Chapter- V

Political Status and Importance of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa

In ancient time the vast area of North-East India covering Assam of modern time was known by the name of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. This vast region nourishing multifacet visage of Indian culture and tradition under different sovereign rulers was recognised as an independent kingdom.

The kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa was established by Naraka. His connection with both the ages of the Rāmāyāna and the Mahābhārata has made it difficult to establish Naraka as a historical figure belonging to the Rāmāyāna or the Mahābhārata age and more than that he took birth from Viṣṇu in his Boar incarnation. But we can not place Naraka as a fictional character altogether. Bhagadatta son of Naraka invariably, belonged to the age of the Mahābhārata and his history has a continuity. Bhagadatta was the king of Prāgjyotiṣa and his father was Naraka and thus Naraka too belonged to the Mahābhārata age. Naraka’s linkage with king Janaka appears to be a myth. Naraka was a man from eastern Bihar of obscure origin. And just to make an impression in his adopted land, he devised the story of his divine birth from Lord Viṣṇu in his Boar incarnation and mother Earth, and that he was brought up by king Janaka the adopted father of Sita who had an
unusual birth, without human parents. So it is not surprising at all that Naraka who had an obscure origin found it easier to circulate the story of his adoption by king Janak. These stories might have also developed at a later stage. Again, it is also possible that there was an earlier Naraka in the age of the Rāmāyana and in course of time the stories of the two Naraka's got mixed up. Naraka's friendship with king Bāna, an asura king of Āṇapura, the modern Tezpur of Assam, strongly points to Naraka's period as belonging to the age of the Mahābhārata.

Naraka was an Aryanised person from the Bihar region, it is said that Gautama, the priest of Janaka, performed the keśvapana ceremony of Naraka, according to Vedic rites (Kālikāpurāṇa 36-40). This indicates that Naraka came to settle in Prāgjiyotisa with permission of Janaka or, in that case the king of his parental land so that he could spread Ārya-dharma in the region. The Naraka legend says that after becoming king, for sometime, Naraka ruled justly. He started an amalgamation process by encouraging free mixing of the immigrant people with the local people. He made asura Hayagrīva his commander-in-chief, and another asura Muḍu or Muḍa was appointed in-charge of defence. After establishing the kingdom, Naraka primarily paid his attention to the strengthening of the same. During this period he maintained good relation with his paternal land because the land was under a number of chieftains. The Kālikāpurāṇa (ch. 36-40) and the Harivaṁsa (ch. 63-64) state that Naraka married a princess of Vidarbha named Māyā.
He had used this matrimonial alliance to have a sound footing in the region. Thus under Naraka the state of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa was formed, and political administration was also established.

After strengthening his kingdom on all sides, he made up his mind to shake off North India’s supposed control on him. At this time, Śri-Kriṣṇa who came to Prāgjyotiṣa, killed Naraka and placed his son Bhagadatta on the throne. Bhagadatta was a friend of Indra, the king of the gods and Paṇḍu, the Kuru prince of powerful Haṣṭinaṇa and the father of the Paṇcha Paṇḍavas (Mahābhārata). Tradition makes him the father-in-law of Duryodhana as the latter is said to have married Bhaṃunāyī (Bhagadatta’s daughter). Although the Mahābhārata is silent about this marrige, the tank (Dighalī-Pukhuri) in the present Guwahati city which is supposed to be the scene of Bhaṃunāyī’s Swayambarā, points evidence to this marriage. Due to this family relationship or other wise, Bhagadatta joined the Kurukṣetra war on the side of the Kauravas even though he was an admirer of Yudhiṣṭhira. The way he has been praised in the great epic for his valour and wisdom he displayed in the war, is clear that he certainly was a remarkable king of India in that period.

After Bhagadatta, his successor, Vajradatta ruled Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa and defied Haṣṭinaṇa’s leadership, when Yudhiṣṭhira wished to perform asvamedha sacrifice. A battle ensued between him and Arjuna who was guarding the sacred horse and the later
defeated the former. Thus started the geneological history in Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa.

**Administration**

The traditional accounts, the epigraphic records and the writings of the foreign visitors confirm that monarchy was the main base of the political structure of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. Epigraphs like the Bargāon grant of Ratanapāla and the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva indicate that there were 7 (seven) component parts of the state structure (saptanga). The head of the administration or Ruler (svāmin), the Minister (amātya), Territory (janapada), Fort (durga), Treasury (kośa), Army (daṇḍa), and Ally (mitra) were the seven limbs of the state structure. The king was the head of administration and thus occupied the commanding position in the state. Divinity was attached to kingship, which is indicated by the fact that all kings of Kāmarūpa, till the last of the Pālas traced their descent from god Vishnu. The law of primogeniture worked in the selection of the crown prince as the ruler. Bargāon inscription, however, refers to the election of Brahmāpāla by high officials and important members of the state as of Gopāla of Gaudapāla family. The Kāmarūpa king sometimes nominated his successors in the presence of the people as was done by Ganapativarman for his son Sthitavarman when the latter had finished his education. The rulers also sometimes voluntarily abdicated for some personal

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1. ÁŚ. VI, 1; VIII, 1
reasons as Jayamāla or Vīrabahu has done in favour of his son Balavarman -III, Brahmapāla for Ratanpāla. Chief title of king was “Mahārāja - dhirāja” (king of kings). The Badagaṅgā rock inscription of Bhūtivarman mentions two religious titles also- “Parāma-daivata” (the supreme Divinity) and “Parāma - bhagavata” (the devout Vaishnava). Most of the Kāmarūpa kings bore high sounding honorifics as “Paramēśwara-Parama-bhattarak-Mahārāja-dhirāja” (the great God - supreme sovereign - king of kings) evidently in imitation of the Imperial Guptas. The kings were also addressed as Devas and in their Prasasties, they were frequently compared with gods like Hari, Hara, Indra, Vishnu and Brihaspati. The rulers might have been so compared because thereby they expected to receive respects from their subjects equal to that of the God’s and the subjects accepted the divinity of the kings because the latter possessed such qualities like splendour and power and was also the executioner of law.

It was a fact that the crown prince is supposed to be well versed in the Śāstras, the Vedas and the Aṅgas, such as the science of politics and fine arts, besides proficiency in physical training and valour, and the use of weapons and the training and breeding of elephants and horses.

The king is expected to strive for people’s welfare. The traditional policy pursued by the kings of ancient India was to

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maintain and protect the Varnāsramadharmā. The responsibility of the rulers of Kāmarūpa in upholding this principle is indicated in the Nīdhanpur grant (lines 34f.) wherein it is stated that Bhāskaravarman "Properly organised the duties of the various classes and stages of life that had become confused." The symbol of royalty of the Kāmarūpa kings appear to be "the royal umbrella of moon like whiteness together with the chowries." It was known as Varuna-chattra said to have been first handed over to Bhagadatta by Krishna.

The ruler was assisted by his council of Ministers popularly known as the ‘Mantri Parisad’. Bhāskaravarman in his meeting with Harṣa was accompanied by ministers. Vaidyadeva is mentioned in the Kamauli grant as shining in the assembly of his Sacivas; Amātya and Mantri are the two other terms for the ministers. The posts of Mahāmātyas, Viṣayāmātyas are different high functionaries. The actual strength of the minister is not known and the appointment is from Brāhmaṇa families and are hereditary. The Kamauli grant shows that these posts were held by the Brāhmaṇs only and were hereditary. The clearcut distinction of Mantris, Sacivas and Amātyas are not found.

The king was helped by a set of officials. Besides, the raja-guru, the court was adorned by poets, learned men and physician.

3. Bargaon grant, V. 5
4. KS, Intro. p.6, fn. 1; p. 15.
The important officials were Mahā-dvaradhipati, Mahā-pratihara, Mahāllaka-praudhikarana (old lady in-charge of harem), Duttaka, Lekhahārak and dīrghādhavaga who communicated royal orders to local officers. In day to day administration the king was helped by the prince who was appointed as Governors of provinces.

Besides these ministers, in the higher echelon, there were a number of officials in the autocratic set-up, mostly borrowed from the machinery under Purohitas and their successors in the north. The court official in the centre with the prefix ‘Mahāmatra’ has access to the king. Mahāllakapraudhika controlled entrance to the female apartments. The other officers with the same prefix mentioned in the same record are Mahāsainyapati and Mahāmātya. Mahāsāmanta also figures in the set up.

Besides these officials and the council of ministers, the Kāmarūpa rulers intended on the services of the royal princes and others connected with the ruling families. These included Rājaputra, Rāṇaka, Rājanyaka and Rājaballabha. Rajaputra was undoubtedly the crown prince while the Rāṇaka and Rājanyaka were probably minor feudatories inferior to Rāja. Rāṇaka is noticed in many records from different places and it is sometimes associated with the Mahāsandhivigrahika and also with the Mahāksapatalika thereby symbolising his association with the administrative machinery. It is very likely that all those who were associated with central administrative machinery might have been
given some territory for their up keeps. Rājanyakas along with the Sāmantas are supposed to represent land-holding aristocracy who supplied men and materials to king. Rājavallabhas are taken to be king’s favourites, of the followers.

