"One of the gravest defects of Indian culture which defy rational explanation, is the aversion of Indians to writing history. They applied themselves to all conceivable branches of literature and excelled in many of them, but they never seriously took to the writing of history."¹ The case of Assam is no exception.

From the earliest times to c. 12th century A.D., prior to the Ahom period, historical documents and other reliable records for the history of Assam are meagre. For the prehistoric period a few paleolithic and Neolithic stone tools have been found. The pre and proto-historic material found in different sites of Assam is helpful for the study of the early people and their culture. These include, besides the stone tools, a number of megalithic remains. For the historical period, we have only a few epigraphs and scattered literary documents, historical and semi-historical. The legendary accounts on which the proto-historic and early historic account of Assam is based are rather confused and scattered.

The materials on which a full chronological record of the early history of Assam can be attempted are, by and large, fragmentary. The sober history of Assam, starts from

¹. Majumdar, R.C., Ancient India, P. 7.
the Fourth Century A.D. (the rise of the Varmans). Prior to
the establishment of the Varman dynasty in this part of the
country nothing definite is known, although it can be said
that civilization in Assam must have begun much earlier than
the occupation of the areas by the Varmans.

The sources may broadly be classified under two heads:

(1) Literary, and (2) Archaeological.

(1) Literary Sources:

These comprise the Puranic and other literary works
and the writings of foreign travellers. References to historical
events and myths are scattered in these writings. Sometimes
valuable information is obtained from literary works, both of
secular and religious nature. This source-material can be
subdivided into four categories:

(a) Early and later, Sanskrit works,
(b) The Purānas,
(c) Tātric Buddhist works, and
(d) Foreign accounts.

(a) Early and later Sanskrit works:

The Satapatha Brāhmaṇa alludes to the spread of
The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa gives indication of further advancement of the Aryan culture to Kāmarūpa. The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa records a tradition pertaining to the origin of the name Kāmarūpa. In the Sāmkhyāyana Grhyasūtra, Prāgjyotiṣa is mentioned as the land of sunrise.

The Arthaśāstra of Kautilya mentions some geographical names in connection with the economic products of the land. These have been identified with places in Kāmarūpa.

The Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata, the two great Epics, furnish important sources for the early history of Prāgjyotiṣa, which along with its people is mentioned in both the epics. The Ādikāṇḍa of the Rāmāyana (Ch. XXXV) refers to the foundation of the city of Prāgjyotiṣa by Amrūtarāja. In the Kiskindhyakāṇḍa (Ch. XLII) we get a references to Narakā's city Prāgjyotiṣa on the Varāha mountain. The Mahābhārata refers to it as a Mleccha kingdom, which was ruled over by King Bhagadatta (Karṇaparva, V, 104-5; Sabhāparva (Ch. XXV), 1000 ff). In the same Epic, the region is also

1. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, I,3,7; Dikshitar, I.H.Q, XXI, PP. 29-33.
2. Published in (Nos. 215-52 of the Bibl. Ind.); also Bloomfield, J.A.O.S., XIX, PP. 1-11.
4. Arthaśāstra, Bh. II, Chap. XI; (S.S. tr.), PP. 82 f.
mentioned as an asura kingdom (Vanaparva, XII, 488). This
country was contiguous to the realms of the Kīrātas and Cīnas
(Udyogaparva, XVIII, 584 ff).

The Bhātasyaḥpitā of Varāhamihira refers both to
Prāgjyotisā and the Lauhitya, along with Magadhā, Cīna and
Kāmbhoja.

The dramas and poems written on historical and
semi-historical themes give some valuable information about
history of the region. The most important work is the Raghuvamsa
of Kalidasa (5th cent. A.D), which gives an account of Raghu's
'Dīgvijaya' (IV, 81-84). In this work references are found to
Prāgjyotisā and Kāmaruṇa, lying to the east of the Brahmaputra.
The people of Prāgjyotisā and Kāmaruṇa are described different
from each other. The Daśakumāra-carita of Daṇḍin was composed
in the 6th Century A.D. It mention that Vikatavarman of Videha
married a daughter of the Kāmaruṇa king, and Thus Videha and
Kāmaruṇa were united by this matrimonial alliance.

