Chapter 1

Geography and Pre-history of the Region

Part 1: Geography of Assam

Culture and geography

The culture of the region of Assam, which developed in comparative isolation from the rest of India, has an unbroken unity which is the result of the geographical unity of the Brahmaputra Valley and the surrounding hills with the Heart of Assam. The demographic formation of its population whose culture is the subject of our study is an outcome of the geographical location of the region.

Although the political frontiers of the state of Assam may expand and retreat depending on its political fortunes, the geographical limits of the region have been marked out by Nature in such a manner as to ensure that it retains its united cultural identity down the ages. The peculiar geographical location of Assam and the dominant physical characteristics of the region have had a great influence on its cultural developments.

As Sanjay Ghosh puts it, "This is one of the few places in the world where a symbiotic relationship between man and nature is actually nurtured through traditional tribal institutions and culture."  

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Location

Modern Assam is the state located on the North-East border of India enclosed on all sides by the Hill states. It lies between 22°19’N and 28°16’N Latitudes and 89°42’E and 97°12’E Longitudes.

Geographical Features

(See PLATE I-Map-2 - Geographical Features)

It consists mainly of the valley of R. Brahmaputra flowing from NE to SW and a portion of the Surma River valley and the intervening Southern hill-ranges. To the North, the Himalayas rise abruptly from the riverine plains beyond which lie Tibet and China. In the East, the mountains make a sharp turn, forming a crescent, beyond which lies South-East China. To the South-East of its hills, lies the Black Mountain Range of Burma. The East is where both these counties meet (China and Burma). (Bhaskaravarman, the 7th Cent. AD contemporary of Emperor Harshavardhan, is reported to have said to Huien Tsang the Chinese Pilgrim – ‘Long have I looked to wards the East to visit your land, but the intervening mountains block my way’. ( from Samuel Beal (ed), The Life of Huien Tsiang, p.172 )

To the South a crop of mountains rise abruptly from the plains – leaving only a narrow strip of land in the sub-Himalayan region.

The valley opens out only in the West where the River Brahmaputra flowing South-West is freed from constraints, breaks out and takes a southerly turn to join the River Ganga and further to the Bay of Bengal.

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Thus we see that Assam is like a deep pocket formed by the surrounding mountain ranges and into which flows the Great Indian Riverine Plain sweeping across Northern India and of which the Assam Valley forms the Eastern most part.

The Great Indian Riverine plain
(See PLATE I -Map -1 The Great Indian Riverine Plain)

Coming down from the mountains of Afghanistan towards East one enters the Great Riverine plain of Peninsular India. The River Indus and its tributaries the Jhelum, Ravi, Chenab, Beas and Sutlej allow access to the plains upto Delhi. From there on, the plains follow along the River Ganges and its tributaries upto the Jharkhand forests where the terrain becomes unfriendly. However, on the Northern Bank of the Ganges, Darbhanga acquired strategic significance in ancient times as the Gateway to Eastern India (as the name ‘Darbhanga’ signifies).

The River Kosi (ancient Kausika?) and the land beyond it was considered in the times of Mahabharata as being the boundary beyond which lay Pragjyotispura (ancient Assam), It was the land of King Bhagadutta, who fought on the side of the Kauravas in the Mahabharata War with his great army of ‘Cheena’s and ‘Kirata’s and thousands of war-elephants’.\(^3\)

B. K. Barua states that the Kusi formerly joined the River Karatoya, forming a natural boundary and Kamarupas were included in the list of Prachya peoples (easterners) along with Paundras, Odhras, Vangas and Gaudas.\(^4\)

B.K. Barua further notes, “The Kusi (Kosi) river today, flows west of Bhagalpur District, Bihar. It should be noted that the main channel of the Kusi is remarkable for its constant

\(^3\) *Ibid*, p.10
\(^4\) *Ibid.*, loc.cit. (quoting Shillingford, *The changes in the course of Kusi river and probable dangers arising from them* J.A. S. B.LXIV Pl. no. 1, pp.1-24)
shift west-wards.” Some historians are of the opinion that the Kusi River of remote times went eastwards.

K.L. Barua confirms this opinion by his finding, and concludes that “The fact probably is that at least the Northern reaches of the Kosi formed the western boundary of Kamarupa till the time of the late Mauryas or early Guptas. ... It was in 7th century that Bhaskaravarman along with Harshavardhan of Kanauj conquered Karnasuvarna and Gauda and renewed the land grants (on banks of Kosi) given by his ancestor, Maha-Bhutivarman.”6 (Refer history in Part 2.) It is to be noted that as recently as 2007, the River Kusi again changed its course, causing wide-spread damage.

The Yogini Tantra and Kalika Purana of the 10th century, however, state unequivocally that the Western boundary of ancient Kamarupa was marked by River Karatoya. (In Koch Behar)7

**The Plain of Koch-Behar**

The Plain of Koch Behar, now a part of West Bengal, acquires a strategic significance due to its location as a link between the Assam Valley and the rest of India.

(In British Period the name was changed to Cooch-Bihar)

The plain has easy access to the Hills of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, the Eastern Duars, Garo-Jaintia Hills, the Gangetic Valley and the Bengal Delta besides, of course, lying at the mouth of the Brahmaputra Valley. All these regions lie like spokes of the wheel the central hub of which is Koch Behar.

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6 K.L. Barua, “Kaushika or Kausiki”, *Readings in Culture and History of Assam*, Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, Assam, 1984, p. 27

This is the place where the river Ganga flows South-Southeast towards Bengal and the River Brahmaputra from the east also turns south after breaking free of its mountainous constraints and flows towards the Bay of Bengal. Tamralipti was the ancient sea-port at the confluence, which is now silted up, forming Sundarban marshland, home to the Bengal Tiger and other exotic wild life.

The Great Indian Riverine Plain continues on its Eastern bank into the tract of flat alluvial land, the Plain of Koch Behar- the Entrance to the Brahmaputra Valley. Starting here, this alluvial tract leads into the valley of the River Brahmaputra - the land called ASSAM.

The name ‘Assam’
The name Asam or Assam came into common use only around the 16th century.

According to some authors, Assam is derived from Sanskrit Asama meaning peerless, unequaled or even undulating.

Others relate it with the name of the south Asian invaders, the Tai-Ahoms who ruled the region for 600 years.

Reading from the “Toponomy of Assam”,

“Grieson notes that Shan is Burmese corruption of Sham. This is confirmed by Chinese scholars who researched the tribes of Myanmar and South West China and affirm that the Tai people are known to the tribes of this region (Daerys, Wa, Maru, Balung, Achang and Lashi) as Sam or variants like San, Sien, Siam, etc. Devendra Bharali suggests that Assam may have come from Asham, which is plural of Sham.

Dr. P. Gogoi states that “ha” in Boro language means Earth, Land or Country. Since the Tais conquered it the land was named A Sam or land of Sams.

The Singpo (tribe) still call the Tai people as Asam or La-sam.
Dr. J. N. Phukan opines that “it is rather likely that the same name Asam was brought into usage by the Borahis, Morans, etc and through them into Assamese.

But it remained in oral form until reduced to writing in the late 16th or early 17th century.”

The word for Tai people in common usage is *Ahom*.

**Assam Valley- Ancient Geography**

(See PLATE II- Map-3 Ancient Geography of Assam)

“This almond-shaped Assam Valley is a flat plain dropping only 12 centimeters in a kilometer from the East to the West. A geographical division of the valley into four different parts was noted since ancient times. The Yogini tantra( 10th century treatise) gives the ancient names and locations of the four regions as Ratnapith, Kampith, Suvarnapith and Saumarapith.  

The western most part of the valley (Ratnapith of ancient times) is between the Karatoya and Sankosh rivers.

It is a flat alluvial plain with very high water table. The Garo hills rise abruptly from the plains in the South and the North is bound by the Himalayan foot-hills. Due to heavy silting and frequent floods, new areas are constantly being found and older ones get washed away. This is the region of the Koch Kings who ruled from the 14th century onwards.

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In the middle is Kamapith. It lies between the rives Sankosh and Rupika. The ancient city Pragjyotispura and Temple of Kamakhya was located in the centre of this region.

The river here hugs the South bank along the Khasi-Garo hills. It is squeezed between hills on both sides in Guwahati region, thus gaining in depth and speed. Ancient Kamarupa finds mention in the *Mahabharata and the Puranas*.

In Upper Assam lies Suvarnapith. It lies between Rupika and Bhairav rivers

Here the river is spread out. Large rivers from the Northern and Southern hills pour thousands of tons of water into the Brahmaputra. The Subansiri River is where gold is carried by the water and washed since ancient times by the Sonowals (tribes). The southern bank has large tracts of thick tall grass-lands - home to the Assam Rhino and other exotic fauna and flora. The River is highly braided with intricate network of rivers. The world’s largest river island Majuli (929 sq. km.) is located here. The North bank is inhabited by tribals of Tibetan stock - the Mising.

The upper most regions of the Brahmaputra valley is the ancient Soumarapith. It lies between Bhairav and Dikrang rivers. The temple of Dikkaravasini is located here.

It is again a flat plain made up of varied assemblage of rocks, hard stone, soft and loose sand, conglomerates, coal seams shale and sandy clay. The river is shallow and very wide measuring 1.0km in some places. Mountain passes connect this region to South-East China and Upper Mynmar. Ancient Trade-routes existed through here.

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The Lower parts i.e. Kamrup (Lower Assam) was ruled by the Koch Dynasty in 14th century at the beginning of the period of this study. At the same period, the Upper parts (Upper Assam) were possessed by the Ahom Kings. “This led to a permanent distinction between Kamarupa and Asam.” - says William Robinson. He commented on the difference in the Culture of the people of Koch Kingdom and the region under the Ahom Kings.\textsuperscript{11}

The River Brahmaputra

The River Brahmaputra plays a dominating role in the development of the culture of the region. Both its banks being thickly forested, the river offers the easiest and softest mode of transport from the Lower Regions of the plains i.e. (from Bihar and Bengal upto Sadiya in upper Assam.) The river and its many tributaries are navigable throughout the axis of state.

