for ordinary, but also for ritual purposes. Among some of the hill people of Assam, blowing of the horn becomes a common method of driving off demons or of producing magical results. The Garos, in cases of sickness, blow the horn to drive away evil spirits which they believe cause it. (6) Sembha or the conch-shell is another very ancient wind instrument. It is an auspicious instrument, being associated with Vismu, and is blown even in performing household rites. (Plate VIII, Fig. 18.)

(4) A.J. Hipkins: Musical Instruments, Historic, Rare and Antique, pp. 87 ff.
(6) Playfar: The Garos, pp. 91 ff.
Vāhi or Muralī (the reed flute) is one of the commonest instruments in the musical traditions of India. Vāhi occupies a dignified place in Indian music. It is the instrument par excellence in the hands of Krisna (Plate XXXFig. 75). The left figure in the third pair in the Tespur panel is very interesting, as it plays a double pipe. Banerji identifies it as a conch-shell, but it looks more like a modern Pēpā or Kāliya, a kind of clarionet. It is, however, noteworthy that Kāliya is nowadays played by men of lower caste.

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<td>A.P.M.</td>
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1947
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A CULTURAL HISTORY OF ASSAM

of the

EARLY PERIOD; 400 A.D. - 1200 A.D.

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THE P. E. N. BOOKS
The Indian Literatures

BARUA (B.N.)
Ph.D.
1947.

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ASSAMESE LITERATURE
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1941
EDITOR'S FOREWORD

India is no exception in a world swayed by politics in an extraordinary measure. Her ruling passion is for freedom from foreign domination; in other countries politics revolves round other ideas and ideals, other hopes and aspirations. India has greater justification for being preoccupied with politics, for her servitude affects her indigenous culture on every plane. This has compelled even a mystic like Gandhiji to experiment with truth in the field of politics.

Mainly because of this preoccupation Indians have undervalued the literary unfoldment of the last few years in the different linguistic areas; if properly coordinated and helped, this would develop into a renaissance of the first order. Visions of literary creators enshrined in books of today are likely to become objective realities of tomorrow. Moreover, the mystical intimations of the poet, the psychological analyses of the novelist, the philosophical expositions of the essayist, the tendency portrayals and the character delineations of the dramatist—these are related to the very problems which engage the whole consciousness of the politician, the economist and the sociologist. India cannot afford to be neglectful of her literary movement of today.

India's many languages are not a curse, however much her enemies may call them so or her political and
other reformers may wish for a *lingua franca*. Ideas unite people and rule the world; not words. Europe is not suffering because it has many languages, but because conflicting ideas and competing ideas have confused issues and have created chaos. Our many languages are channels of cultural enrichment. Many educated Indians are not familiar with the literary wealth of any Indian language other than their own. How many Bengalis know the beauties of Malayalam literature? How many Tamilians are familiar with the literary efforts of old and modern Assam? And so on. Again, India suffers grievously in the Occident, which is ignorant of the present-day literary achievements in the different Indian languages. No systematic attempt has been made to popularize the story of the Indian literatures or to present gems from their masterpieces to the general public in English translation. This is now being attempted by the Centre for India of the International P. E. N.

The plan of this series of books is a simple one. A volume is devoted to each of the main Indian languages. Each book is divided into three parts:— (1) The history of the literature dealt with; (2) Modern developments; and (3) An anthology. There will be about a dozen volumes in all, and they are to be published in alphabetical order, which arrangement has been responsible for some delay in publishing the series. A list of these publications will be found elsewhere in this volume.

In editing each MS. I have kept to the transliter-
atation of words from the Sanskrit, Arabic and Indian languages selected by the author.

I must thank my colleagues of the P. E. N. Movement and several other friends who have helped with advice and valuable suggestions. And, of course, the P. E. N. All-India Centre and myself are greatly indebted to the friends who have undertaken to write the books which make up this series. Without their co-operation we could not have ventured on the project.

For me this a labour of love. But time, energy and other contributions made bring their own recompense as all are offered on the altar of the Motherland, whose service of humanity will be greatly aided by the literary creations of her sons and daughters.

Sophia Wadia
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Editor of The Indian P. E. N. invited Dr. Banikanta Kakati to prepare a brochure on Assamese Literature. As Dr. Kakati had to engage himself in other work, the choice fell on me. Nevertheless Dr. Kakati assisted me throughout in the completion of the work. I have to thank him for permitting me to include a few of the Vaisnavite devotional poems translated by him in the Life of Sankar Deva (Saints of India Series, G. A. Natesan and Co., Madras) and to Shri Ambikagiri Roy Choudhuri for the songs taken from his unpublished work, the Songs of the Cell. I am grateful to Shri Rohinikanta Barua for his help in manifold ways.

I wish to thank Shrimati Sophia Wadia whose earnest efforts have made the appearance of this brochure possible.

Gauhati, Assam.

B. K. BARUA

1940.
DEDICATED
To
Dr. SYAMAPRASAD MOOKERJEE.
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THE HISTORY OF ASSAMESE LITERATURE
Chapter I

ASSAM—THE LAND AND THE LANGUAGE

The present Province of Assam is situated on the north-east frontier of India. It is surrounded by mountain ranges on the three sides: on the north are the Himalayas shutting it off from the tablelands of Bhutan and Tibet; on the north-east is a range of hills which forms a barrier between the Upper Brahmaputra Valley and China; on the east and on the south lie the hills forming the western boundary of Burma and the State of Tipperah and on the west lies the Province of Bengal. The present province consists mainly of two divisions, the Brahmaputra or Assam Valley and the Surma Valley. The Brahmaputra Valley is Assam proper. The people of the Brahmaputra Valley call themselves Asamiya and their language Assamese.

The province was differently called in different historical periods. Its most ancient name was Prag-jyotisha. By this name it is referred to in the two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In classical Sanskrit literature both Prag-jyotisha and Kamrupa occur as alternative names of the country. Kalidas refers to it by both the designations. In epigraphic records, the name Kamrupa was first mentioned in the
Allahabad inscriptions of Samudra Gupta in the fifth century of the Christian era. Ancient Kamrupa, besides the modern districts of Assam, embraced the whole of North Bengal including Cooch–Behar, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur. Its permanent western boundary is said to have been the River Karatoya in North Bengal, according to the Kalika Puran and the Yogini-Tantra, both devoted to geographical accounts of ancient Kamrupa.

The ancient capital of the country was Prag-Jyotishpur near modern Gauhati. But during the latter half of the thirteenth century the seat of the government was shifted to Kamatapur, fourteen miles south–east of modern Cooch–Behar; and in Kamrupa proper certain chiefs known as Bhuyans were established at various places as something like the wardens of the marches in medieval England. These chiefs owed only nominal allegiance to the Kamata Kings. In the sixteenth century the capital was again removed from Kamatapur to Cooch–Behar by King Naranarayan, who came to the throne in 1540 A.D.

The modern designation Assam is connected with the Shan invaders. Since 1228 A.D. the eastern portion of the Brahmaputra Valley came under the domination of a section of the great Tai or Shan race which had spread eastwards from the borders of Assam over nearly the whole of further India and far into the interior of China. These Shan invaders came to be referred to as Ahom in contemporary literature and the province also took the designation Assam.

The Ahoms consolidated their power in Eastern Assam with their capital at Rangpur (Sibsagar). Dur-
ing the succeeding centuries they pushed on so far to the west as to come into direct conflict with the King of Kamata, who ruled the western part of the Kingdom of Kamrup, and with other independent neighbouring chiefs. The history of Assam in the succeeding centuries is equivalent to the history of Ahom domination. The Ahom rulers assimilated the culture, language and religion of the original inhabitants and completely lost their identity in course of time.

The modern word Assamese is an Anglicised formation. The language of the Province is called Assamīyā from the name of the Province Assam. Assamese is a full-fledged modern Indo-Aryan language both in respect of grammatical structure and a large percentage of vocabables. The language probably originated from Māgadhi or Gauḍa Apabhramsa. But it has not yet been determined as to when exactly the Assamese language came to be individualised.

During the first half of the seventh century, on the invitation of Bhaskar Barman, King of Kamrupa, the Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsang visited the province. Hieun Tsang stayed in Assam as a royal guest and he left invaluable accounts of the province at that time. His records tell us that "the people (Kamrupa) were of honest ways, small stature, and black looking; their speech differed a little from that of Mid-India." ¹

From this account of Hieun Tsang, it can be assumed that by the seventh century the Aryan language had penetrated into Assam and that this Aryan language spoken in the province differed to a certain extent from

the Maithili or Māgadhi dialect then current in Mid-India.

ASSAMESE SCRIPTS:—Like the Bengali, the Assamese script also was derived from old Devanagari alphabets. Originally there were several schools of Assamese script, namely, Gargaya, Bamunia, Lakhari and Kaithali; but in later years all the different scripts merged into one. After the establishment of the printing-press at Serampore, near Calcutta, Assamese books began to be printed in the Bengali script, and since then the Bengali script has been adopted for Assamese with certain modifications.
Chapter II

EARLY ASSAMESE

FOLK-SONGS AND NURSERY RHYMES

The beginning of distinctive Assamese literature seems to be marked by the composition of folk-songs, commonly known as *Bihugits*, and pastoral ballads, marriage songs and nursery rhymes.

*Bihu*-songs are connected with the *Bihu* festivals—the national festivals of Assam observed in the beginning of the autumn and the spring seasons. The word *Bihu* is supposed to be a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Visuvat*. There are three such festivals in Assam, in the months of Baisakh, Magh and Kartik. Each *Bihu* synchronises with a distinct phase in the agricultural life of the people. The *Bahag* (Baisakh, about mid-April) marks the advent of the seedtime, the *Kati* (Kartik, about mid-October), the completion of sowing and transplanting, and the *Magh* (about mid-January) the gathering of the harvest.

Of all these *Bihu* festivals, the *Bahag Bihu* ushers in the period of greatest enjoyment and marks the arrival of Spring. The so-called *Bihu* songs are connected with this festival. The *Bahag Bihu* lasts for several
days during which "the young people in the village may be seen moving about in groups gaily dressed or forming circles in the midst of which the prettiest girls dance," singing most highly erotic songs. The Bahag Bihu corresponds with the season of love and pleasure and probably synchronises with the pairing-time of the primitive people of the province. These songs are very popular amongst all sections of the people.

These songs are not preserved in their old garb. Their language has changed from generation to generation. Yet from their prevailing theme, it may be said that both in matter and manner they are free from learned Sanskrit influences. These songs are composed in couplets, and each couplet depicts a different emotion. Their language is simple and suggestive, and the style is neat and clear.

These popular songs exercised considerable influence upon the literature produced in the succeeding centuries by such poets as Durgabar, Pitambar and Mankar. Even the translator of the great epic Ramayana and the great hymn composer Sankar Deva could not escape their influence.

The Vachan or aphorism is another type of unwritten literature. Of the Vachans, the most celebrated are those of Dak, known as Dakar Vachans. These Dakar Vachans deal with such subjects as agriculture, the weather, medicine, politics and every aspect of household life. They are composed in rhymed couplets with a few telling words. The aphorisms of Dak are now collected but unfortunately the date of their composi-

tion is not known. These aphorisms reflect great credit on the compiler and most of them have come from a person having wide experience and intimate knowledge of human life and of the living world.

**DIFFERENT PERIODS OF ASSAMESE LITERATURE:**—
The distinctive period of Assamese literature, to speak from the materials hitherto discovered, begins with the fourteenth century. The history of Assamese literature may for convenience be chronologically divided into three periods:—

1. **Early Assamese**—This again may be split up into (a) the Pre-Vaisnavite and (b) the Vaisnavite sub-periods. The literature of this period is religious in tone; in form it consists of translations and adaptations. The literature flourished mainly under the patronage of the Kings of Kamatapur and Cooch-Behar.

2. **Middle Assamese**—From the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth. During this period the centre of learning was shifted to the Ahom Court at Sibsagar and the Assamese literature began to spread out on an infinite variety of subjects.

3. **Modern Assamese**—From the beginning of the nineteenth century till the present time. The advent of the British brought the Assamese culture into contact with the vitalizing influence of Western literature and art. The modern Assamese literature is vibrant with many literary activities.
Chapter III

EARLY ASSAMESE

THE PRE-VAISNAVITE PERIOD (1200-1450 A.D.)

The recorded literature in Assamese began from the time of Hema Saraswati, who translated the Prahlad Charitra from the Bamana Puran into Assamese verse. He makes mention of his patron, King Durlabhnarayan of Kamatapur, who is said to have ruled in the latter part of the thirteenth century. Hema Saraswati shows a wonderful command over his language; he seems to have been greatly influenced by the more dignified language of the time, Sanskritised Assamese, and he copiously borrowed from Sanskrit. He did not aspire after a select vocabulary.

He wrote mostly in rhymed couplets of fourteen and ten syllables and also in the Dulari metre of ten syllables.

At the time of Indranarayan of Kamatapur, the son of Durlabhnarayan, the two poets Harihar Bipra and Kaviratna Saraswati composed a few books in verse. Harihar’s chief work is Babrubahanar Yuddha, an incident from the Aswamedha Parva of the Mahabharata. Babrubahanar Yuddha is written in verse and contains
Here is the story of the book. It begins with the entrance of the sacrificial horse in the State of Manipur followed by Arjuna, the third Pandava. Babrubahan the King of Manipur, captured the horse, but learning from his mother Chitrangada, that Arjuna was his father, Babrubahan went to meet Arjuna with the intention of returning the horse with apology. Arjuna in his utter forgetfulness as to his union with Chitrangada, not only disclaimed any relationship with Babrubahan but questioned the chastity of his mother and ascribed his submissiveness to abject fear, which he said was not the characteristic of a Pandava. This enraged Babrubahan so much that he fought a most sanguinary battle in which Arjuna met with his death. Then Sri Krisina appeared on the battlefield and restored Arjuna to life, and explained to him how Arjuna married Chitrangada during his travels in Manipur on a previous occasion and begot Babrubahan as his son. Then Arjuna remembered his visit to Manipur and acknowledged Babrubahan as his most worthy son and embraced him and went away with his horse.

