Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

(a) Introduction of Tezpur:

Land and climate:

The modern town of Tezpur, which is the headquarter of Sonitpur district of Assam, is situated on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. Its geographical co-ordinates are 26° 38’ North and 92° 48’ East.¹ The subdivision of Tezpur in the district of Sonitpur covers an area of 2,250 square kilometres as per the record of Survey of India. The topography of the land is almost flat. The region along the river Brahmaputra are, however, chronically flood affected. The region is characterized by recent and old alluvium soil with sandy to loamy and clay texture and slightly to moderately acidic soil reaction with pH 4.5 to 6.5.² The landscape of Tezpur is generally high and uneven and its altitude varies from 69m to 76m. The central and southern portion of the main plain is generally studded with hills and hillocks, especially near the river Brahmaputra. These are the Bhairabi, Bhomoraguri, Bamuni, Agnigarh, Dhenukhana, Rudrapad, Ouguri and Singri hills. Most of these hills are crowned with temples. The Bhairavi Devalaya stands on the Bhairavi hill; the Bamuni Hill contains ruins of almost six shrines while

² http://www.aau.ac.in/dee/KVKSonitpur/district.html accessed on 28.1.12
the Ouguri and Singri hills are both crowned with temples of Saivite deities. The hills generally contain metamorphic rocks like gneiss and granite.

The vegetation of Tezpur and its neighbouring areas are sub-tropical to sub-temperate but some of the common plants of the Indo-Gangetic plains also grow here in the natural state.\(^3\) The region abounds in bio-diversity with different evergreen and deciduous trees. The swampy tracts and low lying areas are covered with riparian forests, savannah vegetation, bamboos and cane forests\(^4\). The highly humid sub-tropical climate contributes to the growth of an extensive forest belt covering the entire northern part of the region. The evergreen forest vegetation largely flourishes in the forest areas of Balipara and Chariduar region of Tezpur. The river Brahmaputra flows through the south of Tezpur forming a dividing line between Nagoan and Tezpur. A number of other rivers like Panchnai, Belsiri, Gabharu and its tributary Sonai-Rupai, Bharali and its tributaries Upper Dikorai and Bor Dikorai also flow through Tezpur. These rivers originate in the Himalayan foothills and flow southwards, ultimately merging with the Brahmaputra River. In the past inlets of water from the Bharali River entered the mainland of Tezpur forming \textit{holas} or catchments. But these natural \textit{holas} are now fast disappearing to meet the growing pressure on land as the town has expanded with growing population. There are also a number of river islands in the Brahmaputra River locally known as the \textit{char} areas. These \textit{chars} were created by the disposition of the alluvial materials carried by the river. Its soil consists of sand, sandstone, clay and sometimes, a mixture of sand, clay and vegetable matter. Some \textit{chars} are large enough and fit for human habitation and cultivation. Tezpur also has a

\(^{3}\) Dr. Akhil Barua, \textit{Floristic accounts of Tezpur}, cited in Dilip Kr. Saikia ed. \textit{Sonitpur Through The Ages}, p.443

\(^{4}\) Ibid. pp.443-44
number of tanks, ponds and stagnant pools called *beels*. Some of the major ponds, *beels* and
tanks that abound the region are Rowmari beel, Kasomari beel, Sonabeel, Tezpur beel, Padum
Pukhuri, the historic Harjjara Pukhuri reportedly built by the Śālastambha ruler Harjjaravarman,
the Sat Pukhuri, the Bar Pukhuri, and Bali Pukhuri. However, due to the continuous increase in
population, most of these *beels* and tanks are now under occupation by the people leading to
the complete disappearance of some of these water bodies. The swamps and marshes which can
still be seen in the modern Tezpur region are probably the remnants of the earlier streams and
channels that once flowed through the region.
Sonitpur district including Tezpur falls in the sub-tropical climatic region and enjoys monsoon type of climate. On the basis of temperature, rainfall and fog, Tezpur can be said to enjoy four seasons – summer, monsoon, retreating monsoon and winter. The pre-monsoon season or the summer season in Tezpur starts from the month of April. This season occupies a major portion of the seasonal calendar lasting till the month of September. Summers are generally hot and humid and the average temperature during this time of the year is usually 18°C to 36°C. The highest temperature is recorded just prior to the onset of the monsoon (around May-early June). Just prior to the beginning of the pre-monsoon season, Tezpur witnesses the beginning of the ‘dust raising winds’. This local phenomenon is generally observed during the month of March when the whole region is plagued by dust storms that continues for days together. This dust storm usually subsides with the onset of the rains. Summer rain is heavy, and is principally caused from late June to early September by the moisture-laden South-West monsoon, on striking the Himalayan foothills on the north. The monsoon weather is characterized by cloudy days, very high atmospheric humidity and variable surface wind. Although there is high humidity making the general weather sultry, the shooting temperature however decreases with the onset of incessant rain. Thunderstorms are also a usual feature that occurs all throughout the rainy season. The average annual rainfall during this time is about 160cm. The monsoon winds retreat by the end of September. The weather becomes pleasant and one can notice the dew fall from the month of October. The autumn season is generally dry and warm. The rainy days are few in the month of October and November. The weather becomes gradually cooler as the month progresses. Winter season extends from the month of late October or early November to February and are usually cold and dry with scanty rainfall.

5 Edited by A.K. Bhagabati, Ashok Kr. Bora et al, *Geography of Assam*, p.30
gets quite chilling in late December and early January, on account of rainfall in the upper reaches of neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh. The days are characterized by cold weather and frequent morning and evening fog. The mercury reading during this time is around 7 °C to 22 °C. December and January are the driest months and generally January is the coldest month.\(^6\) Winter season is followed by the spring season. Springs are cool and pleasant, occurring in the months of late March and April. With mild winds, mornings are generally cool and pleasant. A typical feature seen during these months is the occurrence of sudden rains and thunderstorms, which are at times caused by cyclonic winds, locally known as bordoi-chila.

**Population:**

The population of Tezpur is heterogeneous, representing a mosaic of ethnic groups, an admixture of diverse people who had settled here over time. According to the census of India Report, the population of Tezpur in the year 2011 was 1,00,477.\(^7\) Over a period of time, the town has witnessed successive waves of migration leading to the building up of a cosmopolitan population. The Tibeto-Burmans were the first group of people who came and settled in the region, represented today by the Bodos, Kacharis, Rabhas, Garos, Adis, Apatanis and Lamas. The Bodo dominated areas mainly include the northern part of Dhekiajuli, Rangapara and Balipara. Other areas are sparsely populated and mostly confined to the foothills of the Himalayas near Arunachal Pradesh. Almost simultaneously, probably in the first millennium B.C.E., came the Indo-Aryan settlers from the Gangetic Valley in the west, represented by the

\(^6\) Ibid., p.34  
\(^7\) Census Report of India, 2011
caste Hindu people. The Tai-Ahoms who came in the 13th century C.E. and settled in various parts of Assam in successive phases, also contributed to the diverse population of Tezpur. Following the coming of the Europeans and the occupation of Assam by the East India Company in 1826, Tezpur witnessed more waves of migration, all of which today constitute the population of Tezpur. Besides the indigenous Assamese speaking people, we also find Bengalis, Nepalese, Marwaris, Biharis and people from other parts of India. The Bengali community came from erstwhile undivided Bengal as officials and clerks of the British administration and tea industry and settled in the area. Later, when Pakistan was divided into Bangladesh and Pakistan, many refugees from Bangladesh entered Assam adding significantly to the Bengali population. Over the years, there has been continuous influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh. The illegal migrants are generally found in the char areas of Tezpur. People belonging to tea-tribes also form a major part of the population of Tezpur. They were generally brought in by the colonial planters as indentured labourers from the Chotanagpur plateau region and from Orissa. Till today, most of them work as labourers in the tea gardens of Assam.

