CHAPTER VI

CULTURAL LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT ASSAM

Culture has been defined as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, language, religion, rituals, beliefs, art, crafts, dance and music, moral law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society."\(^1\)

Culture is not natural but it is created and learned so that it may enable man to adapt himself to his natural and cultural environment. It is dynamic and greatly variable and it is manifested in institutions, thought patterns and material objects. Thus culture is the way of life of the people, it binds them together and helps in their socio-economic and political development. Therefore, culture of a nation or a race is a full fledged expression of all its pursuits and should point to the best achievement in its national life.

6.1. Ideals of Monarchy in Kāmarūpa:

Any attempt at reconstructing the cultural life of the people of ancient Assam needs to study the political institution and their ideals. The ideology of kingship is a concept that expresses the status, power and functions of the king of a particular time and area. It also reflects the relations between the king and the subject community. Both these aspects are components of the ideology of kingship and are

\(^1\)The New Encyclopaedia Britanica, Vol. 16, PP. 874ff.
supplementary to each other. The aim of the state was to provide for an orderly life to ensure the social and spiritual end of each group and individuals in a society.\textsuperscript{2} It is not possible, however, to infer when an organized state was established in Assam. Possibly it existed during the foundation of the Bhauma-Naraka dynasty in Prāgyotisa.

The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva (V.12) refers to seven component parts called ‘Saptāṅga’ in ancient texts. The seven elements constituting the state are the king (svāmin), minister (āmatya), territory (janapada), fort (durga), treasury (kosa), army (danda) and ally (mitra).\textsuperscript{3} The king was the head of the administration and thus occupied the commanding position in the state. The kingship of ancient Assam was hereditary. The accession seems to have presupposed the attainment of consent of a number of people, at least expected to witness the Coronation ceremony. The Dubi Grant (V.22) states that Ganendravarman went to heaven after placing Mahendravarman to the throne in the presence of people whom he specially called forth. The idea of hereditary succession to the throne is referred to the Bargāon Grant (VV.9-10) of Ratnapāla where it is clearly stated that the descendants of the Naraka dynasty enjoyed the kingdom in hereditary successions. The grant again refers to the election of Brahmapāla by high officials and important members of the state. The grant refers to this element as ‘prakṛitaya’. It appears, therefore, that in ancient Assam, as in other parts of India, the conception of the state as an organisim was constituted of the seven elements as recognised.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{2} Manu, VII, 41; Yajnavalkya, II, 195.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., IX, 294; Arthasastra, VI, I; VII, I
\textsuperscript{4} P.C. Choudhury, H.C.P.A., P. 260.
The inscriptions of ancient Assam reflect a tendency of selecting qualified, energetic and young successor. The Hāyunthal Grant (V.8) states that Cakra and Arathi of the Sālastambha line were ignored for their insolence and the latter’s son ascended the throne. The Uttarbarbil Grant (V.16-17) refers to voluntary abdication of throne of Vanamala in favour of his son Jayamāladeva also known as Viṛabāhu who had finished his education and attained maturity. The grant (V.21-23) again states that Jayamāla or Viṛabāhu, being attacked by a disease, transferred his throne and crown to Balavarman III. The Bargāon Grant (V.15) states that Brahmapāla abdicated in favour of his son Ratnapāla as he thought it suitable to the occasion.

The prospective ruler as crown prince had to undergo a curriculum of training in all-important subjects. His qualities should include nobility, intelligence, energy and personal attainments. Inscriptions of ancient Assam claim such qualities of the king. The Gauliāti Grant of Indrapāla (V.15) states that he was acquainted with rhetoric, philosophy, logic and religion. Though these titles are conventional they embody a very real ideal. They are literary in origin and reflect the culture of the age. They therefore cannot be passed over as mere verbal adulation or servility.5

The king is expected to strive for people’s welfare. In Kāmarūpa the king was the head of the administration and occupied the commanding position in the state. His chief title was Mahārājādhirāja. The Nidhanpur Grant (L. 34) states that Bhāskaravarman was created by the Lord Brahmā. In the inscription the kings were often referred to as Parameter, Parama Daivata, Parama Bhagavata, Parama

Mahesvara which are evidently more than mere symbol of earthly paramunty.  

Apart from these imperial titles the king used special personal titles (birūdas). The Guwakuchi Grant (L.61-71) refers to thirty two birūdas of king Indrapāla. M.M Sharma suggests that the poet attempts at a deification of the patron king. They were also compared with Hari, Hara, Viṣṇu, Indra, Yamā, Varuṇa, Bhāskara, Kuvera, Agni etc. It shows that they were considered to be an incarnation of god on earth, functioning for the welfare of his subjects. Welfare of the subjects needs social solidarity. The ‘traivargya purusārtha’, the threefold aim of man, Dharma, Artha, and Kāma played a very big part in the thought of Classical India and in moulding the outlook of the people. It is the claims of righteousness, of religion, of gaining merit in order to win a happier rebirth to override those of profit and of sensual and other pleasures. If pursued correctly the three aims ultimately lead on to a fourth one Mokṣa, or complete release from the cycle of transmigration. The Hindu conception of three fold aim, thus works the whole field of human activities as well as the established social order with its attributes of law, conduct and worship.

The Nidhanpur Grant (V.8) refers to Samudravarman whose reign was free from ‘Matsyanyāya’. Matsyanyāya literary means’ the law of fish. It is a state of anarchy occurring due to the inefficiency of the ruling king, in which strong oppresses the weak, just as the big fishes swallow the smaller ones. Kauṭilya

6. Ibid., P. 47.
observes that if Daṇḍa (punishment) is not properly administered it causes Matsyanyāya\(^{11}\). It seems that the theory of daṇḍa deriving its authority and inseparable from an eternal law of Dharma or justice is responsible for the operative aspects of the state. The state is embodied in society to enable those constituting society to pursue this Dharma unhindered.\(^{12}\) This idea of Dharma provides the motive for all social life, and the duty of a government, as an organ of society, it is provided for the undisturbed maintenance of Dharma on earth. This Dharma is embodied to law, justice and duty. In order to do so, it must establish the social orders (Varna) and the stages in life's progress, Asrama i.e. the Varṇāśrama, based on immemorial custom and the authority of the sacred texts\(^{13}\). Establishment of social order in the ultimate analysis is stability of the state to be inferred from the concrete measures adopted to realize the general welfare (Parahitamurtih).

The Nidhanpur Grant (L.35-37) states that Bhāskaravarman established Dharma or divine social order or Varṇāśramadharma. The same grant (L.7) states that when a son was born to a king it is for the preservation of the world. The Gaulāṭi Grant (v.18) states that the king ruled the kingdom in accordance with the laws of the Varna and Āśrama where the people delighted with yielding of abundance of products as if the earth has again attained the prosperity as in the days of Prithu. The Khanāmukh Grant (V.12) states that though Dharmapāla was devoted to Dharma he also protected the cause of Kāma and Artha in proper time. The Puṣpabhadra

\(^{11}\) Arthasastra, I, 13.5.  
\(^{12}\) Manu, IV, 176.  
\(^{13}\) Ibid., VII, 221.
Grant (V.V.6-7) states that Dharmapāla’s heart was dedicated only to Dharma who appeals to the future kings to give up false vanity on account of possessing the kingdom which is transitory as the streak of lightening but should not give up Dharma which is perennial source of pleasure. It shows that the fundamental ideal of the Kāmarūpa monarchy was to do way with Mātsyanyāya and to create conditions for the welfare of all and to strive for the realization of the three aims of life, Dharma, Artha, Kāma, paving the way for the fourth – ‘Mokṣa’.

The Dubi Copperplate Grant (L.38-39) states such an idea in the description of king Mahābhūtavarman, a powerful monarch of the Bhauma dynasty. Here the king is of amiable disposition but terrible to the enemy after enjoying innumerable pleasures to his heart’s fill and giving away the charity to his subjects to his full satisfaction is said to have gone to heaven through Yoga discarding his own bodily fame. The ideal of non-possession through non-attachment is ‘what is striven for attainment’, if ‘vita-ragena teneha sakalanākharuppah kṛtah’ (Dubi, L. 56). This objective can be realized, from a steadfast devotion to duty as a king and as a man of the world in a sacrifice. The Dubi Grant (V.31-34) states that “Having conquered the (whole) world as far as the ocean, and brought under control the enemies through his prowess, that king made sacrifices like Lord Indra and obtained Suvrata”. The idea is to realize the potentialities of the human life through sacrifices in a process of activities in phases in keeping with the stages of life and schematically adjusted to the caturvargas. This ideals of monarchy of Kāmarūpa kingdom is compared with the Indian tradition
what is given by Kalidāsa as the ‘beau-ideal of kingship’.14

The king was prepared for sacrifice from the time of his accession to the throne in a course of religious discipline for the cause of the state and the people. We donot find any reference in the inscriptions of ancient Assam to Vajapeya sacrifice or Ājājasūya sacrifice. But instead of the Ājājasūya sacrifice performed in all details, the Coronation ceremony was called Abhiseka or Mahābhiṣeka. It was performed with due solemnity and eclat maintaining all the traditions of a Vedic Coronation ceremony15. The Dubi Copperplate Grant (V. 40) refers to Sthitavarman who ‘enjoyed like Indra the performance of the Coronation ceremony by the Brahmāṇas according to śastra accompanied by the propitiatory sound of conch-shell and the drum’. The Háyuntal Grant of Harjaravarman (L. 18-20) states ‘that illustrious Harjaravarma being sprinkled with water from all the holy places filled up to the brim in auspicious pitchers made of silver ascended the throne surrounded, as Indra by the Māruts, by saluting kings and highborn princes accompanied by merchants’. This ceremony is performed with reference to the great Coronation ceremony of Indra, ‘Aindramahābhiṣeka’ which is associated with all the Coronation ceremonies of the Kṣatriyas in the Brahmaṇa literature16. It is apparent that the accession to the throne was witnessed by a number of subordinate chiefs who, after offering unquestioned loyalty, indicate their consent to his suzerainty by being present on the occasion of his installation as king. The presence

15. Ibid.
of the princes of high birth and merchants in the sprinkling ceremony has given due representation to the three orders of castes in the society in the ceremony in due conformity with the practices of the Brahmantic period. But from the 8th century A.D. most of the earlier features of the Coronation ceremony became obsolete, and besmearing of the king's body with several auspicious types of earth dust and his bath with the waters of several sacred rivers became very important parts of the ceremony. In the Coronation ceremony of Harjaravarman, he was sprinkled, with the water of all sacred rivers contained in a silver pitcher by the merchants and princes of noble birth. (Hayunthal Grant, V.V. 13-14). A number of inscriptions of ancient Assam from 8th century A.D. introduced a benediction in the name of Lauhitya as Sindhu is significant from this point of view. The Dubarani Stone Slab Inscription also glorifies the cause of building river wharf by Vasundharavarman during c. 400 A.D. Another sacrifice referred to in the inscriptions of the Varman dynasty is the Asvamedha sacrifice. Asvamedha sacrifice is an attempt to conquer a number of states, to declare a king of paramount monarchy and by way of consolidation of his position by letting loose the sacrificial horse in accordance with the injunctions of the sastras. The Nalanda Clay Seal of Bhaskaravarman clearly states that Sri Mahendravarma and Sthiravarma performed two Asvamedha sacrifices each. The Barganga Rock Inscription of Bhutivarman also clearly states that this monarch was also a performer of Asvamedha sacrifice. The performance of Vedic sacrifices began to fall into disuse in later years. Powerful king Bhaskaravarman,

Harjaravarman, Balavarman III, Ratnapāla and others are not described as performer of Asvamedha sacrifice. It seems that the Purānic religion got a preponderence over them as time advanced.

Paternal ideal of the Kāmarūpa kings helped in creating goodwill between the ruler and the ruled. The Dubi Grant (V. 18) states that Mahendravarman protected his subjects like his own children. Verse 34 of this grant again states that Chandramukhavarman removed all blemishes like theft, famine and oppression. The Ḥāyunthāl Grant (V. 6) refers to Harṣadeva who looked upon his subjects as his own children and protects, but never ill treated them.

Thus, the ideals of Indian culture enriched the Kāmarūpa kings which turned them to be a strong patron of that culture. Land grant to Brāhmans, construction of temples, alms-house etc. were a part of that patronage.

6.2. Village Life:

Assam was predominantly an agricultural country and land was the sole possession of man. Agriculture being the chief occupation of the people, the civilization of Assam has tended to centre round villages.

Most of the inhabited and cultivated areas in ancient Assam lay within the valley of the Brahmaputra river or near the various other rivers which constituted an integral part of the Assam valley. The Nidhanpur Grant (L. 27ff) states that Mayūrasālmālāgrahāra was marked off on all sides by the Kausika and the Gaṅgini river beds. The Guwakuchi Grant (L. 49ff) refers to Paṇḍūrī-bhumi which was marked off by the Kaharavijola, Sākhotakajola, Srotāsijola amongst other marine boundaries.
The Puspabhadra Grant (L. 48ff) refers to Guhesvara Digdolavṛddha-grāma which was surrounded by various streams or stretches of water (called jolis) such as Camyalājoli, Nekkadeuli, Siṅgāḍī, Dijamakkā, Cakkojāna and also by the Jaugalla and Bekkasūska rivers.

Organisation of village with agriculture as their main occupation has been an important character of India from early times. In case of ancient Assam, villages have covered most of the landscape of the land. The contemporary epigraphs furnish us with the names of a large number of villages or grāmas. The term grāma, pātaka and koṇči appear almost equally in the epigraphs. It is likely that these terms denoted villages of various sizes. The pātaka invariably denotes a small habitat, smaller than a village. The grant of Vallabhadeva refers to the donation of five grāmas along with two pātakas, Dosripātaka and Sonchipātaka (V. 20). The term grāma denotes a bigger village, not merely the inhabited locality with its cluster of dwelling houses with gardens attached but comprised the whole area within the village boundaries. Thus a grāma comprised the residential part (Vāstubhūmi), the cultivable fields (kṣetra), land under pasturage (go-cāra), the westland that remained untilled, streams, canals, cattle paths (go-mārga), roads and temples (Nowgong Grant, L. 36 ff). It is very much probable that the koṇči is a very big village. The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva (L. 47) mentions Hamsakoṇči as his royal headquarter. Definitely, Hamsakoṇči must have been a larger area.

The boundaries of such bhūmi or grama were well defined by some marks, mounds, ponds, tanks, riverbeds and such other natural boundaries. Sometimes such
a mark was made artificially. The Subhankarapataka Grant (L. 53) refers to the plantation of a Sālma tree (Ropita Sālmalīvṛkṣa) and bamboo fence (L. 60).

The inscriptions refer to the agglomerated villages. The Gauhatī Grant (L. 45 ff) refers to the donated land Kasipātaka belonging to the district of Hapyomā, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river which was surrounded by other plots of land similarly owned or occupied. On the eastemside it touched Makūti mākkiyānabhūmi occupied by Kūntavita and Kambhavā and to the north was Bhavisābhūmi under the occupation of Āditya bhattachāra. The Puspabhadra Grant refers to (L. 47-56) the land of Dijjaratihādi, the land of Abanci Kaivarttas and similarly held lands touched the boundaries of Guhesvara-dig dolavṛddha grāma.

