CHAPTER-VI

EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF PRÄGJYOTṢA-KĀMARŪPA

Pre-Christian Era : within India :

The Legendary Bhaumas (Naraka, Bhagadatta and Vajradatta)

As we have seen already, the kingdom of Prägjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa was established by Naraka. His connection with both the ages of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata has made it real difficult to establish Naraka as a historical figure belonging either to the Rāmāyaṇa age or the Mahābhārata age, and more than that he took birth from Viṣṇu in His Boar incarnation. But we cannot place Naraka as a fictional character altogether. About Naraka’s historicity, we have already discussed in a previous chapter. As is already shown, we have tried to make up a historical figure out of the legends. Because, these legends bore physical traces, though not a whole bunch of it. The same is the case with
Bhagadatta, his son. Unlike Naraka, Bhagadatta invariably, belongs to the age of the *Mahābhārata* and his story has a continuity. Bhagadatta was a king of Prāgjyotiṣa and his father was Naraka, and thus Naraka too belonged to the *Mahābhārata* age. Naraka’s linkage with king Janaka appears to be a myth. Naraka was a man from eastern Bihar of obscure origin. And just to make an impression in his adopted land, he devised the story of his divine birth from Lord Viṣṇu in His Boar incarnation and mother Earth, and that he was brought up by king Janaka of Mithilā. Janaka was also the adopted father of Sītā who had an unusual birth, without natural parents. Thus, this is not surprising at all that Naraka who had an obscure origin found it easier to circulate the story of his adoption by king Janaka. These stories might have also developed at a later stage. Again, it is also possible that there was an earlier Naraka in the age of the *Rāmāyana* and in course of time the stories of the two Narakas got mixed up. However, Naraka’s friendship with king Bāṇa, an out and out *asura* king of Śoṇitapura, modern Tezpur of
central Assam, strongly points to Naraka’s period as belonging to the age the Mahābhārata. Noticeably from the death of Naraka onwards, there is a continuity of events in the legends of the different legendary kings belonging to this land.

In chapter II Sec-A, we have asserted that Naraka was an Aryanised person from the Bihar region. It is said that Gautama, the priest of Janaka, performed the Keśavapāṇa ceremony of Naraka according to Vedic rites (Kālikāpurāṇa, 36. 40). This invariably indicates that Naraka came to settle in Prāgjyotiṣa with permission of Janaka or, in that case, the king of his parental land so that he could spread Āryadharmma in the region. The Naraka legend says that after becoming king, for some time, Naraka ruled justly but at a later stage he started ruling arrogantly under the influence of king Bāṇa, and even dared to marry goddess Kāmākhya. At last, Lord Kṛṣṇa came from Dwārakā, killed Naraka and placed his son Bhagadatta on the throne. Thus, external relations of Prāgjyotiṣa under Naraka simply falls under the Dvāpara or the Mahābhārata age. It seems that Naraka, when
he ruled justly, settled twice-born or *dvija* people in Prāgjyotisha. This obviously indicates that he maintained good relations or somewhat subjugated relation with his foster land. But after sometime, he seems to have tried to throw off the allegiance towards Northern India together with king Bāna of Śoṅitapura. After establishing the kingdom, Naraka primarily paid his attention to the strengthening of the same. As his infant state needed external support to deal with the local people who had been under a number of chieftains, he seems to have maintained good relation with his foster land. On the other hand, he started an amalgamation process by encouraging free mixing of the immigrant people with the local people. For this he made *asura* Hayagrīva his Commander-in-Chief, and another *asura*, named Muḍu or Muḍa, was appointed in charge of defence. The *Kālikāpurāṇa* (chapter 36-40) and the *Harivamsa* (chapter 63-64) state that Naraka married a princess of Vidarbha, named Māyā. If we take this kingdom of Vidarbha as identical with that of princess Rukmiṇī, daughter of Bhīṣmaka, then we
must say that Naraka had used this matrimonial alliance to have a sound footing in the region. Then, he became a great ally of Bāṇa of Śoṇitapura. Thus, after strengthening his kingdom on all sides, he made up his mind to shake off North India’s supposed control on him. At this development, Śrī-Śriṇa, who was on a mission of eradicating bad elements in the society,—these elements being the non-Aryan but powerful kings of India,—also, killed Naraka and placed his son Bhagadatta on the throne. Thus, a rebellious Prāgjyotiṣa under Naraka was brought under control. Obviously, this suppression of Prāgjyotiṣa had its impact upon Śoṇitapura. Bhagadatta was a friend of Indra, the king of the gods and Pāṇḍu, the Kuru prince of powerful Haṣṭināpura and the father of the Paṇca Pāṇḍavas (Mahābhārata). Tradition makes him the father-in-law of Duryodhana as the latter is said to have married Bhānumātī (Bhagadatta’s daughter). Although the Mahābhārata is silent about this marriage, a tank (Dighalī-pukhuri) in the present Guwahati city which is supposed to be the scene of Bhānumati’s swayambara, fervently points to this
marriage. Anyway, due to this family relationship or otherwise, Bhagadatta joined the Kurukṣetra war on the side of the Kauravas even though he was an admirer of Yudhiṣṭhira. The way he has been praised in the great epic for his valour and wisdom he displayed in the war, it is clear that he certainly was a remarkable king of India in that period. The event of Bhagadatta’s presenting Yudhishthira with a number of gifts on the occasion of the latter’s rājasūya-yajña shows that Pragjyotisa was an allied State of Indrapraṣṭha. Thus, one thing which is clear by now is that unlike his father, Naraka, Bhagadaṭṭa made his kingdom a part of the elite club of powerful kingdoms of the subcontinent. Contrary to Naraka’s attempt of coming out of North India’s political hegemony, Bhagadatta made a safe place within it. Hastināpura was the hub of all political activities of the time. Hence, it appears that Bhagadatta always maintained a good rapport with Hastināpura. He had personal friendship with Pāṇḍu (during Pāṇḍu’s rule); at the time of Yudhiṣṭhira’s rājasūya-yajña, he offered his allegiance to Yudhiṣṭhira, and
when the Kurukṣetra war took place, he joined it on the side of the king of Haṣṭināpura, Duryadhana, and died in the battle-field as a hero. Bhagadaṭṭa is said to have kept soldiers of various races like he Cīnas, Kīrātas and others who used to dwell along the sea-coast (sāgaramupāvāsin), and gave one akṣauhiṇī of these soldiers to Duryodhana. Bhagadatta himself is said to have dwelled on the Eastern Sea (pūrvasāgaropāvāsin) as well as in the mountains (śailālaya).

Obviously, Bhagadatta extended the Southern and North-eastern boundaries of Naraka’s kingdom which was between the rivers Karatoyā and Lalitakāntā. It may be held that Bhagadatta extended his control over the foot-hill areas of the Himalayas on the north and north-eastern side as well as the other hill ranges of Assam. Similarly, southern frontier, too, must have touched the Bay of Bengal. These things have been elaborately discussed in Chapter-II, Sec-A. This extension of frontiers and inclusion of local people in the army on the one hand, and keeping up of close diplomatic relationship with

1. Barua, S.L., *ACHA (SLB)*, p. 83
mid-India, especially Hastināpura, on the other, also indicate the fact that Bhagadatta patronised Sanskritisation of his kingdom. Politically, even though he accepted Hastināpura’s hegemony, at the same time, he also built a niche for himself in all India politics. To note, all the ancient kings of Assam cherished this dream in their respective careers; of course, only a few became successful in that. If it is said that Yudhiṣṭhira tried to bring political unity of the country by performing rājasūya (in his first tenure as a ruler) and aśvamedha (in his second tenure after the Great War) sacrifices, Bhagadatta, a king of a border state situated in the eastern-most frontier, duly contributed his lot in accomplishing the elephantine task. This should not be out of place to mention here that during ajñāta-vāsa, Bhīma and Arjuna said to have come in disguise to the North-eastern region and married local princesses—Bhīma married Hiṣimbā while Arjuna married Manipuri Princess Chitrāṅgadā and Nāga Princess, Ulupī.

However, after Bhagadatta, his successor, Vajradatta defied Haṣṭinā-pura’s leadership, when Yudhiṣṭhira wished to
perform *aśvamedha* sacrifice. A battle ensued between him and Arjuna who was guarding the sacred horse and the latter defeated the former (*Mahābhārata*).