**Importance of Tezpur:**

Tezpur occupies a prominent position in the map of Assam. Besides being the district headquarters of Sonitpur district, it is also regarded as the cultural capital of Assam. It was the East India Company who raised Tezpur to the status of the headquarters of erstwhile Darrang district in the year 1835. It was only after independence, in the year 1983, that Darrang was carved out to form a separate district and Tezpur became the headquarters of the new district of Sonitpur. Situated on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra, the town of Tezpur is also the largest town on the north bank. Located in the central part of Assam, Tezpur has easy access to
the other north-eastern states by well-connected roads. It is situated 175 kms north-east of Guwahati. The distance from the state capital Dispur is about 190 kms and it is well connected by roads. In 1987, the Kalia Bhomora Bridge over the river Brahmaputra was inaugurated connecting Tezpur to the district of Nagaon on the south bank by road. It is the longest bridge over the river Brahmaputra till date and spans a total length of 3015 meters, becoming a major tourist attraction by itself. Tezpur also has a meter gauge railway line which is the oldest on the north bank, descending from the Tezpur Balipara Light Railway built in 1885 to carry tea from upcoming estates to the then river port of Tezpur at Jahajghat (literally a dock for ships and ferries). Jahajghat during the British period served as an emerging river port with steamer and ferry service. Regular ferry service as a major means of river transport communication was in vogue in many of the ghats of Tezpur till the bridge over the river Brahmaputra connecting Nagoan was inaugurated in 1987. Tezpur is also well connected by air with the rest of India. The nearest civilian airport is at Salonibari which is only 8 kms from the heart of Tezpur town. The strategic importance of Tezpur can well be gleaned from the fact that the IV Corps Headquarter of the Indian Army is stationed at Tezpur. There is also an Air force Station at Tezpur with advanced supersonic planes, the latest Sukhoi also being stationed there. The region of Tezpur has also made significant contribution to the cultural heritage of Assam. It has produced many stalwartssuch as Bhupen Hazarika, Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Kalaguru BishnuPrasad Rabha, Phani Sarma and Ananda Chandra Agarwala whose noteworthy contribution has enriched the art and culture of Assam. Presently, Tezpur is a fast growing commercial, administrative and educational centre. It has a Central University (the Tezpur University) which is located at Napaam; the Lokopriya Gopinath Regional Institute of Mental Arts.
Health (LGBRIMH), which is one of the oldest mental asylum set up in India in the year 1876 by the then Imperial Government of the British Empire and also a North-Eastern Regional Institute of Water and Land Management (NERI WALM) is also located here. Tezpur also houses a Defense Research Laboratory (DRL); an upcoming Tezpur Medical College at Bihaguri and the noted *Baan Theatre*, which is one of the oldest and famous theatrical stage in Tezpur. The foundation stone of the Indian Statistical Institute has also been laid down at Tezpur. Today Tezpur is also emerging as a fast growing tourist destination not only because of its cultural and historical importance but also because of its proximity to wild life sanctuaries and evergreen forests. The Nameri National Park, the Burachapor Wildlife Sanctuary and the Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary are a treasure trove for wildlife and nature lovers. There are also many tea gardens surrounding the town of Tezpur which add to the scenic beauty of the region, besides contributing to the local economy. Tezpur not only occupies a significant position in modern day Assam, but it also has a glorious past. Tezpur played an important role in the freedom struggle of Assam. In the Ahom period, the region of Tezpur remained an important strategic centre. The Ahom rulers also built many temples in the Tezpur region on the ruins of the earlier ones built by the rulers of the Pre-Ahom period. Even during the legendary period, Tezpur (earlier referred to as Sonitpura) was ruled by a powerful non-Aryan ruler called Bana, who was a close friend of Naraka of Pragjyotishpura. In the pre-Ahom period, Tezpur enjoyed the status of being an important political center. Hadappesvarga, identified with the modern Tezpur region, was the headquarters of the Sālastambha dynasty in the later part of the seventh century, when the rule of the Varman dynasty with their capital at Kāmarūpa came to an end. It also served as the capital of the Pala rulers during the reign of
Brahmapala and Gopala. Several archaeological remains have been found scattered throughout the region which includes inscriptions, architectural remnants; primarily religious edifices, icons, coins, sculptures, terracotta plaques, tanks and ramparts. Most of the temples found today in the region were constructed on earlier foundations. The remains of the period mostly lie scattered in the areas of Da-Parbatiya, Bam-Parbatiya, Baralimara sattra, Bamunipahar, Majgoan, Tezpur town, Singri, Dhekiajuli and Chariduar. These ruins prove the existence of an ancient city beneath the present Tezpur region with a long antiquity and continuity.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM:**

Today Tezpur occupies a prominent position amongst the towns of Assam. Its importance is equally eminent from the remains of the past. Till date, however, no attempt has been made to carry out a thorough study of the archaeological remains scattered all around the region of Tezpur, document and study them to widen the horizons of our knowledge relating to the growth and development of this ancient city. Hence, this study is an attempt to study the archaeological remains of Tezpur and trace the various aspects of history of this region based on these remains.
SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The scope of the present study includes the geographical area that falls under the present town of Tezpur bounded by Biswanath Chariali on the East, Panchnai in Udalgiri district on the West, Bhalukpung on the North and Nagoan district on the South. All the historical and archaeological evidences found within the region will fall under the scope of study. The study primarily focuses on the history and archaeology of this region beginning from the 5th century C.E., up to the 12th century C.E. However, on the basis of literary evidences, the antiquity of Tezpur region can be traced back to an early period. The Mahabharata (Santiparvan, Chapter 399, verses 90-9), the Kalika Purana (chapter 39) and the Vishnu Purana (I, 21.2) speak of the existence of a kingdom in this region, ruled by a non Aryan king called Bana. The capital city was known as Sonitpura. The Agnigarh fort, the temple of Mahabhairav, the ruins a Bhalukpung are all believed to bear testimony to the rule of Bana according to local traditions. This leads one to believe in the existence of an organized human society even during the pre-historic period. Not only has this region been under continuous occupation from the remote past to the present time, but its archaeological remains also provide us with a clear insight into the highly developed and cultured civilization that has evolved gradually in the region. It was undoubtedly the conscious effort of the people that helped in the rise and growth of a definite culture and tradition in the history of this region.
The study is based on archaeological remains. The archaeological remains in the form of temples, sculptures, coins, inscriptions, icons, tanks, ramparts and the like, if interpreted accurately provide us with a clear insight into the past. The find spots of the remains indicate the probable locations of early human habitation in the region, besides providing some clue to ancient geography and topography of the region. The building components found in and around the region, mostly remains of temples and religious edifices, also gives an idea of the structure and architectural styles of the early buildings. The sculptures both religious and secular indicate the popular religious beliefs and practices of the people as well as the structural and social set up of the society. The sculptures very often also depict lively scenes of everyday life as well as their mode of dress, hairstyle and ornaments. Another important archaeological aspect is the coins and inscriptions of the period which supply valuable information regarding important achievements and events in history, sometimes along with their dates and chronology. The land grants recorded mostly on copper plates reveal the area of jurisdiction of the issuing authority, the prevailing laws of the state, besides highlighting important aspects of administration of the state. Very often, the inscriptions also supply us knowledge about the prevailing literary style of the period. Likewise, the numismatic evidences reveal the economic status of the society besides throwing light upon the trade and commercial practices of the region. Thus a study of the archaeological remains is essential to reconstruct the history, life and culture of the people who lived in the region in early times. Tezpur was an important
political centre in early times because of which the factors which facilitated this phenomenon deserve a better understanding of its history.