Sometimes families took-up residence and cultivation at a relatively considerable distance from other habitats. For instance the Ulubāri Grant (L. 31-38) refers to the donated land called Dikkura (with a yield of 2,000 units of paddy) which did not at any point touch the boundaries of similarly cultivable plot. The land was situated within the bend of the Dimdau river with almost no traces of human influence except for the eastern side of a rampart constructed by the king.

The homestead (vāstu) land was the hub around which lay the waste land and wood land consisting of fruit and other trees, shrubs and bamboo thicksets which might extend for some distance before the boundary of another village was reached.

The kṣetrabhūmi or arable land was usually a huge open field without any fencing. In many cases the cultivated land was situated within the bend of the eastern and western sides of river. The Tezpur Grant (Line 24-27) refers to the village
Abhisuravataka which was situated to the west of the famous Trisrota river. The Ulubari Grant (L. 37) refers to the land Dikkura which was situated within the bend of the eastern bank of the Dimdau river. The Gauhati Grant (L. 45-53) refers to the Bhavisva bhumi which was situated to the eastern bend of the Dirgumma river.

Vrhadalis (embankments) seem to be a common feature of the rural landscape. The Ulubari Grant mentions a high embankment constructed by the king. Alis were constructed by the king which were well raised and served as bunds against the encroachment of rivers. Inscriptions also refer to kṣetra alis (low-built ridges) which were crucial elements in providing the necessary water for irrigation. A number of terms refer to the inscriptions like ‘Sajala-Sthala’, jola, garta, doba etc. all of which indicate that arable land was supplied with water. Yuan-Chwang’s recorded statement, ‘water led from the river or from banked-up lakes (reservoirs) flowed round the towns’ may be taken to mean that the water was supplied into the nearby fields most probably orchards.

The inscriptions refer to the pasture land which was donated along with the donated land. The Bargaon Grant (L. 56) refers to ‘Vāstukedārsthala-jola-go-pracarā-vakārādyupeta’ which indicate that pasture land was located along with the village boundaries. Go-cara-bhumi was a very early institution. According to Kautilya an enclosure (for pasturage) at a distance of 100 dhanus (400 cubits) should be made around a village. The Nowgong Grant refers to a cattle path to the east, leading away from

the donated land (Gosantarashra). The pasture land and cattle path were considered
to be common and undivided property of the village.

6.3. Agriculture, Flora and Fauna:

Rice being the staple food cultivation of paddy was done extensively. The
extensive cultivation of paddy is proved by the fact that the areas of donated lands
were expressed in terms of the measures of paddy as
‘dhānyadvisahroptikabhūm’, ‘dhānyacatus-sahasrot pattikā’ etc.

Besides rice growing the Bargaon Grant (L. 52) mentions the gift of a
labukutiksetra, which according to Hoernle was a field with clusters (hills) of
gourds22.

The inscriptions mention a number of plants and trees. These were jack fruit
(Kanthal, Gauhati Grant, Khanāmukh Grant, Puṣpabhadra Grant), black berry
(Jamuu, Uttarbarbil Grant and Nowgong Grant of Balavarman III), mango
(Āmra, Nowgong Grant, Suwalkuchi Grant, Guwakuchi Grant), walnut
(Sakhotaka, Subhankarapataka Grant), sweet root (Sarkaramula, Suwalkuchi Grant), Śrīphala
(Grant of Balavarman), Jujubi (Badarivrksa, Bargaon Grant), Lukuca (Āmalaka, a kind of
bread fruit)23, Gamboze tree (Betasa)24, Caroka (a wild plum tree whose fruits are eaten
as betelnuts),25 Rudrakṣa26 (bead tree, whose nuts are made in to rosary).

Furthermore a large number of trees useful for their timber also referred to

23. K.S., P. 103 f.n.3.
24. Ibid., P. 109 f.n.2.
25. Ibid., P. 163, f.n.3.
26. Ibid., P. 115, f.n.2.
the inscriptions. The most common is the banyan tree (Vata, also called Asvattha
Nowgong Grant), Saptaparna (Ulubārī Grant, L. 54), Jhingani tree (Guwākuchi Grant
L. 53), Odiama (Subhaṅkarapātaka Grant L. 53), Madar (Ulubārī Grant, L. 55),
bamboo (Parbatiyā Grant, L. 49), Cane (Uttarbarbil Grant, L. 53).

Inscriptions of ancient Assam refers to some important plants which had
the potentiality of being items of exchange. These were betelnut trees
(Nowgong Grant V. 5), panvine (Uttarbarbil Grant, V. 5), and agaru. A Bhadrākṣa
tree is mentioned in the Suwałkuchi Grant (L. 60) which can be identified with the
Bhadrāśrī wood. This is a synonym of the famous Chandana or sandal wood tree.
Numerous silk cotton trees known as Sālmali called as Kāśimbala is referred to in
the inscription (Bargaon Grant L. 66). Kāśimbala provided the raw material on which
the silk worms fed to produce the silk for which Kāmarūpa was famous since the
time of Arthasastra. The plantation of silk cotton trees is referred to the
Subhaṅkarapātaka Grant (L. 53).

Besides these trees the inscriptions of ancient Assam refer to a number of
flowers like Suvārṇadāru (Uttarbarbil Grant L. 54), Paṭali tree (Ulubārī Grant, L. 53),
Kadamba tree (Uttarbarbil Grant, L. 53) and Hijjala tree (Bargaon Grant, L. 53).

The forest products of Assam undoubtedly, played an important role in the
economic life of the area. Kautilya states that forest tracts would be granted to
Brahmaṇas for religious purposes. It appears from the Kamauli Grant that such

27. Ibid.
29. Book II, Ch II.
gifts were also made in Assam. The system of forest reservation, a practice referred to in the Arthasastra was well established. The Uttarbarbil Grant (V. 9) of Balavarman refers to the large belts of forest (Vana). Kalidasa also refers to the forests of valuable trees which covered Kamarupa.

Assam is not only rich in flowers but equally so in respect of fauna. From the age of the Mahabharata, down to the present century, Assam is famous for elephant. King Bhagadatta of Pragjyotisa who participated in the great Kuruksetra usually fought sitting on the elephant Supratika. The first three historical dynasties of ancient Assam contained seals having an embossed head or standing figure of elephant. The inscriptions refer to the fauna of ancient period, though it is not exhaustive one. The names include horse (Nidhanpur Grant, V. 31, Tezpur Grant L. 42), snake, peacocks, musk deer, leopards, deer, (Tezpur Grant, L. 21, 6, 7, 8 respectively), elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep (Uttarbarbil Grant, L. 40-43), swans (Nowgong Grant, L. 39, Gachtal Grant V. 11) and cakravaka birds (Gachtal Grant, V. 29).

6.4. Crafts and Industries:

The economic wealth of the country played a considerable part in the evolution of different industries such as textile, smithy, pottery, metal works, ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane. In the development of various industrial products, the craftsmen of Kamarupa had a place in ancient India.

30. Raghuvamsa, IV, V. 81.
6.4.1. Silk:

The art of sericulture and weaving, rearing of cocoons for manufacture of various silk cloths were known to the people of Kāmarūpa as early as the days of the Rāmāyana and Arthaśāstra. The inscription of Ratnapāla (Bargāon Grant, V. 7) refers to Bhagadatta’s widespread fame in the following manner “.............all the directions were covered by the silken canvas of his wide fame”. The grant (L. 37-39) also compares the beauty of the Kailāśa borne Brahmaputra with a silken banner (dukūla) carried by an elephant. Dukūla is associated with this region from the days of Kautilya. While refers to Cīnapatta (Cīnābhūmija) Kautilya refers to three varieties of Indian silk, Dukūla of the Vangas, Pundras and the best one from Suvarṇakuḍya, which has been identified with Assam; Kṣauma from Kāśi and the Pundras; and Patrona-silk from the Magadhās and the Pundras and Suvarṇakuḍya, the last one being the best of all.

The Suvarṇakuḍya variety of Dukūla had the colour of the ‘risinsun’. It is beyond doubt that Kautilya had referred to the golden coloured Muga silk of Assam. The Muga clothes are usually yellowish with the tinge of gold and are often dyed red with lac. Muga worms are generally fed on trees like Chom (Machilus redoroatissima), Champā (Michelia pulnyensis), Dīghalati (T. Dīghalati) and Adakuri (Tetrantheraquadrifolia). There is no Sanskrit equivalent for Muga which

32. Arthaśāstra, II, 102-13, According to Amarakośa, II, 6.16, dukūla is the finest of the Kṣauma class.
33. Stack, Silk in Assam, PP. 13-21.
34. F. Hamilton, Account of Assam, PP. 61-62.
seems to indicate that Muga is an exclusively indigenous product of Assam, though perhaps a small quantity is produced in Dehradun. In connection with the presents to Harsha, Banabhatta refers to ‘abhoga umbrella wrapped in Dukula cloth and a variety of silken objects woven out of pattasutra.

The source of Patroma fibre, according to Kautilya is Nāga tree, Likuca (artocarpus lakoocha), Vakula (mimusopselengi), and Vaṭa tree. Vakula tree is not mentioned in the epigraphs, but the tree is very common in the flora of Assam. The Amarakoṣa (II, VI, 3, 14) defines it as a bleached or white Kauṣeṣya (silk). Kṣirasvāmi, commenting on the Amarakoṣa explains Patroma fibre as produced from the saliva of a worm fed on the leaves of certain trees. This Patroma fibre definitely is the famous ‘Pāṭ silk’ of Assam. Its fibre is generally produced from the worm fed on mulberry trees.

The Arthaśāstra does not connect Kṣauma with Assam. In the Harṣacarita it is said that Bhāskararvarman sent to Harsha silken towels (Kṣaumāṇi). This reference to Kṣaumāṇi makes it clear that this variety was also cultivated in Assam, possibly after Bhūṭivarman’s conquest of the Pundravardhana region. The Harṣacarita by its reference to the colour of Kṣauma as ‘white as the autumn’s moonlight’ makes it clear that it is no other than the present Edi cloth of Assam. The Edi cloth is usually white with a yellowish tinge. Thus it may be presumed that at least at the

36. B.C. Allan, Monograph on the Silk Clothes of Assam.
37. Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 212 f.
38. Arthaśāstra, Bk. II, Ch.II.
39. Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 212f.
time of Bhāskaravarman, Assam produced three varieties of silk—Dukūla, Patroma
and Kṣauma distinguished chiefly by their colour and by material also. These were
identified with Pat, Ḣeḍi and Muga.

It is difficult to fix a date for the knowledge of silk industry in Assam. The
reference of Arthasastra is confirmed by Harṣacarita, which gives valuable evidence
on the industrial resources of Assam during the time of Bhāskara varman. The
continuation of the industry is confirmed by later writers also. Qazim, for instance,
writes that the silk of Assam was very excellent, resembling that of China
40. Tavernier remarks that the silk of Assam was produced on trees and the stuffs made of them
were very brilliant41.

6.4.2. Dyeing:

The Puṣpabhadra Grant (L. 56) refers to the branchless trunk of the
Madhura Āsvattha tree. The trunk of the tree was used for breeding la-poka or lac
insect. The culture of lac insect is a speciality of Assam43.

Roman writer Ctesias and Aelien mentioned the lac insect feeding on a tree
called Siptachora which yielded purple dye. The reference is to the people of Seres
alias ancient Assam44. The Harṣacarita refers to the presents of the ‘smooth figured
textures’ pointing indirectly to the colour produced from lac and other substances.

42. P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S., P. 225.
6.4.3. Gold Washing:
The Tezpur Grant (V. 1) mentions that 'the river Lauhitya ...... looking like the rays of the moon polluted with the mud of gold, gushing up on account of the waters dashing against the accumulation of huge ‘gold rocks of the mount Kailāśa ......’. A similar line also occurs in the Parbatiyā Copperplates (V. 1) of the king. The imageries might have physical basis because the Lauhitya and the rivers like the Noa-Dihing, Buridihing, Dhansiri, Dosei, Subansiri are said to be auriferous. The Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla mentions the later rebuilt gold temple of Hetuksūlina. The same grant records (V. 29) how the king was in the habit of making gifts of gold and silver in different occasions. The washing of gold was practised extensively during the Ahom period. Tavernier writes that the practice yielded a substantial quantity and gold and silk were exported from Assam overland to China.\(^{45}\) Fathiyah-i- Ibriyah records that thousands of people were employed by the Ahom rulers for the purpose of washing gold.\(^{46}\) All these statements prove that the practice was an ancient and lucrative economic pursuit.\(^{47}\)

6.4.4. Jewellery:
Evidence of excellent workmanship of the jewellers' art is referred to in the Bargaon Grant (V. 14) of Ratnapala. The grant compares the battlefield with a market of jewels having plenty of Padmarāga jewels. The Parbatiyā Grant (V. 16) also described Vanamāla wearing a mahāratnamālā in the form of royal qualities. The

\(^{45}\) Travels, II, P. 282 f.
\(^{46}\) J.A.S.B., XXXI, P. 49 f.
\(^{47}\) Wade, Geographical Sketch of Assam, PP. 16f.
Tezpur Grant (L. 14-20) described the boats decorated with varieties of embellishments. The Kalika Purana also (69/17-23) refers to ornaments of gold, silver, bell metal and even of iron. The best specimens of the period were probably included in the presents sent by Bhaskara to Harsha, which according to Bana included the Abhoga umbrella, ornamented with jewelled ribs; ornaments, which crimsoned the heavenly space with the light of the finest gems; shining crest jewels; pearl necklaces which seemed the source of the milk ocean’s whiteness, quantities of pearls, shell, sapphire and other drinking vessels, made by skilful artists; bright gold leaf-work; various birds with the necks bound in golden fetters and enclosed in gold painted cages. 48 These evidences indicate that making various ornaments and wares, the craftsmen of our period and at a subsequent time showed no mean workmanship 49.

6.4.5. Wooden works:

The Tezpur Grant (L. 14-20) of Vanamala refers to boats carved with designs and decorated with ornaments. This single piece of evidence would show that the carpenters of ancient Assam were skilful workers with an artistic bent of mind 50. The art of wood carving is proved by Bana, who writes that the presents from Bhaskara to Harşavardhana included ‘carved boxes with panels’ 51.

6.4.6. Manufacture of Aromatics:

The people of ancient Assam had acquired the knowledge of various timbers

51. Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, P. 212.
for different purposes. Kālāgaru is referred to in the Tezpur Grant (L. 6) of Vanamāla and the Nowgong Grant (V. 5) of Balavarman. The Parbatīyā Grant refers to the fragrant flood water showed by the clouds arising from the smoke of the Krisnāgaru trees burnt in the forest fires occurring in the parks, adjoining the city of Haḍappesvara. The Arthasastra refers to three types of aloe wood Jongaka and Dongaka being products of Kāmarūpa, while the location of Parasamudraka is not certain. K. L. Barua observes that ‘the Hindus of ancient Assam used the substance of agaru in the form of fragrant past like sandal wood paste but not in the form of essence’. 53.

