CHAPTER VI

SOCIETY.
Social divisions:

(a) Varnāśramadharma:

The society of ancient Assam was based on Varnāśrama-dharma. The fourfold division of society, in accordance with the injunction of the Hindu śāstras, was maintained, though there is no direct evidence to show that there existed any close adherence to the fourfold classification in practice.

A late hymn of the Ṛgveda, known as the Parusha Sūkta, has a reference to the creation of the four varnas:

"the Brāhmaṇa was his mouth; the Rājanya issued from his arms; the Vaisya was his thighs and the Śūdra sprang from his feet." It appears that towards the end of the Ṛgvedic period, the fourfold division of society had begun to assume a definite shape. The belief gradually gained ground that the Brāhmaṇas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Śudras issued respectively from the mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the creator. By the close of the later Vedic period, a stupendous system of rites and observances had developed. Side by side with the varna system grew up the order of the four āśramas, known as Brahmacharya, Gṛihastha, Vānaprastha...

1: X., 90.
2: Majumdar, R.C., Ancient India, PP. 48-49; Corporate life in Ancient India, PP. 329-396.
and *śamnyāsa*. These represented the life of the student, of the householder, of the ascetic and of the hermit respectively.

The theory of *varṇa* dealt with man as a member of the Aryan society and laid down what his rights, functions, privileges, responsibilities and duties were as a member of that society.¹

Gradually the caste system was evolved out of the ancient *varṇa* system. There was no rigidity in the caste system in the early stage but gradually, with the growth of complexities in the society, the caste-classification became more rigid.

Many professional groups were formed in the course of time, such as *Ganaka, Nāpita, Kulāla (Kumār), Gopala (goālā), Vayitri (Tānti), Surākāra (Suri), Karmāra (Karmakār) etc.*

These are recognised as castes of the present day.² As Risley suggests, tribal, racial and religious factors were also at work in gradually adding to their number.³

The theory of *āśramas* was truly a sublime conception.

But owing to the exigencies of the times, the conflicts of

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2. Risley, *People of India*, PP. 263 f; Majumdar, R.C., *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, PP. 329-96; Hutton, *Caste in India*, PP. 163 f; Ghurye, G.S., *Caste and classes in India*, P. 155; *Caste and Race in India*, PP. 142 f.
interests and distractions of life, the scheme could not
even in ancient times be carried out fully by every individual,
and seems to have failed in modern times.¹

The Kāmarūpa rulers seemed to have taken special
care to preserve the traditional divisions of society, i.e.
Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras. In the inscriptions,
the rulers are frequently referred to as the protectors of
the Varnāśrama dharma, upholder of the duties of all classes.

In the Nidhānpur 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."² In the Gauhati grant of Indrapāla,
it is said that during his reign," the earth was happy and
greatly flourishing, and became the cow that yields all
desires....as in the time of Pṛthu, because the laws of the
four Āśramas and of the four Varnas were observed in their
proper divisions."³

The four stages (āśrama) into which man's span of
life itself was classified, probably had been followed
particularly by the Brāhmaṇas of early Kāmarūpa.⁴ Nevertheless

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2. 'Avakirṇṇavarnāśramadharma pravibhāṣaya nirmīto',-Line 35.
3. V., 13.
there is constant evidence of the abdication of kings, who embraced a life of renunciation.¹

Brāhmaṇa:

The Brāhmaṇa}s occupied the predominant position in society. They were highly respected by the people including the Kings, on account of their intellectual and spiritual attainments. As proved by inscriptions, the Hindu society of Assam was mainly based upon the Varnāśrama dharma, which envisaged an ideal state of society, the roots of which were in the Vedic injunctions. The rulers must have tried to uphold that order. Bhagadatta was the leader of all these various segments of society, as mentioned in the Nowgong grant. Bhaskaravarman, it is said, was created by the holy lotus-born (god) for the proper organization of the duties of (various) castes and stages (of life) that have become mixed up.² Vanamāla gratified the desires of the people of all classes and stages of life.³ In the Gauhati grant of Indrapāla, it is mentioned that the laws of the four classes

1. Ibid.
2. V. 7, 'Varnāśramāṇām Gururekavīrah;' also see Raghuvamsā, 5/19.
3. Nidhānpur copper plate grant, lines 34-35; see also Bhattacharya, P.N., E.I., XII, PP. 65-79.
and stages were observed in their proper order, during his time. The introduction of the Brāhmaṇical, more appropriately the Aryan, culture in Assam must have started much earlier than the 6th century A.D., and at least from this date the systematic policy of the rulers was to create agrahāras for the Brāhmaṇs and other high class Aryans, as evident from epigraphs and literature.

After the fall of the imperial power of the Guptas in the later part of the 5th century A.D., the influence of Kāmarūpa over north-eastern India increased, which resulted in the migration of a large number of Brāhmaṇs to Kāmarūpa. The Kāmarūpa rulers greatly patronised the learned men and religious teachers; and attracted a large number of learned men to the country. The Kīḍāmpur grant shows that the kings adopted a systematic policy of getting Brāhmaṇs into the kingdom by gifts of land in the shape of an agrahāra to further their religious and literary pursuits. The Khonāmukhi plates recorded a gift of land by Dharmapāla to a learned Brāhmaṇ, who belonged to Madhyadesā, “the well known place of residence of Brāhmaṇs who constantly performed sacrifices and were reluctant to accumulate riches.”

1. V. 18, 'Samyagvibhakta - caturāśramavaraṇadharma'.

Silimpur inscription referred to a Brāhmaṇ of Pundra to whom King Jayapāla offered 900 gold coins in cash and a grant of land yielding an income of 1,000 coins. According to the Kamauli grant, "gifts and donations to Brāhmaṇs were regarded as good fruits and fresh sprouts." Because of the constant royal patronage, possibly, Kāmarūpa became a resort of the Brāhmaṇs of the neighbouring regions; and later on, the Brāhmaṇs began to migrate towards the west when the tide of Buddhism began to subside in Northern India. According to Bhattacharya, most of the Brāhmaṇ families of modern Bengal are the descendants of Kāmarūpa-Brāhmaṇs.

The social organisation of the Brāhmaṇs was distinguished by gotras, Veda-sākhās and pravaras, and these were important fundamentally in matters relating to inheritance, marriage, worship, sacrifice, the performance of daily Sandhyā prayers etc. The Veda-sākhās included various divisions or sections of the Vedas to which different section of the Brāhmaṇs belonged. The gotra denotes all persons who trace their descent in an unbroken male line from a common ancestor. Originally the number of gotras was eight. Subsequently, it increased to several hundreds. The pravaras,

2. V. 20.
in fact, are associated with the priests or sages whose names constituted the pravara of that gotra. The Nidhanpur grant mentions a number of Brahmans donees with their Vedasakhās, Pravara and gotras. In this grant alone 56 gotras are set out. The Tezpur grant mentions one Brahmaṇa of the śāndilya gotra of the Yajurveda sākha. The Nowgong grant mentions the Kānasakhā of the Kapila gotra. The Bargaon grant mentions the same Kānasakhā of the Parāsara gotra, and the Sualkuchi grant refers to the same sākha of Bharadvaja gotra. The grants of Indrapāla mention Brahmans of the Kāśyapa gotra and the grants of Dharmapāla refer to the Kuṭhuma sākha, Suddha Maudgalya, Kārṣṇāyasa gotra and Āngirasa pravara.

The titles mentioned in the epigraphs are Deva, Sarman and Svamin, which are given to most of the Brahmans.


The conception of Pravara is closely interwoven with that of the gotra. Pravara literally means "choosing" or "invoking" (Prārthana). The gotra has come to be associated with one, two, three or five sages (but never four, or more than five) that constitute the pravara of that gotra.

2. V. 30.
4. V. 16.
5. V. 16.
6. Gaṅhatī grant, V. 20; Guākuchi grant, V. 21.
7. Subhaṅkaraṇātaka grant, V. 17.
8. Puṣpabhadra grant, V. 12.
The surnames, which are generally found in the epigraphs are: \textit{Bhattacharya}, Dama, Deva, Dhara, Das, Dutta, Ghose, Kara, Kunda, Mitra, Naga, Nandi, Patila, Sena, Soma, Nagara etc.

At present, all these surnames are not found among the Assamese Brahmins except a few, as in the case of Bengal, too. Many of them are still used particularly by the Kayasthas of Assam and Bengal. These titles are similar to those of the Nagara Brahmins, who are supposed to have originally migrated from Nagarkot in the Punjab to various places of the country. \footnote{1}

The Brahmins, who were granted land by Bhutivarman, were, as some scholars believed, of the same stock as the Nagara Brahmins who are said to have migrated to Gujarata about the same time with the rise of the Vallabhi kings. \footnote{2}

The Brahmins of Assam to-day follow the Mithila school in matters of social law, such as inheritance, gift, will and marriage; and they trace their descent from the Brahmins of Kanyakubja (Kanauj). \footnote{3}

According to the tradition, they migrated to Assam during the time of Naraka. \footnote{4}

The Brahmins of Kamarupa, as mentioned in the inscriptions, led a holy and righteous life. They practised the six-fold duties, i.e. \textit{Yajna, Yajana, Adhyayana}, \footnote{5}

\footnotesize{2. \textit{Ibid.}; \textit{I.H.Q.}, VI, P. 67.}
\footnotesize{3. \textit{Ibid.}}
\footnotesize{4. \textit{A statistical Account of Assam}, Vol. I, P. 33.}
\footnotesize{5. Bargaon grants; Nowgong grant; Subhankarapatanka grant, V. 11.}
adhyāpanā, dāna and pratīgraha; and performed the daily ritual of snāna (bath). Six kinds of snāna are mentioned in the smṛtis.¹ The grant of Bālavarmān refers to the prevalence of Kriyāṅga snāna.² The Brahmins used to observe three Sandhyaś.³ With sandhya is associated japa (the repeating of the Gāyatri and other mantras), which they repeated in three prescribed ways.⁴

The Brahmins had to study the Vedas, and the inscriptions mention the three Vedas. The grant of Vanamāla states that Bhijjāta studied the Raurveda with all its accessories.⁵ Devadatta was the head of the Vedic scholars, and the Vedas had their aims fulfilled in him.⁶ The Mīmāṃsa, the most orthodox school of Vedic theology, was carefully studied in Assam.⁷

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1. Śankha Smṛti, VIII, 1-11. Those are: Nītya (daily), naimittika (due to some cause), Kamyā (bath for some desired object), Kriyāṅga (bath as a part of religious rite), malāpaksaraṇa (a bath solely for cleaning the body), kriyāsnana (ritualistic bathing at a sacred place).
2. V. 32.
3. Puspabhadrā grant.
4. Ibid.
5. V. 30; 'Sāṅgayajurvedadhitavān'.
6. Bargāon grant, V. 16; 'Devadhattah Kānvo agraja vājasaneyakāgryah, āsādyā yam vedavidām parārdāhyam trayā kṛtārthayitameva sāmyaka'.
7. Puspabhadrā grant, V. 14; Khonāmukha grant, J.A.R.S., VIII, p. 119.
The Brāhmaṇs of Kāmapa not only performed the duty of diffusion of learning but also took to other professions. The Puspabhadra grant refers to the grandfather of the donee, as having knowledge of the fine arts. An epithet is used for this Brāhmaṇ, as Caṇakyanikyabhū, which means, according to Bhattacharya, the source of the jewels (i.e. the moral maxims) of Caṇakya. Barua suggests that it may refer to the Arthasāstra which was studied. The academic titles such as Srutidhara, Pandita, and Kathanista were usually found among the Brāhmaṇs.

