CHAPTER-II

SECTION - A

A GENERAL BACKGROUND

Assam is the easternmost Aryanised part of India. In ancient times, it was known by two names, viz., Prāgjyotīśa and Kāmarūpa. The name Prāgjyotīśa denotes this land in both the epics, the Rāmāyaṇa (Ādi-kāṇḍa, ch. XXXV, 1-6; Kiśkindhā-kāṇḍa, ch. X-ii, 30-32) and the Mahābhārata (Sabhā-parva, ch. XXVI, 7-16; Aśvamedha-parva, ch. XXIV-V; Udyog-parva, ch.X-VIII, 80-85). The name Kāmarūpa, denoting this land found mentioned for the first time in the Allahabad Stone Pillar Inscription (prasāasti) of Samudragupta (4th century A.D.) and in the early Purāṇas.¹ In the ancient period, this land comprised of not only the whole of modern Assam, but also parts of North and East Bengal and the mountainous passes upto the borders of China.² However, these boundaries were not static; sometimes these expanded towards the west and

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1. TCHA, Vol. I Intro, p. 1
sometimes contracted. To note, the Brahmaputra or the Assam valley extends from Sadiya in Upper Assam to parts of North Bengal and South Bengal (now in Bangladesh) stretching as far as the Bay of Bengal. geographically too. The *Kalikāpurāṇa* (v 51/56) fixes the river Karatoya as Kāmarūpa’s western boundary and Dikkaravāsinī in Lakhimpur district of Assam, and the Dafla hills (the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh) as the eastern one. The *Yoginī-Tantra* describes her boundaries thus:

\[
\text{nepālasya kañcanādriṇi brahmaputrasya saṅgamam} / \\
\text{karatoyāṁ samārabhya yāvaddikkaravāsinīṁ //II-I/II-I/11)}
\]

“Kāmarūpa extends from the mountain Kāñcana in Nepal to the confluence of the Brahmaputra, and from the river Karatoya to Dikkaravāsinī” (*Yoginītantra*, Introduction, ed. Biswanarayan Shastri. Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, Delhi, 1982).

This work further divides the country into four divisions, viz. Ratna-śākha, Bhadra-śākha, Saumāra-śākha and Kāma-śākha. A later work, *Hara-Gauri-Sarivāda*, also states these four divisions—(a) Ratna-śākha lay between the Karatoya and the Svarṇakoṣa; (b) Kama-śākha lay between Svarṇakoṣa and the Kapila; (c) Svarṇa-śākha between the Puṣpikā and the Bhairavi; and (d) Saumāra-śākha between the Bhairavi and the Dikkaravāsinī. To note, all these are natural or river boundaries.

(i) Origin of the name: Prāgjyotīśa-Kamarūpa:

Several interpretations are offered relating to the origin of the names “Prāgjyotīśa” and “Kāmarūpa”.
a. *Chou-Theius-Juthis-theory*:

According to this theory, a branch of the Chao-Theius people of China migrated to India on some ancient date and established three important centres in the sub-continent— in Assam in the east, in the centre in Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, and in the north-west in Afghanistan. These centres were called Prāg-Zuthis, Madhya-Zuthis, and Uttar-Zuthis, respectively, as these people came to be known as Zuthis in India. The term ‘Zuthis’ in course of time got Sanskritised to ‘*Jyotīsa*’. However, this theory lacks evidence.

b. *Pagar-juh-tic-theory*:

This theory links an Austric phrase ‘Pagar-juh(jo)-tic(e’=ch)’ meaning a place full of hills, with the topographical features of Assam.

c. *Prāg-(eastern)-* *jyotīsa* (*astrology*)-theory:

The term ‘*prāg*’ also means ‘former.’ This has been the most popular theory. And this is the oldest of the three theories advanced so far being mentioned in the *Kālikāpurāṇa*. It is stated in the said work that Brahmā made the first calculation

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of the stars in Prāgjyotīṣa. Gait writes in this connection, ‘Prāg’ means former or eastern Jyotiṣa star, astrology and shining. Prājyotisapura, therefore, be taken to mean the ‘City of Eastern Astrology.’5 The name is interesting in connection with the reputation which the country has always held as a land of magic and incantation and with the view that it was in Assam that the Tāntrik form of Hinduism originated.6 Inspite of all this, more data will be required to prove this theory. Thus, these theories lead us to no definite conclusion.

However, as regards the etymology and conotation of the names ‘Prāgjyotīṣa’ and ‘Kāmarūpa’, the theory advanced by B. Kakati appears to be quite reasonable taking into consideration the topography of the locality as well as the predominance of the people of the Austro and Tibeto-Burman origin in this region, and hence is plausible. The theory is also accepted by the scholars, generally. But in the present state of our knowledge, we may accept this position until more convincing evidence comes to light to prove it otherwise.

It has been accepted that the name ‘Kāmarūpa’ is associated with Kāmākhyā, the famous temple of this region dedicated to goddess Kāmākhyā, the Mother Goddess. ‘The words Kāmarūpa and Kāmākhyā also suggests an Austro or Alpine origin.’7 The word Kamakhya is probably derived from an Austro formation, such as Kamoī (demon) in old Khmer, Kamoit (devil) in Chām; Kāmet (corpse) in Khasi; Komui (grave) or Komuoch (corpse) in Santali. ‘It may be a substitution of the word like komouch meaning grave or the dead.’8 While, as Kāmarūpa is said to have formed

5. Gait, E.A., AHA, p. 15
6. Choudhury, P. C., HCPA, p. 38
7. ibid
from words like ‘Kāmru’ or ‘Kāmrut’, the name of a lesser divinity in Santali, the land thus got associated with magic or necromancy. Literature closely connects Kāmarūpa with Kāmākhya. B. Kakati takes the name, Kāmarūpa to be a new cult having affinity with some Austric divinity and suggests that in exhalation of it, the land was rechristened.

The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa relates the traditional origin of the name— Kāmarūpa. According to it, the Indian cupid, had his rebirth in this place after being burnt up by Lord Śiva. This kind of development can be explained in the light of the prevalence of the cult of magic and sorcery, associated with the Austric-Alpine culture of Assam. That the word Kāmarūpa is a Sanskritisation of some earlier formation is proved by other sources. The usual name is found as Kāmru or Kamrud in the Buddhist Caryās, the Hara-Gaurī-Saṁvāda, and the Persian sources like the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī and Riyāz-us-Salātīn.

11. Choudhury, P. C., HCPA, p. 38
12. Gazetteer of India, Assam State, Kamrup District, 1990, pp. 33
(ii) Different Legends:

'The political History of Ancient Assam is rapped up with legends associated with the rulers of Prāgyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa.'\(^{13}\) These rulers are—Naraka of Prāgyotiṣapura, his successors — Bhagadatta and Vajradatta, Bāna of Šoṇitapura and Bhīṣmaka of Vidarbha. The tales of these rulers, even though confused and scattered, are part of our life. In this section, a general introduction of these rulers is given.

The Bhauma-Nāraka Family:

Among the legendary rulers of ancient Assam, the Bhauma-Naraka family deserve special mention from the view point that all the three important early historical dynasties of Assam, viz. the Varmans, the Sālastambhas and the Pālas had claimed their descent from. Naraka, Bhagadatta and Vajradatta as evidenced by the copperplate charters of the rulers of the respective dynasties. The following is the list: both the Dubi and the Nidhanpur copperplate grants as well as the Dubi and the Nalanda seals of Bhāskaravarman refer to Naraka.

\(^{13}\) Choudhury, P. C., *HCPA*, p. 119
Bhagadatta and Vajradatta (Dubi-vv. 2-4; Nidhanpur vv. 4-5, IAA, p. 20, 50); the copperplate grants of Vanamālavarmā and Balavarma-III refer to three of them representing Bhagadatta and Vajradatta as Naraka’s two sons, and with the addition that while Bhagadatta attained the lordship of Prāgīyotīṣa, the other, Vajradatta obtained the lordsip of Uparipattana at the grace of Lord Śiva.; then the Borgaon grant of Ratnapāla also refers to all the three legendary Bhaumas wherein Vajradatta is represented as brother of Bhagadatta. (vv. 3-8, IAA, p. 161); in the Guwahati copperplate grant of Indrapāla, Vajradatta is described as Bhagadatta’s son. (vv. 5-8, IAA, pp. 185-86). The three copperplate inscriptions of Dharmapāla, viz, the Khanāmukh, the Subhaṅkarapāṭaka and the Puṣpabhadrā grants (vv. 3, IAA, p. 230) are totally silent about Vajradatta; the Gachtal copperplate grant of Gopālavarmā refers to all the three, but silent about Vajradatta’s relation with Bhagadatta.

The Story of Naraka:

Naraka is an epic figure, being mentioned in both the epics. Besides, several Purāṇas, the Kālikāpurāṇa and the Harivamśa
give a detailed account of his life. The Kiṣkindhā-kāṇḍa of the Rāmāyana (ch., 42) refers to Naraka and his city of Prāgjyotiṣapura which, however, is said to have been situated on the bank of the western sea. This very piece of information has been kept aside by the scholars as ‘totally vague and misleading’. The Mahābhārata story about Naraka tallis well with those of the other sources even though it is a confusing one. In the Tīrtha-yātā-parva of the Vana-parva (ch. 142), the Pāṇḍavas are said to have seen a hill, rather a heap of bones belonging to a demon named Naraka. But doubts remain as to the identification of this Naraka with the Naraka of Prāgjyotiṣa. The Udyoga-parva (ch. 48, vv.80-85), the story reads thus: in a citadel named Prāgjyotiṣa, Naraka with the epithet Bhauma (son of Bhūmi or earth) used to live, who stole away the ear-rings of Aditi. Not a single god, not even Indra, could defeat him. At last Kṛṣṇa killed Naraka and also Mura or Muru, his commander-in-Chief, and recovered Aditi’s ear-rings. The same parva also relates that for several yugas, Naraka used to live in Prāgjyotiṣa with other dānavas. But eventually, they all were overpowered by Kṛṣṇa. Naraka lost his life, Kṛṣṇa recovered Aditi’s ear-rings and also thousands of Naraka’s damsels. However, the
Mahābhārata says nothing about Naraka’s birth from Viṣṇu. The Kalikapurāṇa and the local epigraphs, on the other hand, repeatedly say that Naraka was born from Viṣṇu in his Boar (varāha) incarnation through Bhūmi or Prthvī. The Kalikapurāṇa version is quite lengthy. Naraka was the adopted son of Janaka of Videha. When he was sixteen year old, he left Videha in search of his fortune. He came to Prājyotisa and killed the dānava ruler Ghaṭkāsura, a scion of the family of Mahiraṅga dānava. Then he established a strong kingdom and settled dvija or twice-born people in Prājyotisa, lying between the Karatoya and Lalitakāntā. On the other side, he drove away the Kirāta people as far as the seacoast.

After becoming king, Naraka married Māyā, the princess of Vidarbha. It is stated that Gautama, the priest of Janaka, performed the keśavapana ceremony of Naraka according to Vedic rites. Naraka himself was well-versed in the Vedas. In his early career, Naraka was devoted to Viṣṇu and Kāmākhyā. But later on, after coming under the influence of Bāṇa, the king of Śoṇitapura, he started doing a number of misdeeds, like proposing to marry the
goddess Kāmākhyā, and stealing away the ear-rings of Aditi, the mother of the gods and the umbrella of god Varuṇa.

At last, Kṛṣṇa came from Dvārakā, defeated and killed Naraka, and placed his son Bhagadatta on the throne. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that Naraka’s capital was well-fortified in all directions and Muru was in charge of defending it. Kṛṣṇa first killed Muru and his sons, and entered the city and then killed Naraka. He recovered Aditi’s ear-rings and took away with him to Dvārakā 16,000 damsels imprisoned by Naraka and 14,000 elephants and horses.

The story of Bhagadatta

Bhagadatta comes several times in close connection with both the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. Tradition has it that Bhagadatta got his daughter Bhānumati married to the eldest Kaurava, Duryodhana, and due to this relationship he joined the Kurukṣetra war on the side of the Kauravas where he lost his life at the hands of Arjuna. The Sabha-parva of the Mahābhārata relates the story of Bhagadatta’s (the king of Prāgiyotisṭha) eight days resistance to Arjuna who was in his northern expedition in connection with Yudhiṣṭhira’s performing the Rājasūya-yajña (ch. 26, vv 7-16). The same parva again relates the story of Bhīma’s eastern
expedition when he reached the Lauhitya region and forced the Mleccha kings and inhabitants of the sea-shore to pay taxes (ch. 30, vv 26-7). In ch. 51, vv 14-16 of the same parva, Bhagadatta again comes with many precious items (horses, jewellery and swords with hilts made of ivory) to present to the Pāṇḍavas. Here he is accompanied by the Yavanas. In the Udyoga-parva, he joins the Kauravas with one aṅkṣauhinī soldiers, mostly Cīnas and Kirātas endowed with golden complexion in the side of the Kauravas. Bhagadatta’s heroism displayed in the war and the qualities of his elephant, named Supratik, are described in a full chapter containing 86 verses in the Bhīṣma-parva. Four chapters in the Drona-parva (25-28) describe Bhagadatta’s fight first with Bhīma and then with Arjuna in whose hands he lost his life. It is stated that this great grey-haired hero was so old that his eye-lids drooping down like a lobe, covered his eyes and for this reason, he had to tie a strap to keep the drooping muscles fixed up his eyes. As Kṛṣṇa instigated, Arjuna cut down the strap covering his eyes and, thus when blindfolded, he was killed with arrows.