In the Digvijaya section of the Sabhā-parva of the great epic, *Arjuna* defeated Bhagadatta, king of Prāgjyotisā in the course of his conquests in the north. Perhaps Arjuna defeated Bhagadatta who had an army of the Cīnas, Kirātas, and the people of the ‘sea-coast’ with him, somewhere in the foot-hill areas of the Himalayas. The second Pāṇḍava, Bhīma, too, arrived in the Lauhitya and defeated the Mleccha rulers and people of the ‘sea-coast’ in the course of his conquests in the east. This means that Bhagadatta initially did not appreciate the imperial designs of the Pāṇḍavas. And again, when Yudhiṣṭhīra was dethroned and put into exile together with his four brothers, Bhagadatta became ally of Duryodhana and remained faithful to this alliance. It is also obvious that as he was killed by Arjuna in the Kurukṣetra war, his son and successor Vajradatta came to hate the Pāṇḍavas and went against them at the time of Yudhiṣṭhīra’s *aśvamedha* sacrifice.
Thus, the most ancient Assam witnessed several political upheavals. Naraka, just to prevent Northern India’s unwanted penetration, stopped patronising Aryanisation itself. Bhagadatta, on the other hand, patronised Aryanisation throughout his career. In Naraka’s time, Hastināpura was not a great power. But when Bhagadatta found it too powerful to defy; as a shrewd politician, he recognised its power. But, at the same time, he built a safe place for himself among the remarkable kings of the sub-continent.

Vidarbhā of Bhīṣmaka

We have already discussed the historicity of this king in an earlier chapter (Chapter-II Sec-A). Here, it is suffice to say that Rukmīṇī’s father, king Bhīṣmaka and especially her brother Rukmadvīra, wanted a close alliance with a powerful king like Śiśupāla of Northern India. Incidentally, Śiśupāla, who belonged to a non-Aryan family, was an intense opposer of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa. Bhīṣmaka, who also seems to be an Aryanised non-Aryan king, naturally wanted a matrimonial alliance with Śiśupāla. Geographical position of king Bhīṣmaka’s kingdom,
too, indicates its non-Aryan nature. Most probably, as the local legends go, modern Sadiya in eastern-most part of Assam, adjacent to the hills of present Arunachal Pradesh, was the ancient kingdom of Vidarbha. Then, all the other kingdoms of traditional history of Assam were also termed as non-Aryan kingdoms. The Chutiyas (a Mongoloid tribe), who had their kingdom in modern Sadiya region in the medieval times, noticeably claimed their descent from Bhīṣmaṅka. Anyway, it may be held that by marrying Rukmini, Śrī-Kṛṣṇa showed a good way to bring about unity between the Aryans and the non-Aryans. He also got a chance to establish Aryan supremacy over the non-Aryan kings by defeating Śiśūpāla and other kings and also Rukmini’s brother Rukmavīra.

Śonitapura of Bāṇa

The episode of Uṣā-Aniruddha’s affair and their eventual marriage presents another story of violent resistance on the part of the non-Aryan kings of north-eastern region against North India’s, rather Aryan aggression and ultimate failure of the former. Noticeably, this type of resistance of the non-
Aryan kings against the Aryans was very common in that age, which is so remote from us. We are very unfortunate that the remoteness of this very important period of our history has till now debarred us from giving exact picture of this age, every information being based in inadequate data. At any rate, this marriage must have opened a way of close cultural connection between 'extreme West' and 'extreme North-East' of India. This observation is also based on a tradition current in Gujarat that Prāgjyotīṣa princess Uṣā brought there some dance form from her parental land, and among these dances, which developed in Gujarat, is the famous Garba dance.²

After this period, even traditions are silent about this ancient land of Prāgjyotīṣa-Kāmarūpa. The problem of reconstruction of history of this period is already discussed in an earlier chapter [Chapter-II, Sec-B(I)] and we have come to the hypothetical conclusion that the most ancient kingdom of Prāgjyotīṣa got divided into a number of smaller kingdoms or

².'Assam and India', Aspects of the Heritage of Assam., 22nd session, Indian History Congress, Guwahati, 1959, p.4
chiefdoms, each ruled by a tribal chief. The latter seems to be a great possibility in this case. No accounts, either Indian or foreign, refer to the kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa or any kingdom of this area, but they have references to the land and its people. Details are given in the earlier chapter. On the other hand, except the Mauryas, other powerful dynasties ruling during this period (pre-Mauryan and post-Mauryan ages) in Northern India, such as the Naṇḍas of Magadha, the Gracko-Roman rulers of North-Western India, the Huṇas etc. could never build an empire as large as that of the Maurays and it appears that Prāgjyotiṣa was outside the pale of Mauryan suzerainty. Nevertheless, the river Brahmaputra or Lauhitya seems to have been referred to in the Nikāyas (Dīgha, 1, 224, Sārīyutta, iv, 117) as Lohicca with regard to Brāhmaṇas belonging to this area. Again, the Arthśāstra mentions the economic products (various kinds of silk) produced in the ‘Lauhitya’ (land).³ The Brhat-saṁhitā also has a reference to Prāgjyotiṣa and the Lauhitya,⁴ the base being

³. Arthśāstra, II, XI.
the geography of *Parāśara-Tantra* of the first century A.D.\(^5\)

All these references noticeably indicate that some sort of relationship, if it was not political, certainly economic and cultural, existed between ancient Northern India and early Assam.

**Relations between Prāgyotisa-Kāmarūpa and the Outer World**

An attempt has been made to link ancient Assam with a reference given by Greek writers like Hecataeus and Herodotus as early as 4th century B.C.\(^6\) Hecataeus of Miletus mentions a tribe named *Kakatiai* along with some other Indian tribes like *Indoi, Opiai*\(^7\) etc. Although, it is difficult to identify any tribe or caste or a place from these names, P. C. Choudhury endeavours to identify *Kakatiai* with the Kalitas of Assam.\(^8\) This observation is given weight by another reference made by Herodatus. Herodotus mentions *Kalatiai* along with *Gandarioi* and *Padaioi*.\(^9\) *Kalatiai* might have been

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6. Chaudhury, P.C., *HCPA*, p. 18
9. *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian.*, P. 6 (f.n.), cited in *HCPA*, p.18; (henceforth *Megasthenes and Arrian*)
identical with Hecataeus' *Kakatiai*, and henceforth with the Kalitas.\(^\text{10}\) But in our view, such type of observations need more concrete and adequate data for support.

However, identification of Strabo's *Oidanes* and Curtius' *Dyardanes* with the river Brahmaputra seems to be justifiable.\(^\text{11}\) Strabo, while referring to Prasioi (Magadha) and Palibothra (Pātaliputra), mentions that the river *Oidanes* falls into the Sea after being united with the river Ganges.\(^\text{12}\) In the same manner, Curtius describes *Dyardanes* as a river flowing through the remotest part of India. Both Megathenes and Strabo refer to a people called *Derdai* who were known for their expertise in working of gold, and who lived in the eastern side of India.\(^\text{13}\) P. C. Choudhury has taken these people to be some hill people of Assam.\(^\text{14}\) It is also possible that 'Derdais' were some plains people who have got assigned to this job of working in gold according to the *Varṇāśrama-

\[\text{10. Chaudhury, P.C., } HCPA, \text{ p.18}\]
\[\text{11. ibid, p.19}\]
\[\text{12. Mc Crindle., } \text{opcit, p.51}\]
\[\text{13. ibid., p.77 (fn.3)}\]
\[\text{14. HCPA, p.19}\]
Because, it appears that even in the absence of a strong kingdom, the process of Aryanisation or Sanskritisation was going on continuously in the region. Similarly, Pliny's people having 'unusual features' of the frontier and the trans-Himalayan regions definitely were the Mongoloid people of the Tibeto-Burman family.\(^\text{15}\) (Pliny's *Natural History*, VI). Together with these people, mention is also made of some tribes who inhabited in a spur called *Imaus* of the *Exodus*, which is identified with the great Himalaya.\(^\text{16}\) One tribe living there is called *Chisiotosagi* or *Chiriotosagi* identified with the Kirātas in the accounts of Arrian.\(^\text{17}\) On the other hand, the *Exodus* is identified with the Himalayas, and *Imaus* with some hill ranges of Assam.\(^\text{18}\) In the same manner, Pliny's *Mandai* peoples living on the Mount Maleus lying beyond Palibothra in the east has been identified with the Garos of the Garo hills as in Garo language, man in

\(^{15}\) *ibid*  
\(^{16}\) *Megasthenes and Arrian*, p.182, cited in *HCPA*, p.19  
\(^{17}\) *ibid*, P. 173  
\(^{18}\) Chaudhury, P.C., *HCPA.*, p.19
called *mande*. Pliny also mentions a number of people such as *Colubae, Orxulae, Abali* etc. who inhabited the tract lying beyond the Ganges. This may refer to some of the numerous tribes (which is a speciality of Assam’s demography since ancient past) of the North-eastern region.