Hiuen Tsang recorded that Bhaskaravarman was Brāhmaṇ by caste, who ruled over Kāmarupa during his visit. S.K. Chatterji opines that Hiuen Tsang by mistake described Bhaskaravarman as Brāhmaṇ, but he was just a neo-kshatriya, a member of a Hinduised Mleecha of non-Hindu-Indo-Mongoloid family which had been accepted within the fold of Hindu orthodoxy at least several generations before.

The Varmans no doubt, were Brāhmaṇ, as clearly written by Hiuen Tsang and some of the Brāhmaṇ surnames

1. V. 14.
2. Kāmarupa Śasanāvalī, P. 130.
4. Grant of Balavarman.
referred to in the epigraph, are being used today among the Kayasthas. So we can infer that Brahmins also once occupied the throne of Kamarpā.

Brahmins also held high administrative posts, and were court poets. Janardanasvamin was a nyāyakarnika in the time of Bhāskaravarman. Himaṅga, a brāhmaṇ, was skilled both in archery and in reading the omens implied in the movement and fall of other people’s arrows, and was expert also in different methods of war and defence.

Brāhmaṇ scholars from Kamarpā also participated in the theological discussions held in other neighbouring kingdoms. From the account of Hiuenn Tsang, we know that a Brāhmaṇ scholar from Kamarpā, participated in a theological debate held at Hālandā and argued with Hiuenn Tsang; later the scholar had to change his brāhmaṇical faith, and became the disciple of Hiuenn Tsang. The Kamarpā Brāhmaṇs, who migrated to the neighbouring kingdoms, were highly honoured. In the inscription of Anantavarman, the Garga king of Kalinga (Circa 922 A.D.), it is mentioned that the king’s brother Jayavarman made a gift of land to a Brāhmaṇ, Viṣṇu Somācārya by name, who hailed from Kamarpā, at the time

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1. Subbāṅkarapātaka grant, V. 20; 'nārāca-moksādāti gātā-gūnapravina', 'abhyastra-citra-ārtha duskara-karma-mārgah'.
of his daughter's marriage. It further mentions thatViṣṇu
Somaśārya belonged to the Parāsara gotra and was well-versed
in the vedas and vedāṇga. 1 The inscription of Vākpatirāja
of Mālwa, the Paramāra king, records a gift of land to 26
Brahmans. 2 Among those one, Vamanasvamin, was from Paundrika
in Uttarakuladesa, identified with Uttarkul of Assam. 3 The
ancestors of the Brahman, Prahasa, migrated to Pulagrama
in Pundra from a place of Kamarupa, as mentioned in the
Silimpur inscription. 4

Other castes:

We find that other castes are also mentioned in the
epigraphics. They were Kāyasthas, Karnas, Lekhakas, Daivajnas
and others. Among those, many were titles of officers and
professional classes rather than castes. Comparatively less
information about the non-Brahman castes of the past is
found than about the Brahman caste.

The Karna and the Kāyastha were the two important
castes as mentioned in the epigraphs. Karna occurs as the

1. J.A.H.S., Vol. II, PP. 271-72; Banerjee, History of Orissa,
2. E.I., XXIII, Pl. IV.
164-67.
name of a caste in the Sūtras, the Śmrītis and the Mahābhārata. The kāyastha is mentioned as a royal officer in the Viṣṇu and Yājnavalkyāya śrīt. According to the Viṣṇu śrīti, they were writers of public documents (rājāsāksika), and the later śrītis mention them as a caste and include them among the śūdras. But Kaṁrasvāmin on Amarakosa states that karna also denotes a group of officers like Kāyasthas and Adhyakṣas (superintendents). The Vaijayantī seems to take Kāyastha and Korna as synonymous and explains them as denoting a scribe. The Karna caste was gradually absorbed by the Kāyastha, and ultimately formed one Kāyastha caste. In the Mīdhānāpur grant, the terms Karna and Kāyastha are mentioned in the sense of officers and scribes.

2. Viṣṇu Dharmasūtra, VII, 3.
5. Ibid.
6. Kāmarūpā Jāsanāvalī, P. 43 (f.n.). The Karna or the Nyāya-Karna, Janārdana Svāmi was a śrādhman and the Kāyastha was Dundhunātha Pargiter observes that the term karaṇika is not a classical Sanskrit, but evidently a word formed from karāṇa, which was the name of a caste that had the occupation of writing, accounts etc., hence karaṇika apparently member of this caste. J.A.S.I., 1911, P. 501.
The existence of the kāyastha caste is known both from the Gupta inscriptions and some other contemporary inscriptions. The kāyastha caste by name is noticed in a later period (circa 9th century A.D.). The record of Amoghavarsa, the Rāstrakuta ruler, mentions a kāyastha caste in western India.  

1. The inscriptions of Northern India mention Gauda-kāyastha-vāṃśa, kāyastha-vāṃsa, Mathuranvāya etc. The latter smṛtis like Usānas and Vedavyāsa refer to the kāyastha caste, while the Vedavyāsa smṛti includes the Kāyastha among śudras along with barbers, potters and others.  

Some writers like D.R. Shandarkar, Whose and others hold the view that the kāyasthas descended from the Nagarā dāhmans because of the likeness of their surnames. Vasu has refuted their view. Both tradition and genealogical records of the kāyasthas of Kāmarūpa, testify to their affiliations with the ksatriyas. Kakati derived the word 'kāyastha' from Austric formations 'katho' (to write),

1. B.I., XVIII, P. 251, - 'Valabha-kāyastha-vāṃsa'.  
2. Ibid., XII, P. 61.  
4. B.I., XII, P. 64.  
5. History of Dharmaśāstra, II, I, P. 76.  
7. I.H.Q., VI, PP. 60 ff.  
9. Ibid.
kaiathoh (to keep accounts), and feels that it has been sanskritised as ḫāyastha, which seems to have been associated originally with the writer. ḫāyasthas were holding position in the society of Assam next to Brāhmaṇas.

Lekhaka, another class of people, used in the sense of writer, was prevalent, as known from the inscriptions. Quoting in the Parāśava Mādhaviya, Sumantu considers Lekhaka as a low caste along with that of oilmen and other low castes from whom Brāhmaṇas do not take food. Obviously, Lekhaka is a caste, though the local epigraphs mention them writers. Brhaspati, as quoted in the Smṛti candrika, refers to Ganaka and Lekhaka as two persons connected with the work of a judge and stated that they were dvijas. The Daivajña or astrologers, known as Ganakas, a class of people were given the honourable position in the society just below the Brāhmaṇas. The Brhaddharma Purāṇa says that Ganaka was born of a Śākadvīpi father and a Vaiśya mother.

The term 'Vaidya' occurs in the Subhankarapāṭaka grant which was composed by a Vaidya named Prasthānakalasa.

4. Uttara Kānda, XII, 52.
5. V.15; Kāmarūpa Sasanāvali, P.154.
Bhattacharya does not believe that the term was used as the name of a caste.\(^1\) The Vaidyas are not found now as a caste, but a professional group or class like physicians such as Ojåhs or Bejas who are still prevalent in Assam and may belong to any class. The Vaidyas, a distinct social group, existed as early as the 8th century A.D. This is known from the inscriptions of South India,\(^2\) and they occupied quite an honourable position in the society. The Bhisaka, a class of physicians, is again mentioned in Bhalavarman's grant.\(^3\) According to Uśanas, Bhisaka was the offspring of a brāhmaṇ father through a kṣatriya wife. A Bhisaka had to study the Āyurveda in its eight parts, or astronomy, astrology and mathematics. The Brahmapurana, quoted by Aparākara,\(^4\) refers to Bhisaka, who lived by surgery and by attending on patients.

Another caste, the Kalitās, are predominant in Assam. "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 castes take water.'\(^5\) The Kalitās claim the same rank as the kāyasthas, next to brāhmaṇs.\(^6\) According

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1. Ibid., P. 156.
3. Nowgong grant, V. 2.
4. P. 1171.
5. Dalhan, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, P. 79.
to Martin, "they (the Kalitās) no doubt had some science and continued long to be the only spiritual guides of the Koc and indeed in some places still retain by far the chief authority over that people". ¹ He states further that the Kalitās were formerly the priests of the Koc, and in Assam there were several religious teachers (Guru) of this class. Allen remarks that all the Hinduised people of Assam except the Brahmanas, were called Kalitās. ²

The original home of the Kalitās is obscure. Two views have been put forward: one states that the Kalitādesa was to the north-east of Acama and near the regions inhabited by hill tribes, such as Miris and Ābors. ³ Gopāla Ātā with his mother came to Acamadesa from Kalitādesa. Captain Neufville states that "the country to the eastward of Bhōt and northward of Sadiyā, extending on the plain beyond the mountains is said to be possessed by a powerful nation called kalitās or kultās, who are described as having attained to a high degree of advancement of civilization equal to any of the nations of the East. The power, dominion and resources of the Kalitā Rājā are stated to exceed by far those of Assam,

¹. The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India, III, P.545.
². District Gazetteer, Nowgaong, P.78.
under its most flourishing circumstances, and in former
times a communication appears to have been kept up between
the estates, now lying discontinued. To this nation are
attributed the implements of husbandry and domestic life,
washed down by the flood of the Dihing." 1

A popular belief shows that the Kalitās were
ksatriyas and when Parasurāma was determined to exterminate
the Kṣatriyas, they fled from his wrath and concealed
themselves in the forests of Assām, and therefore, they are
kula - caste, lupta - vanished in the sense of degraded
caste. According to Barua, it seems to be a bit of false
etymology. 2

The Kalitās entered Assām from the west. Among
the peoples inhabiting the north of India, the Markandeya
purāṇa mentions kaltā along with Darada, Gana etc. 3 Dalton
considers them to be Aryans of pure descent, who came to the
region before the formation of the existing professional
castes. 4 Baden Powell, referring to a tradition, opines
that the Kalitās were formerly Buddhists, and they dispersed
from mid India due to the subsequent brāhmanic revival. 5

1. Neufville, Captain John Aryan, 'Geography and Population
   of Assam', Asiatic Researches, XVI, 1923, PP. 344-45.
3. Chap. 55.
5. The Indian Village Community, PP. 135 ff.
Kalitās appeared to be pure Hindus and their position is quite high.

