CHAPTER III

LITERARY STUDY OF THE INSCRIPTIONS: A GENERAL NOTE

On the Language of the Inscriptions:

From the earliest times till the advent of the British in 1826 A.D., by and large it has been the usual practice to present the text of the inscriptions through the medium of Sanskrit language. In the inscriptions of the ancient period, Sanskrit was the only language used. In the inscriptions of the medieval period, however, the texts are found in as many as three languages viz., Sanskrit, Assamese, and Tai. In certain inscriptions, Sanskrit and Assamese texts occurred side by side while in certain others, texts occurred in all the said three languages. Sanskrit texts of these inscriptions occurring either alone or by the side of texts in other languages are written in a highly literary style according to the traditional norms of rhetoric and prosody. Very often, their historical perspectives are overshadowed by poetical exaggerations. The Assamese and the Tai portions of these inscriptions, though they do not fall within the scope of the present literary study are, however, important from the linguistic and historical points of view.

Before entering into the literary study of the inscriptions, it is proposed here to discuss in brief as to why the inscriptions of ancient Assam were written in Sanskrit. It may be argued that
these might have been written in the local dialects of those days. Had these inscriptions been written in the local dialects, it may be argued that, they could easily be read and understood by all. In reply to this question an answer may perhaps be given in the following way:

First, the inscriptions were mainly royal documents and these documents were prepared under certain rules and regulations. Originally, the inscriptions of the whole of India were written in Prākrit and from about the second half of the 1st century B.C. Sanskrit gradually ousted Prākrit from the field of Indian epigraphy in all parts of the country. To quote T.P. Verma, "The use of Sanskrit in these courts was a fashion and was considered a characteristic of high scholarship".

Secondly, the inscriptions under the present review were prepared mainly for future kings and other ruling authorities. The text being in Sanskrit even the uneducated kings and the princes could follow these royal documents with the help of the learned scholars.

Thirdly, although no evidences are available to show the distribution of the local dialects prevailing in ancient Assam yet it may be presumed that they differed from place to place and time to time. So if these inscriptions would have been written in the local dialects even then there might have arisen problems for the subsequent generations.

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1 Vide Sircar, D.C., Indian Epigraphy, p. 39.
2 DSAsK, p. 30.
Fourthly, the local tribes of ancient Assam did not have their own scripts. So they had to depend upon other scripts, and preferably the popular scripts of other parts of India.

Fifthly, there are reasons to believe that the majority of the people were illiterate or semi-literate. If the inscriptions would have been written in the local languages, even then all the people could not have been able to read them.

Sixthly, it was presumably considered a matter of prestige by the kings to have as many inscriptions written in Sanskrit.

In fact, it is quite plausible that the kings of ancient Assam left their records consistently written in Sanskrit in keeping with the practice of the kings of other parts of India.

On the Implications on the Term Literary Merit:

For understanding the implications of the term 'literary merit' it may perhaps be deemed enough to quote the following observation of R.G. Basak: "By literary merit of the inscriptions we should mean not only their form, language, style, and metre, but also, to some extent their contribution to the idea of the culture of the Indian nation by their incidental reference to various lores prevailing in India during particular periods in particular localities. There are certain inscriptions which do not possess literary elements as per the traditional norms; but they give an idea of the culture of certain areas of that time. For instance, the Umâcal inscription stands as an index to the

spread of the Aryan culture up to the Gauhati area, the Barganga inscription speaks of the spread of the Aryan culture up to the Dabakā area and the Nagājarī inscription stands as a testimony to the spread of the Aryan culture up to the Sarupathār area of Upper Assam as early as in the early part of the 5th century A.D.

On the basis of the references found here and there in certain inscriptions, we may have rough idea of the society of the contemporary age. So, a brief account of the conditions of the people of Assam as supplied by these references is presented below:

On the Society as Reflected in the Inscriptions:

It is not very easy to work out a complete picture of the contemporary society on the basis of the materials provided by the epigraphs. Yet an attempt may be made to form an idea of certain aspects of the society with the help of relevant materials found scattered in various epigraphical records of the time.

The kings of ancient Assam bore the title 'mahārājādhīrāja- paramānayaśvaramahāpatrāke'. This implies that they were imperial monarchs. But how far the kings became successful in establishing the imperial power is not clear from the epigraphs. It may be gathered from the epigraphs that the king was the executive head of the state and his āsānas were to be executed by the officers. In the epigraphs of ancient Assam generally
no mention of such a word as mantri or mantrigirisat is found. In other words, the executive power of the ministers is nowhere mentioned in the inscriptions. This leads to believe that the king was the supreme head of the administration. As the king was the final authority, the administrative policies were also made according to his nature. It may be presumed that if the king was ideal the administration also went for the benefit of the people. On the contrary, whenever the king was tyrannous naturally the government took the despotic form. Yet, at least in two places there are references to amatyag. The Barganga Rock Inscription has a reference to visavamatya Avaguna (line 3). An idea of a cabinet with individual responsibilities and headed by a Prime Minister may be gathered from the Nayunthal plates of Harjaravarman (lines 25-28). In the last available line of the document there is a clear reference to a mahamatya Srigosvinda.

However, there are also many evidences which may present the idea of the prevalence of an ideal system of government. The attitudes of many of the kings, as given in the epigraphs, lead to the conjecture that the people were by and large happy and prosperous. In the Nayunthal Copper Plates of Harjaravarman (V.6), king Haravarman is described as a virtuous and highly qualified king who protected his subjects like his own children and never
oppressed them. In the prose portion of the Tszpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (line I), while giving the description of the capital city Maḍapāṣāvara it is said that it was inhabited by fully contented people of all the Varnas and all the Āśramas. In the Uttarbarbil Copper Plates of Balavarman III, king Balavarman is said to be afraid of disreputation—bhūravasāśi (line 33). This leads to believe that the king took keen interest in the welfare of the people.

The system of government as found in the epigraphs of the medieval period was monarchy. In some of the epigraphs of the period, the ideal characters of the kings are reflected. The Āhom king Śivasimha is described as steady in nature, having an accumulation of fame which resembles the foam of milk. The mention of noble qualities leads to conjecture that the kings were interested in public welfare also. However, it is remembered that the epigraphs were composed by the court poets and therefore there is always room for exaggerating the good qualities of the patron kings.

The epigraphs of ancient Assam do not give an accurate picture of the position of the queens. Even the names of the

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4 cf. yah śruto harṣavarmatī gunāvān dhārmiko mpah/
    putradṛṣṭyā jano yena pālito na da pūditāh//

5 cf. praprītā-samasta-vānasramād ....

6 cf. chīra-keśa-hindira-yāsonikara; Copper Plate Inscription of Bhṛngesvara Temple (I).
queens of all the kings are not given in the inscriptions. From the records themselves we cannot form an idea as to whether a particular queen took active part in the administrative affairs of the state. In the epigraphs of the Ahom period, the names of the queens are not mentioned. The chief queen of the Ahom king Sivasimha (1714-44 A.D.) is, however, an exception. This particular queen ascended the throne and struck coins in her name. In the epigraphs she is entitled as the 'Mahiśī'. The same queen was also called Pramathesvari and designated vrhadātā in Sanskrit and bar-ralā in Assamese.

The inscriptions of both the ancient and medieval periods by and large present the picture of a male-dominated society. Women in general did not enjoy a position equal to that of men. According to one record women were even offered to others as gifts.

*He who has been making gift of the best of (i.e., ratnas) plenty of gold, silver, elephants, horses, land and women on

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7 Copper Plate Inscription of Shringesvara Temple (I) 1728 A.D. and Inscription of Kamalesvara Temple, Milachala, 1728 A.D.