Local Administration

The detailed working of the local administration in Prāgijotisa-Kāmarūpa is not definitely known. The scanty materials, that indicate that local units did not enjoy much autonomy and the rulers tried their utmost to exert their influence upon them by issuing śāsaṇas, the infringement of which was properly dealt with. The administrative divisions in Prāgijotisa-Kāmarūpa were somewhat in line with the Guptas.

The ‘bhukti’ was perhaps the largest division and the term, as with the Guptas, was used in the sense of a province. It might be a later creation as the term occurs in the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva only, wherein Prāgijotisa is called a ‘bhukti’ and Kāmarūpa a ‘maṇḍala’ which terms earlier stood for the kingdom. From this, it appears likely that during Vaidyadeva’s time the ‘bhukti’ Prāgijotisa, which included the ‘maṇḍala’ Kāmarūpa, stood for the central unit or home province. The grant of Vallabhadeva also (dated 1107 Saka/1185 A.D.) mentions the maṇḍala Hapyocha.

6. Choudhury, P.C. HCPA. P. 297
7. Ibid P. 298
as lying to the east of Kirtipur. Mandala was probably a collection of many ‘Viṣayas’, the next administrative division. The viṣaya was placed under the control of an officer called ‘Viṣayapati’. Nidhanpur grant of Bhāskaravarman informs us that the Viṣayapati had his adhikarana (office) at his adhisthāna (headquarters) and that he was helped by several officers like Nyāya- Karāṇika, Vyāvahārika and Kāyastha.

The lowest unit of administration, was the ‘grāma’ or village. We have very little information about village administration in Prāgjyotisa- Kāmarūpa. However, it can be conjectured that each village had a village headman who was perhaps helped in the administration of the village by an advisory body of council of elders. The village officials had to discharge civil, revenue and other duties and were responsible for the internal safety of the village under their jurisdiction.8

**Administration of Justice**

When and how the judiciary was organised in Prāgjyotisa- Kāmarūpa is not known. Epigraphs of the period indicate that justice was administered according to Hindu law books and describe the rulers as ‘abode of justice. (Gauhati grant, v.15, Puṣpabhadra grant, v.v. 3/4 etc). The land grants contain ordinances promulgated by the rulers which were binding on the officers and subjects concerned

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8 Ibid. P. 302
and violation of which were to be punished. These ‘śāsanas’ had the force of law and these were expected to be in consonance with the rulers laid down in the law books. Hindu texts mention a prādvivāka or Chief judge and other judges called dharmādhikarins. The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva describes Govinda Gonandana as Dharmādhikara, probably a judge, through whom Vaidyadeva communicated the royal orders. There were probably court of justice in the centre and the local units. Inscriptions mention officers with titles, such as Nyāyakaranika, Vyavahārika, Kāyastha and others ordinarily at the head-quarters of a district (viṣayādhikarana) (Nidhanpur grant, Nowgaon grant). From the Nidhanpur grant of Bhāskaravarman, it is learnt that the Nyāyakaranika Jonārdana Swami not only dealt with justice but also acted as an adjudicator, who had to inspect and decide if the boundaries of land were properly demarcated or not and to settle all cases of dispute arising out of the land. Vyavahārika was perhaps a judicial administrator or lawyer and Kāyastha was a scribe. Dandika might be a magistrate who pronounced verdict in the court, while the actual order was carried out by the Dandapasika, who inflicted punishment. We have no details of judicial procedure in Kāmarūpa. Epigraphs mention two types of police officers, Chauroddharanika and Chāta-bhāta. The former was the same as Chauroddhātr or Chauragrāha of the Hindu law book. He was a petty officer of the police department, charged with the

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9. Ibid. P. 282
10. KŚ, P. 284
The duties of the chāta-bhāta have not been well defined. Probably they had the duty of apprehension of criminals, mainly in the country side and also served as spies. Nothing is known about the procedure of trials. Witnesses are, however, mentioned and, probably, they were summoned for trial. Oaths and ordeals might also have been resorted to. We do not have any record of the nature of the punishment meted to the criminals, except fines.

Revenue Administration

The administration of a kingdom depends upon revenue without which the kingdom can not run. The principal sources of revenue a regular taxes, occasional taxes, commercial levies, income from state properties and tribute from feudatories. Among one of the regular taxes raised by the rulers of Prāgyotisa-Kāmarūpa was the ‘Kara’ levied on cultivators. The Nidhanpur grant mentions one Dattakara and Utkhetana, levied on special occasions and chāta-bhāta pravesan or “exactions at the time of the arrival of regular and irregular military and police force.” The commercial levies included the custom-duties and polls. The Tezpur grant of Harijjaravarman mentions the collection of dutie on merchandise carried in keeled boats. It further mentions levying of ‘Sulka’ (tolls) collected from the Kaivartas on the bank of the Brahmaputra and

11. Altekar, AS, State and Government in Ancient India, P. 152; cited in HCPA, P. 283
12. Barua, B.K., ACHA. P. 55
13. Ibid. P. 56
the imposition of fines. The Bargaon grant informs that the state derived considerable revenue from the coppermines.

Officers associated with revenue administration included ‘uparika’ (officer in-charge of recovery of the uparikara tax), ‘utkheṭika’ (officer in-charge of collecting utkheṭana) etc. Besides them, there were other officers like ‘bhāṇḍāgārādhikrita’ and koṣṭhāṅgārīka, who were in-charge of the royal store house and the treasury, respectively. Land revenues were collected through the heads of the local administrative units.

Epigraphs mention various types of lands, such as ‘Kshetra’ (arable land), ‘Khila’ (waste land), and ‘Vāstu’ (building sites). In the Bargaon and Gachtal grants a separate kind of land called ‘Apakṛistabhumi’ (inferior land) finds mentioned. These classifications were made evidently for the purpose of proper assessment of taxes.

Both collective and individual land tenure were prevalent in Pṛagjyotiśa-Kāmarūpa. A single donee could hold not only arable land but also pastures and water-reservoirs. Registration of all grants was a must, otherwise the exemptions enjoined therein would become cancelled. Lands granted to the Brāhmaṇas were called Brāhmādaya land grants and this type of land was made revenue free and immune from all harassments. When granted to a single donee it was called ‘Eka-bhoga’ and when granted to several, ‘Gañabhoga’. Inscriptions also mention endowment to temples and
other religious institutions, which later on came to be known as ‘Dharmottara’, and ‘Devottara’ land grants. Vallabhadeva established a bhaktasāla near the temple of Mahādeva and for its maintenance, granted seven villages along with their woods, thickets, people, water and land 14.

The boundaries of the donated land were clearly demarcated with the help of hills, mounds, tanks, river beds etc. The officer demarcating the boundaries was called “Simāpradātta”.

All documents (Karana) of land grants were kept in the custody of the Registrar of documents, the ‘Karanika’. The record office in the city was called ‘Adhikaraṇa’. The writers were called ‘Lekhakas’ or ‘Kāyasthas’. The royal orders sanctioning land grants were as a rule engraved on copper plates. Most of the copper plates contain royal seal having the figure of an elephant and the name of the king-donor with titles.

Military Organisation:

A large kingdom like Kāmarūpa could not have existed without a well organised army, the success of which depended upon a king’s military qualities and organising capacity 15. The Kāmarūpa rulers were conscious of strong defence necessary for

14. EI, V. PP. 181 f.
15. Choudhury, P.C., HCPA. P. 285
preserving the integrity of their kingdom. From epigraphic records it is learnt that most of the rulers themselves were expert warriors and fought bravely in the battle field. In the organisation of the army, the king was probably helped by a war-minister. Under him there was a commander in-chief or General.

The Nidhanpur grant mentions an officer, Sri Gopāla, as issuing hundred commands and as qualified with the five great sounds (prapta-pancha-maha-sabda). He was staying with Bhāskaravarman at Karnasuvarṇa and was his general. The Hāyunthal grant of Harjjaravarman mentions Sri Guna as the Mahāsenapati or commander-in-chief. Under the Mahāsenapati, there were other officers called Senādhyakṣa, Balādhyakṣa etc. In times of war, the king was also assisted by the tributary chiefs, who usually commanded their own detachments.

The division of the army was the traditional four-fold one. The Nidhanpur grant mentions that Bhāskaravarman’s military camp at Karnasuvarṇa consisted of splendid ships, elephants, horses and infantry. Elephants formed an important element of the army of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa as it had been in other parts of India. Both epigraphic and literary sources refer to the abundance of elephants in the forests of Kāmarūpa. Bhagadatta fought in the Mahābhārata war with troops of elephants and has been credited with as “the best wielder of the elephant goad”. Kauṭilya mentions that the elephants bred in
places like Kaliṅga, Aṅga, Karūsa and the East are the best\textsuperscript{16}, the eastern country probably stands for ancient Assam. Kālidasa writes that elephants were caught in jungles of Kāmarūpa\textsuperscript{17}. Hiuen- Tsiang states that there were elephants in herds in the South-east of Kāmarūpa and so there was a good supply of elephants for war-purposes\textsuperscript{18}. Epigraphy bears testimony to the fact that most of the rulers fought with the help of elephants.