Harihar Bipra wrote not only in Pada metre, but also in Dulari, Chabi and Jhumura. Pada metre was used in narrating the main theme; Dulari in depicting certain picturesque scenes; Chabi in describing pathos and Jhumura in indicating dramatic action. Babrubahan Yuddha is not a literal translation of the original Sanskrit text. The author only borrowed the main story from the Aswamedha Parva of the Mahabharata, but he has embellished the theme with descriptions and dramatic situations not found in the original. But nowhere in these innovations does he disclose any lack of literary taste. The description of the royal court at Manipur is brilliant and magnificent. The episode of the insult to Babrubahan by Arjuna, and the retort

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*Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts. By Hema Chandra Goswami. (University of Calcutta, 1930)*
given by the former, reveals excellent power of characterisation on the part of the author. Harihara Bipra's work is embellished with a variety of rhetorical figures.

Some time after, the centre of learning shifted eastward from Kamatapur to somewhere in the Kapili Valley in the modern District of Nowgong. The Kapili Valley is supposed to have been the seat of government of the Kachari Kings. Here under the patronage of the Kachari King Mahamanikya (about the fourteenth century) the greatest of the pre-Vaisnavite poets, Madhav Kandali, undertook the stupendous task of translating the whole of the Ramayana into Assamese verse. Madhav Kandali was the court-poet of the Kachari King Mahamanikya and was known as Kayiraj Kandali (Kandali, the King of Poets) a well-deserved designation. He was a great Sanskrit scholar but unlike other poets of the time he avoided giving any elaborate introduction of himself in his works. Sankar Deva, who gave the greatest impetus to the cause of Assamese literature in the succeeding century, held him in great respect and was charmed with his exquisitely beautiful rendering of the Ramayana. It appears that the legacy of rich and beautiful diction which the poet of the Assamese version of the Ramayana left behind exercised a tremendous influence upon Sankar Deva and his immediate successors.

Madhav Kandali's Ramayana is remarkable for the constant fidelity to the original with which the translation has been executed. Unfortunately the Adi and the Uttar Kanda of his rendering (the first and the last cantos) were lost during the troubled times of the Ahom-Kachari skirmishes about 1490 A.D.
Devajit is another poetic composition of Madhav Kandali and it is certainly by far the most important book of the period, both as a first-fruit of creative effort in Assamese verse and as foreshadowing the Vaisnavite cult that came into prominence in the next century. In this poem he established the superiority of Krishna and other incarnations of Vishnu to all other Gods.

Like his predecessors he also wrote in the rhymed couplets. His composition is characterised by a full and even flow of words and of thoughts. His great genius for picture-painting found expression wherever the opportunity offered itself in the task of translation. The vivid picture that he has drawn of Lanka may very well be claimed as an Assamese landscape.

Popular Poets:—All the above poets were Sanskrit scholars, and their works are more or less translations or adaptations in a standard spoken language. But a few poets of the period endeavoured to popularise the akhyanas of the epics and the Puranas through songs. Among the eminent poets of this school are Durgabar, Pitambar and Mankar. The respective notable works of these three poets are:—Giti Ramayana (the Ramayana in songs) Usha Parinaya (Marriage of Usha), and Behula-Lakhindar, a story from the Padma Puran. All these works are in songs prefixed by notations. Each of them is knitted together into a complete poem and the erotic sentiment prevails in their verses. As these songs are composed for singing, they are even now recited on festive occasions and at social carnivals.

General Characteristics: The poets of the period may be classified under two heads, namely translators
or adapters of Sanskrit classics and the composers of popular songs.

The substance of the literature is mainly didactic, and in general it lacks vitalising spiritual fervour. The translator of the Ramayana, however, in the concluding verses of each chapter has made passionate appeals to the people to devote themselves to Rama, whom the poet depicts as an incarnation of Vishnu. The other poets selected easily manageable episodes of the epics, especially those about heroes and heroines, for treatment in their works.

In the hands of the popular song-writers, the secular note became predominant. They chose the Pauranic akhyanas generally connected with the marriage of a hero or a heroine, such as the marriage of Sita, Usha or Behula, for describing the erotic sentiment with a romantic background within domestic surroundings.

The religious poets mostly wrote in rhymed couplets known as Pada, Dulari and Chabi. Each line of the couplet is closed, that is; each line contains a complete thought, stated as precisely as possible. The Pada is a rhymed couplet of two lines, each consisting of fourteen syllables, and there is a pause after the eighth syllable. Dulari and Chabi consist of stanzas of six verses. In Dulari, the first, second, fourth and fifth verses contain six syllables, whereas the third and sixth verses are of eight; as the verses are intended to be chanted, the tune makes the adjustment of irregularities in providing for the requisite number of syllables.

Considerable care is taken by the poets to decorate their works with rhetorical figures. Alliterations, similes and metaphors are profusely and skilfully used to en-
hance the beauty of the verses. Madhav Kandali has shown a tendency to artificiality as well as technical ability in his compositions by introducing words and phrases that generally convey more than one meaning (slesha or double entente). To a certain extent, the poets are conventional in the use of set metaphors and similes. Nevertheless, in places, their originality in selecting appropriate phrases, mainly from their observation of nature, is manifest. Introduction of imagery drawn from common life makes their works extremely popular.

The fact that Madhav Kandali and the religious leaders of the succeeding century belonged to Nowgong leads us to believe that Nowgong was then fast developing into a great centre of scholarship and culture whence scholars and learned men set out to the courts of different kings. It also appears, contrary to popular belief, that the Kachari Kings were great patrons of learning. The creation of a centre of learning is a work of generations, covering, indeed, centuries. And the great religious and literary movement of the fifteenth century that had its origin at Nowgong and that was to stir the whole of ancient Kamrupa under the towering personality of the great Vaisnavite reformer Sankar Deva must have been prepared for by the culture of several generations. It must have struck its roots deep in the past centuries till in the fifteenth the tree burst into splendid flowering.
Chapter IV
THE VAISNAVITE PERIOD
(c. 1450-1650 A.D.)

The next few centuries saw the rise of the Ahom power in the Province. By the end of the fifteenth century the whole province was partitioned between the Ahoms and the Koches. The Ahom rule, however, was not undisturbed by external aggressions. The Mahomedans made frequent inroads and constant hostilities against the Ahoms ensued. The Ahoms on many occasions successfully repelled the Mahomedan attacks and maintained internal tranquillity.

As a result of these disturbances from outside, the Kingdom of Kamrupa was split up into numerous petty principalities and a new line of kings known as the Koches rose to power under Viswa Singha (1515 A.D.). Soon after his accession Viswa Singha removed the capital to Cooch-Behar.

Viswa Singha died in 1540. At the time of his death, his two sons Malladeva, the heir apparent, and his brother Sukladhaj were studying at Benares. Ascending the throne Malladeva assumed the name of Naranarayana and his brother Sukladhaj took the name Chilarai. In
about 1546 Naranarayan invaded the Ahom kingdom and died in 1584.

Naranarayan was a great patron of learning. He gathered round him at his court at Cooch-Behar a galaxy of learned men. All the well-known poets and scholars of the Vaisnavite period, Sankar Deva, Madhay Deva, Rama Saraswati, Sarva Bhauma Bhattacharyya and the eminent grammarian Purusottam Vidyabagish went to him. In fact the Golden Age in Assamese literature opened with the reign of Naranarayan.

**Vaisnavite Movement** :—From the days of great antiquity *Saktism* had been the predominant form of worship in Assam. The adherents to this cult base their observances on the *Tantras*. Kamrupa, the seat of the temple of Kamakhya, is generally believed to be a land of magic and of mystery and the place of origin of the later Tantric rituals. The female deity of the temple spread an awful and fascinating influence all over the province. Both the Ahom and the Koch rulers were zealous patrons of the *Sakta* cult.

But the Vaisnavite religious movement of the fourteenth century that came into being as a revolt against "the cold intellectualism of Brahmanic philosophy and the lifeless formalism of mere ceremonial" penetrated into the Province and swept away all other faiths and creeds. Sankar Deva was the originator of this Vaisnavite movement in Assam and he propounded the cult of *Bhakti* or devotion to Krishna, the One God above all gods, by producing a huge popular literature in Assamese.

Sankar Deva (1449–1569 A. D.) is the real founder of Assamese literature. During the reign of the Ahom
Kıng Sunepha in the year 1449 A. D. Sankar Deva was born at Alipukhuri in Baroda Village in the District of Nowgong. He received a Sanskrit education under Mahendra Kandali, a great Sanskrit scholar of his time.

After the death of his father and of his first wife, Sankar Deva resolved to go out on a long pilgrimage and was accompanied by about seventeen companions, including his former Guru Mahendra Kandali. On his journey he visited all the sacred places of Northern and Southern India. At these various places he came in contact with the Vaisnavite reformers of the day and entered into learned discussions with them. The effect of these discussions and the influence they exercised over his mind are reflected in the voluminous religious literature which he subsequently produced.

After twelve years of such wandering through many sacred places of India, he returned home a much travelled man and settled into family life by marrying a Kayastha girl, Kalindri by name, at the request of his kinsmen. The mission of his life now took a definite shape; he started his religious works. It is said that, whatever doubts he previously had about his mission, his sudden coming across the Bhagavata dispelled every vestige of them and he started his missionary work with increasing confidence.

He drew his inspiration from the Bhagavata, and the Vaisnavism he now preached with its allegiance to one supreme being, in the form of Krishna, its abhorrence of animal sacrifice, its freedom from rituals and its simple ceremonial consisting of devotions, hymns and prayers greatly appealed to the imagination of the Tantric-ridden masses.
Sankar Deva's chief poetic works are: — Bhagavata Puran, Books I, II, VIII, X, XI, XII; Ramayana; Canto VII; Rukminiharan Kavya; Nivinava Siddha; Vaisnavamrita; Bhakti Ratnakara (Sanskrit) and Kirtan Ghosa. Out of about thirty books that he wrote, one work; Kirtan-Ghosa, stands out prominently above the rest. This is not so much an independent work as a compilation from various sources, such as Srimat Bhagavata, Gita, Padmapuran, Brahmapuran, etc. The date of its composition is not known; probably it is not a book that he wrote during one particular period of his life. The composition must have spread over several years. As can be seen from the methodical arrangement of the chapters, the whole work was preconceived and is certainly not a work of his early years. He seems to have composed it after his cult had already been propagated among the people who flocked to him in numbers.

The book contains twenty-three chapters in verse composed in various metres. The metre undergoes a good many variations and responds to the nature of the subjects. Many of his verses jingle with alliteration and assonance.

A work of mature years, it has poise, dignity and charm; and with a supreme mastery of the language he has elucidated the various subleties of his cult. It is an epitome of the whole philosophy of his religion. Owing to the superb beauty of its language, its matchless style, its entertaining and wonderful way of story-telling, its presentation of the didactic and worldly maxims through parables and akhyanas, the Kirtan has an importance in our literature. Like the English version of the Bible
it may be said that its Assamese "lives in the ear like music that can never be forgotten."

In two other branches of Assamese literature Sankar Deva was a pioneer and made his mark, namely, in drama and in hymns.

Of his many dramas Rukmini Haran, Kaliya Daman Parijat Haran, Ram Vijaya and Patni Prasad are best known and these have recently been published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam.¹

In Assam, as elsewhere, the drama had a distinctly religious origin and was of the nature of mystery and miracle plays, representing scenes from the life of Krishna, the one god worshipped by the Vaisnavite sect of Assam, or stories from the great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The drama represents a spectacle and the appeal of the spectacular in an age when printing was unknown was profound. Although first used mainly as a means to further the cause of Assamese Vaisnavism, by their spectacular appeal to the people at large, these plays have come to exercise an abiding influence on our common folk to this day. They were mostly written and often acted by the Vaisnavite leader of the day.

Although the subject-matter of these dramas was borrowed from the epics the author had a free hand in the delineation of individual characters and in introducing various scenes. Besides their value as specimens of dramatic art of the period they are highly interesting as

¹ Shri Barua has modestly omitted his name as the Editor of these dramas—Ed.
containing pictures of contemporary manners and customs.

The language of his dramas is an artificial form of Assamese of the day, being a mixture of Maithili and Assamese. It is difficult to guess why Sankar Deva should have chosen this mixed language as a medium of dramatic expression. He had already written many books in pure Assamese verse. His sudden departure into this mixed language seems to be an enigma. Was his choice of Maithili possibly influenced by his reading of Vidyapati’s works, or more probably by his witnessing Maithili performances when he was at Ayodha in the heyday of Vidyapati’s fame?

During his first pilgrimage, lasting twelve years, Sankar Deva stayed long at many centres of religious culture and thus had great opportunities for studying the manners and customs of different sects.

At Vrindaban he found that all the three Vaisnavite sects, the Krishnaite, the Ramayaite and the Radha-Krishnaite, had their religious literature in the Braj Bhasa, the dialect of the Districts of Mathura and Vrindaban and of the surrounding country. During his stay there, he studied that dialect, mastered it and then himself composed hymns (Bargits) in a mixed artificial language for the use of his followers. These Bargits are remarkable for poetic beauty, tenderness of sentiment and loftiness of thought. At Benares he met some disciples of Kabir and was charmed with Kabir’s Chautisa verses. The Chautisa is an exposition of the religious significance of the consonants of the alphabet. Just as in Chaucer’s “A. B. C.” the verses begin with the successive letters of the Latin alphabet; the lines in this form of composi-
tion begin with the successive letters of the Indian alphabet. Their reproduction in Assamese—the Chatihas—was the result.

The next outstanding figure in the Assamese Vaisnavite movement is Madhav Deva, the famous disciple of Sankar Deva. He was born in 1489 A.D. at Letupkhuri in the Nowgong District. He was originally a devout Sakta, but when he came in contact with Sankar Deva, the latter completely won him over to his cult. From now on Madhav Deva became his most devout follower. The religious movement had gained a great impetus by his conversion for in him was the stuff of the religious and social reformer. A past master of the traditional learning of the time, he was also a wonderful singer.

