CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT ASSAM

4.1. Varṇasramadharma and ancient Assam:

Ancient Assam was like a highway through which passes from the main land of India on the one hand and South East Asia on the other, different ethnic groups viz. Austric, Mongolian, Dravidian and Aryan at different intervals of time and settled in this region. As a result, in this region we find amalgamation of various peoples, who speak different languages, have different social structure, cultural patterns, and religious beliefs and are of different ethnic make ups.¹

When and how the Aryans entered Assam from the west is difficult to say. The Satapatha Brahmana (IV.1) preserves tradition of the migration of the Aryans to the east of the river Sadānirā. The river Sadānirā is identified with the river Gaṇḍakī, the modern Gunduck which falls into the Ganges, opposite to Patna and was the eastern boundary of Videha². The story has been dated by Kosambi in the middle of the first millennium B.C.³ Prof. R.S. Sharma dates the advent of the Brahmans in the fifth century A.D. in 'North Bengal and Assam⁴. With the migration of the

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2. M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P. 0.2.
Brahmanas Aryan culture also gets introduced in these regions. The most important features of the Aryan society was the Varnasramadharma.

Varnasramadharma traces its origin from a late hymn of the Rgveda, known as the Purusa-sukta, (Rgveda, X) "The Brahma was his mouth, the Rajanya was his arms, the Vaisya was his thighs and the Sudra sprang from his feet". The belief gradually gained ground that the Brahmanas, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras issued respectively from the mouth, arms, thigh and feet of the creator. It corresponded to occupational association and status by birth i.e. Brahmanas as priests, Ksatriyas as warriors, Vaisyas as producers or traders and Sudras as performers of manual labour in descending order. Side by side with the Varna system sprang up the order of the four asramas, known as Brahmacharya, Grhastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. These represented the life of the student, of the householder, of the ascetic and of the hermit respectively. P.V. Kane opines that the theory of Varna dealt with man as a member of the Aryan society and laid down what his rights, functions, privileges, responsibilities and duties as a member of the society.

D.D. Kosambi opines that the pastoral economy of the Aryans and primitive agricultural economy of the non-Aryans were subjected to a qualitative transformation when the iron plough was introduced to bring about agricultural revolution. R.S. Sharma has shown that this agricultural revolution transformed the tribal, pastoral, almost egalitarian Vedic society in a full fledged agricultural

5. R.C. Majumdar, Ancient India, PP. 48 - 49.
and class divided social order. The nature of happening that took place in the Gaṅga valley is described by Dr. R.S. Sharma. He stated that in the mid-Gaṅga valley, mainly in the forest zone, when cleared with the iron made axe and was thrown open for the action of iron made plough the area became open for the settlement of people. With the help of the iron ploughshare and other tools peasants produced a good deal more than what they needed for their subsistence. Tribal chiefs and others who had grabbed large stretches of land needed of good number of slaves and hired labours, even small peasants needed occasional service in their field. For enjoying the surplus products by the peasants and artisans, hired labourers and agricultural slaves came in to being and the Varṇa mechanism was devised. According to it members of the three higher Varṇas or their social orders were distinguished ritually from those of the fourth Varṇa. The higher classes distinguished themselves from the Sudra by qualifying for Vedic studies and the investiture of the sacred thread after the Upanayana ceremony and claims the dvijas. The fourth Varṇa or the Sudras were excluded from it. Since both priests and warriors lived on taxes, tributes, tithes and labour supplied by peasants and artisans, it is repeatedly emphasised in ancient texts that they can thrive and rule the world only if they co-operate with one another. The Varṇaśramadharma created the idealistic atmosphere by supplying the land-labour force.

Varnāśramadharma, was afflicted with a deep social crisis around the third century A.D. which is clearly reflected in the descriptions of the Kaliage in the

Purāṇas of the third century and fourth centuries A.D. The Kaliage is characterised by Varna-Samkara, i.e. intermixture of Varṇas or social orders, and it made the functioning of the state and society difficult. To cope with the situation the practice of the granting revenues or land in lieu of services rendered to the state was adopted by the rulers on a very wide scale. The practice was extended to both settled and backward areas.

In the backward and aboriginal areas the grants of land to Brāhmaṇas and others led to the spread of iron plough agriculture. In tribal dominated areas where all the members of the community practiced agriculture and crafts as essential components their livelihood, and trade becoming less important as an economic activity causing difficulty in introducing Varṇasramadharma based on their functions and birth. In an expanding agrarian economy their service was essential in agriculture and craft. The Brāhmaṇa lawgivers categorised all ordinary agriculturists and artisans as Sudras, accorded most of them a peasant status. Traditional agriculture and cattle rearing were the specific duties of the Vaisya Varna. The land grants depreciated the position of independent Vaisya peasants as it developed a hierarchy of intermediaries deriving their income from land tilled by the primary producers. The ruling class developed contempt towards manual labour and exploited the classes engaged thus. This was reflected in the social degradation of the peasant communities of the Vaisya Varna and their approximation to Sudras found in the Smṛti literature. S. Jaiswal pointed out that from the beginning of the Christian era,

the Vaiśya turned to regard trade and commerce as the distinctive occupation. The original Varṇa duty on agriculture was no longer associated with the Vaiśya who was now looked upon chiefly as a trader. Thus by the Gupta period Sudras have become peasants and the Vaiśya became traders respectively 10.

The migration of the Brāhmaṇas towards the east and south during the time of the Guptas and the post Gupta period proliferated the caste system at a fast rate. There was no mass migration of the Vedic Viṣ and the Aryan population to these regions. Brāhmaṇas migrated as teachers and 'enlightened land owners' whose migration appears to have taken place after the general decline of trade. The decline of trade gave rise to a new economy in which local needs were satisfied locally. Therefore the Vaiśya Varṇa did not emerge in these areas. According to R.S. Sharma for more than three centuries this formation was characterised by lesser trade, decline of towns and the resultant lack of social and spatial mobility except in the case of princes, priests and warriors 11. The Brāhmaṇa law givers also created a conception of Varṇa-Saṃkara or mixed castes to absorb the large numbers of tribal people in to the Varṇa system. The device of anuloma and pratiloma was adopted to rank hierarchically the non-Brāhmaṇa and to rationalise and explain ideologically the steep gradations of caste status among them 12.

It is significant that in the Varṇa-Saṃkara theory, the impurity of castes doesnot arise from the adoption of low professions, but those who born of impure

births are condemned to follow occupations of low status-value. In the four Varṇa theory the higher rank enjoys greater accessibility to non-polluting occupations and 'power' and status. Thus the theory of purity and pollution arising from birth through approved or disapproved unions further affirms the basic principles inherent in the Varṇa system by denying access to the so-called impure castes. The elaboration of the Varṇa scheme with accent on birth rather than on function was made with a view to providing ideological support to the Varna-Samkara or mixed castes to the cause of social stratification\textsuperscript{13}. Thus, during this period the main contradiction was no longer between the 'twice born' and the 'once born', but between those castes which were created out of approved male and female unions and those (which originated) from disapproved unions\textsuperscript{14}. In the former category were included not only the four principal Varṇas but all those non Brahmāna castes of high social status which were described as sat-sūdras or uttama-samkaras. A distinction between the aniravasita and niravasita sūdra appears in the time of Panini also. By the former he means Sūdras who were out caste or with whom no social intercourse was ever possible and who remained outside the Vedic society by following some mean occupations and were of impure habits (Panini, II. 4.10), such as the Chandālas. By Aniravasita Sūdra, Panini means Sūdras who remained in regular contact with the upper castes, attending to their services and who were pure in habits and character. They were foreigners settled in India and occupational groups. Thus by introducing

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., P.165.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., P. 163.
the Varna-Dharma simultaneously, the ideologues recognised the prevailing tribal
and local customs and primitive lore as Jati-Dharma where by each clan, guild,
caste or locality was entitled to be governed by its own laws which operated within
the larger context of Varna-Dharma. Thus the Brahmaṇa law givers absorbed a large
number of tribal people within the orthodox fold to grow up horizontally. They
were never allowed to rise vertically in the Varna system.15

S. Jaiswal discussed the non-emergence of the Kṣatriya Varna in the eastern
region. According to him there was no local conquering elite in this region which
might seek to preserve its identity through putative Kṣatriya status by forging kinship
relations horizontally with widespread marriage networks. He opined that this
period witnessed a change of occupation not only in the other Varṇas but also in
the individual members of the Brahmaṇa Varna who took up other respectable
occupations. Therefore with a fear of break down of the Varna system they
recognised local tribal chiefs as having Kṣatriya status vertically.16 Thus in the
post Gupta India the concept Brahma-Kṣatra appears among ruling families of
priestly origin.17 Apparently, members of the ruling dynasties preferred a Kṣatriya
status because it signified connection with the control of land, the ultimate source
of political power. The concept under lying the change from a tribal social
formation to a state with more territorial ambitions and wide ranging obligations
cutting across tribal loyalties based on kinship. In short they sought to define

15. G.S. Ghurye, Caste and Race in India, PP. 2-25.
their superior social position vis-a-vis the growing social, economic and legal disparities, on the line of the Dharmasātras. The Brahmana law givers declared that kings were born to uphold Varnāsramadharma, by using their coercive authority if required.

With this background the working of the concept of Varnāsramadharma in ancient Assam may be studied.

The formation of the monarchical institution in ancient Assam is mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta (c. 350 A.D.). Pusyavarman, the founder of the Varman dynasty is accepted as the contemporary of Samudragupta. He is referred to as Pragyotishendra in the seal attached to the Dubi Copperplate Grant of Bhāskaravarman. Active economic forces behind this process of state formation can be inferred from Kauṭilya's Arthasāstra, the Periplus of the Erythraean-Sea, Ptolemy's Geography and other literary sources. But it has been pointed out by scholars that "the process of state started only when it had, to a considerable extent, moved from, shifting to permanent cultivation... because a quantum of surplus was necessary to maintain even a rudimentary state apparatus".¹⁸

The Nagajāra-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Stone Inscription records the donation of an agrahārakṣetra named Gaurīvataka by King Vasundharavarman where names of two village officials e.g. Mahattara Brahmadutta and Vaji also appeared. Mahattara Brahmadutta might have been a Brāhmaṇa, who perhaps received the donated land for a specific purpose.¹⁹ It indicates that Vasundharavarman initiated

the agrahāra policy to settle Brāhmaṇas on the fertile region on the bank of the Dibru river. Agrahārakṣetra was a rent free land given to the Brāhmaṇas. V.B. Mishra has stated that the area of agrahārakṣetra was more or less of the size of a 'Tehsil' that used to be constituted of some villages. Besides the general meaning of its root the original meaning is very important to us. Etymologically it has originated from the root 'hr' meaning to 'snatch', at first is "agrahāra.". So "agrahārakṣetra" is that type of land which Brāhmaṇas occupied first time after their arrival. Those who were pioneer in the expansion of agriculture by ploughing received the right of enjoyment of the area free from any revenue payment. The Umācal Rock Inscription refers to the establishment of a cave temple for the worship of Balabhadravāmin, the holder of plough by Surendravarman, identified with Mahendravarman of the Varman dynasty who reigned around the fifth century A.D. The inscription indicates the emphasis on wetrice cultivation at the state level in ancient Assam. Varman dynasty expanded their territory in the east up to the Kapili valley and in the South-East up to Sylhet during the time of Bhūtivarman and agrarian expansion has taken a concrete shape.

The expansion of agriculture has taken shape in this region after many centuries later than it was in the west. Therefore the description of R.S. Sharma who stated of established agricultural society is not wholly relevant to us. The Nidhanpur Grant referred to the principle of Bhūmichidranyaya (i.e. the maxim of

virgin land brought under cultivation for the first time). R.S. Sharma had a different opinion regarding donation of land as per Bhūmichidranyāya. He stated that by Bhūmichidra, Aprohata, Khila etc. although it meant the uncultivated land and for bringing those under cultivation, the principle of revenue free land was made in vogue but in later period this principle was not rigid as the cultivated land and prosperous villages were also donated. He stated that the principle of Bhūmichidranyāya was applicable in general sense to bring uncultivated land under cultivation and this process got extended to new areas and new settlement. Thus the description of R.S. Sharma is equally relevant in new agricultural idealism. As the Brāhmaṇas never tilled the land they had to play tricks to utilise the labour force to utilise their acquired land. In this case also the Varnasramadharma created the idealistic atmosphere for the utilisation of land and labour force. Royal protection to preserve the system was essential for the Brāhmaṇas.

