Chapter III

SOCIAL LIFE

Society of the Tezpur region of Assam in the pre-Ahom period was fairly similar to that of the contemporary society of north India. It was the Dharmashāstras that defined the rules and regulations to be followed in the society. The priestly class ordained the maintenance of the varnāsramadharma and the ruling class upheld its existence. There were certain social injunctions that were to be followed, especially by the lower sections in the social hierarchy. Notwithstanding these similarities, society in ancient Assam had certain peculiar traits which are not to be found in the rest of the country. Although it abided by the rules of the Dharmashāstras, it did not or for that matter could not, strictly adhere to the societal norms laid down by these law books. This was primarily due to its remote geographical location from the Ganga valley, along with the variation in the indigenous population that was characterised by tribal features that called for certain laxity in following the regulations of the Dharmashāstras. This chapter therefore, tries to look into the social life that prevailed in the society based on the archaeological remains found in the region of Tezpur, while corroborating it with other evidences found elsewhere.

The inscriptions clearly indicate that it was the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas that occupied the highest positions in the social hierarchy. Although the rulers of Assam in the
historical period were probably of non-Aryan origin, they were gradually brought under Brahmanical influence and awarded a kshatriya status. The earliest reference in this context may be cited of Naraka, the legendary founder of the Bhauma dynasty in Kāmarūpa who was given a kshatriya rank by the kesavapana ceremony at which Janaka’s priest, Gautama officiated.\(^1\) Thereupon we find all the kings of the three major dynasties that ruled Assam during the pre-Ahom period, namely the Varman, Sālastambha and Pala, tracing their descent from Naraka. It is noteworthy that although Bana is associated with Tezpur, neither the Sālastambhas nor the Palas who had their capital in the modern Tezpur region, claim their descent from king Bana. This was most probably because of the growing importance of Brahmanism and the Aryan culture that took deep roots in a society where a non-Aryan like Bana was looked down upon as being an Asura or of low origin. The Brahmanas also helped in propagating the divine theory of origin of the rulers among his subjects which in turn gained the latter reverence, submission and obedience of his subjects. The ruling family also desired a kshatriya status because it incidentally implied the ultimate control over land and resources which apparently helped in gaining political supremacy.\(^2\) In return the rulers donated vast tracts of land (agrahara grants) to the Brahmanas and in many cases with some sort of legal benefits over the donated land. Thus they became masters over the land wherein were also settled the aboriginal inhabitants of the land engaged in numerous pursuits. Epigraphs mention the presence of fishermen and potter\(^3\) and weaver communities\(^4\) adjacent to the land donated to the Brahmanas. They invariably must have paid obeisance to the learned Brahmanas and held them in high esteem. Moreover, this was probably,

\(^1\) Mignonette Momin, *Rethinking Varnasramadharma in Kāmarūpa*, in Proceedings of North East India History Association, 21\(^{st}\) session, p.11  
\(^3\) Pushpavadra grant of Dharmapala in D.Sarma ed,*KS*, pp 224-225  
\(^4\) Subhankarapataka grant, *ibid.*, p 221
in part, a royal policy to bring about cultural and political integration of the people in the kingdom.

This Brahmana-Kshatriya alliance thus helped in the maintenance of the Varnasramadharma. The rulers were expected to maintain stability in the kingdom based on this divine social order. The UttarBarbil grant (verse7) hails Bhagadatta as the champion for regulating all castes and all āśramas.\(^5\) Again Vanamala gratified the appetite of the people of all class and stages of life: prapita-samasta-varnasramad.\(^6\) This caste system was the result of the proliferation of the Aryan culture in the land mostly from the 6\(^{th}\) century C.E. if not earlier. For the Nidhanpur grant (lines 34-35) clearly states that Bhaskara was created for the proper organization of their divisions, which had become mixed up; (avakirnanavarnasrama-dharma-pravibhagaya nirmito).\(^7\) However, one cannot assume that varnasramadharma in its fullest form was prevalent in the society, especially in the context of ancient Assam. In the pre-Ahom period, Brahmanas were also seen becoming kings. Vaidyadeva, who ruled in the 12\(^{th}\) century, was in all probability a Brahmana by birth. In another instance, Himanga, the recipient of the Subhankarapataka plates was a charioteer by profession and even proficient in archery although he was the son of a Brahmana.\(^8\) Likewise, the varna appellation vaisya is unheard of and we do not find its reference in our extant sources although the inscriptions do refer to the tradesmen and the merchants. The term Sudra also comes up only once in the Deopani-Vishnu image inscription wherein it is mentioned that the Sudras, along with the twice-born classes (dvijas) and women were allowed to worship the goddess.\(^9\) Thus the society of Assam, including the Tezpur