On the other side, Chang Kien, a Chinese envoy in Central Asia in the 2nd century B.C., has said about the sale of ‘bamboo and cotton stuff from the south-western provinces of China’ in Bactria which were brought from India by caravans. Chang Kien’s information has led Bagchi to put focus on the Assam-Burma route for the first time. The details about this route is to be discussed in chapter on the economic conditions of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa (Chapter VII). The discussion rendered here has led us to conclude that an ever thriving trade was going on between the eastern (China and India) world and the western, particularly Roman world before the birth of the Christ which saw its heydays certainly

19. *ibid*
20. Begchi, P.C., *India and China, A thousand years of cultural relations.*, p.6
21. *ibid, p.7*
in first century A.D.\textsuperscript{22} The rouletted ware found at the Ambari excavation site belonging to the 1st century A.D. provides itself as a strong evidence in this regard.

Now, if we combine the Classical and the Chinese data, the following conclusion automatically follows from it, that the people living in the Brahmaputra valley and the surrounding hills did have trade relations with the outside world and other parts of India. It is very much possible as mentioned above, that in the absence of a strong kingdom in Prāgijyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, numerous tribes of this region lived independently under their respective chiefs.

However, as we have shown earlier, the process of Sanskritisation was going on unabated with waves of Aryans pouring on in the land. Mention of economic products in the \textit{Arthaśāstra} also definitely points to the fact that this eastern land maintained if not political, then trade relations with North-central India. The \textit{Arthaśāstra} does not mention the two

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Glimpses of Ambari Excavation}, a publication of the Assam State Museum. pp. 8-12
ancient names of the land, i.e., Prāgjyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa, it
refers only to the Lauthitya. According to commentator
Bhaṭṭasvāmin, the terms taurūpa, joṅgaka, pārasamudraka,
grāmeruka, sauvarṇakudya or kuṇḍya, pūrṇavipa, antaravīya
pāralauhityaka and were associated with Kāmarūpa. But
then, we should also notice here one point, that continuous
Aryanisation as well as maintenance of trade relations,
although not compulsorily, but demands the existence of a
strong kingdom to motivate them. Under the circumstances, it
is possible that there was a lost kingdom in Prāgjyotiṣa-
Kāmarūpa in the manner of Naraka’s kingdom in the past as
well as Pusyavarman’s kingdom in the future.

External Relations of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa Under the
Varmans, the Sālastambhas and the Pālas:

The reign of Puṣyavarman appears to be the dawn of the
first era of the proper history of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa
authenticated by actual evidence.

23. Cited in IA A., Intr. p.0.4
In Chapter III, Sec-A details have been studied regarding Puṣyavarman’s origin, his emergence in the political scene of ancient Assam and his activities revealed so far from available sources. In that Chapter, we have shown that the Kāmarūpa mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar *praśasti* of Samudragupta was under Puṣyavarman. This is the one and only contemporary record about Puṣyavarman’s time. It goes as follows: *Samataṭa-Ḍavāka-Kamarūpa-Nepāla-Karttīpurāḍī pratyanta ṅṛpatibbih...*. This line has direct bearing on the relations between Puṣyavarman (350-375 A.D.) and the Gupta emperor Samudragupta. The dates of the Varman kings have been rearranged by us in Chapter III, Sec-A. The reference to an actual confrontation between Samudragupta and the Kāmarūpa king is nowhere to be found. Besides this, after considering several other reasons, we have come to the conclusion that Puṣyavarman was not a feudatory chief, but an independent ruler who owed allegiance to Samudragupta, the most magnificent personality of his time. In this connection, we have also shown that Aryanisation or
Sanskritisation penetrated Eastern Assam as early as the 5th century A.D. as evident from the existence of Gupta influence in the script and style of writing of the Nagājari-Khanikargāon stone inscription found at Golaghat district of Upper Assam. The gateway at Dah-Paratiya in modern Tezpur town is a strong evidence of this development with regard to central Assam. This development obviously leads anyone to believe that lower Assam or Prāgjyotiṣa, the gateway to Upper Assam from the western direction, must have been more Aryanised, more under Gupta influence.

Close political connections definitely created a favourable atmosphere for cultural penetration in the whole Brahmaputra valley. Puṣyavarman, after establishing his dynasty in Prāgjyotiṣa adopted a friendly attitude in some sort of a subordinate position towards the imperial Guptas. It helped immensely in consolidating the infant State. For the Guptas, the friendly pratyanta or the ‘frontier states’ such as Samataṭa, Ṣavāka, Kāmarūpa, Nepāla, Kartrṛpura etc. (these States paid regular tribute to the Gupta emperor but had
enjoyed independent status) acted as good buffers against the other big powers across the border.

On the other hand, the naming of Puṣyavarman's son and successor and daughter-in-law as Samudravarman and Dattadevi, respectively, points to nothing else but acceptance of Gupta suzerainty. In the earlier chapter, we have held that it was either Puṣyavarman who named his son and daughter-in-law after his overlord Samudragupta and his consort or Samudravarman and his queen themselves adopted these names after the death of Samudragupta in his admiration. Hence, it can be concluded that Puṣyavarman owed allegiance to Samudragupta and same was the condition during the time of Samudravarman. A detailed discussion is also given on Puṣyavarman's adopting the title of mahārājādhirāja (king of kings). We have come to the conclusion that Puṣyavarman had established sway over the other small principalities ruled by tribal lords or chiefs, and adopted this title.

Adopting or retaining (if the naming was done by Puṣyavarman) the names of emperor Samudragupta and his
consort Dattadevi on the part of Samudravarman and his queen, simply indicates that during his reign too, Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa maintained the same relationship with the Guptas as at the time of Puṣyavarman. The adoption of the title of mahārājadhirāja by Samudravarman means that like his father, he also enjoyed political control over the other existing States and accepted the Gupta emperor as his overlord. We have taken the years between 375 A.D. and 400 A.D. as his reign period. Now he got emperor Chandragupta II as his contemporary. Chandragupta II has been taken to rule between 380 A.D. or shortly before it and 413 A.D. ‘He not only successfully maintained the vast empire that his father had left but also added to it by conquests of his own.’

In his series of conquests, he successfully confronted with the Śaka Satraps of Western India, a confederacy of hostile chiefs of Vaṅga and the Vahlikas across the Sindhu, most probably in Bactria or Balkh. All these were very important conquests, it seems that Bengal which was divided into several

principalities, each under a petty chief, made an unified attempt to shake off the Gupta yoke imposed by his predecessor, making it necessary for Chandragupta II to take his victorious arms to Bengal. Most probably, Chandragupta’s Bengal campaign established direct Gupta administration in Bengal. Now, conquest of Kāmarūpa did not occur in these fruitful campaigns. It appears that the fate of Bengal had debarred Samudravarman to raise arms against the Guptas, rather Chandragupta II throughout his reign. So, Samudravarman maintained the same relationship of a pratyanta king who paid regular tributes to the Gupta emperor. One thing is clear from his aggressive campaigns, that Chandragupta II was not a man who would bear silently any fringe on Gupta suzerainty spread all over India.

The epigraphic records show that Samudravarman’s successor Balavarman I began the tradition of performing sacrifices. Balavarman I ruled between 400 A.D. and 425 A.D. That is, he was contemporaneous to both Chandragupta II and Kumāragupta who had a long reign of over forty years
from 413 A.D., the year of the former’s death. In the earlier chapter, we have negated the theory that it was Balavarman I who conquered Davāka, another recognised Gupta pratyanta State taken to have situated towards the south-eastern boundary of Prāgjyotīsa, in the Kapili valley. The reason behind this theory is the beginning of the tradition of performing sacrifices from the reign of Balavarman I.²⁵ It is quite certain that Balavarman, too, like his two predecessors had control over other principalities and chiefdoms of the land and like his overlord, the Gupta emperor, Balavarman started performing sacrifices. To the time of Balavarman, the Varmans got much acquainted with the Gupta culture and ideologies. Again, the impact of Gupta culture appears to be all pervading in this eastern land as early as 5th century A.D. All this was possible obviously due to close friendly diplomatic relationship with the Guptas, and not a strained relationship with them.