Entering from the Eastern Mountains, the 80-100 kilometer wide river is vast in its upper reaches. The River is, for example, more than a mile across in Dibrugarh. (Saumarapith)

It narrows down to half its width between the Himalayas and Mikir Hills (Suvarnapith), and widens again to embrace the Khapili plains in its fold. (Kamapith) Running through another narrow passage grudgingly allowed by the Shillong plateau and Bhutan Himalayas, the River valley opens out into the plain of Koch Behar (Ratnapith), and turns southwards to join the Ganga on its journey to the Bay of Bengal\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} W. Robinson, \textit{A Descriptive Account of Assam}, K.M. Mittal, Sanskaran Prakasan, New Delhi, 1975, (1841), p .41

\textsuperscript{12} J. P. Saikia (ed), \textit{Op. cit., loc.cit.}
Origins of the River

It has been established in recent years that the Brahmaputra is a continuation of the river Tsangpo of Tibet. The river, called Tsangpo, rises in west of Tibet near the source of the Sutlej and the Indus—the Mansarover Lake, at the foot of Mount Kailash. The Tsangpo vanishes into the deep mountainous forests of Arunachal Pradesh. One of the streams emerging from Pasighat in lower Arunachal Pradesh, called the ‘Dihang’, is conjectured to be a continuation of the Tsangpo. The river travels down to the plains and joins other streams to form the Brahmaputra.

The Brahmaputra however, has its Indian legendary origins in the Brahmakund, a lake in the eastern corner of the State. The river is known as Luit (sanskrt. Lauhitya) upper Assam. Legend has it that it was in these waters that Parasuram the sixth Avatar of Vishnu washed the blood of matricide from his axe. The water turns red with the blood and so does the river. Hence came the name for this river – Lauhitya (Sanskrit for ‘Blood’). In Assam it is colloquially referred to as ‘Luit’. The waters of the river are indeed red during the monsoons as it takes on the color as it cuts through the red soils of the adjoining embankments.

The Brahmaputra is fed with the drainages of the Himalayas in the North and minor Assam Hills on the South. Each tributary has its own tributaries. Together all these rivers form one of the major river systems in the world. Assam can be said to be a land of rivers. The total number of rivers flowing into the Brahmaputra are given as sixty one – (37 from the north and 24 from the south) which is the largest number for any river in the world.

“Those main rivers are Jaidhol, Subansiri, Ranganadi, Dikron, Baroi, Jia-Bharali, Pagladia, Manas, Buri-Aai, Champamati, and Sankosh.
In the South-bank, the main rivers are Noa-dihing, Dibru, Buri Dihing, Disang, Dikhou, Bhogdoi, Janjhi, Dhansiri, Kapili, Kulshi, Dudhnoi, Krishnoi, Jihari, and Jinjiram.”\(^\text{13}\)

During the monsoons the river presents a grand spectacle with its width and intensity and dominating the whole panorama as does the sea in San Francisco. The river can be compared in the point of rendering the whole valley fertile and the harvests rich and copious with the Father Nile of Egypt. The Brahmaputra is bounded so far as its Eastern reaches are concerned, with vast stretches of summer rice and mustard cultivations, thick woods and wild ferns.

“Indeed, the tributaries weave an intricate skien of arteries and viens through which flow the life blood of the people of this region, and impart to it an almost metabolic homogeneity binding the dweller in the remote hills and forests with those who subsist on the fertile plains below.”\(^\text{14}\)

The Origin of the river was a mystery for a long time

Dr. J.P. Wade who accompanied an expedition to Assam under Captain Welsh in 1792 gives an interesting view in his “An Account of Assam” about the source of the Brahmaputra “The sources of the Berhampooter are to the east North East of Assam in a range of mountains beyond Nara. Three streams are supposed to issue from the same springs or lake called Brahmakoontha. The Looicheh or Berhampooter in a westerly direction runs through Assam and Camroop. Its identity with the Sampo or great river of Tibet which passes the Capital of Lama Gooroo at Lassa is rendered extremely doubtful by every account obtained from the natives of Assam”.\(^\text{15}\)

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14 *Ibid.*, p. 79
In the 18th century, there was an unsolved problem regarding the Origin of the river

The problem was that the Tsangpo in Tibet has an average attitude of 3650 meters above sea-level. Yet the river plunges down to less than 150 meters above sea level (at Pasighat) where it emerges into the Plains. The great difference in altitudes of the Tsangpo and Brahmaputra led to many conjectures and fables such as the legendary ‘Shangri-la’ a heavenly paradise said to exist deep in the Himalayan forests where the river dropped forming a mighty water fall. It was only in 1924 that British expeditions finally solved “The Riddle of the Tsangpo gorges”. The river is now known to descend in a series of cascades through narrow gorges without a single fall of more than 50 meters.

The Brahmaputra and its tributaries maintain the most unstable courses in the plains, there being a constant movement of their channels. The geologically infant state of the Himalayas from which the rivers take off substantially contributes to the high silt content in the rivers. The deep channel of the Brahmaputra hogs more in the Southern Bank. The northern bank tributaries, due to their speed of descent tend to push the river to the South.

“In an administrative Report of the Province of Assam, published in 1892-93, Diburgarh was described as being 5 miles away from the cold whether channel of the Brahmaputra. After the 1950 earthquake half of this beautiful town lies buried in the bowels of the river.”

In present Bangladesh, a small river is called Brahmaputra Perhaps it used to be the main flow in older days prior to its division to the present channel which merges with the Ganga at Gualondo to form the Padma in Bangladesh.

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16 Refer Note on ‘Account of the Pandits ‘ at the end of the Chapter.

The Brahmaputra has two significant islets in it. One in small and the other is big. The smaller and older one is Umananda in the city of Guwahati and the other and newer one Majuli was formed by shifting *chars* (sand-banks) in the district of Sibsagar in Assam.

The island of Umananda is a green gem in the middle of the Brahmaputra off the Kachari ghat at Guwahati. It has in it an ancient temple dedicated to Shiva. The other is Majuli Island.

**Formation of Majuli Island**

The island of Majuli is one of the largest river Islands in the world covers an area of about 929-sq. km

When it was formed? – Its formation is a unique geographical phenomenon. “During the reign of Jaya Dhwaja Singha in 1562 AD, the River Brahmaputra (called *Luit*) was flowing North of today’s Majuli. While the *Dihang* flowed parreell in the present channel of the Brahmaputra to the South of Majuli, joining the main channel after receiving waters of the *Dichang* and *Dikhow*.

Due to floods, the main channel of the Brahmaputra (*Luit*) changed its course and joined the Dihang, and the *Dihang* became the main channel, forming Majuli between Lohit and Brahmaputra. The formation of Majuli happened in 1750 according to Dr J.N.Sarma in ‘*Asomer Nadnadi*’. Thus the Brahmaputra flowed along the old course of Buri Dihing and formed Majuli.”

When Sankardeva the Saint who brought about the Cultural Rennaissance in Assam, first came to live in Dhuwahata or Belguri, it was on main land. Later it became the Northern part of the Island of Majuli. In the 16th and 17th centuries the importance of Majuli grew as it became an island populated by Sattras or monasteries of the Vaishnavas.

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18 S.K.Phukan, *op.cit.*, p. 443
The Mountain Passes and Dwars

The most important aspect of the geography of the region is that it is surrounded on three sides by Mongoloid races the Tibetans, Chinese, Barman and the Indo-Chinese on the other side of the mountain ranges. The porosity of these mountains is proved by the variety of races which have been migrating across the mountains over thousands of years to inhabit the mountains surrounding it and also spreading to the plains below.

On the other hand, the river Brahmaputra carried the Indo-Aryan Culture of the Indian Peninsula into the Heart of Assam.

Banikanta Kakati remarks, “It has been noticed by historians of the Far East (Asia) that Indian colonists seem to have proceeded to the Far East both by land and sea and that the land route laid through East Bengal, Assam and Manipur. It would thus appear that Assam lay on the highway to the Far East.”

Further, he says, “This view is supported by archeologist like R.D. Banerjee and K.N. Dikshit. They have found in the architectural ruins of ancient Assam points of resemblance to Chaitya window patterns common in temples of Central India, in the Gupta temples of Bhumra and Deograh (R.D. Banarjee annual Reports 1924-25, 1925-26 Archeological survey of India). K.N. Diksht is more explicit. ‘The affinities of Assamese Art and culture seem to lie more with the schools of Bihar and Orissa than with the contemporary Palas of Bengal.’ This is not unnatural, as among the streams of influence that have molded the Culture of Assam, the strongest current has always been from the North Behar and Mid-India.” ¹⁹

It is possible that as the culture reached the far-end on the Eastern regions it was highly diluted with the prevalent tribal and Buddhist cults to become quite thin and sparsely spread.

¹⁹ Banikanta Kakati, Assamese- It’s Formation and Development, Government of Assam, 1941, p. 34
Ancient Historical records confirm that ancient Trade-routes to China lay through the Valley of the Brahmaputra. “That there were well known sea and land routes to China from Kamrupa can be proved from the account of the Great Chinese pilgrim Huein Tsiang in his detailed account of the conversations he had with the 7th century King Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa. Beal in his ‘Life of Huien-Jsang’ maintains that King Bhaskarvarman and the other former rulers of Kamrupa had the sea-routes to China under their special protection.” 20

Trade Routes
(See PLATE II- Map-4 Trade Routes to Assam)

“It is too often assumed that the Gobi Silk-routes were China’s only means of contact with India and the west. Numerous passes and ways exist since ancient times between Assam and Tibet through the Duars and Bhutan.

The Taba qiat-i-Nasiri says that between Kamarupa and Tibet there are thirty five mountains passes through which horses were brought to Lakhnauti.”

“The most romantic of all outlets from the valley, an extension of the Ganga-Brahmaputra link was the ancient Route to China. There is an open road from Upper Assam to Burma and thence to China through which considerable trade into China was carried on at one time

The line of trade after leaving Sadiya passes by Bisa across Patkai range and then through valley of Hukung to town of Mungkung situated on a navigable branch of the Irrawatty, called river Namyang. Merchants proceeding to Ava at once descended the Irrawatti to the capital, while those to China ascend the Irrawatti for many miles to Katemow, where they disembark their goods and convey them on mules over a range of mountainous country inhabited by Shans in to the Chinese provence of Yunan” 21

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“As the journey between the Irrawady river and Assam was very tedious, Wilcox discovered another shorter route, tracing the Noa-Dihing (which enters the Lohit a few miles down from Sadiya) by water, thence to a nine-day march to Mungkung.”

B. K. Baruah mentions about the same route from Chinese sources-

“A report by Chang Kiew famous Chinese ambassador to the Yue-chi country, submitted in 126 BC. States that “When he was its Bactria he was surprised to find Chinese Silk and bamboo products which came from Yunnan and Szechuan (south-China). On enquiry, he was told of the rich and powerful country of India across which caravans carried these products from South China to Afghanistan.”