\(^5\) M.M Sarma, IAA, p.133
\(^6\) Tezpur grant,verse30, Parbatiya plates, Line33, ibid., p.118
\(^7\) Ibid.,p.311
\(^8\) N.Lahiri, Pre-Ahom Assam, p.117, M.M Sarma, IAA,no.19,verse20
\(^9\) Ibid.,p.115, M.M Sarma, IAA,no.2.Appendix, line 3
region had two divisions – the *dvijas* and the *Sudras*. The ruling class, the Brahmanas along with a host of officials, those designated as *rajas*, *rajinis*, *rajanyakas*, *rajaputras* etc. who were the administrative officers of the state and must have also held some special rights over land and other resources belonged to the *dvija* category. The rest of the occupational groups were clubbed together as belonging to the Sudra caste.

The Brahmanas considered as the learned people were the most favored members of the society. Most probably, the early Brahmanas came from the region of Mithila and created the myth of Naraka as the founder of the kingdom of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa. However, the presence of a number of *gotras* (clans) of the Brahmanas in ancient Assam confirms their origin to an all Indian distribution pattern. All the recipients of the lands donated by the kings in the grants found till date were Brahmanas. They were well versed in the four Vedas and the *Smritishastras* and occasionally officiated at royal and personal sacrifices. The Kuruvabahi Copper Plate grant of Harjjara refers to a Brahmana named Dharesuta who a follower of the *Kanva sakha* of the *Yajurveda*. The grant was made on the day of eclipse and the sacrifice was officiated by the Brahmana himself. The Tezpur plates mention a Brahmana named Bhijjata who studied the whole of Yajurveda along with its ancillaries. The Bargaon grant of Ratnapala refers to the recipient who was a Brahmana named Devadatta, proficient in the *Kanva sakha* of the Vajasaneyi samhita of the Yaurveda. The Brahmanas were also known by their *gotras* and *pravaras* in the society. Thus in the Kuruvabahi grant, the recipient was a Brahmana who

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10 Ibid., p.121
11 D.Chutia, *Kuruvabahi (Nagaon) Copper Plate Grant of Harijaravarmadeva*, Journal of the Kāmarūpa Anusandhan Samiti,XXVI,1981-82,p.4
12 verse30, M.M Sarma, *IAA*,p.105
13 verse16, *ibid.*, p.165
belonged to the Kaundinya gotra of the Nairarua pravara.\textsuperscript{14} The Tezpur grant refers to the recipient who was a Brahmana who belonged to the Sandilya gotra.\textsuperscript{15} The Nagaon grant mentions Maladhara Bhatta, a follower of the Kanya sakha (of Vedas) who was a lamp of the Kapila gotra.\textsuperscript{16} The Gachtal plates of Gopala likewise refer to a Brahmana of the Parasara gotra named Sambhrama.\textsuperscript{17}

However the Brahmanas of ancient Assam, in spite of their social superiority, were liberal in their outlook regarding occupations and in their observance of other social laws.\textsuperscript{18} It was because of this that the recipient of the Subhankarapataka grant, though being a son of a Brahmana was a charioteer and a well acclaimed archer.\textsuperscript{19} Although the grant does not relate to the Tezpur region, the same social laws must have been applicable for the whole of ancient Assam. The Brahmanas of ancient Assam also probably showed flexibility regarding their food habits. This must have been necessitated in a place where they had to live amidst the local tribal and indigenous communities. Even today the Brahmanas of Assam are not found so orthodox in their food habits like their counterparts in the rest of the country.