According to the Mahābhārata (Karna-parva, ch. 5, vv 15-16), Bhagadatta’s son, named Kṛtaprajña, was also killed in the Kurukṣetra war in the hands of Nakula. However, the local
epigraphs do not refer to this son of Bhagadatta. But they have mentioned Vajradatta as the successor of Bhagadatta as in the Aṣvamedha-parva. Harṣacarita’s Puṣpadatta who is described as Bhagadatta’s son may be identical with Kṛtaprajña.

In the same chapter, Vajradatta is referred to as the son of Bhagadatta and the king of Prāgyotiśa. It is also stated that Vajradatta acknowledged Yudhiṣṭhira’s Cakravarty status at the time of his performing the Aṣvamedha sacrifice after a fierce fight.

The story of Bāna

Bāna was the king of Śoṇitapura, identified with modern Tezpur. He was out and out an indigenous non-Aryan king who finally gave in to Aryan penetration both culturally and politically. He was a close ally of Naraka. But his daughter, Ūṣā had an affair with Kṛṣṇa’s grandson Aniruddha. Bāna imprisoned Aniruddha. At this development, Kṛṣṇa came from Dvārakā with an army for the rescue of his grandson which he did after a fierce fight with Bāna. This battle is called Hari-Hara yuddha (the battle between Hari and Hara), for Hara or Lord Śiva sided in this battle with Bāna as the latter was his ardent devotee. In this battle, Bāna lost his life.
After him, his grandson Bhāluk shifted the capital to Balipara, a place near Tezpur at the foot-hill of the Akā hills (West Kāmeng district of Arunachal Pradesh). The place called Bhalukpong nearby reminds us of this Bhāluk only. To note, the Aka tribe traces its
descent from him.

The story of Bhīṣmaka:

The Bhāgavata and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa narrate the story of
king Bhīṣmaka of Viḍarbha located in Sadiya. Kuṇḍina or Kuṇḍila-
nagara, situated on the bank of the Kuṇḍil river of Sadiya, was his
capital. Remains of fortification about 24 miles from Sadiya (a
city wall at present having 16 tiles) tempted some scholars like
Hannay to attribute these remains to this legendary king.14 However.
T. Bloch has expressed no opinion as to the builders of these
remains or the time of construction.15

The Chutiyas, a Mongoloid tribe who ruled in the Sadiya
region in the early medieval period trace their descent from
Bhīṣmaka.

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vey of India; cited in *AASNI* pp. 1-11
Bhīṣmaka had a beautiful daughter named Rukmiṇī and five sons. The name of his eldest son was Rukmabīra. Both Rukmiṇī and Śrī Kṛṣṇa wanted to marry each other after having heard of each other's merits. But her brother Rukmabīra wanted her to marry Śiśupāla, king of the Chedi kingdom. Rukmiṇī secretly sent a brahmin named Vedanidhi to Dvārakā so that Kṛṣṇa come and rescue her. Accordingly, Kṛṣṇa came to Vidarbha and took Rukmiṇī away to Dvārakā. Rukmabīra and Śiśupāla though tried their best to defeat Kṛṣṇa, but ultimately had to give in against Kṛṣṇa's might.
CHAPTER-II
SECTION - B

(I) FORMATION OF STATE : A GENERAL APPROACH AND
FORMATION OF THE STATE OF PRĀGJYOTIṢA-KĀMARŪPA

The state as an ancient institution is a specific kind of social organisation which "gives expression to the existing relations in a society and to ideas pertaining to power, authority, force, justice, property and many other phenomena."\(^1\) The states dating back to the ancient times are observed to have emerged from egalitarian tribal bands. In other words, the area of interest of the historians generally cover those regions where numerous tribes are known to have lived before the emergence of ‘States’ therein.\(^2\) In the Indian context this type of studies is quite fascinating due to the twin processes of cultural assimilation and economic interaction.

\(^1\) Claessen Henry J.M. & Skalnik, Peter(eds). *The Early State*, cited in *SPFPNEI* p.129
\(^2\) Bhattacharjee, J.B. *SPFPNEI*, Intro, p. 11
The following are the generalised factors responsible for formation of a State:

(i) growth in population and population pressure,
(ii) war, the threat of war, or conquest, raids,
(iii) conquest,
(iv) progress in production and the promotion of a surplus, tribute, affluence,
(v) ideology and legitimation, and
(vi) influence of already existing States.

In India, the transition from no-State condition to State systems in the middle first millennium B.C. (the earliest historical period) in the Gangetic valley has been uniformly identified with the transition from Rgvedic society to Later Vedic society, the former—a tribal society while the latter witnessed State-based kingdoms. Verses from ancient texts are taken to indicate the no-State situation in the earlier period. The following is such a verse from the Śānti-parva of the Mahābhārata.

3. ibid, p.132
4. Thapar, R., FITS, p. 4
The society thrived without a king or law court for a long time as people took care of each other out of a sense of righteousness, but later somehow there was a moral degeneration. People lost integrity of character; greed, selfishness and cupidity overcame their mind and the earthly paradise so long enjoyed by them got converted into hell. The law of jungle became the order of the day; the powerful devoured the weak. This grave situation came to an end with the appointment of a king who was born asexually by the chief god Brahmadeva.

The *Dighanikāya* gives a similar description of the no-state situation and the birth of the state system.\(^5\) It

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5. *Dighanikāya* III, cited in *SGAI*, p. 28
envisages of a golden age, when men who had celestial and bright bodies, lived in virtue and happiness. But, later, somehow anarchy and chaos set in; and eventually an able person who was born asexually became the king at the request of the community. The public also agreed to give him a part of their paddy in return for the services rendered by him.

The 9th century Jain writer, Jinasena echoes the same story with Rṣbhanātha, the first Tīrthāṅkara being given the credit for introducing kings, officers, castes and professions, so that order prevailed in the society.6

All these are, however, mere speculations of the no-state condition and thereafter of the origin of the State. But in these stories, we may notice one thing, is that they, while emphasising the need for a coercive authority over a community or a group of people, also equally speak of the institution of tax payable to that ruling authority by the people, thus indicating the close connection of economic

6. Ādipurāṇa III, cited in, SGAI, p. 29
production of community with the existence of the State-system headed by the king. The Śānti-parva (ch-67) refers to a voluntary agreement on the part of the people to pay necessary taxes to Manu, the first king appointed by the Creator.

It has been observed that the term rājā, meaning generally the 'king' dates back to the early Vedic society; however, its connotation underwent great many changes from the second millennium B.C. to the first millennium B.C. The earlier Rājā was invariably a chief of some cattle-rearing Vedic tribe, such as the Purus and the Bharatas; while the latter one enjoyed his share in the production of the land ruled by him. Similarly, the Saptāṅga and the Maṇḍala theories do not hold good to the earlier society. The transformation from the lineage system to the State system in the middle Gangetic Valley from late second to the early 1st millennium B.C. sticking basically to the Itihāsa-purāṇa tradition, covers more or less all the factors mentioned earlier. A lineage denotes a corporate
group of unilineal kin with a formalised system of authority. It is bounded by blood relationship and can be divided into smaller divisions. In course of time, they constituted a clan which generally traces its descent to an actual or mythical ancestor.7

People migrated from the Western Gangetic valley to the Middle Gangetic valley. Between these two valleys, there was no geographical barrier, while the Middle Gangetic Valley offered as much fertile land as they wanted. Permanent settlements became a major feature of mid-or North-Central India. Wet-rice cultivation accompanied by irrigation facilities brought about vigorous stratification between those who owned land and those who worked on it actually. Impact of conflict or conquest was not so significant in the early stage. External conflict was limited to skirmishes, cattle-raids and defense of fortified settlements; rare pitched battles were regarded as special events. It was internal tension which made the emergence

7. Thapar, R., *FLTS*, p. 10
of the state-system a possibility. 'The recognisable state emerges when the stratification is much more widespread both socially and geographically. Stratification gives birth to internal conflicts among the stratified groups as well as contracts for agreements among them. Ultimately, a powerful elite class is born out of these conflicts and agreements.\(^8\) 'This takes the form of the transformation of the \textit{gahapati/grhapati} from a household head within a clan system to a land owner, and subsequent to this, as a participant in trading activities and in its countepoise in the transformation of the Śūdra into the peasant cultivator and the artisan.'\(^9\) These occurrences date back to first half of the first millennium B.C.\(^{10}\) Many of these settlements which had been centres of political power and economic exchange turned out to be towns. The sophisticated Northern Black polished Ware brings out the urban character of the Middle Gengetic valley settlements. This Ware dates back to 6th

\(^8\) Thapar, R., \textit{FLTS}, p. 5

\(^9\) Thapar, R., \textit{FLTS}, p.157

\(^{10}\) Agarwal, D. P. and Kusumgar, S., \textit{Pre-historic Chronogoiogy and Radio-Carbon Dating in India}, p. 138
Century B.C. Because of the greater concentration of wealth and power in such settlements they were required to be defended. External conflict was no longer a cattle-raid, but a calculated campaign for acquisition of territories and towns. Again, 'under the impact of trade the item which was a gift in the lineage system became a commodity when exchanged. Whereas earlier the Kṣatriya gave gifts to the Brāhmaṇas in exchange for the abstract notion of status and legitimacy, in the new system the gift included immovable property. Thus the gift was transmuted into property and the concept of exchange also underwent a transformation.'

Cohen and Service's concept of Primary State and Secondary State (a Primary State gives birth to Secondary State by conquering a 'non-State') Cohen & Service (eds). Origins of the State, p. 6ff ), has been viewed that this theory is not wholly applicable to Indian situation in the first millennium B.C., as it requires subsequently complete

11. Thapar, R., FLTS, p. 72
12. ibid,
13. ibid, p. 158
economic restructure and integration into the conquering State. However, restructuring of the economy of the conquered state is evident in the post-Gupta period. Under the patronage of the metropolitan States, vast areas of waste land were brought under cultivation. ‘The question of restructuring the economy hinges on the wider question of land ownership which has remained controversial in the context of early India.’ It is suffice here to say that the decline of clan ownership and of the householding economy, eventually gave birth to a peasant economy. The beginning was made in the Mauryan period. The State collected revenue from the cultivators and various other taxes. Some lands were State-owned or sitā-lands and others had private land-owners. With these developments, simultaneously, the system of four varṇas viz. Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra (The Brāhmaṇas legitimised the status of the royalty and occupied those high posts with religious sanctions and appropriated descent; the Kṣatriyas

14. ibid, p. 161
were ruling clans converted into royal families, or those of obscure origin who had occupied power. The latter generally claimed descent from some mythical ancestors legitimised by the Brāhmaṇas; the Vaiśyas were connected with economic pursuits and their status varied in accordance with the amount of wealth possessed by a Vaiśya; the Śūdras were peasants and artisans, the mass of the Indian population) also grew and adapted itself to the State system.

The foregoing passage is primarily based on Romila Thapar’s observations in the socio-political condition of early India being taken from her book, *From Lineage to State*. In this passage, only those portions have been taken into account which are directly related to our work, i.e., the formation of State in Prāgyotisa-Kāmarūpa. In Prāgyotisa-Kāmarūpa we find a State in the making twice: first under Naraka which is regarded as mythical and the latter under Puṣyavarman, the founder of the Varman dynasty in the 4th century A.D.,— so far the first historical dynasty of the
history of Assam. After the Varmans, two main dynasties,—the Sālastambhas and the Pālas ruled in ancient Assam. From the rule of the Varmans, Assam has a continuous history. Although the kingdom of Prāgjyotīṣa under Naraka is regarded as a mythical one, without knowing this kingdom,—the first known kingdom of this land,— we cannot proceed to the next one.

The mythical heroes of this land are Naraka, Bhagadatta, Bāṇa and Bhīṣmaka. Naraka is credited with establishing the kingdom of Prāgjyotīṣa in and around the modern Kamrup district of Assam. We have already mentioned their stories from the epics and the various Purāṇas. What is noticeable is that there are still some evidence which have pronounced their connection with these mythical heroes. The Narakāsura hill in the heart of Guwahati city, the staircase, named mekhelā-ujuva leading to the temple of Kāmākhyā in the Nilachala hill in Guwahati are invariably connected with Naraka. Even, there is a hill called Mairang-parvat at a distance of about seven
at the foot of the Arunachal Pradesh. The Akas* trace their
genealogy to Bhāluk. The Chutiyas who established an
extensive kingdom in the Sadiya region in the medieval
period felt proud by claiming descent from Bhīsmaka. The
Idu Mishmis of the Dibang valley in Arunachal Pradesh too
claim that Rukmiṇī belonged to their community.

Legends represent Naraka as being born of Prithvi
(Bhūmi), the earth, through Viṣṇu in his Boar incarnation.
He was left on the sacrificial ground of king Janaka of
Videha who brought him up in his court along with the
royal princes till he was sixteen years old. Goddess Prithvi
impersonated herself as a nurse, Kātyāyanī and brought up
the child. Naraka excelled the royal princes in valour and
intelligence which posed to be a threat to the throne of
Videha in near future, and this made his foster parents
suspicious about him. Naraka came to know of their
suspicion and also the story of his birth through his nurse.
and pretending to accompany her to a pilgrimage to the
Ganges, slipped out of the royal court with some followers.