A.K. Dutta also corroborates this... “This Trade Route was not officially recognized by the Chinese Government. Through this route, however, Chinese goods like Silk, bamboo flutes came to India to be exported via the North West Trade route to Central Asia”

Infact, B. K. Barua cites an itinerary preserved by Kia-ten of the end of 8th cent. AD describes in detail the later route - “Starting from Tonkin in South-most commercial centres of China, the route passes Yunnan fou and Ta-li-fou. Going West wards, it crossed the Salouen at Young Chang Fou on the West of the river. Still going West wards, it reached the town of Chou ko leang to the east of Momein, between Shiveli and Salouen. The route bifurcated there – the principal descending the valley of the Shiveli, joining the Irrawady and continuing to the West. From Ch-ou-ko-leang the route crossed the frontier of P’iao (Burma) near Lo, the frontier town of Nan-chow, passing through the country of mountain tribes it reached Si-li between Ta-guang and Mandalay. Then the route passed Tou-min (Pagan) and reached the Capital of Burma (Sriksetra) Prome.

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22 Ibid., loc. Cit.
Leaving Prome it crossed the Black Mountains (Arakan Range) and entered Kamarupa”.  

The Stilwell Road from Burma to Assam and China built by the British in early 20th century traces the path of this ancient Silk –Route. 

The cultural links brought about by these traders along the routes is significant. The trade-routes from Lhasa in Tibet came down to Indian plains traveling not only to Kabul and Balk but also down to Gujarat and lower western ports to take the sea-route to the Red Sea. 

**Duaars**

The Duaars form a flat strip of country lying beneath the foot of the Bhutan Range of Mountains in Lower Assam. The chief characteristics are the numerous rivers and streams which intersect each other here and the abundance of thick forests and grasslands. The land is extremely fertile and the rivers are mostly navigable. River trade is carried on by the inhabitants, mostly selling timber, cotton, mustard, rice and wild cardomum. The Dwar in Assam are five in number. The rivers are navigable upto the sea. They connect the mountain passes with the mainland.

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27 Note: Chinese traders were reported to have sold their wares in small-town Gujerat even as late as 1950’s  
**Minerals and Ores**

Assam has an abundance of mineral products. Nitre (for preparation of gun-powder), lac, iron ore etc. was found in the mountains. Cinnabar should have been found, as mercury was used for various purposes, particularly for extraction of gold. But there is no record available of the sources of mercury. Cinnabar, called ‘hengul’ was used for red pigment in manuscripts.

Says William Robinson “Its unexplored mineral wealth among which gold and iron are abundant its animal and vegetable productions, the descent, customs, and languages of its numerous mountain tribes, present subjects of inquiry which deserve, and if vigorously prosecuted, will abundantly repay the researches of the lover of Nature and the observer of mankind.”  

One would imagine that her geographical situation alone and her strategic importance as a result would have secured for Assam greater attention from the rest of the nation. Yet it was only after the debacle during the Indo-China war of 1962 that Assam began to claim and receive due interest in military as well as economic matters.

**The cultural divide**

The Lower parts i.e. Kamrup (Lower Assam) was ruled by the Koch Dynasty in 14th century at the beginning of the period of this study. At the same period, the Upper parts (Upper Assam) were possessed by the Ahom Kings. “This led to a permanent distinction between Kamarupa and Asam.” - says William Robinson.

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29W. Robinson, *op cit.*, p.11
Part 2: Prehistory of the Region

Puranic Times

According to ‘The Goalpara District Gazetter’…

“Tradition has it that the earliest Kings of Assam belonged to the non-Aryan people – The Dasas and the Asuras (Also known as Dravidians). However, the Neolithic people of Austric stock are the most ancient inhabitants of Assam and not the Dravidians as was once supported to be. They are now represented by the Mon-khmer Khasis and Syntengs, of Assam (now Meghalaya)”.

In describing the complex culture of the Indus Valley, particularly his theory of the Asuras, D. Neog states “The Indo- Aryans encountered enemies of two different classes- the Vratas i.e. civilized foes and Dasas i.e. enemies of non- Aryan origin.

In many later literatures, reference is found to a cultured race called the Asuras. They are recognized as being civilized, but they were looked down upon by the Indo-Aryans as they did not worship the deities whom they revered.”

‘The District Gazetteer’ refers to them as Dravidians…

“The Dravidians were a highly cultured people belonging to the chalcolithic age and were found to be more civilized than themselves by the Indo-Aryans when they came. However, in Assam the Dravidians had to bear the Mongolian thrust pouring in from the North East. At first, the Mongolians seem to have carried everything before them but in course of time, the new comers, who were themselves probably, a Neolithic people, were vanquished by the Dravidians who used copper and bronze weapons and who ultimately recovered their supremacy as the ruling race.”

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31 D. P. Barooah, *Assam District Gazetters*, Goalpara District, Govt. of Assam, 1962, p.85
The 11th century treatise, *Kalika-Puran*, mentions overthrow of Ghataka, the Kirata king of Pragjyotisa by Naraka, a prince of Dravidian stock. It is a pointer to the above fact (Kalika puran C-900) The Purana refers to Assam by its old name ‘Pragjyotisa’.

The Kalikapuran relates in detail, the life and career of Naraka, King of Pragjyotisa –

“Naraka was born to Mother Earth by Vishnu in the Boar Incarnation, and deposited on the sacrificial ground of King Janaka of Mithila, its head being placed on the skull of a dead man. He was brought up by King Janaka until he was sixteen. His mother, in the form of a nurse Katyayani, looked after him. Later, she took him to the banks of the Ganga where he was introduced to his putative father Vishnu and accompanied him to Pragjyotisa by water. Here, the prince who excelled in skills of war, conquered the country from the Kirata King named Ghataka, and Vishnu installed him as King of Pragjyotisha. At first, Naraka was a good king and ruled his country well. But later, he became friendly with Bana, king of Sonitpura, grew irreligious and presumptuous. He showed his demoniac nature (asura Bhavamasadya) and harassed the people. Vishnu had to kill him in the person of Krishna and Naraka’s son Bhagadutta was placed on the throne of Pragjyotisa.”

“Dr. B.K. Kakati is quoted to have fixed the reign of Naraka somewhere between 200 AD and 500 AD. The Bhauma Dynasty is said to have started with him. (Bhauma- from Bhoomi – his mother).”

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“Copper plate grants as well as the Kalikapuram mention King Bhagadatta as the son of Naraka. In the Mahabharata, King Bhagadutta is frequently mentioned as a powerful warrior King. He is famed for his long and equal contest in war with Arjuna. He is also named as the “friend of Pandu”. He is referred to with friendliness and respect by Krishna saying when addressing Yudhistira that “Bhagadutta is your father’s friend and he is mentally bound and devoted to thee like a father”. Bhagadutta was killed in the Mahabharata war and succeed by his son Vajradutta.”

Dimbeswar Neog in “New light on Asamiya Literature” gives a different interpretation of the origin of King Naraka and Bhaskaravarman. He quotes the learned article in the Indian culture (Vol. II no. 1) by Kanaklal Barua. “During the second millennium BC, Vedic Aryans entered in India through Afghanistan. The physiognomy of the Vedic types can be found only in the North West Himalayan tribes like the Kaffirs and Pathans, and Sikhs of Punjab, and the UP Brahmins but nowhere in Eastern India or West coast.

“Earlier during the 3rd millennium BC, an Alphine immigration poured into India, one branch of them moving towards the West coast of India through the Indus Valley and the other branch pushing towards East India, probably without lingering on their way. At least one Alpine skull has been found at Mohenjodaro confirming their West-ward journey and a prominent bracycehalus (round-head) has been found to be introduced the population of the West Coast. Although J.H. Hutton (census of India 1931 Vol. 1 pt 1) calls them ‘Mediterranean, B.S. Guha opines that these brachecephals (round heads) and the Vedic Aryans who came much later, belong to the same ancestral stock. He find that Pods (Palas?)of Bengal, the Telugu Brahmins, the Oriya Brahmins, the Saraswat Brahmins, the Chittapavan Brahmins, and the Desastha Brahmins are all basically of this race which appears to have contributed most to the physical composition of the people of the west coast and perhaps to their culture (Hutton thinks that the Kalitas, a predominant high caste of Assam probably belong to the same Alpine stock)”

36 Ibid., loc.cit.
Kanaklal Baruwa opines that the Aryan speech came in various waves from the West, and that the speech imported by the Alpines long before the Vedic Aryans entered, was Pisachi, ‘a language of the Dardic type, traces of which can be found in ‘Khowari’ speech of the Khus of Chitral who are definitely Alpine and who evidently mark the route taken by the Alpines for their entry through the Pamirs. Kashmiri and Kohisthani are also languages of this stock like all other languages of the band (Indian Culture Vol. II No. 1)

The use of the ‘X’ pronunciation (a sound between ‘Kh’ and ‘h’) also denotes, according to Baruwa, that Assamese language is Pisachi in origin and more allied with Indo-European language rather than Sanskrit.

In 7th century AD Bhaskaravarman, who had descended from Asura King Naraka had invited the Chinese Pilgrim Huien Tsiang to be with him. The Chinese has clearly said that Bhaskarvarman was a Brahmin King. Many historians claim that he was mistaken. But D Neog contends that Huien Tsiang had very keen observation and he stayed with the King Bhaskaravarman for about a month. Hence he could not be mistaken and Bhaskaravarman was indeed a Brahmin. The title Varman is also there in Gujarati Nagar Brahmins, so like Telegu, Kanara and Chittapavan and Desastha Brahmins, Bhaskaravarman was also a Brahmin of the Alphine race.\textsuperscript{37}

Traditional literature describes Eastern India as Anupadesa or Vratya land and as Baruwa opines, the Vratyas were no other than the Alpines who possessed a fairer complexion a prominent nose and spoke an Aryan tongue though of the Pisachi variety. The Vratyas had prosperous kingdoms in the East like Magadha, Videha, Kosala and Pragjyotisa. Again, Asura was the god of the Iranians (Magins) with whom the Alpines were earlier

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., pp.27-28
connected, hence it may be no wonder that Vratya kings like Jarasandha of Magadha, Naraka of Pragjyotisa and Bana of Sonitpura were dubbed as Asuras...  