Almost against the wishes of Sankar Deva, Madhav Deva remained a celibate throughout his life; and his ideal brought into being a class of disciples called "Keolias" or life-celibates. Sankar Deva was a household and he never encouraged celibacy among his disciples.

Madhav Deva accompanied his Guru during his second pilgrimage. After Sankar Deva he rose to the apostolic gadi. He died in Cooch-Behar in 1596.

Madhav Deva's principal works other than dramas are:—Namghosa, Ramayana Adikanda; Bhakti Ratnavali; Nam Malika; Rajasuya Jajna; Vaishnav Kirtan; Commentary on Sankar's Bhakti Ratnakar; and dramas:—Chordhara, Piparaguchua, Bhumi Letowa, Bhojan Byavahar and Arjun Bhanjan.

His highest achievements in pure poetry are his Namghosa and Bhakti Ratnavali, the one a compilation
of Sanskrit slokas rendered into Assamese, the other an Assamese translation of a Sanskrit work by Vishnupuri Sannyasi, itself a work of compilation from various sources.

Out of 1,000 stanzas in the Namghosa about 700 are translations from numerous Sanskrit texts. It was written at Bheladuar in Cooch-Behar during the later years of Madhav Deva's life. It is ethical in its teachings and belongs to the same class of literature as the Gita and the Upanishads in Sanskrit. Its profundity of thought, unity of outlook and music of expression make it the most precious religious text in our literature. In whatever he wrote Madhav Deva put a strong infusion of his personality; in his writings we find the ideal devotee. His Namghosa is the revelation of a great soul.

Bhakti Ratnavali is, completed in twelve chapters in verse and in each chapter a different aspect of the Bhakti cult has been philosophically elaborated.

But what brought him his lasting fame and made him so outstanding a figure in the Vaisnavite movement was his devotional songs called Bargits. His devout nature found expression in his hymns. In their sweetness of expression, their unostentatious display of lofty spiritual ideas, lies their supreme appeal to all classes of men.

The three topics that form the main theme of Madhav Deva's Bargits are this enviable human life as affording fullest scope for spiritual realisation, its uncertain nature and the fitful progress through this illusive world, where Hari Bhakti alone is the guiding star.
The Bargits have depicted the disportive childhood of Krishna, the cowherd. The conception of Shri Krishna as a child in his manifold solicitations of caresses from his mother is a distinctive feature of Assam Vaisnavism and it has been very poetically depicted in the devotional songs and dramas of Madhav. Each of Madhav Deva’s Bargits is a miniature picture of Krishna’s child life. Their sweet language and harmonious melody, and Madhav Deva’s beautifully musical voice all conspired to make them pre-eminently attractive in the Vaisnavite movement during his lifetime. Written in the so-called Brajabuli dialect they are most valued songs even now.

Ram Saraswati was born in the Barpeta Subdivision of the Kamrup District about the beginning of the sixteenth century. His father, Bhimsen Churamoni, was a pious Brahman Pandit. Sankar Deva introduced Ram Saraswati to King Naranarayan of Cooch-Behar, who at Sankar Deva’s request ordered him to make a translation of the Sanskrit Mahabharata. The king himself supplied him with the original texts. An idea of the voluminous nature of the task entrusted to him can be gathered from the fact that the original manuscripts alone made a cart-load when taken to Ram Saraswati’s place.

Many of the contemporary poets offered him services which he gladly accepted. Sometimes a section had to be divided among two, three or even more persons.

Begun in the reign of King Naranarayan, the work could be completed only in the days of King Dharma Narayan, grandson of Chilarai (Sukladhaj).
The Assamese version of the *Mahabharata* is not a literal translation of the original. Besides lengthy elaboration of the original episodes and descriptions, which was a distinctive characteristic with early translators, Ram Saraswati freely introduced incidents and stories which are not in the original text. Fullest freedom in the delineation of the episodes and the unhindered introduction of adventurous mythical accounts are particularly made in the compilation of the *Bana Parva*. The Assamese version of the *Bana Parva* with its many *upa-parvas* or *svargas* is completed in about 25,000 couplets. In the *Manichandraghosa Parva*, a *svarga* of the *Bana Parva*, Ram Saraswati avows that he has included some episodes from *Yamala Samhita*, *Siva Rahasya* and *Bamana Puran*. The Assamese version of the *Mahabharata* gave a tremendous impetus to the growth and the popularity of Assamese literature. It opened wide the doors of the vast treasure-house of tales, romances and mythological stories.

The other works of Ram Saraswati are *Kulachalbadha*, *Bagasurbadha*, *Khatasurbadha*, all romances in rhymed couplets. They are founded on episodes from the *Mahabharata*. He also made a rendering of Jayadev's *Gita Govinda* at the request of King Naranarayan. Based on an episode of the *Mahabharata* his *Asvakarna Yudha* is a romance in verse.

Two other works of Ram Saraswati which are worthy of notice are *Bhimchārit* and *Vyadhacharit*. *Bhimcharit* is of special interest. Nowhere else possibly in our literature has the popular figure of Bhim been more picturesquely drawn—a big, tall, lumbering person carrying his usual weapon the club, exhibiting prowess and a
keen, gluttonous appetite. In this, book in which Bhim is pictured as having been employed by Siva to tend his bull, Siva's life is presented in a humorous manner. Siva is portrayed as an ordinary cultivator who is addicted to *ganja*. To this pleasant picture here drawn, the book owes its enormous popularity. Beyond this, however, the book has another merit; it paints simply and clearly the peasant life and domestic scenes of old Assamese society. For its immense exaggerations in character-painting and hyperbolic narration, _Bhim-charit_ may be styled a burlesque in Assamese.

Ananta Kandali was a Brahman of Hajo in the Kamrup District. His real name is Haricharan; Ananta Kandali is his scholastic title. But he was more popularly known by his title. A contemporary of Sankar Deva at the court of Naranarayan, he accepted Sankar Deva as his _Guru_ and professed his Vaisnavite creed. As a favour Sankar Deva allowed him to complete the translation of the unfinished half of the tenth _Skandha_ of the _Bhagavata Puran_.

Other poetical works of Ananta Kandali are _Mahiravan-badha_, _Harihar yuddha_, _Vrittasur-badha_, _Bharat-savitri_, _Jiva-stuti_ and _Kumarharan-kavya_. _Kumarharan_ in popularity stands on a level with Sankar Deva's _Rukminiharan-Kavya_. In _Kumarharan_, the author narrates in a beautiful manner the romantic episode of Usha and Aniruddha. He also rendered in excellent verse the fourth, fifth, sixth and ninth Books of the _Bhagavata Puran_.

Sarbabhauma Bhattacharyya (Sarbabhauma) was another great writer of the period. He himself tells us that he resided at Pragyyotishpur where he was well
known as a devout Sakta. He entered into a long discussion with Sankar Deva about the merits of the two forms of Vaisnava and Sakta worship and getting defeated in dispute he left for Benares to study the shastras under a teacher named Bisweswar Chakravarty. After five years of close study, he became, as he tells us, well-versed in shastras. At Benares, he came across a part of the Padmapurana, which he afterwards rendered into Assamese verse under the title of Svarga Khandha Rahasya. At Benares he made up his mind to become a worshipper of Hari and on his return he at once turned to Sankar Deva and became one of his disciples. Afterwards he wrote a life of his Guru Sankar Deva. Part translations of the Bhagavata Purana and Bhabisyat Purana are two other productions of Sarbabhauma Bhattacharyya.

Sarbabhauma Bhattacharyya's wife also was a very learned scholar and she is said to have earned a warm encomium from Naranarayan on defeating at his court the famous Bengali scholar of the time, Raghunandanan Bhattacharyya, in a discourse connected with the different ways of life advocated in the Veda and the Smritis.

Sridhar Kandali (Sridhar), a contemporary and a favourite disciple of Sankar Deva, also deserves mention. As a mark of special favour Sankar Deva allowed him to contribute a chapter, Ghunusa Yatra, to his famous Kirtan Ghosa. But his prime claim to distinction lies in a short poem called Kankhowa (Ear-eater), describing a curious nursery incident in Krishna's child life. The Child Krishna was one day crying. Mother Jasoda tried to terrify him into silence by singing of the advent
of a fearful demon called *Kankhowa*. Krishna at once took fright at the mention of this unknown demon and quickly ran to his mother's arms imploring her to tell him what this curious demon looked like; for as he recalled he had not come across any such demon in all his numerous former incarnations. Jasoda lost her wits and had to confess that she was lying. Even to this day, crying children are hushed into silence by the mention of this fictitious demon who is supposed to bite off the ears of crying children.

The story has become so popular and well-known that it is heard in every Assamese nursery at dusk.

Dvija Kalapchandra:—Dvija Kalapchandra was the son of Ram Saraswati. He translated a portion of the Fourth Book of the *Bhagavata Puran*. But his outstanding contribution is *Radhacharit*. The book is not so important for its language and style as for its theme. The amorous Radha-Krishna romance is not to be found in the writings of the Assamese Vaisnavite poets. Kalapchandra in his *Radhacharit* does not depict the popular Radha-Krishna romance with all its sensuous embellishments. The author illustrates the devotional aspect of Radha's character; her dedication—body, soul and heart—to Krishna; her long suffering and her undying passion for Krishna are described by the author with considerable ability. In short, *Radhacharit* relates the triumph of the selfless devotion of an ideal devotee of Krishna.

The episode of the book is this:—Rukmini, proud of her devotion to Krishna, inquired of him the name of his best devotee. Krishna mentioned the names of many devotees and last of all stated that none could
compare with the gopis of Vrindavan and that among them Radha was the best. This aroused a feeling of jealousy in Rukmini. She prayed to Krishna that she might have a glimpse of Radha and Uddhava was sent for the purpose. Uddhava found Radha incessantly chanting the name of Krishna and quite careless of the outer world. He intimated his object and also the desire of Krishna that Radha should come in her former garb in all her youthful beauty and glamour. Radha then turned into an exquisitely handsome damsel, before whose lustre the beauty of Rukmini and of other consorts of Krishna appeared quite pale.

"Just as a lamp or the moon appears dim before the sun, so the wives of Sri Krishna became pale and insignificant before the indescribable brilliance of Radha, like a lotus in the night."

Then Rukmini and others made many rich presents to Radha. She refused them and told them that her only desire was that she might have the privilege of worshipping Krishna in all her lives.

The hour of departure arrived. Radha was loath to leave. Sri Krishna consoled her with the following words:— "I am pervading the whole universe. I am the middle and I am the end. Know all these objects as my forms. I am in the world and the world is in me. Know thou, Radha, that none can separate thee from me."

Ananta Ata:—Ananta Ata wrote two books, Premalata and Ramayana, known as Ramakirtan. The chief popularity of Ramakirtan lies in the beauty of its narration and the music of the verses.
Other poets of eminence are Gopaldeva, author of *Devi Bhagavat* and *Sankhasur-badha*; Haridas, author of *Sudhana-badh*; Gopinath Pathak, author of the *Drona* and *Puspa Parvas* of the *Mahabharata*; Aniruddha Kayastha, author of the *Gita* and the fifth Book of the *Bhagavata Puran*; Gopal Misra Kaviratna, author of *Ghosa-ratna*; Gopal Dvija, author of the Assamese version of the *Harivamsa*; and Govinda Misra, author of the metrical version of the *Gita*. This brings us to the close of the Vaishnavite period.

**Prose Writers:**—Most of the literary works of the period are in verse. Prose first came to be employed in Sankar Deva’s dramas. But the author who gave a distinct shape to early Assamese prose style is Bhattadeva. He was born in Bheragaon in Barpeta (Kamrup) about the year 1558 A.D. and died in 1638. Bhattadeva was a renowned Sanskrit scholar of his age. He translated the whole of the *Bhagavata Puran* and the *Gita* into Assamese prose. He may be aptly called the Father of Assamese Prose.

Bhattadeva’s prose is of great importance as a first and successful attempt to express subtle scholastic arguments in Assamese prose; his vocabulary is highly Sanskritic. But his work is remarkable as an attempt to make religious and philosophical thoughts accessible to the people in prose.

The prose style which Bhattadeva evolved came to be looked upon as a kind of devotional dialect (*bhakatiya bhasa*) and even now the religious heads of monasteries employ this style in ceremonial and formal addresses to their disciples.
Many of the prose-works of this period still in manuscript are Raghunath’s *Katha Ramayana* (the *Ramayana* in prose), Bhagavat Bhattacharyya’s *Katha-sutra*, Krishnananda Dvija’s *Sattata Tantra* and Parashurama’s *Katha-ghosa*. All these works are modelled on the style of Bhattadeva’s prose works.

**General Characteristics of Vaisnavite Literature**

The bulk of the literature of the period is made up of translations and it is religious in theme. It consists mostly of prayers, sermons, paraphrases, and adaptations from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata Puran*. Almost all the masterpieces of Sanskrit *Pauranic* and epic literature were rendered and made accessible to the Assamese people by the Vaisnavite poets. The zeal for translations was so great that if an author left unfinished the translation of a portion of a Sanskrit text or if a translated portion got lost, a subsequent author was always found to complete the unfinished or the lost portion.

The intensive and wide-spread stimulus given to the translation work was due to the realisation of the fact that knowledge must be rescued from the sibylline leaves of Sanskrit books and delivered to the people in the popular, vernacular garb.⁵

Madhav Kandali confesses in his *Ramayana* that though he could easily compose verses in Sanskrit, he composed in Assamese for the benefit of the people at large.

The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavata Puran* are the main texts from which the poets drew their

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⁵ *Assamese Literature, Ancient and Modern.* By Prof. S. K. Bhuyan. (The Government Press, Shillong)
materials. Some poets chose the poetic episodes from these texts and turned them into beautiful kavyas. These episodes from the epics and the puranas, under the name of kavyas, became very popular. The fortunes and the exploits of a particular hero under the title of Charitra, Vijaya or Vadha became common subject-matter for poetry. The Vadha kavyas are something like the romances of chivalry and as such they describe supernatural exploits and marvellous deeds of daityas and danavas, and their final encounter with some incarnation of Vishnu. In short, the Vadha kavyas are allegorical accounts of clashes between righteousness and vice. Other types of kavyas describe the elopement and marriage of a heroine under the designations of Parinaya and Haran. The Haran kavyas symbolically illustrate the selfless devotion of the devotee, who pines for the Lord as a bridegroom.