**A BRIEF SURVEY OF LITERATURE:**

Many scholars have carried out detailed research on the history and archaeology of the whole of Assam wherein many interesting facets about Assam have come to light due to their sincere effort and hard work. The pioneer in this field was Gunabhiram Barua, whose *Asam Buranji* published in 1878 narrates the history of Assam from the pre-historic period up to the year 1875. But his handling of the pre-historic and historic period before the advent of the Ahoms in Upper Assam is sketchy, and fails to distinguish between history, myths and legends. Edward Gait attempted to write a comprehensive history of Assam from the remote past to the 20th century. But his *A History of Assam* published in 1905 gives scant importance to the period prior to the 13th century C.E. primarily due to lack of reliable sources. The subsequent decades witnessed similar attempts by other scholars to write a systematic history of Assam based on the then available sources. Some of the most prominent among them are K.L Barua whose *The Early History of Kamaupa*, published in 1933 was the first work to deal extensively with the history of early Assam, besides B.K. Barua (*A Cultural History of Assam*), R.M Nath (*The Background of Assamese Culture*) and others. However only certain historical and archaeological facts about Tezpur have found mention in their works. R.D Choudhury in his work, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam* makes an in-depth study of the
archaeological remains like inscriptions, coins, sculptures, icons as well as material remains belonging to the Brahmaputra Valley. In his work we do find references to the remains of Tezpur but the discussion is inadequate in the light of new excavations being carried out in the recent years. Similarly, N.P Choudhury’s, *Historical Archaeology of Central Assam from the earliest period to the 12th century* deals with only a part of the remains found in the Tezpur region. P.C Choudhury in his work, *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the 12th century* provides us useful information on the history and archaeology of Assam also throwing some light on Tezpur. Likewise, *The Comprehensive History of Assam (Vol I)* edited by H.K Borpujari contain many references to the history and archaeology of Assam during the pre-Ahom period. S.L Barua’s work *A Comprehensive History of Assam* also throws some light on the history and archaeology of pre-Ahom Assam. However, the discussion on Tezpur is confined to only a few pages. The *Kāmarūpasasanavali* edited by Dimbeswar Sarma contain a total of 26 inscriptions. P.N Bhattacharyya’s work of the same name has also made an attempt to reconstruct the history of Assam based on the sources. Similarly, M. M Sarma in his work, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam* makes a detailed study of a total of 27 inscriptions. *Pabitra Assam* by Maheswar Neog gives details of the temples of Assam district wise also discussing the temple remains of Tezpur region. P.C Sarma’s, *Architecture of Assam* also makes detailed study of the evolution and development of the temple architecture but it makes no reference to other archaeological remains. Moreover, it makes no mention about their socio-cultural importance. Similar is the case regarding Monuranjan Dutta’s, *Sculpture of Assam* which is a detailed account of the development of sculptures in Assam. Thus, most of the published
works are generally comprehensive in nature and gives only incidental reference to the history and archaeology of Tezpur while discussing them with reference to Assam as a whole. Some of the published papers in academic journals by scholars also discuss some of the aspects of the history and archaeology of Tezpur. However, no attempt has so far been made to go through all the archaeological remains of Tezpur and reconstruct the history of this region based upon them. This work is thus an attempt to do so. In order to make the study more realistic and fruitful, the study also discusses the various factors for the growth of Tezpur as a political centre and makes an in-depth study on the socio-economic and religious life of the people during the period.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the present study are as follows.

- To study the archaeological remains of Tezpur in their historical setting;
- To reconstruct the different aspects of the history of Tezpur based on the archaeological remains

METHODOLOGY:

Historical methodology has been followed in the research work. The study has been primarily based upon field survey to document the archaeological remains like ramparts, structural ruins, building components, tanks, sculptures etc. This has been supplemented by
existing literature to locate the remains in their historical setting. Articles and journals have also been utilized to carry out the study. Libraries of the Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Kāmarūpa Anusandhan Samiti, the Assam State Museum, District Museum Tezpur, District Library, Tezpur, Indian Council of Historical Research etc., have been consulted. The resultant data has been systematically arranged, analysed and organized as given below.

ORGANISATION:

The information collected has been organized in the following chapters:-

Chapter I: Introduction

(i) Introduction of Tezpur

(ii) Historical background

Chapter II: Tezpur as a Political centre

Chapter III: Social Life

Chapter IV: Economic Life

Chapter V: Religious Life

Chapter VI: Conclusion

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOURCES:

Inscriptions

1. Doobi Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman
2. Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription of Bhaskaravarman
3. Deopani Vishnu Image Inscription
4. Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjaravarman
5. Hayunthal Coper Plates of Harjaravarman
6. Kuruvabahi Copper Plate of Harjaravarman
7. Dighaligaon Copper Plates of Vanamalavarman
8. Parbatia Copper Plates of Vanamalavarman
9. Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamalavarman
10. Ulubari copper plates of Balavarman
11. Nagaon Copper Plates of Balavarman
12. Howraghat Copper Plates of Balavarman
13. Bargaon Copper Plate of Ratnapala
14. Soalkuchi Copper Plate of Ratnapala
15. Caratbari Copper Plate of Ratnapala
16. Guwahati Plates of Indrapala
17. Guakuchi Plates of Indrapala
18. Gachtal Copper Plate of Gopala
19. Khonamukh Plates of Dharmapala
20. Subhankarapataka Grant of Dharmapala
21. Puspabhadra Plates of Dharmapala
22. Kamauli Plates of Vaidyadeva
23. Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva
24. Ambari Stone Slab Inscription of Samudrapala

**Coins**

1. Hoard of copper coins belonging to the Śālastambha dynasty found at Dhulapadung Tea Estate near Tezpur.
2. Hoard of copper coins belonging to the Salatambha dynasty found at Tulip Tea Estate in Dhekiajuli.

**Structural Ruins and Sculptures**

1. Agnigarh, a rampart popularly related to king Bana’s times
2. Door-frame and other structural remains of Da-Parbatīya
3. Ruins of a stone temple with an image of Surya at Baralimara Satra
4. Ruins of a brick temple with an image of Ananta at Baralimara Satra
5. Remains at Garh dol site
6. Ruins of Haleswar Devalaya
7. Structural ruins at Henguleswar Devalaya
8. Ruins of stone temple at Naravali and Bandardeva Parvat
9. Image of Siva at Balimara Satra
10. Structural ruins at Majgoan
11. Structural and architectural relics at Cole Park
12. Harjjara Pukhuri dated to king Harjjara

13. Structural ruins at Singri

14. Bhairavi Devalaya, associated with Usha, daughter of king Bana. Some sculpted stone panels and old bricks also lie at the site.