²⁵ Barua, S.L., ACHA (SLB), p.93
We have also shown in the preceding chapter, that the principality of Davāka was conquered by king Mahendravarman and not by Balavarman I. Mahendravarman was the sixth ruler of the Varman dynasty and he has been taken to reign between 475 A.D. and 500 A.D. However, we must also take into account the fact that performing of sacrifices by Balavarman I for the first time is the indicator of something very important, never experienced before. As mentioned before, v 15 of the Dubi grant announces that because of his prowess, Balavarman got the name, 'bala' meaning strength or power. Both his two predecessors had established their control over others. Balavarman, in that case, seems to have not only successfully maintained that control but also increased the number of such dependencies. It is quite possible that he subdued the king of Davāka, an important kingdom of the area and made him a tributary king. He must have had done this in the period between 413 A.D. (the year of Chandragupta II’s death) and 425 A.D. (the year of his death). Because, unlike Chandragupta II’s reign, his
successor Kumāragupta’s rule is generally held creditable for establishing a good administration in the country. Thus, even though he did not make any victorious campaign, he maintained the integrity of the empire which is evident from his performing of an ‘āsvamedha’ sacrifice.²⁶ Now, it can be concluded that Balavarman, realising Kumāragupta’s somewhat passive attitude, displayed his power by subduing the king of Davāka, and at the same time, he also did not endanger his State by openly thwarting Gupta allegiance. Thus, Kumāragupta did not launch any military venture into Kāmarūpa. In the earlier Chapter, we have tried to put forward the view that it was the king of Davāka himself who had sent a mission to the Chinese emperor in the year 428 A.D. after his supposed defeat at the hands of Balavarman I, most probably to check the growing power of the latter. Now, this also seems to be very simple to believe that seeing Kumāragupta’s lukewarm attitude, the king of Kapilī valley or Davāka, turned to the Chinese emperor for support. This

²⁶. Majumdar, R.C., _AI.,_ p.237
was indeed a great military as well as diplomatic victory for Balavarman I. Here, a question arises as to why the king of Kapilī valley sent the mission after the death of Balavarman I. Well, we must commit here that the year 425 A.D., in that case the chronological calendar of the Varman kings, is only a makeshift in the whole discussion about the period of the Varman dynasty. There might have been some differences in the ruling periods assigned to each Varman king. It is also quite likely that the power of Balavarman I so long had prevented the subdued king of Kapilī valley from entering into an alliance with any power.

Besides, the Guptas, Balavarman I established diplomatic relationship with another contemporary independent kingdom of India, which was Kāśmīra. He gave his daughter in marriage to the king of Kāśmīra, named Meghavāhana to cement the diplomatic alliance. It is possible, now, to understand that the aforesaid incidents (with the Guptas) had necessitated such an alliance. The unusually eventful reign of Balavarman I may be taken to point the fact that by the time
of his death, Prāgjyotīṣa-Kāmarūpa virtually came out of Gupta control.

Balavarman's next two successors, Kalyāṇavarman (425-450 A.D.) and Gaṇapativarman (450-475 A.D.), more or less enjoyed peaceful reigns. The troubles created by the Puṣyamitras, a Huṇa tribe in the Gupta empire towards the end of Kumāragupta's reign as well as the war of succession waged between the crown prince Skandagupta and prince Purugupta, the son of the chief queen, at the death of Kumāragupta gradually had made the Guptas less attentive towards a distant Prāgjyotīṣa-Kāmarūpa. Due to this change in the attitude of the Guptas towards Prāgjyotīṣa-Kāmarūpa, China, too, lost any political interest in ancient Assam.

Even though Skanda-gupta was a valiant son of the imperial Guptas, he was too busy with the Huṇas, originally from Central Asia. Skandagupta ruled from 455 A.D. to 467 A.D. Again, the prolonged Huṇa war took a great toll in the economy of the Gupta empire. This is simply evident from his gold coins which are very few in number, lack variety in
types and also show depreciation in the quality of gold. This point may be taken to indicate that Skandagupta did not have time and also inclination to check an increasingly powerful Prāgjyotīṣa-Kāmarūpa. The uncertainty of the history of the Guptas immediately after the death of Skandagupta has motivated historians to believe that certain internal trouble had broken out in the Gupta empire, most probably with regard to the question of succession to the throne.  

This seems to have been a major cause which prompted the feudal chiefs to revolt against the emperor first around 500 A.D., in the reign of Buddhagupta. Most importantly, the governors of neighbouring North Bengal at the time used to address themselves as uparika-mahārāja whereas, earlier, in the times of Kumaragupta. I, they called themselves simply uparika.

So, under the circumstances, the contemporary Varman ruler, king Mahendravarman took fullest advantage of the situation. Mahendravarman ruled from 475 A.D. to 500 A.D.

27. ibid, p.240
28. ibid, p.241
This king who had performed two *āsvamedha* sacrifices (vv-22, 24, Dubi grant, *IAA*, p.22; V-12, Nidhanpur grant, *IAA*, p.51), first adopted the policy of expansion towards the west, obviously to involve this frontier State actively in all India politics. (This point is discussed in details in Chapter III Sec-A). This king had a stormy relationship with his contemporary Gupta emperor Buddhagupta. It seems that he had a series of conflicts with Buddhagupta and proved to be successful in occupying South-east Bengal, about which the Dubi grant refers to as Mahendravarman holding his sway upto the 'ocean'. It was his second occasion to perform the *āsvamedha* sacrifice, the first being the occasion of celebrating the annexation of Davāka into Prāgijyotisa-Kāmarūpa. It is easy to conclude that after conquering Davāka, he tested his might outside Assam, and fortunately he was successful in that. In the earlier chapter, we have also tried to link up Mahendravarman with the construction of a cave temple dedicated to Lord Balabhadra as mentioned in the Umācal Rock inscription. This is our opinion that
Mahendravarman came under the influence of the cult of worshipping Balabhadra which seems to be a bit rare in Assam, in the course of his conquest of South-east Bengal up to the Bay of Bengal. As lord Balabhadra is still worshipped together with lord Kṛṣṇa and Subhadrā in the famous Jagannātha temple at Puri, it is highly possible that Balabhadra had been worshipped in the neighbouring South-East Bengal, too.

However, Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa’s control over this vast tract in Bengal proved to be short-lived. Next king, Nārāyaṇavarman must have had lost this area to Gupta emperor Vainyagupta. According to the Gunaighar inscription, Vainyagupta was ruling the whole area even up to Tripura around 507 A.D.29 But the scene again changed in the time of next Varman king Bhūtivarman, who had a long reign from 515A.D. to 555 A.D. Bhūtivarman was the second Varman king to perform an asvamedha sacrifice. During his reign, the Gupta empire was a thing of the past. It is

29. Sirær, D.C., SI, pp. 331f.
mentioned in both the grants of the Varmans that he again expanded Prājyotiśa-Kāmarūpa’s western frontier up to the ‘ocean’ by conquering South-east Bengal. This time, he did it by defeating a number of local rulers, who started ruling small tracts independently in South-East Bengal after the break up of the Gupta empire. Bhūtivarman also conquered North Bengal or the Puṇḍravardhana-ḥūkti, most probably by defeating a Gupta ruler, named Viṣṇugupta around 550 A.D.

Till mid 6th century, certain Gupta rulers carried on administration over certain parts of Northern India. Because this conquest can not be taken to have occurred either before the exploits of Yaśodharman, 533-34 A.D. or before 543-44 A.D. as a land grant in North Bengal has held that in that year, Puṇḍravardhana was under a Gupta ruler, most probably Viṣṇugupta. It is held by historians that his rule ended in 550 A.D. which is also the last year of Gupta rule. Hence, it is quite likely that Bhūtivarman made the conquest of Puṇḍravardhana around 550 A.D.

