CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

The history of “Political Geography of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa” with the important names of places is a very interesting topic in the annals of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa of ancient Assam.

Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa was a historical kingdom in India, known by different names in different period of history. But the chronology of political history or evidences of the early history of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa till the middle of 4th century A.D. are found missing. During this period Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa witnessed a number of traditional rulers who played an important role in the all Indian politics. One of them was Bhagadatta, who earned both name and fame by participating in the Mahābhārata war in favour of the Kauravas along with his Kirāta and Chīna soldiers. The empire of Bhagadatta was a very extensive one. He extended his control over the foot hill areas of the hill ranges of Assam. Similarly, southern frontier, too, must have touched the Bay of Bengal. It will be wrong on our part to hold that Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa was a united kingdom throughout the earliest period. When Naraka was ruling over Prāgjyotiṣapura, another king named Bāṇa was ruling over the Northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. Similar kingdoms were also established at different places. There are historical evidences about the existence of kingdoms like Manipur, Kadali, Davāka,
The real political history of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa starts with Puṣyavarman, the founder of the Varman dynasty in the middle of the 4th century A.D. In establishing the independent kingdom of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa as an integral part of the Indian sub-continent, the contribution of the kings of this land was tremendous. They did it by three categories, viz. through conquests, by establishing diplomatic relationship and marriage alliances with other Indian states. In the first category occur the names of kings like Mahendravarman (Dubi copper plate grant v. 23), Bhūtivarman (Dubi and Nidhanpur grant v. 31) and Bhāskaravarman (Dubi and Nidhanpur grant, line 2-3) of the Varman dynasty, Sri Harṣavarmadeva (Pasumatinath temple inscription) and Vanamālavarmādeva (Tezpur inscription v. 33) of the Śālastambha dynasty, particularly. In the second category, occur the names of Puṣyavarman, Samudravarman, Balavarman (I) and Bhāskaravarman of Varman dynasty, Sri Harṣavarmadeva of Śālastambha dynasty and Indrapāla of the Pāla dynasty (Gachtal grant v. 22).

When we go through the different phases of the political history of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa, we notice the rising power of the Varman kings in the post Gupta period. Although the contemporary Varman kings to the Gupta Emperor Samudragupta and his two other successors had maintained a good link with the Gupta kings...
contemporary to them more or less as overlords. But since the time of Mahendravarman who threw out the Gupta allegiance by performing two horse sacrifices. Bhūtivarman, his successor extended his sway upto Pundravardhana where he settled many Brāhmaṇas which was the bordering region of the Gupta and Varman kingdom. The then Gupta king being very weak could not check the rising power of the Varmans who established a very extensive kingdom which was not confined within Kāmarūpa, but extended it to north Bengal, i.e. in Pundravardhana.

The rising power of the Varman kings did not stop but continued till the time of Bhāskaravarman the ‘king of Eastern India’. Being contemporary to the emperor of Kanauj and having friendship with him i.e. Harśavardhana, Bhāskaravarman defeated the Gauḍa king Šaśāṅka and compelled him to take shelter in Orissa. Thus it may be stated that after the death of Šaśāṅka his empire faced disruption and his vast dominions and the component parts declared independence and became separate states. The opportunity of this disruption was taken by Bhāskaravarman and Harśavardhana who conquered respectively his former dominions in and outside Bengal. The political disintegration of the Gauḍa empire was referred to in the Buddhist work Arya-Mañjuśrī-Mulākālpa. The empire of Bhāskaravarman touched the fringes of the hill in the north bordering China, Burma in the East, Purnea, i.e. Bihar in the west and the Sea in the South, which comprised Pundravardhana, Samatata, Tripura, Davāka including Chitagong,
Komillar, Rangpur in south; in the north upto Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and the Southern part of China and on the East touched the borders of China and Burma. In any case the kingdom of Bhāskaravarma was larger in extent than the Kāmarūpa whose extent was defined between the river Karatoya and the Dikkaravāsini in the famous Yoginitantra.

The rule of the post-Varman kings, the Āśālastambhas, extended for a period of more than three hundred years. Under them, Kāmarūpa witnessed, though for a short period, the zenith of her military power and glory, when the illustrious Harṣadeva extended his sway to Gauda, Odra, Kaliṅga, Kośala and other lands. The Āśālastambha kings continued the policy of making land grants to the Brāhmaṇas in the midst of non-Aryan population. The frequent conflict with the neighbouring powers in the west have induced the Āśālastambhas to undertake expansion towards the east, where they donated land to a number of Brāhmaṇas. The extension of the kingdom offer an opportunity to assimilate various people of different parts and to exchange their culture which added to the growth of Assamese culture.