15. At Ganesh ghat image of Ganesha with his vahana muska is carved on a rock

16. Images of Mahisamardini and Brahma at Dhekiajuli

17. Sculpted image of Ganesha at Dhenukhana Parbat

18. Tezpur Bill, associated with king Bana

19. A massive pancha-mukhalinga and its yonipitha at Ketekibari

20. Images of Manasa, Jarat Karu and Astika at Phulbari

21. Images of Bali, Tara and Angada discovered at Dhekiajuli seed farm

22. Gupteswara temple at Singri

23. Images of Brahma and Ganesha at Barpukhuripar

24. Sculptures of Vishnu avatars, Durga, Laxmi and Saraswati, Ganesha and Krishna at Chariduar

25. Mahabhairav Temple, associated with king Bana

26. Satpukhuri, associated with king Bana

27. Images of Siva and Parvati found at Dipota haat, now preserved in Tezpur District Museum

28. Bhalukpung ruins, associated with king Bana

29. Tingesvar Devalaya
30. Structural ruins at Sialmara Kachari Gaon
31. Ruins of Nagshankar temple
32. Rudrapad
33. Kanyakashrama, associated with the legendary story of Kanyaka who became river Bhairavi

(b) Historical Background:

The modern town of Tezpur dates back to ancient times when it was known as Sonitpura. The earliest reference to Sonitpura is found in the Puranas, mostly, *Vishnu Purana* (Part v, Chapter 32-33), *Vamana Purana* (Chapter 21), *Kurma Purana* (Chapter 18), *Bhagavat Purana* (Part x, Chapter 62-64), *Harivamsa* (Visnu Parvan, Chapter 116-28) and also briefly in the *Agni Purana* (Chapter 12.41-52) where the name Sonitpura occurs in relation to the kingdom ruled by a king named Bana and the Usa-Aniruddha episode. He was a great devotee of Siva and Parvati which speaks of his non Aryan origin. The Harivamsa and the Bhagavat Purana refers to the kingdom of Sonitpura which was given assurance by Lord Siva and Parvati to be always kept under their protection:

“Tatsyurasah suto banah sivabhaktiratah sada Sonitakhye pure rashye arajyam kuratpura”*8* (*Bhagavat Purana*, part X, chapter 62)

“Jathabanashya nagaring rashyate devi sarvashyah”*9* (*Harivamsa* 118/81)

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According to K.L Barua, Bana’s kingdom included the whole of modern Sonitpur, Darrang, and a part of Lakhimpur Subdivision. But the principal Puranas are silent about the location of Sonitpura. As such, scholars have divergent views regarding the identification and location of the ancient Sonitpura kingdom ruled by Bana. Early medieval works like Hemachandra’s Abhidhanachintamani (Gujrat) and Purushtama’s Trikandasesha (Bengal), both belonging to twelfth century C.E., support the identification of Sonitapura or Banapura with Kotivarsha or Devikotta. The Gupta and Pala inscriptions locate Kotivarsha in the Pundravardhana bhukti. There is also a village called Bangarh, 18 miles south of Dinajpur district. According to Anandaram Barooah, there are villages called Ushapura and Aniruddhapura in the district of Dinajpur. N.N Basu locates Sonitpura somewhere in Sind. There is thus a controversy regarding the exact location of Sonitpura. However, there is a strong local tradition along with archeological remains which undoubtedly locate Sonitpura within the modern region of Tezpur. The battle of ‘Hari-Hara’ which practically took place between Hari (Krishna) and Hara (Siva) turned the city into a pool of blood. The name Sonitpura is said to have been derived from the Assamese word ‘sunit’ or ‘tez’, meaning blood and ‘pur’ meaning city; or the ‘city of blood’. In this connection, a few references from the Kalika Purana can be quoted. In the Kalika Purana, the kingdom of Bana is said to be located on the bank of the river

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9Ibid., p.1  
10 K.L Barua, Early History of Kāmarūpa, p3  
12 R.C Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, p.320  
13 Anandaram Barooah, Ancient Geography of India, p.67  
14 N.N Basu, Social History of Kāmarūpa, I, pp. 100-103
Lauhitya, and it from there that Naraka received instructions from Bana to worship Brahma, the father of Lauhitya, at the proximity of the river Lauhitya itself:

\[ Tasmad Brahma samaradhyo vacanat tava mitraka \]

\[ Tatputrasya mahabahoh lauhityasyambusannidhau \]

\[ Bhavatadhyapitascakaham sisyotha guruna yatha \] 15

This proves that Bana’s kingdom was at the neighbourhood of the kingdom of King Naraka. Since Naraka’s capital Prāgjyotisa stands on the south bank of the river Lauhitya or the Brahmaputra, the kingdom of Sonitpura must undoubtedly be situated in the modern Tezpur region as Tezpur is located on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. King Bana is also stated to have constructed the city fort of Agnigarh, i.e., city fortified with fire-ramparts, 16 which still now stands near the river Brahmaputra at Tezpur.

\[ Narakensamah tasya mahamaitree vajayat \]

\[ Gamanagamanannityamanyonyanugrahistatha \]

\[ Tyorvud mahapritih pavananaluryatha \]

Again in the *Vishnu Purana*, reference is made to goddess “Kotavi”, the tutelary goddess of the Daityas, who stood naked before Krishna when he took up his discuss to slice off the arms of Bana. 17 According to the Bhagavat Purana, the goddess Kotavi or

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15 Chapter 39, sloka 69
16 *Kalika Purana*, Chapter 39, verse 3
17 Chapter 33, p.468
Kattari is stated to have lived somewhere in the neighbourhood of Banapur or Sonitpura.\(^{18}\) According to Late A. Agarwalla, the present Kuthari was the abode of the goddess Kotavi or Kattari.\(^ {19}\) Again in the Harivamsa, Krishna’s grandson Aniruddha tells Bana’s daughter Usa about the fulfillment of his dream of being able to see Kanyapur in reality.

\[
Adristapurvachmaya desu eyong subhadarshane
\]

\[
Nishi swapne yatha dristah sakritah kanyapure tatha\(^ {20}\)
\]

There is a hill called Kanyaka in Tezpur close to the Agnigarh and Bamuni hills. This proves that Kanyapur is in Tezpur. Sir Edward Gait also noticed a silted up tank about a mile west of Tezpur town which is ascribed to king Bana’s time. In the same neighbourhood, there was another tank named after Kumbhanda, the Prime Minister of Bana.\(^ {21}\) All these support the identification of ancient Sonitpura with the modern Tezpur region. According to local lore, Bana had his capital at Bhalukpung which is situated some sixty kilometers north of Tezpur town. From Bhalukpung he used to frequently visit his daughter at Agnigarh [see plate 15] who was kept there for attaining higher education. On his way to visit her, he constructed several Siva temples of which the temple of Mahabhairav, which still stands in the heart of the city, is the most famous.\(^ {22}\) Tezpur was also traditionally known as Saptatirtha, the implication of which is however controversial.