Cavalry did not seem to occupy an important place in the army of the Kāmarūpa king, probably due to the want of good horses. \textit{The Mahābhārata}, (sabhā parva, L 1, 15-16) however, mentions that Bhagadatta presented Yudhiṣṭhira with “horses of noble breed, swift as the wind.” \textit{The Viṣṇupurāṇa} (Book. V.XXIX) narrates that Kṛiṣṇa, after defeating Naraka, took away his twenty one lakh of Kamboja horses, which appears to be much exaggerated. The grant of Vallabhadeva (v12) also indicates that horses were imported from Kamboja. The \textit{Tabaqāt-I-Nāsirī} records that horses in large numbers were imported to Bengal and Assam from Tibet through mountain passes in the North\textsuperscript{19}.

The abundance of river in Kāmarūpa and the extension of the kingdom towards the sea made the people well accustomed to the use of boats. Epigraphs refer to the royal boats on the

\begin{footnotesize}
16\textsuperscript{1} AŚ. Book II. chap. II
17\textsuperscript{1} Raghuvamśa, IV. 84
18\textsuperscript{1} Watters, PP. 185 f.
19\textsuperscript{1} H.G. Raverty, Tr. PP 567-68
\end{footnotesize}
Brahmaputra. The Aphsad inscription of Āditysena mentions a naval battle between the Kāmarūpa king Suṣṭhitavarman and the later Gupta king Mahāsenagupta. The Gachtal inscription of Gopāla records that Indrapāla defeated king Kalyāṇachandra of Vāṅga in a naval battle. The Kamauli grant of Vidyadeva alludes his naval victory over a certain enemy of south Vāṅga. Epigraphs mention of petty naval officers like Naubandhaka and Naurajjuka, who were respectively in-charge of the fastening and the dragging of boats with the help of ropes.

Details about infantry are scanty. The Nīdhanpur grant (1-2) mentions infantry as one of the four units in the army of Bhāskaravarman. The Tezpur grant of Vanamāla also states that the foot-soldiers along with other units of the army were stationed in the city of Harūppeśwara.

Architectural remains and literary references prove the existence of numerous forts in different parts of Kāmarūpa. The cities of Prāgjyotispur, Harrūppeśwara, Durjjayā and Kāmarūpanagara were well fortified with natural barriers and forts. The Bargoān grant (L 34- 35) states that the invincible city of Durjjayā was encompassed by a rampart furnished with strong fences. The king of Kāmarūpa realised the importance of forts and other defences for the safety of the kingdom.

The maintenance of foreign relations formed a very important
department of the kingdom. The Kāmarūpa king had diplomatic relations with the contemporary neighbouring kingdoms. The famous alliance between Bhāskaravarman and Harṣavardhana brought through the instrumentality of Harṣavega was itself a high water-mark of Kāmarūpi diplomacy. Other diplomatic relations were often established by weding knots as well. Thus the Rājatarāṅgini mentions the alliance between Meghavāhana and the king of Kāmarūpa through the marriage of the latter’s daughter Amṛtaprabhā to the Kāśmiṇa king. Diplomatic relations were also established with the Pālas of Gauḍa, the kings of Orissa and the Rashtrakutās of the Deccan. Indrapāla’s queen Rājyadevi was a Rashtrakūṭa princess. There were diplomatic relations with Tibet and China as well.

The diplomatic relations of the Kāmarūpa kings with the feudatories are mentioned in the epigraphs. The Kāmarūpa kings appointed the powerful feudatories to responsible offices in central administration. The Nidhanpur grant of Bhāskaravarman mentions that Mahāsāmanta Divakara was incharge of the royal bhāṇḍar (store). Important feudatories enjoyed autonomy and had their own-subordinate feudatories. The exact relation of the Kāmarūpa kings with the hill tribes as well as the kingdom of Manipur is not known. Possibly some of the neighbouring hill tribes owed allegiance to the Kāmarūpa kings, whereas those of the interior remained independent. On the whole, it appears that the hill people were left to themselves who had their own system of administration.
Society

Varṇāśrama-dharma are the fundamental feature of the social system of Pragjyotiśa-Kāmarūpa, prevalent from 4th to the 12th century A.D. Kings seem to take special care to preserve the traditional divisions of society, namely Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra. In the inscriptions they were frequently referred to as the protector of Varṇāśramadharma, upholder of the duties of all classes. In the Nidhanpur grant, Bhāskaravarman is described as being created for the purpose of re-establishing the institution of classes and order, which had for a long time past became confused. During the reign of Indrapāla (Pāla dynasty), the laws of the four classes and stages were observed in their proper order (Gauhati grant, V. 18)

It should however be noted that Varṇā (colour), that had by this time lost its original significance, became synonymous with Jāti, the system which laid emphasis on birth and heredity. Consequently the original division of the people into four Varṇās had been submerged and numerous new castes and sub-castes had been evolved, mainly by the development of different occupational professions.

In the inscriptions, however, the four stages (āśrama) into which man’s span of life itself was classified shows the pattern of
life. Brahma-carya (a stage in which the three Varnas, Brähmana, Kshatriya and Vaiśya studied in teacher's house), Gārhasṭhyā, the second stage when one enters in a family life on completion of education and discharges his debt to his ancestors by getting sons and was able to perform sacrifice to get god's grace. When he becomes aged he enters to the stage of Vānapraśṭha. After spending the third part of his life in the forest he spends the rest of his life as a Yāti or Śannyāsin. But we have no details about the working of the system, nor do we know whether the four stages were strictly followed at any time by any individual.

There is constant evidence of the abdication of king who embraced a life of renunciation, detached himself from the world. It is evident that the patronage which Kāmarūpa kings extended to learned men and religious teachers attracted a large number of learned men to the country. The Nīdhanpur charter alone reveals that the kings adopted a systematic policy of settling Brāhmaṇas in the kingdom by granting gift of land and by the system of an agrahāra for their religious pursuits. The Khanāmukh plates recorded a gift of land by king Dharmapāla to a learned Brāhmaṇa who hailed from Madhyadesa. According to Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva, "Gifts and donations to Brāhmaṇas were regarded as good fruits and fresh sprouts." In fact on account of the constant royal patronage Kāmarūpa seems to have become a resort of the Brāhmaṇas of the neighbouring provinces.
The social organisation of Brāhmaṇas are distinguished by gotras and Veda-Śākhās. Both were important fundamentally in matters relating to inheritance, marriage, worship, sacrifice, the performance of daily Śaṅḍhya, Prayers and so forth. It meant that when one traces his descent from the ancient sage, Yamadagni, his gotra is Yamadagni. Similarly, there are Vaśīṭha, Kāśyapa, Bhāradvāja, Śaṅḍilya gotra etc. They were originally attached to certain Veda-Śākhās and their progenitors maintained the same. The grant of Vanamāla refers to a Brāhmaṇa of the Śaṅḍilya gotra of the Yajurveda. The copper plate of Dharmapāla refers to Brāhmaṇas of Kaustuma-Śākha, as well as to the Suddha Maudgalya and Kṛṣṇāyasa gotras. The title given to the most of the Brāhmaṇas of the epigraphs are Deva Sarman and Svamin. Their names generally end in Bhatta, Datta, Deva, Dhara, Dasa, Ghoṣa, Kara, Kuṇḍa, Mitra, Nandī, Palita, Sena, Soma and so forth. It is however, not possible to say whether there name-endings were real hereditary family names. Many of them are still held as surnames by the Kāyasthas of Assam and Bengal. But it is interesting to note that they are not in use among Brāhmaṇas now. Besides study of Vedas, Brahmanaṇas cultivated various science and arts.

Of other castes, information was available of Karaṇas and Kāyasthas found in epigraphs as state officials. There are also reference to Lekhakas and Gaṇaka castes. Similarly we find the reference of Vaidya as a caste in Subhaṅkarapāṭaka grant. Grant of Balavarman refers to Bhisaka or physician. Along with Kāyasthas,
the Kalitas are the predominant caste of the province. They are the purest Śūdra of Assam from whose hands higher castes still take water. They claim to same rank as Kāyasthas and actually rank next to Brāhmaṇas. Greece travellers said them as Kalataī. The unorthodox character of the Kalitas is revealed in their custom of marriage of widows and remarriage of grown up girls, both being contrary to the Hindu practice. It should also be noted that differences of sub-castes among the different sub-divisions of the Kalitas are neither wellmarked nor rigid. The Tezpur rock inscription refers to a Kaivarta who was incharge of collecting state toll on the rivers.