The outlook of the literature of this period is preponderantly religious, and many of the literary productions spring directly from the bhakti movement in one or other of its aspects. Bhakti in its manifold forms swayed the life of the masses and became the mainstay of the popular literature. "The new bhakti was an emotion which impelled the bhakta, the devotee, to worship the Lord, to seek him everywhere, to yearn for him, to quarrel with him, to remove the distance which reverence implies, in short, to love him passionately as one would a human lover." Krishna was the first to become the centre of this Bhakti cult. He fired the imagination of almost every Indian poet since the Bhagavata Puran was composed. The Vaisnavite poets of

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*Gujarat and Its Literature.* By K. M. Munshi.
Assam composed popular religious songs, namely, the Bargits\(^7\) all bearing upon the life and the doings of Lord Krishna, and inculcating the purity of bhakti. The poets of this period rendered into music, poetry and drama the entire life story of Krishna.

But unlike the main schools of Northern Vaisnavite thought, Assamese Vaisnavite poets preached the dasya and the batsalya relations between Krishna and his devotees. According to Sankar Deva the devotee must conceive of God as a servant does of his master. Sankar Deva had foreseen that the madhura conception of devotion, however exalted as a personal ideal, could never be fully worked out in this mundane world as a social ideal. Because of its very sublime and transcendent nature it might be carried in actual application to the danger zone of ultra-realism, when it would fall into less enlightened minds. All writers of Sankar Deva's school style themselves "servants unto the Lord" in the closing sections of their books. The note of extreme humility and self-surrender makes itself felt in perfect clarity all through their writings.\(^8\)

The batsalya relationship has been greatly emphasised in the writings of Madhav Deva through his Bargits and natakas. Madhav Deva throws a mystical glamour over the story of the Child Krishna and represents him as an eternal child and a sportive incarnation. Krishna may be won over by motherly love and affection as manifested by Jasoda. His pranks and play amused the gopis as well as the cowherds. Both

\(^7\) Bargits are similar to the Prabhatiyas of Gujarat.

\(^8\) Life of Sankar Deva. By B. Kakati. (G. A. Natesan and Co., Madras.)
have approached him not by penance and severe austerities but by simple love and sincere affection.

Referring to the nature and the characteristics of the Assamese Vaisnavite literature, Dr. S. K. Bhuyan rightly remarks,

The Vaisnava literature of Assam is idealistic in tone. The characters and surroundings are remote from the immediate experiences of the Assamese, and frequently they transcend the limits of possibility. But the ethical principles which they enunciate, illustrate and uphold are imbued with universal interest. Their quality is, therefore, of a superior order, inasmuch as high ideals are couched in a popular garb, divested of their metaphysical and esoteric intricacies, like Plato explaining the abstruse philosophy of Socrates in the popular exposition of his *Dialogues*. The Assamese translations of the Sanskrit classics and scriptures were of an interpretative character. The translator took up the essence of the original Sanskrit passage and explained it in pure literary Assamese, simplifying those phrases and expressions the ideas of which did not come within the ken of the ordinary Assamese reader. The Assamese translators developed a very simple process of translating long strings of Sanskrit epithets and compounds, by which even the most uncouth ideas could be rendered in simple Assamese.9

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9 Assamese Literature, Ancient and Modern: By Prof. S. K. Bhuyan.
Chapter V

THE POST-VAISNAVITE PERIOD

ASSAMESE LITERATURE UNDER AHOM PATRONAGE
(c. 1650–1834)

In the succeeding century, the outlook was changed and Assamese literature began to be composed on a variety of subjects. The Ahoms, who had come in the thirteenth century from the north-east had since consolidated their position with a fortified capital at Rangpur in the modern District of Sibsagar and adopted the Assamese language as a vehicle for court circulars and for diplomatic correspondence with neighbouring kings. In the Ahom Court Assamese literature began to be encouraged and the kings began to court popularity.

Patronised by the kings, the writers composed stories and romances laying greater emphasis upon the secular side of the episodes. Books on astrology, mathematics, veterinary science, rituals, dancing and music were produced.

The Hindu systems of medicine were professionally studied in Assam by numerous families of distinction, and many of the officers in the court of the Ahom kings were professed physicians. Some knowledge of medicine constituted one of the
chief accomplishments of a well-bred Assamese gentleman. The learned physicians translated into plain Assamese almost all the principal Sanskrit works of medicine, as they were known in Assam. The Sanskrit medical dictionary, the Chikitsarnava, and Nidan have been rendered into Assamese. The Sanskrit text-books of medicine were often translated into Assamese for the use of beginners as a preparatory course for entering into the study of the original works.

The Ahom kings supported several poets and court poetry sprang up in full bloom. Loyalty to the king became a flaming passion with the poets of the new age. It became the fashion for every poet to introduce in his works panegyric verse in praise of the reigning king. Vamsavalis or chronicles of royal families were produced in kavya style.

Buranji or The Ahom Chronicle:—The unique contribution of the Ahoms to the Assamese literature is the historical compositions known as Buranjis. The Ahoms brought with them the tradition of writing chronicles or of keeping written records of the chief events during the king's reign. At first these works were recorded in their own tribal language, a derivative of the Tibeto-Burman group, by their own caste men known as Deodhais and Bailungs. Gradually it was found that a multitude of practical interests arising from the new political consciousness demanded expression not in their own alien tribal tongue but in the language of the people over whom they ruled.

The chroniclers drew their materials from occurrences in life and recorded only facts and thus they had to break away from the style of the religious writers. The chronicles are written in prose and a homely practical prose style came into being.
The earliest Buranji written in Assamese hitherto discovered is Purani Asam Buranji, the history of the Ahom kings from Sukapha to Godadhar Singha written in prose in the early part of the seventeenth century.

Full of colloquialisms, the writing might almost be taken for what in fact it purports to be, conversations put down in writing, but the style is homely, idiomatic and racy.

During the latter half of the seventeenth and the succeeding centuries, many Buranjis were written in prose. Some of these have been published under the auspices of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, and the Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, Gauhati. The following is a list of the earliest Buranjis written in prose:—Deodhai Asam Buranji (written after 1648 A.D.), Bagoria Buranji (written c. 1662–1679), Padsha Buranji (c. 1650–1780); Sarganarayan Devar Akhyan (c. 1663–1669), Asam Buranji (c. 1681), Kamrupa Buranji (c. 1700), Kachari Buranji (c. 1706), Jayantia Buranji (c. 1742), Tungkhungia Buranji (c. 1804). Chronicles were also written in verse.

Among the metrical chronicles, mention may be made of Kali Bharat and Belimarar Buranjis. The last Ahom Prince, Kameswar Singha, in 1806 commissioned a writer named Dutiram Hazarika to compile a history of Assam and as a result Dutiram compiled the Kali Bharat Buranji, the epic of the Kali Age, a metrical chronicle dealing with the Ahom kings of the Tungkhungia line. Kali Bharat may be regarded as a chronicle of the Ahom rule in Assam from 1679 to 1854, the year of the transfer of the country to the British Crown.
Biseswar Vaidyadhipa was the author of the metrical chronicle named *Belimarar Buranji* or the History of Sunset. Biseswar wrote the book at the command of King Purandar Singha, who ruled as a feudatory Prince under British protection from 1832 to 1838. The chronicle deals with the declining phase of the Ahom domination.

**Charit Puthis or Biographies:** Side by side with these Buranjis, there grew up a distinct type of literature both in prose and in verse called the Charit Puthis or biographies of religious leaders. *Guru Charit* (Life of Sankar Deva) is the earliest biography in prose, written after Sankar Deva’s death, probably in the latter half of the seventeenth century. The prose is simple. The writer had no literary ambition; it was only his admiration for the Saint that inspired him to compile the work. He gives an account of the doings of this great man and his writing is full of information about contemporary life.

The most celebrated of the contemporary biographers is Daitari Thakur. His book is in verse and is very popular.

Another biographer, possibly of an earlier period, is Ram Charan Thakur. From what he has described in his *Guru Charit* it appears that he was a contemporary of Sankar Deva. Bhusan Dwija and Anirudha are two other biographers of Sankar Deva. Ramraian is another of the school. He recorded the life of his master Damodar Deva in his *Guru Lila*. Another of Damodar Deva’s biographers is Nila Kanta who wrote *Damodar Charit*, but unlike most of the authors of the time he gives us no information about himself.
Scientific Treatises:—Many important scientific and political treatises were compiled during this period. A versified treatise on sex was compiled by a poet named Kabisekhar Bhattacharyya for the entertainment and instruction of Yuvaraj Chau Singha Gohain, son of King Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769) and of the Yuvaraj’s consort, Princess Pramoda Sundari Aideo. The Svapna-dhyaya, a book on dreams and their interpretation, belongs to this period.

Subhankara Kavi compiled a book on dancing, namely Hasta Muktavali. It contains an elaborate process of gestures of hands for the expression of thoughts and ideas.

The most remarkable book of this period is Hasti Vidyanava, a scientific and illustrated treatise on elephants, based on the Sanskrit work Matanga Lila. Hasti Vidyanava was written in 1734 by Sukumar Barkath under the orders of King Siva Singha and his consort Queen Madambica. About the year 1806 Suryya Khari Daivagya compiled a book called Aswanidan concerning the diseases of horses, their treatment and prevention.

Amongst astronomical works Kaviraj Chakravarty’s Bhaswati is well known. It begins with the calculation of the various positions of the sun, the moon and the stars, and ends with the description of lunar and solar eclipses.

The earliest versified treatise on arithmetic, land-surveying and book-keeping is Bakul Kayastha’s Kitabat Monjari, written about 1434. Another arithmetical treatise known as Lilavati Katha, based on the
Sanskrit mathematical work of Lilavati, was prepared by Kaviraj Dwija, during this period.

Other Kavyas:—Romance writing with the elements of love and gaiety is also brought into our literature. Ram Dwija’s Mrigavati Charit depicts a love story. It is a versified fairy tale that narrates in an interesting manner how a prince happened to marry a fairy. The hero of the tale had to pass through difficult enterprises in quest of his sweetheart Mrigavati. The prince wins his beloved after a series of struggles with adversaries.

During the reign of the Ahom King Rudra Singha (1695-1714), the court poet Kaviraj Chakravartee translated the Sanskrit work Gita-Govinda and his book was illustrated under the orders of the King. Sakuntala Kavya is another work of this poet.

Dwija Goswami’s Kavya Sastra is a book in verse containing many fablés from the Hitopodesha and some moral observations in rhymed couplets. Another Assamese version of the Hitopodesha was executed by Raima Misra, the author of Putala Charittra, at the instance of Bhadra Sen Gohain Phukan, an Ahom general.

Kaviraj Misra is another story-teller, who flourished about 1616. He was a vagrant Minstrel, going about reciting his verses about Sial Gosain (The Fox-Saint) and thereby obtaining food and raiment.

The story centres round a legendary figure Sial Gosain by name, who was thrown away under a Ketaki plant soon after his birth through the intrigues of his stepmother, Kundalata. Chandotara, his mother, was blind-

10 The story of the book bears some resemblance to the sixteenth-century Hindi Kavya Mrigavati.
folded at the time of her delivery. The baby was picked up by a newly littered vixen who suckled him and brought him up among her own young ones. The boy grew up among the young cubs and imitated their habits of howling at night and of retreating to their lair at the approach of men.

On his return from pilgrimage, Dharmadeva his father, who traced his origin to the twelve famous Bhuyans, was informed by his wife Kundalata that Chandotara had borne no child, and the dais (midwife), already heavily bribed by Kundalata having confirmed the story, he believed it. But happily one day on his way to the bathing ghat, he happened to notice a child retreating into a den at sight of him. This struck him as curious and apprehending foul play somewhere, he vigorously questioned the dais on his return and elicited the truth that Chandotara had been delivered of a male child. Next day he had the child, the mother fox and the young cubs all dug out of the hole and taken to his house. The boy when he grew up was known as Sial Gosain.

Ananta Acharya, the court poet of King Siva Singha, is the author of Ananta Lahari. The book begins with a hymn to the Goddess Durga, who has been described as the primordial cause of this universe. Then it goes on to describe how, in her infinite mercy, she assumes form to please her devotees and then it dwells on the beauties of her form, gives descriptions of Kailash and of Siva. There are devotional hymns to the Goddess and the poem closes with a eulogy of the royal consort, Queen Phuleswari.
Ruchinath is the author of *Chandi*. There is another Assamese version of the *Chandi* by Madhusudan Misra.

Ramananda Dvija wrote his *Mahamoha Kavya* in 1844. It is an allegorical poem, wherein the poet gives an account of the struggle that is perpetually going on in one's heart between virtue and vice.

Ghanasyam wrote his *Kalki Purana* in verse. The book begins with a description of the people of the *Kali Age* and then it enumerates their irreligious activities.

Suryakhari Daivajnya, author of the *Asvanidan*, compiled the famous *Daranga Raj Vamsavali*, chronicle of the Darrang Kings, in 1806. Among his other contributions to Assamese literature mention may be made of *Kurmabalibadha* and *Khatasur badha*, both adaptations from the *Mahabharata*.
THE MODERN PERIOD
Chapter VI

THE AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSION

The Ahoms ruled in Assam from the beginning of the thirteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century (1826). But the closing decades of the Ahom rule were fateful years in the history of Assam. The whole country was torn with internal strife. In the struggle for ascendancy between the two forms of Hindu worship, the Vaishnavite and the Sakta, that had been going on since the fifteenth century, the latter had so far succeeded as to become the court religion of the Ahom Kings, who extended patronage to its adherents on a large scale. This did not matter so much as long as the Kings themselves did not exhibit any partisan spirit and freedom of faith was not interfered with. But during the last days of King Rajeswar Singha's reign, his wife, who exercised immense power, persecuted a section of the Vaishnavas for their religious professions. They rose up in revolt and the revolution gathered such force that it shook his administration to its very foundation. His successor, Laxmi Singha, was not able to improve the situation. The administrative machinery of the state, already none too strong, was showing signs of disintegration.
Due to the Vaisnavite revolt and other political feuds the administration finally broke down during Chandra Kanta Singha's reign, and in 1817, on the invitation of Badan Barphukan, an Ahom General, the Burmese invaded Assam and plundered the country. They revisited it the following year and, encouraged by the wealth of the country, they decided finally to conquer it and took possession of Assam in 1820. In 1826, the Burmese came into conflict with the British in Cachar and, being defeated, they gave over Assam to the East India Company under the Treaty of Yandabu.