30. Majumdar, R.C., AI, p.241; EI, XVII, p.193
31. Chaudhury, P.C., HCPA, p.165
Thus, it is seen that only the first two Varman kings maintained a cordial relationship with the Guptas as the latter had wished. It was an appropriate policy for an infant State under a new dynasty to deal with an imperial power. From the time of Balavarman I, the Varman kings have always tried to keep their country out of Gupta influence. Balavarman, without caring for Gupta wrath, made Davāka a vassal State of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa; Mahendravarman annexed this area afterwards into Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, and also took his victorious arms up to the sea after coming into direct confrontation with Gupta emperor Buddhagupta. Bhūtivarman conquered Puṇḍravardhana and again South-East Bengal. Continuous warfare with the Hunas, lack of communication due to vast distance between Prāgjyotiṣa and Magadha, revolts of feudatory chiefs in various parts of the empire, internecine feuds and lastly, lack of Samudragupta and Chandragupta II’s magnitude in the later rulers etc, all combined in crippling the Guptas to deal sternly with Prāgjyotiṣa. At last, by mid 6th century A.D., the Gupta rule came to an end.
In the third decade of the 6th century A.D. Yaśodharman of Malwa appeared as a great conqueror who was trampling practically the whole of Northern India under his feet. He is said to have also established relations with the ruler of the country of Lauhitya i.e., Prāgijyotisa-Kāmarūpa (Mandasor Pillar inscription). The ruler of this country is said to have paid homage to Yaśodharman. About this event we have found that Yaśodharman penetrated as far as the Brahmaputra valley. It is likely that Bhūtivarman and Yaśodharman concluded some pact and accordingly Yaśodharman left Kāmarūpa. After his departure, it seems that Gupta ruler, Jivitagupta conquered the territories in Southern and Northern Bengal. Later, taking advantage of the decline of the Later Guptas Bhūtivarman again rose his head and conquered territories upto Eastern Mithilā and performed the aṣvamedha sacrifice. In 555 A.D., most probably he died after a long reign. (Chapter III, Sec.A)

Thus, the imperial designs of the North-Indian powers viz, the Guptas, Yaśodharman of Malwa, and the Later
Guptas on the one hand and the desire on the part of Bhūtivarman to be a participant of the very competitive contemporary NorthIndian political arena, brought the two parties into contact with each other. Obviously, the contact was not a friendly one, but this contact had proved the might of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa to the outside world.

The period between 555 A.D., the year of Būtivarman’s death and 594 A.D., the period of Kumāra Bhāskaravarman’s accession to the throne, witnessed the invasion of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa by the Later Gupta ruler, Mahāsengupta and that of Śaśāṇka of Gauḍa. This was a period of changes in political scenerio.—the changes that would soon open a new chapter in the history of Northern India. The rise of the Maukhāris of Kanauj, the rise of Puṣyabhūtis of Thāneśvara, the downfall of the Guptas, the rise and fall of the Later Guptas and the rise of an independent kingdom of Gauḍa under Śaśāṇka,—all combined to give a new lift in the history of Northern India. And, fortunately for Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, there was none other than Bhāskaravarman to lead her in the new political
scenario. However, before that, on both the occasions of external invasions, Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa was defeated by the invaders. It was a period of temporary subjugation. On both the occasions the invaders refrained from annexing the State. Firstly, because, so long, Prāgjyotisa had remained a too powerful State to be rooted out in one single defeat, and secondly, difficult terrain as well as incessant rain practically throughout the whole year made the stay of outsiders quite impossible. Distance was another factor with Mahāsenagupta. While with Śaśānka, it was his strained relationship with other powers, such as the Later Guptas, the Maukharis and the Puṣyabhūtis which had also prevented him from taking the extreme step. However, he took the two princes, Supratisthīta and Bhāskara to his court. After becoming king, Bhāskaravarman avenged this humiliating treatment meted out to them by Śaśānka.

When Bhāskaravarman became king of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa, we notice another striking feature in the sphere of external relations of the State. Till then the relation of
Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa with other States or powers was that of a conqueror or a conquered. But under Bhāskaravarman, Prāgjyotiṣa earned for herself the coveted status of an allied State of none other than emperor Harṣavardhana. Of course, before that, as early as the 5th century A.D., Balavarman I, first initiated the policy of establishing diplomatic relationship with a very distant land Kāśmīra with a view to countering the aggressive imperialism of the Guptas, but after him the Varman kings, mostly engaged themselves in waging war against their enemies, i.e., the Guptas and other masters that had controlled South-East Bengal and Gauḍa at different times. Absence of the name of any close ally in the Dubi and the Nidhanpur copperplate inscriptions as well as other outside sources attested the above statement. However, the two indigenous inscriptions are also silent about Kāmarūpa’s relations with both Meghavāhana of Kāśmīra and emperor Harṣavardhana. This may be because of the fact that establishing of close political relationship with other States to further self-interest was not a common feature of Kāmarūpa’s
foreign policy. The Varman kings, as we have seen, generally utilised a favourable condition indirectly provided by other States, like the pre-occupation of the imperial Guptas with other States, their internecine wars, revolts of the feudal chiefs, then mutual rivalry among the petty chiefs of South-East and Northern Bengal etc. However, it seems quite improbable that Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa never had any political relationship with so many other States of India, rather midland and Northern India. But complete lack of data in this regard certainly points to the fact that it was close economic (about economic relationship, discussion has been given in the concerned chapter, i.e., Chapter-VII) rather than political which marked the bondage between Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa and the other States until the reign of Bhāskaravarman. But, there is no denying the fact that Bhāskara’s predecessors had put Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa on a high pedestal of respect among the contemporary Indian States. However, it is quite likely that lack of close political connections earned for Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa an enigmatic image. It may be opined
that geographical situation of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa basically helped the Varman rulers in sticking to their non-allying foreign policy.

A drastic change is noticed when king Bhāskaravarman adopted a policy of alliance to overpower his enemies, particularly Śaśāṅka, king of Gauḍa as well as to climb up the ladder of his ambition. Bhāskaravarman ascended the throne in a tragically precarious condition. After the death of his illustrious father, Susthitvarman, his country appears to be under the control of a foreign power, possibly Śaśāṅka in whose court, he himself had to live as a hostage together with his elder brother, Supratiṣṭhita. After this, the country again passed into a period of gloom as Supratiṣṭhita died soon after ascending the throne. Bhāskaravarman spared no time to be wasted. How he dealt decisively with Śaśāṅka has already been discussed in detail in Chapter-III, Sec-A.

It is indeed a noticeable fact that Bāskaravarman took his victorious arms as far as Eastern Bihar and occupied permanently for himself Śaśāṅka’s capital Karṇasuvanā, but
had never in his life-time lost an imperialist like Harṣa’s trust in him. We have shown earlier that Bhāskara was not a vassal king under Harṣa. He was the great ally of Harṣavardhana, the emperor of Northern India. This invariably shows Bhāskara’s diplomatic shrewdness. During the latter’s visit to the empire with Hiuen Tsang, Harṣavardhana did his best to entertain Bhāskaravarman. On every occasion, he gave equal status to Bhāskara. Bhāskaravarman, on the other hand, always remained alert not to irritate the emperor. Once at the time of disobeying Harṣa’s demand for an early return of Hiuen Tsang, he almost offended the emperor, but a shrewd king as he was, he immediately rectified his folly. Mutual benefits from this alliance also brought the misunderstanding between Harṣavardhana and Bhāskaravarman to an end.

In the earlier chapter on political history of the Sālastambhas, the second dynasty to rule Pārgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa after the Varmans, we have expressed our opinion in the possibility of the rule of one Avantivarman in Prāgjyotiṣa for a short time in the intervening period between
the death of Bhāskaravarman and the accession of Sālastambha. We have taken Avantivarman to be a scion of the Varmans and he ruled the eastern part of Bhāskaravarman’s large territory, the western and other parts being divided into several territories, each under different rulers, i.e., provincial governors. (It is possible that they were all descendants of the Varmans). It was Avantivarman who faced the Mleccha revolt led by Sālastambha. The success of this revolt put Sālastambha on the throne of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. Here question arises as to why the other Varman governors did not come to overthrow Sālastambha from the throne. These provincial governors most probably were too weak to do that. Gradually within some years, their rule came to an end. Most probably, these petty rulers also came under Sino-Tibetan invasion of Bengal led by the Tibetan king Srong-tsan Gampo.32 This powerful king of Tibet is credited with the conquest of Kāmarūpa who gradually made himself the master of nearly half of India in the second half of the

32. *HB.*, p.81
7th century A.D. But no source, literary or epigraphical belonging to Assam or India whatsoever throw any light in the matter. In this circumstances it may be held that the Tibetan army defeated these petty Varman rulers who ruled outside Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa proper. It is also a possible view that the Khadge rulers who ruled over parts of Bengal in the 7th century A.D. also had to bear the brunt of the Tibetan invasion. Nevertheless, the Indian states threw off the suzerainty of Tibet around 702 A.D.