\(^{18}\) Chapter X (last part); Dr. Amulya Ch. Sarma, “Sonipur Through Epics And Puranas”, Cited in Dilip Kr. Saikia ed., Sonipur Through the Ages, p.352

\(^{19}\) A. Agarwalla, Avahan, Vol V, no.vii; Dr. Amulya Ch. Sarma, “Sonipur Through Epics And Puranas”, cited in Dilip Kr. Saikia ed., Sonipur Through the Ages, p.352

\(^{20}\) Harivamsa 119/71 Vishnuparva; Mahendra Nath Sastri, “Mahakabya aru Puranadir Sonitpur”, cited in Dilip Kr. Saikia ed., Sonipur Through the Ages, p.3

\(^ {21}\) E. Gait, A History of Assam, p.17

\(^ {22}\) Saharuddin Ahmed, Sonitpura: Legends and Archaeology, p.50; Bulletin of the Assam State Museum No.xvii, 2006
While some people locate Saptatirtha on the Bamuni hill, other scholars consider Saptatirtha as a conglomeration of several temples which includes Halesvar, Sukreswar, Tingesvar, Mahabhairav, Rudrapada, Bhairavpada and Bhairavi.\(^{23}\)

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**The Traditional Rulers**

The earliest known traditional ruler of Sonitpura was king Bana. According to legends, he was a contemporary and friend of king Naraka of Pragjotispura. The Puranas refer to the genealogy of king Bana of Sonitpura in the following way:\(^{24}\)

Marichi → Kashyap → Hiranyakaship → Prahlad → Virochana → Bali → Bana

King Bana is described as an *Asura* or *Daitya* in all the principal *Puranas*. This clearly indicates his non-Aryan origins. Unlike Naraka, an Aryan, who came from Mithila and established his kingdom in Pragiyotispura; Bana seems to have been an aboriginal chieftain of the land, powerful enough to establish an independent kingdom on the north bank of the river Lauhitya. The temple of Mahabhairab [see plate 3] containing a huge Shiva *linga*, existing in the heart of Tezpur town is said to be one of the monumental works of Bana. The Shiva *linga* [see plate 4] is bigger than that of the Somnath temple in Gujrat and is 3.30 metres in length and 2.30 metres in circumference at the *rudra-bhaga*. However original temple collapsed and it was re-built during the later period.\(^{25}\) The *Kalika*

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\(^{23}\) Ibid., p.50;
\(^{24}\) Bamanapurana, Chapter 21; Kurma Purana, Ch. 18; Dr. Amulya Ch. Sarma, “*Sonitpur Through Epics And Puranas*”. Cited in Dilip Kr. Saikia ed., *Sonitpur Through the Ages*, p.348
\(^{25}\) Kanak Chandra Sarma, *Tezpur Through the Ages*, p.66; Bulletin of The Assam State Museum, No. IV, 1982
Purana (dakhya jnagya, p.113) makes reference to “Devikuta” where the legs of Sati fell, which is the area comprising the Bhairavi Davalaya.\(^{26}\) In the Brahmaṇḍa Purana (ch 43), we find reference to ‘Umaban’, which was meant for meditation of the daughter of the Himalayas, Uma. There is also an old rock cut cave temple containing a Shiva linga near the mouth of Briddha Ganga, a sanskrititized name of the present river Burigang near Bishwanath Chariali. The Bishwanath cave is also considered as the monumental work of king Bana by the people of Assam. The Yogini Tantra also refers to Umaban and the Bishwanath cave.\(^{27}\) These references indicate that Bana was a true devotee of Siva, and the latter being impressed by the penance of Bana, himself became the protector of Bana’s realm. Thus we find that Lord Siva himself came to the aid of Bana against Lord Krishna in the battle of Hari-Hara.\(^{28}\)

The foremost reason for the outcome of the battle of Hari-Hara was the hostile attitude of Bana towards the courtship of Usha, the daughter of Bana with Aniruddha, the grandson of Sri Krishna. In the Vishnu Purana (ch.32) one finds, Usha being deeply moved by the carnal desire of Shiva and Durga at Banasarnagar, invoking the blessings of goddess Durga for granting her similar opportunity for enjoying conjugal life. Thus with the blessings of Durga on the twelfth lunation of the light half of Bhaishaka, Usa dreamt of Aniruddha, the son of Krisna’s son Pradyumna and she became enamored by him. With the help of her friend Chitralekha, the daughter of Bana’s minister Kubhanda, Usa seeks union with Aniruddha. Using magical powers, Chitralekha kidnaps Aniruddha from his

\(^{26}\) Kanaklata Devi, Devikute Mahabhaga, p.2
\(^{27}\) Yogini Tantra, part II, 4thPatala 9/23, Dr.Amulya Ch. Sarma, “Sonitpur Through Epics And Puranas”, cited in Dilip Kr. Saikia ed, Sonitpur Through the Ages, p. 353
\(^{28}\) Vishnu Purana, Chapter 33, pp.467-8
chamber in his sleep and brings him to Sonitpura. Meanwhile, the guards discovering Aniruddha in the inner apartment with Usha reports it to Bana. Consequently, Aniruddha is captured and bound by serpents. On hearing the news, Sri Krishna along with his army set off for the city of Bana. Thus took place the battle of ‘Hari-Hara’. In the bloody strife which took place, lord Shiva could not win over the surmounting attacks of Sri Krishna and ultimately being wearied, left the battle field. Thereupon, the thousand arms of Bana were cut off by Krishna with his Sudarsana chakra. However, because of the intervention of Lord Siva, the life of Bana was spared by Krishna. After King Bana, we have no concrete evidence to establish the rule of his immediate successors. According to local traditions, Lord Siva made Bisvajit, the son of Usa the ruler of Sonitpur. Again, Bhaluka is referred to as the grandson of Bana. However, the Puranas are silent in this regard.

Local traditional account also refers to a ruler named Nagasankar or Nagakhya, who flourished towards the end of the 4th century at Pratapgarh near Biswanath. The temple of Nagasankar built by the ruler still stands near Jamuguri and is a highly revered place of saivite worship. Four kings of this dynasty, viz., Mimang, Gajang, Sribang and Mrigang is said to have ruled for two hundred years at Lauhityapur. The Muslim sources also refer to a king named Sankal or Sankaldip who was from the country to the east of the Karatoyā or Kamārūpa and is accounted to have overthrown a ruler of Northern India called Kidar Brahmin. Other sources also refer to the same event. If Sankal may be placed in the 4th century.

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29 Ibid., Chapter 33, p.466
30 E.Gait, AHA, p.17,
century A.D, he may be identical with Nagasankara who was a feudatory of the Guptas and
might have fought with Gandhara. However this seems quite unlikely. Most probably he
was a minor chief ruling in the region.\textsuperscript{32}

**The Historical Period**

The real political history of Assam begins with the foundation of the Varman
dynasty. Though there is no direct reference to the region now associated with Tezpur, and
the capital of the Varmans was situated in the area of modern Guwahati, the northern bank
of the river Brahmaputra must have worked as a frontier outpost. The Doobi copper plate,
in describing the struggle of Supratisthitavarman and Bhaskarvarman with the Gaudas,
mentions a naval warfare where the two brothers are compared to Balarama and Achyuta
(Krishna) in their fight with Asura Bana and the elephant forces of the Gaudas are
compared with the Krauncha mountain range, associated with Bana.\textsuperscript{33} According to D.C
Sircar, the bringing in of the story of Bana in the fight against the Gaudas, in all probability
implied that the battle place was situated near the modern Tezpur region.\textsuperscript{34}

**The Varmans**

Pushyavarman is credited to have laid the foundation of the Varman dynasty in
Assam. The Doobi Copper plates of Bhaskarvarman clearly trace the lineage of

\textsuperscript{32} *Ibid*, pp.128-29  
\textsuperscript{33} Doobi grant of Bhaskaravaran,verse69, D. Sarma ed, K.S.p.158  
\textsuperscript{34} H.K Barpujari ed, *CHA*, Vol I,p.109
Pushyavaran from the line of Naraka-Bhagadatta.\textsuperscript{35} The Nidhanpur grant also supports this view.\textsuperscript{36} The Varman line of kings founded by Pushyavarman which ruled for about three hundred years is therefore also known as the Bhauma-Naraka dynasty. According to the Nidhanpur Copper Plate grant of Bhaskarvarman there was a long gap of three thousand years after Vajradatta before Pusyavarman became the ‘lord of the earth’. \textsuperscript{37} The genealogical list of the rulers as gathered from the epigraphs is given below:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Tentative Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pushyavarman</td>
<td>Middle of 4\textsuperscript{th} century C.E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samudravarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balavarman</td>
<td>5\textsuperscript{th} century C.E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalyanavarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganapativarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahendravarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narayanavarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahabhutivarman</td>
<td>6\textsuperscript{th} century C.E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandramukhavarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sthitavarman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{35} D.Sarma ed, KS, p152  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p161  
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p.161
Susthitavarman