The English were strangers to the land and had no knowledge of the native tongue. So natives from other Provinces of India began to come over into Assam as interpreters and clerks of the Englishmen to carry on the newly established administration. Under the influence of these men, recruited mostly from Bengal, the English officers in charge made Bengali the language of the court and a medium of instruction in schools.

It was in 1836 that Assamese was thrown out of the law courts and schools and Bengali was installed in its place. The same year that Assamese thus lost its official position two remarkable members of the American Baptist Mission, the Rev. N. Brown and O. T. Cotter, with their families, first set foot on Assamese soil. Among other things a printing-machine was part of their missionary equipment.

Realising at once that to instil the love of Christ in the heart of the people they must approach them through the medium of their mother tongue, the missionaries immediately set about learning it and within three months of their arrival in Assam, they produced
the first Assamese primer for use in the schools which they had established.

Even before their arrival, the English missionaries had started work in this direction from Serampore near Calcutta, and in collaboration with an Assamese Pandit, Atmaram Sarma of Kaliabar (Nowgong District) they had translated the whole Bible into Assamese and published it from Serampore in 1813. This was the first Assamese book in print.

The study of our language by foreigners had advanced so far that W. Robinson published an Assamese grammar from Serampore in 1840, the first book of its kind in Assamese. In the following year, he published a short sketch in English of the history of Assam.

In 1846 the American missionaries published a monthly magazine Orunadai in Assamese from Sibsagar. Its pages were filled with articles on various subjects, literature, history, science, etc., and they contained light touches of wit and humour. Many of the illustrations were adapted from the Illustrated London News; the blocks were locally produced. In 1884 the Rev. N. Brown published his Grammatical Notice of the Assamese Language. The Rev. Mr. Bronson in 1868 published his Assamese English Dictionary, which had for its basis a Bengali-Assamese dictionary in manuscript by Jaduram Borua, or possibly the manuscript of Ruchiram Kamrupi prepared in 1810 and now preserved in the India Office Library, London. The dictionary, as the first ambitious attempt towards the compilation of an Assamese lexicon, is extremely valuable. It was the result of twelve years' continuous hard labour and it contains 14,000 words. Each word has an English as
well as Assamese equivalent. This is certainly a great work for a foreigner to accomplish and Bronson is worthy of honour.

In 1845, the Rev. Mr. Brown published Bakul Kayastha's *Kitabat Manjari* in two parts. Of our old manuscript literature, this was the first to come out in print.

Between 1840 and 1850, Brown had succeeded in collecting about forty old Assamese manuscripts.

Through their study of the language and their communion with the common people, these missionaries were convinced that an injustice had been done to the people in depriving them of their natural right to the use of their mother tongue in the schools and in the courts. They advocated the immediate introduction of Assamese into these institutions. One of them wrote at the time:—

We might as well think of creating a love of knowledge in the mind of a stupid English boy by attempting to teach him French before he knew anything of the rudiments of English. To my mind, this feature of the educational policy pursued in Assam is not only absurd, but destructive of the highest motives of education, and must necessarily cripple the advancement of the schools, as well as separate them from the sympathies of the people. (A. H. Danforth, Missionary, Gowahatty. 1853)

The ceaseless and vigorous efforts by these missionaries, supported by the opinion of Anandaram Dhekiâl Phukañ, at last bore fruit. The Government realised their mistake and Assamese was restored to its rightful place in 1882.

The missionaries' work did not stop here; they continued to add to literature in their own way. About the literary production of the Assam Baptist Mission,
Mr. P. H. Moor, a missionary and a linguistic scholar, observed as early as 1907:

The modern literature in Assamese, whether Christian or non-Christian, may be said to be the product of the last sixty years of the nineteenth century. Brown, Bronson, and Nidhi Levi are the trio of names that stand out pre-eminently as the founders of Assamese Christian Literature. 11

The names of William Ward, the poet and the translator of the psalms, and of A. K. Gurney, the translator of the Old Testament into Assamese, are also worthy of mention as builders of modern Assamese literature.

Through the missionaries came to us directly the light of Western civilization and culture. Through the pages of the Orunadai, through their teachings in the schools, we came in direct contact with Western thoughts, learning, science and habits of mind. A new and rich world burst upon our view. This renascence is, however, modern history.

As already stated, the modern period in Assamese literature was ushered in by the establishment of the printing-press by the American Baptist Mission at Sibsagar. The Mission started a school and made arrangements to impart English education. One of the earliest students was Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. Phukan got his education in the Mission school and afterwards prosecuted his studies at the Hindu College, Calcutta (1841-1844). Phukan's learning was very extensive; he was conversant with English and with Sanskrit, and he learned the Persian and the Arabic languages also.

The English education and the language offered to the local people not only the treasures found in English literature but it also gave them new models and fresh sources of inspiration. The impact with Western culture brought into our literature a profound and far-reaching change, and gave it a much needed impetus. The influence was greatly felt in our poetry. In subject-matter, technique and metre, modern Assamese poetry startlingly departed from the traditional path. The lyric became popular; the poet instead of expressing
the religious emotions like the poets of the previous generations, looks into his own heart, and sings of his own joy and sorrow. He tries to visualise the inner feelings and emotions and portrays the fleeting thoughts in all their sincerity, delicacy and subtlety. Varieties of poems, reflective, descriptive, historical, didactic and political began to appear in the language.

Among those who first seized the opportunity and introduced new subjects and metrical forms, Laxminath Bezboroa stands unrivalled. Bezboroa began his literary career as a journalist and has tried many forms in literature, fiction, the satirical essay, the short story, drama and poetry. He is a well-known humorist, finding inspiration from varieties of comic situations in individual and in social life. He is the first and foremost short-story writer in Assamese, and shows acute observation of Assamese life and manners. He is very original and artistic in depicting situations and giving a real Assamese touch. He has acquired fame as a pungent and outspoken critic. He handles Assamese prose with marvelous skill.

Many of Bezboroa's poems contain elements of national interest. He has evinced keen patriotism by composing stirring poems on the historic greatness and the lost glory of Assam. His song *Mor-des* (My Country) has now been recognised as a national anthem in Assam.

Raghunath Chowdhury's poems also reveal the new spirit. Many of his compositions have their roots in a love of the open. Nature, which up till now had served only as a decorative background, has been chosen as a subject of poetry for its own sake. Raghunath loves
the birds and the brooks and the flowers that blossom on the hills. He combines in himself the eye of a naturalist with the heart of a poet. Other prominent poets of the older group are Chandrakumar Agarwalla, Hem Chandra Goswami, Durgeswar Sarma, Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury, Kamala Kanta Bhattacharyya, Ratnakanta Barkakati, Nilmani Phukan and Jatindranath Duara. Kamala Kanta Bhattacharyya and Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury have composed many stirring political poems; pride and delight in their country’s past have become to them a religious faith. Besides his lyrical poems, Jatindranath Duara rendered the immortal Rubaiyat of Omar into Assamese verse. Duara is the most sensitive poet of the time with something like a feminine temperament. A deep touch of melancholy and a brooding sadness are the characteristics of his poems.

Amongst the younger group Dimbeswar Neog, Binanda Chandra Barua, Sailadhar Rajkhowa, Atulchandra Hazarika and Devakanta Barua, have shown great freedom and variety of form; their verses are full of vitality and of vivid imagination.

Chandradhara Barua and Dandinath Kalita are prominent satirical poets. Their satires are mainly social in theme. Bholanath Das and Hiteswar Barbarua have made splendid use of blank verse in their Kavyas.

Assamese dramas of the day can be grouped into two classes: original and translations. Translations and adaptations are either from Sanskrit or from English. The plots of the dramas are mainly chosen from the Puranas and the folk-tales. Dramas of real life and portraying social evils are also popular. One
of these is Hemachandra Barua's *Kaniyar Kirtan* (The Gospel of the Opium-Eater) on the evils of opium-eating. It is composed with view to expressing the mischievous effects of opium-eating which has long been preying upon the very vitals of Assam. *Kaniyar Kirtan* was first published in 1861 and it is frankly a propaganda play written with a definite purpose.

Gunabhiram Barua's *Ram Navami Natak* also deserves mention as a problem play. In it the author advocated the cause of widow remarriage. Gunabhiram Barua rendered considerable service to the development of Assamese prose style also through his numerous contributions to the monthly journals, the *Asam Bandha* (1885), of which he was the founder-editor, and the *Bijuli* (1890).

In his two farces, *Tini Ghaini* (Three Wives) and *Asikshita Ghaini* (Illiterate Wife), Benudhar Rajkhowa has ridiculed and laughed over the ignorance and the conservatism of our housewives. In these plays, he has introduced many comic and farcical situations from the daily life of our illiterate women. *Kuri Satikar Sabhyata* (Twentieth Century Civilization) is another important farce of Benudhar Rajkhowa, wherein the author satirises the Western mode of life adopted by so-called educated young men of Assam.

Padmanath Gohain Barua published his *Gaoburah* (The Village Headman) wherein he describes the cruelties and tortures which the village headman had to undergo to please his Civilian Magistrate.

Padmanath, Laxminath and Durgaprasad Barua have composed a number of farces: *Teton Tamuli, Pacani, Nomal, Lilikai, Mahari*.
For serious dramas, the authors turned to Shakespeare and some of the latter’s plays such as *Comedy of Errors*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, have been beautifully rendered into Assamese to suit the modern Assamese stage. But the translations do not seem to thrive well on the local stage, and so modern writers are exploring the Ahom *Buranjis* for plots.

Laxminath and Padmanath each composed as many as ten historical plays whose plots were borrowed from the *Buranjis*. They are expressions of the achievements and aspirations of the Assamese people.

In a previous chapter (Chapter III) it has been stated that *Pauranic* stories as well as romances were current in our old literature. Side by side with these *akhyanas*, folk-tales also grew up. They are of extraordinary diversity and parallel Grimm’s fairy tales.

The most remarkable collections are those of Laxminath Bezboroa under the titles *Buri Air Sadhu Katha* (Grandmother’s Tales) and *Kakadeuta aru Nati Lora* (Grandfather’s Tales).

Regular novels appeared in our literature in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the credit of first authorship goes to Hemachandra Barua. His novel *Bahire rong-song bhitare-koa-bhaturi* (All That Glitters Is Not Gold) is written in a satirical vein. Though himself a high-class Brahman, Hemachandra satirises Hindu orthodoxy with its hypocrisies and its hide-bound conventions. He mercilessly exposes the immoral practices of Gobardhan Satradhikar, a Hindu pontiff, who professes to be religious, but secretly indulges in all sorts of immoral liaisons, and even goes so far as to seduce the wife of a disciple, a man of low caste.
Rajanikanta Bardaloi occupies a prominent place in modern Assamese fiction. His first romantic novel, *Miri-Jiyari*, came out in 1895 and in the succeeding decades he has published several novels, all works of great brilliancy. He is absorbed in the history of his land, and he has produced historical novels like *Manomati, Rangili, Rahdai Ligiri, Dandua-droha, Tamreswari Mandir* and *Nirmal-bhakat*. The interest of Rajanikanta's novels centres round dialogues rather than in descriptions and action. Daivya Chandra Talukdar has also enriched our literature with several novels.

The output of such fiction in Assamese, however, is not great and its place has now been taken by short stories. The growth of the short story is a distinguished phenomenon as in all other modern Indian literatures. It begins with the adaptation and the translation of English, Russian and French stories. As we have said, Laxminath is the pioneer in this field and he has popularised this form with a masterly blending of pathos and humour. He has been followed by Saratchandra Goswami, Nakul Chandra Bhuyan, Laxminath Phukan and many others with varying success. In recent years, Mahichandra Bora has published a few short stories; and he is now recognised as a good humorist. In his stories, Mahichandra mirrors Assamese daily life with all its foibles and incongruities and presents it in a homely, racy and colloquial style.

The Freudian theory has lately shaken the old literary convention which excluded the discussion of sex. Today sex has become predominant in short stories published in the Assamese periodicals. Laxmidhar Sharma, Beena Barua, Rama Das and Troilokya Nath Goswami
are the writers who first broke away from the convention. Modern journalism has greatly contributed towards the development of the short story. The popular monthly magazine Awahin and the fortnightly Jayanti have given the greatest impetus to this kind of literary production, and no less than fifty short stories a month are appearing in Assamese journals and periodicals.

In essays and in criticism, Assamese has not made much progress. Pandit Hema Chandra Goswami, Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan and Benudhar Sharma have enriched Assamese prose literature with well-written and critical historical dissertations. Satyanath Bora's essays, written in an aphoristic style and now embodied in his two books Sarathi and Cintakati, deserve special mention. In the reviews of a few Assamese works Dr. Banikanta Kakati presents in original and concise form all that is significant in the old and contemporary Assamese literature.

Biographies of prominent persons, both Indian and European, are also available in Assamese. We have biographies of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Booker T. Washington, Kemal Pasha, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Hitler, Mussolini, Subhaschandra Bose and many others. Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography has also been translated into Assamese. Well written and up-to-date biographies of Assamese saints, scholars, patriots and literary men are also available.

Women have also been contributing towards the development of Assamese literature. Padmavati Phukanani was the earliest woman-writer of fiction. Jamuneswari Khatoniar's poems are characterised by simpli-
city; but her life was cut short before she was twenty-four. Nalinibala Devi and Dharmeswari Devi are two mystic poetesses in our literature. Like other mystics, Nalinibala Devi attempts to explore the unity in which all life is one and all life is divine. In everything in the universe, Nalinibala Devi perceives the spark of divine life and she sings of the liberation of the imprisoned soul. It seems that Nalinibala's affinities are more with the sixteenth-century Vaisnavite poets than with those of her own time.