This precarious situation created by the Tibetan invasion indirectly helped the new ruler of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa to consolidate his newly established dynasty.

Under the circumstances, it appears that Sālastambha and his immediate successors maintained minimal relations with the other neighbouring states of India. In the latter half of the 7th century and the beginning of the 8th century A.D., the Later Guptas established their rule in Magadha and held a
large part of Bengal under their control. But, there is absolutely nothing that may indicate that the Sālastambha rulers had any diplomatic relations with the Later Guptas at this stage.

We notice a landmark in external relations of Prāgjyotiṣa- Kāmarūpa in the reign of Śrī-Harśavarmadeva, also known as Harśavarman (730-750 A.D.). He adopted an aggressive foreign policy to revive the military spirit of Prāgjyotiṣa- Kāmarūpa that was under Bhāskaravarman. In the earlier chapter (Chapter IV, Sec-A), we have shown that Harśavarmadeva, though conquered a number of important States such as Gauḍa, Odra, Kaliṅga, Kośala and other lands in his expedition, he faced defeat at the hands of Chālukya prince, Kīrtivarman II between 748 A.D. and 752 A.D. and soon after this defeat the other conquered territories raised themselves up against Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa and regained their independence. Noticeably, no State dared to invade Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. Again, it is a noticeable fact that Harśavarmadeva was the only Kāmarūpa king who could take
Kāmarūpa arms down South. Curiously enough, the practice of wearing white coloured silk by the bride at the time of marriage is same in both South India (particularly Kerala and Andhra Pradesh) and Assam. It is quite possible that this political contact opened up new avenues of social and economic contacts between the two far-off regions. The indigenous and ancient white *pāṭ-silk* of Assam probably have been exported on a large scale to South India and, in this way, this practice came into being in the South. This connection must have also had its impact on the coming of Jitāri and Mādhva, the rulers of later period from South and Western India, respectively, to Prāgyotīṣa-Kāmarūpa.

Harṣavarmadeva also gave his daughter, Rājyamati, in marriage to king Jayadeva II of Nepāla (Paśupatināth temple inscription). After Amṛtaprabhā, this has been the second instance of marriage of a Kāmarūpa princess with the king of another State. Noticeably, both these princesses were married to the kings of two different frontier States of India, viz, Kāśmīra and Nepāla. Definitely, both the Kāmarūpa kings,
namely Balavarman I and Śrī-Harṣavarmadeva made the alliances to have a friendly State on their side. Both these kings followed an aggressive foreign policy. While the first one, for the first time, took victorious Kāmarūpa arms outside the traditional boundary of Assam, the latter took Prāgjyotiṣa up to the peak of its military achievements. Both chose two frontier States as allies, situated at far off places from Prāgjyotiṣa instead of any neighbouring State. It is also very much possible that the Kāmarūpa kings, in possible cases, tried to establish solidarity amongst the frontier kings of India, of course to check mid-Indian imperialism. It may be deduced that the Kāmarūpa kings maintained their external relations considering basically two factors, viz., (i) checking of mid-Indian imperioalism, and (ii) casting of Kāmarūpa spell in mid-Indian political scenerio.

We have already observed that Northern Bengal was under the control of several Śālaṣṭambha rulers (Chapter IV Sec-A). It appears that they, particularly both Harṣavarmadeva and Vanamālavarmadeva had used North
Bengal as base for their respective military expeditions. By the time of Harjjaravarman, the Pāla dynasty of Bengal had already heightened its power and prestige thorough the efforts of Dharmapāla (770-810 A.D.) and had attained the imperial status in all India context covering a large portion of Northern India. After the rise of the Pālas in Bengal, the Sālastambha kings generally restricted themselves from coming into any conflict with the Pālas. On the other hand, preoccupation of the latter with the Pratihāras and Raṣṭrakūṭas of Northern India, definitely left the Sālastambhas to earn a name in local politics. And we have found that Sālastambha kings, beginning with Harjjaravarman, adopting the high-sounding imperial titles indicating clearly the fact that they had been enjoying the same position as the Bengal Pālas in Eastern India. The regnant position of the Sālastambhas in this part of India might have also checked the ambition of the Bengal Pālas to try their luck in the neighbouring Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. When Vanamālavarmanadeva went on his conquest possibly the eastern part up to Purœa in Bihär in the middle
of the 9th century A.D., the worthless Pālas who ruled immediately after the death of Devapāla (c 810-850 A.D.) had reduced themselves almost to an insignificant political power in Northern India. Thus, relationship between the Sālastambha rulers and the earlier imperial Pālas was a restricted one. They were neither friendly nor they were foes.

The Pālas of Kāmarūpa mainly confined their activities to integrating the old kingdom of Prāgyotisa-Kāmarūpa. Brahmapāla, the founder of the Pāla family was the contemporary of emperor Mahipāla I (c-988-1038 A.D) who considerably restored the lost glory of the imperial Pālas of Bengal. The success of Mahipāla, as we have noted in Chapter V, Sec A, was due to a great extent, to the unstable political condition in Northern India unleashed by the disastrous and repeated invasions of Sultan Mahmud. These invasions broke the backbone of the Northern Indian great powers and diverted their attention to the West. Thus, this situation was totally different from the earlier ones, when Northern Indian powers as in the cases of Samudragupta,
Yaśodharman of Malwa etc, had coveted eyes on Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa; when kings of Bengal, particularly Gauḍa made attempts to expand their eastern frontier by defeating the kings of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa; or when, as in the time of Bhākara-varman, a Kāmarūpa king would get an ally in any powerful North Indian king against their common enemy in the neighbouring kingdom of Bengal to crush it. It was completely a different situation, when both Bengal and the Northern India powers made themselves busy with the western direction; the Northern Indian powers with foreign invaders-first with Sultan Mahmud and then with Mohammad Ghori (a century and a half later); while Bengal thought of establishing an empire at the cost of the mid-Indian States.

It seems that the Pālas came into direct conflict with the Chandras of Eastern Bengal. Several Pāla rulers, viz., Brahmapāla and Indrapāla had the taste of fight with the Chandras. It was defensive on the part of the Kāmarūpa rulers. While Brahmapāla, either by force or through diplomacy successfully sent back the famous Śrī-Chandra
most probably from the Northern bank of the Brahmaputra, the third ruler Indrapāla fought against Kalyāṇachandra, evidently for the control of a portion of Northern Bengal which was under the control of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa from the time of Ratnapāla. That Kalyāṇachandra was related to the illustrious Śrī-Chandra has been shown in Chapter-V, Sec. A.

The fact of Ratnapāla’s adopting the full imperial title of mahārājādhirāja paramēśvara paramabhaṭṭāraka Śrī Ratnapālavarmadeva, though indicates that he made some conquests outside the traditional boundary of ancient Assam in the western direction, keeping the old tradition of the Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa kings by no means, the limit of his conquered territory crossed Gauḍa or Northern Bengal, which was at that time under a local king, named Rājayapāla.

Ratnapāla’s successor Indrapāla (c 1040-60 A.D.) had a strained relationship with the king of neighbouring state of Vaṅga by the name of Kalyāṇachandra. We have seen that Indrapāla’s conflict with Kalyāṇachandra was defensive in character and Indrapāla successfully repulsed this invasion
from Vaṅga. Not only this, this strained relationship with Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa would ultimately contributed to the downfall of Kalyāṇachandra, rather the famous Chandra kingdom of Eastern Bengal. After this defeat, Kalyāṇachandra had to face the fierce invasions of the Kālachuri ruler, Karṇa (c 1041-1070 A.D.) which finally destroyed the Chandra kingdom. Conflicts with one Jātavarman of the Belava grant, too, had a hand in this downfall.

The Pālas, it seems, had a tough time with Jātavarman, who ruled in Eastern Bengal after the Chandras. However, the Pālas thwarted this new challenge to the integrity of the kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa.