The Kaliyas, mentioned in the Rāmāyana, were kṣatriyas and were related to the Buddha, and the name appeared as that of one of the ten republican states of the Vṛśajj confederacy. Traditionally they are agriculturists, having extensive holdings, well-stocked farm-yards and comfortable houses, and are the descendants of the Buddhist Kṣatriyas, identified with the present Kalita by Kakati. They may seem to be of the Vaiśya caste, as appears from the above statement. However, they were pure Aryan settlers of the Brahmaputra valley, who once probably spread to the eastern limit of the Kingdom.

The Koces, another caste, even now represent a large population of Assam, next to the Kalitās. The Vajra - tantra mentions the Koces as Kuvagas. The inhabitants of the province were distinguished as Kalitās and Koces, in the earlier times; and the latter are non-Aryans, and probably belong to the Mongolian stock. Gait states that "the name 'Koch' in Assam is no longer that of a tribe, but rather

2. Census of India, 1891, Assam, P. 218.
of a Hindu caste into which all converts to Hinduism from the different tribes Kachari, Garo, Hajong, Lalurg, Mikir, etc. are admitted on conversion.¹

The Kaivartas or fishermen, a class of people, are mentioned in the inscriptions.² In the Smritis, the Kaivartas are mentioned as mixed caste, while Manu used the term to mean the offspring of a Niṣāda father by Ayogava mother.³ The Brahavaivarta Purāṇa⁴ states that the Kaivarta was born of a Kṣatriya father and a Vaisya mother. The Kaivartas, however, were non-Aryans, and their economic conditions depended mainly upon fishing. The Tezpur Rock-inscription refers to them as 'the eaters of the property in the interior of boats.'⁵ They are often associated with water and boats. Some of the Kaivartas are agriculturists, as it appears from the epigraphs. The divisions of the Kaivarta caste, namely Hālovā (one who ploughs) and Jálovā

¹ Ibid.
² Gauhati grant of Indrapāla, L. 47; Puṣpa Bhadrāgrant of Dharmapāla, L. 51; Tezpur Rock Ins. of Harjjjaravarman.
³ Manu, Chap. X, 4.
⁴ Chap. X, 34.
⁵ 'Kaivarta-nau (ka) ksīsvabhakṣa - sādhani'.

(one who is actually a fisherman) prove at least that a section of the Kaivartas are agriculturists. The Tezpur rock inscription, further, refers to a Kaivarta, who was in charge of collecting state toll on the banks of rivers. They seem to have held office in the state. The Kaivartas were a depressed class who, having adopted Hinduism, followed the general customs of the Hindu society and were, therefore, included within the Sūdras.

Among the other professional castes, we find mention of the Kumbhakāras (potters), Tantuvāya (weavers), Nauki (boatmen), and Dandi (rowers of boats). According to Uṣanasa, the Kumbhakāras were the offspring of Brāhmaṇa and a Vaiśya woman. Vaikhānasa agrees with Uṣanasa and states that the offspring becomes either a Kumbhakāra or a barber. Vedavyāsa and Devala include them among Sūdras. In present day Assam, there are two classes of potters namely Kumāra and Hirā; the latter appear to be more degraded than the Kumāras, and are allied to the Kaivartas. Marriage is not permissible between

4. Nidhanpur Grant; E.I., II, pp. 347 ff.; Kamauli Grant; Subhaṅkarapātaka Grant, Lines, 49, 54-55.
these two classes. The method of making pottery is entirely different in both the classes; one's is hand made and the other's is wheel made.

The Ṛantuvāyās are regarded as Jūdras by Patañjali, and, therefore, they are excluded from sacrificial rites. The epigraphs refer to Ṛantuvāyās not as a distinct caste, but as a professional group. The term Ṛāti, the modern equivalent of Ṛantuvāyā, stands for a professional class. All castes including Brāhmaṇas in Assam knew weaving, and used to weave as a profession, and it does not indicate a particular caste or class.

In the Puspa-bhadra grant, reference is made to antyaśa (low castes). The grant further refers to Ṛijja-rat-bādi. The Mādis seem to be the Ṛāri caste of today. The Ṛāris, as antyaśas, are connected with ḍoma and the candāla. The position of the Ṛāri is comparatively better in Assam than in other places, and they have taken largely to trade and to work in gold. Many of them used the terms expressing their occupations such as Ṛṛttiyaśa and Ṛopāri.

2. History of Dharmaśastra, ii, i, p. 63.
Social Institution:

Family:

Our knowledge about the family in ancient Assam is meagre. Hindu life in general has been based upon the joint family system. The smallest unit of society was the joint family, comprising of the patriarch of the family, his wife, sons with their wives and children, and unmarried daughters. The tribal family system, particularly of the khasis, has been based upon quite different principles, and their society shows traces of the matriarchal system. In some cases a transition is indicated from matriarchy to patriarchy. 1

The joint ownership of landed property among several brothers, is mentioned in the Midhanpur grant. 2 In the Subhankara-pataka grant, 3 the division of the joint property among the brothers is also indicated. In the Parvatiya plates of Vanamaladeva, the evidence of joint family system is found, under which the four brothers Cudama, Detobha, Garga and Sambhux lived together, and it is stated that they

1. Gurdon, Khasis, PP. 76 f; Hutton, Sema Nagas, PP. 130 f; Angami Nagas, App. V, 398 f; Kapadia, K.M., 'The Matrilineal social organisation among the Nagas of Assam', PP. 3 f; Playfair, Garos, PP. 71 f; Hudson, India census Ethnography, PP. 40 f; gait, C.R.I., 1911, I, I, PP. 237 f.
2. Bhratryayena ekamsah; bhratra sahārdham sah.
3. V. 22.
lived together out of fear of the loss of their dharma. 1

Theoretically, the joint family includes the jāpinda relations (direct blood relationship). The theory of jāpinda had two different implications according to the mitākṣara and the Dāyabhāga. The family system was based on patriarchy; and the father, being the head, had the sole authority over the property.

Marriage:

The social structure of Hindu and its solidarity was based to a great extent on the institution of marriage, having social and religious sanction.

The normal conditions of marriage for the higher castes were identity of caste and difference of gṛgotra. Monogamy seems to have been the general practice, while polygamy was also known in aristocratic society. Eight forms of marriage are recognised by the Hindu śāstras. These are: (1) Brāhma, where the bride is freely given to a worthy bridegroom with due ceremony, (2) Daiva, where she is married to a priest, (3) Ārśa, in which the bride's father, in giving her away, receives from the bridegroom a formal gift of a pair of oxen,

1. E.I., XXIX, PP. 145 f.
(4) Prajñapatya, in which the proposal comes from the side of the bridegroom, (5) Gândharva, a secret informal union by copulation, (6) Āsura, acquisition by purchase, (7) Rāksasa, where the bride is carried off by force and (8) Paisāca, a secret elopement.

Out of these, the first four were regarded as auspicious forms of marriage, and the last four were not regarded as such.

In the law-books, Gândharva, Rāksasa and Paisāca forms are recognised to the Kṣatriyas, while the Āsura form is allowed to Vaiṣyas and Śudras, though it is countenanced in the Vedas; and the payment of a Śulka or marriage price by the bridegroom, which is even now often practised among higher castes in some parts of India, is likely to be described as a purchase. The other four forms are regarded as particularly suitable to Brāhmaṇas. The Brāhma form was, probably, special to the Brāhmaṇas.

The legendary secret marriage of Aniruddha with Uṣā, daughter of Bāna, indicates a marriage of Gândharva or in another sense a marriage of Paisāca kind. The marriage of Kṛṣṇa with Rūkmīni, described in the Purāṇas, is the form

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1. V. XXVI; Rūkmīni-Harana.
of rāksasa. Another kind of marriage, called Svayamvara, is mentioned in the Rājatarangini, which according to P.C. Choudhury, is the type of informal union occurring during the 'Bihu' festival, which is now a rare occurrence.

The Puṣpabhadrā grant throws some light on the actual rites with which the brāhma form of marriage was attended. It records the marriage of Bhāskara to Jīva. There is clear reference to Pāṇi-grāhana, a rite which is performed either before or after the ceremony of saṃaptapadi, in which the bride, accompanied by the bridegroom, takes seven steps towards the north east. Marriage within the varṇa and kula was the prevailing custom, for these social units are defined by their endogamy.

The Brāhmaṇa youths, as recorded, enter household life by marrying after their return from the guru-grha on the completion of the Samāvartana rites. After samāvartana, in some cases, the young Brāhmaṇa 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.

In Assam, particularly in the plains, the Hindus followed in general all the rites of marriages recognised in

2. V.15; 'Tasyāh kareṇa sa kāraṃ jagrhe grāhasthādharmaṁyā Kaṅkana - dhāraṃ dhṛta - kaṅkaṇena'.
4. Ibid.
the texts. The Rāksasa, vaśesa and āsura forms of marriage, were probably prevalent, and are still existing amidst some lower clans. Some of the Brāhmaṇas, still follow the practice of the three rites concerning a single marriage: one before puberty; the second after the girl when she attains maturity; and the third when she bears a child. The orthodox brahma form has assimilated many popular customs, traditions and superstitions. A few peculiar rites and procedures are followed in Assam along with the Vedic rites. Marriage is usually arranged after rahi-jura-cova, the consultation of the horoscopes of the pair. At some places in the region, bridge price (ga-dhana) is given. The nuptial festivities begin at least a day ahead of the day fixed for wedding. On the commencing day a party from the bridegroom's house leaves for the bride's house with clothes, ornaments, food stuff and sacramental jar of water. A ceremonial function, called joramdiya or telerbhardiya, is held in the bride's house, where she is presented with the bridal dress and ornaments. Both the bride and bridegroom, in their respective houses, take ceremonial baths. The bridegroom starts to the bride's house on the wedding day in an auspicious hour in the evening. Marriage is performed in the bride's house, in the night.

1. Thomson, Assam valley, pp. 61 f; also see Choudhury, op. cit., pp. 322-24.

2. Ghose Choudhury, V.B., Asama 0 Vangadeśar Vivāha Paddhati, p. 5.
After the ceremony, she comes to the bridegroom's house. In that new house she has an honoured place as mistress of the household. The marriage ceremony ends on the third night, with the offering to two demons known as khobā-khubunī, given by the married couple, and a public feast.¹

Child marriage was in vogue among the Brahmans and Kayasthas. The practice is still existing in some cases, as found. Widow remarriage is prevalent among lower castes.

Though endogamy has been the general rule, cases of inter-caste marriages, polygamy and widow re-marriage, among the lower classes as well as tribes, have been almost an universal practice. Instances of polyandry are also found among some tribes. The practices of taking or demanding dowry from the bride's father as well as paying bride price by the bridegroom's parents, were also found. Another practice of marriage, by rendering service to the bride's family, in which the bridegroom becomes the life-long member of the bride's family; which is called 'Capaniā', was in vogue among some of the tribes.

The practice of Sati and concubinage were probably known. The name of Bhāskaravarman is associated with concubines.

In the *Kuttanimatam*, a work of 8th century A.D., by Damodar Gupta, it is mentioned that the King's concubine became a satī after his death.¹ The *Yogini Tantra* also refers to this system, which enjoins upon Brāhmaṇa widows to burn themselves on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands; Vaiśya and Śūdra widows were also allowed to do it, depending upon their deep sense of love towards their husbands. It was prohibited only for unchaste women and those having many children.