Snehalata Bhattacharyya and Chandraprabha Shaikia have written a number of short stories and novels.

Many publishing agencies and institutions have come into existence during recent years which have greatly contributed to the progress and the diffusion of Assamese literature. The two largest of these institutions are, the Assam Sahitya Sabha, and the Assam Government's Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, with their offices at Jorhat and Gauhati respectively.
ANTHOLOGY

i—Dakar Vachans: Aphorisms of Dak
ii—Folk-Songs
iii—Poems
iv—Prose
DAKAR VACHANS: APHORISMS OF DAK

Even a good bullock becomes spoilt if it is kept in another man's house; a good crop is spoilt by allowing a by-way over it.

Purchase bullocks with a long tail. It is not bent in harrowing land.

Do not purchase bullocks from a barber, a washerman or an oilman.

Laxmi says, "I live in that house the roof of which is covered with the leaves of the gourd."

The household where the son consults the father in all matters is like a well-governed kingdom.

His life is useless who has to gather fuel every day, who has been taken away by creditors, who has to depend for his livelihood upon others and who lives away from home.

Laxmi dwells in that wife whose voice is not heard by neighbours, who spins fine thread and who first weaves and then speaks about it.
An astrologer is of no use if he cannot properly interpret the rising of the stars. What is the use of wealth if it is not enjoyed and given in charity?

There is no hope in the transitory body. Then what hope is there in men, money and garments?

Death does not play with that man who opens charitable stalls to dispense food and drink.

Do not fill the stomach all at once. It will injure your health.

Take Ginger along with your food and after each meal eat myrobalan. This will increase your longevity.
FOLK-SONGS

ON LOVE

God first created the Universe,
With millions of teeming beings.
He himself is Love Incarnate,
And kindles the fire within.
How can we then escape the flame?

Love is indestructible, imperishable
and unchangeable.
Once woven, the magic fabric of love
entwines us more and more.

Stay, stay, let us play!
Come, let us love and sing
Lest life should take wing!

YOUTH'S SONG

My mind turns from the field, O darling!
Of my home I grow weary.
With the buoyant fleece I strive to fly,
For without thee my life is dreary.
Bright is the day with the sunbeam,
The night with the mellow moonbeam;
Brighter still is my darling's face,
Shining in the full moon's gleam.

The stream shines with golden bees;
Flowers dazzle in beauteous colours,
My beloved gleams in glow and grace,
With a sprightly smile on her lips.
The bracelets adorn her delicate wrists;
The Riha entwines her tender waist;
How lovely my darling looks,
With the braids embracing her shoulders fair!

I climb over hills and mountains,
But how hard to climb a creeper!
I tame down furious elephants;
How difficult to woo your love!

I lost my elephant in the river reeds;
My steed vanished in the golden meadow.
I won my maiden dear but to lose her
In the hedgerow's shadow.

I shall take wings,
Fly into the pond you fish,
And shall be a catch in your net.
I shall be your perspiration
rolling down your face;
As a fly I flutter,
and kiss your gay cheeks.

My pitcher is full with wine,
My heart is trodden by love,
Maddened I am with fire of passion;
Even Yama fears to place his icy hand on me.

MAIDEN'S SONG

Boatmen's oars move in the river;
The pestle pounds the grain;
My heart aches in passion,
Since I am born a woman.
When yonder you blow the pipe,
And your fingers pass over the tune,
My eyes I cast for a passing glance,
outside the gate.
My hands quiver, the shuttle drops,
Though I sit beside my loom.

BOAT SONGS

[These songs are translated by Major John Butler, Principal Assistant Agent to the Governor-General, N. E. Frontier of Assam, and are included in his *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam*, published by Smith, Elder and Co., 65 Cornhill, London, in 1855. As an appendix to these songs, Major John Butler writes, "Assam is so intersected by rivers, that the Assamese prefer moving about in their little canoes to travelling by land....the watermen seem greatly to enjoy these boat trips, for they are always singing songs as they paddle along."]

1
"Keep the boithas cheerly going;
Rough and fierce the river's flowing,
Ram bal, Hurry bal, Hurry bal Aee.

"See! the sun is fast declining,
To the moon his charge resigning,
Ram bal, Hurry bal, Hurry bal Aee.

"Pull away, boys, nothing fearing,
Though the rapids we are nearing,
Ram bal, Hurry bal, Hurry bal Aee.
"In the well-plied oar confiding,
Safely o'er them we are gliding,
Ram bal, Hurry bal, Hurry bal Aee.

"Keep her clear that granite block there,
See, she nears the sunken rock there,
Ram bal, Hurry bal, Hurry bal Aee.

"Now the threatened danger's over,
Nothing from her course shall move her,
Ram bal, Hurry bal, Hurry bal Aee.

"Soon we'll make the ghat, my hearties!
Spend the night in jovial parties,
Ram bal, Hurry bal, Hurry bal Aee."

2.
"Shades of night are falling fast—pull away, eh, hey;
All our toil will soon be past—pull away, eh, hey.

"Round Thambya's point we stress—pull away, eh, hey;
See the Puckah Ghat appear—pull away, eh, hey.

"Strike together for your lives—pull away, eh, hey;
Towards our sweethearts and our wives—pull away,
eh, hey.

"First we smoke the fragrant weed—pull away, eh, hey;
Morpheus then will slumbers speed—pull away, eh, hey.

"We must work if we would live—pull away, eh, hey;
Sahib will our baksish give—pull away, eh, hey."
3.

"Come and join this merry round,
Tripping over Cupid's ground,
Ram, Krishna, Hurry.

"Dance and sing we all night long,
This shall be the only song,
Ram, Krishna, Hurry.

"Love and music all the theme,
Till the ruddy morning beam,
Ram, Krishna, Hurry.

"Let the ruddy morn arrive,
It shall but our song revive,
Ram, Krishna, Hurry.

"Aided by the solar ray,
Blithe we'll sing throughout the day,
Ram, Krishna, Hurry.

"Let the shadow upwards tend;
Let the weary sun descend;
Still our song shall find no end!
Ram, Krishna, Hurry."
POEMS

SAVE MY SOUL

O my Lord, prostrate at Thy feet, I lay myself down and with a contrite heart beseech Thee to save my soul. My soul is on the point of perishing through the poison of the venomous serpent of worldly things.

On this earth all is transitory and uncertain, wealth, kinsmen, life, youth, and even the world itself, Children, family, all are uncertain. On what shall I place reliance?

Like a drop of water on the lotus leaf, the mind is unsteady. There is no firmness in it.

There is nothing uncertain in Thy grace and no cause for fear

Under the shadow of Thy feet.

I, Sankara, pray to Thee, O Hrishikesh, the dweller in my heart,

To pilot me across this world of trouble.

Turn my heart to Thee and lead me to Thyself, O Lord of all blessing and all grace.

Vouchsafe unto me the truth, the right path, and Thy kindly guidance.

Thou art my mind, Thou art my destiny, Thou art my spiritual guide.

Saith Sankar, guide me across the vale of sorrows.

SANKAR DEVA
MY MIND

Rest, my mind, rest on the feet of Rama:
Seest Thou not the great end approaching?
My mind, every moment life is shortening,
Just heed, any moment it might flit off.
My mind, the serpent of time is swallowing;
Know' st thou death is creeping on by inches?
My mind, surely this body will drop down,
So break through illusion and resort to Ram.
Oh mind, thou art blind;
Thou seest this vanity of things,
Yet thou seest not.
Why art thou, oh mind, slumbering at ease?
Awake and think of Govinda.
Oh mind, Sankar knows it and says,
Except through Rama, there is no hope.

SANKAR DEVA

THOU PHYSICIAN OF THE SOUL

Thou physician of the soul, thou hast not seen the easiest remedy.
Thou hast done a thousand works, still thou hast not attained to the Lord and comest to the world again and once again.

Thou spendest thy years in meditation and in penance; in pilgrimage, in dwelling in Gaya and Kashi.
Thou knowest the arguments of Yoga but the mind is clouded.
Know thou this: except through supreme devotion, there is no liberation.
Entire virtue remains hidden within the name of Rama; this is the final message of all the Shastras. The name of the Lord devoutly taken is the sole religion of the Kali era.

We know of it but grasp not the essence. Says Sankara, transient is this body; never again wilt thou gain this; cast off all pride of action and think of the feet of Hari with the sole devotion of thy heart.

SANKAR DEVA

SELF-SURRENDER

Thou guidest, Oh Lord, the inner workings of my heart. In Thee I am possessed of a Lord. Remove my delusion by offering me protection under Thy feet; be kind unto me, Oh Lord. Thou art the inner controller of my soul; I have turned a servant unto Thee; know this and be kind. I take up a straw between my teeth and bow unto Thee; show me how I may remain in Thy service. A sinner like me in the three worlds, there is none: Like Thee too there is none, who purgest sins. Know Thou this, O Govinda, and do unto me as Thou thinkest fit. This is my prayer at Thy feet. Thousands of sins day and night I commit, being wrapt in delusion. Know me as Thy slave, Thou container of the world, and forgive.
I know what is righteousness, still I do not cleave to it; From unrighteousness, I do not turn away. I do not, as dwelling in my heart Thou biddest me do. I know not how to worship Thee nor how to propitiate Thee. I know naught of invocation or prayer, Hence, O Lord, I fall a servant at Thy feet. Mayest Thou steer my course!

I fall at Thy feet, O Hari, and offer Thee humble prayers to save my soul. Languishing with the poison of the serpent of the world, my life is threatened every moment. Unstable are men and wealth, unstable are youth and the world; Wife and son are unstable; to whom should I turn as eternal and lasting? My heart is fickle like water on the lotus leaf; It does not settle for a moment; it owns no fear in enjoyment of the world of the senses.

MADHAV DEVA

TRIFLING IS LIFE

Be careful, brother; Till life pass away: The providence of Govinda Soon will grant you grace. Trifling is life, trifling, youth. All is illusory; have no care. Sorrows, throw them off! And fasten thy mind at Hari’s feet.
Desires, cast them off!
Break the trap of illusion,
Saith Madhava, pin thy hope to the feet of the Lord.

MADHAV DEVA

I BOW TO THEE

I bow to Thee, O Madhava, Thou art the lawgiver to him who creates the laws. Thou art the parent of the world. Thou art the mind of the world; Thou art the destiny of the world.

Thou art the supreme soul of the universe, Thou art the one Lord of the universe. Nothing exists in the universe except in Thee.

Thou art the creation; Thou art the cause; static and dynamic, Thou art all, like as gold is unto ornaments of gold. Thou art the plants and the trees, Thou art the birds and the beasts, Thou art the gods and the non-gods.

The ignorant, for want of illumination, think of Thee as different.

Infatuated every moment with Thy illusion, none knoweth Thee for the Soul. Thou residest in the heart of all beings, but people search Thee without, not understanding Thee.

Thou art the only truth; all the rest is false. The wise know this and contemplate Thee in their hearts.
I crave not for enjoyment of beatitude,
I long not for salvation,
only let there be devotion at Thy feet.

MADHAV DEVA

MY BELOVED

"I have yet to see a necklace of pearls
although I have heard of it very often."

I called my beloved and smiled at her.
She smiled back and a necklace of pearls was revealed.

"The beauty of the red coral is yet unseen of me."

I pointed out the coral reefs which are the red lips of my beloved.

"It is said that there are no roses without thorns."
I silently gazed at the cheeks of my sweetheart.

"Where is that wonderful lotus
which blooms both day and night?"
I do not speak, but show my beloved.

"Who is the sculptor that has made
this exquisite statue of love?"

I do not care;
I only know that she adorns my heart.

LAXMINATH BEZBOROA
Whose touch made you blossom,
O my beloved rose?
At whom did you smile, removing the green veil?

How did you illumine that Paradise wherein
_Apsaras _and Bulbuls danced
Like fallen angels maddened
with wine of love!

Did your touch quench the thirst
of the moon pining for reunion
In the dreamy night sweetened with
Hashnahana’s fragrance?

You have soothed the radiant
face of the Princess of _Bosra_,
The beloved of Arabia.

In the wave of your beauty
vibrates the melody of the nightingale.

The day you blossomed in the desert grove,
your odours spread throughout the world.
The sky-kissing Colossus drank your beauty deep.

Were you there the queen of flowers
in the beauteous garden of Babylon?
Did you make the Nandan bowers in the air
And give the poet eternal songs?

You conquered the whole of Hindusthan
by your fragrance, love and glow
And flooded the hearts of Badshah's Begums with eternal flow.

You poured forth streams of love and charmed the world with your beauty.
Were you the heart's delight of Begum Nurjahan of Delhi?

Who was that fair queen whose ruddy cheeks you did adorn?
Who inspired Shahjahan to raise a sepulchre for eternity?

You are the living emblem of love unfettered,
The treasure-house of songs and sweet memories of the past.

In your soft bosom are hidden a thousand sighs of lovelorn lovers.
Would you blossom in my mind's bower, O my dearest flower?

RAGHUNATH CHOWDHURY

THE WEDDING OF BAHAGI

All are beaming with joy, For today is the wedding of Bahagi, the lovely maiden, Nature's child.

When the black bee hummed the news,

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12 Spring is personified in Bahagi, the month of Baisakh.
The trees and creepers
pulsated with life.

_Salmali, Palash, Asok_ and _Mandar_
changed their old raiment
and dressed themselves
in colourful attire.

The _Malaya_ wind—the carrier of perfumes—
knows no rest;
He sprinkles sweet pollen of flowers
from his odorous basket.

The diamond-set canopy is hanging
in the sky.
Mother Earth spreads the green carpet below.

The Princess of Dawn
impressed the red spot of vermilion,
Painted the smooth cheeks of the bride
with shades of various flowers.

Cupid in _Vasanta_ is coming
as the bridegroom,
And the diverse tunes of love
in the air are ringing.