Supratisthitavarman 7th century C.E

Bhaskaravarman

Altogether thirteen kings of this family ruled over Kāmarūpa. According to P.N Bhattacharya, Pusyavarman ruled in the middle of the 4th century C.E. and was a contemporary of the Gupta Emperor, Samudra Gupta.\(^{38}\) In the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta, Kāmarūpa was a frontier kingdom along with Samatata, Davāka, Nepal and Kartripura, whose kings owed allegiance to the Gupta rule.\(^{39}\) It is believed that the ruler of Kāmarūpa during that time was Pusyavarman. However, the allegiance to the Guptas did not have any permanent impact on the authority of Pusyavarman since the Doobi Copper Plate inscription refers to Pusyavarman as ‘overlord of Prāgjyotisa’. Also all the kings of this dynasty bore titles expressing their independent and full authority. Nevertheless, Pusyavarman in honour of this overlord named his son Samudravarman and daughter-in-law Dattadevī, after the names of the Gupta ruler and his queen.\(^{40}\) Samudravarman, son of Pusyavarman is stated to have been like the ‘fifth samudra’ (sea/ocean) and his realm was free from matsyayana (anarchy).\(^{41}\) Samudravarman was followed by his son Balavarman. The Nidhanpur grant states that “his force was invincible and his army could easily march against the enemies.”\(^{42}\) Balavarman was succeeded by his son Kalyanavarman whose reign was a peaceful one. He was followed by king

\(^{38}\) P.N Bhattacharya ed, K.S, p.13
\(^{39}\) D.C Sircar, Select Inscriptions, pp265-266, verse22
\(^{40}\) D.Sarma ed, K.S p160
\(^{41}\) Nidhanpur grant, verse8, ibid., p.162
\(^{42}\) Ibid., p.162
Ganendravarman or Ganapativarman (according to the Nalanda seal) and his son Mahendravarman. The latter is said to have been the ‘repository of all sacrificial rites’ (Nidhanpur Grant, verse 12) and he ‘conquered territories as far as the ocean’ (Doobi Grant, verse 24). It is possible that Mahendravarman extended his sway to south-east Bengal. He is also credited with the performance of two horse sacrifices.\(^{43}\) His son Narayanavarman’s reign was uneventful. Next came Mahabhitivarman. The brilliant chapter of military glory begun by Mahendravarman was further enhanced by Mahabhutivarman. According to the Barganga Rock Inscription, Bhutivarman performed an *asvamedha yajna*.\(^{44}\) It was Bhutivarman who issued the original Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription that had been destroyed by fire and later re-issued by his descendant Bhaskaravarman. He is stated to be like the sixth *Mahabhuta*.\(^{45}\) Bhutivarman was succeeded by his son Chandramukhavarman and then came Sthitavarman or Sthiravarman. The latter is said to have constructed a capital city on the holy river (Brahmaputra?) and had a host of feudatory rulers under him.\(^{46}\) Sthitavarman’s son and successor was Susthitavarman (also called Mriganka) during whose reign the Varman dynasty suffered a setback. It appears from the Aphsad Inscription of Adityasena that the Later Gupta monarch Mahasenagupta led an expedition against Kāmarūpa in which Susthitavarman was defeated. Kāmarūpa suffered territorial losses whereby Pundravardhan (northern part of Bengal) was probably ceded and the western boundary was now fixed at river Tista or

\(^{43}\text{Ibid., p.160}\)

\(^{44}\text{Ibid., p. 150}\)

\(^{45}\text{Nidhanpur grant, verse14, Ibid., p.163}\)

\(^{46}\text{S.L Barua, A Comprehensive History of Assam, p.97; Doobi Grant, verse 48-49,ibid.,p.155}\)
The Doobi Plate records that Susthitavaman died a premature death when his sons Supratisthitavarman and Bhaskarvarman were very young; perhaps by sustaining injuries in battle. Soon afterwards the Gaudas invaded Kāmarūpa again and this time carried off the two princes as prisoners. However they were later allowed to return to their own kingdom perhaps after acceptance of Gauda suzerainty. Although Supratisthitavarman was earlier crowned king, his reign was a short one and he was followed by his brother Bhaskarvarman. The rule of Bhaskarvarman formed the most glorious chapter of Varman rule in ancient Assam. As mentioned in the *Harshacharita* and the account of the Chinese pilgrim Hieun Tsang, Bhaskarvarman through his ambassador, Hamsavega, formed a diplomatic alliance with Harshavardhana the ruler of Thaneswar against Gauda. The region of Gauda must have fallen into their hands after the death of Sasanka sometime in the third decade of the 7th century C.E. The Nidhanpur Copper Plate inscription of Bhaskaravarman was issued from the victorious camp at Karnasuvarna, suggesting the defeat of the Gaudas. Another notable event of his reign was the visit of the Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang to the court of Kāmarūpa, whose account furnishes important information on the cultural history of ancient Assam in the 7th century. In all probability, Bhaskaravarman remained a bachelor throughout his life and after his death sometime in the middle of the 7th century C.E., the line of Pusyavarman came to an end.

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*The Sālastambhas*

The death of Bhaskaravarman without an heir ushered in the foundation of a new line of kings. Avantivarman, who assumed the title ‘Sālastambha’ (meaning as strong as a pillar made of the Sāl tree) became the ruler of Kāmarūpa. In the Bargaon Copper Plate Inscription of Ratnapala, a king belonging to a latter period, Sālastambha is described as “the lord of the Mlecchas” who supplanted the Bhauma-Naraka dynasty and was followed by twenty kings of his line.\(^5\) Sālastambha must have begun his rule from the middle of the 7th century C.E. and his descendents continued to rule upto the 10th century C.E. The genealogical list of rulers reconstructed from the epigraphs is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Tentative Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sālastambha</td>
<td>Middle of 7(^{th}) century C.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijaya (Vigrahastambha)</td>
<td>Later part of 7(^{th}) century C.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palaka</td>
<td>8(^{th}) century C.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumara</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vajradatta</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SriHarsha</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balavarman II</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^5\) D.Sarma ed, *K.S*, p 191
According to K.L Barua, Sālastambha must have earlier served as a governor who later taking advantage of the chaos prevailing after Bhaskara’s death raised the standard of revolt and usurped the throne of Kāmarūpa. He must have been a scion of the Bhauma-Naraka dynasty since nobles of royal blood were usually given high posts as governors in administration.\(^{51}\) This view seems correct, since in the Pasupati Temple Inscription of Nepal king Jayadeva, the daughter of Sri Harsha of the Sālastambha dynasty is referred to as ‘Bhagadattarajakula’.\(^{52}\) With the coming of Sālastambha to power, Prāgjyotisa lost its earlier importance as a capital city for the inscriptions of his successors indicate that Sālastambha transferred his capital from Prāgjyotisa to Harrupesvara, identified with modern Tezpur. Salastmbha was followed by Vijaya (Vigraha) and he in turn was succeeded by Kumara and Vajradeva (Vajradatta). Then came Harshavarman or Sri Harsha, “a king of great prowess and piety, who protected his subjects like his own