1. Chaps., XIV, 6; XVI, I,
Prāgjyotiṣa - Lauhitya Kṣīroda - Samudra - purusādāḥ,
Sakayāvāna-Magadhēśvara Prāgjyotisā-Cīna-Kāmbōjāḥ.

2. Collins, M., Geographical Data of the Raghuvamsa and
Daśakumāra-carita, P 48 (f.n.); Chakravarti, M.,

According to Puruṣottama (Trikaṇḍa, p. 93) Prāgjyotisa is the same as Kāmarūpa. It seems that for sometime Prāgjyotisa was the capital city of Kāmarūpa.

The Harṣacarīta of Bāṇabhatta furnishes much more valuable account for the political and cultural history of Kāmarūpa during the 7th Century A.D.² It gives the genealogy of the then king Bhaskara Varman. According to the Harṣacarīta a messenger named Hamsavega was sent to Śrī Harṣavaradhana of Kanauj by the king of Prāgjyotisa.

The Mudrārākṣasa of Viśākhadatta makes an important reference to Avantivarman, king of Kāmarūpa.² The Manjuśrī-mūlakalpa, a Buddhist work, is valuable for the history of Kāmarūpa. Rājaśekhara in his Kāvyamāmsa mentions Prāgjyotisa on the east along with other countries and Kāmarūpa as a mountain.³ In the Kārpūramañjari⁴ drama, Kāmarūpa and Karnasūvarna are referred to along with Campā, Rādhā and Hārikela. Yādavaprapāsa in his Vaijayanti mentions that Prāgjyotisa and Kāmarūpa were located on the east.⁵

3. Kāvyamāmsā, Ch. XVII. P. 93.
Hemacandra's *Abhidhānacintāmaṇī* (IV, 977) mentions Sonítapura as Bānapura (the modern Tejpur). Somadeva in his *Kathāsaritasūgara* mentions Udayādri, situated to the east of Pundra. In Hemacandra's *Abhidhānacintāmaṇī* (IV, 22) the people of Prājyotisa are described as the residents of Kāmarūpa: 'Prājyotisāh Kāmarūpāh'.

The *Vikramāṅkadeva-carita* of Bihana refers to the invasion of Kāmarūpa. Sandhya-karanandi's work *Rāma-carita* records the conquest of Kāmarūpa by Rāmapāla's general, Mayana. Kālhan's *Rājatarangini* refers to Amṛtanrabha, the daughter of a Kāmarūpa king, married to Meghavāhana of Kāśmīra. It further refers to Lalitāditya's campaign as far as the Lauhitya. Yaśodhara, the author of the *Jayamaṅgala* commentary on the *Kāmasūtra*, places Kāmarūpa along with other countries on the east.

(b) The Purāṇas:

The Purāṇas are a very useful source for the early history of Assam, particularly pertaining to the period for which we have no other reliable evidence. In most of the Purāṇas,

both earlier and later, Prāgjyotisā and Kāmarūpa and their rulers are mentioned. The Garuda Purāṇa (Ch. 89) mentions Kāmarūpa and Kāmākhya as the great centres of pilgrimage. The Nārada Purāṇa (Ch. I, II, XXXVII) refers to Hidimba. The Markandeya Purāṇa (57, 58) mentions Prāgjyotisa, Udayācala, Lauhitya and Kāmarūpa on the east.¹