The young shoots shake their leafy fans
And invite the nightingale to sing the wedding
songs.

Fulness of joy pervades
all through the universe,
in the world of life, in the world of matter.

_Raghunath Chowdhury_
SILENCE

In silence I come, and in silence I go;
In silence I receive the gift you bestow.
In silence I gaze at the evening star,
In silence my tears mingle with the universe.

In silence my hopes rise and sink,
In silence my heart doth sing.
In silence Nature clings to me anon,
In silence I receive her adoration.
In silence I find life's delight,
In silence I walk through eternal night
In silence I bear my defeat and triumph
In silence I die and in silence I am born.

JAMUNESWARI KHATANVIYAR

MINE IS NOT A SONG OF LAUGHTER

Mine is not a song of laughter and revelry,
cooling weary limbs;
Mine is a stroke on the harp of fire
that unifies the dead and the quick.

My song is an endless heat:
coming out of a hundred burning losses, insults, humiliations;
It is the fiery vapour
Oozing out from the imprisoned energy of the soul.

Mine is a song of gods and demons
sung over the churning of the ocean for nectar;
It is a song over the drinking of Kalakuta Poison to attain the position of a death-conqueror.

It is the outpouring of the generous blood towards the worshipping of the Mother’s feet; It is the healing word that unites quarrelling brothers at a breath.

It is the self-denying sentiment that blows away meanness, cowardice, helplessness; It is the common seal that impresses with one form, one colour, one expression.

It is the voice of humanity withered under a mountain load of insults; It is the voice of pride incarnate that contemns the vanity of oppressors.

It is the deep grave stroke that awakens the sleeping life; It is the song of the ordered march to reclaim the lost possession of humanity.

It is the terrible history of the humiliation of God in men; It is the heart-swelling desire to die for the rescue of life.

It is the weight of pain wrung out when free life is enchained; It is the haunting determination that laughs to scorn the humiliators of mankind.
It is the great flood of Shravana
washing away the blood of a hundred wounds;
It is the voice of the mother calling children
to immolate their lives to realise the vastness of life.

AMBIKAGIRI ROY CHOWDHURY

MARCH FORWARD

Torpid through two hundred years
the soul of India wakens
throbbing with new vitality.
The days of tyranny are numbered,
of fear, trepidation, hatred, jealousy.

March forward, O child of India,
the paths are cleared of barriers.
There are a hundred thunders
on the enemy’s side
flashing through the clay-pots of flesh;
on our side there’s one tiny rod of defence
charged with the forces of the soul.

Come it will, let it come,
the avalanche of oppressions.
We shall meet them, make them harmless,
fronting them with expanded chests.

Then shall become painted
the forehead of Mother India
with the Tilak-mark of Swaraj.

AMBIKAGIRI ROY CHOWDHURY
Whose bidding is it
that the whole of India has emptied itself here to-day?
There's light and colour, there's gaiety and frolic,
not a trace of sadness is to be seen anywhere.
There is gentle laughter on every face.
Is it a festival in honour of some God?
Or is it a Roman triumph after victory in some battle?
Or is it to celebrate the liberation of your life
that such grand preparations have been made?
Have the shadows vanished
from your walls of serfs and slaves?
Has the mark of bondage disappeared from your person?
Is your body pure and clean?
Does life flow on in your limbs?
Is the foundation of your freedom well laid?
If so, why is there amongst you
So much faction and split?
Where are embracing and kissing among brothers?
Or are all feelings crushed by bondage?
Let go all divisions, all vanities;
sing, thirty crores of brothers,
sing victory to Mother India!
Let heaven and earth resound with the cry of her liberation
or what is the use of your holding on to life?

Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury

13 This was sung as the Opening Song in the Gauhati Session of the Indian National Congress, held at Pandu-Nagar in 1926.
THE UNINVITED

I have not searched Thee in that celestial moment, the dawn of my life, Nor did I tender my devotion with fairest flowers watered with morning dews. Never did I offer Thee my purest oblations adorned with dawn’s radiance. But Thou with bountiful hands hast showered Thy blessings. I made with care a garland of pearl-like lotus, that blossomed in the dawn, Lighted the fragrant lamp on the altar of Love, fed with the blood of my own bosom. I have not chosen Thee to sit on that golden throne; Nor did I bow down at Thy feet, O Lord! But Thou didst sprinkle Thy kindness, behind the veil and without a word. Unasked didst Thou bestow the sweet fragrance with Thine unseen hand.

NALINIBALA DEVI

THE EARTH

Who was the Apsara, whose one glance disturbed the meditations of the sage in that golden hour of some distant age, now forgotten of history?

Does the same lightning flash in thy eyes, O my beloved?
Do the flowers smile and the forests quiver
because of thy love?

Do the million stars shine in the hem
of thy garment?

Does it waft away the fragrance of the spring
that is not yet come,
and does it make the river overflow with joy?
Art thou the lotus I have been so long looking for
in the beautiful tanks and dirty gutters?

The stars are put out, spring withers,
and the lotus petals droop,
The earth glows with the exquisite radiance
of laughter and slaughter.

Thou shalt also die, dearest,
and this rambling dream of our life will end.
Alas! the time shall come
when these poems of today
which are radiant with thy love
will become mere dressing of words.

Thou fair creature of an hour!
Thou shalt adorn this land of Death
only for a while.
O my love! this is the cruel riddle
of this meaningless life
of which thou art the only solution.

This life of ours is coloured with the tint of truth
and the false hue of dreams.
Why dost thou want to paint it
with the futile colour of immortality?

O utter helplessness!
The blue melancholy of the heavens
Overshadows the glory of the earth
and the world of love that you and I have built
is circumscribed by Death.

Devakanta Barua

FORGET NOT THE PAST

My request of you, dearest friend,—
forget not the past,
when, playing my life's tune,
I shall drift to dust.

My life is enveloped by clouds of sorrow,
and not a ray of light to be seen;
slowly and stealthily I pace my steps
towards the gloomy and unknown realm.

Darkness of night confuses my way
And in me lies the crematory of memories.
O how many a vision of love has melted
into a song of doleful music!

Jatindranath Duara

THE END

The lively green leaf grew tired of dancing,
and, slowly descending, kissed the earth.
The pair of swans diving and sporting
embraced each other with joyous hearts.
But the evening came; their play ended;
they had sung the song of life.
The falling leaf below withered;
The star shone and burnt out;
The swans' last strain rose and fell;
Nature, blow now the conch of death!

JATINDRANATH DUARA
There dwelt in a certain village a farmer by the name of Foring (Grasshopper). His wife was rather of a selfish disposition. The family consisted of the man and his wife—they were without any issue. On rising from bed on a certain rainy morning in the month of Magh (January and February) the farmer told his wife "Look here, wife, it is a nice and rainy morning, I don't feel inclined to take our stereotyped rice to-day. I am just in the mood to have a few cakes. Go and make me some." The wife replied "Well, where is Baradhan (a special sort of rice for cakes and pastries) to make the cakes with? There is not a grain in the house." The husband then was about to give up the idea of indulging in a few cakes that rainy morning—but the wife suggested that he might just as well go and see if any of the neighbours had any ground Baradhan ready for making cakes with and he might ask them to be accommodated with a little. This suggestion made the husband think a while and having determined upon something he sallied forth with his Endi (a sort of thick silk made in Assam much worn as wraps by the people in winter) wrap round him.
Not far from his cottage a neighbour was having his grains trodden out by cattle. Seeing this he sat near the place where it was being done and started a conversation with his neighbour on the weather, the crops and the usual topic of the daily meal in vogue among the people. He sat for a long time talking to him and when all the grains were separated from the chaff his neighbour removed them away from the straw. When he was thus engaged our friend the farmer complained of an acute pain in his stomach. It was so intense that he writhed with pain and started rolling on the ground and as the grains were scattered he started rolling on them. He recovered after a while and when he returned home he found that there were at least five seers of the grain stuck on to his Endi wrap. It need hardly be said that the pain was shammed with the intention which he carried out so successfully. His wife congratulated him on his successful mission and joyfully started getting the rice ready for the cakes. She sunned and dried them and made them into powder. After she had seen to her husband's meal in the evening she started baking the cakes. Foring feeling very sleepy after his meal retired to bed. The wife after baking twelve buri (score) cakes arranged them on a platter of cane. She then satisfied her hunger with most of them herself leaving just a few for her husband on a plate covered over for the next morning. When she went to bed she woke her husband up and said "I have finished baking the cakes, but let us come to an understanding—whoever of us will wake and leave the bed first tomorrow morning will get one-third of the cakes and the other will get the
rest." Forging as a good docile husband agreed to her proposal.

Next morning neither of them would leave the bed. The sun was up and it was getting near noon—yet would they not stir. They pretended to snore and sleep on. The husband being mindful of his duties of looking after his fields at last made up his mind to forgo the pleasure of having two-thirds of the cakes and rose. When the wife saw this she said to him that as he had got up first he would get one-third only. The husband said, "All right, you are welcome to the two-thirds." But when he went to eat the cakes he found to his great surprise that there were but a few on the plate and on inquiring from his wife where the rest of the cakes were, she replied, "How could there be more? All that I baked are on the plate there. You had better take your share and leave me the rest." The husband was astonished—"Could there be, he thought, only these few cakes of the five seers of rice? Impossible." Then his eyes happened to light on the cane platter hung on the wall and there were just the tell-tale marks of as many cakes as were baked. He counted the marks and saying nothing to his wife had his share of the cakes without a word. Then when his wife came to give him his usual morning betel, taking it in his hand he made up a cryptic rhyme for the occasion and gave her to understand that he knew all about her doings of the night before. When he mentioned the actual number of cakes she was quite flabbergasted.

She was very much ashamed of herself on being found out like this. When she went to fetch water from the river, woman-like, she told the other women who were
there that her husband was a marvel and could divine other people's thoughts and know what they did. The whole village then was apprised of this fact and he got the sobriquet of Sarabjan attached to his name in less than no time. And his fame reached far and wide.

Just about this time a villager happened to miss his black cow. After searching for her five long days fruitlessly, on learning of the great gifts of Foring he approached him and begged of him to find out where his cow was. As luck would have it Foring had seen the animal grazing just that very morning in the ulu field behind his house. He therefore without any hesitation directed him to look for her behind his house. The man accordingly went as directed and was awarded by the sight of his cow. After this it spread far and wide that Foring was really a Sarabjan and there was ample proof of it. This news in course of time reached the king.

At about this time a gold necklace worth a lac of rupees was missing in the palace, and when the king came to know of Foring's power he sent for him after every effort to find it out had proved unsuccessful. When the king's officers informed him of the king's command he was thunder-struck. What was he to do? If he did not obey he would be killed, the same would overtake him if he could not find the lost article, and it would mean the same thing if he were to give the truth out and say that he was not really Sarabjan. He was completely at a loss as to what he was to do. Leaving it to fate and after praying to God he approached the king. When he was informed of the Sarabjan's arrival the king received him cordially and with outstretched arms invited him to take a seat near
the throne. He was then taken to the inner apartments and was entertained with dainties, one of the items being curdled milk (Doy).

Now the king had two queens. Their names were Madoy and Hadoy. It was Hadoy the junior queen who had stolen the necklace. And when she knew that the Sarabjan was requisitioned for the purpose she was all in a flutter. She peeped through an aperture in the wall to see what the man was like. Forcing himself however was also quaking with fear and, as he saw the plate of Doy (curdled milk) before him he muttered aloud "Ha doy (meaning Alas, Doy! It was the name of the queen also), let me taste of you today, no one knows how the king will decide tomorrow."

The Queen Hadoy heard this and she thought the Sarabjan was referring to her. She began to say to herself "I am done for now, the Sarabjan has found me out." And she then came out, casting aside her modesty, and said to him "Sarabjan, pray do not give me away, I can assure you I will make it worth your while for you." Sarabjan then had no difficulty in finding out how the matter stood and he at once discovered that the thief was no other than the Queen Hadoy herself. He, assuming his most serious demeanour said, "Your Majesty may rest assured that I shall not divulge your Majesty's secret—but my advice to you is that the necklace should forthwith be replaced in His Majesty's cash box as it was before." She did as she was told.

The next day when the king held his court he requested the Sarabjan to tell the assembly who it was that had stolen the necklace. In reply, making his obeisance,
he said, "Your Majesty's humble subject as I am my calculations do not tell me that your necklace is stolen at all. I find that it is still in Your Majesty's cash box." The cash box was sent for immediately and it was found that the Sarabjan was quite correct: the necklace was in its usual place. This was indeed too much for the public, and their faith in him was more than confirmed. The king awarded him free grants of land and other estates and found for him an office in His Majesty's household.

One day the king just to test the Sarabjan's knowledge held a grasshopper in his grasp and asked him what it was that he had in his hand. He was at his wits' end and as was his wont he muttered aloud to himself in rhyme to this effect "Once I counted up and was right and on one occasion I saw it with my own eyes and was correct; the necklace made its appearance when I but called out Ha doy; but now I find that poor Foring's (grasshopper, his own name) end is near."

The king was not aware of his name; he just knew him as the Sarabjan. When, therefore, he had heard "the poor grasshopper's end is near," he thought that the man was alluding to the grasshopper in his grasp. He let the grasshopper off and as a reward for his marvellous powers he then and there presented Foring with the gorgeous suit of clothes he was then wearing.