8 Of. sri-sri-evarganarayana-sivasimha-narandra-mahisi-sri-sri-sri-evarganarayani-prasiddha-vrhadattva-pramathesvarinimitam sastram idam ... (Inscription on Cannon dated 1651 saka, Vide PS, p. 111). After the death of Phulesvarī, the status of the head of the state has been enjoyed in succession by the junior co-wives of Sivasimha viz. Ambikā and Sarvasvari.
numerous occasions and as such being compelled to utter the
dānayākya incessantly, had to become a man of more speech
(literally a chatter-box) though by nature he was a man of limited
speech.\(^9\)

A Brief Survey of the Religious Sects:

A study of the inscriptions may present also a brief idea
of different religious sects prevailing in those days. Accordingly
the worships of different deities as reflected in the inscriptions
of Assam are discussed below.

Worship of Siva:

Most of the inscriptions of ancient Assam begin with mangala
verses addressed to Lord Siva.\(^{10}\) In certain inscriptions, mangala
verses are addressed to Siva alone,\(^{11}\) while in certain others,
obedance is paid also to other deities along with Siva. As in
many of the grants mangala verses are addressed to Siva, it appears
that in comparison to other deities Siva was more largely worshipped.
P.N. Bhattacharyya also opines that the kings of ancient Assam
were devotees of Siva.\(^{12}\) But he has also something more to say. Ne

\(^9\)As translated in IAA.

\(^{10}\)cf. Dubi Plates (V. 2) and Midhanpur Plates (V. I) of
Bhaskararman; Tezpur Plates (V. 2) and Farhatiya Plates (V. 2)
of Vanamalai; Uttarbarbil Plates (V. I) and Moungong Plates (V. I)
of Balavarman III; Barghaon Grant (V. I) of Ratnapala; Gauhati
Grant (V. I) and Guvyakushi Grant (V. I) of Indrapala; Gachhtal
Grant (V. I) of Gopalavarman, and the earlier two grants of
Dharmapala.

\(^{11}\)cf. Dubi Plates and Midhanpur Plates of Bhāskararman.

\(^{12}\)JARS, Vol. II, No. 1, April, 1934. See his article "Mahadeva
the Iṣṭa Deva of the kings of Kamarpura".
is of the opinion that the नील sign and the word स्वस्ति found at the commencement of the inscriptions tend to show that Mahādeva, accompanied by his Sakti, was the 1.7a devatā of the kings of Kāmarūpa. To him, it is essentially a tantric concept of religion. According to R. Neog also the नील is a symbol of the tantric concept of the kundalini nadi. ¹³ But the presence of the नील and the word स्वस्ति in the Puspabhadra CP Grant of Dharmapāla, which begins with a prayer addressed to Viṣṇu and not to Śiva, tends to show that the नील and the word स्वस्ति are employed simply as auspicious sign or word without having specifically to do anything with Śiva-worship.

Worship of Viṣṇu:

All the CP grants, including the earlier two grants issued by Dharmapāla begin with mangala verses addressed to Śiva in any one of his various aspects. But the third CP grant of Dharmapāla begins with a salutation to Viṣṇu in the Boar incarnation. Significantly enough the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva and the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva, which follow the last grant of Dharmapāla in point of time, also begin with the salutation om namo bhagavate vāsudevaya. This shows that, from the later part of the rule of Dharmapāla, the worship of Viṣṇu began to be more popular in ancient Assam.¹⁴

¹³PS, Intr., p. 138.

¹⁴The pictures of śrṇkha, oṅkra, paruda and padma at the end of the Gvākuchi grant of Indrapāla, however, shows that Viṣṇu was not altogether unpopular in earlier days also.
Worship of Other Deities

However, besides Śiva and Viṣṇu, other deities were also worshiped in ancient Assam. Umācal Rock Inscription of Surendravarman through which a cave temple was constructed for one Valabhadra, seems to imply to some extent, an idea of the worship of Valabhadra, a Viśnavite deity. The text of the Śūrya Image Inscription of Kāki suggests an idea of Sun worship in ancient Assam. In the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva the maṅgala verse is addressed to Cānaśa (Lambodara).

Synchronism

Although an attempt has been made above to show the greater or less popularity of any of the gods like Śiva or Viṣṇu, yet a religious synchronism emerges out as the actual trend of the whole period when evidences like the following ones are taken into account:

(1) Deopāni Viṣṇu Image Inscription which states: "sevyā tu devī bhagavati tu guhyaḥ" (Adorable is the goddess (Devi) and the goddess (Bhagavatī) is indeed identical with Viṣṇu (Guhya).)

(2) Saṅkara-Nārāyaṇa Stone Image Inscription which contains the clause: "ādeu nāma saṅkara-nārāyaṇa-kīrtane" (In the beginning (there was) the chanting of the names of Saṅkara and Nārāyaṇa.)

\[\text{Translation is as given in IAA.}\]
(3) The Harihara Stone Image containing the Harihara Stone Image Inscription.

The Sanskrit texts of the epigraphs of the medieval period also convey some information about the religious cults of the period. It is already found that the inscriptions of ancient Assam do not say directly anything of the religion of the donor kings, although an idea may be formed about their istsdevatās on the basis of certain references in the inscriptions. The inscriptions of the medieval period, however, do mention the deity or deities worshiped by the donor kings. It is gathered that many of the donor kings of the inscriptions of medieval Assam worshiped Śiva. It is gathered from the texts of certain inscriptions that the worship of Goddess Kamakhyā was also continued.

16 cf. for instance,
1. kāmakhyā-garaṇārāke vijayate śrīmallaḍeva ṇraha
   (Rock Inscription of Milāchala Kāmakhyā Temple, 1487 saka)
2. ārīrūdra-garaṇārāke-ārīruḍrasimha-maharajadhīraja
   (Rock Inscription of the Rudrēvara Temple, 1671 saka)
3. srigovinda-padaṇavinda-bhaktirasika-śrīśri-gaurināthasimha-
   maharajadhīrajaṇendrei
   (CP Inscription of Land Grant in Kūchārimal, etc....
   1711 saka)

17 In the inscriptions of the medieval period Śiva is referred to with different names like the following ones - Śīvarāja (Rock Inscription of the Siddhāvara Temple), Śṛṅgesvarā (Copper Plate Inscription of Śṛṅgesvāra Temple), Śṛṇva (Rock Inscription of the Vasiṣṭhāsāra Temple), Hara (Rock Inscription of the Western Gateway of the Gauhati city) etc. Sometimes, along with Śiva, different names of his consort such as Bhavāni (Rock Inscription of the Vasiṣṭhaśāra Temple), Gaurī (Rock Inscription of the Western Gateway of the Gauhati city) are also found.

18 See the texts of the inscriptions in KT.
is seen from the survey of the texts of the inscriptions that Viṣṇu\textsuperscript{19} and Durgā\textsuperscript{20} were also worshiped in the said period. It is found that the worship of Kṛṣṇa was also performed.\textsuperscript{21}

It may further be observed here that the same spirit of religious syncretism as found in the ancient Assam generally prevailed in the medieval Assam also as evidenced by the fact that many of kings patronised temples and similar institutions connected not only with the Saiva or the Sākta cult but also with the Vaiṣṇava cult. This spirit is best warranted by the epithet \textit{"śrī śrī hari-hara-gauri-carana-sandra-cakora"} to king Rājesvarasimha in the Inscription on the Gateway of the Brick Wall of the Kedāra Temple, Mājo, 1680 sāka.