Of other professional castes, we have reference to Kumbhakāras (potters), Tantuvāyas (weavers), Naukis (Boatman) and Dandis (rower of boats). The offspring of Brāhmaṇa and a Vaiśya have reference to the antyaja (low castes) in the Puṣpabhadrā grant of Dharmapāla. In describing the boundary marks of land granted, the epigraphs refer to Dijjaratihāḍi, whose land marked the east-south boundary. Perhaps the Hadis were more or less allied to the Hiḍās though not to the fishermen.

The smallest unit of society was the family. Joint-family was also broadly prevalent as we find reference to Nidhanpurgrant, where half or more shares of land were granted jointly to several brothers of a family. In Subhaṅkarapāṭaka grant of Dharmapāla where separate shares of a Pāṭaka are assigned to two brothers, Himaṅga
and Trilocana indicating that they were no longer members of a joint family. So cases of division of property among brothers were also not unknown. Among social institutions, marriage is the most important social function. Various forms of marriages were held. Those are Rākṣasa, Gāndharva, Paisāca, Asura, Brahma, Daiva, Ārṣa, Kaya or Prājāpatya. As per the system in the law books the first three of these modes are recognised as peculiarly appropriate to the Kṣatriyas and the fourth is allowed only to the Vaiśyas and Śūdras. The remaining four modes are regarded as particularly suitable to Brāhmaṇas. The Brahmā form was widespread among the Brāhmaṇas of our country. The practice of child marriage was not in vogue. Marriage within in varṇa and khila was prevailing custom.

The position of women were high in the society. The inscriptions made it plain that they were cultured and pious women. They were also praised in the society. The chastity of Brāhmaṇa women were mentioned in the epigraphs. Motherhood was one of the outstanding aims in married life. Women are represented as mothers of ideal sons. Widowhood was considered to be the highest calamity of women, but there is no mention of Sati. The purdah system was unknown. There is reference of Veśya and Varastri in Bargāon grant. There was prevalence of custom of appointing women as dancers and courtesans in connection with temple services. They were known as nati and daluḥāṅganā, Devadāsī’s were prevalent in the temples. It appears that many of the women,
specially of the Brāhmaṇa caste, were not only educated but skilled in the arts and poetry and rhetoric.

**Food and drink:**

Rice, fish, meat, fruits and vegetables constituted the chief items of food. The Yoginitantra²⁰ recommends emphatically the eating of meat and fish in Kāmarūpa. Sacrifice of various kinds of animals were considered meritorious. In Assam both Brāhmaṇa and Vaiśṇavas eat meat and fish without any social bar. Interest taking out of lent money in general is not encouraged; use of different types of pāṇ-leave and tāmāḷa was prevalent. The Yoginitantra enjoins the worship of goddess Kāmeśwari with wine, meat and blood (bali). In temples different types of drums were used.

**Dresses:**

Cotton cloth was extensively in use. Masses used cloth for dresses made up of Karpāsa (cotton), Kambala (wool), Valka (bark), Koṣāja (silk from cocoons) and hemp cloth.²¹ Kambala was a fixture of fine wools (sheep's wool or goat's hair). Hiuen-Tsiang refers to ho-la-li which Bhāskaravarman presented him. It was made out of course skin lined with soft down, and was designed to protect the pilgrim from rain whilst on the road. Bhāskaravarman

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20. Yoginitantra- Ch. 11/9
21. Kālikā Purāṇa, 68/12 ; 69/2
also sent as presents to Harṣa, ‘Kṣauma’ cloths pure as the autumn moon’s light dukūla was the ritual name for the finest Kṣauma and it is referred to in the Bargāon grant as being used for flags. Bāṇa too mentions that the ‘Abhoga umbrella’ sent to Harṣa by Bhāskaravarman was wrapped in dukūla. It is therefore, evident that Assam even in the fourth country A.D. was celebrated for dukūla fit to be referred to as held-up cloth (śānavastrām) which was probably worn by ordinary people. Kośaja or Kauseya seems to be silk obtained from the cocoons of various kinds of worms. The silk cloth is known as Patrorṇa to Kauṭilya. Kauṭilya says that Patrorṇas was obtained from Magadha, Pundra and Suvarṇakudya. Wild silk of the best quality, it is significant to note, has been still produced in those districts. Kṣauma was a course variety of linen. Sometimes it was mixed with cotton. More fine form of linen was known as dukula. Karpasika in general meant cotton fabrics.

**Economic Condition** :-

The information provided by the sources, viz. the local epigraphs, archaeological remains, literature and the accounts of the foreign travellers on contemporary economy of Prāgjyotisā-Kāmarūpa are scattered ones and do not throw sufficient light on the subject.

One most noteworthy fact concerning the economic life of ancient Assam is the predominance of the rural settlements. Since
early times, as of today, villages have always covered most of the landscape of the land. The people have established themselves in villages and organised their lands and divided it into homestead (Vāstu), cultivable fields, meadows and wood-lands to serve their essential needs. Villages in ancient Assam are mostly known as gāon (derived from Skt. grāma). The term pādā is also rare among the place name. In lower Assam, the term ‘Kunchi’ (Skt. Kuñci/ Kōñci) is generally found with the names of villages. e.g. Suwālkuchi, Khatikuchi, Mugkuchi near Nalbari town and many more etc. The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva mentions Hamsākōñci as his royal head quarter. Hamsākōñci must have been a large area. Even today, in lower Assam. Villages having ‘Kuchi’ appended to their names, like Suwālkuchi are generally bigger settlements encompassing in it several patakas or a few villages.

There is no evidence to show that there were bonded labourers. The inhabitants of the villages cultivated their own fields and used to pay their dues to the donee instead of the king. It is a different matter that they casually served the household of the donee. Only the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva (this grant donated land to an alms house) besides, the seven villages that came within the boundary of the donated land, mentions clearly the names of five persons who would be assistants in maintaining the alms house ("outside this boundary, in between Maitaḍā and Dvariḍāṭa six hamlets are given and also Acaḍahēḍikut, Thathi, Pāḍharu, Vāthola
Lohatadi and Rasāyana - these five assistants (are also given) along with their sons and wives") (VV. 21-22. IAA, P. 298) It is quite clear that the village people lived in compact groups.

Legends and literary evidence, refer to some of the towns of ancient Assam. The ancient towns of Assam were- Prāgjyotiśapura, Haḍappeśvara, Haḍapyaka, Durjjayā, Kāmarūpanagara and Kīrtipura. As we have already mentioned in an earlier chapter, all of these towns appear to be administrative headquarters.

Agricultural Production:

Nowgong grant 22 mentions of go-čāra-bhūmi, invariably indicates importance, the peasants of that time were attached to cattle-rearing. These go-čāra-bhūmis as of today were not privately owned plots of land. The go-čāra bhūmies are today’s caranīya pathārs (grazing land). Waste land was always in abundance in the Brahmaputra valley until recently. The Assamese society never had a distinct class of milkmen either. Ancient literature and the epigraphs too, do not mention any milkmen whatsoever. Nowhere we are to find anything else, which may point out that Assam, at any period ever has had a pastoral economy side by side with agriculture.

22. Nowgong grant of line 36
The jhum-cultivation, i.e. by cutting down jungles and trees or by setting fire to them or by making holes in the land with the help of sharp-faced digging sticks, which is still practised by the hill tribes of North-Eastern India, seems to be the indigenous system of cultivation of the hilly region. With the spread of Sanskritisation, the wet-rice cultivation with the help of iron hoe and plough had begun and shaped the economy of ancient Assam. In later periods, irrigation facilities were made available in the fields by constructing high embankments on royal patronage. For example, Parbatīṭa Plates of Vanamālavaranma, Nowgong copper plate grant of Balavaranma and the Bargāon copperplate grant of Ratnapāla may be mentioned. Expressions like ‘Sajala-Sthala’, used in connection with most of the donated lands and other terms like jala, (small stream), garta (pit), dobā (small tank) etc.\(^{23}\) indicates that the arable areas were supplied with water. Hiuen Tsiang’s recorded statements, “water led from the river or from banked-up lakes (reservoirs) flowed round the towns”\(^ {24}\) may be taken to mean that these waters were supplied into the nearby fields most probably orchards.\(^ {25}\)

Rice being the staple food, cultivation of paddy was done extensively. Paddy cultivation constituted one of the chief economic pursuits of the people, whether living in the plains or the hills.\(^ {26}\) Different varieties of paddy were cultivated like summer paddy

23. Nidhanpur grant, last plate.
24. Watters II PP. 186 f.
25. Choudhry, P.C. HCPA. P. 335
and winter paddy. According to Yoginitantra, different types of paddy were used in the worship of different deities.\(^{27}\) The system of granting rent free lands furthermore proves the extensive nature of paddy cultivation.