Women:

"One of the best ways to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate its excellences and realise its limitations is to study the history of the position and status of women in it."² The civilization can be known from the true status of women in the society.

In the Rgvedic period, the position of women was high. Women were equals of men as regards access to and capacity for the highest knowledge. The *Rgveda* refers to young maidens completing their education as *brahmachārini*.

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3. V. 7, 9.
After that they used to marry. The wife enjoyed with her husband full religious rights and regularly participated in religious ceremonies with him, and thus, the Ṛgveda accorded the highest social status to the qualified women of the days. The Ṛgvedic society was based on monogamy and was patriarchal. As the marriage was a sacrament and indissoluble, widows were not allowed to remarry. The wife took part with her husband in his religious ceremonies (VII, 31). The institution of monogamy is itself eloquent recognition of the high social status of women.¹

A place of honour and respect was accorded to women in the epic period; they were considered pivots not only of domestic life but of the entire society. The birth of a female child was less welcome than that of the male, but it did not arouse cries of dismay as is generally believed. Some parents desired a female child and performed religious rites and pilgrimages so that they may be blessed with a daughter. Although marriage, as means for the fulfilment of a maiden's natural and inevitable goal of life, was always desired, she was never sacrificed at the altar of marriage. In marriage she had freedom and possessed independent judgement to select her life partner. In the Arāhaṇa and the Prṛjāpattyā forms of marriage, her dignity was fully maintained; she is

equal partner in all religious and worldly undertakings of her husband. Marriage as sacrament secured the position of a wife in a polygamous society.

The status of women in the Vedas and in the narrative parts of the great Epic is found to have been satisfactory; later in the didactic portions, it shows deterioration. The idea of impurity attached to woman was taking hold of society. Not only was woman ignorant herself but she lost her religious or social status and was described as a vile character. Child-marriages as well as polygamy resulted in further deterioration of woman's position.

A wife's right of ownership became a limited one. Woman's right over her husband's property was that of an usurper and not of a proprietor. She appears only as a good and trusted manager of her husband's property. Her right was only over strīdhana.¹

Our knowledge about the position of woman in ancient Assam is meagre. However, in the inscriptions we find mention of the queens, lady officers of the royal palaces and the wives of the Brāhmaṇa donees. The lists of officials include the name of rājñī, which shows that the queen had a position of some responsibility in the state. They were cultured and pious women, as mentioned in the inscriptions. Queen Jivadā, the mother of Harjjaravarman, is compared with

Kuntī and Subhadrā and was like the 'morning twilight' (Prabhāta sandhyā), worshipped by many, and was the source of great spiritual fame.¹ Nayanā, wife of Gopāla, was a queen of wide renown (mahanīyakīrtih).² Ratnā, Harṣapāla's queen and Paukā, a brāhmaṇa lady, both were well-reputed for their works of charity and piety and they were compared to goddess Pāravatī.³

According to Vedic sacrificial literature, the wife was the religious partner of her husband and was known as Sahadharminī and Ardhāṅginī. No sacrifice could be performed without her. Chastity and devotion to their husbands were the main qualities of Brāhmaṇa women, as mentioned in the epigraphs. The Bargaon grant⁴ states that Śyāmāyikā, the wife of Sadgāṇgādatta, a brāhmaṇa, who was devoted to her husband and endowed with virtues, shone like the full moon, pure in form and dispelling the darkness. In the Suālkuchī grant, it is stated that Ccheppāyikā was a woman charming and true in faith, and her beauty is compared to that of goddess Lākṣmī, which was her own ornament.⁵ Durlabhā,

¹. Ḫāyūṅthāl grant, V. 11; Tezpur grant, V. 10.
². Puṣpabhadrā grant, V. 5.
³. Subhankarapāṭaka grant, VV. 11, 19.
⁴. V. 18.
⁵. V. 18.
wife of Purandarapāla, as a consort of her husband was like Śacī of Indra, Śiva of Śambhū, Rāti of Madana, Lākṣmī of Hari (Viṣṇu) and Rohinī of the moon god. The grant of Indrapāla states that Saukhyāyikā and Anurādhā were well conducted, virtuous, chaste and according pleasure to their husbands, of firm devotion. Anurādhā is likened to Arundhatī, wife of Vasiṣṭha, for her purity of character and her holiness is compared to the river Ganges.

As a mother, woman occupied a place of greater honour and prestige. She was considered the creator, nourisher, educator and the greatest preceptor of her children, and thus of her race and society. Motherhood was one of the main aims of the woman; and she felt proud to give birth to an ideal son. Jīvadā, the mother of Harījaravarman, is compared to Kuntī, the Mother of Yudhiṣṭhira, and Subhadrā, the mother of Abhimanyu. The Nidānapur grant described Yaśñavatī, the mother of Mahendravarman as resembling the sacrificial wood which produces fire.

Education:

We do not know much about the education of women in ancient Assam. However, the Kāmauli grant gives a veiled

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2. Bargaon grant.
3. V. 12.
reference to educated woman. The prasasti of this grant was composed by both Manoratha, son of the Brähmaṇa Rājaguru Murāri, and Padmā, his wife. The women, particularly of the Brähmaṇa caste, were educated and were also skilled in arts of poetry and rhetoric. It was the practice of the women, who were having high status in the society, to engage scholars to read out to them the contents of popular classics and scriptures and informative literature such as Haragaurī-Samvāda. Special effort was made to give the girls of the cultured family, a good grounding in domestic and culinary arts, and fine arts like music, dancing, painting, garland-making and household decorations. Vāna's daughter, Uṣā's friend Chitralekha was a reputed artist, who drew the picture of Aniruddha as known from the Uṣāharanakāvyā. Probably tutors were appointed in rich families to train girls in these arts. In ordinary families, the women trained their daughters in spinning and weaving for the improvement of their economic condition.

Some idea of the courtesans living in towns can be got from epigraphs. Capriciousness is said to be a trait of

2. Vatsyayana, (Kāmasūtra, 1.3.16) lays down that girls should be trained in all the 64 arts and crafts. From the sculptural remains in Central Assam, we come to know that these arts were cultivated among the ladies.
the women of the town. The Baragaon grant refers to the sensual excesses of the city damsels and to their indulgence in intoxicating spirits. The Yogini-tantra\(^2\) gives in details the descriptions of the bodily charm and beauty of the women of the town, Apunarbha. The women were joyful; they were lean in the middle, their lotus eyes were extended to the ears, breasts were heavy and lofty, buttocks were well formed, cheeks were shining like the moon and the necks were adorned with necklaces. Their girdles and anklets produced a jingling sound. The purdah system was totally unknown and the women used to take bath openly in the rivers.\(^3\) The time of introduction of purdah system in Assam is not known, the wearing of veils is now a common practice among the Assamese married women. The fine arts portray female figures as playing on musical instruments and dancing, and the same source gives an idea of feminine beauty, so graphically described in the \textit{Kumāra-Harana}, \textit{Rukmini-Harana} and the \textit{Yogini-tantra}, in connection with the Kumāripūjā.\(^4\)

\begin{enumerate}
\item Baragaon grant.
\item II, 9, v. 26 ff.
\item Grant of Vanamāla.
\item Yogini-tantra, Bk. I, Chap. 13, 17; 11/9.
\end{enumerate}
Prostitutes and temple girls:

The institution of prostitutes is known in India from a very early times. The earliest reference to them occurs in the Ṛgveda. Gautama also refers to prostitutes. In the Mahābhārata and the Arthaśāstra of Kautilya, courtesans are described as an established institution. Kautilya recommends the appointment of a superintendent of prostitutes to watch their activities and look after their welfare; the prostitutes also paid regular tax to the king and attended his court and rendered him personal service. Kalidasa also refers to the institution of prostitutes.

In the Jātakas, there are numerous references to them.

Prostitution was in existence in Central Assam, as known from epigraphs and literary works. The Bārgaon grant refers to the veśyā and varastrī, both meaning courtesan, and they generally resided in the best streets of the city. In the Rāmāyana, it is found that famous cities were decorated by the presence of Gaṇikās. These public women

2. Ṛgveda, 1. 167. 4.
4. 1. 115. 39; V. 30, 38; V. 86. 15; V. 151.58, IV.239.37; VIII, 94.26.
5. Meghadūtaṁ, I. 35.
6. II, 51. 21; 'Gaṇikā varasōbhītam'.
could be visited by all. 1 People took delight in them and some of them were attached to the royal courts. 2 They had to sing and dance for the entertainment of the Kings and their guests. These women of pleasure were used as ornaments at palaces, courts, camps and cities. 3 They were treated as precious material rather than as human beings, and they were given a rather low social position. The Kāmasutra defines a ganīka as a veṣyā who is accomplished and proficient in the 64 arts. 4

Another institution that gained considerable popularity during the later Purānic period was that of temple dancers. These were known as Devadāsis (attendants to gods), or natīs (dancing girls) and most of the temples in Mediaeval India had a large number of them in their service. 5 The custom of the association of dancing girls with temples probably became quite common in the 6th century A. D. 6 By the

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1. Mahābhārata, VIII, 94. 26. 'Nārim Prakāśamiva Sarvagamyām'.


3. Mahābhārata, V. 86.15,16; XIII, 53.66; V. 125.19; IV, 68.24,29; II, 36.2-3; III, 229.22-24; Rāmāyana, VI.127.3; II.36.2-3; I. 9.17; 10.6; Arthasastra, Book I, Ch.27, Sutra, 123-24.


time of the visit of Huen Tsang (7th century A.D.), the institution of temple-dancers had been well established in India. The courtesans were first employed in the temples of India, for the pleasure of the gods like Śiva, Viṣṇu and their spouses, to entertain them with song and dance.¹

"The institution of the Devadāsī was borrowed by priest from the king. Just as kings employed armies of prostitutes for enhancing their pleasure and pomp, the temples engaged them for singing and dancing before idols, for fanning them during processions, and generally adding to the attraction of temple rituals and feasts. Their sacred duties did not, however, occupy the full time of the Devadāsīs. Their remuneration from the temple was nominal, and when not engaged in their legitimate duties, they were allowed private practice. They acted in stage shows, dance and sang in social functions held in well-to-do households, and the more accomplished were paid highly. Their wages for granting favours of a more intimate nature were even higher, and the better classes of Devadāsīs of the later purānic period were noted for their wealth and liberality like the Gaṇikās of Vatsyayana's time."²

² Ibid., P. 238.
The epigraphs as well as literary works make references to the institution of natīs or dancing girls, which was prevalent in Assam. In the Tezpur grant, King Vanamāla, made gifts of dancing girls to the temple of Śiva.1 The duties of the dancing girls were to fan the idol with cāmara, to prepare garlands, and to sing and dance before the god. They were beautiful and attractive to all minds and they adorned themselves with various ornaments.2 In most of the Śiva temples of Assam, there was a class of people known as Nāta who provided the temple with dancing girls and singers.3 The Natīs held a privileged position in Assam, during the Ahom period, as the instance shows, that king Śiva Simha, who married Phulesvarī, a natī from a Śiva temple and made her the Bar Rāja (the Chief Queen) and struck coins jointly. The survival of the practice of Devadāsis is seen in the Doobi and Hajo temples in Kamārupa.