The last historical dynasty was the house of the Pālas. The kings of Pāla dynasty also continued to pursue the policy of their predecessors. Though they could not make extensive conquests like the Āśālastambhas under Sri Harṣadeva, there are epigraphic evidences to their political sway over North and South-east Bengal,
although at times it had to suffer short interruptions. That they had some control over the Khāsi-Jayantiā hills or a part of it is evident from the Bargāon grant of Ratnapāla which states that the king had a copper mine in his kingdom which yielded a substantial income. Purandrapāla’s marriage with Durlabhā, the daughter of a chief of the extreme North-Eastern region, has also a significance in the political and cultural history of this period. Indrapāla’s marriage alliance with the Raśtrakūtas was not only helped in establishing friendly relationship between these two powers but evidently led to the importation of Deccanese artists, scholars, etc. to Kāmarūpa while encouraging trade and commercial relations at the same time. Their policy of making agrahāra settlement of Brāhmaṇas in non-Aryan villages helped in the spread of Hindu culture in and around the kingdom.

Ambitious kings and princes of Southern and Northern India, right from the time of Samudragupta took the conquests of this part as essential for their career. Besides Samudragupta, we may mention the names of Yoṣadharman of Malwa, Mahāsenagupta, Chālukya prince Kīrtivarman, Jātavarman of Vikramapura and some other kings who were also undertook the policy of expansion towards the East. All these conquerors tried to follow the footsteps of Indian Epic hero Yudhiṣṭhira who at the times of performing both the Rājasūya and Aśvamedha sacrifices sent successful expeditions to Prāgjyotiṣa. Again, in the same manner, kings of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, like Naraka and Bhagadatta, whenever it
is possible, tried to check North Indian imperialism and in opposite circumstances stuck to the policy of maintaining good rapport with the imperial powers.

Thus the Prāgyotisā-Kāmarūpa kingdom which started its growth as a legacy to the Gupta empire became a vast and extensive empire under the three historical dynasties which continued till 12th century A.D. It is a glorious history for the line of kings of these dynasties who maintained their royal hold in a very empathic way extending its western end upto Nālandā during the Varmans, upto Kośala during the Śālastambhas, upto Purnea during the Pāla rulers.

It seems that after the extinction of the Pāla line of kings or soon after the death of Vaidyadeva in the middle of the 12th century A.D. disintegration of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa had began. The discovery of the Tezpur copper plates indicates a new line of kings, among those Vallabhadeva was a powerful one.

From the beginning of the 13th century A.D. Kāmarūpa faced threats from the west from Bengal. But the four Muslim invasions, viz. of Baktiyar Khilji, Sultan Giāsuddin, Nāsiruddin and Ikhtiyāruddin, all failed to win over Kāmarūpa and faced discomfiture about the middle of the 13th century A.D. Soon after these invasions the old kingdom of Kāmarūpa seems to have split up into several independent principalities. At the same time, the Ahoms penetrated
into the Brahmaputra valley and pushed back the successor of the old dynasty towards the west. Probably, the ruler of the old dynasty shifted his capital to Kamata to save himself from the harassment of the Ahoms. The Ahoms occupied the kingdom and they started a new era in the history of Prāgjyotisā-Kāmarūpa which was then known as Assam. Thus it was through this central kingdom (Prāgjyotisā) again this ancient land held contact not only with other parts of India but also with the countries in the east in both political and cultural arena, in the subsequent period of history.

The Bhauma-Varman dynasty established by Puṣyavarman traced his descent from Naraka which was continued by the succeeding dynasties. A number of inscriptions of this period have been discovered in Assam which throw welcome light on the names of important places of Prāgjyotisā-Kāmarūpa kingdom.

Place names of our study area as it stands today are the result of a good deal of evolution with continuous migration of races to this land. The prominent among them are the Austrics, the Bodos, the Indo-Aryans. It is difficult to determine the period of the movement of the pre-historic tribes but they came at a fairly early period. Traces of their language are found in the shape of the place names. The names of famous shrine of Kāmākhya is said to be of Austric origin. Similarly traces of Bodo language are also found in the place, specially in the river names. The name Brahmaputra
Kāmarūpa are said to be associated with the Aryans. The increase of the new places with new names during the period from 4th century to 12th century was a glorious period in ancient time of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. All these new places had their importance in agriculture, industry, establishment of the Agrahāras exposes the Aryan culture. So it can be said that establishment of the new places showed the glamour of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa in ancient time with the establishment of Aryan culture.