Another important caste in ancient Assam was that of the astrologers (vipra/daivajnas) who determined an auspicious time for the grant of land by the rulers to the Brahmanas for

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\textsuperscript{14} D.Chutia, \textit{Kuruviabahi (Nagaon) Copper Plate Grant of Harjjaravarmadeva}, Journal of the Kāmarūpa Anusandhan Samiti,XXVI,1981-82,p.4
\textsuperscript{15} verse30, M.M Sarma, \textit{IAA},p.105
\textsuperscript{16} verse26, \textit{ibid.}, p.147
\textsuperscript{139} verse32, \textit{ibid.}, p.216
\textsuperscript{140} P.C Choudhury, \textit{HCPA}, p.313
\textsuperscript{141} M.M Sarma, \textit{IAA},no.19, verse20
\end{flushleft}
earning religious merit. Though the inscriptions found in Tezpur do not specifically refer to any astrologers their presence is indicated by references to an auspicious day for donation and sacrifices.

The large number of inscriptions issued from the Tezpur region by the Sālastambhas and the Pala rulers suggest the presence of scribes (kayasthas), writers (karanika/lekhaka) and engravers (sasayita/sekyakara/taksasa) who were employed in the service of the state but who did not form any distinct caste. Although the epigraphs prove that most of the writers were probably of the Brahmana background, it was nevertheless their professional titles that designated different grades of writers.

As can be gathered from the inscriptions, the social stratification in the society was largely based on their occupations, ties to specific localities, communities etc. The ninth century Tezpur Rock Inscription refers to the Kaivattaras as the kaivarta-nau(ku) ksi-svabhaksa-sadhani, literally meaning “eater of property in the interior of boats”, obviously referring to their occupation of fishing which was considered low, according to Brahmanaical ideology. However fishing was not sole occupation of the kaivattaras, for they also held land for agricultural purpose as is evidenced by the epigraphs belonging to a later period. The Tezpur Rock Inscription (lines 4-7) also refers to the Naurajjas who were the boatmen engaged in state service but they too had land holdings for agriculture and mooring of boats. They were not among the favored sections of the society like the Brahmanas and must have constituted the lower rungs of the social hierarchy.

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20 P. Das, A Thesis of the faculty of Arts, Gauhati University, 2002, A Study of the Archaeological Remains in the Modern City of Gauhati, p.141
21 Gauhati grant, 1.47; Puspabhadra grant, lines 51-52, M.M Sarma, JAA, p.265
Another occupational group were the potters who constituted an important section of the society. The discovery of pottery in the Tezpur region indicates their existence and importance both in the city and the adjoining rural scenario. They too were in the possession of agricultural lands as proved by the inscriptions issued elsewhere. The Puspabhadra grant (lines 47-56) of Dharmapala, while defining the boundaries of the donated land refers to the land belonging to Hadi or the potter caste. The Kanauli grant of Vaidyadeva (line 60) also refers to the land of the Kumbhakaras or the potters. Thus agriculture was the primary occupation of the people outside the city and although the people were engaged in other trades like fishing and pottery, they continued to cultivate land to supplement their earnings.

The epigraphs also mention the weavers who formed a prominent occupational group in ancient Assam. The Subhankarapataka grant refers to land that belonged to twenty-four weavers\textsuperscript{22} as well as to the land of the Orangi weavers.\textsuperscript{23} Evidently they also practiced agriculture while catering to the needs and demands of the ruling class, the Brahmaṇa recipients and the rural folk.

The remains of ancient Assam also indicate the presence of other classes engaged in various professions like the stone engraver, the artist, the ironsmith, the brick maker, the boat builder, the mason, the coppersmith, the goldsmith and the silversmith. Similarly, there were others that worked on crafts like cane-work, wood-work, leather-work etc. although it did not much cater to the demands of the market and must have been associated with the household industry. Though the volume of trade in ancient Assam was limited, none the less, the epigraphs