The introduction of dancing girls in temples, no doubt, tended to affect their moral and spiritual atmosphere. Some people used to visit the shrines not for paying respect

2. Ibid.
to the god, but for making love to the devadāsī.\textsuperscript{1} The general effect of the institution was undesirable. All the moral and religious leaders of the community fought against this innovation, but in vain. The royal support eventually succeeded in making the custom general and popular.\textsuperscript{2} Now this custom has disappeared.

In the royal courts, a large number of singing girls were engaged as Chauri-bearers, betel carriers, fanservants etc. Most of them used to sing, dance and even stage dramas at the court, besides their own duties. Dancing girls were also employed as spies, and the customs were in vogue even during the Ahom period also. Some women also served as parasol-bearers, door-keepers, hair dressers in the royal courts, and these women probably did not belong to higher classes.\textsuperscript{3}

Food and Drink:

Inscriptions are silent about the nature of food and drink, prevailing in ancient Assam; however, incidental references are found in the literature. Food is determined according to the climatic conditions and the nature of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item[2.] Ibid., PP. 183-84.
  \item[3.] Ibid., PP. 182 f.
\end{itemize}
inhabitants. Rice was the staple food, which is still so
today; and all sections of the people including Brāhmaṇs
were accustomed to eating meat and fish with restrictions
in regard to certain animals or fishes. Food restrictions
were also observed on a few occasions, such as Saṅkrānti,
ekādasi, uncleanness due to the death of person, and during
a period of penance.

Rice, fish, meat, vegetables and fruits constituted
the chief articles of food. Rice and milk were mixed
together to prepare pāyasa and dugdāna. Modaka and pīśaka
of various kinds were prepared from rice flour and guda
(molasses). Curd and ghee were prepared from milk, and they
were commonly used.\(^1\) The earlier literature makes mention
of some twentyfive to fifty kinds of special dishes (Vyāñjana)
prepared with vegetables, pulses, fish and meat.\(^2\) The fishes
which are serpent-shaped and scaleless were not eaten by
the upper castes.\(^3\) The Yogini Tantra mentions the eating
of meat and fish in Kāmarūpa.\(^4\) Sacrifice of various kinds
of animals was considered very meritorious, as both the

\(^1\) Yogini Tantra, 11/9-257,'Māhisam Varjajayenmāmsam kṣiram
dadhi ghṛtam tathā!'


\(^3\) Ibid., 11/5–275, 'Matsyāṃśca sarpākarāṃśca varjjayet'.

\(^4\) 'Kāmarūpena tyajet sāmiṣam'.
Kālikāpurāṇa and the Yoginī Tantra describe. The Yoginī tantra recommends the flesh of ducks, pigeons, tortoises and wild boars. 1 Besides the flesh of goats, deer, antelopes, rhinoceroses, iguanas are also sanctioned. Females of animals were generally prohibited as offering.

Various kinds of liquors were used. One of these alcoholic drinks was known as Ullaka. The Harṣacarita of Bana, refers to 'cups of Ullaka diffusing a fragrance of sweet wine' 2 which were sent by Bhaskarvarman to Harṣa with the royal presents. The 'mahdumada' mentioned in the Bargāon grant, which Hoernle takes to mean 'intoxication with wine' also indicates the use of alcohol. The Yoginī Tantra mentions wine in connection with the worship of goddess Kāmesvar. 3 Lāopāṇi or rice beer is even today the national beverage of the various tribes of Assam; and it is also offered in the worship of tribal deities. Another common practice was chewing and eating of tāmbula (areca nut), both ripe and unripe together with betel-leaf and lime. This is recorded both in the Harṣacarita and in the accounts of the

1. 'Hamśa pārāvatam bhaksyaṁ kūrmam varāhameva ca kāmarūpe parityāgāddṛgatistasya sambhavet'.
2. Harṣacarita, Tr. cowell, PP. 213 f.
3. 11/7, 19, Rudhirairmāmśa madyaśca pūjayet parameśvarīṁ.
The practice of eating betel-nut specially by the women, is mentioned in the _Yogini Tantra_.

Dresses and Ornaments: Figs. 18, 19, 20, 21, 56, 57, 59, 67

The garments used in ancient Assam were known as _vastras_ or _ācchādana_ and were used in both the forms stitched (_Sūcīvidham_) and unstitched, as known from the _Kālikāpurāṇa_.

The normal male dress consisted of a _paridhāna_, similar to the present day 'dhoti' or undergarment as appeared from the sculptures and in the descriptions of the _Kālikāpurāṇa_.

The upper garments, known as _utterīya_, were used specially by the higher classes. The males and females sometimes used _kanchuki_ to cover their upper part, as known from some of the ancient sculptures. The males of distinctive status used head dresses, called _ushnisha_ (_pāgūrī_), the practice is still in vogue among villagers showing their social status. Tribes used various kinds of head dresses.

Textile materials as described, according to the _Kālikāpurāṇa_, are: _kārpāṣa_ (cotton), _kambala_ (wool), _balka_.

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2. 1/6, Na āukradarśanāṁ striṇāṁ tāmbulāśā sadā bhābet.
3. Chap. 69; 69/2.
4. Chap. 69/5.
(bark), koṣaja (silk from cocoons) and hemp cloth (śāpavastra). The cap presented to the pilgrim by Bhāskaravarman, made of coarse skin lined with soft down, was designed to protect the pilgrim from rain. Skins and hides were also used for clothing purposes, as found in the list of royal presents to Harsa, which included parivesā made of kardaraṅga leather with charming borders and also pillows made of samuraka (deer) leather. In the Mahābhārata, it is described as to how the kirāta soldiers of Bhagadatta tied their loin cloths with Siari. The bark fibres fit for weaving into cloth, Kṣauṣa, was by far the most important in ancient times, and that this cloth was highly valued is known from the evidence of the Mahābhārata. Kṣauṣa was worn on festive occasion, and the queen used it because of its fine variety. Among the royal presents to Harsa, the Kṣauṣa cloths were "pure as the autumn moon's light." Dukūla was the usual name for the finest kṣauṣa and it is referred to in the Bargaon grant as being used for flags. Bāna, too, mentions that the

1. Chap. 69/2.
2. Life of Huen Tsang, P. 189.
3. Harsacarita (cowell).
5. Ibid.
Ābhoga umbrella, sent to Harsa was wrapped in dukula. 1 K.L. Barua identifies dukula with the muga silk of Assam. 2 The place, Suvarṇakudya, mentioned in the Arthasastra, where the best quality of dukula was manufactured, was in Assam. 3 Dukula 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." 4

The hemp cloth (śāṇavastrām) is referred in the Kālikā purāṇa, and its use is known from the account of Hiuen Tsang, who mentions Śānaka as a dark cloth made of the fibre of the Śānaka plant (a kind of hemp) and used by the bhikṣus. 5 The silks of Assam are derived from two species of worms: Eri or Erandi (Attacus ricini) and Muga (Antheroca Assamoea); the former one is of a drab colour, coarse in texture, and is very durable, light and warm. 6 True silk, Assamese white pāṭa silk, called patta, is the most valuable product in Assam. In the Harsacarita, reference is made to sacks woven out of pattastra (silk yarn). 7

6. Stack, Silk in Assam (Notes on some Industries of Assam, 1848-95) PP.6-12; Duarah, Eri silk of Assam, PP. 77 f.
According to the status, married or unmarried, the women had distinctive garments. Generally, they used two garments an upper and a lower. Their dresses consisted of a girdle (mekhalā) worn round the waist dropping to the feet, a blouse or a 'ríhā' (upper garment) covering the breast, and an 'Uttariya,' also upper garment, covering the waist and breast, of which one end was coiled round the waist just over the 'ríhā' and the other end placed across the breast and over a shoulder. Greater ornamentation with embroidery of the garments and a particular dress indicated one's status in the society. Married women wore veils and took particular care of their hair dressing with the help of combs, made of ivory, wood and bamboo. The Bargaon grant refers to the use of jewelled mirrors by women in their toilette. The 'tilaka' (sindur, a kind of red paste) on the forehead showed their married status as well as feminine grace.

The art of dyeing both yarn and cloth was well-known. The mention of painted and variously dyed cloths is found in the Harṣaçarita, which includes some of them in the royal presents to Harṣa. In the Kālikāpurāṇa,

1. Harṣaçarita, cowell, PP. 212 f.
references are made to the varieties of coloured garments. The use of embroidered garments, is practice of Assamese women. Red and yellow coloured garments seem to have been regarded as auspicious, though the Kalikā purāṇa forbids the use of blue and red coloured garments for religious purposes. Dyeing is also very common among the tribes, hills and plains alike. The Manipuris have also long been known as skilful and artistic dyers, and they still maintain their reputation in this respect. The Nagās, too, are very adept in dyeing and producing brilliant and pleasing colours.

The manufacture of embroidered cloths, and the gift of such cloths to deities was considered meritorious. The presents sent to Harṣa included pieces of cloths as smooth as birch bark or smooth painted silk, which was probably the mugā silk, soft and tawny in colour like birch bark.

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1. Chap. 69/8-16.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
5. Barua, Op. cit., P. 144; also see Mati Chandra, 'The History of Indian Costume from the 3rd to the end of the 7th centuries A.D.', J.I.S.O.A., VIII.
In ancient Assam, ornaments were used by men and women alike, as known both from literature\(^1\) and sculptures. The epigraphs refer to the various kinds of wares and jewellers' shops with ornaments.\(^2\) The Kālikā Purāṇa\(^3\) gives an exhaustive list of ornaments made of gold, silver and other metal, worn by men and women on different parts of their bodies, feet, waist, fingers, wrists, arms, neck, ears and forehead. Again it forbids the wearing of silver ornaments above the neck; and further stated that the ornaments made of other metals than iron and bellmetal (cansya) should be worn only on the lower part of the body.\(^4\)

Necklaces (hāra) of beads are generally found in the sculptures, sometimes with pendants in the middle of the

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1. The Kālikā Purāṇa (Chap. 69, V. 17-2) gives the names of forty different types, as follows: Kirīta, Siroratna, Kundala, lalātika, talapatra, hāra, graiveyaka, Urmvikā, Prālambikā, ratnasūtra, uttāṅga, akṣamālika, Pārśadyota, nakbadyota, anāgulacchādaka, jutālaka, mānava, mūrdhatārā, khalantikā, anāgada, vāhuvalaya, Sīhābhūṣaṇa, Ḥīṅkā, prāganda, Vandha, Udbhāsa, nābhīpūra, mālikā, saptaki, Śṛṅkhala, dantapatra, karpaka, āru sūtra, nivi, mustivamda, prakīrṇaka, Pādāṅgada, haṃsaka, nūpura, kṣudraghāntika and mukhappāṭa.