The Sanskrit texts of the inscriptions of the medieval period of Assam are completely silent about the personal life in those days. The inscriptions of ancient Assam, however, supply some information with their references here and there, to the personal life of the people. For instance there is a reference to \textit{varṇaśramadhharma} as follows:

\textbf{Varnasrama-dharma in Ancient Assam :}

The four stages of life as maintained by the Hindus of ancient India are noticed also in the inscriptions of ancient Assam.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Vide Rock Inscription of the Aśvākrānta Temple.}

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Rock Inscription of the Durgā-sarovara near the Nilāchala, 1666 sāka.}

\textsuperscript{21} One of the ministers of the Ahom king Rājesvarasimha is shown as the worshiper of Kṛṣṇa, cf. \textit{"śrīkṛṣṇaśaranaśravana"} (Copper Plate Inscription of Sukresvāra Temple of 1683 sāka)
After completing the first stage under a preceptor for a period of regular training course one returns home and starts the next stage of life. This is clearly pointed out in the epigraphic records of the period.

"This honest and pious scholar, skilled in sacred recitation, coming back as a graduate from the home of the preceptor with a desire to enter into the life of a householder comes here as a supplicant."

Prevalence of Vedic Culture in the Ancient Period:

The prevalence of Vedic culture among the brahmans of ancient Assam is noticed in the inscriptions.

As translated in IAM.
As translated in IAA.
The brahmans were not only familiar with the Vedic culture but the Vedic rites were also performed properly.

cf. devapriyo devadharaśuṣujanma tasyāpi sūnuḥ sukṛtātmobhūt/
adhvaryuṇā yena kṛtam vibhajya vaitānikām karmā nirākulena//

(Nowgong Grant of Balavarman III, V. 27)

"That pious man also had a son named Devadhara, who was a favourite of the gods and a man of auspicious birth; as a sacrificer he performed the Vedic rites in proper parts in an unbesieged manner".24

Sacrificial deeds as performed by the Hindus of ancient India are reflected in the inscriptions of ancient Assam. Sacrificial ceremonies were performed to remove sins and to lead a pious life. It is mentioned that these ceremonies were held to remove the sins of the Kali age.

cf. grāmaḥ krosāṇjanāmaḥ śrāvastyām yatra yajvanām/
homadhūmān dhakeraṇḍham nāvisāt kalikalmaṇam//

(Subhāṅkaraṇaṭaka Grant of Dharmapāla, V. 16)

"In Śrāvasti there is a village named Krosāṇja, into which the sin of the Kali age (Kalikalmaṇa) could not enter (on account of) being blinded by the darkness caused by the smoke of the sacrifices of the sacrificers".25

24 As translated in IAA.

25 Translation is as given in IAA.
On the Position of Sanskrit Studies in Ancient Assam as Reflected in the Inscriptions:

An idea of Sanskrit studies in Assam may be gathered from the contents of the inscriptions. It is already found that the Vedas with their angas were studied in Assam. Besides the study of the Vedas along with their angas, the study of other branches of Sanskrit learning was also continued. While narrating the various distinguishing qualities of Indrapāla, it is said that the king was well-versed in different sastras.

cf. suvistṛtānām padavākyatṛkkatantrapravāhātitarasvinināṁ/
yah sarvavādyāsatitāmagnadhamantarnimagnasca gataś ca param//

(Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, V. 16)

"He could dive into the unfathomable depth of, and also swim across, the wide rivers in the form of the various lores, which were very fast with the currents in the form of pada (i.e., grammar), vākya (i.e., mīmāṃsā), tarka (logic) and tantra²⁶

In course of describing Durjjayā, the capital city of Ratnapāla, it is said that this city was the place of poetical figures (kāvyakārāṇa) created (or discussed) by the learned men (bauddhas) and

²⁶As translated in IAA.
the preceptors (gurus)". In the Khanapakh Copper Plates of Dharmapāla, the dona brahmin of the Grant is said to have studied Rimāna regularly.

cf. tābhyāmajayata sutaḥ ेरिमन mahāvahuriti viṣrutah/
imāvabhyaśanīhaṣadopadprosita manasah// (V. 21)

They too had an illustrious son, famous with the name Mahābahu, whose mind was free from all blemishes on account of regular studies of Rimāna.²⁸

Some Notable Features of the Inscriptions of Assam:

Some notable features of the inscriptions of ancient Assam may be pointed out as fellows:

1. The inscriptions of ancient Assam as discussed earlier are written in Sanskrit although certain Prākrit words are also observed therein. Irregularities and mistakes, which are not in a large number, are probably due to the ignorance of the scribes or engravers and not because of any lack of competence of the composers.

2. Most of the inscriptions of ancient Assam are Saivite in character.

²⁷cf. 'nabheavartme vaṃtabudhe-guru-kāvyālaṃkāram' (lines 32-33) ... durjajayākhyā puram (line 40)

"Like the sky embellished with (the planets) Budha, Guru (i.e., Brahaspati) and Kāvya (i.e., Sukra), the city of Durjaya was the place of poetical figures (kāvyālaṃkāras) created (or discussed) by the learned men (budhas) and the preceptors (gurus)". The Bargau Grant of Ratnapāla, lines 32-33 and 40.

²⁸As translated in IAA.
3. Some of the inscriptions of ancient Assam are quite long. The available five plates of the six plates of the Dubi Copper Plates Grant of Bhāskaravarmān constitute the longest inscription so far discovered and it covers 76 verses along with a prose passage in 6 lines.

4. Long inscriptions of ancient Assam are generally written in campū style.

5. In the majority of the inscriptions of ancient Assam no date is given. Date is found in thirteen out of thirty inscriptions of the ancient period. One inscription, viz. the Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjaravarmān contains the date Gupta 510. The Assam Plates of Vallabha gives the date 1107 saka with the symbolic words naga-nabha-nidra. The Naozong CP Grant of Valavarman III also contains a regnal year given with the symbolic word vasu (= 8). The remaining ten inscriptions, which are all copper plate grants contain the date in usual words for numbers corresponding to regnal years.29

6. Another feature of the inscriptions of ancient Assam is that the text of the literary portion of a certain inscription

29 Eventually majority of CP grants (i.e., 12 out of 19) contain dates. But regnal years are of very little worth as historical dates. Thus practically only two inscriptions viz. Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjaravarmān and the Assam Plates of Vallabha may be said to be duly dated.
is sometimes repeated fully or partially in another inscription.\textsuperscript{30}

The texts of the literary portions of the Uttarbarbil Copper Plates of Balavarman III, the Bargāon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla and the Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla are repeated fully in the Nowgong Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III, the Suvālkuchi Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla and the Guvākuchi Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla respectively. Further, the first 15 verses of the Corātbari Grant of Ratnapāla are common to other two grants of the same king.