\textsuperscript{22} KS, p.130
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p.131
do refer to the vaniks,\textsuperscript{24} which evidently stood for a rich class of merchants. They even enjoyed a place of pride in the coronation ceremony of the rulers.\textsuperscript{25} Apparently, all of them must also have had land holdings though the epigraphs are silent in this regard. Significantly, all of them belonged to the Sudra caste. Thus our sources indicate the “relative lack of occupational specialization” in the society.\textsuperscript{26}

However, a noticeable factor is the growing inequality in the society organized on hierarchical lines. The kings are generally projected in the inscriptions as very powerful rulers, assisted by a hierarchy of officials including feudal lords and vassal kings, who also enjoyed various types of rights over land and other resources. This can be surmised from the fact that they were generally informed about the donation of a plot of land in the land grant charters. For instance, in the Nagoan Grant of Balavarman III, (lines33-38) the issue of the grant of land was made known to the citizens of the area together with the Brahmanas and officers of the district as well to the king’s subordinates and officers. The list included the raja (ruling chief), rajni (queen of the ruling chief), ranaka (lesser chief) and others associated with them like the rajanaka (minor lord), rajaputra (son of the chiefs), rajavallava (courtiers) and mahallaka-praudhika (watchmen of the harem). The ruling elites therefore naturally enjoyed a superior position in the society. The oppressive nature of the numerous taxes (as known from the epigraphs) that were imposed on the common people suggests the hardships that must have been faced by them to satisfy the royalty. In addition to this, the land grants of the period brought into existence many land-owning Brahmanas. Temples were also accorded lands for their maintenance as can be

\textsuperscript{24} Hayunthal grant, verse14; Nagaon grant, verse7; Tezpur grant, verse30
\textsuperscript{25} Hayunthal grant, verses 13-14, KS, p.92
\textsuperscript{26} N. Lahiri, Pre-Ahom Assam, p.117
known from the Tezpur grant of Vanamalavarman.\textsuperscript{27} This suggests the emergence of a landed intermediary between the king and his subjects. These landed intermediaries must have enjoyed special privileges (must be in kind and labour) from the peasants, craftsmen and artisans as they were made completely subservient to the beneficiaries of the grants. Although there is no recorded account of any suppressive activities that must have been meted out to the people in the donated lands; the fact that the landed intermediaries were like absolute masters in their own estates itself hints at the prevalence of the suppressive character of the landed intermediaries on the ordinary people.

Again, an interesting fact that comes to light from the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva, is the establishment of an alms-house for the hungry at the centre of the Hapyaca \textit{mandala} (generally identified in the modern Tezpur region) and at the vicinity of the town of Kirtipura near the temple of Madhava.\textsuperscript{28} This is a pointer to the level of poverty that existed among the ordinary people where the standards of earning a livelihood have degraded to begging. It may be possible that with the fall of the Pala dynasty in Assam, there was growing instability due to occupation by the forces of neighbouring Gauda. This must have led to large scale displacement of the people from their previous land and property and also increased the level of unemployment with the fall of royal patronage.

The epigraphs of the period also throw some light on the social laws of descent and inheritance of property. Generally the law of descent and the family inheritance was based upon patriarchy. However in the inscriptions it is generally the ruling class and the Brahmanas who have found a place within the framework of descent. It is significant to note that all the ruling

\textsuperscript{27} verse\textsuperscript{24}, M.M Sarma, \textit{IAA}, p.103
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, p.298, verses 13-14
dynasties in ancient Assam trace their descent from the legendary king Naraka who was the son of the Varaha incarnation of Vishnu and Bhumi Devi. Only after tracing their lineage from Naraka, the rulers define their subsequent filial ties. Thus Harjaravarman was the son of Sri Arathi after whom the throne was given to his son, Vanamalavarman. Likewise, king Indrapala was succeeded by his son Gopala while the latter’s son and successor was Harshapala. According to N. Lahiri, the detailed descriptions of genealogical ties given in connection for the donor kings in almost all the inscriptions shows the importance of patrilineal descent in the society.²⁹ Many a times the land grants also mention the genealogy of the recipients which is also patrilineal in nature. In the Kuruvabahi grant of Harjaravarman, the recipient was named Dharesuta, son of Bhavadeva, who again was the son of the famous Kumara belonging to the Naidaruva pravara.³⁰ The Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjaravarman describes the Brahmana Somadeva as the son of Sankarabhatta who in turn belonged to the family of Pancacula.³¹ Again in the Bargaon grant of Ratnapala, in which the land granted was situated in the Uttarakula, the recipient was a Brahmana named Viradatta.³² The inscription also records the accomplishments of his father, Sandgangadatta and his grandfather, Devadatta.

