CHAPTER - 1

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1.1 Prologue

Kamrup is the ancient name of Assam which is referred to the Epics and the Puranas and other early literature. The name Kāmarūpa, however, find mention for the first time in the *Allahabad Pillar Praśasti* of Samudragupta. (Choudhury, 1987: 39). Sircar opined that the kingdom of Kāmarūpa was a bordering country of Gupta empire during Samudra Gupta's period. He also mentioned that the king of Kāmarūpa was mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar inscription as a *pratyanta-nripati* (ruler of a state bordering on the Gupta empire) (Sircar, 1990: 97). Hiuen-Tsang, a renowned Chinese pilgrim also used the name Kāmarūpa in the second quarter of the seventh century A.D.

The former name of Kāmarūpa was Prāgjyotisha. Sircar viewed that the word Kāmarūpa was used later as the name of the country and as a synonym of Prāgjyotisha. (Sircar, 1990:59). He further mentioned that the Prāgjyotisha was referred to both the epics - the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*, but the name is rarely mentioned in *Rāmāyana*, whereas *Mahābhārata* speaks often of Naraka, his son Bhagadatta and the later’s son Vajradatta as a ruler of the country (Sircar: 1990-60).

However, Bhattacharyya said that Prāgjyotisha was the name of a city which was ruled by Naraka and his successors. This he claimed to be found in a medieval inscription, the name of which was not referred. (Bhattacharyya, 1931: 73).
The name Prāgjyotisha has been explained variously by different scholars. Williams, quoted by Sircar, explained Prāgjyotisha as 'lighted from the east'. *The Kālika-Purāna* says that the name of Naraka's city became Prāgjyotishapura because the god Brahman created the eastern stars (i.e. Venus or morning star) at the place (Sircar, 1990:60).

Nath stood with another explanation. He suggested that the people called 'Chao-Theius' came to India from China and became known as Zuthis. A branch of the tribe settled in Assam, came to be known as Prag Zuthis which had been modified later to Prāgjyotisha. (Nath, 1948:4-5). Kakati came with another explanation which is accepted to be convincing by some authors. He said the name Prāgjyotisha came from the Austric phrase Pagar-juh-tic or Pagar-jo-tich which means a region of extensive hills. (Kakati, 1948:6). However, Gait had given another interpretation of the term Prāgjyotishpur. He explained Prag means former or eastern, and Jyotisha, - a star, astrology, shining. Prāgjyotishpur may, therefore, be taken to mean the 'City of Eastern Astrology'. (Gait, 1984:15). Besides, Sircar again explained that the meaning of Prāgjyotish is the 'eastern light' which appeared to mean a city or land of the eastern light. (Sircar, 1990:60).

Although each of the above transcriptions are meaningful one, but it is difficult to accept either one of the above derivation. Notwithstanding, the name Prāgjyotisha-Kāmarūpa is an old name of Assam and used either singly and combinely, from long perhaps from time immemorial.

The geographical location of Kāmarūpa was found in both the works of *Kālika Purāna* and *Yoginī Tantra*. The *Kālika Purāna* refers that Kāmarūpa is on the east of Karatoypī river. It was triangular in shape and a hundred yojanas in length and thirty yojanas in breath extending from the Karatoypī to the...
Dikkaravāsini in the east. On the other hand, in the Yoginī Tantra, boundary of Kāmarūpa was said to extend from the Karatoyā river on the west to the holy river Dikshu on the east and from the Mount- Kanja on the north to the confluence of the Brahmaputra and Lākshā river on the south.

The Visnu Purāna also described that Kāmarūpa was extended around the Kāmākhya temple in all directions for four hundred and fifty miles. (725 Km approx.). In this regard, Gait had given another explanation. He explained that the boundary included the Brahmaputra Valley, Bhutan, Rangpur, Koch Bihar, the north-east of Mymensingh and possibly, the Garo Hills. (Gait, 1984:11). All these justified that Kāmarūpa was larger than most of the other contemporary kingdoms. This was also supported by Barua (1966:10).

