CHAPTER-VII

ECONOMY, TRADE & COMMERCE AND INDUSTRIES

The information provided by the sources, viz. the local epigraphs, archaeological remains, literature and the accounts of the foreign travellers on contemporary economy of Prājyotīśa-Kamarūpa are isolated ones and do not throw sufficient light in the subject.

Economic growth and development presupposes the process of accumulation. In other words, it means, “production of surplus over consumption need and means of production used up in the process of production and mobilisation of the surplus for expanding productive activities”\(^1\). Our object is to prove this statement in case of ancient Assam which is being done in this chapter.

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\(^1\) Ganguli, J. B., Presidential Address, NEIHA, VII Session. 1986
Rural Settlement

One most noteworthy fact concerning the economic life of ancient Assam is the predominance of the rural settlements. Since early times, as today, villages have always covered most of the landscape of the land. The people have established themselves in villages and organised their lands and divided it into homestead (vāstu), cultivable fields, meadows and wood-lands to serve their essential needs. The contemporary epigraphs furnish us with the names of a large number of villages or grāmas. Hence, it is beyond doubt that these countless villages were of the same pattern. Although the size of a grāma is not specifically mentioned in the epigraphs, it seems to us that their sizes varied. In case of Bengal, it has been observed that pāṭakas were small villages, because from pāṭaka the modern term pāḍā, a small area of habitat or neighbourhood, appears to have been derived. Although villages in Assam are mostly known as gaon (derived from Skt. grāma) the term pāḍā is

2. HB, p. 643
also not rare among the place names. For example, Kumārpāḍā (a small neighbourhood) in the Guwahati city is to be mentioned. Unlike Bengal, in Lower Assam, the term 'kuchi' (Skt. kuñci/koñci) is generally found with the names of villages, e.g., Suwalkuchi, Khatikuchi, Mugkuchi near Nalbari town and many more etc. The early epigraphs supply us with a whole host of village names that end with 'koñci' (cf. Haṁsakoñci). The terms grāma, pāṭaka and koñci appear almost equally in the epigraphs of early Assam in connection with village names. Therefore, it is very likely that these terms denoted villages of various sizes. The pāṭaka invariably denotes a small habitat, smaller than a village, while grāma denotes a bigger village. It is very much probable that the koñci is a sort very big village. The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva mentions Haṁsakoñci as his royal head quarter. Definitely, Haṁsakoñci must have been a large area. Even today, in lower Assam, villages having 'kuchi' (derived from Skt. kuñci) appended to their names, like Suwalkuchi are generally bigger settlements encompassing in it several pāṭakas or a few villages.
The villages, as far as available evidence indicate, were of the 'nucleated' type. There were no 'single farm' type village. Of course, the donated lands enjoyed many privileges including fiscal ones. Mostly as we have noticed in the epigraphs and also in the previous chapters that lands which were donated to individual donees or any institution such as a temple or an alms house, consisted of habitats or vāṣṭu. There is no evidence to show that there were bonded labourers. Mostly, the inhabitants of the villages cultivated their own fields and used to pay their dues to the donee instead of the king. It is a different matter that they casually served the household of the donee. Only the Assam Plates Vallabhadeva (this grant donated land to an alms house) besides, the seven villages that came within the boundary of the donated land, mentions clearly the names of five persons who would be assistants in maintaining the alms house ("outside this boundary, in between Maitāḍā and Dvaripāṭa six hamlets are given and also Acaḍāheḍikā. thathi, Pāḍharu, Vāṭhola Lohataḍi and Rasāyana - these five
assistants are also given along with their sons and wives” (vv 21-22, IAA, p. 298). Anyway, it is now quite clear that the village people lived in compact groups, they did not prefer widely scattered habitations.

Inscriptions also reveal that the villages had been divided into several parts, viz., homesteads (vāstu), cultivable land or generally paddy fields (kṣetra), natural meadows (gopracaṇabhūmi which provided with pasture for the livestock like elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep as recorded in the early charters), dry lands (sthala) ponds (jolā) and refuse lands (saṇsthā). Of course, the grazing ground must had been located in a corner of the village or along the corner of the boundaries. Apart from the ponds (which were excavated on public interest), there were the natural jolās or the julis (small streams) which might have served the purpose of drainage. For the cattle, there were the cattle-tracts (go-patha). Thus lands attached to the villages were categorised considering their usefulness. This definitely helped in the systematic exploitation of the natural resources available in the countryside.
Urban Settlements

Although the available inscriptions prove again and again that ancient Assam was full of numerous villages, urban settlements or towns were by no means completely absent. Because, they do refer to a number of towns; of course, the number is very small. Noticeably, legends and literary evidence, too, refer to some of the towns. The ancient towns were: Prāgjyotisapura, Haḍappeśvara, Haḍapyaka, Durjjayā, Kāmarūpanagara and Kītipura. As we have already mentioned in an earlier chapter, all of these towns appear to be administrative headquarters. However, some other factors might have also contributed to their growth. It is possible for instance, to trace the growth of Prāgjyotisapura or modern Guwahati. First, it was the seat of government at the time of the legendary Bhaums as well as the Varmans in historical times. Secondly, it was a place of pilgrimage (having the famous temple of Kāmākhyā atop the Nilācalā hill) and finally it was advantageously situated along the main trade route of the land. The Kālikāpurāṇa describes
this ancient city, as a *giridurga* or a mountainous fortress

\(\text{śuguptam ca · purīṁ cakre giridurgeṇa mādhava/jaladurganī sarvatobhadram devairapi durāsadām/} (38. 1333).\)

In contemporary estimation richness and luxury of the ancient Indian towns seem to be a most distinctive facet. In case of neighbouring Bengal, the *Rāmacarita* (III 31-32) refers to Rāmavatī founded by Rāmapāla as “a city of rows of palaces” and as possessing “an immense mass of gems”. Likewise, the composer of the Bargaon grant speaks richly of the richness of Durjjayā: “Here the orb of the sun used to be covered from view by the tops of the thousands of white-washed mansions as white as the smile of the intoxicated beautiful dames. This city was the residence of hundreds of people devoted to enjoyment (*bhogin*) .......... and like the peak of the mount Kailaśa, inhabited by god Kuvera (i.e. *Vitteśa*), this city was also inhabited by rich men (i.e., *vittasas*).” (lines 31-34, *IAA*, p. 163).