* Some details about the Akas, see Appendix-1
With the help of his real father Viṣṇu, he subsequently became the ruler of Prāgjyotiṣa, ousting the Kirāta chief, Ghaṭakāsura. Narāka, then drove away the Kirātas upto the sea-coast and settled twice-born (dvijā) people in Prāgjyotiṣa, spread between the river Karatoya and Lalitakāntā. He made his capital city, Prāgjyotisapura, i.e., modern Guwahati, “inaccessible even to the gods.” The legend further says that although initially he was a devotee of goddess Kāmākhyā, later on he desired to marry her. Besides this, he committed several other misdeeds also as vanity had conquered his mind. Once he refused to allow the sage Vasiṣṭha from worshipping at the temple of Kāmākhyā; then he stole away the famous chattra (umbrella) of god Varuṇa, and also the ear-rings of Aditi, the mother of the gods etc. This type of thoughtless actions invited for Naraka the wrath of Lord Kṛṣṇa and soon he met his death at the hands of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

This account points to Naraka’s sky-high ambition of establishing a kingdom of his own. However, uncertainty lies in fixing his time. He has been linked both to the Tretā
and the Dvāpara ages, which is totally absurd. A solution is advanced in the light of the possibility of Naraka being a dynastic title originally belonging to the family of Janaka; but in such a case, a dynasty cannot last so long to cover two ages. Naraka seems to be an Aryan or nearly an Arynised person from Mithilā or eastern Bihar. His coming into the east, supposed to be out of Arynisation or Sanskritisation process, indicates the spread of Aryan culture towards the east. Before him, some Asura chiefs (Ghaṭkāsura, Sambarāsura, Ratnāsura) ruled in Prāgjyotiṣa. Likewise, many other petty chiefs used to rule in other places of the Brahmaputra valley over tracts of land where their respective tribes inhabited. On the basis of ethno-archaeological evidence available in the area, some writers opine that neolithic way of life persisted in the Assam hills which are tribal areas until very recent

times.\textsuperscript{16} On the other side, this has been viewed by experts that "iron and its associates,—the painted grey ware and the black-and-red ware,—might have been reached here, particularly the Brahmaputra valley, in about 800-500 B. C. This observation can be confirmed only by excavation."\textsuperscript{17} Even though there is no concrete evidence at present to confirm the epic linkage with our legendary heroes, we cannot ignore the historicity of these kings altogether. Naraka and Bhagadatta conquered many a tribal chief and established a kingdom therein. Both Naraka and Bhagadatta appear to have been two magnificent personalities of pre-Buddhist period. Otherwise, they would have surely found mention in the contemporary Buddhist sources. Furthermore, Prāgyotisā-Kāmarūpa was not mentioned among the 'sixteen Mahā-janapadas.' On the other hand, a study of Puṣyvarman as a person and his time


proves that by the beginning of the Christian era, Prāgijyotisa-Kāmarūpa was already an Aryanised or Sanskritised land. Puṣyavarman also appears to be a man having enough knowledge of statecraft. Two more reasons may be cited here. The mention of this land as Lauhitya in Kauṭilya’s *Arthāśāstra* (Chap. XI) and in the Classical accounts as an important centre of silk production, and also the discovery of Roman pottery belonging to the 1st cen. A.D. at the Ambari excavation site in Guwahati definitely indicate the importance of this country in trade inside the sub-continent as well as in the very profitable Sino-Roman trade of the beginning of the Christian era. Such trade activities are not possible without State patronage. The period of composition (rather compilation) of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* in its present form took place at a time ranging between 4th cen. B.C. and 4th cen. A.D., and between 3rd cen. B.C. and 2nd cen. A.D., respectively. On

the basis of this observation, it may also be presumed that the accounts of this land in the two epics date back to some centuries earlier than the beginning of the Christian era.\textsuperscript{19}

Coming back to Naraka, it may be presumed that as he was an orphan, Lord Viśṇu and mother Earth were made his parents. Here one thing becomes clear that Naraka initially was a Vaiṣṇava. By his supposed divine origin, it was sought to consolidate his rule. Naraka, like any shrewd politician, on the one hand settled in Prāgjyotiṣapura Aryan people while on the other hand he recruited non-Aryan, rather indigenous people to all important offices in the administration. For example, Hayagrīva was the Commander-in-Chief of his army and Muru or Mura was in charge of defending the capital city, Prāgjyotiṣapura. Not only this, he deviated himself from Vaiṣṇavism, and took to Śaivism and Śaṅktism, and also established a lifelong friendship with Baṇa of the neighbouring Šonitapura. Close mixing with the non-Aryan indigenous people of the

\textsuperscript{19}. Sircar, D. C., \textit{TCIIA}. Vol I. p.81
Brahmaputra valley most probably earned for Naraka and his successors the epithet ‘Asura’. It is quite likely that as he was an Aryanised person from Mithila, — eastern Bihar, the epithet ‘Asura’ had always been used to his name.

The intervening time between the Mythological period and the Beginning of the Historical period:

During the period of ascendancy of Magadha, the kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa does not seem to have any significant role in North Indian politics. The Buddhist works referring to the Sixteen Mahā-janapadas do not include the name of Prāgjyotiṣa. But the Greek writers, as early as the 4th cen. B.C., have referred to the people and places of this region. So did the Classical writers of the 1st and 2nd cen. A.D. Hecataes of Miletus (500 B.C.) mentions a people called ‘Kakattiai’ who may have a connection with the Kalitas of Assam. Magasthenes and Strabo’s ‘Derdai of the East’ who worked in gold might have been some hill people of Assam. Strabo’s ‘Oidanes’ river which along with

20. Chaudhury, P. C., HCPA., p.18
the Ganges fell into the sea, Curtius’ river ‘Dyardenes’ which flowed through the remotest part of India. and Ptolemy’s ‘Doanes’ may be taken to refer to the great river Brahmaputra.\textsuperscript{21} Pliny and Arrian name a number of Himalayan tribes, like the ‘Chisitosagi’ or ‘Chritotosagi’. the ‘Mandai’, the ‘Colubae’ or ‘Koluta’, ‘Orxulae’, ‘Abali’ and others. These Himalayan tribes are identified with the Kirātas (the non-Aryan Mongoloid people of the east), the Garos (mande means ‘man’ in Garo language), the Kalitas, the Akas and the Abors of Arunachal Pradesh. respectively.\textsuperscript{22} Although the identification lacks concrete evidence, but there is no doubt that the Himalaya and its foot-hill areas had been inhabited by numerous tribes. The \textit{Periplus of the Erythrean Sae}’s much acclaimed ‘Kirrhadae’ has been identified with the Kirātas. This identification rests on the order of description of different places of India and, it seems quite reasonable.\textsuperscript{23} Ptolemy’s country of the

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{ibid}
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{ibid} p.19, *Aka (Hrusso); Abor (Adi)
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{ibid} p.30
Rāmachandra. But reservation has been expressed regarding the importance of this account. The *Hara-Gaurī-Saṁvāda* is a later work ascribed to the 18th century A.D. and what is more than that the account given here is confusing. Therefore, we cannot depend too much on this account.²⁵

The *Yoginī-Tantra*, another local literary work dealing with the ancient time, mentions a Śūdra king named Deveśvara, who ruled in Kāmarūpa in the beginning of the Śaka era. He propagated the worship of Kāmākhyā. The *Kāmarūpar Burañjī* refers to a Kṣatriya king of Kāmarūpa by the name of Dharmapāla who originally hailed from the west. He made his capital west of Guwahati, where he established several caste-Hindu families from Northern India. It is said that a famous sage, named Kendukalai, lived in his reign. He was succeeded by Padmanārāyaṇa, Chandranārāyaṇa etc., the last king being again a Rāmachandra. Rāmachandra had his capital at Ratnapura in Majuli. The *Riyāz-us-Salātin*, an early medieval Persian

²⁵ Barua, S. L., *ACHA, (SLB)* p. 84.
work, mentions a king, named Sañkalādib or Sankal who ruled the country to the east of the Karatoyā, i.e. Kāmarūpa. This king is credited with the overthrow of a North Indian king by the name of Kidar Brāhmaṇ. He also founded the city of Lakshnauti. He suffered at last a defeat at the hands of Afrasiab of Turan and Scythia in a battle fought at Ghoraghat. He was then taken to Turan as prisoner and eventually killed there by Rustam. This Kider Brāhmaṇ is identified with Kushan Shah of Gāndhāra and placed in the 4th cen. A.D. But nothing definite can be extracted either from the Assamese chronicles or the Persian ones about the kingdom and lineage of Sañkalādib.

It is really unfortunate that there is neither epigraphic nor literary source to sketch a definite line of State-formation. But the process, it appears, continued. In Northern India, it was the period of the Buddhist movement and the rise of Magadha. The political life of India at this period revolved round the Sixteen Mahā-janapadas. When Chandragupta Maurya, the first historical emperor of India
aspired to establish an all India empire, these areas drew his attention. Furthermore, he had the mission of driving the yavanas (the Greeks) out of India, and thereby secure the north-western frontier of India. During this period, Prājyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa must have had remained more or less an isolated distant land. As such, Prājyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa’s absence in North Indian politics at this period may be taken to indicate that it lacked an able and powerful ruler, if it was a kingdom. It is also possible that after the fall of the legendary Bhaumas, the numerous indigenous tribes under their respective chiefs established their independent rule in different places. Again, the contemporary religio-cultural trends, —Buddhism and Jainism,— appear to have had made no impact in this part of India in the period concerned. After Chandragupta Maurya, Āsoka made only one conquest, i.e. Kaliṅga. After the conquest of Kaliṅga he gave up the path of territorial conquest or digvijaya and adopted the path of dharmaṇvijaya or conquest of the minds of people through love and non-violance or ahamiṁśā. His
successors were incompetent rulers and within fifty years of Asoka's death, the mighty Maurya empire witnessed its complete downfall.

The post-Mauryan period saw the rise of a number of independent states. The territorial limits of the Śuṅgas and the succeeding Kāṇvas were far less than that of the Mauryan empire. These two dynasties remained busy in defending their fast-contracting territory due to the emergence of several independent states and also due to the conquest of several areas of Northern, Western and Central India by the foreigners, like the Yavanas, the Śakas and the Pahlavas.

During the next 200 years of the rule by these foreign tribes who also remained busy in firmly establishing their political sway in India, political relationship between these areas and Prāgījyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa was, therefore, practically nil. The same was the case with the Kushanas. And between the downfall of the Kushanas and the rise of the imperial Guptas, there was no powerful State or royal dynasty to establish political unity in the Indian sub-continent.
With the foundation of the Varman dynasty in Prāgjyotiśa-Kāmarūpa by Puṣyavarman in mid-fourth cen. A.D., begins the proper history of Assam and from that time, Assam history has not lost its continuity. The Varman dynasty ruled for long three hundred years. Altogether four inscriptions, viz. Umācal, Baḍgaṅgā, Dubi and Nidhanpur, belonging to this dynasty have been discovered so far. The last two inscriptions, together with the Nālandā clay seal belong to none other than the great Bhāskaravarman. In the Dubi and the Nidhanpur copperplate inscriptions, Puṣyavarman has been referred to as the great founder of the dynasty. Puṣyavarman’s kingdom has been mentioned as Kāmarūpa in the category of frontier States together with Samataṭa, Ćavāka (generally taken as a separate kingdom in the Kapilī valley of present Nagaon district of central Assam), Nepāla and Karttrpura in the Allahabad Pillar prśasti of the Gupta emperor Samudragupta. But none of these sources throw light on issues like Puṣyavarman’s origin, where did he come from, how did he establish and
consolidate his rule in Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, and so on. Besides, there is no indication as to the time of his accession, or to what extent the people of this country were politically conscious.

Puṣyavarman, the founder of the Varman dynasty, has been referred to as a mahārājādhirāja, i.e. the king of kings, in the records of Bhāskaravarman. We cannot doubt the authenticity of the statement in the light of the daring declaration of the composer of the Dubi copperplate inscription that once his kingdom had faced defeat at the hands of the Gauḍas.

While a general reading of the Allahabad Pillar inscription makes it clear that Kāmarūpa was an allied State of the Guptas and not a part of their empire; ‘Samataṭa-Ḍāvāka-Kāmarūpa-Nepāla-Karttṛpurādi pratyanta nṛpatibhiḥ ..... sarvakaradānājñākaraṇa’

None of the available records say that Puṣyavarman was an adventurer and came to Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa to

26. The Dubi copperplate grant of Bhāskaravarman, v. 72
27. Sircar, D. C., Select Inscriptions, pp. 418 ff
capture its throne, nor Puṣyavarman has been referred to as an allied chief who had helped the Gupta army in invading Kamarupa.²⁸ Had this been the case, his successors would surely record this fact. It is reasonable to believe that Puṣyavarman was a native of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. In the records, he has been referred to as a scion of Naraka-Bhagadatta-Vajradatta’s family. They are the mythological kings invariably connected to this land. A fresh outsider after capturing the throne, would not have traced his origin from these Asura kings.