The society also considered the execution of filial responsibility a social virtue.³³ Thus the ruler’s act of dāna or donation of land to the Brahmanas for earning religious merit for his parents is generally shown as a commendable act in the inscriptions. Vanamala is credited with making a gift of a village called Haposagrama in Uttarakula for earning religious merit for his

²⁹ N. Lahiri, Pre-Ahom Assam, p.119
³⁰ D. Chutia, Kuruvabahi (Nagaon) Copper Plate Grant of Harjaravarmanadeva, Journal of the Kāmarūpa Anusandhan Samiti, XXVI,1981-82, p 4
³¹ M.M Sarma, IAA, no.7, line 7
³² Ibid., no.13, verse16ff
³³ N.Lahiri, Pre-Ahom Assam, p.119
parents in the Parbatiya Copper Plate inscription.\textsuperscript{34} Even the Tezpur Copper Plate charter of the
same king refers to the grant of the village of Avisuravataka to the west of the Trisrota for the
merit of the donor’s parents.\textsuperscript{35} The Uttar Barbil Plates of his successor Balavarman III also
records the grant of land to a Brahmana for the merit of his parents.\textsuperscript{36}

The inscriptions are generally silent regarding the laws of inheritance of property
amongst the common people. However the occupation of the throne, in most cases by the eldest
son may signify that the same norm was practiced in the society by the common people
regarding inheritance of property. Family ties also seem to be quite strong as the evidence of
joint ownership of property is also not unknown. A good example of the joint family system is
found in the Parbatiya Copper Plate inscription of Vanamalavarman,\textsuperscript{37} according to which, the
four brothers, Cudamani, Detobha, Garga and Sambhu lived together out of fear for the loss of
their \textit{dharma}. Significantly, in the Dighaligaon Copper Plate grant of the same ruler, the
recipients of the charter are Bhatta Gallahara, his brother Bhatta Gayahara, his brother Payohara,
his brother Balahara, Canamana and Katyayana, who also appears to be the brothers of
Balahara.\textsuperscript{38}

Regarding the position of women in the society the inscriptions are generally silent.
However, whatever little that can be extracted from the epigraphic evidences, one finds that there
was gender discrimination in the society. Loyalty towards her husband and procuring good sons
seemed to be the ultimate objective of a woman’s life. The Parbatiya plates mention queen Amba

\textsuperscript{34} Lines 48-51, M.M Sarma, \textit{IAA}, p.124
\textsuperscript{35} verse32-33, \textit{ibid.}, p.105
\textsuperscript{36} verse30, \textit{ibid.}, p.136
\textsuperscript{37} verse27, \textit{ibid.}, p.124
\textsuperscript{38} D. Chutia, \textit{Dighaligaon Copper Plates of Maharajadhiraja Sri Vanamalavarmadeva}, Journal of the Assam
from whom, “like fire produced from arani (i.e., the fire-producing wood), the king begot from her an illustrious son” named Balavarman.\textsuperscript{39} The same grant also describes the wife of a Brahmana as being pure like the Soma-creeper, devoted to the husband like the wife of Vasistha, mother of a great progeny like Saci, the beloved of Indra and was like the earth in respect of patience.\textsuperscript{40} Most of the records refer to the fine qualities of the head and heart of the queens and in some cases, of the Brahmana ladies only. The epigraphs do not at all refer to the qualities of the women of the general common people. Harjara’s mother Jivadevi is compared with \textit{Kunti} and \textit{Subhadra}; “she was like the morning twilight worshipped by many and was also the source of great spiritual fame”.\textsuperscript{41} Likewise, Gopala’s wife Nayana was a queen of wide renown.\textsuperscript{42} Again, the Subhankarapataka grant (verses 11-19) praises Ratna, the wife of Harsapala and the Brahmana lady, Pauka for their acts of charity and piety and even compares them with Parvati. It is likely that the women of the royal families had some sort of education along with knowledge of some allied arts. These references apart, women in general were equated with the Sudras as can be understood from the Deopani Visnu Image inscription.\textsuperscript{43} The use of improved methods of cultivation dependent on drainage technology and the use of iron tools made the agrarian society predominantly male-oriented which indirectly marginalized the role of women in the society.\textsuperscript{44} We find the land grants of the Sālastambha and the Pala kings mentioning the \textit{rajinis}, next only to the \textit{rajas}, in the list of important people who were informed about the land transfer. This meant that they had some rights over the land like their male counterparts. But in reality, it may just have been a customary honor showered on them, being the consort of the \textit{rajas}. There is no