**Land Tenures**

Income from land was the base of ancient Assam’s politico-economic system. The early copperplate grants mostly
refer to the gift of both waste and cultivable lands for pious purposes, which were State properties. The process by which these State properties were alienated has already been discussed in a preceding chapter [Chapter-II, Sec. B(II)]. In this connection, it may be well presumed that the estates created by sale (the available early inscriptions do not, however, refer to the sale of any estate. But this should not mean that there was no sale of land at all involving the state as a party for the grants boast of many rich men vitteśa) or by gift marked off from the neighbouring holdings. The copper plate grants often provide us with the details of these boundary marks. The boundaries were generally natural like a tank or a river or trees and sometimes ālis or roads stood as boundaries. To cite an instance from the Nowgong copperplate grant of Balavarman III; “To the east Koppā and a cattle path. To the south-east a blackberry tree and a śrīphala-tree. To the south-west, the mango tree. To the south, the highway and the sonāru (-Skt. suvānādāru)-tree. To the west the highway and
the silk-cotton tree. To the north-west the big banyan tree and the tank of Diddesā. To the north half of the sevā-pond. To the north-east a pond and the wave-leafed fig tree.” (lines 47-49, IAA, P. 148). Likewise, the donated village in the Tezpur copperplates of Vanamālavārman was situated on the western side of the river Trisrotā. It states: “This village is on the western side of river Trisortā, contains both land and waters is demarcated by eight boundaries and is known as the Abhiśuravāṭaka (v 33). Eastern boundary is common to that of Daśalāṅgala, south-eastern boundary to that of Candrapuri, southern boundary to that of Avāri, south-western boundary to that of the Puskariṇī (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).

Here, it is to be noted that though we can not negate the practice of selling of land by the State, this might not have been a wide-spread practice. As towns and cities were
the habitats of rich people (vīttesa), mostly merchants and traders (vanika), the State preferably used to sell land to the desired ones. Sometimes, it so happened that some rich people used to purchase land for making nīvi-dharmma endowments. The particular system of nīvi-dharmma (cf. Damodarpur Plates, No.1 of Bengal)\(^3\) by which the donee obtained the right of perpetual enjoyment over the endowment, but not of further alienation by sale or mortgage. This practice appears to have been followed in Prāgyotisā-Kāmarūpa, also, as early as 5th century A.D. An indication to this effect may be noticed in the Dubarani burnt clay-seal legend.\(^4\) It is to be noted that the State, even while selling out any plot of land for the purpose of nīvi-dharmma endowment, still reserved for itself certain rights over the property sold as well over the nīvi-dharmma endowment.

It has been said that in early Assam, the Brāhmaṇas played no part whatsoever in cultivating the unappropriated

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3. *ibid*, p. 645
waste-land. Because, the description of the donated property in several land grants was made up of "land along with its homesteads, paddy fields, dry lands, ponds, grazing grounds, refuse lands, etc." which seems to indicate an existing rural settlements. In other words, the Brāhmaṇas were granted only those lands which had already been settled and contributing revenue to the State. The peasants, occupying and cultivating the land surrendered to the donee that amount of the total production given earlier to the king. But the Suwālkūchi grant of Ratnāla donated Brāhmaṇa Kāmādeva a plot of land which seems not to have been earlier cultivated even though the land was located in a riverine area among the boatmen (naukis). It seems, the land was not earlier cultivated for this grant does not mention the amount of its earlier production. This seems to be a regular feature of ancient Assam land grants to mention the amount of its earlier production whenever some settled village or villages was/were donated to certain donee(s).

5. Lahiri, N., PA, p.101
Here below we furnish a list of some selected land grants in this regard:

1. The Uttarbarbil grant of Balavarman III mentions 2000 units of paddy as the earlier or existing production capacity of the donated land (line 37, IAA, p. 135).

2. The Nowgong grant of Balavarman III refers to a plot of land which was capable of yielding 4000 units of paddy (line 33, IAA, p. 147).

3. The Ulubari grant of Balavarman III refers to a plot of land capable of yielding 2000 units of paddy (line 28, IAA, p. 315).

4. The Bargan grants of Ratnapala refers to a plot of land capable of yielding 2000 units of paddy (line 53, IAA, p. 165).

5. The Guwahati grant of Indrapala refers to a plot of land yielding 4000 units of paddy.

6. The Guwakuchi grant of Indrapala refers to a plot of land yielding 2000 units of paddy.

7. In the Gachtal grant of Gopalavarman, the donated land is capable of yielding 8000 units of paddy.
8. In the Khanāmukh grant of Dharmapāla the donated land is capable of yielding 6000 units of paddy.

9. In the Subhaṅkarapāṭaka grant, the donated land yields 6000 units of paddy.

10. In the Puṣpabhadra grant, the donated land yields 10,000 units of paddy.

The exceptions are the Dubi and the Nidhanpur grants of Bhāskaravarman, the Tezpur and the Parbaṭīyā copperplate grants of Vanamālavarmān, the Suwālkuchi grant of Ratnapāla, the Kamauli coppeplates of Vaidyadeva and the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva.

In the Tezpur plates, Vanamālavarmān donates a village, named Abhisuravāṭaka to a learned Brāhmaṇa named Indoka for the religious merit of his parents. The donated land has been clearly mentioned as a grāma (village), on the one hand, while, on the other hand, the scribe is silent about the productive capacity of the donated land. Though this village is said to have eight boundaries, only six boundaries have been mentioned. Of course, these six boundaries
certainly point to its location in the countryside,— “This
village is on the western side of river Trisorta, contains
both land and waters is demarcated by eight boundaries and
is known as the Abhiṣuravāṭaka (v 33). Eastern boundary
is common to that of Daśalāṅgala, south-eastern boundary
to that of Candrapuri, southern boundary to that of Avāri,
south-western boundary to that of the Puskariṇī (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).

This contradictory facts indicates several possibilities :
(i) till then it was not a hard and fast rule to mention
the amount of revenue made free and also to mention
the time limit which was generally for indefinite period.
(ii) The area was still not under cultivation.