Then, Bilhana's Vikramāṅkadevacarita records a fight between Vikramāditya, the Chālukyan prince of Karpīṭha and Kāmarūpa. It has been believed that Vikramāditya without making much headway went back from Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa.

Both these invasions took place in Gopaḷavarman’s time, the third Pāla ruler who ruled in the third quarter of the 11th
century A.D. We have shown in the earlier chapter that Gopalavarman and Harşapāla enjoyed the same status as his two predecessors of parameśvara paramabhattāraka mahārājādhirāja evidently indicating their control over a part of North Bengal. In fact, all the Pāla rulers except Brahmapāla, used the above epithet. However, only Dharmapāla, the last known Pāla ruler, appears to have extended his boundary up to the ocean (South-East Bengal) for a period. Dharmapāla’s contemporary was Rāmapala of Gauḍa. The latter also once invaded Kāmarūpa, but no permanent result came out of this invasion.

After Rāmapala, Kumārapāla, also sent such an expedition to Prāgyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. Although, we can not say that this king’s expedition ended Pāla rule, but hereafter certain names of kings appear in several inscriptions particularly Tingyadeva and Vaidyadeva, both of whom were appointed governors of Gauḍa in Kāmarūpa. Luckily, for Kāmarūpa, each tried to shake off Gauḍa suzerainty, the later being successful in that. Vaidyadeva even took the title of mahārājādhirāja-parameśvara-paramabhattāraka.
Now, this has become clear that Prāgiyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa under the Pālas had relations with several states, rather powers of contemporary India. However, the relation was not a friendly one with them. It was the relation between an invader and the invaded. In some cases, mostly with regard to the powers outside Eastern India, Kāmarūpa was the invaded state. While in the others, mostly with regard to Bengal, Kāmarūpa, many a time played the part of an invader. However, the Kāmarūpa Pālas and the imperial Pālas of Bengal did not come into direct contact with each other. Neither they were foes nor they were friends. The Kāmarūpa Pālas mainly fought with local rulers of Northern Bengal and those of Eastern Bengal (the Chandras and the Varmans) who also had a coveted eye on Northern Bengal as well as the territory beyond the Karatoẏa towards east.

According to the Gachtal grant of Gopālavarmaṇa, Indrapāla married a Raṣṭrakūṭa princess named Rājyamati who was his chief queen (v-22). This fact indicates that like the preceding two dynasties, Indrapāla too used marriage as
a means of diplomatic relationship between two states. In Chapter-V, we have drawn the conclusion that this marriage was not the outcome of a military campaign on both the sides. It is an interesting fact that in each of her three ancient dynasties only three kings established marriage alliances with ruling families of other kingdoms and again interestingly, all the three such families belonged to distant provinces (i) Kāśmīra, (ii) Nepāla and (iii) the Raṣṭrakūṭa territory. It seems that geographical position of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa (situated in the easternmost corner of the sub-continent) made this province a bit inaccessible to other Indian States to establishing marriage alliances frequently. The same was the case with Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. One point to be noticed here is that except Indrapāla, both Balavarman I and Śrī-Harṣavarmadeva chose two frontier states for this purpose. The possible reason is already given elsewhere in this chapter and the initiative in that case was obviously made by the Kāmarūpa kings. But in the case of Indrapāla, it is quite likely that the initiative came from the Raṣṭrakūṭas. We have
seen that the Rastrakūṭas did not invade even neighbouring Bengal while Pāla ruler Rāmapāla's mother was a Rāstrakūṭa princess, (Rāmacarita of Sandhyākaraṇaṇḍi, ed., R. C. Majumdar, R. G. Basak and Nanigopal Banerjee, Rajshahi 1939, 11. 27). It may be said that the Rāstrakūṭas, from the time of Indrapāla followed a policy of establishing marriage alliances with the powers of Eastern India. Although Indrapāla’s sway did not cross beyond Northern Bengal, the Pālas must have made themselves a recognised power in Eastern India. After all, they were ruling a state which had been a close ally of none other than emperor Harṣavardhana.

Both Rāmapāla and Kumārapāla got the help of two local chiefs in the expedition of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. In the 13th century, the Muslim invaders evidently followed the same policy.

The Muslim/Islamic Invasions of Kāmarūpa in the 13th century A.D.

In the 13th Century A.D., Kāmarūpa faced three external invasions from neighbouring Bengal which came by that time
under the grasp of the Islamic power of India. Much have been changed in the political scenario of not only early medieval Assam but also of whole of India. The end of Pāla rule in mid-twelfth century A.D., gave birth to a number of small principalities in the Brahmaputra valley already (by the beginning of the 13th century A.D.). In upper Assam, to the east of the Suvanśirī and the Disang rivers, the Chutiyas had established a kingdom of their own, while the Kacharisis established their kingdom in the present Nagaon district. The Bhūyān principalities lay scattered over the whole Brahmaputra valley. The extreme western part of ancient Kāmarūpa was known by the name of Kāmarūpa or Persianised Kāmru. By the beginning of the 13th century A.D., the kingdom of Kāmarūpa extended from the Karatoya in the west to modern Darrang and Nagaon districts.\footnote{36. Sarkar. J.N., \textit{TCHA} Vol-II, p.35} Simultaneously, on the other side of the Karatoya also, much had been changed. The powerful Sena empire of Bengal was a matter of the bygone days. Bengal had passed into the
control of the imperialist Turks. The Delhi Sultanate was going headstrong as the centre of political power in the whole of India.

**Invasion of Ibn Bakhtyar Khalji (1206 A.D.)**

Invasion by Ibn Bakhtyar Khalji, the governor of Bihar under Qutb-ud-din Aibak was the first Muslim invasion of Kāmarūpa. His invasion is described in *Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī* by Minhaj-uddin Siraj, who collected the data some thirty years after the event from a trusted vassal of the Turks. It is stated that the object of Bakhtyar’s invasion was the occupation of Tibet, Turkestan and China in the North through Kāmarūpa. He came at the head of 10,000 well-equipped cavalry. Before advancing towards Kāmarūpa, he defeated the last Sena king Lakṣmaṇasena towards the end of winter. Under the guidance of a Muslim convert, a Mech chief known as Ali Mech, Bakhtiyar Khalji advanced towards his destination in the Northeast along the right bank of the Teesta-Karatoyā, the western boundary of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa. This was a

region inhabited by Koch, Mech and Tharu or Tihar tribes. They reached a place called Bardhankot in front of which flowed the mighty Bagmati river “thrice as broad as the Gangas.” Blochmann identified this river with old Teesta and is supported by R. C. Majumdar\(^{38}\) and also by J. N. Sarkar.\(^{39}\) K. L. Barua took it for the Barahmaputra in front of Rangamati.\(^{40}\) The second view is difficult to accept. It is clear that the Muslim force advanced toward the hills situated on the north west of Kāmarūpa along the Teesta-Karotoyā. They do not appear to have advanced towards Rangamati which lay further to the east. Moreover, it is also difficult to accept that the river Brahmaputra would have been referred to by an unknown name. Under Ali Mech’s guidance, the Muslim army, advanced for ten more days, along the upward course of this river on the left bank. On the 11th day, they reached a bridge-head at the north-western border of Kāmarūpa. At this time, the king of Kāmarūpa, named Prthu requested the

\(^{38}\) HB, Vol. II, p.10
\(^{39}\) Sarkar. J.N., TCHA Vol-II., p. 36
\(^{40}\) Barua, K.K., EH K, p.141
invading army to cancel their expedition as it was not the right season to go for the North. But Bakhtiyar Khalji flatly refused his request and crossed the river by an old stone bridge. By this time, the local guard left him. Leaving only a few soldiers to guide the passage, Bakhtiyar advanced through the passes of the lofty northern hills of Kāmarūpa. On the 16th day, he reached a well-cultivated place of Lower Tibet and his army plundered it. At this the people (of Mongoloid race) suddenly became hostile. A strong enemy reinforcement was also reported to have shortly arrived there from a place called Karampattam or Karugompa, situated at a distance of 15 miles from there. Eventually, the Muslim army started retreating. To shatter the morale of the invading army, the local people burnt everything, thus putting it into lack of food and fodder for fifteen days. To make the matter worse, the king of Kāmarūpa, by that time had destroyed the bridge. The invaders took shelter in a temple, which was again besieged by a bamboo palisade. Breaking through it,

41. *ibid*, p.146
Bakhtyar with few hundreds of soldiers, somehow crossed the Karatoyā on horseback. Ali Mech, however again helped Bakhtyar to reach Devkot, south of Dinajpur and from there he returned to Gaur (Gauḍa). Very soon he died in 1206 only. A local epigraph engraved on Kānāi Barāsi Bowā Rock inscription of North Guwahati records this incident thus:

\[ \text{sāke turaga yugmeśe madhumāsa trayodaśe / kāmarūpam samāgatyā turuskāḥ kṣaya- māyuḥ //} \]

(On the 13th of Chaitra, in the Saka year 1127, the Turks coming into Kāmarūpa were destroyed).