Gait further stated that the country was divided into four Pithas or sectors viz. Kampith - from Karatoyā to Sankoch; Ratna pith - from Sonkoch to Rupahi; Suvarna pith - from Rupahi to Bharali; and Saumar pith - from Bharali to Dikrang. (Gait, 1984:11). The above referred river boundaries substantiated that the Kāmarūpa was a vast country covering major part of eastern India. However, the boundaries of Kāmarūpa did not remain throughout but underwent changes in different periods for political or other reasons. During the Tai-Ahom regime the western boundary of Kāmarūpa had receded from the river Karatoyā to the river Manas.

However, this country was known as Kāmarūpa-Prājyotisha till the arrival of Ahoms. But when and how the name Kāmarūpa-Prājyotisha become Asam or Assam was not clearly known. Gait, however, opined that "The tradition of the Ahoms themselves is that the present name is derived from Asama, in the sense of "unequalled" or "peerless". They say that this was the term applied to them, at the time of Sukapha's invasion of Assam by the local tribvs, in token of
their admiration of the way in which the Ahom King first conquered and then conciliated them". (Gait, 1984:246). Acharyya also states that the name Assam is of recent origin and it came into use after the conquest of Assam by the Ahoms, a shan tribe from Northern Burma in the thirteenth century. (Acharyya, 1987:1).

Further, the word Assam was spelled divergently by scholars. In the Ain-i-Akbari it was spelled as Asham. Hamilton (1807-1814) used the term Asam in his book An Account of Asam. However, Barpujari said, "Assam is apparently the English form of Asam". (Barpujari, 1990:1).

It is noteworthy that though British rule in India was introduced in the last part of the 18th century but Assam, as such, was annexed under British dominion very late. In fact, they were able to annex Assam after the treaty of Yandabo in 1826. Thereafter, for the sake of administration, the British portion of the valley was divided into four districts, viz — Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang including Bishnath and Nowgong in 1834. (Gait, 1984:298). The British imperialist power gradually was able to capture the entire Assam (undivided). In order to govern Assam, several British officers were appointed in different parts of Assam. Besides, British made Gauhati, their headquarters and certainly the entire Kamrup was incorporated into their administration. The area of the Kamrup district was covered both the banks of the river Brahmaputra and part of Barak valley at that time.

The Assam as an easternmost state of Indian sub-continent covering both hills and plains. The north, east and south are enclosed by the continuous ranges of hills. The plains exist in between the hills and also on the western boundary. It is being rightly called the eastern gateway of India. Because through this any kind of migration, cultural innovation and diffusion can penetrate into the other parts of India.
However, Assam's geography underwent changes in different periods due to secessionist plea of the hill-tribes of Assam. In fact, the hill tribes who had accepted the six schedule of the Indian constitution started agitation for separation from Assam at the middle of the 20th century. Consequently, the state Nagaland was formed in December, 1963 and given a full fledged statehood as 16th state of India. Subsequently, other three states, viz — Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura were declared as separate states. Finally, the state Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh was formed in 1972. Therefore, the old state of Assam was divided into seven states and at present these seven states are known as North Eastern States of India. After that, the state of Assam remain only with the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys.

Subsequent to the above division and reorganization of the states, the state of Assam remains only with ten districts which continued till 1983. In 1983, the state of Assam was reorganized into sixteen districts. These districts are Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Kamrup, Darrang, Mangaldoi, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Nagaon, Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hills, Cachar and Karimganj. (D.A* July 1, 1983). In the same reorganization the district of Kamrup was also reorganized. The sub-division of Barpeta with a little addition to its area and boundary, was carved out from Kamrup district and declared as a separate district. At the same time, Nalbari was declared as a sub-division and the district Kamrup contains two subdivisions, viz.— Guwahati and Nalbari. Subsequently, all the districts of Assam were again reorganized in which almost all the earlier sub-divisions become district. Again in 1985, Nalbari — a sub-division of Kamrup district was declared as separate district. Therefore, the original Kamrup district was divided into three districts viz — Barpeta,

* Dainik Asom, Tribune Press, Guwahati (July, 1, 1983)
Nalbari and Kamrup. It is significant to note that the most powerful ancient state of Kāmarūpa of eastern India was converted into a small district during the regime of the contemporary politicians of Assam.