7. In the medieval inscriptions, specific dates are mentioned.\textsuperscript{31}

Sanskrit and Assamese inscriptions or the inscriptions written in both Sanskrit and Assamese are dated in \textit{Saka} era.\textsuperscript{32} Further, the dates are given not by figures but by the symbolic use of names of various objects.\textsuperscript{33} of. "\textit{Saka turaga-yugmēśa}" in the Kānāi-barasā-i-bovā Rock Inscription, 1127 Āraka.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} This feature is sometimes noticed in the inscriptions of Kambuja also. See R.C. Majumdar’s \textit{Inscriptions of Kambuja}.
\item \textsuperscript{31} The Mīlēchāla CP Grant of Madhava, however, gives the date simply as "sam 25 āśvinadine 3", presumably implying the regnal year.
\item \textsuperscript{32} The inscriptions in Ahom are dated in \textit{Lākṣṇi} era. Vide \textit{Epigraphia Indica}, Vol. XXXVIII, part IV, 1969, pp. 179-182.
\item \textsuperscript{33} M. Neog has given a list of the words used to denote the figures. See PB, Bhūmikā, pp. 13-14 and also Intr., pp. 137-38.
\end{itemize}
Some of the inscriptions of the medieval period (Ahom period) are written partly in Sanskrit and partly in Assamese language current in those days. Both these two portions are written in the Assamese script. Sanskrit portions are devoted mainly to the descriptions of the donor kings (sometimes with a brief description of the deputy of a donor king) while Assamese portions describe the executive parts i.e., the purpose of donation, the name of the donee or donees, the land to be donated, 

There are plenty of examples to show that in the inscriptions of different parts of India local dialects were also used in addition to Sanskrit. See Indian Epigraphy, pp. 39-60. This practice is not only found in India but even in the inscriptions of Kamboja or ancient Cambodia where local Khmer language has been used in addition to Sanskrit. Vide R.C. Rajamdar’s Inscriptions of Kamboja, Introduction. A parallel to this tradition is noticed in the Balinese inscriptions also. In support of our view, following two examples are quoted:

"The source of our knowledge about Sri Kesari Varaadeva are the well-known double inscription (in Sanskrit and Old Balinese) of the stone pillar at Belshandjong (Blandjong) near Sanur and a second inscription ................" (p. 9)

"Another interesting feature about the Sanur inscription is that A-side contains a Sanskrit and an Old Balinese inscription in Siddham characters, while the B-side contains a third text again in Sanskrit but with Old Javanese characters ..............." (p. 10)

Its four boundaries, etc. 35

9. It is also noticed that some of the inscriptions of medieval Assam are written in three languages, 36 namely, Sanskrit, Assamese and Tai (Ahom). Sanskrit and Assamese portions occur in one side of a plate while the Tai portion is in the opposite side of the same plate. The text given in the Tai language in the Tai script is often introduced with an expression in Sanskrit like the following ones:

asyartho asamaksara (Insc. No. 58) 37
stadarthavijnapakam asamakseramanaprapratho (Insc. No. 147) 37
stadarthakan asamakserameradaprapratho (Insc. No. 158) 37
asamakseram apapraprathasthi (Insc. No. 176) 37
stadarthakan asamakseram apaprapratho (Insc. No. 188a) 37
stadarthakan asamakserare (Insc. No. 187) 37

In these expressions the terms asamakṣara, asamakṣara, asamakṣara and asamakṣara do not mean the Assamese script. They mean the Tai script.

35 The executive parts of the bilingual charters of the Chamba rulers of Kashmir are also written in the local dialect. Vide Indian Epigraphy, p. 57.

36 A parallel to this method of writing in three languages is found in some of the inscriptions of Gujarat also. Records like the Sathod (Baroda District) inscription of 1369 A.D. are trilingual being written in Persian, Gujarati and Sanskrit.

37 These are the numbers according to the list of inscriptions given in the second chapter of the present dissertation. These expressions occur immediately after the text given in the Assamese language.
10. The Ahom kings of Assam originally issued copper plate charters in the Ahom language. But after the acceptance of Hindu religion they adopted Sanskrit and Assamese as their official languages.

11. In the Sanskrit texts of the inscriptions of medieval Assam, sometimes some Assamese words also occur. In certain inscriptions these words are found in their chaste forms, while in certain others in some corrupt form. In the Rock Inscription of the Western Gateway of the Gauhati city there is the Assamese word प्राणि, which stands for Sanskrit प्राणिरा. In the Land Grant Inscription of Rudrasimha there is an Assamese corrupt form बादी which stands for its chaste form बाडी (homestead land). The Assamese words, ब्राह्मोत्तर, धर्मोत्तर and देवोत्तर stand for the Sanskrit forms ब्राह्मोत्तर, धर्मोत्तर and देवोत्तर respectively. In certain

38 D.C. Sircar says that he saw one such record with the Pāṇḍa of the Kamakhya Temple. Vide Indian Epigraphy, p. 60.

39 See the Sanskrit text of the Copper Plate Inscription of Brahmottara land grant in the Barpeta Bausi Pargana, 1717 A.D.

40 See the Sanskrit text of the Copper Plate Inscription of Dharmottara land grant for the Damodariya Mathbasi Sattrai, 1717 A.D.

41 See the Sanskrit text of the Copper Plate Inscription of the Devottara grant towards daily puja at the Umananda Temple, 1746 A.D.
pages Persian words like *darbar* and *nāṅkār* are also found.

**Script of the Assam Inscriptions**:  
In the ancient period Assam had no script of its own and the inscriptions were written mostly in the current scripts of northern India. To form an idea on this ground the scripts of some of the inscriptions of the period are mentioned below:

1. Dubi copper plates of Bhāskaravarman—Eastern variety of the North Indian alphabet prevalent in the 6th and 7th centuries A.D.

2. Nidhanpur copper plates of Bhāskaravarman—Eastern variety of North Indian Brāhmī alphabet current during the 7th century A.D.

3. Hāyunthal copper plates of Harjaravarman—Eastern variety of North Indian script of middle of the 9th century A.D.

4. Tezpur copper plates of Vanamāla—Eastern variety of North Indian script current in those days.

5. The Parbatīyā copper plates of Vanamāla—East Indian variety of the Sidhamātrkā or Kūṭila script of the 9th century A.D., sometimes called Early Nāgarī or Proto-Bengali script.

6. The Uttarbarbil copper plates of Balavarman III—The script is similar to that of the Parbatīyā copper plates of Vanamāla.

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42 See the Sanskrit text of the Rock Inscription of the Southern Vijaya-duvāra of the Barphukan’s Durbār house at Gauhati, 1738 A.D.

43 See the Sanskrit text of the Copper Plate Inscription of Nāṅkār grant in the Chengā village in Kṣetri Pargānā, 1738 A.D.
7. The Nowgong copper plate Grant of Balaverman III—The script is similar to that of the Uttarbarbil CP Grant of the same king.

8. The Bargāon copper plate Grant of Ratnapāla—The script is similar to that of the plates of Balaverman III.

9. The Suvālkuchi copper plate Grant of Ratnapāla—The script is similar to that of the earlier Grant of the king.

10. The Guvākushi copper plate Grant of Indrapāla—The script of the plates maintains uniformity with the script of the plates of Ratnapāla.

11. The Sachtal copper plates of Gopālavarman—The script is North Indian Brāhmī mixed with Devanāgarī and some forms which later found place in the Assamese script.

12. Khaṇāmukh copper plate Grant of Dharmapāla—The script is Nāgari as it was in the eastern part of India in the 12th century A.D.

13. Subhaṇkarapāṭaka copper plate Grant of Dharmapāla—The script is similar to the script of the Khaṇāmukh Grant of the king.

14. Puspabhadra copper plate Grant of Dharmapāla—The script is basically North Indian Brāhmī as was prevalent in those days.

15. Kamauli copper plate Grant of Vaidyadeva—The script is Devanāgarī, as it has been current in the 12th century A.D.
16. Assam plates of Vallabhadeva—The characters of this inscription belong to the eastern variety of the northern alphabet as it was current in the 12th century A.D.