Invasions of Ghiyasuddin Iwaj-i-Hussain Khalji and Nasiruddin of Bengal (1226-28 A.D.)

The second invader Ghiyasuddin Iwaj was the Sultan of Gaur (c 610-24 A.D./1213-27 A.D.). A short account of this expedition is given by Minhaj. He is said to have advanced from Mymensing side along the Brahmaputra up to Sadiya but ultimately he faced disaster and went back to his country as a looser. Gait views that he went as far as Sadiya42 but his

42. Gait, E.A., AHA, p.38
theory lacks concrete evidence. J. N. Sarkar, rightly opines that no invader could advance as far as Sadiya in the extreme east within such a short period of time and, that too, by continuously defeating all the different ruling units that came up on his way to Sadiya.\textsuperscript{43} The discovery of a coin minted by him, in Guwahati and his reference in the Gachtal inscription found at Nagaon, evidently prove that he maximum advanced as far as Guwahati and Nagaon. A coin (612/1224-5) of Ghiyasuddin was discovered in Guwahati (1880). The Gachtal inscription (1149/1227), names the king as Visvasundaradeva who is identified with Pr\textsuperscript{tha} or Bartu of Minhaj. In the said inscription, king Pr\textsuperscript{tha} inflicts on him a crushing defeat. The news of the attack of his capital Lakhnauti, by Nasiruddin Mahmud, the eldest son of Sultan Iltutmish of Delhi also compelled him to retreat in haste. He was defeated, imprisoned and killed by Nasiruddin. Iltutmish was angry with Iwaj as his invastion of Bang and Kamrup was not permitted by him. (Raverty 593-4)

\textsuperscript{43} Sarkar. J.N., \textit{TCHA}, Vol-II, p.37
In 1228 A.D. Nasiruddin, now the governor of Bengal came to invade Kārmarūpa through Jalpaiguri. This time Prthu was worsted and killed. Nasiruddin appointed a tributary king on the throne of Kāmarūpa. (E. G. Glazier, Report on Rangpur, Calcutta, 1873, p. 8). Thus, Nasiruddin for the first time, got the taste of victory in the invasion of Kāmarūpa.

Invasion of Sultan Malik Yuzbak Tughril Khan (1257 A.D.)

The period from the death of Nasiruddin (1229 A.D.) till the rise of Malik Yuzbak in 1251-52 A.D. witnessed unrest marked by civil war and internal disorder. With Malik Yuzbak becoming the sovereign ruler of Bengal in 1255 A.D., the imperialistic designs of the Turks on Kāmarūpa again got rejuvenated. Before invading Kāmarūpa, Yuzbak conquered Lakhnauti, Bihar and Oudh.

The King who faced and brilliantly handled the situation was Sandhyā (c 1250-70 A.D.) who had his capital at Kāmarūpanagar in North Guwahati. His kingdom extended from the Karatoya on the west to the Barnadi on the east. The Eastern Himalaya formed northern boundary while the
northern part of Mymensing formed the southern boundary of his kingdom. Minhaj refers to him as "the Rai of Kāmrud." Malik Yuzbak charged Sandhyā of stopping the annual tribute, assigned to the kingdom of Bengal. He advanced along the north bank of the Brahmaputra via Rangamati and reached Guwahati in 1257 A.D. Sandhyā, initially offered no resistance and fled away to the jungle on the sub-montane tract. This retreat was actually a well-planned strategy taken by Sandhyā. He dammed the hill-stream so that an artificial flood could be created in proper time down in the plains. He even made a show of his passive attitude by allowing his subjects to submit to the latter and return home. Being overwhelmed with joy, the Sultan advanced as far as the Barnadi. He even constructed a mosque at the capital and had the *khutba* read, to mark his permanent occupation of Kāmarūpa. At this time, Sandhyā sent a peace proposal, but Yuzabak rejected it. It was a blunder on the part of the Sultan. More than that, "being unfamiliar with the conditions of the land, he failed to build up reserve stocks of grain for
his soldiers and fodder for his animals. The available stocks were bought by merchants in disguise or removed to far-off places.\(^ {44} \) Yuzbak’s three coins were also discovered in Guwahati (1880) dated 653/1255-6 A.D.; the assumed date of Yuzbak becoming the independent Sultan of Bangal. In the meantime, spring season with continuous rain started. The Kāmarūpa king came out of his refuge, cut the water-dykes open so that a heavy flood submerged the spring harvest. The king now with the help of his people by following local guerilla tactics, reoccupied the plains and waterways, and stopped the transport of provisions to the capital. Very soon, starvation took the lives of a large number of soldiers. At last, Yuzbak retreated through a sub-montane tract \( \textit{via} \) Koch Bihar towards Devkot. But half the way, the invaders were surrounded on all sides by the Kāmarūpa soldiers. The Muslim forces were routed and Yuzbak lost his life. Thus, the third invasion in the 13th century was a total disaster.

These Muslim invasions, not for a short period but for a century failed to fulfil the Turkish dream of conquering the

\(^{44} \) Raverty., \( TN \), (tr), I, pp.764-66; Gait, E.A., \( AHA \), p. 37-38
extreme north-eastern province of India, that was Kāmarūpa. The kingdom of Kamrup which stretched from the river Karatoyā on the west offered scope naturally for Bengal’s expansion towards the east, not to speak of Assam’s many-sided offerings such as the very fertile tracts, forests with many a useful timber and also aromatic plants, the tusker, the muskdeer, gold etc., that could excite the ‘cupidity’ and ‘fanaticism’ of its western neighbour.45

Minhaj tells that it was the conquest of Tibet, China and Turkestan which brought the first Muslim invader Bakhtyar Khalji to Kāmarūpa. If it was the real cause, then evidently Bakhtyar Khalji wanted to use Kāmarūpa as a base for his supposed to be long expedition of the North outside India. The first invasion proved to be a total disaster. Only the western most part of Assam got involved in this invasion.

The second invasion in its first part led by Ghiyasuddin Iwaj affected the region upto Guwahati and Nagaon. It was a direct invasion from the Turks stationed in Bengal. Iwaj,

however, had to leave Kāmarūpa abruptly and could not come back as he was killed by Nasiruddin, the new governor under Iltutmish. Nasiruddin, too, keeping imperialist design in mind invaded Kāmarūpa and established a tributary king on its throne (1228 A.D.). But his death the next year began a long period of unrest in Bengal. Taking this advantage, Kāmarūpa shook off Muslim yoke and a king named Sandhyā (c 1250-70 A.D.), built up a strong kingdom in Kamrup with his capital at Kāmarūpnagar in North Guwahati. Very soon, the new Sultan of Bengal Malik Yuzbak arrived in Kāmarūpa to punish Sandhyā and the people of the land. But the united effort of Sandhyā and his subjects shattered Yuzbak’s hope of punishing them; in fact, Yuzbak was killed in the encounter. The war strategy and the guerilla tactics, Sandhyā used in total co-operation of his subjects make it quite clear that just as Shivaji the Great (17th century A.D.), a king of Kāmarūpa utilised the geographical and topographical conditions of the land to deal with her enemy. On the other side, the Turks being over confident of their successive victories in other
places of India, did not gather adequate knowledge of this most important fact and faced successive disasters in this frontier province of India. Presumably, the first Muslim invaders only took notice of the fact that the ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa got split up into a number of small independent principalities and therefore, it would be easier for them to expand Muslim rule in the land at the cost of these petty states. Credit goes to the 13th century kings of Assam, i.e., Prāthu and Sandhyā who by displaying indomitable patriotism, tremendous will power, bravery, brilliant war tactics and also shrewd politics saved this land from coming under the ever-growing grip of Turkish rule. Their effort long served as a 'deterrent to Bengal’s North-eastern ambitions till the 1st quarter of the 14th century.'

46. *ibid.*, p. 40