Next point to be discussed in this regard is the question of Puṣyavarman’s acquaintance with the art of statecraft, and to what extent the people of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa were politically conscious. ‘It was Puṣyavarman who after a long period of obscurity raised Kāmarūpa to an important position in the political history of ancient India.’²⁹ The assumption of the title mahārājādhirāja

²⁸. Barua, S. L., _ACHA, (SLB)_ p. 90
²⁹. Choudhury, P. C., _HCPA_, 147
indicates his independent status, but it is not known how far he was successful in the expansion of the kingdom; nor there is any evidence to prove whether he made any attempt at wielding the smaller States like Davāka into one unified kingdom. In the Allahabad pillar prāśasti, the king of Kāmarūpa has been described as a pratyanta nṛpatih. It is of great significance as the Guptas achieved a high degree of knowledge in statecraft. We may, therefore, well-presume that Puṣyavarman was a king in the fullest sense of the term. In other words, the people of this land were in the same level of political consciousness as the people of other monarchies of the time. Puṣyavarman retained his independence in the face of Gupta imperialism. This may be due to two factors. Firstly, the five frontier States of Kāmarūpa, Davāka, Samataṭa, Nepāla and Karttṛpura, being at the frontiers of the Indian subcontinent, Samudragupta was merely not interested in bringing these frontier States under direct Gupta administration. He was content in

30. ibid, p. 206
making the people of these States felt the prowess of the Guptas. The kingdom of Davāka, already identified with Dabaka in modern Nagaon district, was later on conquered and annexed to the kingdom of Kāmarūpa by one of Puṣyavarman’s successors. Samataṭa was south-east Bengal, presently in Bangladesh. While Nepāla was a Northern Himalayan kingdom, Kartṛpura was situated somewhere in the Himalayas. Secondly, these States were not that weak to ignite the passion of military conquest of them in the minds of the Guptas. The politico-economic base of these States, especially of Kāmarūpa and Nepāla evidently was quite strong and it may be easily ascertained that the people were fully conscious of their separate rather national identity.

In the seal attached to the Dubi plates, Puṣyavarman is called a mahārājādhirāja, who was the lord of Prāgjyotiṣa and “a descendent (tanaya) of Naraka and a scion of the family of Bhagadatta and Vajradatta.” In the Dubi grant, he is compared to Indra as a subduer of his enemies and as a ruler, and to Viṣṇu as the lord of Lakṣmī, that is, the royal
fortune. As mentioned earlier, we should accept the scribe of the grant as a person having a good sense of history. In this account, there is, of course, some exaggerations; but that is only a style of literary expression. We may well presume that Puṣyavarman was a powerful ruler, powerful enough to retain his independence and to obtain diplomatic recognition from the Gupta emperor, Samudragupta; he was able to maintain law and order in the kingdom which is a prerequisite to build up a strong economic base. It may be mentioned here that the history of the Varman dynasty is full of military activities as depicted in their own records. Barring a few, in most of the battles, the Varmans got the taste of victory. Without a strong economic base, this would not have been possible.

We have already shown that even though it is difficult to reconstruct the political history of the intervening period, economically the region was active. The Iron Age characterised by extensive wet-rice cultivation made headway in the land well before the Christian era. The total
dearth of material remains makes it impossible for us to know whether the use of iron was invented by the natives or it was exclusively brought by the people migrating here from North-Central-India. However, it can be well-guessed that with the waves of migration from North-Central India well indicated by the legend connected with Naraka, who is credited with the settlement of Aryan people in the country, the use of iron became extensive. Thus, like any other place, this economically-active land had experienced such ideas as surplus (extraction and distribution of surplus), labour process, private property and social differentiation etc. well before the rise of the Varmans in mid-4th century A.D. It is rightly observed that the 'Hinduisation formalised the social stratification and legitimised the royal supremacy in all cases, whether in early or medieval times in this region,'\(^3\)

Puṣyavarman emerged in the Gupta period. This is the period which very steadily began the process of feudalising

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\(^3\) Bhattacharjce, J. B., *SPFPNEI* p. 12
the State apparatus vis-a-vis the economy. We will see a little later that as an inherent part of the Indian sub-continent, the North-East India, too, had the same experience.

Puṣyavarmān let the process of Sanskritisation of the land to be continued unabated. Because, when he established a strong, typical Hindu kingdom in Prāgyotisā-Kāmarūpa, it naturally became easy for his successors and other kings of the later times to bring Brāhmaṇas and settle them in the country by issuing tax-free land grants. To note, barring a few, the discovered charters are land grants made to Brāhmaṇa donees by different kings of the region.

Puṣyavarmān’s successors proved to be quite capable rulers. Kāmarūpa’s independence was maintained throughout. It has been recorded in the Nidhanpur copperplate inscription of Bhāskaravarmān that there was no mātsyanyāya (anarchy) in his kingdom. The utterance of this very term indicates that the process of Sanskritisation was going on and the Kāmarūpa State was well acquainted
with Hindu statecraft. The careers of the Varman kings from Balavarman-I to Bhāskaravarman revolved round the policy of expansion and consolidation like all other ancient dynasties of India and they also adopted the same tactics like establishing diplomatic relationships with other States through matrimony, making fresh conquests, performing aśvamedha yajñas, making land grants to Brāhmaṇas in conquered areas to commemorate victory, and making allies against common enemy etc. as prevalent in contemporary India. Bhāskaravarman followed the Maṇḍala-theory of inter-State relationship to deal with Šaśāṅka of Gauḍa.

The Sālastambhas, and after them the Pālas, followed the same devices which had been introduced by the Varmans in ruling the State of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. There is controversy among the historians regarding the background of Sālastambha. But the important point here is that a different family had succeeded the Varmans to rule the land. Nothing definite can be said about Sālastambha's whereabouts. He may be Devavarman, as suggested by P.
C. Choudhury, or some powerful, ambitious person who came forward to utilise the situation created by the death of Bhāskaravarman who died a bachelor. It seems that there was some immediate successor of Bhāskara but he had proved to be incompetent in controlling Bhāskara’s vast kingdom and also to quell the tide of revolt initiated by the Mech people (generally taken to be non-Aryan people) under the leadership of their chief. This person seems to be Sālastambha himself of the record. It would sound reasonable if we say that Sālastambha and his tribe taking advantage of the prevailing political instability caused by Bhāskara’s death usurped the throne of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa.

In administering the kingdom, Sālastambha followed the same pattern as laid down by the Varmans. The last Sālastambha king was Tyāgasiṁha. After him a new dynasty of rulers came to occupy the throne of Prāgjyotisa-

33. *ibid*, p. 209
Kāmarūpa. This new royal house came to be known as the Pāla dynasty founded by Brahmapāla. The Sālastambhas ruled from the middle of the 7th cen. A.D. to the last part of the 10th cen. A.D. to be followed by the Pālas from about the beginning of the 10th cen. A.D. to the early years of 13th cen. A.D. Tyāgasimha’s death and Brahmapāla’s accession to the throne (c. A.D. 900) is an important landmark in the history of ancient Assam. Because, the State power got transferred from one royal house to another in a peaceful manner at the initiative of the nobles who had been serving the State under the Sālastambhas with popular support. This event certainly shows the advanced degree of knowledge of statecraft and political consciousness of the people of the country.

All these dynasties claimed their divine origin from Naraka, the son of Lord Viṣṇu and Mother Earth. The legitimation was done by the Brāhmaṇas of the royal courts. The kings belonging to these dynasties patronised

34. The Bargāon copperplate grant of Ratnapāla (v 10, c. A.D. 1035)
settlement of Brāhmaṇas in the land. They were given tax-free land grants. Construction of small or big temples and temple complexes on royal patronage was a common feature.\(^\text{35}\) However, barring the donees who enjoyed tax-free grants, otherwise the taxation system seems to be a regular and a strict one. Besides land revenue (which was the main source of State income), several other fines and taxes, tenant’s taxes, duties due to different causes and grazing of animals (elephants, horses, cows, camels, buffaloes, goats and sheep) and fines for fastening of elephants and boats etc. were levied on the common people. Apart from the independent peasant-cultivators, tenants and the donees, other persons connected with the countryside were the visayakaraṇas, vyavahārikas, rājās, rājānis (queens), rāṇakas, rājanyakas, rājaputras and rājavallabhas. The first two were

\(^{35}\) The Mahāgauri-Kāmeśvara temple complex of Tezpur copperplates grant of Vanamālāvarmaṇadeva; the Madan-Kamdev temple complex situated at a hillock near Baihata Chariali of Kamrup district, etc. The v-21 from the Gachtal copperplate grant of Gopālavarman (c. A.D. 1080) is worth quoting here: “By constructing a series of clearly white-washed temples of Sambhu (i.e., siva temples) he rendered the globe of the world, as it were, to be full of Kailāśa mountains” (IAA. p. 215) The king referred to is Indrapāla of the Pāla dynasty.
undoubtedly the State officials connected with the district administration. The others appear to be members of the royal family, and other nobles. These were the persons, who owned land in the countryside and got their plots of land cultivated through tenants. As the kings of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa were generally designated as *mahārājādhirāja* (king of kings), the *rājasa* were presumably petty chiefs, or small kings, so frequently mentioned in all epigraphs as “enemies” of the donor king. Besides, there were the *sāmantas* and *mahāsamantas*[^36] i.e., feudal lords. In case of Assam, these feudal lords were chiefs of numerous tribes inhabiting the region, as we will try to prove in the next discussion.

[^36]: *Sāmanta* Silākuṭṭakavaleya, Tezpur Rock inscription of Harjjaravarman (c. 829 A.D.)  
*Mahāsāmanta* Divākaraprabha, Nidhanpur grant of Bhāskaravarman  
*Mahāsāmanta* Śrī-Sucitta, Tezpur Rock inscription of Harjjaravarman (c. 829 A.D.)
(II) GROWTH OF FEUDALISM IN ANCIENT ASSAM

Two very pertinent questions arise as to whether the socio-political condition of ancient Assam was feudal or not, and if it was how feudalism developed.

Although D. D. Kosambi and R. S. Sharma's idea of Indian feudalism has not been accepted by all and questioned on several grounds, one thing is certain and universally accepted that European feudalism, politically points to the organization of the whole administrative structure centering round land and economically focuses on the ‘institute of servitude’. It is indeed very difficult to define precisely the term feudalism, the most striking feature of the Middle Ages in Europe. The English, ‘feudalism’ and French noun ‘feudalite’ initially concerned itself with the fief which was a form of landed property. In
his. *Letters Historiques Sur les parlemens* (1727), Comte de Boulainvillers for the first time used the term 'feudalism' in the sense of a state of society. For the growth of a feudal society certain psychological and mental factors vis-a-vis material factors are required. These factors are prerequisites for its central administration and defense, such as a mentality able to grasp the notion of the State, an adequate fiscal system or a sufficient net of road communications.¹ The origin of European feudalism is generally traced back to the early Carolingian period of the Frankish kingdom in the 8th century A.D.; when the granting of fiefs on the one hand and the establishment of personal vassalistic bonds on the other, were linked together. This linking finally established the feudo-vassalistic system thus giving birth to feudalism.²

Leaving the European scene, in India, the Marxist historians such as D. D. Kosambi, R. S. Sharma and B. N. S. Yadava are of the opinion that although it was different

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¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* vol. 9. p. 218
² *ibid*
from the European one, feudalism did exist in early medieval India starting from the end of the Gupta age when Indian villages became nearly self-contained owing mainly to the decline of trade and urban life.\(^3\) Both R. S. Sharma and D. D. Kosambi think that total authority over administration and the fiscal matters gradually decreased with the rise of a class of powerful men as it came in between the king and the peasantry.\(^4\) Kosambi has found two lines of operation—feudalism from above (centering round the subordinate chiefs) and feudalism from below (centering round some powerful land owners).\(^5\) R. S. Sharma has found that “Land grants” made to the Brāhmaṇas, temples and monasteries (evidence is available as early as first century B.C.) paved the way for the rise of a feudal class within the village.\(^6\) Because, what (fiscal and administrative rights) was abandoned step by step to the priestly class was later given to the warrior class. This

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3. JPS., Vol. VIII, No-3, 284
4. Jha, D. N., 'Early Indian Feudalism : A Historiographical Critique.' Presidential Address, IHC., xi. session, 1979, p. 2-6
5. ibid
6. ibid, Sharma, R.S., IF., p. 1-62
practice gained momentum with the emergence of local and self-sufficient economies marked by lack of commercial intercourse, decline of urban life and paucity of coins. Of course like in Europe, in India, too, it has been argued that rise of landed intermediaries was accompanied by restrictions on peasant mobility and freedom, increasing obligation to perform forced labour (vīṣṭī), mounting tax burdens and lastly sub-infeudation.7

In the criticism that followed the above mentioned view, it has been however, observed that the decline of India's foreign trade, which was also due to certain external factors and not internal, was not basically responsible for the growth of feudalism in ancient India.8 To counter this view, the 'Social Crisis' theory has been put forward covering the 3rd-4th century A.D. It is held that this social crisis eventually weakened the traditional four-fold order (varṇas) of the society, making it difficult

7. Jha, D. N., Presidential Address, IHC. xi. session, 1979, p.5
8. ibid, p.6
for the royal authority to extract surplus from the producing class directly through its agents. Thus, the new practice of assigning land revenues directly to priests, military chiefs, administrators etc. for their support began. Interestingly enough, the practice of making land grants to the Brāhmaṇas began in the peripheral areas where the Brāhmaṇical order till then was not strong enough to generate a crisis in the society. This can be explained in the light of the fact that there had already been considerable pressure on land in the wholly Brāhmaṇised areas, compelling the practice to begin in peripheral areas, and thus helped in the amalgamation of the tribal population of India with the Aryan Vedic society.