The first one was the real cause of this omission.

Both the Dubi and the Nidhanpur grants also do not
mention the amount of production; instead the donated
agrahāra was divided into aṁśas and the donees were given
accordingly. However, these were old charters renewed later on by Bhāskaravarman. What we must consider is that the loss or bad conditions of charters made them liable to revenue. Hence, clear-cut and explicit writing of the conditions was necessary. The Dubi grant is incomplete. There is no mention of the amount of yield in the Tezpur and the Parbatīyā copperplate grants of Vanamālavarmadeva, also, that too, after 200 years (of Nidhanpur grant’s renewal) draws our attention. Under the circumstances, it would not be unreasonable if we say that it was an earlier practice to make gift of villages or larger plots to Brāhmaṇas which were divided among the donees in aṁśas etc. It appears that the grants were made to the respective donees not only for their life time, but to their descendants, too.

The Brāhmaṇa donees got their land (virgin) to be cultivated by using tillers. They might have been appointed by their masters on both permanent and temporary basis. However, the land which were donated in settled villages, where cultivation had long been practised, in such cases,
the donees got the right to enjoy the share of production given by the peasant cultivators, which was previously enjoyed by the king. In this connection, one significant fact to be remembered is that in contrast to other fertile areas of the country, the Brahmaputra valley always had a sparse population (till the influx of foreigners from neighbouring Bangladesh in the later half of the 20th century). No outside invasions or natural calamity has been recorded in history that caused rapid decline in the growth of population of the land. In such a situation, scarcity of land or scarcity of labour never had been a problem in Assam (including the Surma valley). That means, insecurity of tenure had never been a feature of pre-modern Assam. This availability of land, no doubt, debarred the authorities, either the king or the donees from exploiting the tenants. Transfer of taxes to the donee from the king did not affect the general interests of the permanent peasantry.

It has been observed that in earlier times the Brahmaputra valley was inhabited by a number of tribes, such as the
Khasis, the Brōdos and other non-Sanskritic tribes, just as the forest and waste-land was colonized and reclaimed by tribes in the Mishmi hills and the Karbi Anglong districts in the modern period; and that is why no waste land had been donated to the Brāhmaṇas in ancient Assam.6 "The language of the inscriptions is interspersed with Khasi, Bodo and other non-Sanskritic tribal word formations which are indicative of the sub-stream in that region."7 This seems to be partly true. The Brahmaputra valley inscriptions of ancient Assam make one thing quite clear that the non-Aryan, rather non-Sanskrit speaking kings of ancient Assam, sic Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, were Sanskritised totally. It was the period when the Assamese language took shape with Māgadhī-Prākṛt as its root. The general society, too, appears to have been Sanskritised under the traditional Hindu jāti-(varṇa) system (occupational groups) in the social rankings. The Brāhmaṇas enjoyed undisputedly the highest position. This traditional Hindu social system must have been quite

6. ibid
7. ibid
strong and long took its roots in the region; otherwise in the medieval age, the Ahoms of Shan-Tai stock who even followed their own religion and culture fully for more than hundred years without being adhered to Hinduism, later on, after accepting Hinduism, at once also accepted the traditional Hindu social system which was the system of the land. Hence, the credit for this goes back to the kings of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa and their people. The Brāhmaṇas as a class must have influenced the economy to a great extent, otherwise they could not have enjoyed the same position as their counterparts in other places of India in the society, completely on the ground of religion. The Brāhmaṇa factor has been an important element in the growth of this unique socio-economic system of ancient India in this land, mostly inhabited by Mongoloids. However, since Assam from ancient past had been a pre-dominantly Mongoloid province and as mentioned above, compared to the availability of land, population had been sparse, the system did not become as rigid as in other parts of India. Early inscriptions do
refer to naukīs or boatmen as holders of land. However, the tantras and the kaivarttas always appear in groups. It is possible that these professional groups also took to agriculture for their subsistence as land was abundant and the demand for their occupational services was not so high due to sparse population. —"To the west of the donated land, the land of the Abaṅci kaivattas existed" (the Puṣpabhadrā grant, IAA, p.265). In this grant one boatman is mentioned as holder of land. In the Suwałkuchi grant, the boundaries of the land of a group of naukīs are mentioned. A plot belonging to a potter (hāḍī) is mentioned in the Puṣpabhadrā grant, while Oraṅgi-tantras (weavers) are mentioned as holding a plot of land in the Šubhaṅkarapāṭaka grant. But nowhere we are to find any instance of Brāhmaṇas actually tilling the fields. Some people must have worked both on permanent and temporary (if situation needed extra labour) basis.

Thus, in ancient Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, beneficial tenures existed in both waste-land and settled villages. But as it can be gleaned from the available inscriptions that these
beneficial, tenures, the sāsanas and agrahāras covered not more than a fraction of the total agricultural land. But the immunities enjoyed by the donees definitely made them an influential group in the existing politico-socio-economic system of the land. This point has already been discussed in [Chapter II Sec-B(II)].

There is no direct evidence as to the rights of the bulk of the cultivators in the soil they tilled. As mentioned above, in ancient Prāgjyotīṣa-Kāmarūpa, even the professional or occupational groups like the Abānci Kaivarttas, tantras (weavers), hādīs (potters) and naukīs (boatmen) etc., besides other general cultivators constituted the ranks of peasantry. Except the last one, the other such groups, however, enjoyed land on a co-operative basis. But the inscriptions do not throw any light on the existence of non-proprietary and ex-proprietary tenants among the general ranks of peasantry. All or most of them had to pay several taxes and local cesses and also to entail several obligations. The taxes and several obligations, uniformly mentioned in most of the early
Assam epigraphs from which the donees were exempted, definitely had been levied on the general peasants:

(i) "Haposagrāma...... is rendered free from visits of policemen and the armymen and also from (the obligation to pay) the taxes by temporary tenants (uparikara) as far as its eight boundaries........." (Parbatīyā Plates, IAA, p. 119);

(ii) "the donated land is rendered free from all troubles on account of the fastening of elephants, searching for thieves, inflicting of punishment, tenant's tax, duties due to different causes and grazing of the animals, such as elephants, horses, camels, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep, as recorded in this charter." (lines 40-43, Uttarbarbil grant, IAA, p.135)