The epigraphs of ancient Assam so far discovered are few in number with wider gap of time from one to another. The Bidhanpur CP Grant of Bhāskaravarman has been inscribed sometime between C 620 and 643 A.D. while the Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjara may decidedly be assigned to 829/830 A.D. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why generally there appears a great change in the formation of the letters from one inscription to another. T.P. Verma rightly says, "When they belong to a period with long gap in between they naturally show considerable changes and advancements in the formation of the letters".44 Further, the script for a particular epigraph depends also upon the choice of the scribe. The case of the Guvākuchi CP Grant of Indrapāla may be cited here as an interesting example. In connection with this Grant M.M. Sharma observes that it must be taken for "granted that there were two different scribes; because the letters of the first plate differ from those of the remaining two plates".45

With the beginning of the medieval period, Assamese script began to be used in the inscriptions. Kānāi Baraśi Bevā Rock Inscription of 1205 A.D. is written in the Assamese script.

44DSAK, p. 33.
45IAA, p. 194.
Of course, some specimens of the Assamese alphabet are found in the earlier Grants also. Mahendra Bora is of the opinion that Puspabhadra Inscription is found to be providing the earliest specimens of the Assamese alphabet in the 12th century A.D. 46 R.R. Sharma suggests that some forms of the Assamese script already found place in the Gaonrai CP Grant of Gopalavarman which is assigned to C. 1080 A.D. 47 While, pointing out these forms he says, "The आ and क are almost similar to the modern Assamese आ and क. As in the Grants of Balavarman III and later kings, there are a few anumānas, which are almost similar to that of the modern Assamese/Bengali script. Here the आ assumes a triangular form very similar to that of the modern Assamese/Bengali आ with the peculiarity that here the inner side of the triangle remains filled up. The ख is also very similar to that of the modern Assamese/Bengali script." 48 P.C. Choudhury does not point out any inscription for showing the specimens of the Assamese script but he conjectures the growth of the pure Assamese script in between 12th and 13th century A.D. 49

Assamese script has three distinguished forms- Gadgāyā, Sāmunia and Keitheli or Lahkari. All these three types are found also in the Sanskrit passages of the inscriptions of the medieval

46 The Evolution of Assamese Script, p. 23.
47 IAA, p. 207.
48 ibid, p. 207.
49 HCPA, 2nd edn., p. 391.
period. The Kaithali or Lahkari type is the most artistic and clearest writing. The Bāmuniya type is characterised by long-tendril like ending strokes. The Gadgāyā alphabet is very much simple and unornamented. The distinction between the Bāmuniya and the Gadgāyā is, however, not so prominent. To quote Maheswar Neog, "But whatever be the small variations in style, the system of writing widely speaking, is the same".

On the Scope for a Literary Study

The inscriptions of Assam themselves form a separate branch of literature. An attempt will be made to show in the succeeding chapters that some of the inscriptions are very fine samples of literary art and are excellent poetic compositions. Some inscriptions which happen to be connected with certain fixed chronological points, add value to the criticism of the language and thought, and are thus of great importance for the ascertainment of the evolution and chronology of literary works of the kāvya variety. The majority of the inscriptions of ancient Assam may in fact be treated as a history in kāvya style.

The language of the inscriptions taken for the present assessment is Sanskrit. The literary standard of these inscriptions varies from one inscription to another. Some of the inscriptions possess high literary values, while some of the inscriptions do not maintain the same standard. Some of these inscriptions do not present

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any scope for literary assessment at all. Some of the inscriptions are long literary compositions having verses with different metres and prose with long compound words. It is further observed that in certain inscriptions the descriptions are dominated by depth of ideas while in certain others the ideas are dominated by the literary excellence of compositions. Sometimes, in certain portions of the literary passages of the inscriptions, the beauty of nature plays the dominating role.

The Identity of the Composers:

With whatever merits they have the Sanskrit inscriptions of Assam should legitimately be recognised as forming an important part of Assam’s contribution to Sanskrit literature. Some of these inscriptions are really very good specimens of kāvyā literature. But it is a great pity that apart from four exceptions there are no references to the poets who deserve the encomium for these literary compositions. The four exceptions are: 1. Sri Balabhadra, who composed the Gachtal CP Grant of Gopālavarmā; 2. Prasthānakalasa, who composed the first fifteen verses of the Khaṇāsukh Grant of Dharmapāla (and for that matter the first fifteen verses of the Subhānkarpāṭaka Grant having an identical text); 3. King

51 cf. abhid dvijah sambhrama ityudarāh paraśaro vanmayaśaradraśva/tadatmajah sribalabhadranāma praśastimatām nṛpatasacakāra//
(V. 32, Gachthal CP Grant of Gopālavarmā)

52 cf. prasthānakalasanāmā kavīna govarmamānavaidyena/racita praśastir amalā rajah śridharmapālasya//
(V. 15 of the two epigraphs concerned)
Dharmapāla, who composed the first eight verses of the Puspabhadra Grant of himself and Aniruddha who composed the remaining portion of the Puspabhadra Grant of Dharmapāla.

But so far as the unknown composers of the inscriptions are concerned, they also seem to be Sanskrit scholars endowed with high literary talent. The composers had an intimate knowledge of the Indian epics, kāvyas, purāṇas and philosophical and mythological conceptions. In the inscriptions of ancient Assam references are frequently made to the Indian epic characters with the same degree of reverence. This leads to the conjecture that the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata were sincerely studied by the composers of these inscriptions. It can hardly be denied that the composers of the inscriptions were very intimately acquainted with the works of Kālidāsa and Bāṇabhaṭṭa. The authors of these inscriptions seem to have had the knowledge of the earlier epigraphs also e.g., Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta.

53 of. pālasyavāmbujaravih kavicoakravāla
/ cūdāmanīḥ kalitasarvakatākalāpah/
śrīdharmapālanrpatir guṇaratnasindhur
etām prasātimakarod avadātakirtih/>
(V. 8, Puspabhadra Grant of Dharmapāla)

54 of. nālamkritānātva-kavitva-sabda-
cittvāditah śrīanirudderanāma/
sadānvavaya-stutipunyalobhat
prasātim enām rocayam caṅkura/>
(V. 22, Puspabhadra Grant of Dharmapāla)

55 To illustrate this point a verse is quoted where king Harjara, the father of king Vanamāla is compared to the revered characters of the Mahābhārata.

of. dharmaprayādau yudhiśṭhira yo bhīmorvarga samapāca jīnavara
eka'pyanekairīta sadguṇauhaṁ nirdeṣekuntitantanayatvametah/
(Parbatiyā Plates, V. 12)
The composers of the epigraphs not only very widely studied the traditional Indian works, but they shaped the very view of life under Indian ideas of ethics and morality. These ideas of teachings generally occurred in the concluding part of these royal charters. These are the appeal and warning for the preservers and violators of the grants. These describe the transitory nature of wealth and worldly existence, the good results for preserving the grants and also the sufferings for violating the same. These are found sometimes in one or more verses, while sometimes, in a prose accompanied by a verse or verses. They are the sayings of the sages or of a particular sage or quotations from one of the religious texts. For illustration, two verses from the Midhanpur Copper Plates of Bhasharavarma are quoted below:

\[
\text{of. \textit{saśṭimvaṃsā sahaśāṁni svarge medati bhūmidāḥ/}}
\]
\[
\text{ākṣeptā cānumāntā ca tāny eva maraka vasaṭ/ (V. 26)}
\]

\[\text{56 In this respect there are plenty of parallels which may be found in the inscriptions of other parts of India. It is added here that Fandrabandh Plates of Pratāpamallāh edited by V.V. Mirashi contains as many as seven such (Vv. 22-26) imprecatory verses. These verses very minutely narrate the merits of honouring the grants as well as the evil effect for dishonouring the same. \textit{Vide Epigraphia Indica, Vol. XXIII, 1935-36.}}\]

\[\text{57 \textit{Vide Indian Epigraphy, p. 141.}}\]
svadattām paraṃ dattāmā yā hareṣa vasundhāram/
sa viṣṭhayam kmaṁbhūtvā pitarbhīḥ saha pacyate//

The giver of land rejoices in heaven for sixty thousand years and he who confiscates or assents (to confiscation) lives in hell for the same period. (V. 26)

One who confiscates the land given by himself or by others, becomes warp of the filth and rots with the manes. (V. 27)

In these prohibitory verses, the following aspects of Indian ethics are observed:

First: These are didactic statements in respect of a spirit of renunciation. They are established on the basis of the teachings of the Upanisads.