However, historians like D. C. Sircar and B. D. Chatterjee, opposing the theory of rise of feudalism and decline of trade, have raised doubts regarding the extent of the decline of trade and urbanization during the concerned

9. *ibid*, p.7
10. *ibid* p.8
Again Harbans Mukhia in his article named 'Was there Feudalism in Indian History?', rejects the concept of Indian feudalism. He says that such a complex social structure as the feudal social system can not be established through administrative and legal procedures as it has been propounded by its protagonists. But in this connection, we are to remember one thing that Mukhia’s contention of total rejection of the idea of Indian feudalism goes against the universal laws of social change underneath the peculiarities of individual cultures. Social organization (caste system), and a rigorous system of land revenue, helped the administrative authority in establishing ‘feudal’social set up in ancient India; of course, in the sense of Indian feudalism. Unlike in Europe, in India, the peasantry’s ‘dependence’ does not attribute an extraneous control over the peasant’s process of production. Forced labour in India was a casual manifestation of the ruling authority rather than a part of the process of production. Indian agrarian

12. *ibid*, p. 288
history has been characterised predominantly by a free peasantry in economic, rather in the legal sense. D. N. Jha seems to have rightly observed that 'the challenge to the premises on which the model of early Indian feudalism is based has often comes from such quarters as seem to be reluctant to recognize the elements of change in Indian society. Thus unconsciously accepting the imperialist historiographical cliche of the changeless East'. We appreciate a changeable East, a changeable India through the ages. Change with time is an universal phenomenon. In a self-sufficient economy, the practice of land grants which also underwent a number of changes in its pattern did give birth to a class of landed intermediaries all over the subcontinent. The State in India seems to have mainly concerned itself in collecting revenue from land and as long as the peasant paid his revenue to the State or its assignees, his control over the production process remained intact. Here, however, we must take note of Mukhia's

13. ibid, pp. 289-92
14. Jha, D. N., Presidential Address, IHC: xi. session, 1979, p. 8
certain observations like low subsistence level of the Indian peasantry (due to climatic conditions, the caste system and a rigorous system of land revenue), wastage as well as scarcity of labour leading to enserfement of the peasantry and a restricted peasant mobility, all of which were quite common in feudal Europe. Limited peasant mobility was, however, due to the absence of a developed labour or a land market in the period concerned. Thus, a restricted peasant mobility was of economic, rather than of a legal character.  

Regarding the issue of socio-economic condition of ancient Assam, one thing may be said with some degree of certainty that in Assam, a peripheral land, gradually the Brähmanical order became quite strong so as to produce the same elements that had shaped the socio-political and economic system in other parts of the Indian subcontinent, leading eventually to the development of the ancient Assamese society on the same line.

15. JPS., Vol. VIII, No-3, 291
A general look at the present Assamese society does speak a volume about the historical trend that has had led to its growth. Sanskritisation (Aryanisation) which began in the ancient period itself had created a strong social bond to bind the multi-racial, multilingual and multi-cultural people of Assam together. Tradition gives Naraka the credit of beginning the process of Sanskritisation of the land.

As any other peripheral State, the practice of granting tax-free land to Brāhmaṇas mainly and to other religious institutions, also began in Assam as early as 6th century A.D. if not earlier. (The Dubi grant of Kumāra Bhāskaravarman, 7th century A.D. was a renewal of an earlier charter granted by Bhūtivarman in the 6th century A.D.). Barring a few, all the epigraphs are land grants mostly donated to the Brāhmaṇas. Some of these Brāhmaṇas were immigrants while others appear to be indigenous ones, whose forefathers had migrated to Assam in the past definitely in search of a good livelihood. Here we must always remember one thing that from Naraka’s
time down to the rule of the great Tai-Ahoms, Assam had been an independent state. Assam or Prāgyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa acknowledged Gupta emperor Samudragupta’s suzerainty in the 4th century A.D. After that, Prāgyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, had encountered several invasions from Guptas and other conquerors from North-Central India at different times, but never lost its political identity and entity. The inscriptions say that the three main ruling dynasties, viz., the Varmans, the Sālastambhas and the Pālas, enjoyed the services of numerous vassal kings in their heydays. The existence of subordinate kings or chiefs had created a convenient atmosphere for the growth of Kosambi’s ‘feudalism from above’. The subordinate or feudatory kings appear to be called mahāsāmantas in the epigraphs, as for example, mahāsāmanta Śrī- Sucitta of the Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjjaravarman. The Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva and the recently discovered inscription and a seal of king Vasudharavarman (belonging to 400 A.D.) found at Dubarani in Golaghat district of Upper Assam, may be
taken into account in this regard. The former is a land grant donated to an alms house. In the latter, one king named Vasudharavarman created a permanent endowment. Thus, it may be said that besides the Varmans, Śālastambhas and the Pālas, other petty kings, rather chiefs also used to donate lands and other properties to Brāhmaṇas.

Here, we must take note of one fact that in this part of India, where a great many tribes used to live, each tribe maintaining its autonomy under a chief, the caste system was never as rigid as in other parts of India. The ‘twice born’ (dvija) people, viz., the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas never adopted a very stern attitude towards the other people, the Śūdras. Here, too, the Kṣatriyas were primarily ruling families of the various local tribes. Under the circumstances, the land-holding Brāhmaṇas, inspite of enjoying several authoritative rights within the donated area, must not have posed a serious threat to the ruling authority. It seems that the powerful chiefs of the numerous Mongoloid tribes who possessed both land and armed
power were in a position to alter an existing political situation. Thus, this situation was akin to Kosambi's 'feudalism from below'. But these chiefs were not simply some powerful men who within the village possessed arms and collected revenue. In most cases, they had represented the whole tribe they belonged to. However, we may well imagine that there were really some persons, rather leaders who possessed arms within certain villages. These chiefs are naturally called sāmantas in the inscriptions. This may be the possible reason why not a single service grant has been discovered so far in the area. But, at the same time, we also cannot totally deny the existence of the practice of making service grants by the kings of Prāgjyotisha-Kāmarūpa. These sāmantas and mahāsāmantas, at different times posed serious threat to the ruling dynasty. That is why, the inscriptions say time and again that the kings belonging to all the three main political dynasties involved themselves in waging numerous battles against the hostile 'enemies', most probably the tribal chiefs. Interestingly, all
the three ruling dynasties seem to have descended from such tribal chiefs. (This issue has been discussed in detail in the succeeding chapters). Fortunately enough, the founders of the three royal houses, viz., Puṣyavarman of the Varman royal family, Śālastambha of the Śālastambhas and Brahmapāla of the Pālas appeared on the political scene not as diturding elements, but as saviours of the country. Each of them at different times put an end to the anarchical situation created by the absence of a suitable ruler on the throne. Of them, it was Puṣyavarman who most probably after Naraka (paucity of data to link the intervening period), integrated the country under one sovereign rule. Next, Śālastambha, brought stability in the country created by the absence of any strong natural heir to the throne after Bhāskaravarman’s death. Likewise, when Tyāgasimha, the last ruler of the Śālastambha dynasty died issueless, the subjects, denoting mainly the ministers and courtiers, selected Brahmapāla as their king after Tyāgasimha.
The Brāhmaṇas, who by and large performed religious rituals (sacrifices etc.) for the royalty, on their part, contributed tremendously in spreading Aryan culture in the north-eastern part of India, besides, imparting great influence upon their respective sovereigns. Again, the rulers, by the practice of making land grants to the Brahmaṇas maintained their authority over the subjects, if not wholly, partially. It was somewhat like a deliberate attempt on the part of the early Prāgjyotiśa-Kāmarūpa monarchs right from Naraka, to bring Brāhmaṇas from North-Central India and settle in the country. Several factors prompted the Prāgjyotiśa-Kāmarūpa monarchs to issue land grants to them along with a number of administrative and economic privileges, such as,–

(i) to legitimize their position,

(ii) to become a part of the great Vedic (Indian) culture and civilization,

(iii) to build a niche for themselves in the political arena of India,
(iv) to attain the elements of divinity (by claiming decent from mythological & divine figures) with the help of these Brähmanaśas,

(v) to let the system of economic (agricultural) production continue without any hindrance as the epigraphs show, the donated lands mostly consisted of settled villages with cultivable fields to produce rice (kṣetra),

(vi) lastly, the general decline on trade in northern India, and the resulting paucity of coins was also a factor that compelled the rulers to stick to this policy.

In the beginning of the Christian era, early Prāgyotisā-Kāmarūpa enjoyed a part of the most flourishing and profitable Roman trade. (For details, see infra, Chapter-VII). The discovery of Rouletted pottery belonging to the 1st century A.D. proves her close trading connection with the Roman world. Besides, being a great center of silk manufacturing industry and home of several useful flora,
this land situated at the pivotal point of three main ancient trade routes.

But after the downfall of the Roman trade,* the situation changed. This definitely helped in the growth of a close peasant-agricultural economy in the region. Anyway, a solid foundation of a Sanskritised State had thus been set up. That was the reason why the land could retain its basic socio-economic and cultural identity in the period when a new kingdom grew up on the ruins of the old one under the authority of the great Tai-Ahoms (13th century and afterwards), even when the head-quarter was in Upper or Eastern Assam and not in Guwhati (sic. Prāgjyotiṣapura). As a matter of fact, the Tai-Ahoms adopted the same tactic as the early ruling dynasties of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa by patronizing Hinduism and the Brāhmaṇas in the establishment of their kingdom on a sound footing. Again, as in the case of the whole Indian sub-continent, Assam also possessed several hundreds of self-contained villages from the ancient times down to the beginning of modern

*See Appendix - 2
age under the British when the communication gap between the villages and the towns first started receding. Some Ahom monarchs like Rudra Singha, Śiva Singha, Rājeśvar Singha and Pramatta Singha, during the heydays of the Ahom monarchy, paid considerable attention in establishing towns. However, their attempts were largely to make the political centres effective and to beautify them. The cities were, of course, the hub of political activities, but not of economic activities on a larger scale. About the city life or urbanization in ancient Assam, some investigative studies is necessary here. The following are some of the cities of the early period mentioned in the epigraphs.

(i) Prāgjyotiṣapura, (ii) Haḍappesvaraṇa/Haṭappesvaraṇa/ Haḍapyaṇaka, (iii) Durjaya, (iv) Kāmarūpanagara and (v) Kīrttipura. All these were administrative headquarters. The most ancient and the most talked about name in this respect is Prāgjyotiṣapura. Prāgjyotiṣapura as the capital city of Naraka and his Bhauma successors has been mentioned in the 5th verse of
the Uttarbarbil and the Nowgong copper plate grants of Balavarman III: "That (King Naraka), who surpassed (even) Kāma (i.e., the cupid) in beauty (or who had already conquered the Kāmarūpa) used to live in a city named Prāgjyotiṣa in (the kingdom named) Kāmarūpa....." (IAA, p. 133); in the 5th verse of both the grants of Ratnapāla: "He (i.e., Naraka) resides in the best of the city, Prāgjyotiṣa...." (IAA., p. 161); the 8th verse of the Gachtal copper plate grant of Gopālavarmān states thus: "He had a capital city named Prāgjyotiṣa, which could vie with the city of the gods whose high ramparts were touched by the waves of the eastern sea........" (IAA, p. 214); and the 2nd verse of the first two copper plate grants of Dharmapāla, viz., the Khanāmukh and the Šubhākarapāṭaka, states thus: "A king named Naraka was the son of the god (Viṣṇu) who .......ruled over his kingdom for a long time from the city of Prāgjyotiṣa" (IAA, p. 230). The same thing is echoed in the Kalikāpurāṇa (38. 123f).