The Nidhanpur Grant informs us the development of caste society in this region. The grant states that after hundred years the revenue free land became liable to tax which indicates that within this hundred years definitely there was considerable change in Mayūrasālmalāgraharakṣetra. Within these period the virgin land turned to a fertile rice producing rich agricultural land. The extent of transformation of the land into a source of wealth is evident from the Nidhanpur Grant. The division of land in the grant was made carefully. Boundary determiner

(Snnapradata) was mentioned who was a royal officer. To implement the royal order as recorded in the inscription the concerned royal officers and the village head men enthrust with were made responsible. In the description of boundary even fig tree, the hole of Kumbhakāra (potter) were referred in details. Changing of river course and the dried river track (recorded as Gaṅginīka) were also referred to in the inscription. Dr. N.N. Acharyya has referred that to make a land document faultless all the factors those are presently considered are available in the Nidhanpur Grant. These were - composer, writer, inscriber, boundary demarcator, dispute-settler, clerk, lawyer, treasurer, revenue collector, full identity of donor and donee, office of registration, witness, purpose and effectivity of registration of land document, right of progenitor, revenue, direction to future ruler and religious sanction of the concerned matter.

It shows that Bhāskaravarman had a well-organised Revenue Department for keeping records of land, its periodical survey and inspection. Thus Mayūrasālmālagrāhāra of Pundravardhana area became an prosperous economic zone and revenue department of Bhāskaravarman also aware of the fact.

The Nidhanpur Grant also hints the formation of the Brahmanical culture based on rural society in the Mayurasalmalagrahara ksetra. The Nidhanpur Grant refers to the names of the donee with their Vedas, gotras and pravaras. There were references to stone engraver Kaliya, clerck, potter, writer, a number of royal officers and Vyavahāri Khāsoka. The term Vyavahāri was translated as one issuing officer.

Vyavahārī Khāsoka was referred to at the time of determining the boundary of the donated land adjacent to the boundary of another plot of donated land. M.M. Sharma translated the word to be tradesman. It is noteworthy that the Khāsīs acquired the natural expertise to work with metal. Except these two non-Brahmanic names the grant is silent about other non-Aryan people or the labourer of the agricultural field. But in tribally dominated areas all the members of the community practiced agriculture and craft as essential components of their livelihood. When they came in to contact with superior Aryan culture the Brāhmaṇa law givers accepted them as Śūdras. They sought to differentiate between various social groups based on their occupation to specific localities, communities etc. The Nidhanpur Grant pointed out this gradual proliferation of social groups based on their professions and occupations.

To examine the society referred to the Nidhanpur Grant the nature of the original Brāhmaṇas also needs explanation here. Many historians expressed that the Brāhmaṇas whom we find in the inscription could not maintain their stature as Brāhmaṇa in later period. The title of the Brāhmaṇas in the Nidhanpur Grant were Deva, Sarma and Svāmin. In the Nidhanpur Grant P.N. Bhattacharya noticed that the Brāhmaṇas who received donated land were having a middle title. These are Vasu, Ghoṣa, Nandi, Mitra, Nag, Som, Pal, Palita, Das and Dutta. These titles were prevalent in non-Brahmanic society of Bengal. He noticed that these Brāhmaṇas were

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mainly Nāgara Brāhmaṇa of Gujrat, a special caste based society. It is presumed that Kangra valley was the original home of these Nāgara-Brāhmaṇas at Nāgarī-Karsukh area. From this area they migrated to Nāgarkot of Gujrat (Kāthiāwaḍ) where they settled since 2nd century A.D. Their main deity is Ḥatakesvara Siva. In some of the copperplates of western India Vasu, Dam, Palit, Ghoṣh etc. titled Brāhmaṇas are having references. According to Bhandarkar one of the groups of these Brāhmaṇas settled in Pañcakhandā on having landgrant from Bhutivaran. P.C. Choudhury has stated that long before the Vedic Aryans, Alpine Aryans entered in Western India and these Brāhmaṇas are all but the descendants of these Alpine Aryans. The statement of P.C. Choudhury was based on the theory of R.P. Chanda.28 Dr. Grierson nominated this theory as Outer Aryan and Inner Aryan.29

According to R.P. Chanda from cultural and anthropological stand point the Aryans in India can be divided in to two groups - Inner Aryan group and Outer Aryan group. Maharashtra, Orissa, Bengal, Assam and some portion of Gujrat belong to Outer Aryan group. Hindi and other allied linguistic groups belong to Inner Aryan circle. As per R.P. Chanda in India too two waves of Aryans entered, one Alpo-Dinarian and the other is Nordic. The very basic difference between the Nordic and the Alpines are that the first ones are Vaidic and the latter ones are non-Vedic. According to him as they belong to the non-Vedic culture they are told as 'Vratya'.

29. Grierson, L.S.I, 1, 1, PP. 116f.
But the Brahmanas of the Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant referred to their Vedic language in all forms of gotra-pravara, including Veda, vedasākha. Therefore the theory of P.C. Choudhury needs further investigation.

H.D. Sankalia, the reputed historian of Gujrat did not accept the Nāgara Brahmana theory of Dr. Bhandarkar. He stated with reference to the Vallabhi Copperplate Inscription that the suffixes of the Vallabhi Copperplate exhibit rich varieties, some even completely Ksatriya like viz. Varma and he refused to accept that the suffixes were Nāgar Brahmana. Sankalia refused to consider the middle titles which frequently occur in the names of the Gujrat Brahmanas as hereditary rather personal names. It is important to mention here that the existence of such titles are evident in contemporary or previous or later royal land grant inscriptions of Assam and its neighboring states. The Pascimbhag Copperplate Inscription refers to such middle title holder Brahmanas who has been given land grant by the Buddhist king of East Bengal in the Southern portion of Śrīhatta. The earliest of this type middle title holder Brahmanas noticed in Pundravardhana where we get two names viz, Amaradutta and Mahasenadutta who received land grants. All these references indicate a wave of migration of people who definitely contains the marks of a tribe. Therefore Sankalia's suggestion is not relevant to the Brahmanas of the Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant.

But Sankalia suggests that most of the names of Brahmanas were Nakshatra names, but names of the personal deities like Viṣṇu and Śiva were also current.

30. H.D. Sankalia, Aspect of Indian History of Archaeology, P. 15.
which is prevalent in the Viṣṇu-Puranā. Likewise, besides the orthodox suffixes, Brāhmaṇas had begun to append non-Brāhmaṇa suffixes to their names. Both these practices indicate almost complete non-observance of the rules laid down even in the latest Grhya-Sutras and literal interpretation of the vague rules prescribed by Manu. Thus, in alienation of the rules of 'Grhya-Sutra' and 'Manu-Samhita' one of the groups of the Brāhmaṇas of Gujrat used the Nakṣatra names and un-Brāhmanical titles along with the names of Siva and Viṣṇu or similar worshipped god names. The Brāhmaṇas of the Nidhanpur Grant also used and followed the same tradition in naming their own themselves.

The migration of the Brāhmaṇas from Gujrat to this eastern part of land can be inferred from the Khalimpur Inscription of Dharmapāla. According to the grant Mahāsāṁanta Sri Nārayanavarṇa donated land to Brāhmaṇas for Viṣṇu temple and these Brāhmaṇas belonged to 'Latadesa'. Sankalia has determined the area of 'Latadesa' which comprised the Mahi in the north and the river Daman in the south or the districts of Kheda, Bharuch and Surat and parts of Thana district, which may be said to be Bhṛgukaccha of Western coast and the Kathiawad area of Gujrat. This inscription is a proof of the far and wide movement of the Brāhmaṇas of Gujrat. It was more possible that the first settlement of these Brāhmaṇas was in North Bihar and North Bengal where from their movement came to further east. The descendants of the donees of the Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant traces their origin from Mithila.

The Brāhmaṇas of Assam today follow the Mithila School of law, such as

32. Rajabali Pandey, Historical and Literary Inscriptions, PP. 235-40.
inheritance, gift, will and marriage. P.N. Bhattacharya referring a book Vaidic Samabādini states that five Brahmaṇas of five different gotras were invited by Tripurārāja to perform a Yajña. The meeting place of these five Brahmaṇas was called Paṇcakhaṇḍa. The names of these five gotras were Vatsa, Vatsya, Bhāradvāja, Kṛṣṇatreyā and Parasara. These Brahmaṇas were very much impressed with the sacred beauty of Paṇcakhaṇḍa and they later called another five Brahmaṇas of different gotras to settle in the same place. They were of Katyāyana, Kasyapa, Maudgalya, Subharnakausika and Gautama. These ten gotras of Brahmaṇas established their various Vedic and traditional rites at Śrīhatta and became famous as Vaidic or Sampradāyika Brahmaṇas. Seven gotras out of ten are referred to in the Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant. Other three gotras viz, Vatsya, Parasara and Subarnakausika are referred to as Vatsya, Parasarya and Kausika.

K.K. Gupta discussed the topic in details. According to him the Vaidic Samabādini refers to two land grant copperplates by Tripurārājas, one in the 7th century A.D. and the other in the 12th century A.D. K.K. Gupta has presumed that the land grants by the Tripurārājas referred to in the Vaidic Samabādini was actually the Nidhanpur Copperplate and Paschimbhag Copperplate. The location of donated land, the time gap between the two and in many other matters there are similarities between the accounts of 'Samabādini' book and the above mentioned copperplates.

Thus the Brahmaṇas referred to the Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant were

36. Ibid.
Nāgara Brahmānas coming from Gujrat. These Brahmānas came with a new methodology of agriculture in ploughing and irrigation. This system of production itself changes the very nature of local economy, social system and the governmental structure. Today it is fairly well accepted that the word ‘Aryan’ refers not to a race but to Sanskrit speaking people. Therefore, the Brahmānas who came during Bhūtivarman’s reign to this area, their claim of being Aryan was culture based but not on purity of blood. The Brahmānas were very conscious of their Vedic origin which reflected in the Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant. Therefore it may be accepted that some Brahma families in later period adopted other respectable occupations and thus formed new professional castes. D.C. Sircar very pressingly stated with regard to entire Bangladesh (Bengal) "Some Brahma families, thus appear to have been merged in non-Brahmana communities."

Against this background when the Dubi Grant states that the valour of Bhāskaravarman once again re-established the dislodged virtue by completely destroying the ‘Kaliage’ recalls the statement of Kaliage of the Purānas which had been written around the third century A.D. The Kaliage as mentioned earlier is characterised by Varna-Samkara, i.e. intermixture of Varnas or social orders which made the functioning of the state and society difficult. The Nidhanpur Grant states that Bhaskaravarman was created for the purpose of establishing the institution of classes and orders which had for long time past confused (L. 34). Therefore the

37. Select Inscriptions, P. 53.
38. M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P. 52
reign of Bhāskaravarman also witnessed the emergence of new castes and change of profession which termed as the 'Kaliage' in the Nidhanpur and the Dubi Grant. To strengthen Aryādharma royal protection was necessary. The Brahma law givers created the myth of Naraka to elevate the Varman family to the Kṣatriya rank. In the grants of Bhāskaravarman, the Varman dynasty traced their genealogy from Bhauma-Naraka, who was the son of Varaha-Visnu with the mother goddess Earth. He was paired with Bhumi or Devi, identified with Kāmakhyā, a mother goddess. B.K. Kakati tried to assert, the names Kāmarūpa and Kāmakhyā derived from pre-Aryan formations such as Kamoi (= demon in old khmer), kamet (= corpse in Khasi), komui (= grave in Santhali), kamru/kamrut (= in Santhali, the name of a lesser divinity associated with magic and sorcery), etc. Thus, with Naraka the mother goddess cult emerged with a local goddess Kāmakhyā in the Brahmancial fold. The fertility cult of the female principles of tribally dominated areas, which also indicates the importance of mother rights recognised by the Brahmancial religion in ancient Assam.