\(^{51}\) K.L Barua, *EHK*, p 67

children”. The Pasupati epigraph of the Nepal Lichchavi king Jayadeva II, while referring to his marriage with the daughter of Sri Harsha, Rajyamati describes Sri Harsha as “lord of Gauda, Odra, Kalinga, Kosala and other lands”. This indicates that the territories of Kāmarūpa expanded both towards the east and the south. Shortly after the incision of the Pasupati Inscription (737 C.E) however, Harshadeva was probably defeated and killed by Yasovarman of Kanauj. Harshadeva was succeeded by his son Balavarman II (c 730-750 C.E.). The Hayunthal Grant mentions two princes, Chakra and Arathi, who never sat on the throne. Next, came Pralambha (c800-820 C.E.) son of Arathi. Pralambha’s son and successor was Harjaravarman (c 820-835 C.E.) who assumed high sounding titles like ‘Paramesvara Paramabhattaraka Paramamahesvara Srīman’ Harjaradeva. The Harjarapukhuri [see plate 20] excavated by him which still exists near Tezpur town bear testimony to his attention to public works. During the reign of Vanamalavarman, son of Harjaravarman, the boundaries of his kingdom extended “as far as the lines of the forest near the sea-shore” The inscriptions of Vanamala also describe the beauty of the capital city at Tezpur. He is also credited with the renovation of the lofty temple of Hetuka Sulin which was in a dilapidated condition. Vanamala abdicated the throne in favour of his son Jayamalavarman, also known as Virabahu (c860-75 C.E.). The Bhagalpur Inscription of Narayanapala makes reference to Jayamala as having friendly ties with Jayapala, the brother and commander of Devapala, the Pala ruler of Bengal. He also abdicated the

53 cited in S.L Barua, ACHA, p.113; Hayunthal Grant, verse6
54 H.K Borpujari ed, CHA, Vol I, p.127
55 D.Sarma ed, K.S, p 169
56 Tezpur grant, verse17, P.N Bhattacharya ed, K.S, p.102
57 H.K Barpujari, CHA, Vol I, pp 132-33
58 P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S Introduction, pp 23-24
throne in favour of his son Balavarman III. The grant of Balavarman speaks of his prowess and glorious military conquests whereby he extirpated all his enemies.\textsuperscript{59} In his grants, Balavarman like his ancestor bears the title of ‘paramount monarch’ or ‘king of kings’. There is no account to provide us details of the immediate successors of Balavarman. The last known ruler of this dynasty is Tyagasinha (c 970-85) but no details are available regarding his reign. He died issueless and as such the people of the land selected one Brahmapala to rule over Kāmarūpa.\textsuperscript{60} This marked the end of the dynasty of Sālastambha. It is noteworthy that during the rule of the Sālastambha dynasty, the importance of Haruppesvara or modern Tezpur as a political and religious centre was established.

\textit{The Palas}

Brahmapala, who was placed on the throne of Kāmarūpa traced his descent, like the Sālastambhas, from the Bhauma-Naraka dynasty of Pusyavarman. This is evident from the Bargaon grant of Ratnapala which states that when the twenty-first king of the Sālastambha dynasty (Tyagacimha) departed without any heir, “the subjects thinking it well that a Bhauma (i.e., of Naraka’s race) should be appointed as their lord, chose Brahmapala, a kinsmen of the deceased ruler, on account of his fitness to undertake the government of his country”.\textsuperscript{61} The kings of this house had their names ending in the word Pala and as such the dynasty came to be known as the Pala dynasty. The Pala kings of Kāmarūpa were contemporaries of the Pala rulers of Bengal, but they were not related to each other and unlike the Palas of Bengal who were the followers of Buddhism, the Palas of Kāmarūpa

\textsuperscript{59} Nowgong Grant, verses 21-23; Uttarbarbil Plates, verse 22-24
\textsuperscript{60} D.Sarma ed, K.S. p. 191
\textsuperscript{61} Verse10, B.K Barua, \textit{A Cultural History of Assam}, p.37, M.M Sarma, IAA, p.161
were followers of the Brahmanical faith. There appears to have continuous hostility between the two houses for supremacy with varied fortunes on both sides. The names and tentative dates of the rulers are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Tentative Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmapala</td>
<td>Later part of 10(^{th}) century C.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratnapala</td>
<td>11(^{th}) century C.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purandarapala</td>
<td>Did not rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indrapala</td>
<td>11(^{th}) century C.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gopala</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harsapala</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharmapala</td>
<td>12(^{th}) century C.E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayapala</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samudrapala</td>
<td>13(^{th}) century C.E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No records of Brahmapala have so far been discovered, but in the inscriptions of Ratnapala, he is described as a great warrior, though simply called ‘Maharajadhiraja’.\(^{63}\) They also mention that Brahmapala married Kuladevi who was the mother of Ratnapala. In his old age, Brahmapala abdicated the throne in favour of his son, Ratnapala (c 930-980

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\(^{62}\) P.C Choudhury, *HCPA*, pp.13-14

\(^{63}\) S.LBarua, *ACHA*, p. 122
C.E.). From the Bargaon Grant of Ratnapala, it appears that he was a very powerful king of this dynasty since in his inscription; he uses the title ‘Paramesvara Paramabhattachāra Maharajadhiraja’. He shifted his capital to Durjaya (at or near Pragjiptishpur) which he fortified. The Grant also refers to his hostile relations with the powers of Gurjara, Gauda and the Deccan. The Gachtal Inscription of Gopala states that Ratnapala defeated king Rajyapala of Gauda. As Ratnapala’s son Purandarapala predeceased him, he was succeeded by his grandson Indrapala (c 980-1010 C.E.). The Gachtal Inscription of Gopala (verse 21) records that Indrapala vanquished Kalyana Chandra, son of Sri Chandra of Vanga. It also states that he established matrimonial ties with the distant Rashtrakutas. After Indrapala, his son, Gopala ascended the throne. It is important to note that Gopala retransferred the capital from Durjaya to Hadappaka (modern Tezpur) when his father Indrapala was ruling the country. The Gachtal Inscription of Gopala has been of immense help in solving the chronology and events of the dynasty of Brahmapala. Goplala’s son and successor was Harshapala. It was during his time that Pundravardhana was lost to Kāmarūpa as it was occupied by Jatavarman, a king of East Bengal. Next came Dharmapala (c 1070-1100 C.E.). He seemed to have regained some lost territories in North-Bengal and probably towards the sea in the south-west of the kingdom. According to the Puspabhadra Grant of Dharmapala, towards the later part of his reign, Dharmapala shifted his capital to ‘Kāmarūpanagara’. Jayapala, who was one of the last rulers of the house of Brahmapala, succeeded Dharmapala. His name occurs in the Silimpur Inscription.

64 P.C Choudhury, HCPA, p 13-14
65 H.K Barpujari, CHA, Vol I, p 151-52
66 S.L Barua, ACHA, p.125
67 Ibid., p. 125
in relation to a *tulapurusadāna* that he made to a Brahmana which the latter refused.\(^{68}\) He was overthrown by king Ramapala of Gauda who conquered Kāmarūpa. However he did not rule Kāmarūpa and placed Tingyadeva as his vassal. Soon after Ramapala’s death Tingyadeva revolted. Ramapala’s son and successor Kumarapala sent his minister and general Vaidyadeva to subdue the revolt. Tingyadeva was defeated and was replaced in c 1131 C.E. by Vaidyadeva, who ruled as a feudatory chief of the Palas of Bengal. Vaidyadeva ruled as a vassal of Kumarapala of Bengal but possibly after his death, Vaidyadeva freed himself from vassalage and assumed the royal title of ‘*Maharaja Paramabhattaraka Paramesvara*’ and established a Brahmana kingdom in Kāmarūpa. He ruled from his capital at Hamsakonchi in modern Kamrup district\(^{69}\) till about 1150 C.E. The Ambari Stone Slab Inscription of Samudrapala discovered in the heart of Guwahati is dated in the saka era 1154 corresponding to 1232 C.E. This indicates that Pala rule was confined to Kāmarūpa at least till the thirteenth century C.E.