The present district of Kamrup contains three sub-divisions viz— the Rangia, Guwahati and Pragjyotishpur. Pragjyotishpur though once declared as district but later the authority modify their decision and declare pragjyotishpur as a sub-division. This was the situation when field study was conducted for this research. Subsequently, however, this again modified and the subdivision was merged with Guwahati sub-division. Therefore, at present the total number of districts of Assam is twenty three.

The district of Kamrup now after more than a couple of reorganizations becomes a triangular landmass. But still, it extends on both the banks of the river Brahmaputra. The area stands on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra is known as North Kamrup and South Kamrup, contains the areas of the south bank of the river Brahmaputra.

In this present research the Hira potters of the South Kamrup has been preferred. This community along with their ceramic products has been comprehensively studied. The study covers all the aspects of pottery production, a brief history of the community, socio-cultural impact, the occupational mobility, demand and marketing.

1.2 Genesis and development of pottery:

Pottery is one of the ancient craft of man. It is an integral and inseparable component of man's culture. It is also considered as the alphabet of archaeology. (Deo & Ansari, 1977:123). In fact, when no other datable evidences like coins etc. are found, archaeologists have to depend on pottery for chronological
analysis. In this, although chronologies are counted as temporal sequence of types but they reflect the culture historical relationships through time. These are based on the similarities and differences between types, styles or attributes which are relatively contiguous in time and space. (Arnold, 1989:1).

Further, Arnold viewed that "First and foremost, archaeologists believe that ceramics can reflect the culture of a people such that the main forces of cultural change that affect a society are reflected in their ceramics. Secondly, typological or attribute similarities are believed to be the result of cultural contact or diffusion; people in one area acquire pots or the ideas of how to make and decorate them by trade, exchange, migration or conquest. Conversely, differences in types, attributes or style indicate the lack of such cultural contact and diffusion. Thirdly, except for differences in available resources, the environment is a neutral variable not appreciably affecting the similarities and differences in ceramics. At best, archaeologists recognize the occurrence of clay deposits as an environmental requisite affecting the presence of pottery making communities, but beyond this factor, there are few statements which shed light on the relationship of ceramics to the environment". (Arnold, 1989:1).

However, when and how people started making clay vessels is clearly not known. Scholars expressed divergent views in regards to the history of genesis of pottery. Cox opines that before man learned to chip stone (the Palaeolithic periods) he had learned to make clay cups. Further, he stated that young children intensively love to make mud pies and from the mud pie to the mud cup is a short step. (Cox, 1970:1). In fact, clay is plentifully and easily available raw material and so people used clay as best media for their intrinsic expressions. In this context, the opinion/views of Deetz - an archaeologist of repute, may be worth referring. He stated, 'in the mind of every artisan there
exists an idea of the proper form that his handiwork should take, these psychological constructs being called mental templates.' (Deetz, 1967: 45). Further, in the context of mental template Thomas remarks, "The process of artifact manufacture translates this idea from the head of the maker to the raw substance of artifacts, whether it is volcanic glass, basketry material, or potter's clay. In a plastic medium such as pottery, finished artifacts are usually accurate reflections of the mental template, since errors can be readily corrected. But with more intractable materials such as stone and bone, the mistakes cannot be so easily corrected. If one accidently removes the wrong flake in manufacturing an arrowhead, he must either work around this mistake or discard the artifact to start anew. Some kinds of artifacts will hence reflect the mental templates better than others." (Thomas, 1974:12).

Singh, however, very aptly pointed out that pottery was undoubtedly invented and developed independently, perhaps several thousand years ago in each part of the world. He further stated that all people of the world moulded pots of soft clay by hand until the Egyptian invented the potter's wheel about 3000 B.C. (Singh, 1979:14).