The Parbatīyā Plates of Vanamālavarmadeva for the first time mentions a tax named uparikara (muktoparikaram.). Again, the Nowgong grant of Balavarman III mentions another name, auparikarika evidently derived from uparikara. After them all the Pāla kings such as Ratnapāla, Indrapāla,
Gopālavarman and Dharmapāla had used this term as taxes in their grants. Hoernle took *uparikara* to be a tax or rent paid by such tenants called *uparis* who did not reside or had no occupancy rights on the land. 8 M. M. Sharma, in the light of this observation, has rendered the term *uparikara* as a tax paid by a temporary tenant. 9 P. D. Chaudhury and D. C. Sircar have translated the expression *muktoparikaram* as “unendowed with (the right to enjoy) the tax on temporary tenants.” 10 P. C. Choudhury, on the other hand, takes *uparikara* to be ‘an extra revenue derived from all classes of cultivators both permanent and temporary.’ 11 For us, too, this term denoted extra taxes paid by all cultivators, permanent and temporary alike. *upari* or *upario* in modern Assamese means ‘in addition to or extra’. The term is also mentioned after the other important taxes derived from land holders like *hastibandha, naukābandha* etc. Moreover, in the Pāla grants and also in the Uttarbarbil grant of Sālastambha

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8. *KS*, p.86
9. *IAA*, p.125
king Balavarman III, uparikara and the duties due to different causes nānā-nimitta-utkheta come together: both seem to be irregular instruments of State authority. The expression -- nānānimitta-utkheta literally means causing harassment on different occasions or causes.

Measurement of Land

In the Dubi and Nidhanpur grants of Bhāskaravarman nothing is mentioned about measurement of land. We have no knowledge regarding the use of kulyavāpa and dronavāpa, the two Gupta units of measurement. Instead, natural boundaries were followed as evident from the epigraphs. In the Nidhanpur grant the description goes thus: "......to the east lies the dry Kauśikā, to the south-east, that very dry Kauśikā, marked by a hewn fig tree, to the west now the boundary of Gāṅginī, to the north-west a potter's pit and the said Gāṅginī bent eastwrd, to the north a large jatali tree; to the north-east the pond of the controlling tradesman Khāsoka and the dry Kauśikā." (IAA, p. 53). Similarly, we do not find any data regarding the use of nalas (reeds)
as measures of land. In some of the Gupta copper plates, the term nala is also qualified by the figures 8 and 9 (aṣṭaka-navaka-nalena or aṣṭaka-navaka-nalabhuyām (Kotālipāda plates and Baigram plate). In the post Gupta period, in Bengal the largest unit of measure was pāṭaka or bhupāṭaka which is so frequently mentioned in the inscriptions of the Khaḍga, Chandra, Varman and Sena kings. Besides, pāṭaka, other terms used in post Gupta records to indicate measurement of land are droṇa, (pāṭaka seems to be five times as big as the kulyavāpa, 40 droṇas or droṇavāpas were equivalent to one pāṭaka and one droṇavāpa, according to various ancient lexicons, were equivalent to one-eighth of a kulyavāpa in appa. (Ref. Gunaighar grant of Vainyagupta, 507 A.D., HB, p. 653). Besides, pāṭaka and droṇa, other terms used in post Gupta records to indicate measurement of land are āḍhaka or āḍhavāpa, unmāna or kāka or kākinika, all these being interlinked by an unknown equation.

12. HB, p. 652
13. ibid
14. ibid
However, in the ancient Assam grants we do not find any of the above mentioned measures of land. As in the Nidhanpur grant, the boundaries in the later grants too are of natural type like trees and marine boundaries or in some cases are certain man-made constructions like a brick-field, a potter’s pit, ālis or roads and embankments or the plots of some other land-holders. Thus, the boundaries were of meandering nature, not straight. In fact, emphasis was put on the amount of production yielded by the land. That is on production capacity of the land. In most of the grants, together with the boundaries are mentioned the amount of production of paddy, simply expressed as ‘dhanyadvi-sahasrotpattikabhumau’, ‘dhānya-caitus-saharotpattika......’ and so on. Referring to a number of copper plate grants of medieval and late medieval Assam, D. Chutia has observed that the puṭaka was the standard unit in all these cases and that the modern purā is same as the puṭaka which is equivalent to three doṇas (four doṇas in Kamrup district) and weighs 9.64 kg.15 The Assamese system of puṭaka

measurement seems to be an indigenous development. There seems to be only philological similarity between Bengal *pāṭaka* and *puṭaka*. Because, we have already mentioned the numerical strength of one *pāṭaka* which is equivalent to 40 *dronas*. While there is no numerical link between *dona* and *drona* even if we take the word *dona* to be a corrupt form of Sanskrit *drona*.16 Now, one thing is clear that land measurement system was a simple one, but uniform in all over the State and bear witness to the important fact that the rural economy of ancient Assam was definitely an agricultural one, and not pastoral, which had also been an ever-expanding trend with the development of irrigation facilities as well.

**Demographic pattern**:

Regarding demographic pattern, it has been observed that in the earlier period (from 5th to 9th century A.D.) the density of settlement was quite low in comparison to the

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settlements of later period, i.e. 11th-12th century A.D. We find the names of thirteen villages in the inscriptions of the earlier period, but forty-seven villages in the inscriptions belonging to the 11th and 12th century A.D. Secondly, it is also noticed that the donated lands specified in the later inscriptions usually have village settlements and the plots of other land-holders as boundaries. The plates of Dharmapāla (12th century A.D.) mention 12 such villages and also the plots of several persons including the land of the tantras. Increase in the number of settlements can also be ascertained from another change noticeable in the boundaries of the donated land; from the 11th century onwards, the descriptions of the boundaries became too complicated with each boundary line having sub-boundaries.

Extension of the wet-rice cultivation together with the growth of several useful plants such as jack-fruit, arecanut, cane bushes, śarkara-mula (sugarcane), bamboo, black-sandal, cardamom etc. definitely can be held as the most

17. Lahiri, N., *PA*, p.106
18. *ibid*, p.107
19. *ibid*
important reason for the growth of population. Several references to timber trees in the inscriptions might have had important implications in the contemporary trade and industries which in turn also influenced favourably the rural economy and the subsequent increase in the demography of the land.