The same opinion is arrived at by historian B N Puri. “Perusing ancient sources for tracing movement of Aryan Culture into Assam, which took a steady rise during early centuries of the Christian Era and reached its culmination in the time of King Bhaskaravarman (7th cent. A.D)  

“The time and manner of Aryans entry into Assam from the West is uncertain. In Vedic literature, Eastern India is described as Mleccha country. But we do find evidences of a movement of Vedic people in the Easterly direction.

“The very interesting legend in the Satapatha Brahmana pointed out by Weber, mentions that the sacred fire of the Indo-Aryans traveled from the banks of the Saraswati along North Bank of Ganges crossing Sarayu, Gandak and Kosi rivers and reached west bank of Sadanira (the Karatoya). According to Sayanaacharya, Sadanira is another name for the Karatoya. Thus by the time of Aitareya Brahmana, the movement towards the East gained further impetus.”

With its richness in wood and the SOMA plant in the hilly tracts of Kamarupa, Assam attracted members of the Brahmana community in large numbers, and it came to be known as the land of sacrifices. The unholy ground became Punya Bhoomi (holy land) after defeat of Naraka at the hands of Krishna.

38 Ibid., p. 28
39 B. N. Puri, Studies in Early History and Administration of Assam, Dept. of Publication, Guwahati, 1968 p.6
Whatever might be the origin of Naraka or the truth of the Krishna Legend, the Aryanization of Assam appears to have been properly set during the early centuries of Christian Era.”

D Neog states that the Nidhanpur grants prove that as early as 5th century AD, there were already a fair number of Brahmins and Kayasthas in Asam. It is so remarkable that while in neighboring province of Gauda (Bengal) the import by Adisura of five Brahmins from Kanauj or the mythical creation of Saptasathi (700 Brahmins) is not earlier than 8th cent. AD, there should be so many Brahmins found in a single village in Kamarupa two centuries earlier. (Epigraphia Indica Vol. XIX pg. 115-25) “Such was the pleasant surprise of Padmanath Bhattacharya.”

Dynastic Rulers of Early Times Upto 12th Century AD
“The Nidhanpur copper plates record that a period of three thousand years elapsed between the death of Vajradutta (son of King Bhagadutta of Mahabharata fame) and the accession of Pusyavarman the founder of the new Bhauma dynasty (4th cent.AD). Huien Tsiang the Chinese Pilgrim who visited Kamarupa in the 7th cent. AD also records that there were a thousand generations between Vishnu the progenitor of Naraka and the birth of Bhaskara now the pilgrim’s patron King.

Fortunately, three clay seals relating to Bhaskaravarman were found in Nalanda
The second seal gives us a complete genealogy of Pusyavarman. K.L. Barua considers

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40 Ibid p.7
41 Note: The Nidhanpura grant is one of the most important record of contemporary History of India. It consists of 7 copper plates but one is missing. They were found in a village called Nidhanpur in Sylhet at different times. The object of the grant is to gift off lands to the Brahmans.
42 D. Neog, op cit., p.30
43 B K Barua, op. cit., p. 22 (Clay seals noticed by Dikshit in A.R.A.S.I. EC 1917-18)
Pusyavarman to be the ‘frontier King (Pratyanta Nrpathi) of Kamarupa” referred to in the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta.

The *Harsacharitam* of Bana also mentions the last five Kings of the list mentioned on the seals. Pusyavarman was the first important ruler of the Bhouma dynasty. Next, the Badganga inscription states that Bhutivarman (510-555AD) performed an Aswamedha Yagna. According to the Nidhanpur grant of Sylhet, Bhutivarman or Maha-Bhutivarman had a number of feudatory Kings. He is also believed to have conquered Pundravardhana in about 550 AD. He is also said to have given gifts of lands to a large number of Brahmins on the banks of river Kaushiki.(Kosi).

After Bhutvarman, his son Chandramukha Varman ascended the throne of Kamarupa. He was succeeded by Sustithavarman who according to Apshad inscriptions, was defeated by Mahasenagupta the later Gupta monarch. Susthitavarman had two sons, namely SuprathistaVarman and Bhaskaravarman. The former ruled only for a few years.\(^{44}\)

**Bhaskaravarman and the Chinese Pilgrim**

Bhaskaravarman (594-640AD) was undoubtedly the greatest monarch of the Bhauma family and stands out in the history pages of Assam as a beacon light. He revived the sunken fortunes of his family and is rightly considered to be one of the most remarkable rulers of Ancient India.

“To commemorate his ascent to the throne, King Bhaskaravarman is said to have started an era in 594 AD called Bhaskarabda which is still current in Bengal as the Vangabda.”

“It is evident from the Nidhanpur grant and also from the account of Huien-Tsiang that Bhaskaravarman has made himself master of Eastern India, pitched his victorious camp in the capital of his late rival Sasanka of Gauda and thus increased the power and prestige of the Kingdom of Kamarupa to an extent never dreamt of before.”

(See PLATE III-Map-5 Kingdom of Bhaskaravarman)

The Chinese pilgrim has left detailed accounts of his talks with Bhaskaravarman which shows the high standard of intellectual achievement in an Indo-mongoloid King of the 7th cent. A.D. The Doobi copper plates record that Bhaskaravarma’s intellect was matured by listening to the essence of the meaning of the various Sastras. Further they say that he acquired high eloquence and poetic genius of all styles possessing sweet wording with clear and superb ornamentation. The Chinese pilgrim’s account also throws some light on the person and character of Bhaskaravarman. He states that “the King was fond of learning” and “men of high talents from distant regions aspiring after office visit his dominions Though he has no faith in Buddha,yet he much respects Sramanas of learning.”.

King Bhaskaravarman in his conversation with the Chinese Pilgrim says - In the Kingdom, there are many persons who sing about the victories of Tsin , King of Mahachina country. I have heard this song. Is it true that this is your honorable birth place”? He said – “It is so. This song celebrates the virtues of my sovereign” - To which Bhaskara replies – “I ever have great esteem for the laws and manners of your country.

Long have I looked to the East but the intervening mountains have prevented me from visiting it”.

Huien – Tsiang also learnt from Bhaskaravarman that a route to China exists from the mountains to the East. “Their frontiers are contiguous with the barbarians of South-West China. On enquiry, I have found that after two month’s journey, we reach the frontiers of the province of Szchuen. But the mountains, the pestilential air, poisonous vapors and fatal snakes, destructive vegetation all these causes of death prevail”.

Bhaskara had also offered the Chinese pilgrim an escort upto the port (Tamralipti) from where he could embark by sea to China if the latter wished to return to China by sea-route. Bhaskara had asked the Chinese pilgrim for a book of the philosophy of Lau-Tzu and also a portrait of Lao-Tzu.

Huien – Tsiag had been studying at the Nalanda Monastery in Magadha when Kumar Bhaskaravarman sent emissaries to invite him to his capital. At first he declined not to go, but changed his mind when Silabhadra, his teacher, pointed out that it was his duty to propagate true law. He came to Kamarupa⁴⁶.

According to the Chinese Pilgrim, Kamarupa was more than a myriad li or 1667 miles in circuit. He travelled through Pun-fa-tan-na (Pundravardhana) in the East for more than 900 li or 150 miles, crossed a large river Ka-lo-tu (Karatoya) and reached Kia-no-leu-po or Kamarupa.

‘Dr. Chatterjee has expressed his pain that Huein-Tsang is silent about the language of Pundra vardhana (North Bengal) or Karna suvarna (North-Central Bengal or Murshidabad),—which he would have crossed to reach Kamarupa. 

It is said in the” Life of Hiuen-Tsiang” that when he had been in Kamarupa for about a month, Harshavardhana heard about it on his way back after his attack on Kongoda. He sent off a note to Bhaskaravarman to send the pilgrim to his camp at once. Bhaskara however, replied that Harsha “can take his head but he cannot take the Master of the Law yet”. Harsha, perhaps annoyed, sent back a message “Well, then, send the head that I may have it immediately by my messenger who is to bring it here”. On receipt of this answer, Bhaskaravarman is said to have quickly proceeded with a large troop of elephants and ships up to the Ganga, and taking the Pilgrim along personally, arrived at the country of Kie-shu-ho-ki-to (Kajangala near Rajmahal). Here on the North bank of Ganges, he together with his ministers proceeded to meet Harsha who received him courteously and then they were joyfully reconciled”

It follows from the above account that Bhaskaravarman passed with a Kingly army though Gauda country without any opposition. Had Gauda been under the sway of any other King, Bhasakara would not have been allowed to proceed through the country with his army. DC Ganguli rightly points out that about this time (i.e. AD 642), Gauda was part of Kamarupa Kingdom. (Political conditions of Bengal during Huien-Tsiang’s visit, IHQ XV pp122-124)

As per Chinese records, after the return of Huien-Tsiang to China, Bhaskaravarman received the Chinese envoys sent by the Chinese Emperor. Wang Hiuen-tzu and Li Yipiao visited him. He is said (in Chinese records) to have presented them with a MAP of

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47 B. Hazarika, op.cit, p. 26
48 B.K. Barua, op. cit., p. 29
his Kingdom Showing a wide tract of Eastern India, Assam and Bengal. The mention of this map and the territories of Bhaskara is significant. It shows the high standard of intellectual attainment in an Indo-mongoloid of the 7th century AD. It is also known from the same record that the Chinese Emperor ordered for a Sanskrit translation of Lao-Tze’s book but whether it reached Bhaskaravarman is not known.

The accounts by the Chinese Pilgrim⁴⁹ and Banabhatta⁵⁰ have amply portrayed the great heights of cultural advancement of the people of this region. The list of the gifts given by Bhaskara to King Harsha (details in chp.5) also give us a fairly good idea of the artifacts produced during his reign. It reflects a highly refined culture. Surely the advancement of culture continued into latter centuries for a long time.

“The last mention of Bhaskaravarman occurs in the story of Chinese ambassador Waughhusen Tse’s invasion of Tirkut in 648 AD. He captured and carried off Arjun (the minister of Harsha of Magadha, who had usurped the throne) to China, “Kumar, king of Eastern India had sent him abundant supplies of cattle, horses and accoutrements for a victorious battle.” It is concluded that Bhaskaravarman lived at least until 650 AD.

The fact of King Bhaskara issuing a royal edict from his victorious camp at Karna Suvarna the old capital of Gauda King Sasanka (Nidhanpur Inscription Epigraphica Indica Vol xii No 13) shows that he had sway over whole Eastern India.