58. The texts of the verses are given here in the light of the texts as found in IA. Besides in the Nidhanpur Plates of Bhashkaravarman, this kind of verses are found in the following inscriptions also: Partatiyā Plates of Vanamālavarmadeva (V. 29-30), Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadēva (V. 30) and the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva (V. 28-29).

In this respect, it is necessary to say that in the inscriptions of the medieval period this type of description is rarely found. Accordingly in the Copper Plate Inscription of the Siva temple, Dergaon (1734 A.D.), a hint to the future kings for preserving the Grant is found as follows:

he he kitaśā bhavato bhaviṣyate
vinīya yāca naya-dharma-pādakāḥ/
saṁsthāpitaisāvanideva-vṛttih
pāyā bhavedbhīḥ satataṁ mahatmabhīḥ//

(This verse occurs at the close of the inscription after the text given in Assamese)

59. ma ārdha kasya avid dhanaṁ/ śāvēyaparāśig. I.1.
Secondly: The belief in rebirth which is found in Hindu philosophy is expressed here. It is the Hindu philosophy which holds that the Self (ātma), though immortal in nature undergoes births one after another.

Thirdly: These statements are based on the law of karman. Indian philosophy teaches that one is strictly destined to get the fruits of one’s own action (i.e. karman) in exact proportion and in due time. The result of the meritorious deeds is happiness either in this life or hereafter, and that of the opposite deeds is sorrow.

Fourthly: The word ‘pitṛbhūḥ’ (V. 27) is significantly employed. It means the manes or the deceased (or departed souls). Because of the performance of evil deeds, one is bound to suffer with the deceased, in the life after death. The idea of the deceased suffering a course of misfortune immediately after death in proportion to the magnitude of the evils performed is peculiar to Hindu ethics.

A Note on the Contents of the Inscriptions:

The contents of the longer inscriptions, particularly the land grants of ancient Assam, are more or less of a similar pattern

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60 of. vāśāsī jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni grhātī nara'parāni/
tathā sarīrāni vihāya jīrṇā-
nyanyāni saṁyātī navāni dehi // Gita, II, 22.
and the land grant inscriptions would normally have the following contents according to a set pattern.61

(a) invocation (maṅgalācaraṇa),

(b) evastivācana and the announcement of the place from which the document is issued,

(c) description of the forefathers of the donor king,

(d) a comparatively longer description of the donor king,

(e) description of the donee preceded by a description of the forefathers of the donee,

(f) description of the land to be donated including the measurement of the land and enumeration of its boundaries,

(g) special privileges attached to the donated land,

(h) declaration of the donation of the land along with the specification of the purpose of the donation if any,

(i) imprecatory verses,

The invocations to the deities are invariably in verse. The predecessors of the donor kings are also described in verses. The description of the donor king is usually given in several verses.

61 The pattern of the inscriptions of the medieval period is, however, different. Most of them are land grant inscriptions and the Sanskrit texts are mainly devoted to the descriptions of the donor kings. The executive parts of these inscriptions are written in the Assamese language.
followed by a long prose passage. The place from which a grant is issued is described completely in prose. The brahmin dones, the predecessors of the dones and the wife of the dones are described in verses. The boundary of the land to be donated is described in prose.62

The literary merits and excellences of the epigraphs are generally reflected by the following elements:

1. Description of the King: The poet composers of the inscriptions employ their highest literary elements in the eulogies of the patron kings. The authors describe the distinguishing qualities of the patron kings both in verse and in prose. The poets frequently compare the patron kings to the revered characters of ancient Indian epics. The distinguishing qualities of king Vanamāla, according to the poet, surpass even the qualities of the Indian epic characters.

   cf. satyagāmbhīryatungvetvapratapatyāgavikramaḥ/
   yojayaddharmajābdhyādrībhāṅkarnamarutsutān//
   (Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla, V. 26)

   "He (Vanamāla) with truth, profoundity, height, prowess, sacrifice and valour, surpassed the son of Dharma (i.e., Yudhiṣṭhira), the ocean, the mountain, the sun, Karna and the son of the wind (i.e., Hanumāna or Śiṣa) respectively.63

   62There are plenty of examples of the inscriptions of other parts of India which have also followed the same pattern of composition.

   63As translated in IAA.
In the Nidhanpur Copper Plates, the birth of king Bhāskaravarman is compared to the rising sun:

\[ \text{cf. saiva syāmādevī tasyānujamakalitodayamasūta/} \\
\text{sribhāskaravarmānam bhāskaramiva tejasāṁ nilayam/ (V. 22)} \]

"The same Syāmādevī also brought forth his younger brother Sri Bhāskaravarman, who like the sun was of incalculable rise and the abode of all splendour." 64

The composers of the epigraphs of ancient Assam, sometimes, describe the qualities of the donor kings in long prose passages 65 in addition to the verses. It is noticed that the authors of the epigraphs have consistently employed the best of their literary talents for the descriptions of the patron kings. It is due to this reason that greater numbers of literary elements are found in the descriptions of the donor kings.

Sanskrit portions of the inscriptions of the medieval period (Ahom period) which are mostly written in prose are devoted mainly to the descriptions of the donor kings. The authors of the epigraphs of this period abundantly use Alamkāras (both Sabdālamkāras and Arthālamkāras). Because of vigorous use of Alamkāras, the historical perspectives of these epigraphs are sometimes overshadowed.

2. Description of the Queen: The poets of the inscriptions show their literary proficiency in the description of the queens.

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64 As translated in IAA.

65 In the Tezpur Copper Plates twenty lines are devoted to the description of king Vanamāla.
as well. In several epigraphs, the queens are compared to the
noble characters of the epics and the classical kāvyas with
the same degree of reverence.

In the Midhanpur Copper Plates, the queens of the predecessors
of king Bhaskararvarman are described in several verses uniformly
in the Āryā metre. The queen of king Candramukhavarman is described
as follows:

bhogavatībhogavatībhutē śhītavarmmaṇah tate hetuh/
āśīdbhogipateriva bhūmitbhōtonantanaṃgasya// (V. 16)

"Thereafter (queen) Bhogavati of (good) enjoyment became the
cause (of birth) of Śhītavarman, the supporter of the world, who
had innumerable (source of) enjoyment like Bhogavati (the city of
the snakes of the nether regions), the source of prosperity of the
chief of snakes, the supporter of the earth, who has a myriad of
hoods".66 The word ‘bhogavati’ has pun. It means the lady who enjoys
and also the city of the snakes of the nether regions.

In the Parbatiyā Copper Plates of Vanamaḷavarmanadeva, the chief
queen of king ṇarjara (father of Vanamaḷavarmanadeva) is described as
follows:

gopijanaraṇjitamānasaṇya
seśyeva vakṣah parihrtya vianoh/
niḥsaṣaṃaṇmājanadehasamathām
ādāya saundaryamaṇiḥjagāmaa// (V. 13)

66 As translated in IAA.
Lakṣmi (the goddess of fortune), having left, like a jealous woman, the breast of Viṣṇu, whose mind is enamoured with the milk-maids (gopījana), (and) having assumed the beauty of one and all the women, has come here to become the heart-gratifying chief queen of that king (i.e., Marjara), with the name Śrīmāṅgalā, the best of best among the women, thinking thus: This person (i.e., Marjara) bears all the qualities, beginning with the complexion, of my husband Rathāṅgapaṇi (i.e., Viṣṇu), who is matchless in valour. Hence by being the chief queen of this ruler of the world I do not become the object of disrespect in the world. 67 (Vv. 13-15).