Nature of agricultural production

Our data provides scattered but important informations regarding the nature of agricultural production. Mention of go-cāra-bhūmi, invariably indicates, importance, the peasants of that time attached to cattle-rearing. These go-cāra-bhūmis as today were not privately owned plots of land. The go-cāra-bhūmis are today's caraniyā pathārs (grazing lands). Waste land was always in abundance in the Brahmaputtra valley until recently. Nowhere we are to find anything else, which may point out that Assam, at any period (ancient or modern) ever has had a pastoral economy side by side with agriculture. The Assamese society never had a distinct

20. *ibid*
class of milkmen either. Ancient literature and the epigraphs too, do not mention any milkmen whatsoever.

The jhum-cultivation, i.e., by cutting down jungles and trees or by setting fire to them or by making holes in the land with the help of sharp-faced digging sticks, which is still practised by the hill tribes of North-Eastern India, seems to be the indigenous system of cultivation of the hilly regions. With the spread of Sanskritisation, the wet-rice cultivation with the help of iron hoe and plough had begun vigorously and shaped the economy of ancient Assam. Much has been discussed about it in detail in [Chapter II, Sec.B(i)]. In later periods, irrigation facilities were made available on the fields by constructing high embankments on royal patronage. For example, Parbatīyā Plates of Vanamālavarmā, Nowgong copperplate grant of Balavarmā III and the Bargaon copperplate grant of Ratnapāla may be mentioned. Expressions like ‘sayala-sthala’ in most of the inscriptions and other terms like jola (small stream), garta (pit) dobā (small tank) etc. in the early inscriptions
indicate that cultivated fields were supplied with water. Hiuen Tsang’s recorded statement, “water led from the river or from banked up lakes (reservoirs) flowed round the towns”\(^{21}\), definitely may be taken to mean that these waters were supplied into the nearby fields most probably orchards.\(^{22}\)

Rice being the staple food, cultivation of paddy was done extensively. Rightly paddy cultivation constituted ‘one of the chief economic pursuits of the people, whether living in the plains or the hills’ \(^{23}\) Different varieties of paddy were cultivated like summer paddy and winter paddy. In fact, according to \textit{Yogini Tantra}, different types of paddy were used in the worship of different deities.\(^{24}\) The system of granting rent free lands furthermore proves the extensive nature of paddy cultivation.

Besides, a number of vegetables are mentioned in many inscriptions. Next important cultivation was the cultivation of sugarcane. It seems that molasses (\textit{guda}), in earthen pots

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23. \textit{ibid}  
24. \textit{Yogini Tantra}, Ch.II, 5, pp.289-91
prepared from sugarcane were sent to Harṣavardhana by Bhāskaravarman. Cultivation of pumpkin was in existence because in addition to the purpose of food, pumpkin shells (dried) were used as containers for keeping painting materials. Several such containers were sent to Harṣa’s court from Kāmarūpa.

The largely mentioned trees are the fruit trees in the inscriptions. These are: vata or banyan (Latin: Ficus indica; Parbatīyā plates, Uttarbarbil-, Nowgong-, Bargāon-, Khanāmukh-, Šubhaṅkarapāṭaka-grants;), venu-vitapa, i.e., bamboo bush (Parbatīyā-, Šubhaṅkarapāṭaka-, Puṣpabhadrā-grants); śālmali-tree or silk cotton = sīmālu, also called kāśīṁbalā (Latin: Seven-leaved Bombax; Parbatīyā-, Uttarbarbil-, Nowgong-, Bargāon-, Suwālkuchi-, Šubhaṅkarapāṭaka-grants;), palāśa or tripatraka (Latin: Butea Frondosa; Uttarbarbil grant); palāśa or tripatraka (Latin: Butea Frondosa; Uttarbarbil grant); kadamba = kadam (Parbatīyā plates), vaikaṅka (by its timber, ladles were made which...
were used for pouring clarified butter on the sacrificial fire: 
IAA, p. 141; Uttarbarbil grant); veta or cane (Uttarbarbil-,
Bargāon-, Suwālkuchi-, Ulubāri-grants); vitiśṭupa i.e. a bush
of vita trees, (khadira. Latin: Acacia Catechu; Uttarbarbil
grant); jāmbu or black-berry (Latin: Eugenia Jambolana;
Uttarbarbil-, Nowgong grants); suvarṇadāru =sonāru (Latin:
Cassia Fistula; Uttarbarbil-, Nowgong-, Puṣpabhadrā- grants);
śrīphala (a larger variety of wood-apple; Nowgong grant);
āmra or mango (Latin: Mangifera Indica; Nowgong-, 
Suwālkuchi-, Guwākuchi- grants); badarivṛkṣa (badari or
badarika, jujube tree; Bargāon grant); aśvattha or pippal
(Nowgong- and Šubhaṅkarapātaka-grants). ġumbari or fig tree
(Nidhanpur grant); jāṭali-tree (Nidhanpur grant); bijala-tree
(Bargāon-, Suwālkuchi-, Šubhaṅkarapātaka-grants); bhadrākṣa
tree (Suwālkuchi grant); coraka, (corāt in Assames,) the
fever and Devil nettle (Latin: Laportea crenulata; Suwālkuchi
grant); varuṇa (Suwālkuchi-, Ulubāri-grants); šākhotaka or
walnut; (Latin: Aleurites indicana; Gauhati-, Šubhaṅkarapātaka-
grants); kaṇṭāphala or jack-fruit (Khanāmukh-, Guwākuchi-
grants); sāhadāyotaka (a kind of nut; Khanāmukh grant): jīṅgāni (Latin: Lannea coomandelca it is a medium-sized tree found in deciduous forests; Guwākuchi grant); 27 odiāmma-tree (Latin: Bischofia javanica; Subhaṅkarapāṭaka grant): bahuśāla (Subhaṅkarapāṭka grant); lahuca or lakuca (Latin: artocarpus lakoocha; Subhaṅkarapāṭaka grant); pārāli and pāṭali tree (these could be the names of the same tree. Latin: Bigonia, Puspabhadra- and Ulubārī-grants); saptaparṇā-tree (Latin: School echites; Ulubārī grant), jaḍi/jaṭi tree, madār-tree (madār in Assamese; Latin: Calolrophis gigantea; Ulubārī grant;) tāmbula and pūga, (the betel nuts and betel-leaf creepers; Uttarbarbil- and Nowgong grants); kṛṣṇ-āguru (black aloe wood, Latin: Aquilaria Agallocha; Uttarbarbil- and Nowgong grants); and durvā (Latin: Agrostis Linearis; Tezpur- and Parbatīyā-grants). 