Our clothes had to be sent to the wash and we returned home. 15

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15 All Assamese narrators of tales wind up with some such words to give the tale a semblance of truth, that is to say, to show that they were present during the incidents narrated in the tale.
THE AHOM KING RUDRA SINGHA
AT GAUHATI 16

With the object of invading Bengal, the Swargadeo went down to Saraighat in the month of Bahag, and pitched his camp near the rampart of Raja Parikshit. A few days after a Changtalia Hari, or sweeper who used to work under the chang or platform, entered the house of the dancing girls adjoining the main hall of the King. The sentinels saw him when coming out and said, “Who is there?” There was a great commotion. The King was startled in his sleep, and stood up with his sword and called in Ghanasyam of Cheregua, headman of the attendants, from the gate-house to whom he said,—“Well, Ghanasyam, enquire into what is afoot.” He accordingly enquired into the matter after pacifying the hubbub. He was told that the commotion was due to the sudden appearance of a man there. The men then examined the place with torches. There was rain before and footprints were left on the soil. The footmarks indicated a toe detached from the remaining toes. Enquiries were made as to who was the trespasser, and every one denied. The King, on hearing this, ordered that the man with parted toes should be found out by an identification of his footmarks. The Pachani-Bara or chief steward investigated into the matter and came upon such a man in the wood, and his footprints bore evidence to his being the culprit. The

16 From the English version of the Tungkhungia Buranji, compiled during the latter half of the eighteenth century and translated by Rai Bahadur Dr. S. K. Bhuyan. (The Oxford University Press. 1933)
matter was reported to the King who ordered him to be imprisoned. In the morning, after a prolonged enquiry into the matter, some three of the suspects were killed in the vicinity of the rampart of Raja Parikshit by having their chests ripped open with axes. A few others, who served in the inner chambers of the King's residence, were turned out after having their noses and ears clipped, and the Haris or sweepers who had served outside were admitted for inner service.

While at North Gauhati, the King once started for a deer-hunting excursion to the Dirgheswari Hill. On the way a buffalo issued out of the woods and dispersed the procession of elephants and horses as well as that of the archers and shieldsmen. The brute further rushed through the line of palanquin-bearers and stood between the palanquins of the King and of his two sons. The buffalo had, after killing a man, come alongside the Dirgheswari Hill from north to south. A deer-slayer pierced him with a spear, and the buffalo ran up to the Dirgheswari Hill. The King after entering Khajikhowa went out again and ascended the raised platform erected for the purpose of shooting deer, and busied himself in killing deer. Then a large number of monkeys assailed the hunting loft and perched on the royal canopy as well. They could not be driven by any means. The King alighted from the machang and ordered his men to open fire at the monkeys. On the return journey, at the Kanai-barasi-bowa rampart, the elephant Prabalsing attacked a palanquin-bearer who was on the point of being gored with the tusks, but his body was not penetrated through. The man stood between the tusks. The man being released was running for his life, when
the elephant, again caught hold of him by a sudden move, snatched away his head-apron and chewed it. The elephant became infuriated and rolled down from the rampart, head downwards, into the ditch. The Buragohain of the Pukhuriparia family was serving as the Mahut or elephant-driver; he also rolled down but he firmly clung himself to the head of the animal, and managed not to have a fall. The King placed two elephants and a few men in charge of the mad elephant and forbade them to lift him till he came to his senses. Thus saying the King came away.

BHANDARI

A SCENE FROM ASSAMESE VILLAGE LIFE

Sishuram was just returning from the field. He placed the plough in the courtyard and after a hurried bath changed his loin-cloth and hastened to the kitchen, where Bhadari, his wife, was preparing the midday meal. Sishuram became indignant when he found that the rice had not yet been cooked and that the curry also was not in preparation. He saw that the vegetable leaves, dhekiya (a kind of edible fern), had not even been dressed for cooking; the maida (a curved knife with a wooden handle) was lying on a plantain leaf like a dead peacock, and the kai fish lying on the floor looked like ash-besmeared fakirs intoxicated with puffs of hemp. On the other side, near the oven he saw Bhadari, blinded with smoke, blowing the fire.

17 So that it may not slip away, the kai fish, before dressing, is besmeared with ashes.
Sishuram was fretting and foaming with anger when he found that the meal was not ready. From early morning a disputatious mood had possessed him. His anger had been steadily mounting to a climax for very many reasons. The day before, he had had to stop ploughing as it was a *Krishna Ekadasi*, a day forbidden for ploughing; this morning the bullocks had given him a lot of trouble in the field; besides, Sishuram had had a quarrel, this same morning, with his neighbour Bahua over an encroachment on land. The quarrel had swollen in size and would have certainly exploded but Bahua had been able to foresee the danger and had fled before the bubble burst. It is an age-old maxim that whenever one is angry one’s rage is to be borne by one’s wife. On a previous occasion also, when Sishuram had been vexed to a degree by that redoubtable Bahua, he had extinguished his anger by beating Bhadari on the plea that she failed to feed the bullocks on time.

Bhadari, like Mother Earth, patiently bore these onslaughts of her husband without a groan or a grumble. In fact, Bhadari had a firm conviction that these occasional beatings and chastisements were as natural as sleep and hunger—indispensable corollaries of married life. She sought her salvation through devotion to Sishuram.

But there is a limit to everything. Even Mother Earth, the embodiment of forbearance, sometimes gives a tremor. Would it therefore be unnatural if poor Bhadari should rise up in revolt when things became intolerable?
Bhadari was exhausted with her efforts at blowing the smoky fire. Sishuram looked at her with a curse and from a distance cried out excitedly, “Daughter of So and so, why have you not prepared the meal, late as it is?” His face and his eyes were flushed red with anger.

Turning round from the smoke, Bhadari replied dryly, “Should I cook the food with my head? There is not a single log in the house. I am blowing myself out to kindle the fire with wet logs. Is it right simply to flare up without giving a bit of consideration?” Her tired eyelids were weighted down with drops of perspiration.

“What do you say, you daughter of a bitch?” roared Sishuram, and with a shrug of his shoulders, he rushed towards Bhadari and struck her on the back with the maida that was lying on the floor. Before a second blow could be given, hearing Bhadari’s heart-piercing shrieks, Kinaram, Sishuram’s brother, came running and immediately caught hold of his brother and dragged him outside. Poor Bhadari swooned, lying in a pool of blood.

Later on, Bhadari was sent to the hospital. On the third day; in the hospital, recovering her senses she turned her eyes about in the room, as if expecting some one beside the bed. The attendant came near and glanced at her; Bhadari in a low voice wistfully enquired, “Where is he?”

“Whom do you want?” asked the attendant.
A little nonplussed, Bhadari said, “My husband, Sir.”
“Oh, that scoundrel? He is now in the lockup.”
“Let him come here, Sir!” Bhadari entreated piteously.
"How can he come? He is now in the hajat. Don't think of him. If you think of him, you may get worse."

Bhadari's eyes narrowed as she listened to the attendant and within a few seconds she again became unconscious. The doctor was informed, and the attendant related the matter to him. The doctor realised that unless Sishuram was brought near, the patient might sink. He made arrangements to keep Sishuram near Bhadari's bed, so that immediately on regaining consciousness Bhadari might see her husband.

Next morning, on coming to her senses, Bhadari saw Sishuram caressing her head and gently passing his fingers through her hair. At the sight, her expression showed great relief, as if her husband's presence dissolved all her troubles. She smiled slowly and enquired: "How are you? Have you been taking your meals regularly? I am sure you are finding it hard to prepare your meals. Never mind, I shall be all right in a day or two. Kindly fix it up to take me home; I'll come to your help." Two streams of tears gushed from Sishuram's eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

Bhadari, seeing the doctor coming near her bed, entreated, "My God! My father, he is not to be blamed! He is innocent, guiltless; spare him; forgive him; I beseech you, forgive my husband. It was I who stumbled over the maida and got myself hurt." Her eyes brimmed over with tears.

The doctor, the attendant and Sishuram all were struck dumb at these words of Bhadari's. Sishuram could no longer suppress his surging sorrow. He broke into a fit of anguish and wept like a child.
"It isn't true, Sir! It is I who struck her with the maida, and it is right that I should be hanged. My Lord, I am a sinner, I who stabbed my poor devoted wife," he added hastily and passionately.

Within a few weeks Bhadari's wounds healed and she was discharged from the hospital. But though she tried to shield Sishuram from the process of the law by attempting to prove his innocence, the law took its own course and Sishuram was sentenced to three months' hard labour. Sishuram went smiling to jail to atone for his sin.

Bhadari cursed her own unworthy self for the tragedy brought upon the life of her dear husband. No one could condemn her as severely as she condemned herself.

LAXMINATH BEZBOROA

PADUM-KUMARI

[Padum-Kumari] is a semi-historical novel by Laxminath Bezboroa. The following extracts, from the first chapter of the book, are translated to show the writer's power of detail painting.

Gauhati, the heart of the Kingdom of Kamarupa, the darling place of Nature, guarded by a garland of sky-embracing mountains; consecrated by the sacred water of the mighty Brahmaputra and strewn with innumerable places of pilgrimage, was known all over the world as the befitting abode of the eminent astronomers. Its King Narakasur, the son of Mother Earth, was the lord of sixteen thousand lovely-faced brides. Bhagadatta, who as a warrior attained far-reaching glory in the
Mahabharata war, belonged to this splendid city of Gauhati. In its neighbourhood stand the Nilachal Hills with the sacred shrine of Kamakhya, the residence of Mahamaya Bhagavati. To the south-west, enhancing the glory and splendour of the place, stands a ring of hills known as Narakasur. The holy hermitage of the illustrious sage Vasistha, where three sacred currents of the same rivulet are making eternal tunes of murmuring song, lies to the south-east of it. Here, at a place named Beltala, the great sage Galvava, always served by sixty thousand devotees, used to fill the sky with the sound of recitations of the Vedas, and the ears of the Hayagriva Madhava (a temple) were regaled with the songs of the Samaveda sung by the revered sage Gokarna. At the Gauhati of such description lived, in 1771 of the Saka Era, a rich and powerful nobleman, Haradatta by name. His family consisted of a virtuous wife, a son, a daughter and a brother named Viradatta.

Haradatta was fifty-six years of age by this time. Youthful brilliance in eyes, high ambition on broad white forehead, firmness in rounded hands and feet, courage in mind, unbounded enthusiasm, indomitable valour and unparalleled practical wisdom could always be seen in him. A short and sudden meeting with him was quite sufficient to create a profound impression even on the mind of a stranger, who had never seen or heard anything of him before. He was a man of commanding voice, tall and massive in stature, measured and appealing in conversation, and of wonderful deeds and action. These traits of Haradatta were further glorified by such delicate sentiments as conjugal love, parental affection, devotion to friends and love of his
motherland. At times harshness and obstinacy crept into his conduct as he had to engage in military strife against the Mowamarias, to protect his beloved city of Gauhati. War is a terrible thing and it makes a man hard-hearted. Warfare hampers the growth of noble and sublime impulses. However, to be frank, virtues like ambition and self-reliance were strong in Haradatta, and when he was guided by them he used to neglect the advice and the instructions of others, even the humble prayers of his beloved wife and their daughter Padum-Kumari. 18

Padum had reached the age of bashful fifteen. Up to then she could not even have dreamt of anything except the sweet affection of her parents; but her mind was now unconsciously agitated with some novel emotions. Nowadays she could not work attentively for a couple of hours together. Padum, who had been able even to forget food and drink in reading the Namghosa and to dedicate her mind and soul to weaving, spinning, playing or keeping house, now had lost all her concentration of mind. A great change had come upon her. Padum now felt too shy to speak freely before her parents and would often change colour when called upon to meet her uncles and other elderly relations. Now she could express only a bit of her mind to her friends.

But we are not to imagine that Padum's heart, which was pure and simple, had been visited by sin. Even now her face beamed with the spotless lustre of virtue and sweetness; still she was an emblem of loveliness, piety and simplicity. This change in mood was natural

18 Padum (Lotus); Kumari (Princess).
for her. It was due to her first entrance into the enchanting garden of youth, which was redolent with the rose, the ketaki, the seuti, the malati and other odorous flowers, resounded with the melodious songs of the cuckoo and the sweet hummings of the bees and was adorned with beauteous groves of mango trees. This change spread vermilion on her milk-white cheek, gave a charming look to her lotus-eyes, bestowed the warmth of love on her cream-soft heart, added distinction and grace to her symmetrical limbs and made her every feature an abode of the god of love.

LAXMINATH BEZBOROA

SUMARAN

( THE RECOLLECTION )

[ This is an extract from Satyanath Bora’s essay on "Sumaran" included in his Cintakali. In it the writer wants to show that everything of the earth, its splendour and its beauty, is fast disappearing, casting only a shadow behind for our recollection. ]

The sun is just sinking on a golden disc. What a radiance of beauty! What a marvellous spread of glowing colour! Did any emperor ever sit on so fair a throne of such magnificent decorations? The glorious sun now illumines the western horizon, seated on this throne engraved with rich gems and jewels. Curly clouds saunter round the King. Birds, with diverse
tunes fill the air with matchless melody. The musing Brahmaputra with dancing waves offers his evening oblations to the Golden King of the sky. What a sight! I gaze spell-bound, sitting on a solitary rock.

My eyes, wandering about, rest on the ruins of an old temple lying near-by. I plunge in reverie: "Oh, how gorgeous this temple once was! What a festivity it once saw on the day of its first consecration! Who can now recollect the joy of the people on that ceremonious opening day? More than five hundred years have passed away, but it appears to me that the festivity has just ended. I now clearly see the King in a mirthful procession proceeding towards the temple with his ministers and other high dignitaries. I behold the drum-beaters, the dancers and the delighted throng of men and maidens with their gay attire. I see the Brahmanas with rows of offerings. I see the sacred fire burning on the altar and smell the fragrance of incense and flowers. I hear the songs of the singers, the music of the players. I see the holy Brahmaputra triumphant flowing by. Who can say, since when this mighty river has been running towards infinity? On its bank rose and fell the kingdom of Asur Naraka. Here on this bank the King Bhagadatta, the best wielder of the elephant hook, displayed his mighty prowess."

All this vanished history appears before my mind's eye. I look up. The sun is not on the throne; he is making his descent to the nether world. The wool-pack clouds sail out of the sky. Now darkness shrouds the vermilion-coloured western sky and the ruins of the temple are disappearing from my sight.
I hear a voice above, as if somebody addressed me. I look upward and trace a lonely swan plunging through the darkness crying for his lost mate. I turn around and find the circle of mountains and the river, all disappearing, casting a mysterious shadow and leaving a new world around me.

Satyanath Bora
THE P. E. N. ASSOCIATION

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Printed by Kishansingh Chavda at Sadhana Press, Raopura, Baroda (India) and published by The International Book House Ltd., Bombay.