The Tezpur Grant (V. 30) of Vanamāla refers to the use of perfumes by women. The musk of deer (kasturikā marganām) finds mention in the inscription of Vanamāla. In the Harṣacarita we get reference to ‘musk-deer scenting the space all round them with their perfume’ as well as ‘tame female camaradeer’. 54. Camara is referred to in the Tezpur Grant (L. 18) of Vanamāla. All these references indicate that Kāmarūpa was a noted centre as early as the period of Arthasastra for manufacture of varieties of perfumes.

6.4.7. Minor Crafts:

6.4.7.1. Leather Work:

The grant of Vallabhadeva refers to hide strap. 55. The development of the industry can be inferred from the reference of literature. The manufacture of woollen

52. Arthasastra, (Kangle), II, 11, 57-58.
54. Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 212f.
and leather goods is proved by the Kalikā Purāṇa (68/12; 69/2) which mentions kambala (woolen cloths) among the textile materials. Bhāskara is said to have given a cap of fur or skin to Yuan-Chwang as a present for protection against rain in his return journey to China\textsuperscript{56}. The Harṣacarita states that Bhāskara sent to Harṣa ‘loads of Kargarāṅga leather bucklers charming boarders, bright gold leaf work winding about them’ and ‘Pillows of Samūraka leather’\textsuperscript{57}. An earliest reference to buffaloe and rhinoceros’ hide as export commodities from Assam is made by Classical writer like Ammianus Marcellinus and Pliny\textsuperscript{58}.

6.4.7.2. Pottery:

The Nidhanpur Grant (L. 130) refers to Kumbhakāragarta or pit where from the pottery makers used to gether their materials for wheel. The Kamauli Grant (L. 60) refers to Kumbhakāras and the Pūṣpabhadra Grant (L. 50) refers to the land of Dījaratihādi indicate the existence of the pottery making in ancient Assam. The Clay Seals of Bhāskaravarman and Vasundharaśvanman point to the development of the art of clay modelling in this region. Bāna mentions among presents of Bhāskara ‘drinking vessels embossed by skilful artists,’ ‘molasses in earthen pots’ and ‘cups of ullaka diffusing a fragrance of sweet wine’\textsuperscript{59}. The discovery of an ancient potter’s kiln in the village Barabhit-a, 14 k.m. north-west of Goalpara town, on the south bank of Brahmaputra has brought to light several unknown informations on processing/firing of terracotta objects (votive stupa segments). It was the first kiln

\textsuperscript{56} Life, P. 189.
\textsuperscript{57} Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 212ff.
\textsuperscript{58} J.A.S.B., 1847, PP. 68f.
\textsuperscript{59} Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 212 ff.
discovered in Assam so far where terracotta objects were burnt before they were fixed into temple/Stupa, inspite of the fact that they were first modelled in soft clay, then were dried under the sun and there after burnt. The terracotta objects can well be dated stylistically to C 9th –10th century A.D. 

6.4.7.3. Brick Building:

The Suwałkuchi Grant of Ratnapala (L.5) mentions the root of a Sarkarā tree on brick mounds (Iṣṭa kendra) while describing the boundary of the donated land. This indicate building activities in ancient Assam. The Bàrgaon Grant refers to the city of Durjaya which had thousands of white washed mansions. It appears that these mansions were brick built and they had been white washed. The Gauhāti Grant (V. 10 ) of Indrapāla also refers to the construction of a number of white washed temples and houses of Brāhmaṇas. The Ambāri excavation has also unearthed ruins of brick built structure. 

6.4.7.4. Engraving on Stone / Copper/ Bronze:

Blacksmiths are such an important group with out whose service no settled agricultural community using iron implements could exist. Besides agricultural


63 A.K. Sarma, Emergence of Early Culture in North-East India.
implements the blacksmiths rendered their services in the manufacture of war materials like swords, spear, discus, javelin, arrow, dagger etc. Numerous stone inscriptions, some of which inscribed on stone image give us evidence of the development of the art of stone engraving. The Da-Parvatiyā gateway of Tezpur is the earliest stone art work of the region. Some people worked on copper also. The Nidhanpur Grant (L. 136) refers to the coppersmith named Kāliya. The Puspabhadra Grant also refers to its engraver SṛīViniṭa (L. 45). Metallic composition analysis of a copper coin indicates the talent of the royal mint master, who was able to achieve high purity despite prevalent technological limitations.

The people of ancient Assam also possessed the knowledge on bronze work. Discovery of a number of bronze icons, some bearing inscriptions proved the work on bronze in ancient Assam. The Kalika Purana (Ch.69/17-23) also refers to the working on metal such as silver, copper, bronze and brass. Minting of bronze coin in ancient Assam is indicated by the metallic composition of the Nakuchi-Bargaön coins.

6.4.7.5. Bamboo and Mat making:

Bamboo is one of the important products of Assam. In the inscriptions of ancient Assam we very often find mention of bamboo forests as marking the boundary.

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66. Sec. Chapter III.
line of some donated land. Inscriptions of ancient Assam refers to Hijjal which is a kind of bamboo of splendour quality used in the villages for building houses, making fences, baskets, bridges and traps for hunting and fishing. On account of such importance, bamboo is held in special reverence and popular superstition forbids cutting such trees on inauspicious days. Bana testifies to this highly developed craft in ancient Assam. He states that Bhaskara sent to Harsha 'baskets of variously colourd reeds', 'thick bamboo tubes' and various birds in 'bamboo cages.'

Mat making was another allied art. These were usually made of cane which was found in plenty in the forests of Assam. Evidence of the production of other cane articles is also supplied by the Harṣacarita, which mentions stools of cane.

6.4.7.6. Ivory work:

Assam is rich in elephants and rhinoceros, which led to the rise of ivory work, and other objects made of the horns of the latter type of animals. The abundance of elephants in the forests of Assam is testified by the epigraphs of ancient Assam. Besides, the Bargaan Grant (V.14) refers to elephant pearls (gajamukta). The Classical writers also refer to the abundance of elephants in Assam along with ivory and rhinoceros horns. Kalidasa alludes to the capture of elephants in the jungles of Assam. Yuan-Chwang wrote in his accounts that in the south-east of Kamarupa there were elephants in herds. Bana mentions among the presents of

69. Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 212ff.
70. J.A.S.B., 1847, PP. 52f.
71. Cowell & Thomas, Harṣacarita, PP. 212ff.
73. Raghuvamśa, IV, V. 84.
74. Watters, II, PP. 185ff; Life, II, PP. 195ff.
Blāskara to Hārṣa, rings of hippopotamus ivory, encrusted with rows of huge pearls from the brows of elephants. Working in ivory is now an extensive and one of the most artistic industries in Assam, practised not only in the plains but also by some tribes like the Manipuries.

All these prove that varied industrial arts were developed in Assam at an early period and were continued to be practised till recent times, based on that traditions, like those of the crafts men of other parts of India, who showed equal skill whether in the making of clay toys or in the preparation of costly perfumes.

6.5. Emergence of Towns:

The agricultural and forest products and crafts of ancient Assam naturally led to the growth of trade and commerce. A number of terms which were used to denote urban settlements in ancient and medieval period occur in the inscriptions. In the Dubi Copperplate Grant (V.41) where Indra’s capital is referred to, it is called a pura. The grant (V.49) again mentions that Sthiravarman (i.e. Sthitavaraman) spent sometime in the old city (pura) and built a new city on the bank of the Lauhitya along with his retinue. The Nidhanpur Grant (V.21) refers to the unnamed capital of Supratiśhitavarman, which was situated on a hilly area and likened to Kulācala. This pura was most probably Pragjyotiṣapura. Pragjyotisapura is identified with the Jatiya and Dispur areas of modern Guwahati. But the inscriptions issued by Bhaskaravarman do not refer to the name of the capital city. Yuan-Chwang

75. Cowell & Thomas, Harsacarita, PP. 212-15.
76. Donald, Ivory Carvings in Assam.
78. In the Dubi Seal Puṣyavarman is referred to Pragjyotisendra.
emphasized its bigger territorial dimension and the presence of moats as a feature of Kāmarūpā's town. In the Nidhanpur Grant (V. 2) the term Skandhāvāra occurs denoting the royal residence of the aforesaid king, named Kānasuvāra.

Yuan-Chwang recorded that there were a number of people from other lands who had come to Bhāskara varman's capital in search of work. Probably he was referring to specialized functionaries and occupational groups who could sell their skill and wares in urban settlement. The Umācal Rock Inscription of 5th century A.D. refers to the construction of a cave temple. Evidently a class of workers had tools and expertise to excavate a cave in a rocky hill side. They must be professionals in the art. Besides, there must be a composer, well versed in Sanskrit, engraver and blacksmith. The 8th century Copperbell Inscription of Śrīkumāra also indicates the existence of workmen engaged in producing copperbells. The recent finds at Ambari, a suburb of Guwahati, of Kaolin pottery, icons of Brahmanical deities, fragments of the walls of dressed and undressed stones, tentatively assigned to a time bracket beginning with the 7th – 8th centuries point to the existence of an urban centre at Prāgiyotisapura.

A careful study of the list of things offered by Bhāskararvarman as presents to Harṣavardhana gives an idea about the agricultural and forest products and crafts of Kāmarūpā which would be items of trade during this period of the Varmans.

79. Watters, II, PP. 185f.
80. Ibid, P. 186.
Sandal, black aloe oil, silk cloth, scent bags of musk oxen were known as the products of this region from the time of Kautilya. In this list precious stones and gems, which were once exported from the port of Ganges to the Roman world were also listed. He also presented quantities of pearls shell and sapphires. The list also shows various new crafts objects made of bamboo and cane, leatherwork. The list included many birds and animals among which we have reference to mermen (jala manuśe) whose existence have never been proved till date in Assam. Another product of this region that we get reference for the first time was luscious milky betel-nut fruit. We donot get the two famous items of Roman trade of this region, the Malabathrum and Spikenard in the list of Bhāskaravaman.

With the establishment of the Śalastambha dynasty Harūpesvara (Hadappesvara) emerged as a political centre referred to as pura (Tezpur Rock Inscription). However in the Hayūnthal Copperplate Grant of Harjarivarman and in the Tezpur Copperplate Grant of Vanamala, Hadappesvara, the royal capital is referred to as a skandhāvāra. In the Uttarbarbil Grant of Balavarman III, another term is found to denote the capital city of the king, Haḍappesvara is called Kaṭaka, while the ancestral capital of Balavarman III is called ‘paitāmaha katakām’. The capital of the legendary king Naraka in the same inscription, however is referred to as puram.

The kings of the Śalastambha dynasty made attempts to excercise greater control over agricultural land, forest and waterways on an extensive scale. The Uttarbarbil Grant of Balavarman records more or less uniform revenue terms as Kara, Uparikara, Utkhetana, Cauraddharana, Hastibandha and Naukabandha as well
as the officers responsible to collect these taxes. Extensive wet rice cultivation, embankments, irrigation techniques were referred to in the inscriptions of the Sālāstambha dynasty. All professional groups possessed land indicate full-fledged village settlements or localities within a village. A process of urbanization was going on smoothly in the region. Obviously Hadappesvara became the nucleus of the movement.

The urbanisation in the region was also associated with the transformation of local cult spots into ceremonial centres. This was achieved with the help of the 

Brahmanas. By reconstructing the temple of Heṭukasūlina, Vanamāla transformed it into a ceremonial centre for the people coming from different parts of the state. This mobilization might also be seen in the temple of Mahāgaurī-Kāmesvara, temple of Da-Parbatiyā etc. of the region. Hadappesvara became conspicuous by the presence of sculptural and architectural components, the remains of which lie in Tezpur and its periphery, all dating from the 9th-10th centuries with the possible exception of Da-Parbatiyā in which place has been discovered a door frame assigned to an earlier period.

Hadappesvara seems to have been built up from an exchange centre (hāṭta) into an urban centre by the Sālāstambhas who made it their political base. Hadappesvara was strategically located, being in close proximity to the Sadiya region and the Himalayan foot hills on the north east, the Patkai range of hills on the

84. P. Bhattacharya, J.A.S.B., (New Series), V. PP.19-20
south-east, and having access to Pragjyotisapura which was already an established urban centre under the Varman’s.

The Parbatiyā copperplate Grant highlights the urban life of Hadappesvara as the following:

The illustrious city of Hadappesvara is inhabited by fully contented people of all the Vañṇas and the Asramas ……… the home of innumerable good soldiers, virtuous and learned men, the royal roads of which (city) are crowded by the great kings, seated in beautiful elephants, horses and palanquins, engaged in the act of coming and going back for the purpose of serving (or saluting) the Lord of the earth (i.e. Vanamāla) which has whole of it completely filled up by the armies consisting of innumerable elephants, horses and foot soldiers and which is situated on the bank of the river Lauhitya.87

The Nowgong Grant (VV. 5-6) of Balavarman III gives a graphic picture of Pragjyotisapura where arecanut trees were wrapped in leaves of creepers of betel-plants and Krishnagaru or black aloe-wood were surrounded with cardamon creeper and where in the upavana or parks, peacocks used to dance in consonance with the beating-time of the movement of the ears of the intoxicated elephants. Some scholars maintain that it was due to the abundance of gua or betel-nuts that Pragjyotisapura ultimately came to be known as Gua-hati or Guwahati. Bhattacharya points out that such epigraphic description of betel-vines etc. in Pragjyotisänagara is also reflected in the Raghuvamsa. (VI. 64). The Nowgaon Grant (V. 14) further

87. M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P.122-123.
informs us that Pragjyotisanagara had rows of palaces which contained many rooms with different types of pictures in them. This shows that Pragjyotisanagara is also providing the development of architecture and painting.

In the inscriptions of the Pala dynasty the royal capital of Naraka is referred to as a pura. The capital of Ratnapāla i.e. Durjjayā is also referred to as pura (Bargaon Grant, L. 40). However, in the Corātbari Grant (L. 27) of the same ruler, there is a description of a city called Hadapyaka, which is called a nagara. The capital of Indrapāla, a scion of the dynasty was also called Durjjyānagarī in the Gauhati Grant (V. 19). The term puram continued to be used as well. In the Gauhati Grant (V. 6) Naraka’s capital city was called Pragjyotisapuram. In the Khanamukh Grant (V. 20) Naraka is said to have ruled from Pragjyotisapura. Besides these terms, in the Gachtal Grant of Gopalavarman (V. 8) a new term is used to describe Naraka’s capital, i.e. rajadhāni. The description of Durjjayā and Hadapyaka closely resembles that of Hadappesvara in the Parbatīyā Grant. Hadapyaka, the first recorded political centre of the Palas, has also been spoken of as a holy centre in the Gachtal Copperplate Grant (L. 58). If the identification of this place with Hadappesvara is correct it had become a ceremonial centre in the time of the Palas. The Bargaon Grant (V. 14) of this dynasty shows Kamarupa’s connection with the Gurjara country, Kerala, Vahika and Tajika. The grant refers to various kinds of jewels, Topaz, which are not an indigenous jewel of the Kamarūpa country. The Puspabhadra Grant (V. 13) also refers to catuspatha pointing to the existence of broad high ways through which articles of trade were often brought to the big cities.
The Puṣpabhadra Grant (V. 220) refers to Kāmarūpa nagara as the capital of Dharmapala. Kāmarūpa nagara and Kirtipura mentioned in the Assam Plates have not been described in the inscriptions. But the latter was placed near an alms-house which was established and endowed with over seven villages with its inhabitants settled by the king.