Hieun Tsang refers to plenty of coconut trees as grown in the country.28

27. Lahiri, N., PA, p. 96
28. Watters, II, pp. 185f
Thus, ancient Assam grew a very many nutritious fruit as well as useful timber-wood. However, it is obvious that none of these (even the fruits) were cultivated on a commercial basis in separate areas or fields. None of the inscriptions mention any grove of fruits. These are mentioned as located mostly on the boundaries of the plots of land. That is, these big trees were used to mark the boundaries. This type of non-commercialised production, definitely was consumed locally. Bāṇa states that Bhāskaravarman sent bamboo tubes containing mango juice to Harṣavardhana. This may indicate that mangoes were grown by cultivators for commercial purpose, but it was strictly of a local character. This may also hold good in case of some other fruits like betel nut and leaf. These were grown plentifully since they held an important place in the food habit of the people of ancient Assam, as is today. This is evident from not only the Nowgong grant of Balavarman III (v 5), but also from the Harṣacarita and the Yōgini Tantra which also

29. HC, pp.29f
30. Yōgini Tantra, Ch.II, 7, v 186, cited in HCPA p. 361
furnish us the names of several spices such as turmeric (haridra), ginger (adraka), cumin (jiraka), long pepper (pippaliyaka), pepper (marica), mustard (sarsi) and camphor (karpūra). Black pepper and Bay leaves were grown extensively in Assam.31 "The Classical works, beginning at least with the 1st century A.D. associate the production of and trade in this article (tejpāt or Bay leave) with the Sesatae, identified with some hill tribes of Assam...... The hill tribes of the Classical writers, like the Garos, inhabiting the areas of the Garo hills. Sylhet etc., which were famous for the production of malabothrum (tejpāt) extracted an essence from it, as mentioned by Sir William Jones."32 In fact, it has been still practised by hill tribes like the Garos, Abors and the Mishmis.33

Crafts and Industries

Although pre-dominantly agricultural, ancient Assam witnessed the development of a number of crafts and

industries, too. These are textiles and weaving, sugar, metalwork, ivory-work, stone-work, wood-work and pottery, brick buildings, masonry etc.

The names of many identified as well as unidentified trees have already been mentioned as supplied by the epigraphs. It seems that the people of ancient Assam had already acquired the knowledge of utilizing various timbers for different purposes. The most common was the vata or the banyan tree. Besides using its timber for building purposes, according to Kautilya, along with nāga tree, likuca (artocarpus lakoocha), vakula (mimusops elengi), vata tree were the sources of pātroṇa fiber.34 Magadha, Pauṇḍra and Suvarṇakuḍya in Kāmarūpa produced this type of silk.35 It is noteworthy that this silk is still produced in these places. Although, vakula tree is not mentioned in the epigraphs, this tree is very common in the flora of Assam. The Amarakośa (II, VI, 3, 14) defines it as ‘a bleached or white kausheya’ (silk). Kṣirasvāmī, commenting on the Amarakośa.

34. AŚ, Bk. II, Ch. II
35. ibid,
explains *pātroṇa* fiber as produced from the saliva of a worm fed on the leaves of certain trees.\(^{36}\) This *pātroṇa* fiber definitely is the famous ‘*pāṭ* silk of Assam. Its fiber is generally produced from the worm fed on the mulberry trees (*Nuni*-tree or *Morus Indica*). Like *pātroṇa* one variety of *dukula* linen was also produced in Suvarṇakudya of Kāmarūpa, according to the *Arthaśāstra*. The Suvarṇakudya of Kāmarūpa variety had the ‘colour of the rising sun.’ It is beyond doubt that Kauṭilya had referred to the golden coloured *mugā* silk of Assam. *Mugā*-worms are generally fed on trees like *chom* (*Machilus rorogatissima*), *champā* (*Michelia pulnyensis*), *dighalati* (*T Dighalati*) and *adakuri* (*Tetranthera quadrifolia*). It appears that the place called Suvarṇakudya was one of the chief centres of ancient textile industry of India. It is significant that the *pāṭ* or the *patṭa*-silk of the best quality is still produced in Magadha, Paunḍra and Kāmarūpa. A small town by the name of Suwałkuchi in present Kamrup district produces the best quality ‘*pāṭ*’-silk. This place may

\(^{36}\) *HB*, p.655
be the ancient Suvarṇakuḍya. *karpāsika* or cotton fabrics were also produced in ancient Assam. It seems that Kāmarūpa was not a prominent seat of cotton textile manufacturing industry. However, *karpāsika* trees are very common in Assam which is called *kapāh* in Assamese.

The timber of the *jingani* tree is suitable for planking and for making agricultural and domestic implements.

One most important tree from economic point of view was the *agaru* or *krṣṇāguru* tree, i.e., the aloe wood. Its price is sky high in the export market, because the famous ātar perfume is made of its wood in the Arabian countries. In the medieval age, Assam confronted with a number of Muslim invasions including that of Mirjumla for the possession of this wood. The epigraphs do not specifically mention that this wonder wood was exported to other places, but it seems that the people well knew this particular trait of this tree, "which (wind) flows with the fragrant flood water showed by the clouds arising from the smoke of the *krṣṇa-aguru* trees which burn in the forest fires occurring
in the parks adjoining the city of Haḍappesvara” (Parbatīya plates). The Kalikāpurāṇa, too, mentions the aloe wood. Earlier, the Mahābhārata states that on the occasion of Yadhiṣṭhirā’s Rājasūya sacrifice, presents from Prāgjyotiṣa included not only the aloe wood but also the sandal wood (chandana) together with jewels, skin, gold and heaps of different aromatics.37 That means even in the past the aloe wood was in demand and Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa exported this precious wood to different places because this plant grew only in the Brahmaputra Valley. The śāl wood, which is famous for its strength and durability, has extensive use in making piles, beams, planking and bridge-buildings, and also for boat making. It is most suitable for making excellent frames for doors and windows. It is also used for gun-carriage. Again, its aromatic resin is used in boats and ships to make them impervious to water. The resin must have been also used as incense. Oil obtained from the seeds has also various uses. Its barks are used to prepare

37. Mahābhārata, Sabhā-parva, XXX
some kind of dye and leaves are used for serving food-stuff in festivals. Like the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harṣacarita*, too, states that Bhāskaravarman sent *gosīrśa* sandal with fine smell to Harṣavardhana along with other presents.