**Dynasty of Sala Stambhas**

No mention is made either in Bana’s Harshacharitam or by Hiuen-tsiang of any wife of Kumar Bhaskaravarman. Perhaps he was celesbate. It also appears that shortly after Bhaskaravarman’s death in 648 AD, there was anarchy which ended the line of Kings.


owing their origin to Naraka. In its place was a new line of Kings headed by Salasthamba.

Thus, by adverse turn of events, the Kingdom was possessed by a line of twenty Kings headed by Sala Stambha Mlecchaadinatha, (a great chief of the Mlechas,) who was followed by Vigraha Stambha, Palaka Stambha, and Vijaya Stamba. The reign of these kings appears uneventful.

**Kamarupa- Nepala Alliance**
The accession of the next king Harsadeva (725-750 A.D) on the throne of Kamarupa marked a period of prosperity and territorial expansion. The entire North Bengal was part of the kingdom of Harshadeva, descendant of the Salastamba family. This is proved by an inscription in Nepal whose contemporary King Jayadeva was married to the daughter of Harshadeva. We find great relation being established between Kamarpa and Nepala. Harshadeva, a great ruler of Kamrupa gave his daughter in marriage to Nepala King Jayadeva II. “Having secured North-East, he could concentrate on Gauda, Odra, Kalinga and Kosala.”  

The stone Inscription of Jayadeva, King of Nepala, who married Rajyamati, of “Bhagadutta Rajyakula” and daughter of King Harsadeva of this line, styles this king as “Gaudadri Kalinga Kosalapati” and this inscription is dated 748 AD.  

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51 B.N. Puri, *Studies in Early History and Administration of Assam*, Department of Publications, Gauhati University, 1968, p. 44

52 E. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp.29-31
This line of twenty one kings ended with Tyagasimha. From the names of these Mleccha Kings it may be concluded that they were converted to Hinduism as soon as they became worthy of the notice of the local Brahmin priests

**Reign of Pralambha**
The next line mentioned in the copperplates is that of Pralambha the father of Harjjara who may have risen to power at about 800 AD i.e. thirty years before the time of Harjjara’s inscription on the rock near Tezpur. The same date may be taken as that of the extiction of Sala Stambha’s Dynasty.

The Reign of Pralambha has left three relics in the form of Rock Inscriptions at Tezpur and the Tezpur and Nowgong copperplates. Pralambha killed or banished all members of the former ruling class. His wife was named Jivada. He was succeeded by Harjjara who by his wife Tara had a son Vanamala. The latter, who became King in his turn, is described as having a broad chest, thick set neck and club-like arms, a noble disposition and serious demeanour. Like his father, he was an ardent devotee of Siva. He enjoyed unusually long reign and his Kingdom extended upto the sea-shore. (This may have been an invention of the panegryst.)

**Kings of the family of Brahmapala**
The family of Salasthamba being extinct, the Kingdom passed to the hands of a new line. This is evident from the Bargaon Grant of Ratnapala, which says that when Tyagasimha the twenty first King departed without leaving a successor to the throne, the people thinking it well that a Bhauma (Naraka’s race) should be appointed as their Lord, chose Brahmapala on account of his fitness to undertake the government of the country.

...Brahmapala was followed by others in his time for several generations. We have no epigraphs of Brahmapala. However, from the records of his son Ratnapala, he reigned

around 1000 AD. Ratnapala, who styled himself Parameshwara Parmabhattarka Maharajadhiraja, was a powerful king. That he had a long reign is known from his Sualkuchi grant made in the 26th year of his region. He perhaps suffered an attack by Deccan Chalukya Prince Vikramaditya Kalyani.

Indrapala, the next King was the grandson of Brahmapala his father having died a few years earlier. Even in his reign, extensive grants (Khonamukhi and Subhankarapataka) were issued.

The Puspabhadra grant bears no date. Dharmapala in his inscription refers to his great grandfather Indrapala, grand father Gopala and father Harsapala and Harshapala probably ruled towards second part of 11th century.

“The rising power of Kamrupa led to it’s contest with Western Chalukyas as suggested in the inscription of the Rastrakusta- Dandhi-durga. Kamarupa was dragged along with Gauda into the political web of the North Indian powers bidding for supremacy, which continued for generations.

While the Gaudas sought the help of Rashtrakutas of Western Peninsula, the rulers of Kamrupa seem to have maintained the balance of power by aligning with Kanyakubja, repeating the role of Bhaskaravarman in the 7th century A.D. We have no epigraphic evidence to justify this fact but we do find the Rashtrakutas giving a princess in marriage to the Kamrupa king Indrapala, as mentioned in the Gachtal inscription of Gopala.

This must have been done to wean away the Kamrupa rulers from the influence of Kanauj. The shift in alignment may have prompted the Rashtrakutas to press upon Gauda, thus paving the ground for the expansion of the Kamrupa Kingdom.

The Pala rulers of Kamarupa (probably Dharmapala) did take the advantage, and extended the kingdom upto the ‘Southern Sea’. We have the evidence of the Gauhati Grant referring to the discomfiture caused to the Lord of the Deccan.”
Another Kamarupa King was Jayapaladeva mentioned his Silimpur stone inscription of Brahmana Prahasa. He has been taken as successor of Dharmapala. He was probably conquered by the King of Gauda. Thus the dynasty of Brahmapala ended in early 12th Century AD. The line ended when Jayapala who was overthrown by Gauda King Rampala.

All these three lines of Rulers claimed descent from ‘Naraka of the Asura Race’.

Rampala of Gauda seems to have set up on the throne of Kamarupa his vassal called Tingyadeva. Soon after this, Vaidyadeva a minister of court from Gaudesvara Kumarapala (1120 AD) along with his brother Buddhadeb marched against Tingyadeva and took over the reign of Kamapura.54

After this, Arimatta (1158-1228) is said to have ruled the kingdom.

Some historians conjecture that in 1228, Prithu, the last King of the Arimatta family was killed by Malik- us- Said Nasir-ud-din Mahmud Shah, who placed Sandhya, the son of deceased king on the throne in Kamata. This was later destroyed by Hussien Shah.

In 1498, the Bara-Bhuyans recaptured it.

Soon after, the old Kamrupa Kingdom seems to have been split up into several independent principalities by the Bhuyans (land Owners).

In the 16th century, i.e. around 1515 A.D., Viswasimha, the cowherd, captured power and established the Koch Dynasty in the Western Region.

Ancient Capital Cities
The earliest name of the country appears to be Pragjyotispura, from the innumerable accounts in Ramayana and Mahabharata, while, Kalika Purana, uranand other sources

54B.K .Barua, *op. cit.*, p.39
down to eleventh century refer to Pragjyotisa as well as Kamarupa. Pragjyotisa is identified with modern town of Guwahati.

Bhaskaravarman is conjectured to have ruled from Suryapahar in present Goalpara district.

Later, significance is given to Harrupeswara near modern town of Tezpur and then to Durjaya, probably in modern Nowgong Dist., and lastly to Kamarupanagar, perhaps Kamatapur in modern Koch Behar.\textsuperscript{55}.

\section*{The Beginning of Mohamedan Invasions}

The most noted aspect of the reign of Vidyadeva and Buddhadeva, his successor was the beginning of the invasions by Mohamedans towards the end of the twelfth century – the first being that of Mohamed bin Bhaktiyar who set out in 1205 A D to conquer Tibet from Tirhut.

His army was annihilated and he himself narrowly escaped with a few followers. And the incident was recorded on a stone boulder at Kanaibadasi east of North Gauhati. The \textit{Tabaquat-e-Nasiri} by Miraj also records it.

Another inscription was found in Gachtal, Naogong dist. issued in 1227 AD it has been deciphered as King Viswasundaradeva ordered one Chandrakanta to repair the damage done by the \textit{Mlechas} to the temple of Siva. It is believed that the \textit{Mlecchas} referred to were Mohamedans who accompanied Ghiyasuddin Iwaj on his expedition to ‘Kamrud’ and ‘Bang’ in 1244 AD which began in 1226 AD.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55}D. Neog, \textit{op cit.}, pp.46 -47  
\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., p.39-40
The Thirteenth Century is marked by three major happenings
(See PLATE III-Map-7 -13th Century Assam)

Firstly, as mentioned above, the Mohamedan invasions began. The Muslim power in Delhi or its agents in Bengal conducted 17 expeditions against Assam since the beginning of the 13th to the end of the 17th centuries, but did not succeed but once in defeating or subduing Assam. Consequently, the Muslim population in Assam was very less until 1826 when the East India Company took over the State. Nevertheless, they played role in the cultural development of Assam.

The second important event of the early part of the 13th century is the emigration of Ahoms under the leadership of Chukapha from Upper Burma to Eastern Assam through the Patkai range of hills in 1228 AD.

The third event of significance in the 13th century is the shifting of the capital from Kamarupa – nagari (near modern Guwahati) to Kamatapura in Koch Behar. The Kamarupa kingdom seems to have shrunk into the western regions (Including modern districts of Kamrup, Goalpara and North Bengal.) The Eastern parts of the earlier Kingdom ruled by the Palas along the North bank of the Brahmaputra became the hunting-ground of the power-seeking Bhuyans and petty Chiefstains.  

The 14th and 15th centuries
For a reconstruction of history of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we have to depend on the scanty evidences afforded by some copperplate and stone inscriptions, the political works of several pre-Sanskrit poets and of Sankaradeva himself, the Guru-Charitas (biographies of saints) the Raja-vamsavalis of the Koch Kings of Kamrupa, and

also some Mohamedan chronicles like Tabakat-i-Nasiri and Riyazau-s-Salatin. M. Neog considers it inadequate and requiring more research, as the references are generally mutually contradictious.

The *Mahaparusia* (Vaishnavite) traditions refer to DurlabNarayan as ruling in the 14th century with his capital at Gariya, ‘at a distance of three *praharas*’ away. Around this time or probably after the death of Durlab Narayan, Viswasimha, who was at first a cowherd, slowly rose to power in the Kuntaghat pargana of (modern) Goalpara district. But other accounts mention Arimatta and his descendants as the ‘Kings of Kamarupa’ around the same period.

Popular legends still prevalent about Arimatta and his wife prove that he was a well-known king with many adventures to his credit. The Assam *Buranji* (Ahom historical chronicles) says that King Durlabendra of Kamatpura was murdered and that his throne was usurped by a kinsman Phinguwa. Phinguwa also killed Arimatta through a conspiracy with the later’s wife. It is said that Arimatta had an immaculate conception and when attacked by Phingawa, he jumped into the water and disappeared. His son, Ratnasimha ruled after killing Phinguwa and the line ended with Ratnasimha who was childless, leaving the country safe for the Bara Bhuyans (petty landlords).