Thus it seems that the urban settlement of ancient Assam were all centre of political power. Pragjyotisa, Kamarupanagara, Durjaya and Hadappesvara among others were all examples of political towns, i.e. the capital of the kings of ancient Assam which also controlling economic activities between the rural and urban centres.

**6.6. Commercial Enterprises:**

The people of ancient Assam by virtue of their geographical position could maintain contact not only with Northern India but also with Bhutan, Tibet, Burma and China. These routes involved goods passing between China, Tibet and Central Asia to the north and east; and the seaport of Chittagong to the South; and thence via various sea routes to the rest of the world.\(^8\) Inscriptions of ancient Assam refers to various natural products and articles of art and crafts of ancient Assam. Discovery of cowries and coins of gold, silver, copper and bronze help us to study commercial enterprises of ancient Assam. Some trade may have been generated by local products and the requirements of Assam itself, but as Assam was itself self sufficient in most

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of the necessities of life except for salt, major trading activity was mainly generated by export and transit trade.

India was firmly united under the Mauryas and the Gupta emperors. Road communications were also developed. It appears that by 1st century A.D. the capital city Pragjyotisapura became a transit point in the trade between Rome and China. The discovery of roultetted ware in Ambari excavation site, a pottery which has been regarded as the ‘type fossil’ for Indo-Roman trade in the first century A.D. indicate the fact. Discovery of inscribed stone pieces datable to c.A.D., 200-300, bearing numerical character found in Dubarani (Pt. I) and Barpathar (Pt. II) also makes it clear that the region had come into contact with people indulging in merchantile activities.

Classical literature and Arthasastra supplies us with some very important information in respect of ancient Assam’s products and their trade. The author of Periplus refers to the port town Ganges through which brought Malabathrum, Gengetic Spikenared, pearls and muslin clothes. The author also mentioned a number of additional articles which were sent to the ports of Damirica i.e., the Tamil country for export to the western world. These additional items were ivory, silk cloth, transparent stones, diamond and sapphires. Gengetic Spikenard and Malabathrum were the two most treasured ingredients of the ointments and perfumes of the Roman empire. Modern scholars show that originally Gangetic Spikenard was a product of Eastern Himalayas but it seems that it is also indigenous in Sylhet,

90. Schoff (tr.), Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, P. 45.
Rangpur and in the valleys along the base of the mountain range as far as Mussouri.\textsuperscript{91} Periplus refers to Burma as an important source of transparent stone, jade, sapphires and rubies which were of easy avail to the tribal people of ancient Assam. Periplus also refers to raw silk, silk yarn and silk cloth which were collected from the city called Thinae of the land called 'This' and brought on foot through Bactria to Baryagaza and these were also 'exported' to Damirica by way of the river Ganges.\textsuperscript{92} Thus the silk trade went on in different routes, but ultimately sent to the port of Baryagaza or the port of Damirica.

Pliny also mentions that they exported skin, iron and cloth. The iron of serica (Assam) is considered to be the best in India.\textsuperscript{93} Ctesias refers to the lac insect Siptachora which was produced in this region along with all 'good things'. According to Taylor these 'good things' were silk, lac and other dyes, including musk, ivory, gold, silver and iron, which were exported to India via Brahmaputra. The export of lac to China and Japan is mentioned also by Tavernier.\textsuperscript{94} The export of hide, buffaloe horns, pearls, including lac and silk to China through Bhutan and Tibet was also common. Lhasa merchants used to go to China and brought back silver bullion and rock salt which they exchanged with the Assam traders for rice, silk, lac, hide, buffaloe horns, pearls and other commodities. All these account prove that the country exported many valuable articles to other lands and had

\textsuperscript{91} J.A.S.B., Vol. XVI, 1847, P. 39.  
\textsuperscript{92} Schoff (tr), The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, PP. 223, 226-227.  
\textsuperscript{93} J.A.S.B., 1897, I, PP. 43f.  
\textsuperscript{94} Travels, II, P. 282.
important commercial enterprise from earlier times. While discussing the trade and market of North-Eastern India, C.R. Gupta pointed out that some articles mentioned in the Arthasastra did not form important item of foreign trade as such were not mentioned among the objects sent from the Ganges port. These were sandal wood, camphor and other incense from this part of the country. These were probably items of inland market.

During the Gupta period the economy of ancient Assam was not monetised. Gupta and Kushana coins did not penetrate in ancient Kamarūpa. During the sixth and seventh centuries several rulers of Bengal struck gold coins, declared independence of the Gupta empire. Sasānka also struck some very debased pieces between A.D. 606 and 625.

After the death of Sasānka around 635 A.D. Bhāskaravarman appears to have been recognised as the Paramount ruler of Eastern Bengal and the kings of Samatāta also acknowledge his suzerainty. Bhāskaravarman struck coins in the name of Śrī Kumāra for the use of Samatāta.

The discovery of the Paglatek hoards of gold coins throw light on the trade and commerce of ancient Assam. The discovery of the coins at Paglatek indicates that though the coins were issued primarily for use in Samatāta region by Śrī Kumāra, identified with Bhāskaravarma of Kamarūpa kingdom, the find spot of the hoard at

96. C.R. Gupta, Trade and Markets of North Eastern India, Archaeology of North Eastern India, PP. 280 ff.
97. Robert S. Wicks, Money, Markets and Trade in Early South-East Asia, PP 69ff.
Goalpara indicates that they move towards the centre of the kingdom of Kamarupa, though it was never extensive within the Assam valley.\(^{101}\)

Kamarupa controlled the trade route to the sea is known from the reference that Bhaskaravarman offered to escort the Chinese pilgrim to the sea port from where he could take the sea route back to China. Yuan-Chwang mentions a direct land pass route passing from Kamarupa to Yunnan to the east, but notes that it was extremely dangerous. If the mere direct routes had been much frequented Bhaskaravarman might have suggested these as potential routes back to China for the pilgrim. The route through Tibet and Nepal became popular for Chinese traveller after the mid seventh century.\(^{102}\) It is worth noting that under the powerful king of Tibet, Trisong Detsen (c 755 - 974 A.D.) conditions of Tibet became conducive for a flourishing trade but next century again shows political turmoil and confusion in Tibet for over a century.\(^{103}\)

The gift list of Bhaskaravarman refers to black and white cowrie shells to Harṣavardhana and these shells must have been acquired as a result of trade with the coast. Most probably these shells played a very important role as currency in Kamarupa, where they would have facilitated market trading. The list also refers to silk. Though Assam produced silk independently, they may be acquired from outside and China was the only source, which Kamarupa may have acquired as imported goods from China through Chittagong port.

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102. Ibid, P. 36.
Bhāskaravarman left no heir and after his death the Saññastambhas founded the Mleccha dynasty in Kāmarūpa. Their hold over the Samatata was controversial. However trade continued to flourish through Samatata region.

It was during this period that Harikēla is found to develop as a port. Around 700 A.D. the gold coinage of Samatata ceased and appeared to be followed by silver coins struck in the name of Harikēla which were in circulation over a wide area, including Arakan, Chittagong, Noakhaï, Commilla and Sylhet. Most of these areas were along the route which the Kāmarūpa traders would have travelled on their way to the sea port Chittagong. These coins are said to have similarities with the coins of the Chandras of Arakan. Shipping communication between Ceylon and Harikēla is known from the record of It-sing who refers to the travel of Wu-Hing to Harikēla from Ceylon. Another Chinese monk, Tan-Kwong came to Harikēla by the Southern sea route. The Arab merchant Sulaiman, who made several voyages to India and China in the 9th century A.D. knew Harkinā as the third sea between Arabia and China. If Harkinā can be equated to Harikēla the importance of the region becomes apparent. But it is yet to be ascertained as to how the hinterland of the port of Harikēla worked and what character of transactions were carried on from this port and other exchange centres. But it is not unlikely that along the lower course of the Brahmaputra, the course of the Barak/Suraṇā and other rivers flowing from

107. The Life (XXXI)
108. M. Chandra, Trade and Trade Route in Ancient India, P. 2.
the hills of Meghalaya, Manipur regions much of the products of the Eastern
Himalayas came to the Vanga-Samatata region and were exchanged for food grains
and other necessities109.

The inscriptions of the Salastambha’s refer to some products like betel leaf,
arecanut, black aloe and cardamom. Black aloe and other aromatic wood retained its
market in this period. Both Chinese and Arab sources mention these items among
exports of Tien-chu and Ruhmi in their respective accounts110. Ruhmi is generally
identified with Bengal. Al Idrisi (11th century) while speaking about Samandar, a
large town and an exchange centre mentioned that aloe wood was brought there
from the country of Kamrut, which was fifteen days’ journey by river. This aloe is
said to have been of superior quality and of a delicious perfume.111

Growing importance of the merchants, refers to as Vanika is noticed in the
Hayunthal Copper plate Grant. The Hayunthal Grant refers to the merchants sprinkled
the king, at the time of his Coronation, with holy water contained in a silver pitcher.

Articles refers to the inscriptions of the Varman and Salastambha rulers indicate
the growth of local markets also.

The inscriptions of ancient Assam refers to five buttikas112 which was equal
to 100 cowries as tax or fine. At least four hoards containing cowrie shells have
been found in Assam. Three hoards were found near Guwahati and at Lanka and

109. C.R. Gupta, Trade and Trade Markets of North-Eastern India, Archaeology of
North-Eastern India, P. 290.
110. Lalanji Gopal, The Economic Life of Northern India (A.D. 700-1200)
111. Elliot and Dowson, (ed.) History of India as told by its own Historians, Vol. I, P. 90.
112. Tezpur Rock Inscription.
Hojai and the last one discovered at North-Lakhimpur. Scholars thought that the cowries belonged to the pre Ahom period. Cowries were imported to Assam from Bengal. Bangal imported cowries from Maldive island.

During the 9th century A.D. some Mleccha kings of Kamarūpa struck copper coins. The discovery of a series of hoards of copper coins in Assam conclusively proved this fact. B.N. Mukherjee opined that the importance of foreign goods in eastern sector of Bengal was not very great. So there was no need to strike a coinage that was useful for paying for valuable imported goods. Most probably the copper coins were issued purely for use internally. Whether their value could be guaranteed by royal decree and they were probably not accepted as currency outside the territory controlled by the Kamarūpa kings. In fact the coins fulfilled the same purpose as cowrie shells in these markets. So the reason for production must have been associated either with reduction in the supply of cowrie shells or an increase in the volume of market trading.

Cowrie shells were very much in demand in South Western China and Yunnan province. After 877 A.D. due to the decline of the political power led to a shortage of supply of cowrie shells to these areas from the China coast. It was substituted by the import of cowries from India to Yunnan. This additional demand may have depleted

113. R.D. Choudhury, Itihase Soaura Chashata Bachar, P. 157; On three Hoards of Cowries from Assam, Archaeology of North-Eastern India, PP. 228-231.
114. Ibid.
116. Sec Chapters III.
the supply of cowries in Kāmarūpa. The copper coins would have helped to satisfy that demand, particularly in respect of larger transactions in the markets.  

The metallic composition of the Nakuchi Bargaon coins show the composition as follows:

- Iron — 0.58%
- Copper — 62.29%
- Tin — 28.23%
- Oxygen — 8.90%
- Total — 100%  

It appears that at a certain stage the Mleccha kings changed from a copper to a bronze alloy for their coins. Bronze is not found as a natural alloy. So the tin and the copper must have been mixed intentionally. In India tin is available in Bastar and in Haryana, but we have no corroborative evidence to indicate that tin was imported to Kamarupa from central India in the early 9th or 10th century A.D. An alternative source of such metal could have been Burna, China, Thailand or Indonesia.  

Records indicate that in the 15th century Chinese exported various items, along with copper coins, which reached India through the Chittagong sea port. The Chinese used to import from Kozhikode (South India) via the same route a number of items including iron swords and tin. Through a similar process it might also have found its way to Kāmarūpa via Chittagong in the 9th century A.D.

119. Ibid, PP 57-64.
121. Ibid, P. 35.
122. Ibid, P. 38.
After the end of the Mleccha dynasty around the year 900 A.D. no further copper coins were issued by the rulers of Kamarupa and the land reverted to a cowrie based currency system. Harikela of course, continued to struck coins during this time (between the 10th and the early 13th centuries). Around A.D. 1110 Nepal struck gold and silver coins which coincides with a growth in trans-Himalayan trade around that time. A number of Buddhist missionaries from India such as Atīśa Dipānikara travelled to Tibet. Kārmapā Rang Chung Dorjee founded the Buddhist shrines at Tawang in 1109-92. A trade in horses from Tibet through this route seems to have been well established by 1205, when Bakhtiyar Khiliji, tried to invade Tibet in an apparent attempt to control this valuable trade.  

6.7. Medium of Exchange / Weights and Measures:

The value of an article generally was measured in terms of commodities in early times. Most of the business transactions were carried on by a system of barter, which became the medium of exchange.

The use of cowrie as a medium of exchange is found for the first time in the Harsacarita. The Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjara further proved the use of cowries as medium of exchange in ancient Assam. The discovery of copper coins indicate the prevalence of copper coins as a medium of exchange. Reference to gold coins is found in the Silimpur Grant of the twelfth century A.D. which referring to a tulapurusa gift from the Kāmarūpa king Jayāpāla, states that the Brahmaṇa Prahāṣa did not accept the offer of 900 gold coins. The same grant states that the

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123. Ibid, P. 25.
124. Ibid, P 50.
125. E.I., XII, PP. 289f.
Brahmana refused to accept a gift of land yielding an income of 1,000 coins. The currency of gold coins is further attested to by the discovery of 14 gold coins from Paglatek. The earliest reference to gold coin Kaltis is found in Periplus. In the opinion of P.C. Choudhury Kaltis has a connection with the Kalitas of Assam.

P.C. Choudhury also maintains that the earliest reference to a silver coin probably from Kamarupa is noticed in the Arthasastra which mentions it under the name Gaulikam.

To appreciate the value of the coins one should know the value of the coins in relation to cowrie shells. The following is a late mediaeval table produced by D.C. Sircar:

- 4 Cowries = 1 Ganda (Ganda is mentioned in the Nilachal plate)
- 20 Cowries = 5 Gandas = 1 Budi or Vutika (Vutika is mentioned in the Rock Inscription of Harjarvarman)
- 80 Cowries = 20 Gandas = 4 Budis = 1 Pana

1280 Cowries = 320 Gandas = 64 Budis = 16 Pana = 1 Kahana or Karshapan (one silver coins)

A copper coin weighing one Karsha or 80 ratis (9.5 g) or 1 tola (96 ratis), the weight of Pana however, varied in different parts of the country because of varying weight to the Karsha seed.