It is evident that even Kautilya’s time witnessed the fame of Prāgjyotīśa-Kāmarūpa as a prominent seat of textile manufacture. The *Periplus of the Erythraen Sea* written in the first century A.D. refers to Assam silk. That means, Prāgjyotīśa retained its eminence as a textile manufacturing seat in the succeeding ages. The available epigraphs frequently mention the *tantuvāyas*, the traditionally professional class of weavers, who were settled in a group in vast areas of the land. The Bargon grant indicates the existence of the silk (*resam*) industry, while describing Bhagadatta’s widespread fame in the following manner: “................. all the directions were covered by the silken canvas of his wide fame.” (v 7, *IAA*, p.161). The Bargāon grant compared the beauty of the Kailāsa-borne Brahmaputra with a silken banner carried by an elephant (lines 37-39, *IAA*, p.163).
The Subhankarapataka grant refers to a group of 24 landholding tantras. In the 17th century, the muga silk was an article of trade in Bengal as well as in the Coromandal and the Malabar coasts. European traveller Tavernier was well aware of the fact that Assam Tavernier was well aware of the fact that Assam silk was produced on trees and these were very brilliant.\textsuperscript{38} The Roman writers by the names of Ctesias and Aelian mention the dry fruit of a tree called siptachora from which amber exuded and upon it a small insect yielding a purple dye resided. Ctesias further mentions that the country of siptachora produced all good things.\textsuperscript{39} The good things produced in the country of siptachora included besides ‘lac’ and other dyes, including musk and ivory, gold, silver and iron, which were exported to India via. the Brahmaputra.\textsuperscript{40} Tavernier confirms the production

\textsuperscript{38} Gait, \textit{E.A, AHA}, p.266
\textsuperscript{39} Choudhury, P.C., \textit{HCPA}, p.35
\textsuperscript{40} Heeren, \textit{Asiatic Nations}, II, IV (App.), p. 380; Taylor, \textit{JASB}. 1847, I., p.47
of a superior quality of red shellac in contemporary Assam.\footnote{cited in HCPA, p.387}

The lac insect is found in abundance in Assam, and red dye is prepared from it. Thus, lac and other kinds of dyeing have been prevalent in Assam since the most ancient times till today maintaining the same continuity as in the case of production of textiles.

The next important industry was gold washing and jewellery. In the succeeding ages, particularly under the Tai-Ahoms, washing of gold from the sands of rivers, especially the Suvaṇširī river in modern Lakhimpur district at the foot hills of the Daffala hills was a wide spread practice. That the names Suvaṇñakūḍya (a place), Suvaṇširī (a river) and Suvaṇṇaḍāru (a tree) obviously points to the importance of gold in ancient Assam society. Jewellery of gold, silver, copper and other precious stones (ratnas) are mentioned in each and every early inscription and that, too, many a time; however, there is no single direct reference to this practice in the epigraphs or other sources. Only one line in the
Tezpur grant may be linked with the prevalence of this practice in ancient Assam. The line reads thus: “the river Lauhitya....... looking like the rays of the moon polluted with the mud of gold, gushing up on account of the waters dashing against the accumulation of huge gold rocks of the Mount Kailāśa......” (IAA, p. 101). A similar line also occurs in the Parbatīyā copperplates of the same king i.e., Vanamālavarmadeva. Like the pāt-mugā silk-manufacturing industry, this unique practice might have also originated here in the ancient period. The Bargāon grant of Ratnapāla testifies to the fact that his capital capital city, Durjeyā was also inhabited by rich men (vīteśa-nisevita). This definitely points out that jewellery, too, provided occupation to quite a large group of metal workers as the rich used gold and silver dishes and ornaments made of precious stones and metals for personal adornment. Precious stones have been mentioned on several occasions; Vanamālavaranman is described as wearing a mahāratnamālā (a garland of large jewels) in the form of royal qualities (v 16, IAA, p. 122);
boats in the Lauhitya being “decorated with varieties of embellishments exposed like the limbs of (the body of the) prostitutes which are adorned with many ornaments........ again the boats are endowed with garlands of tinkling bells like small girls (bālakumārikā).” (Parbatiyā copperplates, IAA, p. 123); king Ratnapāla’s battle-fields have been compared with a market of jewels having plenty of padmarāga jewels; in the city of Durjjayā there used to be jadatā or liquidness only in the pearl necklaces, but never any jadatā (dullness) in the sense organs.” (IAA, p. 163).

These examples may imply the fact that precious jewellery meant only for the rich and the powerful people. Two factors were behind this development. Firstly, common people could not afford it and secondly, the idea of simple living, which had bound the whole Indian masses into one whole.

Pottery appears to have been practised on an extensive scale. The Ambari excavation site gives testimony to this fact by containing 1st century A.D. Roman pottery, 9th
century A.D. Chinese Celadon pottery ware and a good number of beautifully modelled terracotta figurines belonging to the same period among other ruins. Some of the wares belonging to the 11th-12th century have impressed designs, too. No doubt, pottery was an important profession at that time. The Nidhanpur grant refers to kumbhakāra-garta (potters' pit), while the Kamauli grant refers kumbhakāras.

As both these records are land grants centering round some village settlements, it seems to be quite certain a fact that pottery industry was conducted mostly from rural settlements.