The Visnu Purāṇa (I, IV, V, XXIX) mentions that Visnu in the Boar incarnation installed Naraka in Prāgjyotisa, and that later Krisna killed Naraka and put Bhagadatta on the throne. Again it (II, III) refers to the Kiratas and others of Kāmarūpa, to Bāna of Sonitapura (I, XXI; V, XXXII f) and to Bhismaka of Kundila (V, XXVI). The Brahma Purāṇa (114-115) relates the story of the birth of Naraka and (27) mentions Prāgjyotisa as a kingdom. The Vāyu Purāṇa (45) mentions Prāgjyotisa and the Lauhitya along with other countries of the east. The Skanda Purāṇa refers to the prevalence of the Sākta faith in Kāmarūpa. The Agni Purāṇa refers to Bāna of Sonitapura. Among all the Purāṇas, the Kālikā Purāṇa is the most important source for the early history of Assam, as it was composed in Kamarupa itself in c. 10th century A.D. Kālikā Purāṇa contains valuable material on both

¹ 'Prāgjyotisāḥ sabhuhītyāh' - 58/13. 'Prāgjyotisāca madrasca videhastāmrāliptakāḥ 1 Mallā-magadha-gomantāḥ praicya janapadāḥ smṛtaḥ' II - 57/44.
the political and cultural history of Assam.¹

(c) **Tāntrik-Buddhist Works and Assamese Chronicles**:

The Tāntrik-Buddhist literature of Eastern India is also important as a source of the past history of Assam. Most of these works mention Kāmarūpa-Kāmākhyā and other pīthas of Assam. The Hevajra Tantra of the 7th/8th Century A.D. mentioned Kāmarūpa as one of the four pīthas of India. The Kāmarūpa yātrā, a Sanskrit work, composed in Assam, deals with the way of worship of goddess Kāmākhyā, and it also records the origin of the names of Prāgjyotisa and Kāmarūpa. The Rikṣakalpa, another Tāntrik work, deals with the worship of goddess Tārā and gives the ancient geography of Kāmarūpa. The Vojinī Tantra is most important as it contains the ancient geography of Assam and the cultural conditions of its people.

The Dīpikāchanda of Puruśottama Gajapati, another religious work, contains legendary accounts of the early rulers of Assam. The Hara-Gaurī-Samvāda deals with the political history of Assam and also with the geography of that period. The genealogy of the rulers is given in another book, called

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Hara-Gaurī Vilāsa. In addition to the works mentioned above, there are some other books which give the socio-religious information regarding the Tāntric-Buddhist period of Assam. In the Smṛtisāgarasāra of Mahāmohopādhyāya Rājaguru Damodara Miśra, a prominent Kāmarūpa digest-writer, who flourished between 1400-50 A.D., we find mention of some religious rites of the Kāmarūpa school of Dharmaśāstra.

A complete code of judicial procedure consisting of three works, namely, - Vyavahāra Kaumudī, dealing with the judiciary in general, Vivāda-Kaumudī, dealing with topics of litigation or dispute, and Danda-Kaumudī, dealing with punishments for crimes, all were compiled by Mahāmohopādhyāya Pitāmbara Siddhāntavāgīśa Bhattacharya between 1540 and 1610 A.D.

The other important works are: Āṅgirasa-Samhitā, Matsyasukta, Gṛhyapāraskara, Smṛti-mīmāṃsa, Dhavala Saṅgraha, Smṛti samuccaya, Tātparya-nibandha, Manusmṛti by Narayana Sarvajña, Yajñavalkya by Ācārya Vimalabodha, and Kāla-Kaumudī, Śrāddhabhasya or Śrāddhaprakāśa, and Candraprabhā by Nilambarācārya (13th century A.D.), Smṛtiratnākara by Vedācārya (1250-1350). The Varṣapradīpa by Śrīdhara Bhaṭṭa, Smṛtipadma, and Gangājala etc. by Rajguru Damodara Miśra.

(d) Foreign accounts:

The commercial and cultural relations between the
kingdoms of Kāmarūpa and China through Burma and other regions are mentioned by earlier sources like the accounts left by Chang Kien of the Second Century B.C. ¹ The accounts of Shung Shu (420-79 A.D.) record about the sending of two embassies from India to China, of which one was sent by Yu Chai in 428 A.D. from the Kapili Valley,² identified within Nowgong district of Assam. The King of Kapili was probably Kalyanavarman, as identified by P.C. Choudhury.³

Hiuen Tsang's visit to Kāmarūpa (642-43 A.D.) and his accounts furnish very valuable source material for the early history of Assam, particularly during the first half of the seventh Century A.D.⁴ The records of I-tsing⁵ throw fresh light on Devavarma of eastern India.