The period of the rule of Arimata’s family is conjectured by M. Neog as 1438 to 1489 AD. This seems to be coeval with the reign of another dynasty, that of Khems in Kamata. Hence, M. Neog surmises that the former reigned in Eastern Kamrupa (Darrang) with Pratapapura (near modern Tezpur) as their capital, whereas the Khen Dynasty had the Lower part (Goalpara) and their capital at Kamata, located in the extreme west of the region. ..

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Muslim chronicles as well as Buchanan- Hamilton’s accounts give the names of three Kings- Niladhvaja, Chakradhraja and Nilambara of the Khen/khem dynasty which came to power in the 14th century, after Durlab Narayana.

But the dynasty was soon de-throned by Alauddin Hussein Shah Sultan of Gaur, Bengal(1493-1519) The whole of Kamrupa was annexed to Gauda (1498). Hussien Shah is also reputed to have subdued many local petty kings (perhaps the Bara Bhuyans). Muslim glory was, however, short-lived. Hussien Shah had kept his son Daniyal (called Dalal Ghazi in the Buranjis) in charge of the administration. With the coming of rains, Daniyal’s garrison met with complete destruction at the hands of the local soldiers who leaped on them from the adjoining hills. Gait and Assamese historians assign the date to this event as 1498 AD. 

With the devastation under which Kamata pura was laid by Hussein Shah, and the death of the last Khem monarch Nilambara as also the end of Arimatta’s descendants in the region of Kamarupa, the rule of independant Kamata-Kamarupa Kings came to an end and the land was held by the petty land-owners called the Bara Bhuyans. Infact it was the Bara Bhuyans, who, with the help of their neighbouring hill-tribes were able to throw off the yoke of the Muslim rulers.

What is the most important aspect for us of this confusing period is that a few Kings of this period reigning in Kamatapur liberally patronized Assamese poets and Scholars in

60 H. K. Borpujari, Comprehensive History of Assam (Vol.II) ,Publication Board, Assam, 1992, p.47
their noble task of rendering Sanskrit Epics and Puranas into Assamese. Durlab narayan and his son Indranarayana who according to B K Barua ruled in Kamatapura between 1330 and 1365 AD have been praised by Hema Saraswati, Kaviratna Saraswati, HarivaraVipra, and Rudra Kandali in their poetic works.\(^{61}\)

**Part 3: Brief Historic outline of the period of study (16\(^{th}\) to 19\(^{th}\) century A.D.)**

The 16\(^{th}\) century saw the consolidation of Koch Empire in the West and rising power of the Ahom Kings in the East. The Bara Bhuyans were struggling to maintain their position in between.

*(See PLATE III- Map-8 Koch and Ahom Kingdoms in the 16\(^{th}\) Century)*

**The Bara Bhuyans of Kamarupa – Asama**

An introduction to this ethnic group is significant and relevant here as the Founder of the Assamese Culture and thus the ‘hero’ of this story was a member of this clan, in fact a *Siromani Bhuyan* or an overlord of the Bhuyans.

The Bara Bhuyans are an ethnic group not originally from Assam. There are many legends about the Bara – Bhuyans of Assam. They were mainly petty chieftains of Kayastha communities. They were land holders. Sankaradeva belonged to a leading Bara-Bhuyan family and in his writings he refers to his father as Kusumavara his grandfather Suryavara, and his great-grandfather Rajadhera. His ancestors were Siromani Bhuyans (overlords of the Bhuyans) Gait points out that the Bhuyans are not connected to Bhuialurs of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Assam Bhuyans are not all Kayasthas. It was a title held by virtue of power and property. There were Brahmans – like Damodardeva’s

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ancestor Brahmananda, Harihara Vipra the grand father of the saint Vamsigopala. Amongst Bara-Bhuyans of Bengal, we have Muslims also (Isa Khan, Anwar Gazi) 62

The tradition of Bara-Bhuyans is peculiarly common to Bengal and Assam. They are also mentioned in Ain-i-Akbari so the institution existed before Akbar’s time. Bhusana holds that Chandivara, great grandfather of Sankaradeva and other Bhyans held their land independently at Kanaujapura and being attacked by Pathans or Yavanas migrated to Gaudeswara’s Kingdom and later to Kamarupa. They are said to have come to Kamarupa as a result of a treaty concluded between Dharmanarayana of Gauda and Durlabhnarayana of Kamarupa after the battle on the Mahananda River. Seven Kayasthas and seven Brahmanas were sent to Kamarupa by the Gauda King. Chandivara, a scholar and warrior, a favourite of the Gauda King was made the leader of the group as the Siromani Bhuyan. He was the Chief Ancestor of Sankaradeva.

According to Guru Charit of Ramachandra Thakur, the Bara-Bhuyans ruled the lands of Kamarupa under the King Dharampala. The King was forced to leave the Kingdom due to a curse by Godders Kamakhya. The Bara Bhuyans are said to have established their principalities during this period. Durlab narayana a kinsman of Dharmapala (Gauda King) ruled the Kingdom from his capital at Gariya a few miles away from Kamata. The boundaries between the regions held by Bara Bhuyans and the Kamata rulers (of Khem Dynasty) advanced and receded constantly. On the Eastern front, they were at war with the Chutiya Kings and Kachari Kings. Legend has it that once Ahom Kings captured twelve of the chiefs and sent them as human sacrifice to Sadiya to Goddess Shyama Kali. Later they were granted release on the oath to support the Ahoms against other kings 63

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The final crises for the Bara-Bhuyans, however, came when the Koch King Viswa Simha rose to power in Kamrupa with Koch-Behar as the capital city, 10 km. from the old capital at Kamata.

**Rise of the Koch Kingdom**

Although he was not able to retain power for long, the conquest of Kamrup by Hussein Shah affected the country not a little. For nearly quarter century (1494-1518) the Pathans were a force to reckon with. Thereafter, they were squeezed out by the Koch Kings and the Bara Bhuyans. The Koch people were originally from Mongoloid stock and they had a language allied to the Kachari Tipperahas, Lalungs, Chutiyas and Garos. They adopted Hinduism after which ‘Koch’ became a caste.

Taking advantage of the absence of a central power in western Kamarupa, Visu, an adventurous youth of humble origins established himself as the King of Kamata Kingdom by defeating powerful Bhuyans of Auguri, Luki, Jhargaon, Karnapura, Phulguri, Bejini, and Pandu. (Darrang Rajavamsavalli pp. 16, 21-23).

After formal investure as King, Viswasingha shifted his capital from Chikana to Koch Behar. Thus the Koch Dynasty came into existence in the first decade of sixteenth century A.D. He consolidated his newly acquired Kingdom by appointing suitable officers of administration, he also raised a powerful army to defend his territory. He renovated temples like that of Goddess Kamateswari.

Viswasingha was succeeded by his son, Naranarayana whose reign for more than forty years (1540-1584) is a very important period in the Military History of Assam.

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64 S.N. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p.19
It was a period of great conquests and great cultural encouragement. The King’s brother SukladhvaJA alias Chilarai was a great scholar, an able military commander. He led a series of victorious campaigns against the Ahoms, Jaintapur, Manipur, Cachar (Hedambapur) Sylhet, and exacted tributes from all of them. His victorious career received a set-back when he lost the battle with Nawab of Bengal who captured Chilarai and held him prisoner. He managed his freedom and returned, but died soon after due to small-pox.

In the reign of King Nararayana, the Koch power extended over Koch Behar to Kamrup, Darrang, and Goalpara besides all tributary Kingdoms of Jainta, Manipur, Kachari and Srihatta (Sylhet) Kingdoms. He constructed a great highway on the North Bank of Brahmaputra from Koch Behar to Narayanpur near Lakhimpur a distance of more than 600 kms in a year’s time. (Gosain Kamal Ali) He waged war on the Ahoms by attacking them from this highway. For some time, the Ahom Kings too paid tribute.

Although the Koch Kings were Shaktas, the King encouraged Vaishnavism. Particularly patronizing Sankeradeva and his famous disciples Madhavadeva and others, King Naranarayana along with his great brother Chilarai gave shelter and offered Sankaradeva their patronage to freely practice Vaishnavism. Sankaradeva, infact, achieved the full flowering of his creativity in various aspects of literature, performing arts and also crafts like weaving etc. in Koch Behar under the benevolent patronage of the Koch King. The Bhatima (Eulogy) written by Sankara for Naranarayana is an expression of his gratitude.

The Koch King also patronized a galaxy of scholars and poets by making liberal economic provisions for maintenance of their families. The King himself, being a Sanskrit Scholar encouraged Sanskrit learning and according to Katha-guru-charit he issued a directive to his officers to learn Sanskrit and asked the scholar Purushottam Vidyavagisa to prepare a simplified Sanskrit grammar (Prayogarathnamala) for the
purpose Bhagavatpurana was translated by Sankaradeva into Asamese during this time. Bakula Kayastha and Sridhara were engaged to write a simplified version of ‘Lilavati’ the treatise on Mathematics, and Khandasadhya, a work on Astronomy.  

The cultural encouragement thus received from the Koch King considerably helped the Scholars and religious preachers to spread Hindu religious and scriptural ideas amongst the indigenous people who had been languishing in ignorance.

Religion was one of the principal stabilizing forces of Medieval society in India as a whole. The Neo-Vaishnavite Bhakti culture initiated by Sankaradeva in the 15th and 16th centuries and encouraged by King Naranarayan and his brother Generalissimo Chilarai contributed a great deal in ushering in the cultural Renaissance in Assam.

After Naranarayana, the Kingdom was divided into two between the sons of Naranarayana and General Chilarai respectively. The separate States were called Koch Behar and Koch Hajo (eastern part).

This division got consolidated when the Muslim rulers gained sovereignty over Koch Behar and the Ahom Kings in the 17th century annexed Koch Hajo into Assam.

(See PLATE IV- Map-9- Ahom and Mussalman Kingdoms 17th Century)

Balinarayana was a tributary King under the Ahoms upto 1637 A.D. until his death in an encounter with the Muslims. The Koch dynasty practically came to an end after this. In Koch Behar, the princely family retained their title albeit only in name until modern times.