Once the Varmans had built up the state of Kāmarūpa, their successors the Sālastambha and the Pāla kings also claimed a Kṣatriya status through symbolic association with Naraka. Thus the Brahma law givers gave the king legal sanction to organize society on the lines of ranking differentiation, maintaining the social order and preventing social crisis arising from 'failure' of

39. Based on the evidence of the Kalika Purāṇa and Yogini Tantra Kakati (in the M.G.K.) elucidated this point.
the different components of society to observe the Brahmanical codes. The people's failure to perform their duties could have been in the nature of non-payment of royal dues, scant respect for Brahmanas, state functionaries, state laws, etc. M. Momin pointed out that by the renewal Bhaskaravarman enabled the Brahmanas to exercise their fiscal rights effectively in the donated land. This renewal suggests that the Varmans considered Brahmana support in the Sylhet area which was vital for maintaining Kamarupa's political integrity. Need of Brahmana support also pointed out in reference to the prowess of Bhaskaravarman in his grants. The Nidhanpur Grant (L. 47-48) referred to the circle Samantackravikrama who were defeated by Bhaskaravarman. During the 6th century A.D. in Northern India, the term samanta meant conquered feudatories who in person paid tributes and military service in needs to the conqueror. The Dubi Copperplate Grant (V. 48) also referred to a number of kings who were defeated by Bhaskaravarman. The Nidhanpur Grant refers to Sri Gopala who adorned with the great title of Praptapanamahasabda, i.e. five official designations beginning with the maha such as maha danandanayaka, mahasamanta etc. But the most meaningful explanation in which the word denoted the sound of five musical instruments such as Singhā (Trumpet), Sankha(Conch-Shel), Bheri (Kettle-Drum), Jayaghanta(Gong), Tammata(Tabour) etc, which only the king was entitled to receive as an honour at his appearance at some place or while visiting some one. Its appearance in reference to the officer

41. Ibid., P. 13.
42. P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S., P. 42; D.C. Sircar, Epigraphical Glossary, P. 230.
43. M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P. 75.
attending the issue of the sāsanas in the Nidhanpur Grant suggests that in time of Bhāskaravarman the most influential officer was given great honour equal to that of the king. The reference to Mahāsāmanta Divakaraprabha who was also the master of the treasury indicate their influence on the administration. All these references indicate that though the king's superior military strength seems to have been a major factor underlying his ability to secure sāmanta's allegiance yet they were very active, dominant groups in that region. Bhāskaravarman claimed that like the sun, which removes darkness by equal distribution of his rays, he too dispelled darkness of the Kaliage and brought to light of Aryadharma by the proper utilization of his revenue "Yathayatha mucitakakaraṇikaravitaranaṇakalitakalitimira sancayatayapraekasitaryadharimalokaḥ". C.R. Gupta comments distinctly that “the state ideology was to spread Aryadharma and the rural settlement where ‘crops were regular’ must have provided a major share of the revenue which could be utilised for the upliftment of that ideology”. Thus, establishment of Varnāśramadharma was socio-economic and political need of the time.

4.2. Pattern of Kāmarūpa Society:

4.2.1. Brāhmaṇas:

4.2.1.1. Migration of Brāhmaṇas:

Inscriptions of ancient Assam show that in the later part of the 5th century A.D., a large number of Brāhmaṇas migrated to this region. The Kāmarūpa rulers greatly patronised the learned men and religious teachers. The Brāhmaṇas of the

Nidhanpur Grant if it is accepted migrated from Gujrat region. The name of the father of the donee of the Tezpur Copperplate Grant is given as Bhijjata, while the father of the donee in the Parbatīyā Grant is referred to Jejjata. The affinity of these two names with the celebrated Kashmirian scholars like Mamaṭa, Aḷḷaṭa, Kallata and Rūdraṭa show that these two Pundits perhaps hailed from Kashmir. Indoka, the donee of the Tezpur Copperplate Grant reminds us of the Kashmirian scholar Indurāja, the teacher of Abhinava Gupta and Praṭiharendraṇa, Commentator of Udbhata's Kavyalāmkaśārasarasamgraha. Perhaps both Bhijjata and Jejjata belonging to the same Sāndilyagotra were brothers. From the Guwākuchi Grant it seems that inscriptions refer to original home of the donees. Somadeva, the grand-father of the donee of the Guwākuchi Copperplate Grant of Indrapāla (V. 20-21) hailed from village Vaināmā of Savathī. Rāmadeva, the grand-father of the donee of the Subhaṅkarapātaka Grant of Dharmapāla (V. 16-17) hailed from village Krosanja of Sravastī. Savathī and Sravastī are probably synonymous and the locality indicated by these names is the same as the more celebrated Sravastī of Madhyadesa. R.G Basak thought that Sravastī was included in Gauḍa viṣaya. But P.N. Bhattacharyya has controverted this view and maintains that it was within the Kāmarupa kingdom. The Khanāmukh Copperplate Grant of Dharmapāla (V. 16) refers to Ummuka, the grand father of the donee, who was born in Madhyadesa. The Kamaul Copperplate Grant of Vaiḍyadeva (V. 22) refers to the family of the donee Śrīdhara who belongs  

to the Varendra region. The Silimpur inscription refers to a Brāhmaṇa of Pundra to whom king Jayapala offered 900 gold coins in cash and a grant of land yielding an income of 1,000 units of paddy.\textsuperscript{49}

4.2.1.2. Social Organisation of Brāhmaṇas:

4.2.1.2.1. Gotra:

The inscriptions of ancient Assam throw light on the social organisation of the Brāhmaṇas. They were divided into exogamous septs - gotra and pravara. All Brāhmaṇas were believed to have descended from one or other rṣi or legendary seer, after whom the gotras were named. The religious literature generally speaks of seven or eight primeval gotras. They were Kāśyapa, Vasistha, Bhrigu, Gautama, Bhāradvāja, Atri, Visvamitra and Āgastya. These primeval gotras were multiplied in later times by the inclusion of the names of many other ancient sages. The chief importance of gotra was in connection with marriage, which was forbidden to persons of the same gotra. Thus gotra signified kin units, rather than ancestry and was formed about 800 B.C.\textsuperscript{50} Brāhmaṇas belonging to a large number of gotras lived in ancient Assam. The Dubi Copperplate Grant refers to Kausika gotra, Maudgalya gotra, Māṇḍavya gotra and Ātreya gotra. The Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant set out the following gotras-Prâcetasa, Kâtyâyana, Yāska, Bhāradvāja, Kâśyapa, Kautsa, Gaurâtreya Krsnatreya, Kaundinya, Gautama, Vâtsa, Maudgalya, Saubhaka, Parasarya, Aslayana, Vārāha, Vaisnavrddhi, Kausika, Kautilya, Kavestara, Māṇḍavya,

50. G.S. Ghurye, Two Brahmanical Institutions, PP. 84, 125.
Vasistha, Agnivesya, Sankrtyayana, Bhargava, Jatukarna, Gargya, Pautrimasya, Sandilya, Paurama, Sivarika, Salankayana, Alambayana, Angiras, Pavalkya Barhaspatya, Saunaka and Saktaayana. In later inscriptions we get only one new gotra, Upamanyu in the Uttarbarbil Grant.

In ancient Assam Kausika, Atreya, Bhargavaja, Kasya, Kaundinya, Gautama, Vatsa, Paryasarya and Gargya gotras are most common gotras. According to G.S. Ghurye, references to these gotras are available in North India, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Maharasatra and Gujrat. Among these the Kausika and the Bhargavaja gotras are most popular. Twenty eight Brahmanas belonging to these two gotras are referred to in the inscription. Gautama gotra was fairly common in ancient Assam with fifteen references. Two gotras viz Kautilya and Yaska mentioned in the inscription are interesting. Kautilya was the author of Arthasastra and Yaska was the author of Nirukta and Nighantu. Both of them came to be regarded as rsi at a later stage. The Upamanyu gotra mentioned in the Uttarbarbil Copperplate Grant is seldom found in other parts of India.

4.2.1.2.2. Pravara:

In the Brahma's daily worship he mentions not only the name of the founder of his gotra but also the name of certain other sages who were believed to be the remote ancestores of his family. This conception is called the pravara which is closely interwoven with that of gotra. The gotras have come to be associated with

51. Ibid., P. 72.
one, two or five sages that constitute the pravara of that gotra. The organisation of pravara set up a further bar to marriage because the same names would occur in the pravaras of families of other gotras. The Kuruvāhā Copperplate Grant refers to one Brāhmaṇa belonging to Naidhruva pravara. The Puṣpabhadrā Copperplate Grant of Dharmapāla refers to the pravara Autathya, Maudgalya and Aṅgirasa of the donee.

4.2.3.1.2.3. Vedasākhā:

Another kind of organisation existed among the Brahmanas on the basis of their branch of learning which is called Vedasākhā. Vedasākhās are the various recensions of the texts (Samihitas) of the four Vedas which have been prevalent in the different schools of seers (ṛṣis). Thus it signified an ideal succession of teachers and pupils who learn and teach a certain branch of the Vedas.

G.S. Ghurye pointed out that "the terms carana and sākhā, pertain more or less to one and the same phenomenon and institutional or organisational aspects ...... Patanjali, commenting on it, has told us of the grouping of caraṇas as Eastern, Northern and Middle one". These seems to indicate that each of these divisions developed a particular type of Vedasākhā institution of its own and Brāhmaṇas of the Kāmrūpa country pertained to the Eastern character.

Most of the Brāhmaṇas of the Dubi and Nidhanpur Grants belonging to the Vaiṣṇava carana of Yajurveda branch of learning. The grants also refer to two Brāhmaṇas belonging to Taittiriya sākhā and nine Brāhmaṇas belonging to the

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54. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, VI, PP. 35 3 f.
55. G.S. Ghurye, Two Brahmacical Institutions, PP. 1-3.
Carakhya śākhā of Yajurveda. According to P.N. Bhattacharya Carakhya belongs to the Yajurveda branch of learning. Later grants refer to KāṇVASĀKHA of the Vājasaneyī samhitā and Madhyandina śākhā of the Yajurveda.

Inscriptions of Assam refer to the Chandogya, Kauthumasākha of Śāmaveda study (Nidhanpur Grant, Parbatīyā Grant, Subhaṅkara pāṭaka Grant). At present the Śāmaveda tradition is almost nil in Assam. A few Brahmanas had their Bahvṛcyā śākhā of Rgveda.

4.2.1.3. Duties of the Brāhmaṇas:

The Inscriptions of ancient Assam refer to a number of Brāhmaṇas well versed in three Vedas. The most orthodox school of Vedic theology, the Mīmāṃsā was carefully studied by the Brāhmaṇas of ancient Assam. (Puṣpabhadra Grant)

Inscriptions refer to ideal Brāhmaṇas who performed yajñās, fire oblations, trisandhyā, muttering of prayers in the morning, at noon and in the evening and read the four vedas. Further they were referred to well versed in Śruti, Smṛti Mīmāṃsā and bestowing charities on others. They also engaged in sixfold duties viz., yajña, yajana, adhyāyana, adhyāpana, dāṇa and pratigraha. (Bargāon Grant, Subhaṅkarapāṭaka Grant).

The Brāhmaṇas daily performed the ritual of snāna (bath). Six kinds of snāna are mentioned in the Smṛtis (Sankhaṃṛti VIII. 1-11). They are nitya (daily bath), naimittika (due to some causes) kāmya (bath for some desired object), kṛyāṅga (bath as a part of religious rite) malapakārsana (a bath solely for cleaning

57. P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S., P. 35.
the body) and kriyasnana (ritualistic bathing at a sacred place). The Nowgong Copperplate Grant (V. 32) of Balavarman III refers to the prevalence of kriyanga snana. The Häyunthal Copperplate Grant also refers to ceremonial snāna.

The Brahmanas also used to observe three sandhas as enjoined by Arti who says, 'a twice born person possessed of the knowledge of the self should perform three sandhyās on adorations'. With sandhyās associated japa (the muttering of the Gayatri and other holy mantras). The Puspabhadra Copperplate Grant (V. 11) states that the Brahmanas of Khyātipali destroy their own sins by muttering the prasamamamantras in the time of taking baths in the three junctures of time. (Trisandhyāyām)

The Kamauli Copperplate Grant refers to Śrīdhara, the donee who was adored the best of Brahmanas because of visiting holy places, study of Vedas, offering of gifts, teaching, performance of sacrifices and rigid observance of vows. He could draw out the Lord Somanātha from a Guggulu tree and propitiate him by taking vow of not begging and by fasting both by day and night (V. 25-26). He was the scholar well versed in the Karmakanda and the Jñānakanda of the Vedic literature and a repository of all sorts of penances. He became as celebrated as Brhaspati through his mastery in the Śruti and Smrti literature (V.27).

Besides Vedic studies, Brahmanas cultivated various sciences and arts. The Puspabhadra Copperplate Grant (v. 14) describes the grand father of the donee as having possessed like the donor, a knowledge of the fine arts which were generally acquired by Kṣatriyas alone. An epithet of the Brahmana is Caṇakyamanikyabhu
Further the inscriptions record academic titles such as Srutidhama, Pāṇḍita, Kathānīṣṭha etc.

4.2.1.4. Gradation in Brāhmaṇical Society:

The Inscriptions of ancient Assam hint at social gradation among the Brāhmaṇas. According to the Dubi Copperplate Grant the donee Priyaṅkara ghoṣasvāmin was bhattachhāttara and Devaghosaśvāmin was avasarakabhaṭṭa. Other Brāhmaṇas referred to are mere names. Gradation was maintained among the donees of the Nidhanpur Grant. Leaving aside the deity, who was the major land holder of the agrahāra, at least four broad categories could be made among the land holding Brāhmaṇas settled there. Only seven Brāhmaṇas could be grouped in the first category, as receivers of two āmsas of land and obviously they were the most influential members of that village community. The second category consisted of those who received less than two but more than one āmsa of land. The bulk of the donees received one āmsa of land. There were many Brāhmaṇas who received even less than one āmsa.

Existence of Kulaguru and Mathapati is referred to in the inscription. One Mathapati is referred to in the Viṣṇu Image Inscription from Deopani (L. IV). The Saṅkara-Nārāyana Stone Image Inscription refers to Kūlaguru as well as priest (Mathapati) of the family temple.