Curtius (viii) mentions Dyardanes as a river flowing through the remotest part of India.⁶ The names of the river as mentioned by them may be identified with the Brahmaputra according to P.C. Choudhury.⁷ Pliny in his Natural History (VI)

1. Bagchi, P.C., India and China, PP. 7 f; 16 f.
3. Ibid.
5. Life, Indro., PP. XXXVI-XXXVII.
6. Ancient India in classical Lit., P. 77 (f.n. 3).
Next is the archaeological evidence, which may be

Archaeological Sources:

Gives a reasonable information about Kamarupa
stretch as far as the sea; Manipadum Strata (13th Century A.D.) as lying far to the east of Kamarupa, the mountains on which
Alberuni in his work on India, has mentioned Kamarupa

cannot accounts do not give definite information.

Important for the first two or three centuries A.D., when our

Geography of Assam both the works are very useful. The references
in the second half of the first century A.D. For the ancient
India written by an unknown Greek author, who visited India
seen, a valuable account of trade and maritime activities in

Two important works are the Geography of India written

Assam.

22
(a) **Monuments:**

The monument type of archaeological evidence, considered by itself and apart from the inscriptions on the walls of the buildings, is of high illustrative value, and greatly helps in realizing the power and magnificence of some of the ancient dynasties responsible for their construction. The monuments, which are scattered throughout Assam, are eloquent testimony to the artistic skill of ancient Assam, and testify to their wealth of grandeur during different epochs of history. They also give us greater insight into the culture of the people than would be possible from a mere study of literary records. The stratification or orderly succession of the layers of ruined buildings, when systematically observed, may be made to yield conclusive evidence concerning the relative dates of dynasties and stages of civilization.

(b) **Numismatic evidence:**

Coins also have preserved the names and titles of kings some of whom have left no other record. By their aid it is sometimes possible to reconstruct the dynastic lists and to determine the chronology and the geographical extent of sovereignty.

Unfortunately not a single coin has so far been discovered minted by any of the numerous Kāmarūpa kings, the
period ranging from the earliest times to circa 12th century A.D.,
though it has been mentioned to in the Silimpur Inscription that
900 gold coins were presented to a Brāhmaṇ by Jayapāla,\(^1\)
probably son of Dharmapāla.

Recently 14 gold coins have been discovered in Assam
by the State Archaeology Department. The inscriptions on the
coin have not yet been deciphered.\(^2\)

(c) **Epigraphy**:

Unquestionably the most copious and important source
of the early history of Assam, are the epigraphs. The
inscriptions, being contemporary records of a reliable
character, have helped us most. They have furnished us with
the names of kings, sometimes together with their dates and
other necessary particulars, and have recorded many important
events of history. Thus they supply the most valuable evidence
as to the political, social and economic conditions of the
period and the country to which they belong.

The inscriptions totalling 28 engraved on stone pillars,
stone slabs and copper plates, found in Assam, are mentioned below:

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2. Choudhury, R.D., 'Pañātekar Svarna Muḍrā,' Dainik Assam,
August 20, 1972.


3. The Doobi Copper Plate Grant of Bhāskaravarman. (J.A.R.S., XI, PP. 33-38; Ibid, XII, PP. 16-33; Sircar, D.C., I.H.Q., XXVI, PP. 241-46).

4. The Nīdhānpur Grant of Bhāskaravarman. (E.I. XII, PP. 65 f; Ibid, XIX, PP. 118 f., 245-50; Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvali PP. 1-43; B.S.P., (N.4), 1312 and Vijaya, Asād, 1320).


8. The Tezpūr Grant of Vanamāla. (J.A.S.B., IX, II, PP. 766 f; Bhattacharya, P., Kāmarūpā Śāsanāvali, PP. 54-70; R.S.P.P. No. I, 1321).