Prāgjyotiṣa as the capital city of Puṣyavarmān has been mentioned in the seal attached to the Dubi copperplate...
grant of Bhāskara (line 2): “The great king of kings Śrī Puṣyavarman, the lord of Prāgjyotiṣa, a grandson of the illustrious Naraka......” (IAA, pp.33) The 49th verse of the Dubi copperplate grant refers to Sthitavarman, also called Sthiravarman, of building and residing in a city on bank of ‘the holy river’ (i.e., Brahmaputra) along with his friends, servants and followers. D. C. Sircar\textsuperscript{16} views the said city as a newly built city of the old name, while P. C. Chowdhury\textsuperscript{17} and M. M. Sharma\textsuperscript{18} take it to be an extension of the old city, the old city of the time of Naraka being located in and around the Narakasur hill. Actually, this is not a matter of much concern. Even if Sthitavarman built a new city on the bank of the Brahmaputra and shifted the royal palace and some other important administrative departments, the close proximity of the two places, in fact, helped the urbanisation of the whole area which is identical with modern Guwahati proper. It was, indeed a big city in

\textsuperscript{16} TCHA., p.106
\textsuperscript{17} HCPA., p.170
\textsuperscript{18} IAA., pp. 30-31
the ancient time. But the fact of the matter here is that it was essentially an administrative centre. Hence, an administrative urban centre to what extent influenced the contemporary economy is uncertain. More than that, even a general study of the social history of ancient India makes it clear that the contemporary economy of the country was basically a rural economy, the masses mostly living in the villages doing agricultural activities.¹⁹

Prāgyotisā-Kāmarūpa flourished on the fertile valley of the great river, Brahmaputra, while the surrounding mountains and numerous rivulets helped in irrigating the cultivated land. The land also enjoyed a large amount of rainfall. All these factors immensely helped in the production of agricultural products. At the same time, they also facilitated in carrying out trading activities. References in different grants to the use of water ways and to the fleet of boats waiting on the river Brahmaputra (Tezpur Rock inscription of the Sālastambha king Harjjarvarman,

¹⁹. Desai, A.R. Social Background of Indian Nationalism, pp. 7-29
Parbatīyā copperplates of Vanamālāvarmādeva, (IAA, pp. 85, 123-24) remind us of the fact that maritime trade was carried from these cities. Hiuen Tsang gives testimony to the fact that there were trade routes between Prāgyoṭiṣa-Kāmarūpa and China,\textsuperscript{20} and the cities usually stood on the maritime routes.\textsuperscript{21} In fact the North-East India has its geographical position situated between two great civilised nations i.e., India and China. Scholars have already shown several mountainous passages from this part to Upper Burma and thence to China.\textsuperscript{22} One route between Pāṭaliputra of Magadha and North Burma went through Assam. The discovery of the Kaolin pottery (Chinese clay) in the Ambari excavation site at Guwahati belonging to 7th to 13th century A.D. tempts experts like T. C. Sharma to postulate on the existence of regular trade route from China to India through the Brahmaputra valley.\textsuperscript{23} According to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[20] Life., Intr. (XXVI)
\item[21] Watters., II, pp. 185-186
\item[22] Lahiri, N., PA, p.150
\end{footnotes}
him, the same clay was used for making pottery vessels and terracotta art objects in China, and besides this Chinese Celadon ware is also revealed in the site. But more such physical remains will be needed to arrive at the details of such routes. Hence, the issue is still hanging at the present state of our knowledge. Under these circumstances, it is reasonable to conclude that urbanization did not cover the total land, or the masses had remained basically out of urban impact. Ancient Assam had essentially a rural agricultural base. The neighbouring tribes, except few ones like the Idu Mishmis of Lower Dibang valley and the Akas of Kameng district of Arunachal Presesh, have remained totally out of Sanskrit culture. Till the last century, ethnographic studies say that the tribes, out of fear of loosing their identity, themselves followed the policy of self-isolation. Rough terrain, torrential rain and bad communication system debarred the plains people from establishing too close and cordial relation with the tribes.

24. ibid
living in the mountains. Moreover, the great monarchs of ancient Assam like Bhāskaravarman, Śrī-Harṣadeva, Vanamālavarmadeva, Ratnapāla etc. carried their victorious arms into the west, as the west simply offered the key to political glory and greatness. After the Pālas, a period of anarchy and confusion set in in ancient Prājyotisha-Kāmrūpa. We find a remarkable king in Vaidyadeva. But he was too busy in administering his State and dealing with the troublesome vassals. But one thing is certain that some trade activities were going on through the open mountain passages. The items were most probably luxury items meant for the upper strata of the society, the royalty and the nobles who lived in the cities and the land or the feudal lords who lived in the countryside. This may be offered as the reason behind the absence of a town developing purely as a trade centre.

Regarding the issue of towns which come into prominence as centres of pilgrimage, only Haḍappeśvara. situated at the modern town of Tezpur on the northern bank
of the Brahmaputra was one such urban centre. This city, called Haḍappesvara, the abode of lord Śiva (Hara) was built by king Harjjaravarman. Besides, the Mahābhairava temple of Bāṇa’s time, the Mahāgaurī-Kāmcsvara temple described as a famous temple in the Tezpur and Parbatīyā copperplates of Vanamālavaran, successor of Harjjaravarman was also situated in this city. However, it was a capital city. Thus, the glamour rested mainly on its being the State headquarter. Again, as mentioned earlier, it seems that king Sthitavarman either built a new city on the bank of the Brahmaputra or extended the existing capital city, Prāgiyotisapura upto the bank of the Brahmaputra. It is possible that with the rise of the temple of goddess Kāmākhyā atop the Nilācala hill on the bank of the Brahmaputra, the place around it developed as a urban centre and Sthitavarman extended the royal headquarters to the bank of the Brahmaputra. From the new palace, it became also convenient for the king and other royal devotees to pay their homage to the Goddess. In the
process by enjoying royal patronage the glory and fame of the shrine rose to a tremendous height and Prāgjyotiṣapura became synonymous with the famous Kāmarūpa Śaktipīṭha. The name Haḍapyaka occurs in line 26 of the Corātbārī grant of Pāla king, Ratnapāla; again in the same grant, the same city occurs as Haḍappēśvara. This means that Haḍapyaka was identical with Haḍappēśvara. Most probably, the Pāla kings used Haḍappēśvara as their second seat of government, with Durjayā being their state capital.

Besides some general descriptions of the above mentioned cities or *puras* or *nagaras*, we do not find any reference that can throw much light on the part played by the *puras* on the economy of the country. Even in all India context, the *puras* or the *nagaras* played an important role only in ancient Indian political life. But while the *puras* played comparatively an important role in politics, the *janapada* and *vana* (the forest region) were more important from the economic point of view, particularly in an age

25. Majumdar, R.C., *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, pp. 102-106
when the use of machinery was hardly developed as at the present time. Pliny says that Alexander subdued nearly 5000 towns in his conquest of Northern India. It seems that Pliny included the temporary military settlements (skandhāvaras) also in his statement. In case of Assam only Karṇaṣuvarṇa (which, however, was already a nagara or a city) was a skandhāvāra of Bhāskaravāman. Other urban centres, as we have seen above, were permanent seats of government. It has been conjectured by some historians that as the river Brahmaputra stood as a maritime durga in the west and in the other directions, as also the hill and mountain ranges stood as natural barriers to the kingdom of Prāgyotīśa-Kāmarūpa, no need was felt by its kings to establish a purely military settlement like Pāṭaligāma of king Ajātaśatru, which in course of time grew up to be the city of Pāṭaliputra. The Arya-Dravidian, and not the pure Dravidian culture developed the process of urbanization in

27. Majumdar, R.C., The Classical Account of India, p. 340
28. Chattopadhyaya, S., opcit p. 246
ancient Assam, - the *grāmas* (village), gradually turned out to be *nagaras*. Ancient literary works like the *Arthaśāstra*, the *Harṣacarita* and the *Si-yu-ki* mention a number of luxury items produced in Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa. No doubt, these were certainly the products ancient Assam exported to other parts of India and also exchanged with foreign traders through the Bhutan-Tibet and the Burma-Yunan routes. It appears, this high flying trade contributed a lot in filling the coffers of the State, but there is nothing solid by which we can prove that Ancient Assam’s economy was an urban economy. The small number of towns (which were again capital towns) in ancient Assam verify this statement. Moreover, the vast areas of cultivable as well as forest land described in the various epigraphs clearly point to the fact that ancient Assam had a rural economy.

Now, the question arises as to how this rural economy shaped the administrative set up of ancient Assam. In other words, we are to see whether this rural economy feudalised

29. *ibid.*, 246
the administration or not, and if it was to what extent. In this study, we are primarily to depend on the land grants discovered so far. However, many a time we have to take the help of historical imagination and reasoning. As B. N. Puri puts it: ‘In a broad survey of history of any particular region its relations with the neighbouring states widens the scope of the historical imagination.’

The earliest of the land grants are the copperplates of Bhāskaravarman (1st quarter of the 7th century A.D.) which, however, were renewals of the charters earlier made to some Brāhmaṇas by the great-grand-father of Bhāskaravarman, Bhūtivarman. Bhūtivarman ruled in the 6th century A.D. Thus, the practice of making land grants to Brāhmaṇas was well existent in Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. Again this very contention leads us to believe that the beginning was obviously made much earlier than the issuing of the charter by Bhūtivarman.

30. Puri, B.N. ‘Studies in Early History and Administration in Assam;’ Banikanta Kakati Memorial Lecture-1967, Gauhati University; p.1
The Dubi copperplate grant presently consists of four plates,— all subject to much corruption, while the last two plates have been lost. Hence, we miss the concluding verses on the merit of bhūmidāna. The available plates supply only the names and gotras of some of the Brāhmaṇas. But the way Bhāskara's ancestors starting from Naraka- Bhagadatta-Vajradatta and their achievements have been glorified. cf.

(i) "........ Naraka by name, who was powerful enough even to torment the ambrosia-drinking gods and who was all powerful on earth being the king of kings." (v 2, IAA, p. 20).

(ii) "In that very family Śrī-Puṣyavarman, who was like Indra and was the destroyer of the enemy-soldiers, became the king after the retirement to the abode of Indra (i.e., after death) of the kings whose fame was similar to the (luster of the) moon." (v 6, IAA., p. 20)

(iii) "He had planted very high the banner of his victory, raised up by deliberate strikes in different directions after having acquired, with the darkness
dispelling rays of his intellect in the assemblies of the noble men..........” (v 74, IAA., p. 27).

it becomes quite clear that much importance was laid in the donation of land to these Brāhmaṇa donees. In fact, most of them held the title of Bhaṭṭa (a title of respect held by the Brāhmaṇas) and the foremost among them was a Bhaṭṭamahattara belonging to Kauśika gotra and a follower of the Vājasaneyī (carana of the Yajurveda),...

\[\text{‘kauśiko-vājasaneyī-bhaṭṭamahattaraḥ-priyāṅkaraghoṣavāmi,}\]
i.e., a leading Bhaṭṭa. It is needless to say that certain rights or privileges together with the land were granted to these respectable donees. In the very first line of the charter, it has been written like this: “‘Having saluted the God, who wears the moon as the crest jewel, who is lovely, who holds the \textit{pināka} bow and who is decorated with particles of ashes, I once again clarify the well-known words for the benefit of the prosperous Brāhmaṇas.” (1.1, IAA., p. 20).

Moreover, Bhāskara’s other charter, the Nidhanpur copperplate charter, also originally issued by Bhūtivarman, clearly describes the immunities to be
enjoyed by the donees in the manner of bhūmi-chidra, i.e., exemption from the payment of taxes indefinitely, and it was also declared in the grant that the land could never ever be confiscated. The granting of these two facilities may be taken to mean that some privileges had been granted to the donees of the Dubi grant, too. The withdrawal of these two fundamental coercive rights on the part of the monarch indicates that feudalism did exist in this part of India. It is very likely that the earlier grants did not abandon administrative rights, but slowly gave in to the system. The kingdom of Prāgjyotiśa-Kāmarūpa from the time of Puṣyavarman had been closely connected with the Gupta empire. Thus, the Varmans had already a ready-made setup to follow.

We have already mentioned the factors that had prompted the ancient Assam rulers to issue land grants particularly to the Brāhmaṇas. The practice of making land grants to Brāhmaṇas accompanied by coercive rights moulded the socio-economic and political system of the
country in its pattern. In the process was born its logical end, feudalism. Again, here we must not forget the ordinary functions of the Brāhmaṇas, such as being counsellor to the king, teacher to the royal disciples and others, performing religious duties (sacrifices, pūjās etc.) for the royalty and others etc. In this way, they came to exercise tremendous influence upon the government, the royalty and the society.

We have several land grant charters ascribed to the Sālāstambha period unearthed so far. Of these, the Tezpur Rock inscription is a public notice related to administration while the loss of two plates of the Hāyuṇthal inscription makes it inaccessible to ascertain the character of the charter. Others are land grants made to the Brāhmaṇas.

The Tezpur copperplates of Vanamālavarmadeva is the record of the grant of a village, named Abhisuravāṭaka with well demarcated boundaries to Indoka, a learned Brāhmaṇa “.... for the religious merit of his parents.” (v 32). The charter made the donated village revenue-ree for the learned Brāhmaṇa. Though the exact size or capacity of
production is not mentioned in the grant, but the manner in which the eight boundaries of the village are described, makes it clear that the plot was a fertile one containing both land and water.

“This village is on the western side of river Trisrota, contains both land and water, is demarcated by eight boundaries and is known as the Abhisuravāṭaka. Eastern boundary is common to that of Daśalāṅgala, southeastern boundary to that of Candrapuri, southern boundary to that of Avāri, south-western boundary to that of the Puṣkariṇī (i.e., the tank). Western boundary is common to that of Naukuvā, north-eastern boundary to that of Daśalāṅgala. These are the eight boundaries.”

(lines 24-27, IAA, p. 105).

The Prabatīyā plates of Vanamālavarmanadeva, however, is more clear in this respect:

(“from the city of Hadappesvara this document is being issued by) that paramācāra-paramabhaṭṭaraka- mahārājādhīrāja, the illustrious Vanamālavarmanadeva,... (lines 47-48, IAA, p. 124)
“By this grant, the village called Haposagrāma belonging to the Svalpamaṅgoka district of the Uttarakūla (i.e., the Northern Division) is rendered free from visits of policemen and the armymen and also from (the obligation to pay) the taxes payable by temporary tenants as far as its eight boundaries, .......