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126. J.A.R.S., XX, PP. 56f.
128. Ibid.
130. A. Cunningham, Coins of Ancient India, PP. 45-46.
of the Dhulapadung hoard, observed that the heaviest coin weighed 15.78 gr and the light one weighed 1.94 gr. He noted that the heaviest coin might be a double Pana and the lightest one eighth Pana.  

The Kuruvavahi Grant refers to the chartered area producing four thousand puttaka of paddy. The word puttaka was used for the first time in the epigraphs of Assam. Previously the measurement of an area of land was indicated in terms of quantity of paddy. The units thus referred to are supposed to be intended for a drona. On the basis of the Gupta inscriptions, pataka is taken to be equal to forty dronas. According to Arthasastra, the weight of a drona is about 21 lbs. Drona (dona in Assamese) is used now in Assam as measuring five seers of any article; but when applied to a plot of land, it stands for about a bigha of land. Both putaka and droṇa might have been used in the sense of a particular area of land as well as for weights and measures. The reference in the Silimpur Grant to a tulapurusa gift of 900 gold coins (i.e. equal to the weight of the body), suggests that the weight of a gold coin was equal to about five tolās, taking the average weight of a body as about 120 lbs. But the discovery of gold coins at Paglatek shows that the weight of a rupee or half rupee coin weighs from 5.8070 to 5.0220 grms. Analysis of the weights of the copper coins bearing the letters Ha were struck to a single weight.

133. D.C. Sircar, Select Inscriptions, I, PP. 331f.
134. Pran Nath, Economic Condition of Ancient India, PP. 72 f.
136. Ibid.
standard of around 15 grms. The Va coins exhibit a much greater variety of weights, and probably struck to a single weight standard, but by the end of the period of the Va letters the standard denomination, which may have been a pana, had fallen to about 4 grms or less. Ta coins comprises two groups on the basis of weights. The light group of Ta coins seem to follow on naturally from the lighter Va coins starting with a weight standard of 4 grms. The heavy group averaging nearly 12 grms. The heavy weight Ta coins led some scholars to think whether these coins represent a currency system or not. However, without further documentary evidence, nothing can be stated definitely. The average weight of the Ga letters bearing coins are less than 75 grms. The denomination of the coin is likely that a Gaṇḍa or 1/20th Pāṇa was intended.

6.8. Education:

The inscriptions of ancient Assam throws light on the system of education. The kings of ancient Assam claimed themselves as upholders of Varnasramadharma. They attracted learned Brahmāṇas by agrahāra land. Those who were endowed with the agrahāras maintained village schools and were keen in discharging their six fold duties, one of which was adhyāpana (teaching). The Bargāon Grant (VV. 30-31) and the Subhaṅkarapatāka Grant (VV. 16-17) refers to Gaṅgādatta and Bharata respectively, who were engaged in discharging the six fold duties. The main centre of education was ‘Guru-grha’. Under the Gurukula system from the Upanayana or

139 Ibid.
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid, 117.
initiation till the ceremony of Samāvartana the pupil studied at the house of his teacher and carried on his academic life according to the code of conduct prescribed by Dharma-Sūtras. The Nowgong Copperplate Grant (VV. 30-31) refers to a Brahmana named Śrutidhara who having performed the Samāvartana ceremony at the preceptors house returned to lead the life of a house holder and acquired the title Kathaniṣṭha for his proficiency in reciting ancient lore.

Inscriptions showed the prevalence of Indian system of curriculum in ancient Assam. Six systems of philosophy formed a part of the educational curriculum. The Nidhanpur Grant (7th century A.D.) described Mahendravarman, as atmattvajña and the Dubi Grant (7th century A.D.) speaks Susthitavarma as extraordinary king who crossed the vast ocean of knowledge having mastered Vyakarana, Śāmikhyā, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta (V. 55). The Bargāon Grant (V. 1) salutes the Natarāja Siva who is described as both the perceiver (draṣṭa) and the perceived (dṛṣṭya). Here through the identity of draṣṭa and dṛṣṭya the monastic doctrine is neatly expressed. The Dubi Grant (V. 4) also referred to Vajradatta who was a scholar in Vedas and Āṅgas. All these references show that the Vedānta system, especially its monastic school was widely studied in ancient Kamarūpa.

The Puṣpabhadra Grant (V. 14) refers to Bhasvara, son of Naravahana, who became the foremost scholar in Mīmāṃsā, Arthasastra and Śruti. The Gauhati Grant (V. 16) states that Indrapāla studied Vyakarana, Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya and Tantra. A number of inscriptions state that some rulers retired to heaven with the help of Yoga or
meditation (Dubi, VV. 13, 30) which indicate their intimate acquaintance with the Yoga system.

Most of the land grant charters refer to the Vedāsākhā of the donees where specially state their proficiency in the three Vedas. The Nowgong Grant (VV. 26-31) states that Srutidhara, the donee was proficient in the Vedic learning. The Uttarbarbil Grant (V. 26-27) refers to Garga who belonged to the Kāṇvaśākhā of Yajurveda but the inscription praises him for his knowledge on the three Vedas and Suktas.

Literature was one of the popular subjects of educational curriculum. The composers of the inscriptions were well versed in the Classical literature of India. The use of various alamkāras and metres also testifies to the composers' proficiency in those two branches of poetic technique. The Dubi Grant (V. 74) refers to Bhaskaravarman as a king having poetic ability and adept in using alamkāras. Provision of teaching Kāvyā-sāstra can be inferred from the Puṣpabhadra Grant (V. 8) of Dharmapāla who himself composed the first eight verses of the inscription.

Arthasastra refers to the science of polity and the art of warfare formed a part of educational training for Ksatryas and princes (Arthasastra, II, V). The Nidhanpur Grant (V. 13) called Narāyanavarman 'arthasastrajñā'. Similarly Bhāskaravarman is described in the same grant as an expert in the sixfold political expedients. The Subhāṅkarapātaka Grant (V. 20) refers to Himāṅga, the donee, who was an expert in the military science.
Jyotisa Astrology received special attention of scholars and attracted pupils and the king. The very name Prāgiyotisa, the land of eastern astrology, points to the cultivation of this branch of study in ancient Assam. The Kamauli Grant (V. 8) refers to astrologer. Kamarūpa had its own system of astrological and astronomical calculations. The earliest astrological treatise, Kamarūpanibandhanīya-Khanḍasādhya is supposed to be a work of the sixth or seventh century A.D.¹⁴²

In Assam, as there is no sub caste of Vaidya as of Bengal practising Ayurvedic system of treatment. Ayurvedic medical science had been a virtual monopoly of the Brāhmanas because of their accessibility to the Sanskrit texts of the Ayurveda. Hastāyurveda by Palakapya, whose hermitage was situated in this region dealing with disease of elephants and horses. M.M. Sharma assigned the Hastāyurveda of Palakapya to a period around the beginning of the Christian era.¹⁴³ The Dubi Grant (VV. 4-5) refers to Vajradatta who knew the science of training elephants and learning also all about the breed, nature and excellence of horses.

The inscriptions refer to a number of professional castes.¹⁴⁴ But as these professions belonged to the Sudra caste, it was not included in the curriculum of education but carried on from generation to generation.

The inscriptions of our period are silent on the education of women. In the early Vedic period education was common for girls as well as for boys. The Upanayana Sāṁskāra or the ceremonial initiation into Vedic studies was performed

¹⁴⁴ Sec. Chapter IV- Professional Castes.
by both boys and girls. In the period of Sutra and Dharmasāstra also women were
highly advanced in education with full knowledge of grammar, logic and metres and
had power of reasoning.\textsuperscript{145} The women of higher class in Kāmarūpa also acquired
knowledge of sastras and to some extent women also participated in administration.\textsuperscript{146}

6.9. Literature:

Sanskrit was the court language of Kāmarūpa kings. The inscriptions were
written in mixed prose and verse, prose and completely in verse. The Nagājāri-
Khanıkargāon Inscription was written in Sanskrit verse. Following the Dubi Grant
of the 7\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. the inscriptions followed the typical North Indian formation.
The description of the donor and the donee were written in verse and the donated
land and villages were inscribed in prose. However in the Nidhanpur Grant the
description of the donee are in prose. This style was continued by the 9\textsuperscript{th} century
A.D. It is only in A.D. 1185 that once again we come across a donative grant, the
Assam Plates in verse with the exception of the benedictory verse.

The poetic talent of the inscribers is evident from the poetic portion which
exhibit thirty metres. In the Dubi Grant seventy-six verses were written in fifteen
metres.\textsuperscript{147} The Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, twenty-four verse have been inscribed
in nine different meters.\textsuperscript{148} The Gachtal Grant also used nine metres written in

\begin{flushright}
145. Bharati Barua, A Study of the Socio-Religious Ceremony of Upanayana
(Investiture with Sacred Threads ) in the Sutra and the Dharmasutras. P. 101.
146. Sec. Position of women in Chapter IV.
147. M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P. 11
148. Ibid., P. 180.
\end{flushright}
thirty two verses.\footnote{Ibid., P 280.} An analysis of the style of the epigraphs reveal that they were written in the Classical Kāvya style. The essential characteristics of this style, according to Winternitz, are the accumulation of metaphors and similes and fascination for long-winded descriptions which occupy so much space that the real subject matter recedes wholly into the background.\footnote{M. Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, Vol. III, P. 4.} Moreover, the use of rare words and the long compounds of words with more than one meaning and the strenuous effort made throughout to express nothing in a straightforward way shows the extent to which the writers of this period gave the form and style weightage. For instance, in the inscriptions, when the name of a king is mentioned, in many cases the etymology of the name is given along side. The Parbatīyā Grant (V. 17) states that Vanamāla was named Vanamāla by the creator on the ground that he was found to fit to assume the Lordship of the whole earth extending up to the rows of forests lying on the sea-shore. The Bargāon Grant (V. 13) states that Ratnapāla was known by that name because his subjects knew that this king would protect, with his own qualities, the highly respectable persons who resemble the jewels. The Guwākuchi Grant (L. 61 ff) of Indrapāla devoted eleven lines of prose to thirty two names of the patron king.

The Ornate court poetry, reached its golden age, during the period of the Gupta dynasty. However by the 2nd century A.D. the style is seen in the Girm Rock Inscription of Rudradaman. The inscriptions of ancient Assam adopted this
tradition. For example, the Tezpur Grant records the gift of a village to Indoka, a learned Brahma. However the major portion of the grant made of thirty three verses trace the genealogies of both its donor king and its donee Indoka. Most of the prose portion also is basically a description of the city of Haruppesvara.

The inscriptions betray a very close affinity with the state of the language in North-India. In the Dubi Copperplates (V. 74) of the seventh century, in verse seventy-four, the expressions, alankrtaih, lalitapadam and sarvamargam are used. According to M.M. Sharma, this shows that alankarasstra was thoroughly studied in this region and further more, there was a clear conception of padaalaliya. The occurrence of the term sarvamargam, according to M. M. Sharma, shows that the writer was familiar with the Kavyadarsa of Dandin. Dandin was the first of the Classical Sanskritists from whom we learn about margas. Although the exact period of Dandin is not known, tentatively, he is assigned to the seventh century A.D.

M.M. Sharma suggests that the literary portions of some of the inscriptions, e.g. the Nidhanpur Grant contains both prose and verses and as such assume the form of a Campu Kavya. According to him the influence of Banabhatta on the Nidhanpur Grant is doubtful. But the influence of Banabhatta cannot be ruled out in the prose portion of the Bargaon Grant. In the description of the city of Durjjaya the poet used a lot of ‘lesa’ and parisamkhya alankaras. The description of Durjjaya is reminiscent of the description of the asram of Jvali by Banabhatta. In the

152. Ibid.
Uttarbarbil Grant of Balavarman, passages from the Raghuvamsa of Kalidāsa are found. The first part of verse five of this inscription, ‘tāmbulvaliparinda pugam krishna garu’, has its parallel in Kalidāsa’s drama Raghuvamsa, ‘tāmbulavalli parinndha pugasvelalatalingitacandanasu’. Again in verse seven of the inscription, ‘rājā prajāranjanalavadhavarno varṇārmanām guṇurekavirah’ is an adaptation of Raghuvamsa ‘rājā prajārājanalabdhavarnah parantapo nāma yathārthanāma’. These examples prove that an attempt was being made towards the production of good Kāvya in the inscriptions, and the authors from whose works various aspects were being borrowed were the great Sanskrit scholars like Kalidāsa and Daṇḍin.

6.10. Language:

A careful examination of the inscriptions shows that inspite of being written in the Classical Kāvya style it contains certain linguistic irregularities. In his Kamarūpaśāsanāvali P. N. Bhattacharya presents in the main body of the book a completely edited reading of ten copperplate grants so as to make the text free from orthographical irregularities. A careful examination of the contents of the anthology and also of the inscriptions since discovered will show that the irregularities of corrupt forms have a ‘method’ in them and established the existence of a local Prakrit language side by side with the chaste literary Sanskrit language of the royal court. The irregularities are of immense importance for forming an idea about the local Prakrit of those days.  

In fact the vernacular languages particularly of North India are derived from

apabhramsas, based on not Sanskrit but on old Prakrits. These must be considered as the descendants not of grammatical Prakrit but of various apabhramsas, spoken in different parts of India. 156

Grierson propounded the theory of the origin of the Assamese language from Magadhi Prakrit which was followed by S.K. Chatterjee. 157 It is perhaps due to the common origin of the North Indian languages like Bengali, Oriya etc. and the similarity of alphabet that a claim is made about Assamese being nothing but a dialect of Bengali. 158 Though a common origin and similarity of scripts are found in Assamese and Bengali languages, their vocabularies, grammar and accent are completely different from each other. It appears that both are separate and independent languages. Both the languages, ‘started on parallel lines with peculiar dialectical predispositions and often developed sharply contradictory idiosyncrasies.’ 159 Assamese is an independent speech, related to Bengali, both occupying the position of dialects with reference to some standard Magadhan apabhramsa. 160 But D. Neog contends that the theory of Grierson which was followed by S.K. Chatterjee is only a concoction of fact 161. The replacement of s and s by s is one of the main characteristics of the Magadhi Prakrit as warranted by Vararuci’s rule sasau sah. But in the Kamarupa inscriptions we find the reverse of it, i.e., the replacement of s by s as in the word Suhankara, substituted for Sanskrit

159. B.K. Kakati, Assamese, Its Formation and Development, PP. 7f.
160. Ibid., PP. 9-10.
Subhánkara in line 32 of the Subhánkarapátaka Grant of Dharmapala. On the other hand the inscriptions of Assam from 7th century A.D. and later shows some Assamese formations which are even found in their present form and used in the same sense. For example in the Nidhanpur Grant we see Kalia, Dumbari which are at present used in the same sense. P.N. Bhattacharya shows the influence of the Prakrit in the Tezpur Rock Inscription of the king Harjaravarman of the early 9th century A.D. On the basis of such evidences it is claimed that the Assamese language developed not from the Magadhi but from another parallel variety of Prakrit which deserves to be called the Kamarupa Prakrit. S.N. Sarma suggests that even if we do not recognize it as a parallel variety of Prakrit, we cannot avoid recognizing it at best as an eastern or Kamarupi variety of the Magadhi Prakrit itself. B.K. Kakati has shown the various influences of the Austric, Kolerian, Malayan, Bođo and other elements in the formation of the Assamese vocabulary. Like the composite character of the Assamese culture, the language has also absorbed these various elements and like the Bođo "the Austirc elements seem to constitute an essential substratum of Assamese vocabulary." As an evidence of the prevalence of a distinct variety of Prakrit reference is often made to Yuen-Chwang's observation that the language of the people of Kamarupa differed a little from that of Mid-India.