3. Description of the Predecessors of the King : The posts of the inscriptions of ancient Assam employ the literary elements in the descriptions of the predecessors of the donor kings. In almost all the inscriptions of the period (especially the copper plate inscriptions) the predecessors of the reigning kings are depicted in a standard kāvya form. In the Uttarbarbil Copper Plates

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67 Translation is as given in IAA.
as well as in the Newgong CP Grant of Balavarman III, for instance, Jayamala, the father of the donor king, is described as follows:

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tasyatmajah srijayamaladeva
ksiramburasriva sitaraami
bahuva yaayaskhalitam bhramanti
yasamai kundendusamarabhani
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(Verse 15 of the concerned inscriptions)

"Like the moon arising from the ocean of milk, from him was born his son Sri Jayamaladeva, whose fame, as radiant as the jasmine and the moon, travelled along (i.e., spread) without any stumbling". 68

4. Description of the High Officials: The Ahom kings, sometimes, instructed their high officials to issue the royal charters. These deputies of the kings are referred to as ‘vrhatphukkana’ in the epigraphs. The composers, in addition to the descriptions of the kings, describe these officials in a standard literary prose. The literary portion related to the description of a high official of the Ahom king Sivasimha is quoted below:

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erisrimatsvaragdeva-sivasimha-mahimahendranam nidesatah
tacoaraa-chatra-chayanusarana-mantrivara-pavitra-guna-gana-garima-
gambhirasaumudra-eriyuta-pani-dihingiyas-vrhatphukkanaa sabresalopante
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68 As translated in IAA.
pāṇḍavaṃśatyaśadha-sata-traya-dhanu (mita-) parikha-sahita-vijayākhyadvaram niramayi śīlaśṭhakadibhiḥ harāsya-baṅgartu-sasāṅka-sakaḥ/

(Rock Inscription of the Southern Vijaya Gateway of the Gauhati City, 1733 A.D.)

5. Description of the Capital City: The composers of the inscriptions of ancient Assam applied their literary talents also for the descriptions of the capital cities. These cities are described in a prose form. The descriptions are given in long sentences having long compounds. It is noticed that the composer of the Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla describes the capital city of Durjāyā in the style of the description of the city of Ujjayini by Bāna. Here in this description the first sentence covers lines 29 to 40. Lines 28-30, describe the meteorology of the city. The heat of the city of Durjāyā was allayed by the shower of the drops of dhore flowing from the temples of the rowe, of the spirited elephants. Lines 30-31 say that the city was fit for the residence of great men, though it was full of forests of the trees in the form of the arms of the strong warriors, 'subhāṭavāhuṣṭapāṭaviṣaṅkaṭamapi mahājanalivāsayogam'. In lines 31-32, the white washed mansions are compared to the smiles

69 The descriptions of the capital cities having literary values are found in the three inscriptions of ancient Assam, namely (1) Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamala, (2) The Parbatiya Copper Plates of Vanamalavarmadeva and (3) The Bargāon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla. The first covers lines 1 to 18, the second covers lines 33 to 46 and the third covers lines 29 to 40.
of the intoxicated beautiful dames (of. 'samadasundarismita-
sudhādhavalitasaudha'). In lines 30-34, the poet informs that
the city was the residence of hundreds of people devoted to
enjoyment (bhogin) like the forest of sandal trees growing on
the soil of the mount Malayā, which are infested by hundreds
of snakes (bhogina), of. 'malayaçalasthaliruhakanamivānskabho-
gisatasevitam'. This city is described as the place of poetical
figures (kavyālakāra) created (or discussed) by the learned
men and the preceptors. Lines 34-36, are devoted to the
description of the outskirts of the city with suitable compari-
sons. Lines 36-39, give a very beautiful description of the
river Brahmaputra by the side of which the city was situated.
Line 39 says that the city was the object of adoration for
innumerable hosts of kings. In lines 40-43, the poet employs
the Parisaśkhyā Alamkāra for describing the city with a high
degree of dexterity as is usually noticed in a poet like
Bānabhatta.

of. "tatra ca jadatā hārayastisu nendriyesu pāñcalatā
harisu na mānasassu bhanguratā bhrūvibhāmesu na pratipannesu
sopasarggata dhātusu na prajāsu vāmatā kāminisu skhalitam
madhumadumuditakaminigatisu niḥprahata desakārisu niratayamadhu-
pāñasaktirmadhukara kulesu atyantam priyāնuwarttanam rathānga-
nāmasu piśitasita svāpadesu"... (Lines 40-43)

"In that city of Durjjayā, there used to be jadatā (i.e.,
liquidness) only in the (pearl-) necklaces but never any jadatā
(i.e., dullness) in the sense organs; there used to be 
cāṅgacalata (i.e., fickleness) only amongst the monkeys but 
never any caṅgacalata (i.e., fickleness) in the minds (of people); 
there used to be bhaṅgurata (i.e., fickleness) only in the 
play of brows but never any bhaṅgurata (i.e., undoing or breach 
of trust) in respect of deeds undertaken; there used to be 
sopasargata (i.e., prefixing of upasargas) only in respect of 
the roots (i.e., dhātus) but never any sopasargata (i.e., illness) 
in respect of the subjects; there used to be vāmata (i.e., beauty) 
only in the damsels (and never any vāmata or crookedness in respect 
of others); there used to be skhalitam (i.e., faltering of steps) 
only in case of the beautiful women elated through the intoxication 
caused by wine (and never any skhalita or breach of conduct of the 
people in general); there used to be a sense of apathy (nihaprhata) 
only towards the wrong-doers (and never towards ordinary fellow 
beings); there used to be desire for incessant madhupāna (i.e., 
sucking of honey) only in case of the swarms of bees (and 
niratayamadhupānāsakti or interest in incessant drinking of wine 
was never to be seen in case of the ordinary citizens); there 
used to be excessive allegiance to the beloved only in case of the 
cakravāka birds (and never in case of the citizens) and there 
used to be taking of meat (piśīṭāśītā) only in case of the animals 
(and never in case of the citizens). 70(Lines 40-43)

70 As translated in IAA.
6. Description of the Donor: The poets of the epigraphs
describe the donor in a kāvyā form and thus create the scope
for employing literary elements. These particular portions
of the literary passages are important for the fine use of the
Sabdālāmākāras as well as Arthālāmākāras involving beautiful
imagery. To illustrate the point, a verse is quoted below:

kāṃvah kṛti kāpilagotradīpe
mālādhāro nāma babhūva bhaṭṭah/
vidyātapaśampadupattasamyag
vivekavidhvastassamastadōṣah//

(The Newgong Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III, V. 26)

"There was a successful (brahmāna) named Mālādhāra Bhaṭṭa,
a follower of the Kāṃva āśkha (of Vedas), who was a lamp of the
Kāpila gotra as it were; he could overcome all faults with a
perfect power of discrimination derived through learning and the
wealth of penance."

This verse is pretty rich in Anuprāses. There is a fine
Rūpaka in comparing the brahmāna with a lamp and an Atisāyokti
in asserting that all the faults are overcome. The ideas of a
lamp, the power of discrimination, learning and removal of faults,
put side by side constitute a very rich imagery.