Inscriptions also mention endowments to temples and other religious institutions. The Umacal Rock Inscription mentions the establishment of a cave
temple. The Bargāṅga Rock Inscription refers to an asylum. The Tezpur Copperplate Grant of Vanamāla refers to the reconstruction of the fallen temple of Śiva by Vanamālavarmadeva and also large gift of land, people, elephants and courtesans etc. to the deserving. The Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva mentions a gift of villages as well as the inhabitants for the maintenance of a bhaktaśāla. He also gifted five families to be permanently attached to the bhaktaśāla for its service. It seems that land granted for the purpose of construction and maintenance of temples or Bhaktaśālas went to a class of Brāhmaṇas or priests.

Brahmanas could be associated with satka-sāsanas. Satka is Sanskritised form of Prakṛta santaka "the holding of .......... belonging to". According to M.M. Sharma, satka-sāsana was a free grant of land allotted in the name of certain temple of a certain deity as a devottarabhumi by the strength of a charter. The Guwākuchi Copperplate Grant of Indrapāla refers to two satka-sāsanas - one belonging to Mahāgauri and Kāmesvāra (L. 52) and the other to Vasumādhava (L. 53-55). The Subhaṅkarapātaka Copperplate Grant of Dharmapāla refers to the chartered land (Satka) belonging to Kurmanath (L. 49). But Satka-sāsanas were not necessarily granted in favour of temples. The Puspaḥadrā Copperplate Grant of Dharmapāla refers to the grant of a land in favour of a Brāhmana and the place was called Śrī Madhusūdhana satka Guhesvāra Digdolavṛddhaγrama after him.

The Brāhmaṇas also held high administrative offices.

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Nagajātā-Khanikargāon Inscription refers to one Mahattara Brahmadatta, probably a village headman who might apparently been connected with village administration.

The Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant refers to one Janārdana svāmin, a Nyāyakaranika. The donee of the Coratbari Copperplate Grant enhance the property of the king by imparting lessons on Arthaśāstra (vikāsitā śīkṣāśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstrašāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāsta
of single word of learned Brāhmaṇa Gonandana, the Superintendent of religious affairs. Thus some Brāhmaṇas worked in close association with the King. Perhaps their rank was higher than the other Brāhmaṇas.

4.2.1.5. Privileges of the Donee:

The donees of the Nidhanpur Grant received land right according to Bhūmichidranyaya i.e. the principle of the rent-free enjoyment of land by one who brings it under cultivation for the first time. Hence all tax free land came to be referred to by the term Bhūmichidranyaya. It appears that such an injunction was meant to enable the Brāhmaṇas to exercise their fiscal rights effectively in the donated land. There is also a warning against those who confiscates land (V.26).

The Kuruvavahī Grant of Harjaravarman is the earliest evidence of the king of Kāmarūpa, renouncing his power to the donee. Here the king withdrew all his power of collecting taxes from the donated estates. Further more the land was rendered free from all troubles on account of fastening of elephants, searching of thieves, inflicting punishment, tenant’s taxes and duties due to different causes. The Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla refers to the donation of a village, where administrative power was not transferred to the donee. The donee got the right to collect and enjoy only the land revenue but not the other taxes. The Parbaṭīya Plates (VV. 48 - 51) mention that the grant is rendered free from visits of policemen and the army men and also from the taxes payable by temporary tenants. The withdrawal of the visit of Chatta and Bhatta means that the responsibility of the maintenance of law and order in the

63. M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P. 75.
donated land was left to the donee. In the Kaliabor inscription of Vanamāla not a village, but a particular plot of land was donated to six Brāhmaṇas. In the inscription however neither any reference is made to the withdrawal of any type of taxes in favour of the donee, nor did the king withdrew administrative responsibilities from the donated area. The Uttarbarbil Copperplate Grant (L. 40-43) refers to some privileges mentioned in the Kuruvāvāhī Grant besides rendered free the donated land from grazing of the animals such as elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep. The Nowgong Copperplate Grant of Balavarman III refers to a revenue free grant to Brāhmaṇa Srutidhara, with the above mentioned privileges, referred to in the Uttarbarbil Copperplate Grant (L. 33-38) in addition to the protection from all the trouble makers like the Rajā (queen) the Rajaputra, the Raṇaka, the favourite of the king, the old female guard of the harem, the collectors of the recovery of the stolen property, the Policemen, the inflictor of punishment and the collector of the tenants' taxes and duties and the (royal) umbrella bearer.

All the donees of the later copperplate grants of the Kamarupā kings enjoyed these privileges, which means that henceforth these powers and responsibilities were to be executed and controlled by the donee. In the Kamauli Grant (VV. 29-30) of Vaidyadeva, both the villages of Santipataka and Mandara were allowed to be enjoyed by the donee along with its water, dry land, whole forest, gardens and grazing lands, provided with all sources of income and free from all types of taxes and levies shall be enjoyed as long as the sun and the moon shall endure and the donee have as

64. Ibid., P. 140.
much fruit of the land as desired.

Thus from the days of Hatjara in the 9th century A.D., the land donation along with the withdrawal of administrative, economic and judicial responsibilities on behalf of the donees made them powerful Lords over the people. These privileges with their traditional socio-religious privileges in the caste hierarchy placed them on a respectable position in the society.

4.2.2. Kṣatriya:

The inscriptions of Assam do not refer to the term Kṣatriya. Puṣyavarman, the founder of the Bhauma-Varman dynasty assumed the title Varman which was meant to signify Kṣatriya status. The dynasty of Puṣyavarman also took its name after the title and was known alternately the Bhauma-Varman dynasty.

Yuan-Chwang referred to Bhāskaravarman as Brahmāṇa by caste, who ruled over Kāmarupa during his visit. S.K Chatterji opines that Yuan-Chwang by mistake described Bhāskaravarman as Brahmāṇa, but he was just a Neoksatriya, a member of a Hinduised Mleccha of non-Hindu Indo-Mongoloid family which had been accepted within the fold of Hindu orthodoxy at least several generations before. Perhaps the Varmans used the concept of Brahma-Kṣatra which was popular among ruling families of priestly origins, particularly in post Gupta India. D. Neog discussed the matter in his 'The Origin and Growth of the Asamiya Language'. He pointed out that Yuan-Chwang who visited Kāmarupa early in the 7th century A.D. referred to

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65. S. Beal, Buddhist Records of the Western World, II., PP. 404-5.
Bhāskaravarman a Brāhmaṇa by caste. He was a keen observer and an accurate compiler of facts so much so that few of his statements could be challenged till present times. And he stayed for more then a month in the capital of Bhāskaravarman and looked into matters with penetrating eyes. According to him, to think the statement of Yuan-Chwáng a mistake is injustice to him. D. Deog pointed out that Varman is also the title of the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas. Bhāskara must have been a Brāhmaṇa of the non-Vedic Mediterranean or Alpine race. B.S. Guha also finds that the Pods of Bengal, Telegu Brāhmaṇas, the Oriya Brāhmaṇas, the Kāññarese Brāhmaṇas, the Saraswat Brāhmaṇas, the Chippavan Brāhmaṇas and the Desāstha Brāhmaṇas are all basically of this Alpine race. In all probability Vaisnava Brāhmaṇa immigrants from Mithilā were responsible for creating the myth of Naraka to elavate them to Kṣatriya rank which is reflected in the genealogy of the Varman dynasty. The Salastambha and the Pāla dynasties also traced their genealogy from Naraka through which they claimed their Kṣatriya status. But the Bargaon Grant of Ratnapāla (V.9) refers to Salastambha, who took over the kingdom from the last king of the family of the Varmans as the leader of the Mlecchas. Harjaravarman of this dynasty also celebrated Abhiseka and assumed the title of Mahārājādhirāja Paramesvara Paramabhattaraka Parama Mahēśvara (Tezpur Rock Inscription, V.2), Devādideva Mahādeva (Hayunthal Copper Plates V.14).

The Bargaon Grant (V.10) of Ratnapāla refers to the election of Brahmapāla

after Tyāgasimha, belongs to the Bhauma dynasty and thus became the founder of a new dynasty. The Pala dynasty came to power in all probability around the 10th century A.D. But the most interesting fact is that like the earlier dynasties, this dynasty also traces their descent from the progenitor of Assam i.e. Naraka. The Gauhati Grant (W. 6ff) of Indrapāla states that “He (i.e. Naraka ) of boundless fame, pre-eminently reside in the city of Prāgjyotisa. In that family there was a king named Śrī Bhrahmāpāla”. The Khanāmukh Grant also states that “A king named Naraka was the son of the god who assumed the form of Boar............ in that royal family there happened to be a king of the celebrated name Bhrahmāpāla, who was like a Kulācala and was similar to Indra”.

Besides, in order to show their relation’s with the earlier Bhauma-Naraka kings, these Pala rulers of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa also added the word Varman after Pala in thier names, so that Bhrahmāpāla was also called Brahmapālavarman (Seal attached to the Gauhati Copperplate Grant).

In the Puspabhadra Plates of Dharmapāla, (VV.5-8) Brahmapāla is not only indirectly represented as a Naraka or Bhauma but has also been described as a king of the Avanikula i.e. the dynasty of the Earth and his decendants were described as “Pālānvayāmbūjaravi” (the sun to the lotus that was the family of the Pālas. Possibly by the 8th century A.D. in Kāmarūpa the mythological ancestry of Naraka had gained such pre-emenence that it was used by kings not belonging to the same stock as means of gaining political legitimacy 69. The rulers were also associated with the

69. N.J. Lahiri, Pre-Ahom Assam, P. 75.
concept of divinity, sometimes they were personified with gods. The Dubi Grant (V.7) refers Puṣyavarman as the second Viṣṇu while Nārāyaṇavarman in the same grant (V. 26) is called Cakrapaṇi in the human form.

Indian mainland seems to accept the Ksatriya status of the Kāmarūpa kings. According to the Rajatarangini70 Amritaprabha, a princess of Kāmarūpa was given in marriage to Meghavāhana, king of Kashmir. The Gchtal Grant (V.22) records that Indrapala married Rajyadevi, a Rastrakūta princess. After the decline of the Paṇas Vaidyadeva and Vallabhadeva did not associate themselves with the Bhauma family. In the Kamauli Grant (VV. 3-5) Vaidyadeva proudly recorded his descent from a Brahma ministerial family that had served the Gauda imperial family for generations. In the Assam Plates (VV.3-10) Vallabhadeva traces his ancestry to one Bhāskara of the Lunar family. Thus it seems that the rulers were not defined socially in terms of their caste.71

4.2.3. Vaiśya:

Vaiśya Varna was also not mentioned in the inscriptions of ancient Assam. The Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant (L. 128) refers to a pond of the controlling tradesman, Khāsoka to the north-east of the donated land (L. 128). The Hāyunthal Copperplate Grant (V.14) of Harjaravarman refers to Vaṇika who had participated in the Coronation ceremony of the king. Pāṇini calls traders with the names of ‘Vaṇika’ and ‘Vaṇīja’ but these terms seem to have been applied to traders without

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70. M.M. Stein (tr.), Rajatarangini.
71. N.J. Lahiri, Pre-Ahom Assam, P. 115.
reference to caste. (Panini. III. 3. 52). In case of Kāmarūpa, the Vanika stood for a class of rich merchants. They found pride place on important occasions like the Coronation ceremony. Probably they resided in the urban centres. The Bargāon Grant (V.14) of Ratnapāla compares to his battlefield with a market of jewels and the soldiers with the merchants.

The Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant refers to one Vyāvahārā Haradatta who attended in the time of the issue of sāsanas. The Bargāon Copperplate Grant (L. 52-55 ) also mentioned Vyāvahārā in the list of important people informed about land transfer which is also occurred in the latter copper plate grants. Some scholars thought that the designation Vyāvahārā meant a business person or a trader, among other definitions. However, it is more likely that the Vyāvahārā was legal expert in the prevailing customary laws and was necessarily informed about the land grant. The land grants were largely concerned with matters of land tenure, management and administration. They could not have referred to traders who had no direct bearing on such matters. In that sense traders had no attachment what so ever to the donated land.  

4.2.4. Sudra:

In case of ancient Assam only one reference to a Sudra is available. In the Deopani-Viṣṇu Image Inscription (L. 3), it is mentioned that the Sudras along with the twice-born classes and women were allowed to worship the goddess (Devi) as

well. For the first time the inscription depicted a society on two divisions—dvijas and the Sudras where women were also clubbed together with Sudra. Inscriptions of our period do not refer to the common people by any specific name. In the landgrant charter common people were simply refer to within the term Janapada (i.e., the countryside including its inhabitants). In the Kamauli Grant (L. 49) Vaidyadeva addressed to Karsakas along with other officers in time of the issue of the grant. Karsakas were probably small land holders whose control over land was bequeathed on the donees.