Assamese language of the formative stage is also seen in epigraphs. The

163. Ibid, P. 188.
language of the text of the Stone Inscription of Samudrapāla is mixed with certain Assamese expression. The inscription contains the text: "ādityasama-srīsamudrapāla-rajye. prabala-sarvāsika-satra sarūna-kṛya sanvasina bole dāna punana saja. Yogiḥātu. saka āṇa cakra mūḍha bhanati. Here the language is mixed with certain Assamese expressions. The inscription is dated 1154 Saka = 1232 A.D. The Gachṭal Octagonal Stone Pillar inscription contains 24 lines: of these, the first three lines were read by N.K. Bhattasali as Srimat visvasundaradeva (ra) jye saka 114 (*) P.C. Choudhury gives a fresh reading of the entire text which contains some developed Assamese forms and idioms.

The language here appears to be more Assamese than anything else. Thus the present inscription contains the specimen of the Assamese language prevalent in the middle of the thirteenth century, i.e., SE 1184 = 1262 A.D.\textsuperscript{168}

6.11. Script:

The earliest specimen of writing so far discovered in Assam is found in the

inscribed Stone Slab of North-Indian Brāhmī Script, datable to c. A.D. 200-300 (Pl. I & Pl. II)\textsuperscript{169}. The script of the Nagājari-Khanikargaon Inscription in the eastern variety of the Brāhmī script has the distinction of maintaining a difference between b and v.\textsuperscript{170} To Dani ‘Assam had no separate script of its own. The late inscriptions found there followed the style of Bengal’.\textsuperscript{171} T.P. Verma opines ‘the Assamese script can seek their parentage to the Brāhmī script which later on developed in North India into proto regional script popularly called by the palaeographers Kutila or acute angled’ or Siddhamatrika script, in due course of time, developed into Protonāgarī and Nāgarī. The Assamese happens to belong to this family of script. But maintained its individuality, may be in cases of only few letters. T.P. Verma maintains that ‘the Nidhanpur Grant may be said to have been written in Kutila alphabet, so also were the Hayunthal Grant of Harjaravarman and the Parvatīya Plates of Vanamāla.\textsuperscript{172} With reference to the script of the Parbatīya Grant D.C. Sircar and P.D. Choudhury observe, ‘The characters employed belonged to the East-Indian variety of the Siddhamatrika or Kutila script of the 9th century, some times called Early Nāgarī or Proto Bangali. Some of the aksharas (cf. a, ka, g, j, s, medial e and au, etc.) closely resemble their Bengali-Assamese forms’.\textsuperscript{173}

Mahendra Bora says, ‘the fact remains, the Assamese script is direct descendant of the Brāhmī branching itself off from the so-called Gupta alphabet or the North

\textsuperscript{169} H.N Dutta, A.A.D.D.V.A., P. 56.
\textsuperscript{170} M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., PP. 303-304.
\textsuperscript{171} A.H. Dani, Indian Palaeography, Plate XIa, P. 110.
\textsuperscript{172} T.P Verma, Development of Script in Ancient Kamarupa, P. 31.
\textsuperscript{173} E.I., Vol. XXIX, No. 20, P. 145.
Indian script, which progressed on its own way by acquiring for itself certain basic traits of the Kutila style writing in course of its journey through the long corridor of history.\textsuperscript{174} Upendranath Goswami writes ‘the origin of the Assamese script is Brahmi and it developed from namely the Gupta script.\textsuperscript{175} But S.K. Kakati states that ‘The Assamese script is a descendant of the Kutila variation of the Gupta script of Eastern India.\textsuperscript{176} But we have seen the specimens of Assamese script in the inscriptions of 5th century A.D. Further, Kutila is only a form of a particular script. It cannot be termed as an independent script in the sense as the Brahmi is or its North-Eastern branch. The views of T.P. Verma, Mahendra Bora and Upendranath Goswami are same. All of them are of the opinion that the Assamese script originated from Brahmi script. M.M. Sharma also suggested that this script (Early Nagari or Proto Bengali) also deserves to be called Proto-Assamese in as much as in the inscriptions of ancient Assam we notice a sure progress of the alphabet towards the modern Assamese script.\textsuperscript{177}

6.12. Music and Dance:

The inscriptions of ancient Assam indicate the existence of a regional trend of Classical music comprising the three branches of ‘nritya’, ‘git’ and ‘badya’ in Assam since early historical period. Bharata’s Natya Sastra, the first well arranged work on India’s dramaturgy and music, which was a product of 2nd century B.C. is frequently quoted to refer to Odra-Magadhi Prabitti, i.e. style of dramatic

\textsuperscript{174} M. Bora, The Evolution of Assamese Script, P. 32.
\textsuperscript{175} U.N. Goswami, Assamiya Lipi, P. 1.
\textsuperscript{176} S.K. Kakati, Ancient Assamese Script, P. 5.
performance prevalent in the eastern region of India including Pragjyotisapura.\textsuperscript{178} The mention of Pragjyotisapura here aptly asserts that the people of this kingdom were definitely used to the practice and performance of dramatic and musical arts in those days. The Chinese pilgrim Yuan-Chwang records that during the reign of the Kamarupa king Bhaskaravarman, the music in Kamarupa was not confined only to ‘git’ and ‘badya’ but also included drama.\textsuperscript{179} Gandharvavidyā was the study of dance, music and dramatic performances.

The Nidhanpur Grant of Bhaskaravarman (L. 133) refers to the officer who issued or promulgated hundred commands received the title of five great sabdas. Now to many scholars ‘Pāṇcha Mahā Sabda’ means five musical instruments. Those who attained the status of this honour was felicitated with the auspicious sounds of five musical instruments. Then he was eligible for title. Some scholars again hold that the word means five great titles having relation to office or work like Mahāsamanta etc. According to P.N. Bhattacharya, both the meanings are possible.

Singing, dancing and playing musical instrument formed the integral part of rituals in religious worship. The Dubi Copperplate Grant (V. 40) refers to the performance of Coronation ceremony along with the sound of the conch-shell and Dunaubhi - drum.

The copperplate grants of Vanamāla (middle of the 9th century A.D.) refer to the existence of temples in his kingdom where sweet songs accompanied with

\textsuperscript{178} M. Neog and K. Changkakati, Sattriya Dances of Assam and their Rhythems, PP. 3-4.  
\textsuperscript{179} Watters, II, P. 185 f.
musical instrument enthralled the atmosphere. The Gachtal Grant of Gopalvarmadeva refers to the sound of the war trumpet (V. 25).

According to Indian Musical treatise musical instruments are classified under four categories - Tata, Ghana, Susira and Anaddha. In Assam all the musical instruments covered under these categories were available from ancient time. The five musical instrument referred to here, as P.N. Bhattacharya pointed out, might be the Singā or trumpet, Tammata or tabour, the Saṅkha or conch-shell, the Bheri or kettle - drum and the Jayaghanta or gong. Archaeological evidence of Saṅkha and conical drum (Dava ) datable to A.D. 800 have been discovered at Barpathar in Golaghat District of Assam. The Kalika Purāṇa also refers to many musical instruments like Mṛidaṅga, Gomukha Saṅkha, Dava etc, which are within the fold of Classical musical treatise.

Like music, dancing has been of a long tradition in the society. King Vanamalavarman of Salastambha dynasty reconstructed the lofty temple, Hetukasulin, and endowed it with other things besides prostitutes meaning dancing girls dedicated to the temple. They were Devadāśīs, which was a pan Indian ritualistic tradition observed in the temple since long past. The practice of Devadāśī dance was prevalent in ancient Assam. The grant of Vanamaladeva also refers to Duluhārganās, dancing girls and male dancers, (V. 30. L. 16 ). Nātarāja Śiva represents the Supreme authority of dance, drama and music. It is highly significant that the composers of Bargaon and Suwalkuchi Copperplate Grants of Ratnapāla

began with invoking the Natarāja Siva.

Sculptural ruins discovered and now preserved in the State Museum as well as in other places also confirm that dancing and music formed the integral part of the Assamese cultural life from the earliest times. A stone-slab recovered from the archaeological ruins at Tezpur and now preserved in the Cole Park contains dancing figures in a panel where a male is playing on a pipe or flute, a female dancing by his side, one male playing a pipe, another on a drum, and a male playing on drum and female dancing, a male playing on cymbal and women dancing, a male playing on a lyre and another dancing on his right, a male playing on a drum and another dancing in his left. The figures are very lively and vivacious, natural and full of action. These stone sculptures belong to a date not later than 9th century A.D. Whether these forms and styles of dances, along with the musical instruments, were indicative of the folk rural dancing like Bihu or conformed to those of Classical line cannot be ascertained. Similarly, numbers of dancing figures, dancing gods and goddesses sculptured in the stone walls at different ruined temples are now restored and preserved. The Kalika Purāṇa provides information that singing and dancing with these musical instruments were parts of the ritual in worship. There are 108 types of mudrās (handgestures) mentioned in the book which were also depicted in the sculptures. The frequent reference to Natakasaila or Natakachāla signifying particular hillock in this book definitely indicates something having relevance to the dramatic activities.

6.13. Epigraphic Bearing on Art and Architecture of Ancient Assam:

Epigraphic records can sometimes be treated as objects of fine arts. The inscriptive allusion to accompanying scenes or figures and references to or description of forms of architecture, icons etc. can form interesting subjects of study. Inscribed sculptures if dated can really be treated as sheet anchors in determining the development of the relevant sculptural style. If it does not bear a date it can be at least approximately dated with the help of the palaeographic features of the relevant inscriptions.

The earliest remains belonging to the late Gupta period are located in Da-Parbatiyā, near Tezpur, Assam. R.D. Banerjee announced the discovery of a monument of outstanding significance in the cultural history of this territory. He described the ruins as 'consisting of the remains of a brick-built temple of Śiva of the Ahom period erected upon the ruins of a stone temple of the later Gupta period, circa sixth century A.D.'

Ancient Assam has yielded a large number of stone sculpture in the context of independent cult images as well as architectural ones. Besides rock-cut sculptures forming group composition, metal sculptures, terracotta objects are also discovered in a number of places. Ivory and wooden work might have been executed but due to the fragility of the materials and weather such objects have naturally disintegrated. Besides a number of drawings on some plaque and

184. Ibid., 711.
inscriptions are also noticed in the inscriptions. Inscriptions also refer to a number of description of Hindu gods and goddessess viz. Lord Siva, and Ardhayuvatsvara.

6.13.1. Sculpture:

While discussing the stone art sculpture in Doiyang Dhansiri Valley H.N. Dutta attempts to show the ancient tradition of drawings in schematic fashion on some Dubarani plaque. A plaque is found inscribed with a letter either su(for Sūrya) or ā (for Āditya) which may be representative of numerical figure 1000. On a corner of this fragment is represented an animal figure of 'indeterminate nature'. Another plaque (23 cm x 16.5 cm) according to him possibly a part of a quern, depicts an incised figure of a fish. Depiction of fish either represents a true object of nature carved as an ornamental motif or indicates some ancient belief in animal symbolism. B.K. Kakati opined that as fish emphasises the male principle it might also indicate the cult of fertility. H.N. Dutta suggests that the development of the stone art could be assigned to c.A.D. 200-300, as some inscribed stone pieces in Brahmi character datable to c. A.D. 200-300 discovered together with the stone plaques and querns.

The Dubarani Stone Slab Inscription (datable to c. A.D. 400-500) bears at least five motifs or symbols in it. The emblem bears at least five motifs or symbols in it. From the top these symbols are the trisūla, an axe, a horizontal line and a kumbha or an ardha candra, at its bottom. The kumbha or ghaṭa at the bottom

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185. Sadashiv Gorokshar, (ed.) Animal in Indian Archaeology, Intro., P. III.
186. Asis Sen, Animal Motifs in Ancient Indian Art, P. 34.
represents water principle the apa. The horizontal line above it probably signifies to the earth principle called the khiti, the crescent moon obviously stands for the energy principle, the teza. These symbols together with the other two motifs i.e. the axe and the trisula at the top may suggest the combination of five gross elements of creation namely, khiti (earth), apa (water) teza (energy), marut (air) and byoma (space) as referred to in the Indian Silpaasstras. According to D. Chutia these combined symbols seem to imply male principle as the anji symbol implies the Kundalinī-the female principle.

The Guwākuchi Grant (L. 73,74,75) depicts four sketches vertically (L. 73, 74, 75) from left to the right. First we have the figure of a bird (probably the Garuḍa) sitting on something like a snake. Then we have a lotus (Padma) followed by the pictures of a Saṅkha and Cakra.

Elephants are very common in the art of ancient Assam. All the kings of Kāmarūpa from Bhāskaravarman (7th century) to Dharmapāla (12th century) used elephant as the royal insignia in the copperplate inscriptions. The Dubi Seal of Bhāskaravarman is of oval shape and the elephant figure there is counter sunk in full standing form to the front in an attractive posture. The Nalanda Clay Seal of Bhāskaravarman also depicts the same elephant figure on the upper half of the seal. The seal attached to the Kuṇuvāhā Grant of Harjaravarman is slightly different from the seal of the Varmans. The surface of the seal of the Kuṇuvāhā Grant is in the pattern of an asvattha-leaf. The seal is divided into two parts by a horizontal

189. Kala, J.I.A.H.C., 8th session, P. 27.
ridge. The frontal part is counter sunk on sitting elephant in the upper half and in the lower half a legend is engraved. The subsequent Kāmarūpa rulers attached to this type of seal in the land grant charters.