Next important cultivation was the cultivation of sugarcane. It seems that molasses (g繁殖la) in earthen pots prepared from sugarcane were sent to Harsavardhana by Bhaskaravarman.\(^{28}\) Cultivation of pumpkin was in existence because in addition to the purpose of food, pumpkin shells (dried) were used as containers for keeping painting materials. Several such containers were sent to Harṣa’s court from Kāmarūpa.\(^{29}\)

The largely mentioned trees are the fruit trees in the inscriptions. These are - Vaṭa or banyan (prabatiyā plates, Uttarbarbil, - Nowgong,- Bargāon,- Khanāmukh,- Subhaṅkarapāṭaka-grants); Venu-vitapa, i. e. bamboo bush (Parbatiyā,- Subhaṅkarapāṭaka-Puṣpabhadra-grants); Sālmali-tree or sik cotton = sīmalu also called Kaśimbala (Uttarbarbil,-Nowgong,- Bargāon,- Suwałkuchi,- Subhaṅkarapāṭaka- grants); Pālāśa or tripatraka (Uttarbarbil grant) ; Kadamba=kadam (parbatiyā plates); Vaikaṅka (Uttar barbil grant); Veta or cane (Uttarbarbil,-Bargāon,-Suwałkuchi,
Ulubāri-grants); Vitiṣṭupa (Uttarbarbil grant); āmra or mango (Nowgong-, Suwalkuchi-, Guwākuchi-grants); badarivrksa (Bargaon-grants); asvattha or Pippal (Nowgong and Subhaṅkara-pataka grants); āmra or mango (Nowgong-, Suwalkuchi-, Guwākuchi-grants);...Hiuen-Tsiang refers to plenty of coconut trees as grown in the country.31.

However, it is obvious that none of these (even the fruits) were cultivated on a commercial basis in separate areas or fields. These are mentioned or located mostly on the boundaries of the plots of land. That is, these big trees were used to mark the boundaries. Bāna states that the Kāmarūpa king (Bhāskaravarman) sent bamboo tubes containing mango juice.32 This may indicate that mangoes were grown by cultivators for commercial purpose. The extensive plantation of arecanut and betel vine is supported

30. Lahiri, N. PAA. P. 96
31. Watters. II PP. 185 f.
by a number of literary sources and epigraphy. This is mentioned in the Apshad inscription of Ādityasena, Nowgong grant of Balavarman III (V.5.), Harsacarita, Yoginitantra and other sources.

The plantation of Haridra (turmeric), ādraka (ginger), Jiraka (cumin) pippaliyaka (long pepper), marica (pepper) Sarisa (mustard), Karpūra and others is evidenced by the Yogini Tantra.

Black pepper and Bayleaves were grown extensively in Assam. The classical works, beginning at least with the 1st century A. D. associate the production of and trade in this article (Bayleave or tejpāt) with the Sesatae, identified with some hill tribes of Assam. The hill tribes of the Classical writers, like the Gāros, inhabiting the areas of the Gāro hills, Sylhet etc. which were famous for the production of malabothrum (tejpāt) extracted an essence from it, as mentioned by Sir William Jones. In fact, it has been still practised by hill tribes like the Gāros, Abors and the Mishmis.

33. C I I, III. PP. 200f ; cited in HCPA. P. 336
34. Cowell. HC., PP. 212f.
35. Cited in HCPA. P. 336
36. 1 bid
38. Cited in HCPA. 337.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
Fishing and Hunting

The people of Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa whether Aryans or non-Aryans were both fish and meat eaters. Epigraphs mention a class of people, called Kaivartas, whose main profession was most probably fishing. The profession may have been practised by individuals for their personal use as well. Inscriptions also refer to the hunting of animals, evidently for meat and also for pleasure. We have no evidence of professional hunters. The Dubi grant makes an incidental reference to the snaring of a deer. The grants of Indrapala refer to the catching of tigers, in connection with the daring exploits of the prince Purandrapala. The plates of Vallabhadeva seem to refer to buffalo hunting. The abundance of elephants in Assam, and the use of ivory as an article of trade and industry point to the conclusion that elephants were caught for various purposes and sometimes killed for ivory. Both fishing and hunting therefore, constituted one of the important occupations of the people.

Industries:

Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa witnessed the development of a

41. Gauhati grant of Indrapala, line 47; Puşpabhadrā grant of Dharmapāla line 51
42. JARS., XII, PP. 16f; cited in HCPA P. 338.
43. Gauhati grant. V. 12; Guakuchi grant, V. 12
44. EI., V. PP. 181-88; Cited in HCPA. P. 338
45. Choudhury, P.C., HCPA. P. 338
number of industries, too. These are textiles and weaving, sugar, metal-work, ivory-work, stone-work, wood-work and pottery, brick buildings, masonry etc.

According to Kauṭilya Ārthasastra 46 dukūla linen was produced in Suvaṇṇakuḍya of Kāmarūpa. The Suvaṇṇakuḍya of Kāmarūpa variety had the colour of the rising sun. It is beyond doubt that Kauṭilya had referred to the golden mugā-silk of Assam. It appears that the place called Suvaṇṇakuḍya was one of the chief centres of ancient textile industry of India. It is significant that the pat or the patta-silk of the best quality is still produced in Magadha, Paṇḍra and Kāmarūpa. A small town by the name of Suwālkuchi in present Kamrup district produces the best quality paṭ-silk. Karpāsika or cotton fabrics were also produced in ancient Assam. Karpāsika trees are very common in Assam which is called Kapāh in Assamese. It seems that Kāmarūpa was a prominent seat of cotton textile manufacturing industry.

One most important tree from economic point of view was the agaru or krṣṇāguru tree. Its price is fabulously high in the export market, because the famous atar perfume is made from its wood in the Arabian countries. The epigraphs do not specifically mention that this wonder wood was exported to other places. But people knew this particular trait of this tree. The Mahābhārata

46. JARS., VII, PP. 24 f.
states that on the occasion of Yudhiṣṭhira’s Rājasūya sacrifice, presents from Prāgjayotisha included not only the agaru (aloë wood) but also the sandal wood (chandan) together with jewels, skin, gold and heap of different aromatics. That means even in the past the aloe-wood was in demand and Prāgjayotisha-Kāmarūpa exported this precious wood to different places.

It is evident that even Kauṭilya’s time witnessed the fame of Prāgjayotisha-Kāmarūpa as a prominent seat of textile manufacturer. The Periplus of the Erythrean sea written in the first century A.D. refers to Assam silk that, Prāgjayotisha retained its eminence as a textile manufacturing seat in the succeeding ages. In the 17th century, the muga silk was an article of trade in Bengal as well as in the Coromandel and Malabar coasts. European traveller Tavernier confirms the production of a superior quality of red shellac in contemporary Assam. Thus lac and other kinds of dyeing have been prevalent in Assam since the most ancient times till today maintaining the same continuity as in the case of production to textiles.

The next important industry was gold washing and jewellery. Gold was found in almost all the rivers of Lakshimpur district, particularly in Suvaṃśirī. The washing of gold was practised extensively during the Ahom period. The abundance of gold is

47. Mahābhārata, Sabha-parva XXX
48. Cited in HCPA. P. 344
also confirmed by records. Tavernier writes that the practice yielded a substantial quantity, and gold and silk were exported from Assam overland to China. 49

The Bargāon grant of Ratnapāla testifies to the fact that his capital city Durjjayā was also inhabited by rich men (Vitteśānisevita). This points out that jewellery, too provided occupation to quite a large group of metal workers as the rich used gold and silver dishes and ornaments made of precious stones and metals for personal adornment. Precious stones have been mentioned on several occasions; Vanamālavarman is described as wearing a mahāratnamālā in the form of royal qualities (V. 16. I AA. P. 122); king Ratnapāla’s battle fields have been compared with a market of jewels having plenty of Padmarāga jewels; in the city of Durjjayā there used to be jaḍatā or liquidness only in the pearl necklaces, but never any jaḍatā (dullness) in the sense organs. (1AA. P. 163)

Pottery appears to have been practised on an extensive scale. It was an important profession at that time. The Nīdhanpur grant refers to Kumbhakāra garta (potter’s pit), while the Kamauli grant refers to Kumbhakāras, who were professional pottery makers.

Brick-building was also such an industry conducted from rural settlements. The Suwałkuchi grant of Ratnapāla refers to such

49 J Ibid. P. 346
a brick-building manufacturing unit, istakendra situated among the lands belonging to some nauksis (boatmen). The Bargāon grant says that the city of Durjjaya had ‘thousands of white-washed mansions’. It appears that these mansions were brick-built and they had been white-washed.

A section of people took up different types of metal work as their respective professions. Blacksmiths were such an important group without whose services no settled agricultural community using iron implements could exist. Copper plate inscriptions themselves are good proofs to the fact that some people worked on copper. Kāliya is the copper-smith of the Nidhanpur plates. The Puṣpabhadrā grant refers to its engraver Śrī-Vinita (line 45; IAA. P. 265). Together with it, this may be mentioned that quite a few took to script writing of the inscriptions.