Inscriptions refer to a number of taxes which had to pay by the common peasants. The Nidhanpur Grant refers to the taxation of the Mayurasalmalagrahāra subsequent to the loss of the royal charter and an officer Utkhetayita. The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva refers to a grant of two villages to a Brāhmaṇa according to the law of the uncultivated land (bhūmichidranyāyena) to be provided with all sources of revenue (sarvāyopaya - samyuktam) and to be immune from taxes and their contingencies (karopaskaravarjījītam). All these references obviously point out that there were several types of imposts and burdens on the land. The Uttarbarbil and Nowgong Copperplate Grant referred to these in general terms as Uparikara and Utkhetana. Kara stands for the general tax levied on land periodically, which is generally referred to as one-sixth of the produce in the inscriptions of the Gupta period. The fiscal term Uparikara according to Fleet means a “tax levied on cultivators

who have no proprietary rights in the soil. Dr. Ghosal, on the other hand, objects to this interpretation and contends that the ‘Uparikara was not a regular item of revenue like the ‘Crown’s share of produce’ but was an irregular tax which bore harshly on the cultivator. According to him in the grants of Assam both Uparikara and Utkhetana officers were oppressors. M.M. Sharma suggests that Utkhetana is an impost levied upon the villagers on specified occasions. It is probably the trouble of free labour. B.K. Barua opines that it was a charge imposed on those cultivators who were tenants at will and had no proprietary rights in the soil, viz, those who were literary above the obligation of hereditary proprietorship and as such they would pay a higher rate of tax. The term Utkhetana is absent in the whole range of Bengal inscriptions. A Guha has raised the question as to whether Utkhetana can be regarded as “periodic labour service or not”. By the eight and the 9th centuries inscriptions from all parts of India refer to the term ‘Pida’. G.K. Rai interpreted the term as ‘free from all oppressions’ (forced labour). He stated that the Kāmāṇḍakiya niṣīsara, while describing the characteristics of the Janapada, the text states that it should be able to bear the burden of Pida (forced labour) and Kara (taxes). The Uttarbarbil Grant (L. 42-43) of Balavarman

76. C.I.I III, P.98.
77. (a) M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P. 140.
79. (a) Ragholi Plates of Jayavardhana contains the term ‘Sarvapidaṇṇīvarjitaḥ’, E.I., IX, No. 5, 45. 1.29.
contains the clause that the land granted was not to be disturbed by trouble makers refers to ‘Sarvapida’ comprising the queen, the princes, the royal favourites, the chamberlain matron, persons tethering elephants and mooring boats, trackers of thieves, police officers and so forth. It therefore shows that besides the regular taxes, there were a number of customary burdens upon agricultural land. Besides the Uttarbarbil Grant, the term appears in the grants of Ratnapāla, Indrapāla and Dharmapāla also. Such burdens were concerned not only with the supply of food on the occasion of members of the royal family and royal officers’ visit and camping (Chatravāsa) in the locality, but also with the grazing of animals, the tethering of elephants and the mooring of boats, apparently in the course of state service. These services rendered to the trouble makers may be termed as forced labour used in various inscriptions in ancient Assam. The Assam Plates (VV. 21-22) of Vallabhadeva refers to transfer of Pancasahāyas (five helpers), their sons and wives along with the donated land to a bhaktaśālā. The workers probably didn’t have right of any kind on the land that they tilled and may be called landless labourers. Donation of people to the religious establishment is also referred to the Tezpur Grant (V. 24, 29) and Parbatīyā Grant (V. 24) of Vanamāla. But the grants of people only related to religious establishment. The Assam Plates indicate that the system of forced labour didn’t disappear in the twelfth century A.D. in Assam.

4.2.5. Professional Castes:

4.2.5.1. Karaṇa and Kāvastha:

Inscriptions of ancient Assam referred to a number of professional castes.
In the Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant of Bhāskaravarman (L. 132) we find reference to Dundhunātha, a Kāyastha and Janārdanasvāmin, a Nyāyakaranika. Pargitar observes that the term Karanika is not a Classical Sanskrit, but evidently a word formed from Karana, which was the name of a caste that had the occupation of writing, account etc., hence Karanika apparently were members of this caste. In the Purāṇas, the Karanās occupied the place of the Kāyasthas. In the Sūtras, the Śmṛtis and the Mahābhārata, Karana is used in the sense of a caste. The Kāyastha is mentioned as a royal officer in the Viṣṇu and Yajñāvalkya Śmṛtis. According to the Viṣṇu Śmṛti, they were writers of public documents (Rajasaksika), Viṣṇu Dharmasūtra, (VII, 3) and the later Śmṛtis mention them as a caste and includes them among the Śudras. But Kṣirasvāmin on Amarakośa states that Kārana also denotes a group of officers like Kāyasthas and Adhyakṣas (Superintendents). The Vaijayanti seems to take Kāyastha and Karana as synonymous and explains them as denoting a scribe was gradually absorbed by the Kāyastha and ultimately formed one Kāyastha caste. In the Nidhanpur Grant, the terms Karanika and Kāyastha are mentioned in the sense of officers and scribes and not as a caste. The existence of the Kāyastha caste is known both from the Gupta inscriptions and some other contemporary inscriptions. The Kāyastha caste by name is noticed in a later

82. P.V. Kane, History of Dharmasāstra, II. I. 74.
83. Ibid., P. 76.
85. Ibid.
86. P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S., P. 43 (f.n.)
period. (c. 9th century A.D.). The record of Amoghavarsa, the Rāstrakūta ruler, mentions a Kayastha caste in western India. The latter Śrīṅgīs like Uṣānas refer to the Kayastha caste, while the Veda Vyāsa Śrīṁti includes the Kayastha among Sudras along with barbars, potters and others.

Some writers like D.R. Bhandarkar, Ghose and others hold the view that the Kayasthas descended from the Nāgara Brahmanas because of the likeness of their surnames. N.N. Vasu refuted their view. Both tradition and genealogical records of the Kayasthas of Kāmarūpa testify to their affiliations with the Kṣatriyas. Kakati derived the word ‘Kayastha’ from Austric, Kātho (to write), kaiathoh (to keep accounts) and feels that it has been Sanskritised as Kayastha, which seems to have been associated originally with the writer. Kayasthas were holding position in the society of Assam next to Brahmanas.

4.2.5.2. Lekhaka:

Another class of people allied to the Kayastha and the Karanas are used in the sense of a writer was the Lekhakas. Sumantu, quoted in the Parasara Madhaviya, takes the term standing for a low caste like an oilman from whom food should not be taken by a Brahmana (II, I, 383). Brhaspati, as quoted in the Śrīṁti Candrika refers to Gaṇaka and Lekhaka as two persons connected with

87. E.I., XVIII, P. 251.
88. P.V. Kane, History of Dharmasastra, II, I, P. 76.
89. I.A., LXI., P. 48.
90. I.H.Q., VI, PP. 60 ff.
92. Ibid; Prachiṇ Kāmarūpiya Kayastha-Samājar Itibṛitta.
the work of a judge and stated that they were dvajas. The Gachtal Grant (V.32) refers to Brahmāna Balabhadra who had composed the eulogy. The Puspabhadra Grant (V.33) refers to specifically Śrī Aniruddha the composer of the Prasasti. The twelfth century Kamauli Grant refers to a Brahmāna named Manoratha who had composed the eulogy. These evidences prove that most of the writers were of Brahmāna background. But they did not form a distinct caste.

4.2.5.3. Savarṇa

The Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjarvarman (L.6) refers to Savarṇa which was probably a professional name derived from the profession svārṇa vṛtti, i.e. profession of writing documents.

4.2.5.4. Engraver:

Engravers are referred to in the inscriptions as Sasayita / Sekyakara or Taksakara. The Nidhanpur Grant referred to Sasayita (L. 35) and Sekyakara (L. 36). The Kamauli Grant (V.35) mentions Sekyakara. The twelfth century Puspabhadra Grant (L. 45) specifically refers to Taksakara (engraver) Śrī Vinīta. The Kamauli Grant refers to the engraver as a highly intelligent artist Kamabhadra (V.35). It seems that engravers were of non-Brahmana background who were specifically engaged in the profession of engraving copperplates.

4.2.5.5. Vaidya:

The twelfth century Khanamukh (V.15) and the Subhankarapataka Grants (V. 15) were composed by a Vaidya named Prasthanakalasa. Brahmānical texts of

94. P.V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, II, 1, P.76
early medieval India described Vaidya as the offspring of either a Kṣatriya woman and a Brāhmaṇa man or a Vaisya woman and a Brāhmaṇa man. The reference to Vaidya in the inscription of our period seems to categorise them as an occupational group. But P.N. Bhattacharya does not believe that the term was used as the name of a caste. Isanadeva’s Bhatera plate reveals that in Sylhet Vaidya had developed into a caste name at least by the twelfth century. P.C. Choudhury tries to identify Vaidya with Bhiṣaja, who were a class of physician mentioned in the Nowgong Grant (V. 19) of Balavarman. M.M. Sharma suggests the Vaidya of the Khanamukh Grant (V. 15) to one adept in the Brāhmaṇical lore, not a caste of physician.

4.2.5.6. Daivajña / Tārkuk:

Other occupation based castes categorised by the twelfth century were the Daivajnas (astrologers) and Tārkuks (sooth sayers). The Kamauli Grant (V. 8) records that they announced the coming of Vaidyadeva and causes restlessness and fear among his foes. Most of the inscriptions refer to an auspicious moment for granting land. This also indirectly implies the presence of astrologers who determined an auspicious time for the task. The Brhadhārma Purāṇa says that Daivajña was born of a Sakadvipa father and a Vaisya mother (Uttarakāṇḍa, XIII, 52). It seems that the astrologers were held in respect in Assam and may thus be regarded as belonging to the upper class.

96. P.V. Kane, History of Dharmasāstra, II,I, PP. 74 – 76.
97. P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S., P.150.
4.2.5.7. Kaivartta/Nokka/Dandi:

A significant section of the population of our period belonged to the Kaivartta community. In the Śāṁtis, the Kaivarttas are mentioned as mixed caste, while Manu used the term to mean the offspring of a Niṣada father by Āyogava mother (Manu, Ch. X. 4). The Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa states that the Kaivartta was born of a Kṣatriya father and a Vaisya mother (Ch. X, 34). In the 9th century Tezpur Rock Inscription (L. 4ff) of Harjaravarman there is a reference to a Kaivartta Naukuksi, described as the eater of the property in the interior of boats which refers to their occupation of fishing which was considered low.

In Kāmarūpa they had been well organised and powerful. Naukuksi of the said inscription was involved in a dispute over the rowing of boats in a part of the water passage. Army officials, feudal lords, prominent Brahmāṇas had to intervene in the matter and the decision over the issue of imposition of rules on fishing boats had to be made through a process of conciliation. Though they professionally involved in the fishing, epigraphic evidences show that in Kāmarūpa, they were included within the rank of peasantry. The Puṣpabhadra Grant (L. 51) refers to an area near by to the donated land called Avanca, which was a colony of the Kaivarttas. The Gauhāti Grant (L. 47) of Indrapaṇa refers to the Bhogadīrghika of the Svalapadyuti Kaivarttas which show that holdings of the Kaivartta’s extended to large bils or ponds. These references indicate to the division of Kaivarttas but probably it was not clearcut and strictly separate. At present Kaivarttas are divided into two sections in Assam, Halova, those working with ploughs and Jalova, who
works as fisherman.¹⁰⁰

The Tezpur Rock Inscription refers to Nokkas. Nokkas were occupational boatmen in state service. The Puṣpabhadra Grant (L. 47) refers to land of Nokkā Debbaripāla on the border of the donated land. The grant (L. 51-55) also refers to one stream (Jola) named Nekkādeuli and land belonging to Nokkatada. The Suwālkuchi Grant (L. 58-63) refers to common boundary of Candenauki, Daksapatinauki and Sadhava nauki. These references show that they also held land for agriculture and mooring of boats. The Subhāṅkarapātaka Grant (L. 54-55) refers to 'Vijayāṣī naubhuktaka śimnī' probably applies to a locality inhabited by a group of boatmen. Probably they received land in lieu of their service rendered to some authority.

The Kamauli Grant (L. 54-55) refers to common boundary of Dighdāndi. Dāndi (Towers of boats) points to the profession with which they were connected.¹⁰¹ Naukī and Dāndi were in all probability sub-branches of the Jalovā Kaivarttas.¹⁰²

4.2.5.8. Kumbhakāra/Haḍi:

Potters formed an important occupational group. The Nidhanpur Grant (L. 131) refers to Kumbhakāra garta in the boundary of the donated land. The Kamauli Grant (L. 60) refers to the southern boundary of the donated land which touched the outskirts of the settlement inhabited by the potter community. The

¹⁰⁰. Census report, 1901, 1, P. 132.
¹⁰¹. B.K. Barua, A.C.P.H., P.128.
origin of the Kumbhakāra is uncertain. Usānas takes Kumbhakāra as the off spring of a Brahmana by a Vaisya woman. Vaikhāna adds that such an offspring becomes either a Kumbhakāra or a Barbar. Vedavyāsa and Devala take them as Śūdras. In modern Assam the potters are known as both Kumāras and Hiḍās; but in their origin, the latter appears to be more degraded than the Kumāras, and are allied to the Kaivarttas. They gave up their original profession of fisherman and took to the making of pottery. Marriage is not permissible between these two classes.