6.13.2. Iconography:

A few inscriptions of ancient Assam are found inscribed on images of stone and metal. These are:

6.13.2.1. The Viṣṇu Image from Deopāni:

The image carved from a block of basalt measures 11 cm. x 41 cm. The image is in samāpāda sthānaka attitude. It is a four handed image, but two of its hands are broken. Of the surviving left two-hands, the upper one holds a śāṅkha (conch-shell) and the lower one touches a gada (a heavy rod-shaped weapon), placed upright on the adhīsthāna (pedestal) which is partially broken. The two broken hands must have held the cakra (wheel) and the padma (lotus). Besides ayudhas the deity wears a kīrtimukūṭa, upāvīta (sacred thread), kuṇḍalas (ear-ornament) as alaṅkāras (ornaments) on his body and a kaṭivastra (a dhoti) reaching down the knees, as paridhāna (dress) of the lower part of the body. It can be guessed that there was a plain and round prabhā (halo) behind the head of the deity, now broken off. The kīrtimukūṭa of the image is less conical. The figure depicts a soft and kindly disposition, in bare body without much decoration. The figure has round face small open eyes, prominent lips, acquiline nose, broad chest and shoulders and eyebrows. The tuft of hair is shown as resting on shoulders and the hair band
the hair band visible at the back of the head. The fleshy contour invariably suggests a contented sensuousness, in facial expression, the figure of Viṣṇu displays a sort of calm contemplation. Thus a sensuous youthful physiognomy combined with calmness of inner spiritualism, constitute the basic ideology of this Viṣṇu image.

K.N. Dikshit, who has deciphered the inscription on the back of the image remarks that the present image bears the characteristic feature of the late Gupta or the early Pala structure and he stylistically placed it in the 9th century A.D. R.D. Choudhury opined that the Viṣṇu image of Deopanī bears some common characteristics of the Rajasāḥī Viṣṇu image, though the Deopanī image bears a tribal affiliation. He conjectures that the present image, stylistically should date in the 8th century A.D. According to S.K. Sarasvati the Viṣṇu image apparently belongs to the sophisticated idiom of the eastern school of Art combined with the autochthonous trend displayed in the physiognomical features of the image.

6.13.2.2. The Saṅkara-Nārāyana Image:

The image from Deopani now at Assam State Museum, Guwahati is a high relief work retaining circular steālāe of equal height of the deity. This is a Hari-Hara figure but called Saṅkara-Nārāyana for the occurrence of this name in the inscription inscribed at the back of the image. In mediaeval period some sculptures illustrate in a characteristic manner the rapprochement between different cults. The reconciliation is emphasised by depicting gods or god and goddesses in

192. R.D. Choudhury, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, PP. 25-26
composite forms. One such combination is the Hari-Hara murti, a composite icon of Viśnu and Siva, which emphasises the reconciliation between the two major cults of Vaisnavism and Saivism. The descriptions are given in the Matsya Purāṇa and the Viṣṇudharmottara. The Varaha Purāṇa also mentions it. The Brahmaputra Valley has yielded only a few icons of HariHara.

The Śaṅkara-Narāyana image is carved from a block of granite. This image is clearly divided into two equal halves by a line of demarcation between Hari and Hara. This saṅghatamūrti is in samapādasthānaka attitude. The right half of the image represents Hara, while the other half depicts Hari. This four handed image holds in its hands clockwise: a sāṅkha (broken), presumably a gada, a trisula, and an aksamāla. The mukuta, worn by the image, is also divided. The right half represents a Jatāmukuta while the left half represents Kirītimukuta. The image has an urdhvalinga which is clearly seen and which seems to be in the right half of the image. In this image the consorts of Viśnu and Siva are absent, but they are substracted by the respective vahanas of the gods. To the deity’s right Śiva’s vahana and to its left Viśnu’s carrier Garuḍa are clearly depicted. The figure of Garuḍa is in the anjalihasta pose. The image is slightly damaged. According to R.D. Choudhury, the artists made the icon of the deity almost in accordance with the traditional formula regarding the iconography of Hari-Hara as prevalent in other regions of India.

197. Ibid, P. 66.
6.13.2.3. The Hari-Hara image from Deopāṇī:

The inscribed Hari-Hara figure (35x20 cm) standing on a lotus pedestal in samapāda sthānaka posture from Deopāṇī is a specimen pronounced with stiff and squarish features. The syncretistic character of this sculpture is noticed only in its ayudhas. An amṛtalīṭā with an aksamāla in right lower hand, a trisūla in right upper hand, and saṅkha and cakra in left lower and upper hand respectively are to be seen. The figure is flanked by garuḍa (Viṣṇu) on the left and nāndi (Śiva) on left at bottom. The usual ornaments such as, kundalā, hāra, keśu, valaya are provided. The yajnopoviṣṭa reaches to the thigh. This sculpture is provided a flat squarish treatment which is prominent in face, ears, hands and in the mukuta. The mukuta is found with feather like folk motif. Its lips are flat and wide. Long nose, eyes are flat owing to the rigid and stiffened lines with sharp edges, which provide the figure with a mundane outlook.¹⁹⁸ R.D. Choudhury opines that the image bears some typical crude traits.¹⁹⁹ B.N. Mukherjee²⁰⁰ and Monoranjan Dutta²⁰¹ considered the static and rigid execution of this Deopāṇī Hari-Hara as prototype of wood carving. But according to H.N. Dutta the Deopāṇī Hari-Hara was not imbued with features of wood carving. He opined that this sculpture incorporates native tribal texture and folk elements.²⁰¹(a) The development of this trend in sculptural art could be attributed paleographically to A.D. 800, which is confirmed by the inscription inscribed

¹⁹⁹ R.D. Choudhury, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley, P. 67.
²⁰⁰ B.N. Mukherjee, East Indian Art Styles, P. 20.
²⁰¹ Monoranjan Dutta, Sculpture of Assam, P. 57, 60.
²⁰¹(a) H.N. Dutta, A.A.D.D.V.A., P.
upon the HariHara figure. The sculpture is provided with a bejewelled fillet set around its head held against matted hair arranged in the form of a crown. The figure has a third eye, a well-developed body with round face, broad shoulder and chest, long pointed nose, flat lips and elongated ears. The usual ornaments such as hāra around the neck, keyūras and valayas in arms, yajnopavita across the body and diaper designed vanamālā flowing across the lower hands up to the ankle are provided. Aksamalā and trisūla respectively in right lower and upper hands and saṅkha and cakra respectively on left lower and upper hands are provided. The figure is flanked by garuḍa (left) and naṇḍi (right).

It seems that iconographers strongly emphasized the religious reconciliation among the principal Hindu cults, such as Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism and Tantricism. As a result certain regional characteristics in the art developed. In this case single sculptures were often depicted to have composite characters. Sometimes the composite characters of individual image is found additionally emphasized epigraphically, e.g. the inscribed Deopāṇi Viṣṇu image.

Sarasvatī opined that the images of Hari-Hari from Deopāṇi represent very likely the autochthonous popular idiom of that century, despite the physiognomical features. The Hari-Hara image has a very crude, low-cut relief, whereas the Saṅkara-Nārāyaṇa illustrate an advanced plastic diction in higher relief.202

6.13.2.4. The Sūrya Image from Kāki:

Sūrya is another principal god of sectarian Hinduism. Sūrya is considered to

be the presiding deity of the Saura sect of Smārta affiliation. The iconography of Sūrya has been described in the Brihat Samhitā, the Mastya Purāṇa, the Agni Purāṇa, the Bhavisya Purāṇa, the Vaikhānasagama etc.203

The small image of Sūrya is now in the Assam State Museum. There is a high pedestal on which occurs the figures of the horses of the sun-chariot. Over the high pedestal may be seen the god Sūrya in a standing position with the lower portion of the leg concealed behind the pedestal. On two sides there are seen two seated male attendants, possibly Daṇḍi and Pingala, and in front a seated figure with folded hands. The God holds two lotuses in two hands. The reliefs are much coarser and flat and the rectangular stela with rounded top is bare of any ornamentation. The face is squarish with protruding eyes and there is a flat crown over the head. The treatment of this sculpture at least from the standpoint of style is similar with the HariHara images of Deopānī described above. S.K. Sarasvati opined that the style of the Sūrya image bears correspondence with the third group of the Paharpur sculpture and a product of a popular idiom of plastic art very probably derived from terracotta tradition which is said to have a wide distribution in Bengal as well as in Assam.204 According to him the treatment of the figures in respect of their flat relief, crude and summary modelling of the limbs together with the emblems held are belonged to the popular idiom noticed in the Sūrya image.205

203. Ibid, P 402.
204. Ibid, P. 469.
205. Ibid.
6.13.2.5. The Bronze Image of Sūrya from Narakāsūr Hoard:

An inscribed bronze image of Sūrya has been noticed in the Narakāsūr hoard. This has now been preserved in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati.

The concerned image measuring 20 cm in height and 12.5 cm in width is made to stand to front in samapāda-sṭhānakas posture on a lotus pedestal resting on his conventional chariot (ratha) drawn by seven horses, whose frontal parts are only shown. He is accompanied by his two attendants, Daṇḍa and Piṅgala, and his charioteer. The main deity is shown as having a large forehead and a small mouth; its ears are a bit larger than normal; its eyes are large and bulging, and the nose straight and pointed; it has a well-shaped body with broad chest and shoulders, around narrow waist and a large hip. Its hands, which are bent at the elbow, are shown in an uncommon pose, the index and middle fingers being bent inwards evidently for holding the long stalks of the two blooming lotuses, one in each palm. The lotus stalks pass over the bent arms up to the upper point of the arms where the two full-bloom lotuses, one on each side, are shown. The hands are at the waist level which is distinctively a north Indian feature. The deity has for its ornaments a karaṇḍa-mukūṭa, a pair of hanging karnā-kunḍalas, a hāra, valayas, and the usual yajñopavita. The two feet of the deity, as usual, remain hidden behind the figure of the charioteer. The deity wears a kaṭū-bandha and a semi-diaphanous lower garment hanging down to the knees. The delineation of the folds of the garment, however, appears to be somewhat rigid and schematic.

Behind the deity’s head, there occurs an egg-shaped prabhamandala (nimbus) which apparently rises from behind the level of the upper-most portion of the arms where there are also the two full-bloom lotuses. The view of the back side, however reveals the downward continuation of the nimbus up to the middle portion of the arms. The nimbus has a border of three rims. Between the outermost rim and the two inner rims, is a row of dot forming an inner rims. What is interesting is that beyond the outermost rim, on each side are two designs apparently representing the flames, while at the top of the nimbus are three flames of comparatively bigger size, the central one being the biggest. This flaming background perhaps is reminiscent of the Martanda aspect of the Sun-god.

The deity is shown as being attended by Danda (Dāṇḍī) and Pingala on either side. Both are also depicted as having broad forehead, large bulging eyes, round, narrow waists and large hips similar to the central deity. They are also decorated in the same way as their overlord. They are shown as wearing semi-diaphanous lower garments resembling a dhoti covering the lower parts of their bodies to the ankles. The vastra of both of them are shown in somewhat schematic folds. Danda (Dāṇḍī) standing to the left of the principal deity, holds a staff (danda) his left hand in a vertical position which extends all along the body from the foot to the mouth level while in his right open palm he holds an unidentified object. The upper end of the staff bears a knot resembling a lotus bud. Pingala, also called Kundi, standing to the right of the Principal deity in similar manner, is shown as holding in his right
hand something perhaps writing materials like bark leaves and an unidentified object, properly an ink-pot which he is used to hold with his left hand.

In front of the principal deity is shown the figure of the charioteer, bearing similar physical features and ornaments as of the main and attendant deities. It is shown as seated on the back of the centrally placed horse which is in a galloping pose and whose front legs are shown as touching the pedestal. The charioteer is shown as holding a whip with his right hand while the left hand is drawn to his chest in the pose of holding the reins which are, however, not shown in the present composition. As against the normal practice of depicting the charioteer, who is normally Aruṇa (the uterine brother of Gūrūḍa), as legless, here he is shown as sitting astride, like a rider, feet touching the pedestal below and the bent knees projected out along the two front legs of the horse on the back of which he is shown as seated. Another interesting feature in respect of the figure of the charioteer is that he is shown as having a pair of wings behind his arms.

The epigraph inscribed on the back side of the sun-disc or the nimbus placed behind the head of the central deity. The inscription bears the name of Aditya-Narayana. On the basis of such iconic names D. Chutia suggests the image is a composite image showing Saura and Visnuite iconographic features. According to him the central image (the rider) should be taken to be Gūrūḍa and not Aruṇa as suggested by S.K. Sarasvati and R.D. Choudhury. R.D. Choudhury pointed out that the image bears some features of the Pāla sculptures of Bihar. But the 207 Dr. D. Chutia, "A note on an inscribed Sun Image preserved in the Assam State Museum", J.A.R.S, Vol. XXX, No. I, PP. 50-56, 1988; and also in the History and Archaeology, Prof. H D Sankalia felicitation Volume, PP 182-185.
physiognomy of the figure of the deity and the attendants are different from those of Bihar sculpture, as it appears. He placed the image stylistically in c.A.D. 9th-10th century. S.K. Sarasvati suggests that the Sūrya image from the Narakaśur hoard is another example of developed plastic diction of popular idiom.

6.13.2.6. The Inscribed Bronze image of Sūrya from Titabar:

A Caturbhuja bronze figure of Sūrya (47x27 cm ) is found at Titabar. This is an erect Sūrya figure in samapāda sthānaka attitude. The deity stands on a lotus pedestal supported by a Kurmaśana. The deity holds two full bloom lotuses in both hands and is flanked by figures of Piṅgala (Agni) and Daṇḍi (Yama), both door-keepers of Sūrya. Of Agni and Dandi, the former holds a pen and the latter a sword, which have been projected to the right and left of the main idol respectively. The entire complex has been placed on a rectangular pedestal which is inscribed as Visvakundasya Kirtti i.e. the glory of Visvakunda, which seems to indicate the name of the sculptor.

The deity is adorned with a tall and tapered kirita-mukuta and provided with a prabhāmadandala of burning fire behind the head. The deity wears a hāra, a Katibandha, and a lower garment which clings down to the ankle.

In facial expression the principal figure suggests a meditative state. Its half closed eyes point to the tip of its pointed nose. The elongated ears are provided with kundalas. The deity has a well developed body with broad shoulders, chest and

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208. R.D. Choudhury, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, P. 55.
round and narrow waist, that merges in its large hip. Both the hands are bent at elbows and fingers are bent inwards evidently for holding the long stalk of two full bloom lotuses, one in each palm. The lotus stalks pass over the bent arms upto the upper point of the shoulders where two lotuses are shown prominently.

The attending figures Dāndi and Piṅgala, one either side of the main deity, are depicted in wide open eyes. The round narrow waists and large hips of these figures are similar to the principal deity, and decorated in similar style of their overlord. These subordinate figures are also found with prabhāmaṇḍals.

The prabhāmaṇḍala of the main deity has atleast six rims. The outermost rim has dotted ornamentation, possibly indicating a ring of fire, the nimbus is further adorned by two flames on each side and one at the top. By discarding earlier style the sculptors resumed to stylization in this figure and as such could be dated to A.D. 900.