Numerous stone images belonging to pre-Ahom age are scattered all over the state. The Ambari excavation site has unearthed some of the best and unique specimens of stone-work such as Natarāja with ten hands (10th century A.D.) ; the image of Durgā or Mahiṣamardini with sixteen hands (9th-10th century A.D) ; the images of Devi Gaṅgā and Yamunā (11th-12th century A.D.) ; the images of Maharṣi Attreya (11th - 12th century A.D.) and another unidentified Maharṣi ; the unfinished image of Viṣṇu and another image of his avatāra (9th-10th century A.D.) deserve special mention. In addition, small stone images of Viṣṇu, Sūrya and
Mahīṣamardini have been found in the site in large number. In the category of great structures the ruins found at Bamunī Pāhār in Tezpur, the Madan Kāmdev Temple complex, the Sūrya Pāhār in Goalpara and Bhaitbari in the Gāro hills, speak volume of the craftsmanship of the Kāmarūpa stone masons and the style of Kāmarūpa architecture. The famous Mahābhairava Temple and the Dah - Parbatiyā gate way of Tezpur and the available rock inscriptions, too, points out that stone carving achieved a great height under the early Kāmarūpa kings.

Considering the availability of wood in the land, wood masonry and carpentry must have taken a shape right in the ancient period. The Tezpur copperplates of Vanamālavarmadeva refers to beautiful and speedy boats that added to the beauty of capital Hadappesvara. Together with wood-carving, some artisans worked in bamboo and cane. As it is today, common people of that time must have used thatched and bamboo dwellings.

**Trade:**

The accounts of Strabo and Pliny and the Periplus of the Erythrean sea supplies us with some very important informations in respect of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa’s products and their trade. Kautilya’s Arthasāstra also provides testimony to the continuity of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa’s importance in respect of trade. Besides qualitative and quantitative development of Kāmarūpa’s
industries, and its good river systems, geographical position of the land provided the facilities to this early growth of commerce.

Inland Trade:

The principal centres of inland trade, were the towns. The wealthy merchants, used to live in the cities as is referred to in the Bargāon grant. Both the Tezpur and Parbatiyā copperplates of Vanamālavarmadeva mention rows of decorated speedy boats that used to adorn both the banks of the Brahmaputra. The chief routes of internal trade were obviously the water ways of the land. To be noted, the four great ancient capital cities, viz- Prāgjyotiṣapura, Hadapēśvara, Durjjayā and Kāmarūpanagara grew up in proximity to the river Brahmaputra. A certain amount of inland traffic must have taken place along the land-routes. The petty village traders brought necessary commodities to the villages from the cities in exchange of agricultural products, raw materials for manufacturing industries like textiles and forest produce.

External Trade:

Archaeology traces the history of Assam’s external trade back to first century A.D. The ancient city of Prāgjyotiṣapura acted as the transit point in the trade between the Roman empire and China, during the first two centuries of Christian era. The demand for Chinese silk in the west worked behind the opening of this route as
in the case of the other routes. Such contacts with China must have contributed in the growth of Prāgjyotiśa- Kāmarūpa itself as a centre of best quality of silks.

Agaru (Aloe wood) and Sañci-pat were other important items of Assam’s trade. Sañci wood or Agaru is still exported to the Arab countries in large amount as raw material for aromatic industries therein. Joṅgaka and Doṅgaka were two such aloes exported to the western market as given in the Arthasastra.\textsuperscript{50} Like aloe, Sandal wood was exported to the west. The Sandal wood found in Kāmarūpa is mentioned as Pāralauhityaka in the Arthasastra.\textsuperscript{51} Elephant, elephant-ivory and its products appear to have been exported to other parts of the country.

Another important export item of ancient Kāmarūpa was lac, which is produced by its trees in abundance. It is possible that Duryodhana’s lac-house built for killing the Pāṇḍavas got its materials from Assam.\textsuperscript{52} In the beginning of the Christian era, the classical writers refer to the existence of a profitable trade in lac.\textsuperscript{53} The export of lac to China and Japan is mentioned also by Tavernier. Ctesias and Aelian mention a river, called ‘Hyperchos’ and say that the country of Hyperchos river produced ‘all good things’. This Hyperchos river for us is the river Brahmaputra. At present, lower

\textsuperscript{50} TCHA. Vol. 1. P. 257
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid
\textsuperscript{53} Choudhury, P.C. HCPA. P. 361
Assam, Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills are the prominent seats of lac industry. By ‘all good things’ of the Roman writers, Taylor refers to silk, lac and other dyes, including musk, ivory, gold, silver and iron which were exported to India via the Brahmaputra. 54

Besides lac and silk, it seems that China also imported iron, hide, buffalo-horns and pearls through Bhutan and Tibet. In later years too, the Tibetan merchants exchanged Silver bullion and rock salt from China, with the Assamese traders for rice, silk, lac, hide, buffalo-horns pearls and other commodities. 55

Malabothrum was another commodity of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa which had an international market. As mentioned above, early Kāmarūpa traders exchanged home products for silver bullion and rock salt from China. As passage to China was open both from Lower Assam (through, Bhutan) and Upper Assam (through Assam-Barma route and others) salt from China and Tibet a much needed commodity was in use both in Lower Assam and Upper Assam. A considerable amount of salt also came from Bengal. But, the exported salt could not meet the demand for it. so Assamese people used home made Kalākhār. (Made from banana trees)

Besides salt, some other sea-borne objects or goods come to

54. Ibid.
Prāgjyotiṣa- Kāmarūpa from Bengal in the ancient period. There are conches (used in both political and religious matters), Kauris (used as medium of exchange) and the precious pearls which formed an important part of Kāmarūpa jewellery.

The local epigraphs relating to the granting of land, frequently refer to two domesticated animals such as horses and camels. Both these animals are not found in Prāgjyotiṣa- Kāmarūpa. The horses must have come from Tibet. Camels, too must have come from other places like Rajasthan. It seems that only the merchant class used camels for carrying their business loads.

**Trade Route**

Assam is said to be a museum of races, because it is situated in "one of the great migration routes of mankind." Coming of different people through different routes to Assam must have kept them open for business purposes. The river Brahmaputra made the water-transport system convenient and accessible one towards the west. Besides, land routes were also there both in the west and east to conduct export and import in the ancient period. In ancient time the city of Prāgjyotiṣapura was acted as an entryport between Roman world and the Chinese empire. There are three principal land routes from Prāgjyotisa. One is along the valley of the

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57. Cited in HCPA P. 75
Brahmaputra up to the Pātkāi range and then through its passage upto upper Burma. The second is through Manipur up to the Chindwin valley; and the third through Arakan upto the Irrawaddy valley. All these routes met on the frontier of Burma near Bhamo and then proceeded over the mountains and across the river valleys to Yunanfu i.e. Kunming, which was the chief city of the Southern province of China. The first one is called the Assam-Barma route which started from the Magadhan capital of Pātaliputra (Patna) passed by Champā (Bhagalpur), Kājaṅgala (Rajmahal) and Puṇḍravardhana (North Bengal), proceeded towards Prāgjyotisā. It has rightly been assumed by scholars that “India maintained her contact with China through Kāmapūra which was conected by eastarn routes, difficult to traverse although they were, with north Burma and South China and the bamboos referred to by Chang-Kien evidently passed through Kāmarūpa which it may be presumed, also carried on independent trade relations with these countries.

At a subsequent time numerous other routes were opened into China through Burma, Bhutan and Tibet and not only people from the plains but also the hill tribes, the Ābars, Daflās and the Mishimis in particular, were responsible for these early commercial contacts. These trading routes confirm that ancient Assam

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58. Bagchi, P.C. India and China. P. 6
59. Ibid
60. TCHA. Vol. 1. P. 258
had regular commercial transactions with China and the Far-East through Burma, Manipur, Pātākāi and other passes of Assam in the north and the South-East.  

**Medium of exchange**

In view of the dearth of coins of Prāgjyotiśa-Kāmarūpa excepting a reference to Caltis in the Periplus 62 and another reference to gold coins in the Silimpur grant 63 it is difficult to determine what the exact nature of the revenue of the state was. Evidently, the barter system was followed for the purpose of internal affairs, but it was difficult to think how by the system of barter foreign-trade could have been carried on. The statement in the Harṣacarita that Bhāskararvana presented Harṣa with heaps of black and white cowries 64 seems to indicate that for inter-state relations within India and also possibly for paying taxes the subjects used cowries or paddy of prescribed weight. In case of trade with foreign countries like Śuvarnabhūmi, China etc. metals, probably gold coin Caltis, were used, but it was otherwise with regard to the revenue paid by the subjects to the state.

In order to get a total picture of the coinage and relative economic condition of Kāmarūpa, gold and silver coinage too come

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62. Schoff, Periplus. PP. 47-48; cited in HCPA. P. 361  
63. EL. XII P. 289 f.  
64. Cowell, HC, PP. 212-4; Cited in TCHA
under review. No silver coin has been discovered belonging to the Kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. Thirty one gold coins of the Imitation Gupta type have been discovered in a place called Paglatek about 15 kilometers west of Goalpara. D.C. Sircar studied fourteen of them and has come to the conclusion that these coins travelled from the eastern regions of present Bangladesh to Goalpara in Assam. 65

In the Gupta-age, the Kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa came politically closer to the Guptas. This political closeness might have definitely provided a fillip to trade between Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa and the Gupta empire. It is quite possible under these circumstances that simultaneously with barter system, Gupta currency (gold, silver and copper) was also prevalent in Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa.