It is believed that sedentariness has traditionally been associated with pottery making. Morgan used the presence of pottery making, as a criteria for Lower Barbarism - one of his stages of cultural evolution. He also claimed that the pottery making presupposes village life. (Morgan, 1963:13). Further, Mason opined "... as soon as people had fire, became sedentary, ate farinaceous food, the pot came to be born." (Mason, 1966:154). Besides, it is believed that after the use of fire men apparently learned that heat would fix the shape of the earthen materials and would tend to make them stable in water. However, Singh revealed that it was accidental fire which produced the knowledge that clay hardened on firing and their shape retains for all times. (Singh, 1979:13).
Several scholars suggested that the idea of pottery making is originated from the imitation of baskets, gourds and other natural objects. In support of the above it is worth quoting Herskovits. He opined that before baskets and pots were devised, man had to recourse to natural objects, such as skins, gourds and shells for his belonging. (Herskovits, 1974:137). However, Scott revealed that basketry might have preceded pottery as there exists some closeness between the methods of manufacture of pottery by coilbuilding and basketry. (Scott: 1954). Herskovits also alluded that "Molded pottery, the least frequently encountered, is made by spreading the clay over a basket or an old pot in order to give it the desired shape. Potsherds showing the indentations of basketry molds, recovered in pueblos of pre-spanish occupancy, demonstrate that this was long practiced in the New World." (Herskovits, 1974:139-40). Perhaps, a basket with clay was manufactured in order to prevent the drop off seed or water. Basket impressed pottery also reported from the pre-historic context of China. (Wu, 1938). Moreover, Matson calls the pottery a child of basketry. (Matson, 1965:202-17) Therefore, it may be justified to surmise that the earliest pots were shaped in the imitation of baskets. This may be more clear if we discuss the pottery making procedures of the people of North-east India.

The indigenous potters of Assam and the tribal potters of North-east India, still made basket impressed pottery. Moreover, almost in all archaeological sites basket impressed pottery is profusely found. Over and above, basketry is a very common and popular technological device for the indigenous people of Assam and North-east India. Therefore, both basketry and pottery manufacturing in this part of India, are closely inter connected. It is plausible that at the beginning pots might be manufactured by taking baskets as mould. It is also seen that there are some wooden/bamboo beaters with basket impressed design. These beaters are available among the potters of North-east India.
Therefore, those basket impression might have been achieved by using those beaters.

The morphology is basically variable cultural component in terms of material cultural products, and it varies from place to place and country to country. Hence, it is difficult to draw a general conception about this. Besides, it is a highly dependable criterion. However, still it is not clear when and how the concept of shape and size of the pottery has came into being. In this regard Childe belief that the idea of shape and size of the pottery comes after the fruits. He opined that imitating shape and size of fruits might have been recurrent practice of pottery manufacturing areas. (Childe, 1956:13).

At the beginning pottery was made with the hand. Later on, the potter’s wheel was developed. The use of first wheel for shaping pottery was known in Mesopotamia. (Singh, 1979:14, Ghose, 1981:17). Regarding the introduction of potter’s wheel Herskovits opined that, "the potter's wheel, however, is not found outside the literate cultures of Europe and Asia. Almost everywhere that pottery is produced with the aid of a potter's wheel, man makes it . He further stated "The wheel was discovered during the neolithic age, probably in connection with transport." (Herskovits, 1974:140-41).

It has already mentioned that the art of pottery making was first developed in the sedentary society of the world. In India, pottery became an important factor when people resort to sedentary way of life. It is, in this context Sankalia states that most Indian sites (prehistoric) beginning with a certain phase of microlithic culture are associated with pottery. Whatever be its origin one cannot deny the fact that in India pottery could not become an important factor of human culture until Neolithic man had adopted it along with their sedentary way of living as well as subsistence pattern. (Sankalia, 1962:65). It seems that the potter’s craft
have developed during the Neolithic period. In that stage pottery might have been produced by hand. So, these potteries were obviously coarse. Potteries were painted with varied colours like pale grey, red, orange or pale red, brown and black.

The next important phase of development of pottery was the Harappan period. In this both handmade and wheelmade potteries were found. The most important potteries of the post Harappan period were painted black and red, malwa and jorwe wares. (Ghose, 1960:117-132). A special type of pottery with a variation of colours from coal black, steel blue and black was found in second half of 1st millennium B.C. The scholars termed this type of pottery as Northern Black Polished pottery (N.B.P.). Another typical type of pottery, black and red wares, of 2nd and 3rd millennium was associated with the Megalithic cultures.

Moreover, some special varieties of pottery have been encountered in Indian archaeological sites. Notable among them were Rouletted and Arrentine wares. These belong to 1st century A.D. These wares were carried by the Romans. Interestingly, in certain states in India these potteries were imitated and some excellent types of potteries were produced by the Indian artisans by emulating the designs and decoration of the above wares.