2. Bargason grant (second plate), V. 14.


4. Kālikāpurāṇa, chap. 69/33, Grīvordhadesē raupuntu na kadācicca bhūṣaṇaṃ.
necklace. The flat necklace (graiveyaka) is called galpatā in Assam. The Keyūra and āṅgada were worn on the upper arms. The āṅgada type of armlet, as found in the sculptures, is a circular band often ornamented with designs. The bracelet, known as kānkana, was also worn. Some sculptures are seen with bangles, which look like a modern khāru, worn both by men and women. Kundalas (ear-rings) were used in the ears; nūpurās (anklets) in the feet; kinkinī, a chain base fringed with little bells round the feet, were worn by young girls. 1 Tilaka or lalātika, the ornament for the forehead was worn by women only.

The various ways of arranging hair and decoration of the hair are noticed in the sculptures. Although most of the figures are represented as wearing head-gear, some are depicted with different styles of hair arrangement. The simplest and most common coiffure is shown raised; and this method of arranging hair is still in use, and to swell the chignon women even now put padding or borrowed hair inside it.

Perfumes and cosmetics were also used in ancient Assam, particularly by the wealthy classes. From different sources, we know that āgaru, sandal wood, musk of deer,
gosīrṣa and other scented oils were used in abundance in Assam.\(^1\) The Kālikā Purāṇa\(^2\) mentions the different kinds of perfumes, which were used in common. They were scūrnikrta (powder), ghrṣa (paste) dhābakārṣita (ashes) sammarādjarasā (juice), Prānyaṅgodbhava (like musk) etc. in which are included varieties of Kumkuma, Kalāguru, Kasturi and Karpūra. Scented oil was used on the body, and it was a common practice among men and women alike. The Tezpur grant states that women used scented oil and anointed their breasts with odorous substances. Sandal-paste was probably a favourite material used in all religious and social ceremonies. A rich perfume was prepared with kṛṣṇā-guru oil. Aṇjana (eye salve) and Karpūra (camphor) which was "cold, pure and white as bits of ice", were used.\(^4\) Hamsavega brought to Harsa sacks of woven silk, containing jet-black pieces of black aloe wood, gosīrṣa candana, camphor, Kasturikākoṣā (musk), Kuḍkola sprays.\(^5\)

The use of perfume is meant for the increase of personal attraction. Hiuen Tsang records that the people of

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2. Ibid.
3. V. 30.
5. Ibid.
India stained their teeth red or black. This custom of colouring the teeth as a mode of prasădhana (ornamentation) is described by the Yogini Tantra, and was prevalent among the Assamese women.

Among luxury articles were hand-made fans, garlands, and "jewelled mirror used by the women in their coquetries." The grant of Vallabhadra refers to sandals with leather straps. Foot-wear was made both of wood (Khagama) and deer-hide (upanaha). Umbrellas were usually made of woven cloth. The abhoga umbrella of the rulers of Kamarpura was a royal insignia. The umbrella sent to Harsa, manifested 'many wonder moving miracles'. The royal umbrella was marked by three features, viz., that it was adorned by white pearl-festoons; its round margin was fringed by a dangling row of chauris; its top (śikha) was decorated with the beautiful figure of a hamsa with outspread wings.

Economic condition:

Ancient Assam depended mainly upon agriculture, although the forest products and industries also helped to

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3. Harsha grant.
4. E.I., V. PP. 181 f.
5. Kalika Purana.
improve the economic condition of the regions. Owing to
the tightening up of the agricultural economy all the lands
were thoroughly organised with the help of departmental
machinery and the demand for more cultivable land was gradually
felt. Jungles and marshes were reclaimed and gradually
brought under the plough.  

The Jhum method of cultivation of rice, probably
the earliest method of crude type of cultivation had been
carried on in Assam, and it is still continued among most
of the tribes. The extensive cultivation of paddy at least
from the 6th century A.D., is proved by the fact that the
areas of donated lands are expressed in terms of the measures
of paddy. As rice is the staple food of the region, truly
the cultivation of rice constituted one of the chief economic
pursuits of the people. The Bargaon grant mentions the
gift of a lābu kutiksetra, which according to Hoernle was
"a field with clusters (hills) of gourds."  

Pumpkins are
still largely grown on the river banks of Assam.  
Sugarcane
was another crop, produced in Assam. Qazim states that the
sugarcane of Assam "exceeds in softness and sweetness and

1. Maity, S.K., Economic life of the Northern India in the
   Gupta period, PP. 188-89 ff.
2. Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvalī, P. 118.
is of three colours, red, black and white.\(^1\) The cultivation of various vegetables is mentioned in the \textit{Yogini Tantra}.\(^2\) Besides crops, the plantation of various fruit trees is mentioned both in inscriptions and literatures. The epigraphs mention \textit{Kantaphala} (Jack fruit), \textit{Aur}a (mango), \textit{Jambu} (eugenia jambolana), \textit{Sripahala}, \textit{Dumbari} (fig tree), \textit{Sakhotaka} (the walnut tree), \textit{badari} (jujube tree), \textit{Lakuca} or \textit{amalaka} (a kind of bread fruit tree), \textit{amla}, \textit{betasa} (gamboze tree) and various kinds of citron trees. \(^3\) Both jack-fruit and coconut were produced in abundance, as recorded by Huen Tsang who states that in \textit{Kamarupa} "the jack fruit and coconut were in great esteem though plentiful."\(^4\) Again we find from Qazi\'s records that "Assam produces 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 coconut trees, pepper vines, areca trees and sadij (malabothrum) in great quantity."\(^5\)

1. \textit{Asiatic Researches}, II, P. 173.
2. II/9.
3. Grant of Indrapāla; Grant of Dharmapāla; Grant of Balavarman; Grant of Ratnapāla; \textit{Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvali}, PP. 163 f.n. 3; 109 f.n. 2; 115, f.n. 2.
extensive plantation of areca nut and betel vine is supported by a number of sources.\(^1\) The plantation of *haridra* (turmeric), *ardraka* (ginger), *jiraka* (cumin), *pippaliyaka* (long pepper) *marica* (pepper), *sarisa* (mustard), *karpūra* etc. are referred to in the *Yogini-tantra*.\(^2\) The *Kālikāpurāṇa* mentions not only fruits but also a large number of precious trees including *sarala* (Pine), *sāl*, *candana* and *agaru*.

The forest products of Assam undoubtedly played an important role in the economic life of the area. Kautilya states that forest tracts would be granted to *Brahmans* for religious purposes.\(^3\) It appears from the Kamauli grant that such gifts were also made in Assam. The system of forest reservation, a practice referred to in the *Arthaśāstra*, was well established. The grant of Balavarman refers to the large belts of forests (*vana*).\(^4\) The incidental references given by Kālidāsa, further, prove that forests of valuable trees covered Assam.\(^5\)

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1. Āśad Inscription of Ādityasena, C.I.I., III, PP. 200 ff; Newgong grant, V. 5; *Harṣaśarita*, PP. 212 ff; *Yogini Tantras*, 11/7, 9; Qazim, *Asiatic Researchers*, II, P. 173; *Kumāra Harasa*, V. 207.
2. 11/7, 9.
3. Book II, Chap. II.
4. V. 9.
The most common trees vata (Ficus India) and aśvattha (Ficus Religiosa), serve many religious purposes. Madhuraśvattha trees are used for rearing lac insects. Sālmāli is the silk-cotton tree. The forests produced many valuable articles such as scents and toilet preparations. Assam was an important source for supplying aromatic woods, resins etc. to the other parts of India. In the Mahābhārata, it is mentioned that the sandal wood and aloewood (agaru) were presented to the Pāndavas by the Kāmarūpa ruler. In the list of royal presents to Harsa was included the gosīrsa sandal, "stealing the fiercest inflammation away", and 'black aloe oil'. Sandal wood was produced in Kāmarūpa, as may be known from the references of the Arthasastra. Kalidāsa occasionally described the black aguru trees in the country of Prāgjyotīṣa. Aguru or aloewood is a valuable product of Assam forests, which is used as incense and also for perfumes. Tejpāt, identified by Adams and other writers as the malabothrum, was exported to foreign countries, probably from Assam and Burma, as the trees were common in this region.

1. Grant of Balavarman; Grant of Dharmapāla; Grant of Ratnapāla.
2. Grant of Dharmapāla; Kāmarūpa Śasanāvalī, P. 182 f.n. 4.
3. Grant of Balavarman.
4. Sabhā parva, 30, 28; 52, 10.
6. Raghuvamśa, IV, I.
Black pepper or long pepper, and lac are two characteristic products of Assam forests.\(^1\) Tavernier states that 'the country (Assam) also produces an abundance of shellac, of a red colour; with which 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 quality 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.'\(^2\) The *Harṣagārika* further mentions "heaps of black white chowries, curious pairs of kinnaras, apes (vanamānusa), jivanjivaka birds, and mermaids with necks bound in golden fetters; musk deer scenting the space all round them with their perfumes; tame female cāmara deer; parrots, ārekas, and other birds enclosed in gold-painted bamboo cages, and partridges in cages in coral."\(^3\) Kālidāsa refers to elephants, caught in the forests of Assam,\(^4\) for different purposes. Ivory is an important article for trade. In the *Mahābhārata* we find mentioned the wild animals in the forests of Assam such as rhinoceros, tigers, elephants,

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buffalos, wild boars and other common animals. The epigraphs, the Yogini-tantra and other earlier works of Assam give the names of the different kinds of birds found in this region.

**Industries:**

The economic wealth of the country played a considerable part in the evolution of different industries such as textile, smithy, pottery, metal, ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane. In the development of various industrial products, the craftsmen of Kāmarūpa had a place in ancient India. The extensive manufacture of cloths from the cottage and hand-loom industries has occupied an important place in every Assamese household. The early use of cotton (Tulāpāt) as a writing material, produced by pressing and turned to the shape sheet of paper, is proved by some old manuscripts. The use of karpāsa (cotton) garments is known from the Kālikā Purāṇa and the Harṣacarita. The extensive supply of cotton clothes shows that the art had reached a stage of perfection. The Kālikā Purāṇa, further, refers

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2. II, 9, 258-60.
4. Chap. 69, V. 2; 68/12.
to the manufacture of woollen garments (kambala), bark cloths (valka), silk (Kosaja) and hemp cloth (Sanastra). \(^1\)

The manufacture of bark cloths is still known among most of the tribes who produce, various designs of fabrics and cloths. \(^2\)

The art of sericulture and weaving, rearing of cocoons for manufacture of various silk cloths, were known to the people of Kamārūpa as early as the days of the Rāmāyana and the Arthaśāstra. \(^3\) The art of manufacturing silk and silk cloths, evolved in China first, came to Assam as well as to some other parts of the country. \(^4\) According to Watt, it was originated in Manipur first, which was the home of the silkworm, and later the art reached China. \(^5\)

The manufacture of Mugā silk, undoubtedly, originated in and was confined to Assam, which had a world-wide reputation in the manufacture of different varieties of silk cloths.