In the Puspabhadra Plates (L.50) of Dharmapāla, there is a reference to the land of Dijja -rati - hādi. Hādi may mean the potter caste which is known by this name in Assam. The Hādis as antyajas, are connected with doma and the candala but they will not eat with the latter, and their occupation is quite distinct. But, the Kumbhakāra / Hādi also practised agriculture while catering to the needs of the rural folk.

4.2.5.9. Weaver:

There are references to weavers (Tantrānum) in the inscriptions of ancient Assam. The twelfth century Subhankarapataka Grant (L. 54) refers to a colony of twenty four weavers to the east of the donated land. Similarly to the east and north - east of the plot granted to Himāṅga was another settlement of weavers, called Orangi - tantras. M.M. Sharma has suggested that these weavers came here from Oraṅg in the present Sonitpur District of modern Assam, situated on the

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103. P.V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, II, I, P 78.
104. Census of India, 1891, Assam, 1, P. 272.
northern bank of the Brahmaputra river. The migration of a group of weavers from the northern bank of the Brahmaputra to its southern part shows professional mobility in spatial context and suggests that contemporary village societies were not absolutely closed. The inscription (L. 53) further refers ‘Ropita - Sāmalivrksah- Ksetralih’ with the possible purpose of supplying raw material to the weavers who settled down in the locality.

4.2.6. References to Tribal people:

Social groups that could not be incorporated in the Varṇa system were mentioned by their tribal names. The Nidhanpur Grant (L. 128) refers to a pond of the controlling tradesman Khāsoka to the northeast of the donated land. Khāsoka, probably was the Khāsi people. The Tezpur Copperplate Inscription (L. 14-20) mentions Avari located in the southern boundary of the donated land and beautiful Duluha women. Avari and Duluha may be identified with the Ābor and the Daflā (Daflā, at present known as the Nisi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh). The Subhankara pataka Grant (L. 61) refers to Vr̥had Rava. Vr̥had Rava seems to mean some Bar Rabha, a chief amongst the Rabhās or one belonging to a higher strata of the Rabhās. The epigraphs though inscribed in Sanskrit are interspersed with words of non Sanskritic origin. B.K. Kakati in his ‘Place and Personal Names in the Early Land Grants of Assam’ showed the occurrence of a number of words of Boro and Austric origin, Viz, Boro (hensibā, dirgumma etc.), Austric

4.2.7. Asrama:

The inscriptions of our period referred to the four stages (Asrama) into which man's span of life itself was classified and which provided the pattern of life of the period. As stated in Manu, the first stage of man's life is Brahmacarya in which he studies in his teacher's house, after he finished his studies, in the second part of his life he marries and becomes house holders (Gṛhastha) and discharges his debt to his ancestors by begetting sons and to the gods by performing sacrifices; when he sees that his head is turning grey and that there are wrinkles on his body, he resorts to the forest and becomes a Vanaprasthin; after spending the third part of his life in the forest he spends the rest of his life as a Yati or Sannyāsin. (Manu IV. 1.V, 1,169; VI, 1-2, 33). But this was only an ideal. Even Manu maintains that as all living creatures subsist by receiving support from the house holder, therefore, the order of the house is the most excellent order (Manu, III, VV, 77 - 8;)

Gautama (III, 1.35 ) and Baudhayāna (II,6,29) hold that there is really one Āśrama, viz, that of the householder (Brahmacarya being only preparatory to it), the other Āśramas are inferior to that of the house holder. H.C. Chakladar points out that the third stage of Vanaprastha along with Yati was going out of vogue in Indian society by the time when Vatsyāyana worked his book. Kautilya reverses the order of the first two Āśramas as given in the Dharmasastras by putting the Gṛhastha order

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110. G.Buhler, Laws of Manu, P. 89.
111. H.C.Chakladar, Social Life as described in the Kamasutra of Vatsayana, PP. 83-89.
or the life of the householder at the top of the scale. Probably the Brahmanas of Kamarpupa had followed the Asrama system. The Nowgong Copperplate Grant (V. 30-32) refers to one Brahmana Srutidhara who had after coming back as a graduate from the home of the preceptor with a desire to enter into the life of a householder come to the court as a supplicant and the king donated an area of land called Hensiva to that Brahmana. Nevertheless there is constant evidence of the abdication of kings, who embraced a life of renunciation. On the contrary Bhaskaravarman died as a bachelor indicates that it was not compulsory for the ruling class.

4.2.8. Social Institutions:

4.2.8.1. Family and Inheritance:

Inscriptions throw light on the family and the nature of inheritance. The Nidhanpur Grant mentions the joint ownership of landed property among several brothers (Bhratrtrayena ekamsah; bhratra Sahardharmsah). The Parbahya Plates (V. 27) of Vanamaladeva refers to the four brothers Cudamanihilation, Deobha, Garga and Sambhu who lived together out of fear for the loss of their dharma. Nevertheless, cases of separation of property among the brothers is also indicated in inscriptions. In the Subhankarapataka Grant (V. 22) of Dharmapala separate shares of a Pataka are assigned to two brothers Himanga and Trilocana, indicating that they were no longer members of a joint family and probably had separate residence. The Kaliabar

112. Dr. Chattopadhyaya, Social Life in Ancient India (in the background of the Yajnavalkya Sūrti), PP. 53-57.
114. E.I., XXIX, P. 145 f. 27.
(Dighaligōn) Copperplates of Vanamālavarmadeva records a grant of a plot of land equivalent to a Khandalaka of land to six Brahmanas among which the first four (i) Bhatta Gallahara (2) Bhatta Gayahara (3) Bhatta Yasośara (4) Bhatta Talahara are stated to be brothers being the offsprings of Jātaveda. The first five are allotted 2 parts of land each. Separate shares to the four brothers indicate probably separate residence, like the Subhankarapāta Grant. The above references present a conflicting picture of family system in ancient Assam.

The joint family system is based on the sapinda relations (direct blood relationship). The theory of sapinda had two different implications according to the Mitakṣara and the Dāyabhāga. According to the Mitakṣara system a child became the owner of the ancestral property as soon as he was born and according to the Dāyabhāga system a son got his right of inheritance on the death of his father.

The Parbatīya plate indicates the prevalence of Mitakṣara rule. The Dāyabhāga system was practically started by Jīmutavahana in Bengal in the 11th century A.D. and there is no exact evidence to show when Assam changed its Mitakṣara laws for the Dāyabhāga system.

4.2.8.2 Marriage System:

4.2.8.2.1 Forms of Marriage:

Inscriptions throw scanty information regarding the marriage system of ancient Assam. The Puṣpabhadra Grant (V.15) records the marriage of Bhāskara to Jīva. Jīva was born of a pure family who was endowed with a charming beauty and a

commendable form of the person. Bhāskara in order to start the family life took her hand embellished with bangles (Kankana) with his own hand, adorned with the auspicious matrimonial thread. The grant refers to the Brahma form of marriage.

The Vedic Kalpasutras mention eight types of marriage rites viz., Brāhma, Daiva, Prajāpatya, Arsa, Āsura, Gandharva, Raksasa and Paisāca. These eight forms of marriage may be grouped under the following heads\textsuperscript{115(a)}:

1. Marriage in which the father made a gift of his daughter - Brāhma and Prajāpatya.
2. Marriage in which more or less resembled the sale of the girl, however insignificant or veiled that may be Daiva, Ārsa and Āsura.
3. Marriage or union effected without the consent of the father or the guardian Gandharva, Rāksasa and Paisāca.

Manu states that the first six according to the order Brāhma, Daiva, Ārsa, Prajāpatya, Āsura and Gandharva are lawful for a Brāhmaṇa and the last four Āsura, Gandharva, Rāksasa and Paisāca for a Ksatriya and Āsura, Gandharva and Paisāca for a Vaisya and Sudra (Manu III, 23).

Taking note of the sanctity attached to each type of marriage Baudhāyāna quotes a verse from the Vedas, “The quality of the offspring depends on the quality of marriage rites” (Baudhāyāna Dharmasūtra, I. II. 21.1). Among the eight types of marriage the first four in the following order: Brāhma, Prajāpatya, Ārsa and Daiva have been declared valid by some of our Dharmasūtras and by Kautilya\textsuperscript{116}.

\textsuperscript{115(a)} R.C. Majumdar, Ancient India, PP. 80-81.
\textsuperscript{116} Arthaśāstra (Kangle), 3.2., 10-12.
Manu III 24, 37-39). Gautama however refers to some other law givers and declares the validity of all the first six types of marriage (Gautama Dharmasūtra, IV. 15; Cf. Manu III. 23). We may also take into account the interesting remark of Kauṭilya that 'on pleasure of everybody every type is approvable'.

4.2.8.2.2, Age of Bridegroom:

The Nowgong Grant of Balvarman III (V.31) refers to Śrutidhara, who was coming back as a graduate from the home of the preceptor with a desire to enter into the life of a house holder approached the king as a supplicant and Balavarman III granted Heṇśivā bhūmi to him. This reference helps us to ascertain the age of bridegroom. A dvija was expected to burn the nuptial fire (so as to commence the house holdership) only after the completion of his normal education at his teacher's house. From the Dharmasūtras it may be inferred that with the exception of those who continued their study of the Vedas to become expert in more than one or all the four Vedas and those who preferred to remain life long student, a Brāhmaṇa would finish his education by the age of twenty, a Kṣatriya by the age of twenty three and a Vaiśya by the age of twenty four (Asvalāyana Grhasūtra, I. 19; Apastambha Dharmasūtra, I. II. 19). Arthasastra refers to princes who used to finish their education by the age of sixteen and a man of 16 years of age was deemed to be a major. Broadly speaking, the range of age of the bride generally ranged from 12 to 16. The age of groom however varied between 16-25.

117. Arthasastra (Shamashastry) III., II. P. 172-173 (Kangle), 3.2.13.
118. Arthasastra (Kangle), 1.5 9-10.
4.2.8.2.3. Qualification of Marriage:

Caste, family and gotra were of paramount importance in the settlement of marriage. In the view of our lawgivers, a bride or a bridegroom must be selected from the same caste and from the family of equal status. Inscriptions of ancient Assam, refers to physical beauty, intelligence, younger one, auspicious character and virginity as some other characteristics of selection of a bride. The Tezpur Grant (V. 31) refers to the marriage of Bhijjata, a Brāhmaṇa of Sāndilya gotra, with Sabhāyika, who was endowed with pure qualities of a Brāhmaṇa lady and belonged to a noble family. Bhijjata married her according to the customs of the Brāhmaṇas. The Uttarbarbil Copper plate Grant (V. 18) refers to Virabahu who married a lady named Ambā who was suitable to Virabāhu in respect of lineage, beauty and age. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla (v. 13) refers to Purandarapāla who married Durlabhā as she was beyond the reach of the ordinary beings of the world and was born in the royal family of the Prajarājya, conquered by the strength of arms by Jāmadagnya. The Gachtal Copperplate Grant of Indrapāla (V. 12) refers to Rājyadevi who was born in the family of Rāstrakūṭas, was the chief queen of him. The Bargaon Copperplate Grant (V. 12) refers to the marriage of Brahmapāla with Kuladevi who symbolised the steady presence of the royal fortune.

4.2.8.2.4. Polygamy:

Hindu lawgivers sanctioned four, three and two wives for a Brāhmaṇa, a Kṣatriya and a Vaiśya respectively in the anuloma order of marriage. However the inscriptions of ancient Assam refer to having a number of queens of a king. But the
inscriptions do not refer to second wife of the donees in any one of the land grants.

4.2.8.2.5. Conjugal Life:

Relations between husband and wife is reflected in almost all the copper plate inscriptions of our period. Most of the grants compare the relations between husband and wife with various gods and goddesses and sages with their wives. References to Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, Paulomī (Saci) to Indra and Durgā to Pasupati, Rati to Śmāra, Lakṣmī to Hari, Rohini to Niśākara, Vāsiṣṭha and his wife and Girijā and Sambhu are frequently referred to the inscriptions.

4.2.8.2.6. Expectation of Son:

Expectation of son is also reflected in the inscription. The Dubi Copperplate Grant (V.9) refers to performance of many a pious deed by which Puṣyavarma obtained a son who was similar to the king of gods. He was Samudravarma. The Kamauli Grant (V. 25) refers to Śrī Śrīdhara who was born as a result of the maturity of good deeds done in several previous births by his mother and who was adored by the best of Brahmaṇas. In case of girl child, it seems that they were also not neglected as we found a number of references comparing women with various Goddesses and with their qualities.