Literature and Education:

The fame of Prāgjyotiṣapura as the centre of learning, especially in astrological studies spread in the earliest time in India. Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsiang spoke highly of the devotion of the people to learning. According to him ‘Men of high talents’, ‘visited the kingdom’ 66. Bhāskaravarman, he states was fond of learning and the people followed his example. His association with the

65. Sircar, D.C. Money in pre-Ahom Assam and its Neighbourhood. CENESL, P.3
66. Watters. II. PP. 185 f.; Beal II PP. 195 f.
University of Nalanda, one of the noted centres of learning in the period, and with pilgrim and Harṣa, one of the most enlightened monarchs of northern India, indicates his desire for the acquisition of knowledge, which he spread among his people.

Although the language of the inscriptions of the kings of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa was Sanskrit, there is indication that the Assamese language was in the process of formation even in the seventh century A.D. There are some pure Assamese words in the inscriptions of Khanikargaon and on the join icons of Hari-Hara as well as on the Viṣṇu icon from Deopani. It is well-known that the Assamese script was derived from the Devanāgarī and the language itself belongs to a branch of the Neo-Indo-Aryan languages, or rather the outer band of the Indo-Aryan groups, with a definite admixture of the Dārdic speech of the Alpines, its vocabulary is not entirely based on the Sanskrit. But the Assamese language adopted freely many words of Aryans and non-Aryan dialects. The Assamese language is, therefore, the product of both Aryan and non-Aryan genius.

The famous Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsiang visited Kāmarūpa during the regin of Bhāskaravarman. He observed that the Assamese language was already in its formative stage. According to him

67 Choudhury, P.C. JARS XX PP. 3f.
68 Grierson, Ency. Br. XIV, P. 488 ; cited in HCPA P. 365
69 Dutta, P.N. Glimpses into the History of Assam. P. 54
the Kāmrupi language was “slightly different from that of Mid-India”\(^70\) (Magadha etc.) According to P.C. Choudhury, \(^71\) the Kāmarūpi or Assamese language originated from the same group as the Bengali, Oriyā and Bihāri, derived from the eastern variety of the Magadhān Prākrit, more appropriately Kāmarūpi Prākrit.

The accounts of Hiuen Tsiang supports this view. Thus the Assamese script as well as the language had their origin in an Aryan language. But centuries of association of the Aryans with the non Aryans led to the assimilation of non-Aryan words and therefore Assamese is not so much dependent on Sanskrit.

The independent growth of Assamese may also be attributed to the extensive literary works of the period. The earliest specimens of the Assamese are supplied by the Buddhist Dohās or songs, recovered from Nepal, and the writings of the Tantrik-Buddhist sidhas, most of which were composed in old Magadhān Apabhraṃśa, allied to old Kāmarūpi and were current in Bengal and Bihār including Tibet. The Kṛṣṇa Kīrtana of Babu Candidāsa also presents such specimens of speech. \(^72\) It may be pointed out here that ancient Assamese literature consists of much unwritten poetry, such as pastoral ballads. The best examples of this class of literature are "Bihu folk song's", cowherd and boat-songs, riddles,

\(^70\) Watters, II, 185 f.
\(^71\) Choudhury, P.C. HCPA. P. 365
\(^72\) Kakati, B.K. (ed). Aspects of Early Assamese literature. P 4 ; cited in HCPA. P. 368}
maxims, ojāpāli etc. The best specimens of wise saying are contained in a work Dākabhanita, attributed to Dāka written in old Kāmarūpi dialect.\textsuperscript{73}

The Sanskrit compositions included, besides the epigraphs of the period, works relating to astrology, astronomy, palmistry, arithmetic, medicine and voluminous Tantrik works most of which however, do not belong to the period prior to the 12th century A.D. The volumes of manuscripts composed in Sanskrit preserved at the D.H.A. S. alone covering all branches of knowledge, some of which are as old as the fourteenth century A.D., present a good picture of the culture of the language and literature in the land: (P.C. Choudhury, A Cat. of Sanskrit Manuscripts at the D.H.A.S.). The settlement of Brāhmaṇas and other Aryans, and the royal patronage of Brāhmanical culture and of learned panditas in the court, contributed largely to the culture of the Sanskrit literature. Kāmarūpa, as testified by Hiuen-Tsjiang, was a noted centre of learning\textsuperscript{74}. The epigraphs both in prose and verse are written with stately diction and poetic style and some of them may be compared with any other compositions of the period from ancient India. Some of the verses in the epigraphs contain passages from Kālidasa and Bāṇa and the scribes tried to imitate their style. The Nowgaon grant, for

\textsuperscript{73.} Cited in HCPA. P. 369, Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts. No. 35

\textsuperscript{74.} Watters II, PP. 185f.
instance, contains passages from the Raghuvamśa. 75 As noticed by T. Bloch, the writer of the Bargāon grant imitated the style of the Harṣacarita. 76 These facts indicate that the composers were well versed in Sanskrit literature.77

The rulers of Prāgjiyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa were generous patrons of learning. The Gauhāti grant (V.11) credits Purandarapāla with the epithet “Sukavi”. In the Khaṇāmukh grant V.9. and in the Subhaṅkarapāṭaka grant V.9. Harṣapāla was described as being favoured by the goddess of learning. In the Puśpabhadra grant V-8 Dharmapāla was described as Kavićakravāla cuḍāmāni and eight verses of the said grant were composed by him. The facts that the king Bhāskaravarman sent volumes of fine writing on aloe bark leaves to Harṣa of Kanauj, as mentioned in the Harṣacarita, which was evidently in Sanskrit and the king desired to have a Sanskrit translation of Tao-to-king, a treatise on Taoism, from China, shows that he was well-versed in the language and its literature. 78 A few of the great Sanskrit literary works of ancient India viz., “Kālikā-Puṇāṇa”, “Yogini-Tantra” and “Hara-Gouri Saṁbada” were produced in Assam. Kāmarūpi Buddhist scholar Minanath composed Tantrik books like “Kaulajñānininaya”, “Akulavīratantra” and others in the eleventh century. In Prāgjiyotiṣa - Kāmarūpa materials used for

75: Hoernle, JASB. L XVI, PP. 288-89
76. JASB. L XVII, I, PP. 99f.
77. Choudhury, P.C. HCPA. P. 370
78. Ibid.
writing were inner bark of the bhūrjapatra, aloe wood, and sāncipat, tulāpāt or cotton cloth, wooden-board, palm leaves, clay, metal, stone, brick etc.\textsuperscript{79}

The main centres of education and learning were the houses of the Brāhmin preceptors called “Guru-griha”. Ancient Indian social system called students as Brāhmacarins. Students were sent to Guru-griha or home of their teacher for their education. Here, they went to beg food for themselves and their teacher, performed their household work, and studied. Main subjects of study were the Vedas, Aṅgas and other subjects. Technical subjects were also taught by Gurus at their home. Some of these Gurukulas attracted a large number of students and were considerably big.

With the growth of urbanization there developed urban centres of education. Brāhmanical educational system revolved round a teacher imparting knowledge to a few students. This system, however, gradually changed with the growth of urbanization. As a result urban centres of education comparable to modern schools and Universities developed. Such institutions required help from rulers to maintain themselves.

In Prāgjyotīśa - Kāmarūpa neither epigraph nor literature supplies us with definite information regarding schools except the gurugrihas, Sanskrit-ṭolas and village schools provided mainly

\textsuperscript{79.} Ibid. P. 374
by the agrahāras, created and patronised by the rulers on behalf of and for the maintenance of the Brāhmaṇas. Those who were endowed with the agrahāras maintained village schools and were keen in discharging their sixfold duties, one of which was adhyāpanā (teaching).\textsuperscript{80} The maintenance of a ālā or chātrasāla is indicated by the fact that Śaṅkaradeva received all his instruction from guru Mahendra Kandali in one such educational institution. Temples and religious establishments like those of Vaishnava satras of Prājyotisa - Kāmarūpa organised on the system of Buddhist monasteries, where discussions of all kinds were daily held, contributed more than any other centre to the spread of social, if not literary, education.\textsuperscript{81} Temples also managed and maintained educational institutions. It seems that Buddhist Viharas, Jaina Pallis and Brāhmanical Gurukuls and later the temples and ālās educated not only the monks but others as well in different branches of learning and thus contributed not only to the dissemination and growth of knowledge but also led to a better mutual understanding and tolerance.

Evidence of educated women of our period was very scanty. But in the early Vedic period, education was as common for girls as it was for boys. The Upanayana Sanskara or the ceremonial initiation into Vedic studies was performed in respect of both boys

\textsuperscript{80} Bargaon grant. (JASB, L XVII, 1. PP. 99 f.)