The Varman, the Sālastambha and the Pala rulers were great patrons of art and architecture. The numerous structural and other ruins found in and around the region of Tezpur and in other parts of Assam are living testimony of the importance given by these rulers to building and public works. It is mainly through these archaeological remains that one can get a glance of the development of a civilized society with a well developed political structure, besides portraying the socio-economic and religious beliefs and practices of the people who lived during the period. The following chapters will try to focus on the above mentioned themes.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., p.127; Epigraphica Indica, XIII (verse22), pp.289-95  
\(^{69}\) K.L Barua, EHK, p. 127-28
The table below shows the list of archaeological sources in the region of Tezpur in chronological order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Structures</th>
<th>Sculptures</th>
<th>Inscriptions</th>
<th>Coins</th>
<th>Ramparts</th>
<th>Miscalle-nous</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5th-6th Century C.E</td>
<td>Da-Parbatia door-frame at tezpur and Da-Parbatia ruins. The site consists of the plinth of a brick structure. The general lay out consist of two dissimilar rectangles aligned in east-west direction. The bigger rectangle contains the square garbhagriha in its west end. The eastern part of the</td>
<td>At Da-Parbatia, sculptures of Garuda, attendant figures, stylized svastika, amorous couple, dancing scene with a miniature female figure holding a vina and a miniature male figure in dancing pose, dwarfish figure and figures of Ganga and Yamuna are seen.</td>
<td>At Da-Parbatia, terracotta plaques of human figures were found.</td>
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<td>7th-8th century C.E.</td>
<td>Remains of an old stone temple at Balimara Satra at Da-Parbatiya. Ruins of a brick temple at Balimara Satra of Da-Parbatiya. At Garh Dol, near Da-Parbatiya, an elevated flat area of 100 mtrs square contains ruins of brick structures.</td>
<td>At Balimara Satra, image of Surya with lotus on each hand and flanked by attendants are seen. Image of Ananta with two arms and a nine hooded serpent canopy is seen inside the manikuta at Balimara Satra.</td>
<td>At Garh Dol, a square earthen rampart is noticed surrounding the elevated flat area of 100 mtrs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Century</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>8th-9th C.E.</td>
<td>The Henguleswar Davalaya at Tezpur</td>
<td>Close to Henguleswar Devalaya at Tezpur, a door lintel with 9 kalpavrksas on its upper register and a sunken lower register having a figure of Ganesha is seen. A four-armed Siva in sthanaka attitude is noticed at Balimara Satra at Tezpur.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Close to Henguleswar Devalaya at Tezpur</td>
<td>At Tezpur, an image of Saraswati is seen as part of a broken stella.</td>
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<td>9th-10th C.E.</td>
<td>At Majgoan, near Tezpur</td>
<td>At Dhulapadu-ng Tea Estate, near Tezpur a hoard of coins have been found.</td>
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<td>At Singri, a few kilometers from Tezpur</td>
<td>The Harjjara Pukhuri has a raised embankment on all four sides. The Harjjara Pukhuri excavated by Harjjara-varman covers an area of 70 acres of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Details</td>
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<td>Tezpur, remains of old structures are seen.</td>
<td>Ruins also exist at Bangla Basti, Bhanga Mandir Gaon and Visvakarma Mandir in Singri. At Bhairavi Devalaya, ruins of old structures are noticed.</td>
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<td>At Majgoan, the dvarasakhas and dvarasirapat-tis are beautifully sculpted having images of Ganesha, Ganga, dvarapala, Nandi and Yamuna.</td>
<td>The Hayunthal Grant of Harjjara varmam was issued by Vanamala varman from the capital city of Hatappesvara or modern Tezpur. The KuruvaVahi Copper Plate grant of Harjjara-varman were issued from Hadappesvar-a. The Dighaligoan Copper Plate inscription of Harjjara-varman was issued from Hadappesvar-a. At Tulip Tea Estate, coins of the Salastambha dynasty have been found.</td>
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<td>At Cole Park, a long stone slab contains figure of a male fighting along with some dancing figures.</td>
<td>The Bali Pukhuri which is now un-traceable due to earth filling and human habitation. At Cole Park, two huge stambhas are noticed, the first is 16 sided with a kirttimukha on top; the second stambha’s upper part of the shaft is decagonal while the top is divided into three horizontal parts. A huge sirapatti is noticed at Cole.</td>
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<td>Another stone slab contains some avatars of Vishnu. A huge sirapatti</td>
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<td>Contains a small sthanaka image of Surya along with Siva and Brahma. At Ganeshghat near Tezpur, an image of Ganesha is sculpted on a rock along with his vahana. At Dhekiajuli, an image of Mahisamardini is sculpted along with her vahana-lion. An image of Brahma is also noticed. At Dhenukhan-a Parvat, near Tezpur, Inscriptions of Vanamalavar-man was issued from Hadappesvar-a. Parbatiya grant of Vanamalavarman was issued from Hadappesvar-a. The Kaliabor copper Plates were issued from Hadappesvar-a. Uttarbarbil Copper Plates were issued from the capital city of Hadappesvar-a. Park housing a miniature figure of Ganesha.</td>
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<td>10th-11th century C.E.</td>
<td>At Bamuni Pahar, near Tezpur extensive ruins of pre-Ahom temples are seen.</td>
<td>Bamuni Pahar has many sculptural ruins consisting images of Varaha, Narasimha, Surya and also dancing couple.</td>
<td>The Ulubari Copper Plates were issued by Balavarman from Hadappesvar-a. Nagaon grant was issued from Hadappesvar-a.</td>
<td>A massive Pancha-mukha Linga is noticed at Keteki-bari, near Tezpur town. Its yonipitha is at a distance from the linga and is</td>
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At Phulbari Devalaya, images of Manasa along with two figures of Jarat Karu and Astika is noticed.

At Singri, a Gajavyala was found, now kept in the Tezpur District museum.

At Tezpur District museum, image of Tara seated on a lotus and images of Buddha on the stele is seen.

Caratbari Copper Plate of Ratnapala was issued from Hadapyaka.

The Bargoan grant of Ratnapala was discovered in a village near Tezpur.

The Gachtal Copper Plates of Gopala was issued from Hadapyaka.

Ghatas, which were apparently part of temple are seen in the Tezpur District Museum.
At Tezpur District museum, images of Bali, Tara and Angada are preserved.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>12th century C.E.</th>
<th>At Singri, the Guptesvar temple is built on the ruins of an older temple.</th>
<th>At Barpukhuri par near Holesvar Devalaya in Tezpur, images of Brahma and Ganesha is noticed.</th>
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<td>At Chariduar near Tezpur, stone cut figures of Vishnu avatars, Durga and an image of Krisna with his flute is</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
At Dipotahat, near Tezpur, images of Siva and Parvati are noticed on a single stone panel. It has now been kept in the Tezpur District museum.