4.2.8.2.7. Common responsibility towards Society:

Inscriptions of ancient Assam refer to responsibilities towards society. The Uttarbarbil Copperplate Grant (V. 29) refers to Śyāmadeva, the donee who was born for the welfare of the Brahmaṇas. The Puṣpabhadra Grant (V. 16) refers to Sutanu who was full of good qualities and engaged in giving away as gift all his
wealth and (V. 13-14) kept himself aloof from the unrighteous path. Vallabhadeva stated in his Assam Plates (V. 14) that the constructed an alms-house for the hungry ones at the instance of his father for his mother’s obtaining the heaven for ever.

4.2.9. Position of Women:

The position of women in a society is the index of its cultural, social, religious and spiritual levels. Without taking into consideration the status and contribution of women in different spheres of life we cannot have a total picture of any civilized country.

In the inscriptions we find mention of the queens, lady officers of the royal palaces, wives of the Brāhmaṇa donees and a class of public women. On the basis of these references we can study the true status of women in the society of ancient Assam.

4.2.9.1. Women as Mother and Wife:

Women as wife of the king or the donee was given the dignified and honourable position. Most of the inscriptions mention the names of the queens along with their king husbands as well as the names of the wives of the Brāhmaṇa donees. They were depicted as the source of inspiration of their husbands, compared their qualities and beauty with different goddesses of Hindu religion. She was the Dharma, Artha and Kāma for the attainment of the object of human life.

The Hindu concept of married life has made women a co-partner in the spiritual and temporal affairs of her husband, the Gṛhalakṣmī and Sahadharminī.

119. Pratima Asthana, Women’s Movement in India, P.1.
Chastity and devotedness to her husband have been considered as two great ornaments of her character. Motherhood was also considered to be the primary aim of women’s life and great importance was attached to motherhood. The Dubi Copperplate Grant (v. 25) refers to Suvrata, the wife of Mahendravarman, who stood as the epitome of the foremost limit of the beauty and on her own part, she was so devoted to the king that she shone like a constant lustre in a moon in the bosom of that king. She was again compared with Aditi and Nārāyana, the holder of the Cakra born with a human form to her and become a king with the same name. The same grant again refers to the wife of Śrī Śhitavarman as beautiful as Śrī (i.e. Lakiśmī) and beloved and dear to the king who felt endowed with pride. To him she was like Paulomī (Śaci) to Indra and Durgā, the daughter of the mountain to Pasupati (i.e. Siva). In the Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant (V. 12) Yajñavati, the mother of Mahendravarman resembled the sacrificial wood that produces fire. The Hayunthal Copperplate Grant (V. II) refers to Śrī Jīvadeva who was the mother of Śrī Harjara and compares her with Kunfī and Subhadra who gave birth to Yudhiṣṭhira and Abhimanyu respectively. The Tezpur Copperplate Grant (V. 10) refers to Śrī Jīvadeva, as the progenitor of a great light like the morning twilight. The Tezpur Grant (V. 15) and the Parbatīya Grant (VV. 13-15) refer to Śrīmattāra, the wife of Harjaradeva as the human form of Lakiśmī who was fully agreeable to the mental make up of the king and the best amongst the women. The Uttarbarbil Copperplate Grant (V. 18) compares the purity of the mother of the donee Gaḥiṣṭhira with the Somacreeper, who was devoted to her husband like the wife of Vasiṣṭha, mother of a great progeny.
like Śacī, the beloved of Indra and was like the Earth in respect of patience. In the Bargaon Grant (V.12) the wife of Brahmapāla assumed the name Kuladevi, symbolising the steady presence of the royal fortune belonging to the king of the Bhauma family. The same grant (V.18) refers to Śyāmāyikā, who was the mother of the donee, accomplished with character and qualities and devoted to the husband, with her pure form she shone like a sharp digit of the moon, that destroys darkness. The Suwałkuchi Grant (V.18) refers to Ccheppāyikā, the wife of Vasudeva who was, the father of the donee, a celebrated, dear and pious wife like Lakṣmī (the goddess), keenly attached to the virtues of a devoted wife. She was beautiful and embellished with a bright complexion. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla (V.14) compares the wife of Purandaraṇa with Śacī to Indra, Parvati to Śiva, Rati to Smāra (i.e. Kamadeva), Lakṣmī to Hari (i.e. Viṣṇu) and Rohini to Niśākāra (i.e. the moon). The same grant (V.22) refers to Saukhāyikā, a chaste, devoted to noble customs and capable of giving pleasures through service. Rajyadevi, the chief queen of Indrapāla was compared with Lakṣmī (Kamalakara) in the Gachtal Grant of Gopāladeva (V.22). The Khanāmukh (V.11) Grant refers to Ratnā, the wife of Harsapala as the foremost among the chaste wives, just as Girijā in relation to Sambhu. The Subhaṅkarāpataka Grant (V.19) refers to Paukā, the mother of the donee like Rohini, the consort of the moon and like Parvati, the dear wife of the enemy of Andhaka (i.e. Śiva). The Puspabhadra Grant (V.17) compares the mother of the donee Madhusūdana with the beautiful creeper of emerald growing in the jewel-mountain of good luck; who was a green (i.e. delicate and immature) lotus
stalk growing in the mud of beauty (lavonya); who was a creeper sprouting out of a bulb (kanda) of delight and who had eyes like those of a young deer. Patrā, his wife was an object of his unalloyed love. She was an inexplicable creation of a female form by the creator. The petals of her eyes were as fickle as those of a frightened fawn, and her face was as charming as a blooming lotus (V.19). The Kamauli Grant (V. 24) refers to Pai, the wife of Yudhisthira, the father of the donee, as a boundless beauty, a repository of good character, generosity and grace and was the very solace to his (Yudhisthira’s) heart. The Assam Plates (Vv.8-9) refers to Ahiavadevi, the chief queen of Nīhsāṇkasimha similar to his own life. Like the female swan to the lake Mānasa in the form of the mind of the king, she was also a female swan; she was the light of the moon for the lily in the form of the whole host of erotic sport; she had the beauty of a lotus which is the very essence of the mundane life and she appeared as the only abode of loveliness. The exceptional degree of reverence to wife as well as mother can be seen in the Assam Plates (vv. 13-14) when Vallabhadeva, the son of Nīhsāṇkasimha gave an alms-house for the hungry father, for his (Vallabhadeva) mother’s obtaining the heaven for ever.

4.2.9.2. Participation in the Political affairs:

The queen had a position of some responsibility in the state. In the landgrant charters the name rajmā also referred to amongst the officials who were addressed by the king. From the Uttarbarbil Grant we get this term in almost all the inscriptions of the Kamarupa kings. The Nowgong Copperplate Grant (L.33-38)
refers to the granted land free from all the trouble-makers where the name Rajmā (queen) and ‘Mahallaka Praudhika’ were also mentioned along with other trouble makers. The word mahallaka probably means a member of the pāncāyat. The term also explained as ‘city elders’. The word praudhika taken separately should mean an old woman in general. Hence the two words are taken together to mean the old female guard of the harem, with the word mahallaka in the sense of a palatial building, as given by V.S. Apte. In that sense M.M. Sharma opines mahallaka praudhikā is ‘the old woman who officiates in the place of the eunuch’. Based of the Tantrik work Pag Som Zan, R.M. Nath spoke of Kadali, a kingdom where a queen reigned. He located Kadali in Nagaon and said that it was under the rule of either Kachari or a Jaintia queen. Inspite of all these references to the great qualities of women, the inscriptions donot give us any idea about their education and learning.

4.2.9.3. Common women:

The inscriptions of ancient Assam donot throw much light on the condition of common women. The Deopani Viṣṇu Image Inscription (8th century A.D.) refers to the worship of the goddess (Devi) in association with Siva. It refers to the Devī who is identical with Viṣṇu (Guhya) and accordingly the stone image of Narāyana was worshipped by the Śūdras, dvijas and women. The Tezpur Grant (V.29) refers to the gifts of women (Pramada) on numerous occasions along with the best of (i.e. ratna) plenty of gold, silver, elephants and horses. The Assam Plates (vv.21-22) refers to the grant of five assistants along with their sons

120. M.M. Sharma, I.A.A, P.149.
and wives for the maintenance of the alms house.

4.2.9.4. **Women’s association with Religious affairs:**

4.2.9.4.1. **Devadāsī and Nāṭī:**

The Tezpur Grant of Vanamala (V.24) refers to the reconstruction of the temple of Ḥaṭakasūlin and how endowed it with matchless villages, people, elephants and courtesans. This is also repeated in the Parbatīyā Copperplates of Vanamāla (V.24)

Women donated to temples were however meant to serve the god, the presiding deity of the temples and were popularly known as devadāsīs or female slaves of the god. The duties of the dancing girls were to fan the idol with cāmara, to prepare garlands and to sing and dance before the god. Most of the temples in mediaeval India has large number of them in their service. Dr. Altekar has observed that the custom of the association of dancing girls with temples probably become quite common in the sixth century A.D. By the time of the visit of Yuan-Chwang (7th century A.D.), the institution of the temple dancers had been well established. The courtesans were first employed in the temples of India, for the pleasure of the gods like Śiva, Viṣṇu and their spouses, to entertain them with song and dance. But the silence of reference to Devadāsī in the inscriptions of Bhūskaravarman and Harjaravarman suggests that this custom was not prevalent during this time. Most probably this custom came from South India to Assam in between 8th

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122. P. Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, P.236.
124. P. Thomas, Indian Women through the Ages, P. 237.
and 9th century A.D. The survival of the practice was found not only in a temple in Dubi but also in the Buddhist-Vaiṣṇava temple at Hajo.

In the inscriptions of Assam we have a reference to the Naṭiśī. The Tezpur Grant (Lines 14-20), the Parbatīyā Grant (Lines 33-47), refer to the movement of the dancing Naṭiś which becomes faster at the approach of the Naṭās. Reference to this dance of Naṭiś and Naṭās probably intended as a group dance. The Naṭiś in this reference are not to be identified with the Naṭiś of the Temples. But in medieaval Assam we have reference to Naṭiś associated with temples. P.C. Choudhury opines that in its extreme development, the institution has a parallel, in the premarital communal life of the bachelors’ quarters of the Assam tribes, but that has nothing to do with the Naṭī. The Tezpur Copperplates (L.16) refers to Duluhāṅgana. M.M. Sharma suggests that the term may have some relations with the Daflas. But according to B.K. Kakati ‘The compound seems to mean temple women’. If we accept this explanation then it is evident that Duluhāṅganaś were also one class of temple women of our period.

4.2.9.5. Prostitutes:

The inscriptions of ancient Assam contain some references to prostitutes. The Tezpur Grant (Lines 13 -14) refers to the waters of the river which became

fragrant on account of being addled with the mud of musk, besmeared on the surface of the pitcher like breasts of luxurious ladies (vilāsinīs) who have taken a plunge. While describing the city of Harūpesvara, the same inscription refers to the region adjoining both banks of the river Lauhitya which were embellished with rows of boats. In the inscription these boats were compared with harlots who display their bodies embellished with varieties of ornaments. Like prostitutes they hold chowries (cāmaras). The Bargāon Copperplate Grant (V.38) of Ratnapāla refers to erotic dalliances of the beautiful damsels who remove their fatigue sitting on the open top of the palatial buildings. The same grant (Lines 40-42) also refers to the sensual excesses of the city damsels and their indulgence in intoxicating spirits. The grant also refers to the term Vesyā and Vārastrī, both meaning courtesan and they generally resided in the best streets of the city. The grant also (Lines 41-43) refers to people who used to enjoy a lot of liberty in respect of love making. The Guwākuchi Grant of Indrapāla (Lines 61-62) records thirty two virudas of the king. One of these refers to him as a Kalāvilāsinīs. The Assam Plates (V.10) describes king Vallabhadeva as a lord of prostitutes in the form of the sons of his enemies with whom he is said to have performed erotic sport, in the form of heroic deeds or battles.

The institution of prostitutes is known in India from a very early times. Kane points out that there were women who were common to several men i.e. who were courtesans or prostitutes even in the Rgvedic Age. But the Dharmasāstra

131. P.V. Kane, History of Dharmasāstra, II, P. 637.
writers dismissed the class as belonging to the group of the Patitas and they say nothing of their merits which are often focussed in the Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana.

Yajñāvalkya is perhaps the earliest of the Dharmasastra writers who throws light on different classes of public women of the age, which we can categorised into three groups (Yajñāvalkya-Smṛti II.9-2, I.161) 132.

(a) Vesya or public women who openly entertain the people.
(b) Those slave women (dāsī) or the fallen women (svairini) who live in the house of a person as concubines
(c) Gaṇikā or the Courtesans.