12. The Bargaon Grant of Ratnapāla (Tezpūr). (Hoernle J.A.S.B., LXVII, 1, PP. 99 f; Bhattacharya, P., Kāmarūpā Śāsanāvali, PP. 88-109; B.S.P.P., No. 1, 1322).


14. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla. It was found in Barpanara (Darrang). (Hoernle, J.A.S.B., LXVI, 1, PP. 113-32; Bhattacharya, P., Kāmarūpā Śāsanāvali, PP. 116-29; R.S.P.P., Nos. 2 & 4, 1319).

15. The Guākuchi Grant of Indrapāla (Nalbari). (Bhattacharya, P., Kāmarūpā Śāsanāvali, PP. 130-45; R.S.P.P., 1336).

17. The Khonāmukhi grant of Dharmapāla (Nowgong).
   (Choudhury, P.D., J.A.R.S., VIII, PP. 113-126; Bhattacharyya, N.K., J.A.R.S., IX, PP. 1-3; E.I., XXX, PP. 203-09).

18. The Subhakarapātaka grant of Dharmapāla. (Bhattacharya, P., Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvali, PP. 146-167).

   (Bhattacharya, P., Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvali, PP. 168-84).

20. The Silimpur stone Inscription of Prabhāsa (Bogra district).


22. The Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva (S.E. 1107 = A.D. 1185).
   (Kielhorn, E.I., V, PP. 181-88).

23. The Kānāi Varasi rock Inscription of North Gauhati
   (S.E. 1127 = A.D. 1206). (Kāmarūpa Sāsanāvali, Intro. P. 44).


26. Deopani Inscription Engraved on the Visnu image
   (Circa 9th Century A.D.). (J.I.H.).

27. Deopani Inscription Engraved on the Hari-Hara image
   (Circa 9th Century, A.D.). (J.I.H.).

28. Deopani Inscription Engraved on the Crude Miniature
   Image of Hari-Hara. (J.I.H.).

The following contemporary epigraphs, from other
parts of the country supply valuable information pertaining
to Assam:

1. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta.
   (Fleet, C.I.I., III, PP. 6-8).

2. The Mandasor Inscription of Yasodharman
   (M.E. 589 = A.D. 532-33).

3. The Apsad Inscription of Adityasena.
   (Fleet, C.I.I., III, PP. 200-208; I.H.Q., XII, P. 457).

4. The Pasupati Inscription of the Nepal King, Jayadeva II
   (153). (Bhagavanlal Indraji, I.A., IX, PP. 178 ff).

5. The Samangad Inscription of the Rastrakuta King,

6. The Bhagalpur Grant of Narayanapala of Gauda.
   (I.A., XV, PP. 304 ff).

   (E.I. XXV, PP. 62-63).

8. The Belava Grant of Bhojavarman (E.I., XII, PP. 37-44).

10. The Mādhāinagar Grant of Lākṣmāṇa Sena. (*J.A.S.B.*, (N.S.), 1909, P. 467 ff.).


(d) **Pottery and Other Objects**:

Coins, icons and inscriptions are invaluable as sources of history, but they are never plentiful and often absent in the material dug up from the early remains. The pottery is the most useful for determining the relative chronology of various sites, cultural contacts and influences and affinities between different regions. The changes in types and designs of the most useful and most common industry of a household give sufficient clues for distinguishing between different tribes or countries as well as between successive periods of time in relation to each tribe or country. The near indestructibility of the potsherds along with its changing nature well affords a criterion for fixing the age and character of ancient remains, and their relation to other monuments of the past.

Although excavations have not yet been adequately done in Assam, in Daojali-Hading the Anthropology, Department of Gauhati University conducted excavation where pottery of the
neolithic times had been discovered. In Dahparbatia, Mahadeo
Sāl (Nowgong), Māyāng area (Nowgong) and Āmbāri (Gauhati),
potteries have been found. From these we can form an idea of
the ceramic industry during the past epoch.

All this evidence has thrown welcome light on the
history and culture of Assam since prehistoric times to C.
1200 A.D.