7. Description of the Locality of the Donor: The poets of
the inscriptions of ancient Assam while describing the localities

71 As translated in IAA.
of the donees employ their poetical talents. For example, in
the Quvākuohi Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla, a particular
locality called Vaināmā, the dwelling place of the brāhmaṇa
donee of the Grant is described as follows.

śāvathyāmasti vaināmā grāmo dhāma dvijanmanam/
dharmasyādharmanabhītasya durggalaṃbhanibhaḥ kalau// (V. 20)

"In Śāvathi, there is a village named Vaināmā, a dwelling
place of the brāhmaṇas, which has been like a fort resorted to
by virtue out of fear for sin, in the age of kali". 72

In this verse there is a (Vāsyā) Upama Alamkāra as warranted
by the term nibha. But this Upama is based on a Sāmaṅkāti, which
emerges out on account of the personification of dharma and
adharma.

8. Description of the Wife of the Donee: The composers of
the inscriptions of ancient Assam describe the wives of the donees
in a standard kāvyā style. The wives of the donees are frequently
compared with the revered female characters of Sanskrit kāvyas
and purāṇas. It is noticed that in describing the wives of the
donees also the composers exhibit a lot of their poetical craft-
manship. In the Uttarbarbil Copper Plates of Balavarmān III, the
wife of a brāhmaṇa donee is described as follows:

kulodbhava somalateva pāvani
vasīṭhabhāryeva pativrata hi yā/

72 As translated in IAA.
"He had a wife, belonging to a good family, who was pure like the Soma-creeper, devoted to the husband like the wife of Vasistha, mother of a great progeny like Saci, the beloved of Indra and was like the earth in respect of patience." 73

Obviously this verse is very rich with a series of Upamas endowed with allusions to the puranic lore.

9. Description of the Forefathers of the Donee: The poets of the epigraphs of ancient Assam used their literary merits in the descriptions of the forefathers of the donees. Like other characters of the inscriptions, the forefathers of the donee are also compared to the revered characters of Indian epics and purāṇas. In the Guvākushī Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla, the father of the brāhmaṇa donee is described as follows:

"He had an illustrious son, named Vasudeva; like Vasudeva who was 'a friend of Nanda' and a 'source of delight to Puruṣottama' (i.e., Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa); he also 'caused delight to his friends' and was a 'pet of Puruṣottama' (i.e., Lord Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa)." 73

This verse contains an Upama enlivened by two Slesas due to the use of puns as evidenced by the translation given above.

73As translated in IAA.
Kavisamayes in the Inscriptions:

The term kavisamaya means poetical conventions. These represent certain fanciful ideas of the classical poets who used to uniformly incorporate these ideas into their compositions. So far as the practical world is concerned, these ideas appear to be absurd or fictitious or only partially true. But for the poets these ideas involve not even an iota of unreality. Rhetoricians dealing with the poetical blemishes (i.e., Doṣas) recognize a blemish called Khyātiviruddhata. But, even a case of Khyātiviruddhata would present itself as a Guṇa or positive quality if it is endorsed by the poetical conventions. Cf. "kavīnām samaya khyāte guṇeḥ khyātaviruddhataḥ" (S.D., VII, 22). Visvanātha Kavirāja in the context of discussing this merit of the poetical conventions innumerate a number of typical kavisamayes as follows:

mālīnyaṁ vyomini pāpe, yasāśi dhavalatā varnyate hāsakīrttyoḥ
raktau ca krodharāgau saridudhigataṁ paṅkajendīvarādi/
toyādhāre'khile'pi prasaratī sa marālādākāḥ pakeisanghe
jyotsnā peyā oacakorairjaladharasamaye mānasāṁ yānti hāmsaḥ/
padāgathadasākam vikasati bakulaṁ yosītāsya yamadyair
yunāmāṅgese hāraḥ sphuta ca hṛdayam viprayogasya tāpaiḥ/
maurvi rolambamalā dhanurathā visīkhaṁ kauṣumāṁ puṣpapakturn-
ghīnum syādasya bānairuyvajahanārdayam strikātākṣaṇa tadvat/
ahnayambhojan, nisayam vikasati kumudam, oandrīka suklapakse
meghadhvāṇeṣu nṛtyam bhavati ca sikhināṁ nāpyasoke phalam syāt/
na syākṣatī vasante; na ca kusumaphale gandhasaradrūmānāṁ
ityādyumnayamanyatkaśyamayagataṁ satkavīnāṁ prabandhe/

(S.D., VII, 23-28)
The sky and sin are described as black; fame, laughter and renown as white; anger and love as red. Red and blue lotuses are spoken of as growing even in rivers and seas, and birds such as the duck and others invariably haunt all receptacles of water. The chakwā drink the moonlight; and in the rainy season the ducks emigrate to the Mānasa lake (Mānassarovara). The Asoka flowers from the stroke of fair women’s feet and so thus the Vakula from the wine of their mouths. The necklaces on the breast of youthful lovers along with their hearts burst from the flames of separation. The God of Love bears a flowery bow furnished with flowery shafts and strung with a string of bees. His arrows pierce the heart of the young and so does the glance of a woman. The lotus blooms in the day and the lily during the night; there is always the moonlight in the white fortnight. The peacocks dance at the grumbling of clouds and the Asoka does not bear fruit. The Jāti blooms not in the spring and fragrant trees neither flower nor fructify, and so forth. Other poetical conventions are to be found out in the compositions of good poets.74

Most of the works concerned with Kavisīkṣas present a list of similar Kavīsāmyas. The composers of the inscriptions of Assam were also no exceptions in respect of employing Kavīsāmyas in their compositions. It should be evidently clear from the following few assorted examples:

74As translated by Pramadā-Dāsa Mitra in The Mirror of Composition.
(i) 'yaśya yaśaḥ saśśinedam bhuvanaṁ dhaśaṁ kṛtam viloṣya dṛṣṭa/
savṛtī ivodati pralayaṁ ruci radyāpi//'

(Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla, V. 27)

"Seeing with own eyes that this whole world is whitened by
the 'moon of his fame', the moon even today seems to rise in the
sky, as it were with shame". 76

In the verse, fame is taken to be white. The white fame of
king Vanamāla surpasses even the whiteness of the moon.

(ii) On the strength of the poetical convention which recognises
fame as white, the fame of king Śivasimha is said to be as white
(pāṇḍura) as moon-rays (hīmakara), snake Vasuki which is put on
by Śiva as a neck-lace (hara-hāra), diamond (hīra) and foam
(hindira), of. "hīmakara-haraḥ āra-hīra-hindira-pāṇḍura-yaśomandala-
mandita ..." (Inscription of the Rangmahal Moat, 1654 Saka). 76

(iii) Besides the prescribed Kāvīsāmāyās, the composers of the
inscriptions of Assam, employ certain other Kāvīsāmāyās in imitation
of the good poets. For example, the poets of the inscriptions
compare gravity with the depth of the sea, 'sāgara-gambhīra' (Land
Grant Inscription of Rudrasimha, 1701 A.D.), valour with that of
the sun, 'pratāpa-tapanā' (Rock Inscription of the Rāndakatā Rampart,
1723 A.D.) and of fire 'pratāpanāla' (Inscription of Kamalesvara
Temple, Mīlahala, 1728 A.D.)

76 As translated in IAA.

76 This type of description is very frequently met in the
Sanskrit passages of the epigraphs of medieval Assam.
After giving a general note on the literary values of the inscriptions of Assam, it is now proposed to evaluate their literary merits and demerits in detail. For this purpose the inscriptions of ancient Assam are taken up first in the chapter that follows.