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1. Chap. 69, V. 2; 68/12.
2. Hutton, Angami Nagas, PP. 60 f., 72 f; Butler, J.A.S.B., 1875, I, P. 324; Godden, J.R.A.I., XXVII, P. 7; Playfair, Garos, PP., Man, 1927, PP. 15-16; Robinson, Account of Assam, PP. 212 f.
4. Schoff, The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, P. 267; J.A.S.B.,
and had a foreign market. The silk industry was very well developed technically in ancient times.

The edi or erandi (attacus ricini) another variety of silk, which is very warm and suitable for use in winter, is produced in Assam.

The three varieties of Indian silk, known as ṭāt, Endi, and Muga, are largely manufactured in Assam. Skill in the art of weaving and spinning has been held to be one of the highest attainments of the Assamese women.

The gold industry must have developed in Assam; and the goldsmiths settled mostly in the rich localities as to satisfy the demand of that section of the society. Gold was found in abundance in the rivers of Assam, namely, Subhansiri, Dikhau, Jaglo, Dihong, Bharali, and Dhansiri. Subargakudiya was one of the tracts of Assam on the bank of some river which produced plenty of gold. ¹ The Tezpur grant refers to the river Lauhitya, which brought gold-dust from gold-bearing boulders of the Kailasa mountain.² The Tezpur grant of Vanamala mentions that he re-built the gold temple of Siva at Haruppesvara. According to the Silimpur inscription,

¹. Das Gupta, N.N., I.C., V, PP. 339-41.
². J.A.S.B., IX, PP. 766 f.
King Jayapāla offered a gift of gold equal to his own weight to a learned Brāhmaṇa, along with 900 gold coins.\(^1\) Tabāqat-i-Nāsiri states that a huge image of gold weighing one thousand maunds was enshrined in a temple of Kāmarūpa.\(^2\) During the Ahom period, the washing of gold had been practised by a class of people, known as Sonowāl. Thousands of people were engaged for this work, as mentioned by Fathiya-i-Ibriyah.\(^3\) It appears that the practice was an ancient economic pursuit.\(^4\) The existence of copper mine in Assam has been referred to in the grant of Ratnapāla, which the king worked with profit.

The jeweller's art may be visualized from the examination of the list of the royal presents to Harṣa, described by Bana, such as the exquisite ornamented Ābhoga umbrella with the jewelled ribs: Ornaments which crimsoned the heavenly spaces with the light of the finest gems: shining

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1. E.I., XIII, PP. 289 f.
2. Raverty, II, Tabāqat-i-Nāsiri, P.569; Riyaz-us-salātin, P. 67.
crest jewels: pearl necklaces which seems the source of the milk ocean's whiteness: quantities of pearls, shell, sapphire, and other drinking vessels by skilful artists, cages of coral and rings of ivory, encrusted with rows of huge pearls from the brows of elephants. ¹ Kālidāsa refers to the mineral resources of Kāmarūpa which yielded gems in large quantities. ² Inscriptions refer to various wares and goldsmith's shops with varieties of ornaments. ³ Moreover, the high intrinsic and aesthetic quality of the gold coins also suggest that the jeweller's art in metals must have reached a high pitch. The royal ladies, their host of attendants, courtesans, and women in ordinary circumstances, all used to decorate their persons according to the means at their disposal. Vātsyāyana advises a wife never to appear before her husband without some ornaments on her body. The ladies as well as the rich men used ornaments on their persons, as is found in the sculptures. Gold, silver and precious stones were the chief materials for making these ornaments. The women of the poor classes used perhaps the ordinary beads, which continue to this day.

2. Rāghu-va-mā, IV, 34.
The working of other metals such as silver, copper, bronze and brass seems to have been well developed in the ancient times, as may be known from the Kālikāpurāṇa. ¹

The other types of craftsmen, such as basket makers, wood-workers and painters flourished in Assam as can be seen from the Hārṣa-carita. The description of the artistically carved, painted and decorated boat in the grant of Vanamala, testifies to the high proficiency of the early wood-workers in their craft. Referring to various articles of wood, a later source Fathiyahi Ḥibriyah states that wooden boxes, stools, trays and chairs are cleverly and neatly made from one piece of wood. ² Besides these industries, minor crafts like leather work, stone work, brick work, pottery, cane and bamboo work were established, as is proved from the literature as well as epigraphs. ³ Mat-making, a major cottage industry, is known even today. The early literature refers to well-decorated and artistically made sital patis used by the rich and fashionable people.

3. Life of Hiuen Tsang, P. 139; Hārṣa-carita, PP. 212 f; J.A.S.B., 1847, PP. 68 f; The grant of Vallavadeva, E.I., V, PP. 131 f; Nowgong grant, V. 14; Tezpur grant, V. 24; Gauhati grant, V. 10; Suālkuchi grant, L. 59; Taylor, J.A.S.B., 1847, I, PP. 52 f;
Pottery, metal work, jewellery, minting of coins, weaving, dying, stone working, ivory-work, and bamboo-work made remarkable progress in ancient Assam. The industrial development brought beneficial results not only to society at large but also to the workers. They were gradually recognised in society.

Medium of Exchange:

The value of an article, generally, was measured in terms of commodities in early times. Most of the business transactions were carried on by a system of barter, which became the medium of exchange. This system still continues in the villages and also among the tribes.

The earliest reference is made in the Hariśarūtika, to the use of cowries, to the "heaps of black and white cowries" which were presented to Hariśa by Bhāskararāvarman. The use of cowries is also mentioned in the Tezpur Rock inscription., which refers to a penalty of a hundred cowries for the infringement of a certain state regulation. The reference to silver coins, probably from Kāmarūpa, mentioned in the Arthaśāstra, under the name of Gaulikām, 3

1. Cowell, PP. 212 f.
seems to be the earliest so far found. References to gold coins are to be seen in the Silimpur grant. The currency of gold coins is attested to by the recent discovery of 14 gold coins from Pāglātekar near Goalpara town, by the State Department of Archaeology, Gauhati. The existence of a copper mine mentioned in the grant of Ratnapāla shows that copper was used for coinage also. This evidence goes to prove that cowries, coins of gold, silver and copper were used as media of exchange side by side with the barter system in vogue.

The prosperous industry and trade produced other beneficial results in the economic life of the country. To facilitate trade and other transactions, the kings of the region minted gold, silver and copper coins.

**Education**

Education is self-culture and self improvement. The aims and ideals of education in ancient India were the infusion of a spirit of piety and religiousness, formation of character, development of personality, inculcation of

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1. E.I., XII, PP. 289 f; XIII, PP. 292, 295.
civic and social duties, promotion of social efficiency and preservation and spread of national culture. The direct aim of all education, whether literary or professional, was to make the student fit to become a useful and cultured member of the society.

The emphasis on the moral and spiritual aspects of life greatly shaped the type of education and subjects for studies, and therefore, it was primarily based rather on theory than on practical vocational training.

The caste system has had an important role in Hindu society for a long time and has naturally exercised considerable influence on the theory and practice of education in ancient India. The profession of teacher was confined to the Brāhmaṇas, although Kṣatrapa teachers of Vedic and philosophical subjects existed down to the 6th century B.C. The keen intellect of the Brāhmaṇa community was for a long time utilised to further the bounds of human knowledge in several branches of non-vedic studies. It was only in later times that religious and literary education came to be confined to the Brāhmaṇas, and professional and industrial

2. Ibid., P. 10.
training to non-Brāhmaṇas. According to the smṛiti rules, the Vedic studies must have dominated the course prescribed for the Brāhmaṇas and all Brāhmaṇas had to devote 12 years to Vedic studies after their Upānayana Samskāra. When new branches of knowledge like grammar, philosophy, law and classical Sanskrit literature came to be developed, only a section of the Brāhmaṇa used to devote themselves to the Vedic studies; and the rest were required to memorise the new Vedic Mantras necessary for daily religious purposes. Kṣatriya and Vaiśya also had to pursue Vedic studies after their Upānayana, and gradually, the Upānayana was prohibited to other castes and confined among the Brāhmaṇa community. There was also restriction on Vedic studies for the non-Brāhmaṇa.

Before the introduction of writing, teaching and learning were done orally in gurujrahs, hermitages. The method of teaching orally was continued even after writing was introduced.

The gurujrha was the main centre of education, besides schools maintained by private individuals or village schools provided by the Brahmaṇas of the agrahara village,

2. Ibid.
patronised by the kings. The Gurukula system, in which a student has to stay at the house of a teacher, or in a boarding house of established reputation, was one of the most important features of ancient Indian education.¹ The Brahmana donees of royal grants were keen on discharging their six-fold duties, one of which was adhyapana (teaching). Their system of education was based mainly on the study of Sanskrit literature and religious works. The Vedas, the systems of philosophy and various other branches of learning, were taught to those in the schools. There was no restriction on the admission of non-brāhmaṇs to those schools, and they studied along with the Brāhmaṇa students. The royal court which was the abode of many learned poets and scholars was another centre of learning. The temple also played an important role in the cultural and social life of the people. The temple was a centre of popular education, where the people could gather knowledge of theology, and participate in other social activities, such as dramas, music, dancing. All these activities helped a great deal in the interchange of ideas and the diffusion of knowledge among people of all walks of life.

The Nowgong grant of Balavarman² refers to the Samāvartana ceremony which was performed after the completion

¹ Bergaon grant, J.A.S.B., LXVII, I, PP. 99 f.
² V. 31.
of the Brahmacharyya, the period of educational studies. 1
The kings were also keenly interested in spreading education
and made large grants for that purposes. Hiuen Tsang states
that 'the king (Bhāskaravarman) was fond of learning and
the people imitated him'. He further states that 'men of
high talents visited the kingdom'. 2 The pilgrim specially
mentions the visit of a learned Brāhmaṇa who informed
Bhāskaravarman of "the high qualities of the Master of Law
(Hiuen Tsang)". This Brāhmaṇa was formerly a heretic of the
Lokāyata sect, who came to the Nālandā monastery to
dispute with monks. Having been defeated in the theological
discussion, he was converted by the Chinese pilgrim to
Buddhism. 3 Education and learning flourished well in Assam;
and attracted scholars of other countries, known from the
statement of Hiuen Tsang, that 'men of ability came from
far to study here'.

Curriculum of study :

The curriculum of study was changed from time to
time. In the early Vedic age, the Vedic literature formed
the main topic of study. Besides sacred hymns, historical
poems, ballads and heroic songs were taught. Vedic studies

   PP. 408-15.
usually began at about the age of nine or ten and the initiation ceremony known as Upanayana was performed at their commencement. More effort was made to understand the meaning of the hymns than to remember their exact wording. In the later period, remarkable achievements were made in the realm of philosophy, sacred law, epic literature, philology, grammar, astronomy and several fine and useful arts like sculpture, medicine and shipbuilding; and those were included in the study.