\textsuperscript{39} verse19, M.M Sarma, \textit{IAA}, p. 134
\textsuperscript{40} verse28, \textit{ibid.}, pp.135-36
\textsuperscript{41} Hayunthal grant, v II; Tezpur grant, verse10; Parbatiya Plates, v12
\textsuperscript{42} Puspabhadra grant, verse5
\textsuperscript{44} Mignonette Momin, \textit{Rethinking Varnasramadharma in Kāmarūpa}, in Proceedings of the NEIHA,21\textsuperscript{st} session,p.15
doubt that the there was all-round security in the kingdom because of which we find the inscriptions mentioning that the women even bathed in the open without any fear of their modesty being threatened. But these very inscriptions indicate that women were looked down upon as another object of indulgence. The Tezpur grant of Vanamalavarman records the gift of devadāsis (temple dancers) to the temple of Hetukasulin. This institution is nothing but a kind of sacred prostitution in one form or the other. The same grant also refers to the prostitutes or veśyās. The Nagaon grant refers to a mahallakapraudhika among the high functionaries of the state. According to M.M Sarma, the title denoted one who was in charge of the royal harem. This could mean that the kings had many wives and concubines for which personnel had to be appointed for the maintenance of the royal harem. Again, the Bargaon grant of Ratnapala also refers to town women and the existence of courtesans. Even the sculptures from Tezpur and other parts of Assam depict women mostly as courtesans, musicians, dancers, chowrie-bearers and attendants. Thus all things considered, the prevalence of a patriarchal mindset in the society led to the general subordination of women in various spheres of life in the pre-Ahom society.

The archaeological remains of Tezpur are also very helpful in successfully depicting the type of dress and ornaments used by the people in ancient Assam. However the icons of gods and goddesses are sculpted strictly according to canonical norms and cannot be regarded as a true depiction of the contemporary society. It is the sculptures that depict secular themes, though fewer in number, from where a lot of information regarding costumes and ornaments can be gathered.

45 Tezpur grant, lines 13-14; Parbatiya grant, lines 33-47
46 verse24,M.M Sarma, IAA ,p.103
47 lines-14-20
48 line-37
49 IAA,p.149
50 lines 40-43, ibid., p.164
Normally as it appears from the sculptures, the men wore a dhoti like lower garment called the *paridhana* which was fastened to the waist by a *parivesa*. As is depicted in most of the sculptures found in Tezpur, the garment is usually transparent with the folds of the dress hanging loosely in front above the knee. The male sculptures were devoid of any upper garments. Generally the men have been depicted with headdresses. However in some cases, like the terracotta figure of a yogi at Da – Parbatiya the coiffure is represented as a *jatadhari*. The women are represented as using two garments – upper and lower. They wore a long flowing garment on the upper part of their body called *uttariya*. The lower garment is fastened from the waist by a *nivibandha*. The hair is usually depicted in a bun or hanging loose. Even the icons are similarly clad. For example, the sculptures of the door frame at Da-Parbatiya where the deities and the attendants are seen wearing transparent draperies with floral bands on their heads and waist. Here the hair of the goddesses is finely dressed into a bun.