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65 Ibid., Loc. cit.
Coming of the Ahom Rulers

The Ahom Dynasty ruled in Assam for 600 years, the longest duration for an Indian Dynasty.

The Ahom Kings played the major role in the formation of the Culture of Assam.

So far the historical records are confined to Ratnapith and Kamapith regions of Brahmaputra valley.

It is only in the 13th Century that we are enlightened about the Suvarnapith and Saumarapith particularly by the chronicles of a race of foreign invaders who made their appearance in the eastern extremity of the Brahmaputra and who possessed a well-developed historic sense. They were the forefathers of the present Asamas or Ahoms, originally belonging to the Tai clan of Shan tribe who had their territories in the Northern and Eastern hills of upper Burma probably Maulung under their leader Sukapha.

(See Map-7 showing the route of entry of Ahoms in the 13th century)

Sukapha is said to have left Maulung due to a private dispute about 1215 AD with 800 nobles and 9000 men, women and children, 2 elephants and 300 horses. In 1228 AD he arrived at the banks of Kam-nam-jang after moving for 13 years in the hilly tracts of the Patkai on the extreme North East of Assam and now and then making raids into the Naga Hills. They built a city at Charaideo near Sibsagar in 1253 AD after defeating the Bodo tribes of Marans and Barahis. They intermarried and adopted conciliatory measures over defeated kings. (They called it the Thapit-sanchit policy).\(^{66}\)

By the Ahom historical accounts (called the Burunjis) of the far Eastern provinces, we learn that in the 13th century a line of Chutiya kings ruled the country East of River Subansiri except a strip on the south and east where some independent Bodo tribes enjoyed precarious independence. Further west on south bank, there was the Kachari Kingdom. West of Kachari on the south bank and besides the Chutias on North bank was a number of petty chiefs called Bara Bhuyans who have already been considered. The

boundaries between the Bhuyans and Kamata Kings on extreme West varied from time to time\textsuperscript{67}. (Refer -Map-7 for Chutia and Kachari kingdoms)

D Neog gives a thought on the origin of the word Ahom – Assam had four main geographical divisions- Ratnapith, Kamapith, Suvarnapith, and Saumarapith. The east was definitely Saumara (Souma) and the foreign invaders were Asouma (not Souma) or Asom (Ahom). The Non-Aryans invariably changed ‘s’ into ‘h’ sound.

Another interpretation which seems more acceptable is the Ahoms themselves describing their origin as Shan \textit{A.Shan (we are Shan)} which was corrupted to Asom or Ahom.

During the time of the second leader of the Ahom invaders, Sutapha (1286-81) the \textbf{Kacharis had to give up their territories east of Dikhang to the Ahoms.}

Sukhangpha (1293-1332) fought a \textbf{war with the distant Kamata King} and their hostilities terminated with the later giving his daughter Rajani in marriage to the Ahom King.

\textbf{The next King (1380-1389) Tyaokhamti defeated and captured the Chutiya Kingdoms.} By 1891, according to Gait, one third of the Chutiyas said they were Ahom Chutiyas.

Next, Sudangpha (1308-1407) was called Bamuni Konwar as he was brought up by a Brahmin. He was the first King to admit Hindu influence in the Royal family. He subjugated the tribes to the North and North East of the valley. The entire 15th century was for the Ahoms a constant series of battles with all the tribals who kept resurrecting from the dead and put up a fight.

In 1497 Dihingya Raja’s reign is part of the period of the current study. **He crushed the Bara Bhuyans** and maintained safe relations with Manipur and some local hill tribes were also subjugated. Sankaradeva’s son-in-law was beheaded at the behest of Ahom officers. Also his disciple Madhavadeva was in captivity for many months. **The cruel and despotic nature of the Ahom Rulers made Sri Sankaradeva to take the decision to leave Ahom country and sail down the Brahmaputra to Kumtaghat in Koch Behar, as he had heard about the Koch King Naranaryana who was a generous and good King.**

Most importantly, at this stage, the Ahom Dihingiya Raja paid attention to the social condition of the people, who were organized into *Khels, Gots and Paiks*, and placed them directly under administration of princes.

The next King Gadgaya Raja (1539-52) and his successor Khora Raja (1552-1603) mainly had to face hostilities from the Koch General Chilarai who attacked from the North along the *Gosain Kamal Ali Highway* from Koch Kingdom to Narayanpur on North east corner of the valley. The Ahoms were worsted and not until 1564 were they able to get back the hostages taken by Naranarayana. When Chilari became a prisoner of Badshah of Bengal, the Koch King halted his aggressive stance and had conciliation with the Ahom King as a safety measure.

**The Muslims invaded** (General Mir Jumla’s invasion in 1662-63 A.D.) and although the great and powerful General Mir Jhumla was successful in defeating the Ahoms, the climate and Geography were not on his side. He could not consolidate his victory and died a very sorry death on his return, his great army and naval forces being totally annihilated.

Many Moslem records are available regarding their various invasions. (Assam was invaded 17 times unsuccessfully)
Rudra Singha (1696-1714 A.D.) can be seen as the last great monarch in the Ahom Dynasty. He conquered wide tracts of the Koch empire on the Eastern side by the end of the 16th century and would have gone further west but he died suddenly on the eve of battle. He had developed Hindu proclivities in his old age, for which he invited a Brahmin from Bengal to initiate him. Thus he was the cause of alien elements entering politics in Assam.

(See PLATE IV - Map 9 Rudra Singha’s Kingdom)

A chaotic end of the Ahom Supremacy
Jayadhwaja Singha in around 1660 A.D. had herded the Vaishnavite Sattras into the Majuli Island in a bid to contain their spread.

Rudra Singha was followed by Shivasingha when some wrong policies were followed by the Queen Phuleswari along with the alien Brahmin elements.

It is seen that after Sib Singha, seven other Kings were appointed in rapid succession in eleven years, no king dying a natural death.

The chaos in the Monarchy led collapse of the administration and to a civil war, which again the Ahom Kings failed to contain. The war escalated and the land was devastated by the Burmese Army, finally leading to annexation by the British.

The people of Assam did not lose their independence until the nineteenth century when a disastrous civil war broke out due to poor administrative policies of Ahom Rulers, and the whole country lay open to attack by enemies from within and without.

The 19th century - The British enter the scene
The materials for constructing the History of 19th century Assam is quite abundant and varied. As more and more records are being unearthed, the historians are in a position to conduct deeper research. They also perhaps felt more free to write about the British and
the Bengalis critically particularly in regard to the exploitative revenue systems, the selfish policies and the total side-tracking of the interests of the indigenous populations.

When the Mayamara Rebellion began, Ahom King Gaurinath appealed to the British in Bengal for help.

**The Moamaria Rebellion**

In 1792-93 the British deputed Captain Welsh with a regiment of infantry to assist the Ahom King Gaurinath Singh, to quell a rebellion by Mayamara Vaishnavites. When he arrived, the Raja had already fled upper Assam. The whole country was in a state of rebellion and anarchy. “The Raja had fled to Guwahati – driven by the Muttoks (inhabitants of the country round Debrooghar) and disciples of the Moamariah Gosains joined by other priests and followers of Vaishnavite satras west of Dihing. They had captured the capital, Gargaon and held sway.”

On the North bank, the Raja of Darrang and others raised their heads and took possession of North bank. In the South Bank, the Khasis threw off their yoke and refused to pay tribute or to assist the Ahom Raja Gaurinath in any way.

From this State of prostration, the Ahom Raja Gaurinath Singh “who appears to have been a man utterly worthless”, according to Captain Welsh, was rescued by Captain Welsh, and in the three years that the British regiment remained in Assam, the Motoks were driven back east beyond the river Dihing. The bands of Hindustani freebooters (burkandazees) were thrown out of Assam and he almost restored the compete ascendancy of the authority of the Ahom King or rather a council of State. The Raja himself was kept a prisoner by Capt. Welsh - under the pretext of guarding his safety.
But due to the departure of Marquis Cornwallis, the British Government in India changed hands and the new Governor - General Sir John Shore, ordered Capt. Welsh to return immediately. Ahom King Gaurinath had requested Capt. Welsh to remain and Capt. Welsh himself seconded the wish saying that the uneasy peace he had restored would again collapse into anarchy-- if he left at this stage and that “Gaurinath would never keep his promises of pardon to the rebels and confusion, devastation and massacre would ensue”.

But the Governor General’s orders were imperative and on 3rd of July, 1793, the expedition reached back into British territory.

Immediately following their exit the rebels again captured Rangpur. Gaurinath had already left his capital and shifted to Jorhat which now became his capital. From his position of newly acquired strength, Gaurinath then let loose with vindictive spite against all officers and other who had been befriended or protected by Capt. Welsh. The Bar Barua, the Bar Phukan and Bairagi who had let the attack on Gauhati were all beheaded, tortured, murdered cruelly. All previously of Moamaria persuasion were hunted down and put to death.

The Bura- Gohain (prime-minister) set up an army on the model of the British regiment, and brought back order into the chaos.

In the mean while, however, Raja Gaurinath Singh was seized with a mortal illness and died on 19th Dec. 1794. The Bura-Gohain, who was present, concealed his death, killed his immediate rivals and after gaining complete control over the Kingdom, announced the Kings death and placed Kinaram (Kamaleshwar Singh) a descendant of Gadadhar Singh on the throne. He claimed that Gaurinath had nominated the new King at the time of his death.
Then followed twenty years of peace and prosperity under the ‘reign’ of the Bura-Gohain who became the virtual ruler of the land. He even offered free pardon to those who fought on the side of the rebels. The people became prosperous again and order was restored in the Kingdom by him.

In 1810, there was an epidemic of small-pox to which the King Kamaleswar himself succumbed. He was just a puppet in the hands of the Bura-Gohain. The Bura-Gohain had achieved a lot in the last twenty-years to put down rebel forces and constructively improve the condition of the old capital Rangpur to its former glory and he had also improved the town of Jorhat.

The Bura-Gohain nominated Chandrakanta brother of the late King Kamaleshwarc. But being still a boy, the control still remained with the Bura-Gohain.

The affections of the young King Chandrakant was captured by a youth called Satram who was the son of an Ahom Soothsayer. Satram who had the young King’s ear, became more and more powerful. At last he plotted the assassination of the Bura-Gohain. But like many other plots, it was discovered and the Bura-Gohain put all the conspirators to death, but Satram himself was banished to Namrup where he was killed by some Nagas.