Gautama also refers to prostitute (Gautama Dharmasūtra, XXII.27). In the Rāmāyana(II,51.21;) it is found that famous cities were decorated by the presence of Gaṇikās (Gaṇikāvarasobhitām). Gaṇikās were not ordinary prostitutes. Kauṭilya enjoins that Gaṇikās attend upon the king seated on the royal throne and in the royal palace. The Kāmasūtra defines a Gaṇikā as a Vesya who is accomplished and proficient in the 64 arts 133.

Vesyā(vesyāṅgā), Vārastrī and Kalāvilasini or Vilasini are all Sanskrit variant for prostitutes (Amarakosh). Kalāvilāsinī were perhaps those prostitutes who had achieved perfection in singing and dancing. The term Vilāsinī used for prostitutes in some Purāṇas. (Matsya Purāṇa, 70-75; Varaha Purāṇa,II,40;) Vārastrī are called Camaradahrinī in the grants ( Tezpur Grant, Lines. 14-15; Parbatīyā

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132. Dr. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, Social life in Ancient India.
Grant, Line. 46; Kuruvāvāhi Grant Line. 50). The epigraphic reference to Vārastrīś as Čamaradhārīṇīś may indicate that in ancient Assam prostitutes were employed by kings as their fly whisk bearers.

Thus, it is evident that royal women enjoyed greater privileges in the society. The wives of the donees or mothers also occupied a respectable position in the society. Their achievements were not depicted in the inscriptions. They were given religious rights along with dvijas and Śudras. It is very significant because long before the Vaiṣṇava reformer Sankaradeva women’s of Assam participated in religious affairs equally with the dvijas and Śudras. But gift of women along with other commodities, the existence of dancing girls, prostitute in ancient period proves that the patriarchal social structure of the Hindu society places women in a secondary position.

4.2.10. Food Habits:

Incidental references are found in the inscriptions about the nature of food and drinking, prevailing in ancient Assam. Food is determined according to the climatic conditions and the nature of the inhabitants.

Rice was the staple food, as is still today. Inscriptions refer to abundance of paddy cultivation. Paddy yielding of land was recognised as measurement of land. Besides rice, vegetables, fruits, fish constituted the chief articles of food. Inscriptions refer to a number of vegetables and fruit trees of ancient Assam.

The Gauḍāti Grant of Īndrapāla (L. 47) refers to Bhogadīrghikā which
according to M.M. Sharma is the pond of fish for their own consumption.¹³⁴

The Kalika-Purana and the Yogini Tantra refer to various kinds of food. The Yogini Tantra (11/9-257) refers to the preparation of curd and ghee which were used commonly. The earlier literature makes mention of some twenty five to fifty kinds of special dishes prepared with vegetables, pulses, fish and meat.¹³⁵

But the Bargaon Grant (L. 43) refers to ‘Pisitaśita svapadesu’ which according to M.M. Sharma tends to carry the socio-cultural datum that the people of ancient Kāmarūpa were vegetarian in food habits.¹³⁶

Various kinds of liquors were used. One of these alcoholic drinks was known as Ullaka. The Harṣacarita of Bāna refers to ‘Cups of Ullaka diffusing fragrance of sweet wine’¹³⁷ which were sent by Bhāskaravarman to Harṣa with the royal presents. The Bargaon Grant (L. 42) refers to ‘Madhumada mudita’ which according to Hoernle was an intoxication with alcohol. The same grant (L. 42) states that beautiful women elated with intoxication caused by wine indicates the practice of drinking wine by a section of women in ancient period. But the same grant (L. 44-43) states that incessant drinking wine was never seen in case of the ordinary citizen. The Yogini Tantra (11/7, 19) mentions wine in connection with the worship of goddess Kāmesvara.

The Dubi Grant (V. 21) refers to a lump of alkali. Tavernier refers to the

¹³⁴ M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P.
¹³⁵ Yogini Tantra, (11/7-189; 11/9); Kumāra Harana, V. 207, V. 208-9.
¹³⁶ M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P. 171.
¹³⁷ Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 213f.
extraction of salt from plantain trees. Another common practice was chewing and eating of tambula (arecanut).

The Uttarbarbil Grant (V. 5) refers to abundance of arecanut and betel leaf in Pragjyotisa. The practice of chewing and eating of tambula is recorded both in the Harṣacaria and in the accounts of the Muslim historians. The practice of eating betel-nut specially by the women is mentioned in the Yogini Tantra (1/6)

4.2.11. Dresses:

The Subhāṅkarpāṭaka Grant (L 54) refers to a special class of weaver (tantavāyus). Moreover the Bargāon Grant (Line 37) of Ratnapāla refers to Dukula cloth. The Arthasastra also refers to Dukula cloth along with Kṣauma and Patroṇa in connection with their production in Suvarṇakuḍya and other places in Kāmarūpa. Harṣacarita also refers to these cloths. These were identified with Edī, Muga and Pat silk of Assam. The Edī cloths are warm and were used by all classes of people during winter. Both Muga and Pat clothes are fine and costly. Harṣacarita refers to painted and variously dyed clothes which include among the presents of Bhaskara to Harsa. The Kalika Purāṇa (Ch. 69/5) described in detail the dresses of ancient Assam. Normally, male dress consisted of a paridhāṇa, similar to the present day dhoti. The Upper garments known as uttarīya, were used specially

138. V. Ball (tr.) Tavernier's Travels in India, II, PP. 282-3.
139. J.A.S.B., XLI, Pt. 1, P. 81.
140. Arthasastra (Shyamasasty), PP. 92f.
141. Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 212f.
142. Stake, Silk in Assam, PP. 6-12.
144. Cowell and Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 212f.
by the higher classes.

The Kalika Purana (68/12; 69/2) refers to varieties of garments made of Karpasa (cotton), Kambala (wool), Valka (bark), Koṣaja (silk from cocoons) and hemp clothes (sañavastram). The garments were usually ornamented with embroidery and a particular dress indicated one's status in the society, 145 which were mentioned in the Kalika Purana (68/8-16). The Kalika Purana (69/8) states that the use of red and yellow garments was auspicious, but on religious occasions, the use of red and blue garments was forbidden. Hemp cloth (sañavastram) is also mentioned in the account of Yuan-Chwang who mentions sañaka as a dark cloth made of the fibre of the Sañaka plant (a kind of hemp) and used by the bhikṣus. 146

The dress of the people as revealed in the sculptures of the period consisted of a single unstitched under garment (paridhāna) like the present day dhoti. This was worn wrapped round the waist, and hardly reached below the knee. It was held tight at the waist by a girdle (parivesa) consisting of three or more bands, fastened together by means of a knot in the centre, just below the naval. Sometimes one end of the garment was allowed to hang in graceful folds in the front. The use of the parivesa, waist-band, is known also from the Harṣacarīta, for Bana records that Harsa gave one to Hamsavega, whereof one part had cluster of clear pearls. 147 The same authority mentions a parivesa made of leather. Besides undergarments the Kalika Purana refers to the people of higher social status dressed in upper robes

145. Ibid., P. 215.
146. Watters, I, P. 120.
147. Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarīta, PP. 212f.
such as uttāriya and uttāriyasanga. Women too, appear to have worn two garments, the upper and the lower. The lower garments descended from the stomach to the ankles and was fastened by means of nīṁbandha. Yuan-Chwang informs that king Bhāskar used ‘tiara’ in his head at the time of Harṣa’s religious ceremony at Kanauj. Qazim, a later Muslim writer also refers to its use.

4.2.12. Ornaments:

The use of ornaments in ancient India goes back to a very remote period. Inscriptions of ancient Assam also refers to the use of ornaments. The Dubi Grant (V. 3) refers to Kundāla (earrings) which was mentioned in a number of later inscriptions. The Tezpur Grant (L. 14-15) states that harlots display their bodies, embellished with varieties of ornaments. The Grant also refers that small girls wear jingling bells which was also used by prostitutes. The Bargāon Grant (V. 14) refers to the various kinds of wares and jewellers’ shop of ornament. The Puspabhadra Grant (V. 15) also refers to the use of Kānkana (bangal)

The Kalika Purāṇa, (69/17-23) gives an exhaustive list of ornaments made of gold, silver and other metal, worn by men and women on different parts of their bodies, feet, waist, fingers, wrists, arms, neck, ears, and forehead.

The Kalika Purāṇa (69/33) states that silver ornaments could not be used above the neck, iron and and bell metal ornaments couldnot be worn and those of other metals could be used only for the lower part of the body. Some sculptures

148. Watters, I, P. 120.
149. Ibid.
testify the use of necklace (hāra), of beads in particular; some times middle; a flat
necklace was called galpata. The keyura and angada were worn on the upper arms

'The most simplest and the most sophisticated of attire is in the form of
Ardhanārīśvara' the right half practically unclad or clad in a tiger skin or elephant
hide with reptiles as ornaments, but the left half with the most sophisticated of
both drapery and ornaments. The mountain princess Parvati decks herself with
every possible jewel and has gorgeous costume.\(^{151}\)

The Tezpur Grant (30) refers that women used scented oil and anointed
their breasts with odorous substances. Inscriptions refers to the abundance of agaru
and sāndal wood, musk of deer in ancient Assam. Kalikā Purāṇa (69VV 37-53, 86/
39) also mentions the different kinds of perfumes which were used in common. A
rich perfume was prepared with Krṣṇa-guru oil. Hamsavega brought to Harṣa sacks
of woven silk, containing jet-black pieces of black aloe wood, gośirṣa candana,
camphor, kasturikākosa(musk) kukkola sprays.\(^{152}\)

The Tezpur Grant (L. 5) refers that prostitutes have red teeth like the damsels
of the harem of Rāvana. Yogiṁ Tantra (Ch. IX, V. 15) refers to the custom of
colouring the teeth Yuan-Chwang records that the people of India stained their
teeth red or black.\(^{153}\)

The Bargaon Grant (L. 38-9) refers to the use of manidapana by women.

The grant of Vallabhadeva refers to Sandals with leather straps.\(^{154}\)

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151. R. Alkazi, Ancient Indian Costumé, Forward by C. Sivaramamurti.
152. Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, P. 214.
153. Watters, I, P. 151.
154. E.I., V, PP. 181 f.
Inscription (L. 4) refers to the use of Camara (chowries) by the prostitutes. Use of umbrella in ancient Assam is mentioned in the Harṣacarita. The abhoga umbrella of the rulers of Kamarupa was a royal insignia. The umbrella sent to Harsa, manifested ‘many wonder moving miracles.’

The account of Bāna furnished a picture of upper class people of Assam who used ornaments studded with various kinds of jewels and had in their house silken and loin clothes, pillows of fine leather having various figures drawn on them for decorative purpose. They also were in the habit of keeping various kinds of birds in cages and domesticated deer that often roamed in their houses. They were also in the habit of using scents like Sandal, Camphor, musk etc. Collyrium was evidently used by the female folk as it is in vogue even today.

4.2.13. Sports and Pastimes:

Sports and Pastimes are integral parts of a vibrant social life. A nation or community devoid of these life-sustaining activities is physically and mentally retarded and is devoid of gusto for life. Hunting was a favourite pastime. Vallabhadeva’s plates (V. 11) mention ‘buffalo hunting and the Dubi plates (V. 75) refer to snaring of deer. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla hints at the method of catching tigers with nets. ‘Being passionately fond of the chase’, says the record, ‘Purandarapāla gave more than once extraordinary proofs of it by the way in which he captured hostile kings, like lion, in nettings of arrows improvised for the

occasion”. The Kalika Purana (86/134) also refers to the commonest children’s game which was played with dolls: *pacciones-viharādyaih sisunāṁ kautukaiśtatthā.* In a later work, the Deodhāi Asam Buranji presents an interesting account of the various pastimes of the Ahom monarch. 157 Dancing and music were popular amusements which were referred to in the inscriptions of ancient Assam. Inscriptions also refer to swimming as an amusement of upper class ladies which was referred in the Tezpur and Parvatia Copperplate Grant of Vanamāla.

4.2.14. Beliefs in Omen & Spirit:

People generally believed in Omens. Omens may be classified into two categories. The first category indicates good luck heralding happiness and good fortune and the second category signifies misfortune, ill luck, danger and even death. In the Kamauli Grant (V.8) soothsayers and Daivajñas announced coming of Vaidyadeva who would defeat the kings of the world. Most of the land grant charters of ancient Assam refer to the grant of land in an auspicious moment which reward in the other world for the parents and the donor king. Thus the belief in Omen played a conspicuous part not only in everyday life, but also in political affairs.

Belief in Spirit is reflected only in the Khanāmukh Grant (V. 10) which refers to Dharmapāla who in the battle, by breaking with weapons the foreheads of the enemy elephants, repeatedly made offering of drinks to the demons on all sides, who being thirsty drank up hurriedly the luke warm profusely.

157. Deodhāi Asam Buranji, Intro., XV.