The Vedic study included śikṣā chandas, Vyākaraṇa, Nirukta, Jyotisa and also the study of the self and god. The epigraphs of Kāmarūpa mention both the study of Vidyā and Kalā: Vidyā is literary study, and kalā is professional activity. Vidyā includes the four Vedas, four upa-vedas, consisting of Ayurveda, Dhānurveda, Gandharaveda and the Tantras, the six Vedāṅgas, Itihāsa, Purāṇas, smṛtis, Arthaśāstra, Kāmasūtra, Silpaśāstra, Alāṅkara, Kāvyā. The Puṣpa bhadra grant refers to a Brāhmaṇa well-versed in śrutī, smṛtī, Mimāṃsā and Arthaśāstra. The Tezpur grant makes a

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2. Das, S.K., Educational system of the Ancient Hindus, PP. 18 f.
4. V. 30, 'Sāṅgam Yajurvedamadhi tavān'.
reference to Bhijjāta, who studied the Vajurveda with all its accessories. The Bargaon grant refers to Devadatta, who was the chief of the Vedic scholars and "the Vedas had their aims fulfilled in him". The donee of the Tezpūr grant, Indoka, was well versed in the Vedas. Rāmādeva, the grand father of the donee of the Subhankarapaṭaka grant was chief among the Brāhmanas, who were well versed in the Vedas. His son Bhārata was skilled in all the six Karmas, enjoined for Brāhmanas. The Brāhmanas as well as some of the rulers of Kāmarūpa were learned in the Vedas and various śāstras.

The subjects taught were 'the four Vedas, the fourteen śāstras, the eighteen purāṇas, the Mahābhārata, the sixteen Vyākaraṇas, the eighteen kāvyas, the eighteen kośas, and Arthaśāstra, besides Yoga-śāstra and texts on Kālithāli or Mathematics (the learning followed by kāyasthas or clerks and Accounts). For advanced studies, Assamese students of Sanskrit would go to Mithilā (Darbhanga), Sāntipur and Navadwip in Bengal, and to Benaras. Sankarādeva, of the

1. V. 16.
late medieval period, studied four vedas, fourteen śāstras,
eighteen purāṇas, the Mahābhārata, fourteen Vyākaraṇas,
eighteen kāvyas, eighteen koṣas, saṁhitas, Amara, Cāṇakya
and yoga śāstra.¹ This list, however, represents the
entire traditional curricula rather than specific studies.

The Jyotisha-vedāṅga (astronomy and astrology)
was extensively studied, and the king maintained Daivajñas
at his court² to forecast the coming events, celestial and
terrestrial. Ayurveda, the science of medicine, was also
studied. An earlier work, dealing with elephant medicine,
(Hastyāyurveda) probably compiled in Assam by Pālakāpya,
the science dealing with the characteristics, diseases,
cures, and training of elephant was an important study.
The Doobi grant states that even rulers were conversant with
the science of both elephants, and horses.³

Various arts (kalā), silpaśāstra, music and dancing,
were taught and cultivated in Assam as known from literature
and archaeological remains. Huien Tsang also recorded the
custom of singing, dancing and playing musical instruments

². Kāmauli grant, V. 8.
³. V. 4; also see Choudhury, Op.cit., P. 381.
at the court of Bhāskaravarman. Singing and dancing, accompanied by musical instruments, took place during dramatic performances and religious ceremonies. The grant of Vanamāla refers to singing to the tune of musical instruments. The specimens of musical instruments, noticed in the sculptures of the period, are: vīnā, flute (vāhi), double pipe (kāli), comh (sāṅkh), drum (mridaṅga) damaru, cymbals, lyre etc. Some early Assamese literature, written on songs and music, refers to various rāgas, which prove that both mārga and desī music had already been advanced on the lines indicated in the saṅgīta śāstras. Singing, dancing and playing musical instruments formed the integral part of rituals in religious worship. The custom of keeping dancing girls (Nāṭī) in the temple establishments and the various decorative dancing figures noticed in the ruins of temples, prove that dancing was cultivated and was an esteemed art. The art of painting was considerably developed, as known from epigraphs and literature. The Nidhānpur grant refers to portraits, hung on the walls of the royal palace. The remains of early pictures are found on the Guākuchi copper plate grant. In the early Assamese literature, references

1. V. 28.
are made to paintings on the wall and the antiquity of painting is attested by those works.

Writing material:

The Yogini Tantra refers to writing and engraving on materials like clay, bark-leaves, gold, copper and silver. The use of clay, copper, and stone as writing materials is mostly found in the epigraphs. Among those three materials, copper plates were more extensively used than stones. Clay was used as writing material; the evidence is found from the clay seals of Bhaskaravarman discovered in Nalanda. Wood board was also used as writing material, as has been pointed out by Winternitz. According to him the Bodleian library contains a manuscript on wooden board from Assam. The use of strips of bark of the sāci tree (aloe bark) is evidenced by Bana. Most of the early Assamese manuscripts were written on the strips of the bark of the sāci tree. The materials for use in writing were: bhūrjapatra, aloe wood and sāncipāt, tulāpāt (sheet made of pressing cotton) or cotton cloth, wooden board, palm leaves, clay, metal, stone, brick etc. But the most common materials were tulāpāt and sāncipāt.

1. II/VII, 14-16.
3. Harṣagārīta, P. 214.
The pen and pencil for writing were made of bamboo, wood, reed, animal horns, bell-metal, copper, gold and iron. The ink was made from peculiar ingredients such as silikhā (Terminalia cibrina) and the urine of bulls. References to the use of invisible ink made from earth worms are also found. The ink prepared in Assam was characteristic for its tenacity to glossy and slippery surfaces.

Script:

The Assamese script, undoubtedly, is a later development. The script seems to derive from the Brāhmī and Devanāgarī, and was developed through successive stages until it reached its final form. S. Kakati supposed that it was a 'descendant' of the kuṭila variation of the Gupta script of eastern India. The script of the epigraphs is mostly Brāhmī and Devanāgarī, and its study may show the trend of its evolution on independent lines. The earliest known script of Assam was a form of Brāhmī as found from the inscription of Bhutivarman (circa 6th century A.D). Beginning with a gradual change in the Kāmarūpi dialect, which differed only a little from that of Mid India, as recorded by Hiuen Tsang, the process of

1. Yoginī Tantra, II/VII-V-VIX.
evolution of both the script and the language continued until the language had an individualised and independent script of its own.\textsuperscript{1} Most of the inscriptions were composed in the Sanskrit language. In the Kānāivaraśī Rock inscription (dated saka 1127), specimens of a few archaic Assamese characters are noticed. It appears that the Assamese alphabets began to assume their present forms by circa 12th century A.D. The ancient epigraphs of Assam were composed in North Indian Brahmi and Sanskrit language. The early evolution of the Assamese script possibly explains its universal use in producing both Sanskrit and Assamese manuscripts.\textsuperscript{2} The alphabet of the early inscriptions i.e. Kānāivaraśī inscription, present a clue to the gradual transition from Brahmi and Devanāgarī to the early Assamese script, which was marked subsequently by four schools which, in process of time, merged into one another producing more or less a common script. Many alphabets of the old manuscripts tend to be almost similar to those of Devanāgarī of a mixed form, and the older the manuscripts are, the more marked are the similarities.\textsuperscript{3}

Assamese language:

The Assamese language is not entirely based on Sanskrit, and its evolution on independent lines began very

\textsuperscript{1} Choudhury, \textit{Op.cit.}, PP. 363-64.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., Cotton College Diamond Jubilee Volume, PP. 119-27.
early. The vernacular languages of north-eastern India are derived from apabhraṃśas, primarily based on old prākritas.¹ These "must be considered as the descendants not of grammatical sanskrit, nor of grammatical prākrit but of the various apabhraṃśas, spoken in different parts of India".² The Assamese language originated from the same group as the Bengali, and Oriya, derived from the eastern variety of the Magadhan prākrit.³ Though a common origin and similarity of scripts are found in Assamese and Bengali languages, their vocabularies, grammar and accent are completely different from each other. It appears that both are separate and independent languages. Both the languages, "started on parallel lines with peculiar dialectical predispositions and often developed sharply contradictory idiosyncracies."⁴ Assamese is an independent speech, related to Bengali, both occupying the position of dialects with reference to some standard Magadhan apabhraṃśa. Assamese is a branch of the

1. The influence of prākrit is noticed from the Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjjaravarman (circa 9th century A.D.). In this inscription, the language, used, is sanskrit, but it contains many words in Prākrit; Kāmarūpa Śaṅśānāvālī, P. 138.
4. Kakati, B.K., Assamese, Its Formation and Development, PP. 7f; Aspects of Early Assamese Literature, PP. 3f; 5. Ibid., PP. 9-10.
New Indo-Aryan speech and it was developed into a distinct language out of the eastern Māgadhi Prākṛta. The earliest specimens of the language are preserved in the songs of Baudha gāṅ-o-Dohā, compositions on the esoteric doctrines and yogic practices of the Sahajāya school of the Buddhist (compiled before circa 800 A.D.). Besides, there exist unwritten songs and ballads, such as songs with the episode of Behulā and Lakhindār, the worship of Manasā, the snake goddess.

Literature had been composed in ancient Assam, both in Sanskrit and Assamese. The works relating to astrology, astronomy, palmistry, arithmetic, medicine and voluminous Tantrik works, were composed in Sanskrit. Most of these works were written in the 12th century and later. Most of the early epigraphs were composed in Sanskrit; the earliest one is the Kāmākhya rock Inscription of Surentravarman, circa 5th century A.D. The epigraphic evidence proves that the Kāmarūpa rulers took personal interest in Sanskrit language and literature. In the Gaubati grant, Indrapāla's father Purandarapāla is described as a renowned poet, and it is said that Bhagavatī and Sarasvatī reside in his speech. He was, further, described as kavičakrāvalacūḍāmaṇi, (chief of the circle of poets). He is said to have composed the

1. V. 11.
2. V. 9.
first eight verses of his Puspbhadra grant. In the Saúkta-
-karnamrta, ten verses are attributed Dharmapala, who is
identified with king Dharmapala of Kamarupa by Dasgupta.¹

The highly ornate and poetic prasastis of the
epigraphs indicate the high degree of literary activity of
the period. Many verses have been regarded as the best
specimens of the period.

The composers were not only well acquainted with
the classical authors, but were greatly influenced by the
classical kavya style. The evidence shows that they adopted
many passages from the works of Kālidāsa, Bānabhātta and
others; for example, in the Nowgong grant, influences from
the Raghuvamśa are discernible. The author of the Bargaon
grant seems to imitate the style of Bānabhātta. The literary
style of these inscriptions ranks quite high.

The Kālikapurāṇa, a notable literary work of the period,
is of the nature of a manual of rituals prescribing various
rites and procedures of worship and also gives valuable
information about the religious conditions prevailing in
early medieval Assam. The Yogini Tantra and Haragaurīsāmvāda,
later works, have preserved earlier traditions, and are
important as semi-historical texts.

¹. Dasgupta, N.N., 'King Dharmapala as poet', J.A.R.S., IV,
PP. 56-57. In Dharmapala's record, names of two court
poets are mentioned; they are Prasthāna Kalasa and
Aniruddha.