While studying this topic we have seen that in every aspect, Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa retained its uniqueness. The royal family attained divinity in the eyes of the subjects. Epigraphs of the early kings of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa indicated that seven component parts, called ‘Prakṛtis’ in the Hindu law book, were as the basis of the monarchical system. Prakṛtis is both subject or ministry of the seven elements of the state. A significant reference to these elements (Prakratayah) is made in the Bargāon grant (V-10) in connection with the election of Brahmapāla when there was nobody to succeed Tyagasilōṇha who died without leaving any heir. King was the executor of dandaniti. In a sense kingship is based on taxation and protection which was a trust and monarchy was but a limited one. Epigraphs of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa indicated that kings of Kāmarūpa looked upon his subjects as his own children and engaged whole heartedly in works of general welfare. The rulers of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa were conscious of strong defence necessary for preserving the integrity of their kingdom. There was reference to
the war like qualities of a king in the inscription. We do have information on their military organisation. The rulers were not dependent on the Mahāsamantas and Sāmantas who were required to render military assistance.

The establishment of matrimonial alliances with other states, particularly the border states appear to be an effective device of the Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa kings against North Central Indian imperialism. Balavarman I started this policy. He gave his daughter (Amṛtaprabhā) in marriage to the king of Kāśmirā, named Meghavāhana to cement the diplomatic alliance. Harāsavarmadeva, the powerful king of Śālastambha dynasty also gave his daughter, Rajyāmatī, in marriage to king Jayadeva II of Nepala (Paśupatinath temple inscription). After Amṛtaprabhā, this has been the second instance of marriage of a Kāmarūpa princess with the king of another state. According to the Gachtal grant of Gopālavarman, Indrapāla married a Rāṣṭrakūta princess named Rajyāmatī who was his chief queen (V.22). This fact indicates that like preceding two dynasties, Indrapāla too used marriage as a means of diplomatic relationship between two states. It may be deduced that the Kāmarūpa kings maintained their external relations considering basically two factors - viz- (i) Checking of mid-Indian imperialism and (ii) Casting of Kāmarūpa spell in mid-Indian political scenerio. However, all these matrimonial alliances had proved the might of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa to the outside of the kingdom.
In the field of religion, the mainstream of Brāhmanical religion had penetrated into Prāgjyotisa- Kāmarūpa much earlier than the historic period. But in this border region, inhabited largely by the Kirātas or Mangoloids, the Aryanised social form and Vedic customs and rites failed to assume a rigid pattern. Inspite of the prevalence of so many Aryan and non-Aryan cults, there was perhaps a spirit of toleration among their adherents. The ruins indicate that at a single place, images of different deities were erected on the same site. The best example is furnished by the shrines at Kāmākhyā and Hājo. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the region continued to profess different faiths, the harmony was not lost, and the followers of all sects prospered here equally well, and contributed to the building up of a complex socio-religious fabric of ancient Assam.

Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa, on the other hand, was a power to be reckoned with in times of both peace and war. She had, as we have noticed, trade relations with the rest of India and countries like Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Tibet, China and Burma. The Indian Trade route to northern Mongolia also lay through Prāgjyotisa. These trade relations had far reaching consequences in the cultural life of ancient Assam as well as of other trading countries.

In the field of learning and education, Assamese scholars maintained close contact with their Indian counterparts. Many of them visited Nālandā, and court of other places for philosophical
discussion and took part in scholarly debates and discussions. The fame of Prāgīyotiṣa as the centre of learning, especially in astrological studies spread in the earliest time. Navagraha hill (Karnačhal) with its temple worshipping the nine planets still existed. It speaks of a very rich culture that ever contributed to the study of planets and planetary movements and the knowledge is still a very unique feature of the culture of Kāmarūpa.

Thus, North-East India, maintaining its uniqueness was never cut off from the rest of India, neither the hills were isolated from the plains. The linkage between Assam plains and the neighbouring hills had been in existence from the very archaic times of Bhagadatta who had soldiers recruited from the unknown hill tribes of the North-East. The long existence of the Assam-Burma route is another solid example of this linkage between the plains and the hills. Horses from Tibet used to come to Assam through the hill passes of Bhutan and Tibet. The study reflects that during the time of three dynastical rulers viz- the Varman, the Śālastambha and the Pāla, the Hindu kingdom Prāgīyotiṣa - Kāmarūpa came to the zenith in all sides. Not only geographical extension of the land, this glorious kingdom earned fame and name in trade, commerce, industry and matrimonial link with various kingdoms of India. Balavarmana’s daughter Amṛtaprabhā married to Meghabāhana of Kāśmīra. On the other hand silk route was established with China through Prāgīyotiṣa. Famous traveller Hiuen-Tsiang went to China by the route through Prāgīyotiṣa by using the mountainous route through
North-east region crossing Pātkāi and Burma. Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa is the gateway of India to link the South-east Asia with Indian peninsula. Silk route is still continued to link with China. Present Guwahati which is called as Prāgjyotisapura early, is the capital city of modern Assam still be known as the ‘gateway’ of Assam. It is the only capital which connects all the other parts of India and South-east Asian countries.