The icons as well as the ordinary men and womenfolk are adorned with a variety of ornaments. The icons are generally depicted with a halo. Sometimes male icons are depicted using crowns. The use of beautiful headdresses by the womenfolk is also not unknown. However the display of ornaments in the sculptures of the ordinary people and the icons are similar. They are adorned with ear-rings (*kundalas*), bangles, armlets, waistbands, anklets (*nupuras*), bracelets as well as bead necklaces.

The epigraphic records also provide a few references about ornaments and articles of luxury used by the people in the pre-Ahom period. The grants of Vanamalavarman refer to *kundalas*, *nupuras* and *kinkini* with attached small bells worn by the women folk.51 The use of

51 Tezpur grant, lines 14-20; Parbatiya grant, lines 33-47
different types of ornaments (*nana-bharana-sobhitapratakavyava*) by the public women is also mentioned along with the use of *camara* (*camara-dhaini*) in the Tezpur grant.\textsuperscript{52}

Use of perfumes, scented oils and cosmetics was also in vogue as can be gathered from the inscriptions. The capital city, Hadupesvara had an abundance of *agaru* and sandal wood trees in its vicinity where musk deer roamed about freely.\textsuperscript{53} Women also used scented oil and anointed their breasts with kasturi or musk before taking their bath in the river Lauhitya.\textsuperscript{54} The Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva also refers to sandals with leather straps\textsuperscript{55} which formed another object of luxury. Epigraphs also refer to *abhoga* or the umbrella which must have been used at least by the elite class in the society.

Dance and music seemed to have been the favorite past-time of the people. A lot of the secular sculptures found in the Tezpur region portray women in dancing scenes while the men are usually depicted playing on musical instruments. A long stone slab at Cole Park bears beautiful dancing scenes divided in parts by pilasters or *laghu-stambhas*. The men are seen playing numerous musical instruments like the flute, *dundhubi*, cymbals and the *vina* while the women merrily dance by their side [see plate 26]. In the ruins of the Bamuni hill, dancing figure of a male and a female dancing side by side is depicted. The same stone slab at Cole Park mentioned above, has a male figure fighting with a lion. Thus hunting must have been another favorite past-time sport practiced by the people. Weapons like the bow and arrow and the mace (*gada*) must have been used for hunting and also to fight against enemies. An inscribed stone panel at the Tezpur District Museum belonging to the 10\textsuperscript{th}-11\textsuperscript{th} century depicts male figures,

\textsuperscript{52} H.K Borpujari, *CHA*, Vol I,p.230  
\textsuperscript{53} Tezpur grant of Vanamala,lines 6-10, M.M Sarma, *IAA*, p.104  
\textsuperscript{54} Tezpur grant of Vanamala,lines 13-14, *ibid.*, p 104  
\textsuperscript{55}*ibid.*,p.296, verse3
divided into two groups; two men are shown attacking some people with a mace. Another stone panel of the same period depicts a figure holding bow and arrow and fighting against the enemies.

The large number of ancient ruins of temples and sculptures of gods and goddesses is a pointer to the religious fervor of the people. It is interesting to note that sculptures of numerous gods, both big and small, like Siva, Visnu along with his avatars, Saraswati, Ganesh, Brahma etc. and also sculptures belonging to the Buddhist pantheon are found in Tezpur. This indicates that there was religious harmony in the society and people could follow any pantheon they chose or perhaps even both.

In conclusion, it can be said that the society was a mosaic of different tribes and communities, co-existing in harmony as the epigraphs do not refer to any strife among the different classes or castes. The political structure of the state was monarchical where the king ruled with the help of his officials and had supreme control over the state land and resources. He was to rule according to dharma or the law of the land. The Brahmanas were the supporters of the royal legacy and helped the rulers by bringing about political and cultural unification with the help of Aryanisation. The ruling class and the Brahmanas thus occupied the highest rank in the social hierarchy. The rest of the occupational classes were termed as the Sudras. However, there seemed to be lack of any social taboo regarding the practice of most professions in Assam. One cannot also find strict caste-based discrimination like untouchability, so common in many parts of the country. Nevertheless, inequality prevailed in the society which was hierarchically organized. Women, in general, seemed to have played second fiddle to men, in a male oriented
society. On the whole, the remains of the period depict a picture of a vibrant society engaged in a variety of activities related to peace and war.