Meanwhile on the death of the Bar Phukan in Gauhati, one Badan Chandra was appointed. There were reports of his oppressive behavior and his sons’ conduct was even more outrageous on the street of Gauwhati. At last, the Bura-Gohain determined on the removal of Badan Chandra. Men were sent to eliminate him. But the Badan Chandra was warned of it and escaped to Bengal.

Badan Chandra sought the help of the British giving out falsely that the Bura Gohain was ruining the country. When he did not get success with the British, he sought out the
Burmese King and obtained promise of help by mis-representing the facts regarding the conduct of the Bura Gohain.

The Burmese Invasion - 1816
In 1816 Burmese army of about 16000 men attacked from the South. A battle was fought by the army of the Bura Gohain but the Burmese were victorious. The Bura Gohain died, or as some say, he committed suicide by swallowing diamonds. A young Bura Gohain was appointed but he could not hold the fort and fled to Gawhati. The Burmese occupied Jorhat. They reinstated the Bar Phuken Badan Chandra, and retained Chandrakanta as the King.

The Burmese army was sent back in April 1817 with a great amount of compensation and also an Ahom girl for the royal harem.

The young Bura Gohain now returned from Gauhati where he had taken refuge - came along with a great army consisting of Hindustani mercenaries (burkandazees) and locals. King Chandrakanta fled to Rangpur. The Bura Gohain put Brajnath, a grand son of Raja Raghuvir Sing on the Ahom Throne. But it was found that Brajnath was mutilated so unfit for the throne. His son Purander Singh was made King.

The second Burmese invasion - 1819
A fresh force of Burmese army was sent under a General Aloa Mingi February 1819.

This time, the Burmese army found it very easy to capture the capital. The Ahom army was totally routed and Purandar Singh fled to Gauwhati.

The Burmese put Chandrakanta back on the throne but it was only nominal. The Burman commanders held sway and terrorized the entire population.
Owing to the difficulty in collection of provisions for such a large army the Burmese troops distributed themselves all over the valley in small detachments and harassed and looted the people for food.

The Burmese King Baggidan became aware of his opportunity, ordered the greatest of his generals Mingimaha Bandula to kill Chandrakanta and establish Jogeshwar on the throne. Bandula entered Assam in April 1822 with a force of 30,000 fighting men. They defeated Chandrakanta at Assam Choukey after reaching Gauhati. Thus at the end of June 1822, Burmese commander was declared Raja of Assam.

The pretence of acting in the name of Ahom Prince was practically given up. The Burman commandos became so drunk with their power that they sent insulting threats to the British to not allow the fugitive King Chandrakant asylum or else, they would with 18000 men commanded by forty Rajas, invade the Company’s territory and arrest him wherever he was found.

The two rival rajas Purendar and Chandrakanta instead of joining forces, each tried to wage war independently against the Burmese.

David Scott did not miss the significance of these developments. He reported in July 1822 to Superme government, “The Burmans having obtained complete mastery of Assam and a person of that nation having been appointed supreme authority, the country may now be considered as a province of Burman Empire”.68

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68 Ibid., p. 271
The Burmese Rule in Assam

Even in the remotest villages, the people of Assam had to suffer oppression of various kinds including torture, in connection with payment of taxes under the Burmese. The Burmese soldiers collected their provisions by force from the villages which were marked by grave excesses. Outrages on women were common. People were shut up in houses by force and set afire.

Terrible stories of the period of Burmese occupation have become part of popular tradition in Assam.  

The British war with Burmese – 1825 A.D.

The Burmese, found easy victories in Assam partly became of paucity of the Ahom Standing army. Whatever the cause, the Burmese started behaving insolently and committed various wanton acts of aggression.

At last, it was decided by the British to take up arms. Another factor which aided this decision perhaps was the discovery in 1823 of the tea-plant in Assam and the prospects of having lands to cultivate the same were attractive to British.

In January 1824, The British collected a force of about 3000 men with several canon and gum-boats and reached Guwahati. The Burmese withdrew to upper Assam as the British arrived at Guwahati. The British troops moved very slowly due to uncertainty of roads and availability of supplies. In the mean-time, the rains set in.

When they realized that the British army was not in pursuit, the retreating Burmese army came back and they unleashed another great fit of atrocities on the hapless people whom

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69 Ibid., p.274
they drove in crowds into Naamghars and set them on fire. The terror they inspired was so great that many thousands fled into hills and jungles dying there of starvation and disease. “Only a small remnant population reached the plains of Surma Valley. Several sub-mountain villages of Jaintia hills are still inhabited by people who speak pure Assamese”.  

After the rains, the British troops moved again and the Burmese were surprised and were very easily defeated. The Treaty of Yandaboo was signed at a village called Yandaboo near Ava., Burma. The Burmese had no choice and accepted all terms and condition of the British. They accepted to abstain from all interference in the affairs of Assam.

1826 A.D.-The British take charge
(See PLATE-IV-Map-11 When British Annexed Assam-1826 A.D.)

The British, who had earlier ignored all pleas for help of the Assam Kings, changed their minds.

The discovery that tea plant grows wild in upper part of Brahmaputra Valley was made by Mr. Robert Bruce who was an agent first of King Purandar Singh. He learnt of its existence from a Singpho Chief. In the following year 1824 a sample was made over as requested by Robert Bruce to Mr. C.A. Bruce, who was in Sadiya. These plants were submitted to David Scott.

A last bid for Independence was made by the Ahoms.

In 1830 war broke out again between British and joint front of Ahoms, Khasis, Nagas Singphos and Khamptis – simultaneously. It caught British off guard and British suffered set backs initially. But British later gathered their forces. The leaders were killed in battle. Some were banished and Piyoli Barphukan their leader was hanged.

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71 Ibid., Loc.cit
72 Ibid., p. 277
The historic 1847 mutiny left Assam untouched, except for a conspiracy by an Ahom prince with some sepoys of Dibrugarh. It was planned by Maniram Dewan. The British banished the prince and hanged Moniram Dewan.

The British abolished slavery in 1843. About 5-9% of population of Assam Valley was slaves. Although slavery was abolished, it took a long time to be rooted out of the system. The well-to-do landowners became very impoverished as they had nobody to till their lands.

Wastelands were offered on long lease to tea planters by the British authorities. Some Bodo tribesmen became laborers in the plantations. But later, by mid 1860’s recruitment of labours from other places started. Bengal Admin. Report of 1867 says that 22800 out of total 34,433 plantation labourers were from outside state of Assam. The political ‘understandings’ with various political factions led to subsequent drastic imbalance in the demographical patterns of the region due to unrestricted immigration, sowing the seeds of the prolonged conflicts amongst the immigrant and native populations.

The British impacted the educational policy by introducing Bengali as the medium of education. It led to near collapse of education in the State for almost a century.

The administrative system underwent total change from revenue payment by labor to revenue payment by cash, which the local people were not at all familiar with. It forced them to move from place to place in search of revenue free lands.
The British invited the American Baptists to proselytize in the hills and created the inner line to separate the plains people and the hills people. (divide and rule policy)

The end of the nineteenth century also witnessed the epidemics of ‘Black Fever’ amongst the native population which greatly reduced the indigenous population and gave scope to more immigrants to occupy depopulated regions.\(^{73}\)

The ease with which the Burmese had been ejected was no surprise to the British officers. Yet they were not keen to occupy it due to the unhealthy climate.

The British divided the State piecemeal for their own convenience and thus splitting the cultural and religious bonds developed by Srimanta Sankaradeva.

The entire Culture, Economy and Demography of Assam was drastically changed from the 19\(^{th}\) century onwards.

See PLATE IV Map-12- Under the Chief Commissioner 1875 A.D.

**Conclusion**

Thus we see that the natural ancient geographical divisions of Ratnapith, Kamapith, Suvarnapith, and Saumarapith underwent a change after the 13\(^{th}\) century.

Koch Kings consolidated the western regions and extended their territories southwards and westwards.

Ahom Kings from east pushed westwards after conquering the eastern tribal kingdoms.

\(^{73}\) J.P. Saikia, *op.cit.*, p.68
In the 17th century Mohamaddans made inroads into the Koch kingdom, due to partition of the Kingdom into Koch Behar and Koch Hajo. Ahom Kings extended their rule into Kamarupa.

After the terrible chaos due to Mayamara rebellion, Burmese King wrested the Kingdom and ruled in Assam.

In the 19th century, the British held the land and divided Assam piecemeal, fracturing forever the delicate Vaishnavite cultural linkages of the people.

Assam was the last region to be colonized by the British and turned into one of their Indian Provinces. The people of Assam have had to pay the most dearly for their independence.
Note- A

The account of the Pandits-1879-1882 in Tibet.

“Under the guidance of high-ranking British officers of the Survey Department, a scheme was devised to train Indian men in rudiments of geological surveying and send them under the guise of Buddhist monks to Tibet (forbidden territory) Their training was peculiar—they were to take strides of equal length and use the beads of the rosary to keep count. They recited their findings as though they said prayers—while memorizing them. They were sent on spying expeditions to Tibet mainly to unlock the secrets of the Tsangpo- Brahmaputra course. They were called Pandits. The most thrilling adventure was that of Darjeeling—born Kin thup. His mandate was to travel in disguise as far east as possible along the Tsangpo and cut and float 500 specially marked logs down the river and send news of the dispatch. At the Lower reaches of river Dihang, Capt. Harman and his men were to keep watch for the logs.

But Kinthup’s companions got fearful when he kept moving Eastwards. They secretly sold him to a Tibetan officer as a slave and made off. Kinthup managed to escape after a long stint, and even then he did his duty and floated 500 logs. He sent a secret message to his superiors. But it was not delivered. The logs were not detected. Kinthup, was not even rewarded by the British officers. Pandit Nain Singh got the information in Lhasa that the Tsangpo was the Brahmaputra.”


Note- B

In the Island of Majuli, at around the same period, the Sattradhikar (Head of the Monastery) of Kamalabari Sattra looking to set up their Sattras, had a dream. He saw that large logs of Tulsi trees were coming down the river. In deed! there were logs and they were collected and used by the main Sattras to build Naamghars Majuli.) The Kamalabri Sattra –II was started in 1858.

Ref: Oral record by the monks of Kamalabari Sattra.

The ancient logs are still preserved in the Sattras at Auniati, Majuli and at Titabor. Could these have been Kinthup’s logs? (See PLATE V-Ancient Tulsi Log and Ancient Pillars in Dakhinpat Sattra.)