Physiognomically, the Titabor bronze Śūrya is similar to the other bronze figures of HariHara and Durga. However, this Śūrya icon maintains certain similarities with the Kahilipara bronze figure (23x14 cm) of Śūrya as noticed in the depiction of the figures and Prabhāwali. But in depiction of facial expression the Titabor Śūrya icon is found with an elegantly carved meditative state and stylistically more elaborate. Its frame work behind the figure remains invisible from the front. These figures, although miniature in size, constitute a part of the east Indian metallic sculptural tradition of the early mediaeval period. Unlike in

211. Ibid.
the case of stone sculptures, no new local style in metallic art developed during this period.  

Besides, the Nidhanpur Grant (V. 1) refers to Lord Siva who wears the moon as the crest-jewel, who holds the piṇaka bow and who is decorated with the particles of ashes. According to Rupamandanda, the ḍīśa aspect of Siva should have a colour like crystal with as jaṭā and chandrakalā, the hands carrying a aksamāla, triśūla, kapāla and one of them showing abhaya. The ḍīśa aspect of Siva standing in the samapāda-sthānaka pose is seen on a panel from Tezpur. The description of Siva in the Nidhanpur Grant may be an ḍīśamurti of Siva.

The Khanāmukh and the Subhānkarpātaka Grants of Dharmapāla ‘Salute to that Ardhayuvaṭṭiśvara, who is the foremost of all gods, who wears a blue lotus (indīvara) and the jewel of the hood of the snake as the ornament of the respective ears, whose person is besmeared with saffron, applied to the large and high breast with ashes and who is, as it were, the only embodiment (i.e. creation) of both the erotic (śṛṅgāra) sentiment and the sentiment of anger (Raudrarasa)’. In Assam only one composite figure of Ardhanāriśvara has been found as forming the central figure of a frieze of stone, 5 3˝ long by 1 6˝ deep in a place called Matharbari. M.M. Sharma opines that the poetical description of the Pūṣpabhadra and Subhānkarpātaka Grant is similar with the Siva-Ardhanāri of the Kangra School of

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212. Ibid.
early XIX century A.D.

6.13.3. Architecture:

The inscription of ancient Assam records an abundant architectural activity in Assam. But not a single ancient temple or building is found in its original condition, except huge heaps of ruins lying scattered throughout the state.

Epigraphic sources mentioned the erection of temples and buildings of secular nature by the kings. From the ruins it appears that the materials used for the construction of temples and other buildings were permanent in nature consisting of stone, brick and even clay. Still not a single edifice of that remote past is found in its original shape.

The nature of soil and climate are mainly responsible for the destruction of the monuments. According to Gait; “Nature has vied with man in destroying them. The Brahmaputra valley is an alluvial country, and the impetuous, snow-fed rivers which debouch from the Himalayas find so little resistance in its friable soil that they are constantly carving out new channels and cutting away their banks; consequently no buildings erected in their neighborhood can be expected to remain for more than a limited time, except at a few points like Guwahati, Tezpur, Nagaon, where the solid rock pierces through the alluvium. Further, though occurring at distance intervals, violent earthquakes are, in Assam, quite as great the cause of destruction as fluidal action. A less sudden but almost equally potent, cause of damage is found in the luxuriant vegetation of the country. The religious zeal, which

led the early Muslim invaders, was also one of the causes for the destruction of the temple.  

218

The inscriptions refer both secular and religious architecture. In secular sphere architecture mainly concerned with construction of palatial building and its defensive architecture. Religious architecture was concerned with the construction and consecration of religious establishments.

6.13.3.1. Secular Architecture :

The Bargāon Grant (L. 28-23) refers to the fortress city of Durjjaya or Sri Durjjaya evidently because of the impregnable nature of its defences. It is said to be encompassed by a rampart and furnished further with a strong fence which defended it, ‘like cloth which protected the king’s broad chest’. Again it is described to have ‘baffled and struck terror’ into the heart of many kings. There were at least two lines of protective works surrounding the city, a high rampart apparently of stone and an additional fence the nature of which is difficult to ascertain. There are poetic descriptions of building within this fortress city. There are said to be thousand of buildings with high towers glistening white with lime plaster and inhabited by fair and smiling damsels. The tall heights of these towered buildings are said to have hid the view of the sun. The impregnability of Durjjaya was due as much to its strong defences as to its ‘brilliant troops of warriors’ to which also we have a pointed reference in the Bargāon inscriptions (L. 30-32).

219

Nowgong Grant of Balavarman (V. 14) states that king Vanamāla had erected

a palace ‘which, though having no equal, stood equal on its ground, though unlimited in rooms, possessed many rooms, though gay with several ornamentation, were also furnished with realistic pictures’. A palace, so described, seems to be functionally efficient and beautiful in appearance.  

Inscriptions also refer Pragjyotisapura, Haruppesvara, Kamarupanagara and Kirtipura but they do not throw light on architecture of ancient Assam.

The Kalika Purana (Ch. 87) refers to some important cities of ancient Assam and described six types of fort. The Purana refers to Pragjyotisapura a giridurga. Yogini Tantra (Ch. II, IX, 22-32) also refers to a sacred tirtha called Apunarbhava, with its shrine of Hayagriva-Janardana. The city is said to be adorned by prasada-s with streamers of many colours flying from their tops. There are references again, to many beautiful temples, well-laid parks and lotus filled tanks. But proper investigation by way of scientific explorations and excavations is thought to be necessary before anything definite can be said about the secular architecture of ancient Assam.  

6.13.3.2. Religious Architecture:

Ancient literature refers to religious establishment in ancient Assam. The Markandeya Purana (Ch. 109) refers to an early temple of Surya built in Kamarupa. The Chinese pilgrim Yuan-Chwang refers to ‘hundreds of Deva temples which are extant during the time of his visit’.

221. Ibid.
222. Watters, II, P. 186.
The Umācal Rock Inscription of Surendravarman is the earliest epigraphic record mentioning the consecration of a religious establishment. A cave temple was dedicated to Lord Balabhadrasvāmin by this inscription. Rock-cut architecture was the usual order in India before the structural practices in permanent material seriously started. From the history of Gupta architecture we know that because of the absence of a continuous architectural tradition from the past the Guptas at their beginning had to excavate cave-temples at the Udaygiri hills near Vīdisā. It is therefore possible that the cave temple of the Umācal Rock Inscription was done in imitation of Udaygiri. It is note worthy in this context that the wording of the Udaygiri cave temple inscription of Vīrasen, the minister of Chandragupta II has some similarity with that of the Umācal Rock Inscription. Thus the Umācal Rock Inscription informs the architectural activity of ancient Assam at least in the 5th century A.D.

The Tezpur Grant of Vānamāla (V. 24) records that the king out of devotion got the tall and towering temple of Hātakasūlin rebuilt and provided it with villages, elephants and dancers. Evidently the older temple which had fallen into disrepair belonged to an earlier date. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla (V. 10) records that Ratnapāla caused the whole earth to be covered by white washed temples of Siva. The Gachtal Grant (V. 21) records that king Indrapāla, by constructing a series of clearly white-washed temples of Sambhu, rendered the whole world full of Kailāsa mountain. The Guwākuchi Grant of Indrapāla (L. 53-55) refers to a temple of

224. Ibid., P. 145.
Vasumādhava and the temple of Mahāgaurī-Kamesvara. In the Puṣpabhadrā Grant of Dharmapala (L. 18) there is a mention of temple dedicated to Śrī Madhusūdana (Śrīmadhusūdanasaṭka’). Towards the end of our period we have reference in the Assam Plates of Vallabha (VV. 13-14) to the establishment of an alms-house by the side of a Śiva temple.

The above are a few temple building activity in ancient Assam which we get from the inscriptions. These few instances may reasonably indicate a far more wide-spread activity in founding and building religious establishments.

From the architectural remains which are lying scattered in different places of Assam, we may reconstruct the temple architecture of Assam which were once prevailed in this region.

From the plinth of the temple (adhisthāna) is found in temple ruins or some later temples are constructed on the ancient plinth, it appears that the general lay-out of temples consisted of:

1. Torana, which is situated on a little distance from the main temple on the approach road.
2. Door way (two dvarasakhas and sirapatti) at the entrance of the temple building.
3. Mandapa or Natmandir (Assembly hall)
4. Antarala (entrance chamber), and
5. Garbhagriha or the sanctum-sanctorum of cella.

It has been noticed that some small shrines consist only of garbhagriha with an enclosed yard in front of it. In these small shrines, only one deity was enshrined.

The Vimāna or spire is the general structure over the cella or the recess of the gods habitation. The Vimāna being a replica of the human body, has its pada (leg). Jangha (thigh, waist) kandha (neck) and the sikhara (the peak-crown). The sikhara is the main structure round which all the architectural craftsmanship was concentrated by architects according to their ideas and conceptions with local variations; and thus different types of temples derived their architectural nomenclatures.

The first and earliest phase or Vimāna in Assam is not found in its original condition. The Da-Parbatiya temple was the earliest i.e. c. 6th century A.D. so far noticed in Assam. Next comes the temple of Majgāon which is placed during 8th-9th century A.D., where there are some miniature temple designs (the replica sikhara of Nāgara style) carved on the lintels. In other temple ruins, temple motifs carved on the lintels and anīga sikharas of the temple are also found, which may give a clue to the original temple.

The miniature temple and temple motif carved on the lintel and anīga sikhara found in the ruins including Madan Kamdeva may throw some light on the Vimānas which were prevalent in the region- the replica sikharas of Nāgara style or of the Pāhārpur (Bengal) style, one with the four sides of it divided in sections horizontally as well as vertically with the help of lines and tiers at the angles, again divided
vertically with the help of āmalasilās. Partly because of this and partly because of an intended konakapaga, this part projects out a little. This may well be under the whole scheme or pagas. Another sikhara is composed of moulded tiers of bhūmis vertically diminishing in size, topped by the usual āmalaka. At the centre of the sides of the sikhara a vertical decorative panel covers almost all the bhūmis. Another sikhara provides a clear division of the body, which is horizontally divided into ratha, anuratha and konika pagas. This is akin to the style of the first one.

The body of the temple may be divided along the vertical axis into four principal parts, namely,

1. The pada or Pista or pedestal
2. The Jangha, waist or body or wall.
3. The Kāndha (neck) or gandi, and
4. The sikhara (the peak-crown) or mastaka.

The Pada or Pista does not form an essential part of the temple. The Jangha or wall rises vertically upto certain height. The Kāndha or gandi rises straight up to a short height and then begins to curve inwards at an increasing rate. The sikhara or mastaka starts from above the gandi. Just above the gandi comes āmla or āmalaka, a flattened spheroid, ribbed at the sides and resembling an enormous myrobalan or āmalaki in appearance. Above the āmlaka comes the khola (the khapuri) and skull on it is placed the kalasa (kalasi) or vase and the ayudha or the weapon of the deity to whom the temple is concentrated. Above the āmalak, nothing is shown upon the
replica sikhara of the lintels.

In the architectural history of ancient Assam, two phases of architecture have been identified. This was the result of two art currents flowing from the western side of Assam and from two different sources: one carries with it evidences of Gupta Hindu stream percolating into Assam. The other represented the extreme eastern limit of Orissan (northern Indian) style. The former is evidenced by the door-frame of the Da-Parbatiyā. The temples forming latter group allied to the Orissan (North Indian) style, have the appearance of shrine as they consist mainly of the sikharas, with only a small porch of portico. Some of them may originally have been provided with maṇḍapas or assembly halls and nāṭa-mandiras or dancing halls.

6.13.4. Painting:

With the development of architectural and sculptural arts, ancient Assam must have developed its own style of painting also. The origin of the Indian paintings goes back to the pre-historic period as the instances of cave paintings are evident on the walls of the group of caves in the Kaimur range of central India and examples of the later Stone-Age have been discovered in excavation in the Vindhya Hills. When the art of painting was practised in Assam is hard to guess. P.C. Sarma opines that the art manifests in the Da-Parbatiyā. The art manifested in the Da-Parbatiyā door panels of the Gupta age is a solitary instance of art culture in Assam of the 5th and 6th centuries. Development of education, art and culture is a continuous process.

227. Percy Brown, Indian Painting, P. 15.
and although these flower into vigorous activities with the active support and encouragement of wise and enlightened monarchs, they do not become extinct with their passing away from the political scene. The trail blazed to the gifted artists and painters is carried on by the sons and disciples from generation to generation.\textsuperscript{228}

Bānabhatta’s Hārṣacarita enumerates some of the most remarkable artistic and economic products of Assam in which Assam excelled then as now.\textsuperscript{229}

Reference to ‘carved boxes of panels for painting with brushes and gourds attached’ and ‘gold painted bamboo cages’ in the Hārṣacarita, unmistakably point to the fact that the art of painting flourished in Assam in the early 7th century. Similar literary evidence of painting is found in the New History of the Tang Dynasty where it is referred that the king of Kia-mu-lu (Kāmarūpa) presented the Chinese emperor with some curious articles including a map of the country prepared by the artists at Bhāskaravarman’s court.\textsuperscript{230} The particular reference to the portraiture painting in ancient Assam is alluded to the Bhagavata Purāṇa (X,CXII) which narrates the skilfulness in portraiture of Chitralekha, the daughter of Kumbhanda, the minister of the legendary Sonitpur King Bāna. The story narrates that Chitralekha, in order to pacify her friend Uṣā, the daughter of King Bāna, portrayed hundreds of princes of India including Aniruddha, the grandson of Kṛṣṇa, the king of Dvarakā, in one night. The Kālika Purāṇa (Ch. 68/8-16) mentions coloured or decorated cloth in connection with offerings to deities.

\textsuperscript{229} S.K. Chatterjee, ‘The palace of Assam in the History and Culture of India’, P.28
\textsuperscript{230} D.C. Sircar, Geography of Ancient and Medieval India, P. 246.
The existence of the art of painting is supported by the reference in the inscriptions of Assam. In the Nidhanpur Grant (L. 24) we have a description of Bhāskaravarma (Line 24), we have a description of the king’s prowess borne out by the fact that his portraits were seen in the palaces of his vassal kings. ‘whose mark (i.e. the picture) was seen in the houses of kings un tarnished on account of great lustre, like the disc of the Sun in several water pots.’

In the Uttarbarbil Grant (V.14) of Balavarma III we come across a poetic description of a row of unparalleled royal palaces bedecked with pictures. ‘With him (as the resident) the row of palaces became atulā (matchless) even when remaining satulā (i.e. containing sloping beams); became visāla (i.e. large), even while being bhurikṛtasāla(i.e. consisting of many rooms); became akṛtāvicitra (i.e. devoid of non-uniformity in colour) while remaining saccitra (i.e. while containing pictures within).’

It is clear from what has been cited above that painting flourished in Assam right from the Gupta period and it received impetus and encouragement during the enlightened rule of the Varman dynasty, although no actual specimen of it is available today. The school of painting which was prevalent here could not be basically different from the same art, prevailing in other parts of contemporary India—although themes and delineation of the
subject-matter might have been influenced by local factors. In the succeeding centuries we get actual illustration of painting in Assam. This developed form was naturally grew up in time with long usage of this art. Thus the observation of P.C. Choudhury seems to be correct 'the perfection that was attained in this branch of fine arts during the Ahom period is itself an indication of the existence of a long established tradition and its early culture.'