\textsuperscript{81} Cited in HCPA. P. 378
and girls, The Vedic age held that Brahmacharya discipline and training were as much necessary for girls as it was for boys. 82 Harita apprehended, “If the most important religious Sanskara of Upanayana was not performed in the case of girls, women would be automatically reduced to the status of Sudras; how then could Brahmaṇas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas be born of them” ? 83 After this Upanayana ceremony girls used to follow a discipline more or less similar to that of boys. They were, however, not to follow some of the strict rules of Brahmacharya such as they were not to grow matted hair, they were not to go out to beg their daily food and as far as possible, they were to be taught by their near relatives like the father, the uncle or brother; they could discontinue their studies if their marriages were fixed at the age of 16 or 17. 84 But some of the girls showed their passion for education and continued their studies for a longer period and became Brahmavadinis such as Lopamudra, Apala, Visvara, Ghosa, Nivavari etc. who were expert in Vedic theology and philosophy. 85 Women in those days were highly advanced in education with full knowledge of grammar, logic, lexicon and metres and had power of reasoning. 86

82. Atharvaveda, XI, 5, 18
83. Altekar, The position of women in Hindu civilization, P. 200
84. Ibid
85. Ibid. PP. 10-11
86. Barua, Bharati, a Study of the Socio-religious ceremony of Upanayana (Investiture with sacred threads) in the Sutras and the Dharmasutras, P. 101
But in Assam, neither epigraph nor literature supplies us with definite informations regarding the education of women. Though the inscriptions describe the qualities of the head and heart of the queens, but whether they were educated or not are not clear. Only one reference is made to the appointment of an old lady to take care of the royal harem. 87 We also find reference to women ruler and her ministers in the kingdom of Kadali which was also known as Narirajya which points out towards the education of women, otherwise they could not have run the kingdom. Few instances of educated and learned women were found in the ancient Assamese society, but they belonged to the upper class specially Brahmana class. We find elsewhere that Kamarupa was the main centre of Tantrikism and women equally contributed to the Tantrik culture, which is also clear from the term Sahajayoginicintā. 88 The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva informs that Brahmana Monoratha composed its prasasti in conjunction with his wife Padmā. 89 Some women were skilled in the arts of poetry and rhetoric. Some of them employed intellectuals to interpret the contents of popular classics, scriptures and informative literature to them. The consort of the king of Kamata appointed the son of the royal priest to interpret and explain her Haragaurisamvada and the Bhagavata. 90

87. Choudhury, P.C. HCPA, P. 386
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid; EI 11 PP. 347-58 ; Gaudalekhamala, PP. 127-46
90. Barua, B.K. ACHA, P. 136
Thus it may be presume that "the general level of culture of Assamese women in the period before the Vaisnava reformation was in no way high."

Religion:

The kingdom of Kāmarūpa came into contact with Vedic culture in very early times. The Kāmarūpa king's policy of establishing Brähmaṇas in different parts of the country led to rapid expansion of Vedic culture and conversion of the non-Aryans, to Hinduism. In their efforts to assimilate the non-Aryans, the Aryans had to radically change their own cultural outlook so much so that the Vedic culture acquired new forms and flourished with the addition of new deities to its pantheon together with the adoption of religious myths and cults of the Non Aryans. Fetishism, animism, cult of fertility, human sacrifice, ancestor worship etc. which were prevalent among the non-Aryan people of Assam, as elsewhere in India, passed on to Hinduism, and moulded its character which became manifested in new local forms.

All the inscriptions of Kāmarūpa kings so far discovered make definite reference to the worship of Śiva which unmistakably point to the fact that Saivism was a fully developed religion with various sub cults during the period from 4th to 13th century A.D.

91. Choudhury, P.C. HCPA. P. 386
Siva was a very popular deity among both the aborigines and the Aryanised people. All the ruling dynasties of Prāgyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, except Vaidyadeva, were worshippers of god Śiva. Epigraphs refer to the erection of Śiva temple by the Kāmarūpa kings. Thus Vanamālavarmadeva repaired the lofty temple of Hetuka Śūlin (Śiva). Ratanapāla studded the earth with white - washed temples enshrining Śambhū, Bhagadatta, who was so devoted to Kṛṣṇa, worshipped Śiva with penance. The Nīdhanpur grant describes Śiva's concrete manifestation. Hiuen-Tsiang noticed, during his visit to Kāmarūpa, hundreds of Deva-temples. The worship of Śiva in his various forms is confirmed by the extensive ruins of temples and icons of the deity, found throughout the state.

Kāmarūpa was an important centre of Devi worship. The temple of Kāmākhyā on the Nilāchala hill, where the genital organ of Sati is said to have fallen, is a most famous Śakta shrine in India, which attracts a large number of votaries from different parts of the country. Here the Devi was worshipped with Tantrik rites and sacrifices, the details of which are narrated in the Kālikā Purāṇa and the Yogini Tantra. Another noted centre of Devi worship was the temple of Tāmreswari at Sadiyā, where the goddess in her ‘kesaikhati’ (eater of raw flesh) form was propitiated with sacrifices even of human beings. She was the same goddess as Dikkaravāsini of the

93 | Gauhati grant V. 10
94 | Tezpur grant V. 5
95 | Nidhanpur grant V. 2
96 | JASB, X LII, PP. 240 f.; cited in HCPA, P. 420
Tantras. Y.T. (II/1) and Purāṇas (K.P., 80-39). The worship of Devi is also proved by epigraphy. Kāmeswara-Mahā-Gauri was the popular deity during the Śālastambha and the Pāla kings of Kāmarūpa. The Śālastambhas constructed the second Kāmākhyā temple on the Kāmakūta hill. The extensive ruins of Devi temples and numerous icons of the goddess in her various forms point to the wide-spread prevalence of the faith.

Sun-worship also prevailed in Assam from very early times which is proved by literature and architectural remains. The very name “Prāgjyotisa” points to the antiquity of the cult. The earliest reference to Prāgjyotisa as a centre of sun-worship is found in the Griha-sūtras. According to Taranath, before the introduction of Buddhism, the people of Kāmarūpa were sun-worshippers. There are remains of sun temple at Śri Sūryyā pāhār in Goalpara. The recent architectural findings at Malinithan in the lower Siāng district of Arunachal adjoining Assam contain beautiful images of the Sun-god. In the Navagraha temple at Guwahati also, the Sun-god was worshipped.

It is said that Vaishnavism was established in Assam at a time when sun-worship and Brāhmanical culture made considerable progress. Prāgjyotisā had long been associated with Vishnu

97. IHQ, V, P. 720
98. Cited in ACHA, P. 159.
99. Choudhury, P.C., HCPA, P. 409
worship. Naraka traced his descent from the Boar incarnation of Vishṇu.

The first epigraphic reference to Vishṇu worship is made in the Badagaṅgā epigraph, where king Bhūtivarman is mentioned as “Parama-doivata Paramabhāgavata”. Bhāskaravarman is said to have been created by (Brahmā), the holy lotus, issuing from the navel of Vishṇu. All the records of the period refer to the Boar incarnation of Vishṇu and mention some of his popular names. Vishṇu as Hayagrīva is still worshipped in Assam in the temple of Hayagrīva Mādhava at Hājo, a place about 24 k.m. North-West of Guwahati. By this way we find many references support of the view that Brāhmanical culture or the true Aryan Dharma made a strong hold in Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa.

Some scholars think that Kāmarūpa remained outside the pole of Buddhistic faith, but there are evidences to show that the faith existed even before the visit of Hiuen-Tsiang to the land. There are traditions in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Assam that Buddha died in Kāmarūpa near the Hayagrīva Madhava temple of Hājo, which is still visited by pilgrims from Bhutan and Tibet. Kalhana states that Amṛtaprabhā (the daughter of a Kāmarūpa king of probably the 5th century A.D), wife of Meghavāhana of Kāśmir brought with

100. Lines - 1-2, Badaganga Epigraph.
101. Nidhanpur grant. L. 34
102. Choudhury, P.C. HCPA. P. 401
her a Tibetan Buddhist guru of her father, called Stunpa who built a Vihāra in Kāśmira (Lo Stunpa) which shows the prevalence of the faith about this time. Bhāskaravarman was highly devoted to the faith and his assurance to Hiuen- Tsiang to build one hundred monasteries in case, the latter agreed to stay in his kingdom indicates his leaning towards Buddhism. Kāmarūpa is also associated with a number of Buddhist scholars and Siddhas. During the rule of Sātastambha line there were Buddhist scholars in Kāmarūpa, such as Abinavagupta to defeat whom Sankaracarya, came to Kāmarūpa. A large number of Buddhist temples, and icons of the Buddha indicate that “both Mahāyana and Vajrayāna, possibly Hinayāna prevailed in the land.”

Apart from these major cults, there were such other religious practices as the worship of minor deities like Gaṇeśa, Kārtikeya, Indra, Agni, Kubera and Manasā. There is, however, no evidence of any major conflicts between the civil authority and the adherents of various cults in Prājyotīsa-Kāmarūpa during the period.

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103. RT. III, 1-10
104. Cited in HCPA. P. 404.
105. Ibid.