The art of pottery industry was developed with new design and decorations during the Sunga, Kushana and Gupta periods. At that time, pottery were decorated with paintings stamp, incisions and applique designs.

Another important phase of development of pottery industry was found in the late medieval period. During that period, glazed and painted potteries were found.
Analysis, evaluation and reassessment of the ceramic products of different periods substantiated that the ceramic was a developing craft with exquisite designs and decorations up to late medieval period. Thereafter, it was deteriorating tremendously. In fact, the cheap substitute products aggravated its degeneration and restricted the art to certain areas only. By now, in most part of the country its utility confined to the religious sections and to certain specific domestic affairs.

1.3 Genesis and development of pottery in Assam:

Pottery was an important craft of Assam and North East India as well, since ancient times. The earliest record of pottery was found at Daojali Hading, a stone age site of Neolithic period in the N.C. Hills district, Assam. (Sharma, 1966:69, Sankalia, 1974:283). This in fact, substantiated that pottery craft practised in Assam from prehistoric periods. But it is difficult to give a chronological account of growth and development of pottery in Assam as no systematic study of pottery of the ancient period was undertaken in the state. However, finding of potsherds and potteries in various archaeological ruins, relics, and old temples of Assam, though validate its continuity, but does not give an explicit and well defined chrono-cultural history of the craft.

In the historical period some records of presence of the craft had been encountered. In the Nidhanpur Grant, mention had been made about the Kumbhakaragarta (Potter's Pit), and the Kamauli Grant refers to the Kumbhakars, who were professional pottery makers. (Shakespear, 1974:83). Moreover, Dhavalikar mentioned about the discovery of a Cornucopia. He referred that, "The numismatic evidence shows that this particular vessel reached Assam in the 4th century along with Samudra Gupta who invaded Assam." (Dhavalikar, 1973 :142).
Choudhury, however, reported that, "The art of making pottery was known from very early times....... Some of the best specimens of pottery, with artistic and decorative designs belonging to the 5th-6th century A.D., have been discovered from Dah Parbatia, some specimens have also been found in Tezpur and near Sadiya. The clay seals of Bhaskara Varman also point to the fact that the art of clay modelling was developed. Moreover, Bana [Harsa carita] mentions among the presents of Bhaskara 'drinking vessels, embossed by skillful artists, molasses in earthen pots and 'Cups of Ullaka diffusing a fragrance of sweet wine." (Choudhury, 1987:352). This, in fact, proved the well developed pottery industry of Assam at that period. But, it was difficult to ascertain whether it was manufactured by the indigenous potters or imported to Assam.

Further, the excavations at Ambari, Guwahati presents a panorama of ceramic history since the beginning of Christian era. Sharma referred that, "However, on the basis of the antiquities recovered so far two cultural periods could be discerned. Period I, which contains the sculpture and enormous quantities of Kaoline potteries belong to 8th to 12th century A.D. This period covers the recovered from layer (3) and below. Nevertheless, some antiquities of the lowest layers may go back to still earlier period. Period II, contains basically the Chinese celadon, green glazed pottery which could be dated to 13th to 17th century A.D." (Sharma, 1994:74).

Sankalia reported that highly sophisticated bowls and dishes with at base, were also prevalent in Assam. These bowls and dishes were further decorated with incised, impressed, applique and cut-designs. He aptly remarks that all these wares are rare feature in Indian ceramics of historic and prehistoric period. He also stated that these sophisticated potteries were made of kaolin or kaolin
mixed clay. Infact, kaolin clay potteries were white in colour even after baking whereas, pottery made from mixed kaolin clay were reddish in appearance. He noted that the kaolin coated pots were still made at Lakhipur about 180 Kms away from Guwahati. Some of them bear cut impression and decoration. The bases of bowl and dishes are decorated with incised lotus design. Finally, he remarks that these decorative motifs are similar with the pottery of Kausambi, Rajghat and Hastinapur. (Sankalia, 1981).

Therefore, the discoveries and studies of the products of ceramic industries so far done in the context of Assam, substantiated clearly that pottery with its introduction in the neolithic period passed through a splendid period with varied designs, decorations and types in the early historic and medieval period and still persists among two communities - the Hira and the Kumar.