By this grant, Vanamālavarmadeva gave up two important coercive rights, viz., the right of sending policemen and armymen, and the right of collecting taxes from the village concerned. The abandonment of the right first mentioned is a new phenomenon regarding land management in ancient Assam. The grant was issued in the middle of the 9th century A.D. and by that time, however, grants of this type were common in all over India containing in it a potential element of feudalism.

The following verses are worth quoting in this connection:

"The king of commendable nature has been pleased to donate the village named Haposa to the Brāhmaṇa, who
was the eldest (of the four sons of one Jejjata, namely Cudāmaṇī, Deṭṭobhā, Garga, and Śambhu) with great care on an auspicious day (v 28, Parbatīyā Plate. IAA., p.124)

“(The gift has been made) for the increase of the merit and fame of his parents and also of himself and hence this (i.e., the act of donation) should be approved by all.” (lines 57-58, IAA, p. 124).

‘Whoever takes away the land given by himself or by others, rots with manes assuming the form of worms in viṣṭhā.’ (v 30, IAA, p. 124).

These verses clearly display the seriousness of Vanamālavarmadeva in issuing the charter. In other words, they display the unchangeable character of the land grant for all the time to come. That is, the king had abandoned two important tools of maintaining his authority over his subjects and the authority to administer the tract was handed over to the donee for good.

Balavaranm III’s both the Uttarabarbil and the Nowgong copper plate grants (last quarter of the 9th
century A.D.) are two very important land grants made to the Brāhmaṇas. In both the grants are stated very clearly, the purpose (for attaining religious merit for the king and his parents) of making the grants, and the various features of the plots of land donated.

The Uttarbarbil copperplate grant:

"...with due respect the king issues an order to all the citizens beginning with the brāhmaṇas, the scribes and the administrators duly present in the plot of land, capable of yielding 2000 units of paddy, sliced off from the Vappadeva-ṇaṣṭaka, belonging to the Vārāsepattana viṣaya, and also to the others like rājanaka, rājaputra and rājavallabha etc. associated with the rājā and rājāni and the rāṇaka, and also to all who will happen to be there in course of time as follows..........’ (II.36-40, IAA, p.135).

"Let it be known to you that this plot of land, consisting of homestead land, paddyfields, ponds and mounds, standing as it is up to the boundaries of its own is rendered free from all troubles on accounts of
the fastening of elephants, searching for thieves, inflicting of punishment, tenant’s taxes duties due to different causes and grazing of animals such as elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep, as recorded in this charter” (ll. 40-43, IAA, p. 135)

The Newgong copperplate grant:

“On the southern bank, in the district of Dijjinā, there is an area of land called Heṅsivā, having an yield of 4000 units of paddy. (the king) with due respect makes an appeal, gives to learn, and makes an order to citizens beginning with the Brāhmaṇas, the scribes and the administrators duly present in the land or at the vicinity of the land, and also to others who are associated with the rājā and the rājātī (queen) and the rāṇaka, and also to all who will happen to be there in course of time, (as follows) :

Let it be known to you that this plot of land consisting of homestead-land, paddy-fields, dry lands, ponds, grounds and mounds standing as it is up to its own
boundaries is (by virtue of this grant rendered) out of bounds to all the trouble makers like the ṛājīṇī (queen) the ṛājaputra, the ṛāṇaka, the favourite of the king, the old female guard of the harem, the collectors of the hastibandha-tax and the naukābandha-tax, the officer in charge of the recovery of stolen property, the policeman, the inflictor of punishment and the collector of the tenant’s taxes and duties and the (royal) umbrella bearer (ll. 33-38, IAA, p. 147).

Both these charters have given much emphasis on matters like family background, educational qualifications and personal merits of the donees. Both these charters have granted maximum freedom to the donees in the enjoyment of the land donated by declaring the lands to be exempted from each and every kind of coercive authority usually exerted by a monarch and others associated with the monarch.

The Pāla king Ratnapāla’s Bargāon copperplate grant (c 1035 A.D.) is exactly on the same line with the aforesaid two grants.
"With reference to the plot of land, capable of yielding two thousand units of paddy, situated in the field of Lāvukuṭi, comprising also of a plot of land sliced off (apakṛṣṭa) from the Mahādevapāṭaka, and belonging to the viṣaya named Trayodaśaṣṭiga of the north bank (of the river Brahmaputra), the king pays his compliments to the people of the countryside beginning with the brāhmaṇas, the viṣayakaraṇa, the vyavahārika and others like rājā, rājūi and rāṇaka and also others like the rājanyaka, rājaputra and rājavallabhas who are present now, and also to all those who will happen to be in future time in the respective positions, and makes this command. (II. 52-55, IAA., p. 165)

Be it known to you that this land, along with its homesteads, paddy-fields, dry lands, ponds, grazing ground, refuse lands, etc. lying as it is within its boundaries and freed from all troubles on account of the fastening of elephants, fastening of boats, searching for thieves, inflicting of punishment, tenant's taxes, duties
due to different causes and grazing of animals, such as elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep as recorded in this charter. (ll. 55-58, IAA, p. 165)

On the auspicious moment of the Viṣṇupadi-saṅkrānti in the twenty-fifth year of my reign, I donate (the aforesaid land) to him (to Vīradatta) for the fame of my parents and my own merit.” (v 20. IAA, p. 165)

The Suwālkuchi grant of Ratnapāla (c 1036 A.D.) declares:

“To this Brāhmaṇa, (Kāmadeva) I donate (a land capable of producing 3000 units of paddy and belonging to the Kalaṅgā- viṣaya in the 26th regnal year for the merit of my parents and of mine, and for gaining fame.”(v 20, IAA, p. 176)

This grant has the same anusāsanavākya as the Bargaon grant:

By the Gauhati grant, Indrapāla (c 1058 A.D.), successor of Ratnapāla, donated a well-demarcated land capable of
yielding 4000 units of paddy, located in Hapyma-viṣaya of the Northern side of the Brahmaputra to a Brāhmaṇa named Deśapāla. It contains the same anusāsanavākya of the charters issued by his predecessor.

Then by the Guwākuchi copperplate grant (c 1071 A.D), Indrapāla donated a well demarcated land to one Devadeva which was capable of yielding two thousand units of paddy; while describing the boundaries of the donated land, we have the expression: ‘mahāgaurī-kāmcśvarayos-satka-sāsana’ and ‘vasu-mādhavadeva-satka-sāsana’ (ll. 52 and 54, respectively; IAA., p. 199) which means ‘a free grant of land allotted in the name of a certain temple of a certain deity as a devottarabhūmi by the strength of a charter (sāsana) for the maintenance of the temples concered’. However due to dearth of materials we can- not discuss such cases in detail.

The Gachtal copperplate grant of Gopālavarmaṇa, son and successor of Indrapāla (c 1080 A.D) is another important land grant. With this grant king
Gopalavarmadeva donated a plot of land, capable of yielding 8000 units of paddy belonging to the area named Khārikoṇākoṇci of the Bāراسrojambu-viṣaya with all the other immunities generally noticed in the early Kāmarūpa land grants.

King Dharmapālā’s (c first half of the 12th century) all the three land grants, viz., the Khanāmukh, the Śubhāṅkarapāṭaka and Puṣpabhardā copperplate grants are on the same line, each having granted huge plots of land, (—the Khanāmukh, yielding 6000 units of paddy; the Śubhāṅkarapāṭaka, yielding 6000 units of paddy and Puṣpabhadā, yielding 10,000 units paddy) of these, by the Śubhāṅkarapāṭaka grant, the king also divided the plot between the two donee brothers (the area yielding 4000 units of paddy to the elder brother while the remaining area to the younger one—) with several immunities.

"Be it known to you that land along with its houses, paddy-fields, dry lands, wells, grazing grounds, refuse lands etc. lying as it is within its boundaries and freed
in respect of waters and lands etc. from all troubles on account of the fastening of elephants, the fastening of boats, the searching for thieves, the inflicting of punishment, the tenant’s taxes, the duties due to different causes and grazing of animals such as elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep as recorded in this charter.” (ll. 32-35, Khanāmukh copperplate grant, IAA, p. 232)

The last two land grants belonging to the ancient period are the Kamauli copperplate grant of Vaidyadeva (c 1142 A.D.) and the Assaṁ Plates of Vallabhadeva (c 1185 A.D.). While Vaidyadeva was a king of this region, there is no mention whether Vallabhadeva was a king of Prāgjyotisha-Kāmarūpa or not; nor there is mention of the seat of his government from where he had issued this charter. Both these charters have the same characteristics as in the other contemporary charters of this region. By the Kamauli copperplate grant, Vaidyadeva granted two villages called Śāntipāṭaka and Māndara situated in Badā-viṣaya of the
Pragjyotisa-bhukti in Kamarupa mandala to a Brahmana named Sridhara, 'for gaining heaven.' (v 28, IAA, p. 286).

"Let there be welfare to all.......Maharajadhiraja-Parameśvara-Paramanabhattraaka the illustrious Vaidyadeva remaining in a perfect state of health greets, informs and commands as they deserve in order of superiority and proximity the cultivators and other citizens beginning with the Caṭṭa, the Bhaṭṭa and the Visayillaka, belonging to the villages of Śānībaḍā and Mandara, possessed by Gaṅgādhara Bhaṭṭa and situated in the viṣaya of Bāḍā in the mandala of Kamarupa, in the bhukti of Pragjyotisa, (as follows).” (ll. 47-50, IAA, p. 286)

"Let it be known to you that these two villages, demarcated by their four boundaries, free from hindrances and entry of the constables and their leader, complete with their waters and dry lands, and according to the principle of bhūcchidra free from every type of tax, are given to Gugguli Śridhara-Śarmāṇ, along with 400 (inhabitant workmen) by us, in the fourth year (of
our reign) on the first day of Vaiśākha, by issuing this charter. Hence, be obedient to this.” (ll. 50-53, IAA, p. 286)

“This village called Ṣāntipāṭaka, joined to the village of Mandara, and belonging to the viṣaya of Baḍā’, along with its waters dry lands, whole forests, gardens and grazing lands (roads and cattle tracks), provided with all sources of income and free from all types of taxes and levies shall be enjoyed as long as the sun and the moon shall endure and the donees will have as much utility and fruit of the land as desired, as determined by the Bhūcchidra rule” (vv 29-30, IAA, p. 287).

“Whoever appropriates this land himself or causes somebody else to appropriate will see the destruction of his children and then will have to live in the hell for a full cycle. But the honourable man, who would protect it will prosper with sons and wealth, and then after enjoying the heaven will attain the adorable abode of Vishnū for ever.” (v 31, IAA, p. 287)

No doubt, this is a very important land charter. In all earlier Assam grants the monarchs had abandoned certain
administrative rights over the land donated, especially the 
right to collect land revenue as well as other taxes and 
various duties within the boundaries of the land. But this 
charter together with the abandonment of these rights, has 
also mentioned that ‘all sources of income’ had been 
surrendered to the donee. Again, only this charter has very 
clearly mentioned the handing over of the all 400 inhabitant 
workmen to the donee obviously to supply him with various 
types of menial services both at the field and the home.

Thus, Vaidyadeva had elevated formally this particular 
donee by the name of Śrīdhara to a much higher pedestal 
than any other earlier ruler did in the past.

By the Assam Plates, Vallabhadeva granted seven 
villages viz., Cāḍī, Devunikoñcī, Sajjāpigā, Vaṅgaka, 
Śaṁśrahikoñcikā, Doṣipāṭaka, Soñcipāṭaka along with the 
bushes and trees, villages, inhabitants, waters and dry 
lands, for the maintenance of a widely calibrated alms-
house constructed by him at the centre of the Hapyaca 
maṇḍala near the town of Kīrtipura, for the purpose of his
mother’s obtaining heaven for ever (vv 13-18, IAA, p. 298)

Again it is stated, ‘Outside this boundary,.....6 hamlets are given, and also Acaḷheḍikā Thaṭhi, Pāḍharu, Vāṭholā, Lohatadī and Rasāyaṇa these five assistants (are also given) along with their sons and wives (vv 21-22, IAA, p. 298).

A request has also been made to his progeny:
‘Whoever be the king in my family coming down from Bhāskara in an unbroken line of succession, to him, Śrī-Vallabha, with highly auspicious words, passionately says ‘please protect my fame’ (v 23, IAA, p. 298).

The following verses stated below display Vallabhadeva’s serious attitude in issuing the charter.

‘Whoever does something favourable, even for a moment and even within his heart, for this alms-house, which is as it were, both a march to the heaven and a march against the enemies woold in this life become the abode of all prosperity and would have all the enemies defeated, and then in other life would enjoy the coveted world of the gods” (V26). (IAA., p. 298).
Those, who are religious-minded by nature and pay attention solely to religious deeds, are likely to do something (for this alms-house). In this life they would enjoy wealth with children and grand children and in the life hereafter would obtain the various delights of heaven in large measures’ (V27). (IAA., p.299).

‘One who confiscates the land given by himself or by others, becomes worm of the fifth and rots with the manes’ (V28). (IAA., p.299).

The Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva by far the one and only land grant, discovered so far, issued for the maintenance of an alms-house. It has all the typical characteristics of a land charter. In addition, it clearly states the element of viṣṭī or forced labour so common in the grants belonging to other parts of India.

In this connection, it may be mentioned that even if no charter has been discovered regarding the granting of tax free lands for the maintenance of temples, as in other parts of India, especially south India, the two instances of the
Mahāgaurī-Kāmeśvara temple and the Vasumādhava temple being mentioned in the Guwākuchi grant of Indrapāla (c 1071 A.D), may be cited and we may conclude this by saying that the practice of giving of lands to temples, almshouse etc., for their maintenance was well in vogue in early Assam as it was in the medieval period.

The Nagājari-Khanikargāon Fragmentary stone inscription found in the Nagajari area of Golaghat district which had been accepted as belonging to the early part of the 5th century A.D. gives us an idea of bhūmidana. It has been stated that Brahmadatta, the village headman and one official by the name of Vaji were in some way or the other were connected with the donation of the land. This grant evidently proves the spreading of Aryan culture in Eastern Assam as early as 5th century A.D. Most probably, it was a case of bhūmidāna to some Brāhmaṇa donee or donees as it has the expression, ‘kīrttyartham,’ i.e., to attain fame, obviously, it was not a salary grant.

Thus, the practice of making land grants to Brāhmaṇa had really been a very effective method in imparting as
well as in spreading Aryan culture in the north eastern part of India. Besides this, the three early historical dynasties and other rulers maintained their authority, if not wholly, partially by this method.

The practice of issuing land charters which was originally done as a sign of gratefulness to the Brāhmaṇas for their contribution both in administering the country as well as in moulding the society in an Aryan, rather all India shape and again in maintaining order in the society, became a regular feature of the system of government. One thing must be noted here is that in all the inscriptions, it has been stated that lands were donated to Brāhmaṇas for attaining spiritual welfare for the king himself and for his parents.

The most common features of these land grants were that the king in all probability gifted land on behalf of himself as well as his progeny; that a grant made by a former authority or government was not binding on the successive ones; that the grants were made of both
cultivable and forest lands, that already settled villages with their homesteads, paddy-fields, dry lands, ponds, grazing grounds, refuse lands, etc. were also donated by the monarch to the donees. As we have seen the grants were generally accompanied by a number of privileges. All the grants right from the time of Bhūtivarman had exempted the donees from the payment of land revenue as well as all other taxes payable to the government. Then, the donated lands, in most cases, were freed from all troubles on account of the fastening of elephants, fastening of boats, searching for thieves, inflicting of punishment and also grazing of animals such as elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep. Thus, it seems that the donated lands were made free of governmental authority as far as possible. In other words, administration of these lands which, in many cases, included settled villages, was handed over to the donees. Although, the right of inflicting punishment to the offenders by the donees had not been specifically mentioned as in certain grants of central and
western India, the clear mention of these terms, prohibition of ‘inflicting of punishment’ to offenders within the boundaries of the donated land actually implies that offenders within its boundaries were tried by the donees. Thus, virtually, the donees were made de facto rulers of the donated lands. Then lands were always granted for ever, i.e., ‘as long as the existence of the sun and the moon’, which means ‘the permanent break up of the integrity of the state’. However, the ancient Assam land grants do not mention the surrender of the right of ownership over the mines and hidden treasures within the donated land by the monarch. But the various privileges granted were enough to feudalise the State apparatus. Several of the land grants discovered till now record that the land had been donated to several donees; in some cases, the monarch (donor) himself divided the land between the donee brothers. The Śubhaṅkarapāṭaka copperplate of Dharmapāla (1st half of

31. Sharma R.S., *JF*, p. 3
32. *ibid.*, p.3
the 12th century A.D.) is such a land grant. 'To his brother, Trilocana, the king himself has donated (a plot of) land sufficient to produce 2000 units of paddy out of land granted by this very charter.' (v 22, Śubhaṅkarapāṭaka grant, IAA, p. 248) Again, as the grants were made for an indefinite period, it is but natural that the successors of the original donees had the right of possessing the land. Hence, a process of sub-infeudation was also going on in the country.

The practice of making land grants to Brāhmaṇas went hand in hand with the process of Aryanisation of the land. Therefore, though there is enough reason to believe that the legendary Bhauma kings started the process of Aryanising the land, but due to the supposed political instability in Prāgjyotiṣa in the period between the end of their rule and the beginning of the rule of the Varmanas in the 4th century A.D., the Aryanising process got obstructed to some extent, since this process has had always been closely connected with the contemporary political condition of the
land concerned. This may as well be sighted as a possible reason for not covering the hilly tracts around the Brahmaputra valley, inhabited by various hill tribes under the pale of Aryanisation as they had never been under complete political control of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa.

On the basis of the titles of the posts prevalent in ancient India, historians say that certain officers such as the bhogika, bhogapatika, vişayapati etc., enjoyed land (bhoga = to enjoy) and its spoils. But in case of Assam, we have only the instance of vişayapati (district governor, Nidhanpur copperplate inscription of Bhaskaravarman.) But we have two more examples of such type of high officials of the state. These are vişayamālya (most probably a minister immediately below the rank of the king who could establish an ‘āśrama’ on behalf of the king. (Baḍgaṅgā Rock inscription of the time of Bhūtivarman; 6th century A.D) and vişayakaraṇa (most probably a top rank officer connected with the settlement of land, on whose presence, usually a land charter was issued by the king. (Bargaon
copperplates of Ratnapāla; Gauhati copperplates of Indrapāla). In addition to these two, we have other officials like the mahāsenādhyakṣa, (Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjjaravarman); mahāsainyapati (Commander-in-Chief), mahā-dvarādhipati (Chief of the gate-keepers), mahāpratihāra (Chief usherer), mahāmātya (Chief Counsellor), brāhmaṇādhibhāra (Officer-in-charge of the welfare of Brāhmaṇas, Hāyuṇṭhal copperplates of Harjjaravarman of the 9th century A.D.; vyavahārika (Bargāon copperplates of Ratnapāla) etc. These top-rank officials might have been granted land in lieu of salary in cash as was done in other parts of the country.

Moreover, it is very much possible that the chiefs of the various tribes or clans after coming under the political set-up of Prāgjyotiṣa, were imposed on the villages. This feudalised the administrative set-up. They are the sāmantas so often mentioned in the inscriptions. Sālastambha and Brahmapāla were two such powerful and ambitious sāmantas.
In the period of the Later Guptas in Bengal (5th/6th century A.D.), the local elites of different occupational groups organized themselves in territorial assemblies called *adhikaraṇas*, whose activities tended to divide communal proprietorship over land. The post-Gupta and the pre-Pāla period witnessed the decline of the power of the *adhikaraṇas* and the rise of the *sāmantas*.\(^{33}\) We don’t find the term *adhikaraṇa* in the ancient Assam epigraphs.

However, in the Tezpur Rock inscription of Harjjarvarman, the term *mahāsāmanta* has been mentioned which implies that there were also other ordinary *sāmantas*. This particular *mahāsāmanta* by the name of Śrī-Sucitta was also incidentally the *senādhyaṅkaśa*, i.e., the Commander-in-Chief of king Harjjara’s army. This proves two things: firstly, great feudatories like Śrī-Suitta were given high posts like the *senādhyaṅkaśa*, while secondly, this can also be said that high-profile military and

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administrative officers enjoyed land and possessed armies of their own. The existence of the term sāmanta in early Assam leads to the conclusion that the idea of private property was very much in vogue, and also very strong in ancient Assam. In Bengal, mahāmātya, mahākarttakritika, mahādanānāyaka and others were regarded as sāmantas who were involved in the transactions, i.e., the territory of one of these sāmantas was surrendered to the king for the royal donations. This process is called Sāmantaization, first coined by Herman Kulke. This process integrated the local and the regional rulers (sāmantas) with the royal court and the king, and under this process, the prefix mahā came to be used before the titles of the Sāmantas. As is mentioned earlier, the Tezpur Rock inscription of Harjyavarman mentions one mahāsāmanta by the name of Śrī-Sucitta. (A straight dispute was brought to the court on a day when the mahāsāmanta-Senādhyaṅa Śrī. Sucitta was acting as the judge in the vardhamāna-vijaya-rājya of Śrī-

34. ibid, p. 77
Harjjaravarman.) Then, mention may be made of Mahā-sainyapati (mahā-sainyapati Śrī Gana, 'who delights the whole world and who is like an ornament of the circle of the vassals'...... mahā-dvārādhipati (Chief of the gatekeepers), mahā-pratihāra, mahā-Amātya, brāhmanadhikāra stated in the Hayuṇṭhal copperplate inscription of Harjjaravarman.

In this connexion, mention may also be made of the rājās (subordinate kings), rājanakas, rājaputras, rājavallābhas, the rājāi (queen) and the rāṇakas (the Uttarbabil copperplates of Balavarman III, last quarter of the 9th century A.D.; the Bargāon copperplates of Ratnapāla, c 1035 A.D.; the Gauhatī copperplate grant of Indrapāla, c 1058 A.D.; the Gachtal copperplate grant of Gopālavarmāṇa, c 1080 A.D.; the Khaṇāmukh copperplates of Dharmāpāla, 1st half of the 12th century A.D.).

These persons were generally addressed while granting a plot of land to a donee by a king. They were asked not to interfere in the affairs of the donated land. This means
that these persons had some administrative rights to exercise and possessed large estates of their own.

Again, we must notice one thing that all the epigraphs in one or other connection, have mentioned about the vassals of the kings of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa from the time of Puṣyavarman himself. There should be no doubt that the three dynasties of ancient Assam by maintaining the lord-vassal system integrated the land to a great extent. As a matter of fact, the kings of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa after establishing hegemony over the whole land could think of expanding their frontier towards the west at the cost of the other contemporary Indian kingdoms. But as this system depended more on the person of the king, so whenever there has been a weak monarch on the throne, the integrity of the kingdom dwindled. With the passing of time, the traditional area of the kingdom decreased, rather dwindled. After the downfall of the Pālas, the whole kingdom got divided into a large number of small independent territories each under a king or a chief. Although, Vaidyadeva, the
victorious general from Bengal, who later asserted himself as the independent king of Kāmarūpa, for some time established a strong central authority in Kāmarūpa proper, but immediately after his death, there was no central authority over the whole Brahmaputra valley until the establishment of Ahom rule in the 15th century.

It seems quite relevant here to say a few words about the Bhuyāns who ruled practically the whole of middle and eastern parts of Assam in the 13th and the 14th centuries. In the western part, there was the Kamatāpur kingdom under the Khens. The Bhuyāns did not establish a united state by organizing themselves into one group under one leader. But it seems that each Bhuyān chief was powerful and became united when confronted with some common enemy. For if not so, outsiders would have easily ousted them or crush them completely. There are two kinds of Bhuyāns. Padmanath Gohain Barua, Nakul Ch. Bhuyan and Sarbananda Rajkumar—all maintain that inspite of its meaning as ‘jamindar’ in other parts of India, in Assam,
those persons who established coercive authority over others by sheer use of their prowess for a long time came to be known as ‘Bhūyāns’ in the early years of the medieval period. Thus, it is well evident that this development could take place because by that time the ancient kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmrūpa had been a matter of bygone days. These so called Bhūyāns possessed wealth as well as man power since they were essentially associated with land. It is said that the actual Bārabhūyāns belonged to the family of the unnamed powerful minister-general of king Jitari. His immediate successors also enjoyed the post on the basis of heredity. Later, one of his successors (great grand son), Samudra who was the minister of king Arimatta, established his own rule after Arimatta’s death which gave birth to a period of political unrest in his kingdom situated in middle Assam. Samudra’s great grandsons were the Bārabhūyāns who extended their jurisdiction upto Lakhimpur in Eastern Assam.

35. Nakul Chandra Bhuyan Rasanavali (Assamese), p.4
The other Bhūyāns were originally brought from Gauḍa and settled in Kamata by king Durlabhanārayaṇa in 1295 A.D. following a treaty made with king Dharmanārayaṇa of Gauḍa. They were given the task of collecting revenue and for their services rendered, were awarded land. In course of time, these landed magnets began to rule independently, taking advantage of the prevailing political instability in west Kāmarūpa.

The Bhūyāns were powerful. But neither the Bārabhūyāns nor the other Bhūyāns had ever tried to establish a united state. The Barabhūyan territory was divided into a number of small divisions. Initially, two to four villages were under one Bhūyān. But gradually with the growth of the Bārabhūyan family, the early division got sub-divided into a number of small divisions. 36

36. *ibid*, p.500
the process of developing a united state in Assam in the early medieval period. The issue of the rise of Barabhuyans and other Bhuyans can be connected with Kosambi’s ‘feudalism from above.’

On the whole, these developments, i.e., ‘feudalism from above’ and ‘feudalism from below’, and the practice of donating tax-free land grants to Brāhmaṇas, together helped tremendously in the direction of spreading Aryan culture in the region. But, as we have seen, the existence of numerous indigenous petty chiefs who basically formed the back-bone of ancient Kāmarupa’s feudal world gave a special tinge to the issue.