Brick-building was also such an industry conducted from rural settlements. Actually, riverine character of this particular industry necessitated its location in rural areas near the river. The Suwalkuchi grant of Ratnapāla refers to such a brick-building manufacturing unit, īṣṭakendra situated among the lands belonging to some naukīs (boatmen). The Bargāon grant says that the city of Durjjayā had ‘thousands of white-washed mansions’ It appears that these mansions were brick-
built and they had been white-washed. The grants of Balavarman III say that Hadappesvara had rows of palaces. The Ambari excavation has also unearthed ruins of brick-built walls (structure) of early medieval period.

A section of people took up different types of metalwork as their respective professions. Blacksmiths were such an important group without whose services no settled agricultural community using iron implements could exist. Besides, agricultural implements, the blacksmiths rendered their services in the manufacture of war-materials (spears, bows-arrows, swords etc.). The epigraphs provide testimony to this fact. Copperplate inscriptions themselves are good proofs to the fact that some people worked on copper. One Kāliya is the copper-smith of the Nidhanpur plates. The Puspabhadra grant refers to its engraver Śrī-Vīnīta (line 45, JAA, p. 265). Together with it, this may be mentioned that quite a few took to script-writing of the inscriptions. The Nidhanpur grant of Bhāskaravarman, the Khanāmukh and the Puspabhadra grants of Dharmapāla, the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva, and the Gachtal grant of Gopālavarman gives
the names of their respective composers who were generally Brāhmaṇas of high literary skill.

Numerous stone images belonging to pre-Ahom age are scattered all over the state. The Ambari excavation site has unearthed some of the best and unique specimens of stone-work such as Natarāja with ten hands (10th century A.D.); the image of Durgā or Mahiśamardini with sixteen hands (9th-10th century A.D.); the images of Devi Gaṅgā and Yamunā (11th-12th century A.D.); the images of Maharṣi Attreya (11th-12th century A.D.) and another unidentified Maharṣi; the unfinished image of Viṣṇu and another image of his avatāra (9th-10th century A.D.) deserve special mention. In addition, small stone images of Viṣṇu, Sūrya and Mahiśamardini have been found in the site of large numbers. In the category of great structures, the ruins found at Bāmuni Pahar in Tezpur, the Madan-Kāmdev temple complex, the Sūrya Pahar in Goalpara and Bhaitbari in the Garo hills, speak volume of the craftsmanship of the Kamarupa stone masons and the style of Kāmarīpa
architecture. In the same breathe, we are to take note of the numerous stone temples belonging to the ancient period including the famous Mahā-Bhairava temple and the Dah-Parbatīyā gateway of Tezpur. The available rock inscriptions, too, points out that stone-carving achieved a great height under the early Kāmrūpa monarchs.

Considering the availability of wood in the land, wood-masonry and carpentry must have taken a shape right in the ancient period. It is impossible to produce evidence because of the perishable nature of the material. The Tezpur copperplates of Vanamālavarmadeva refers to beautiful and speedy boats that added to the beauty of capital Hadappesvara. House-hold furniture, chariots, wheels, palanquins etc. were other objects of wood carving.

Together with wood-carving, as mentioned earlier some artisans worked in bamboo and cane. As it is today, common people must have had used thatch and bamboo dwellings.

Other frequently mentioned professional groups in the epigraphs are the Kaivarttas (fishermen) and the Tantuvāyas (weavers).
Regarding the nature and organisation of industrial labour, it is nearly impossible to track anything direct and details out of the ancient sources. However, certain indirect informations occurring here and there in the inscriptions, suggest positively that workers in various trades and industries were organised in some kind of corporate groups.

For example, the *Kaivarttas* and the *Tantras* are always mentioned in the epigraphs in groups. It seems that some *naukis* were individual land-holders, but they, too, had been settled in one area adjacent to each other. Several such land-holding *naukis* are mentioned in the Suwałkuchi grant of Ratnapāla. The Šubhakarapāṭaka grant of Dharmapāla refers to the land of Orangi Tantras. Similarly, the Abānci Kaivarttas possessed the land-holdings to the west of the donated land in the Guhseśvara-Digḍola Vṛdhagrāma in the 12th century A.D. (Puṣpabhadrā grant of Dharmapāla). In the same manner, different groups of Kaivarttas who were fishermen were given exclusive right of fishing on some particular ‘bil’ or pond. For example, the Švalpadyoti
Kaivarttas were given exclusive right to fish on the Bhogadīrghikā pond (paschimaga-vakreṇa, śvalpadyutikaiivarttānāṁ-bhogadīrghikā; line 47, Gauhati grant of Indrapāla; IAA, p. 188).

TRADE: INLAND AND FOREIGN

The antiquity of Assam’s inland and foreign trade can be traced back to the epic age. It appears that by 1st century A.D., the capital city Prāggyotisapura became a transit point in the trade between Rome and China. This has been proved by the presence of the Rouletted ware in Ambari excavation stite, a pottery which has been regarded as the ‘type fossil’ for Indo-Roman trade in the 1st century A.D. (The Statesman, Calcutta, April 14, 1969). The accounts of Strabo and Pliny, and the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea supplies us with some very important informations in respect of ancient Assam’s products and their trade. In between the two above-mentioned sources, Kauṭilya’s Arthaśāstra provides testimony to the continuity of ancient Assam’s importance in respect of trade. Besides qualitative and quantitative development of
Kāmarupa’s industries, and its good river systems. geographical position of the land provided the facilities for this early growth of commerce.

Inland Trade

Strangely enough, the contemporary records which form our basic sources concerning the early economic life of the people of Assam do not, rather can not by their nature, throw sufficient light on the issue of internal traffic. But what is noticeable is that the beginning of a considerable foreign trade which will be discussed later, presupposes also the early existence of a certain amount of internal commerce.

The word ḫaṭṭ, meaning market, is a pure modern Assamese word. This word originates from the Sanskrit ḫaṭṭa. The Dubi grant of Bhāskaravarman refers to a market-place in the expression, “The beauty of bowers and houses of the park attached to the temple of his gods surpassed the market place and the township of the city of Indra.” ‘A market of jewels’ is mentioned in the Bargāon grant of Ratnapāla. It also appears from the meaning of the earlier extract that this
‘market place’ refers to a market of luxury items only, like jewels and beautiful or luxury clothes as in the later case. Thus, it indicates that there were different markets meant for different items. In the luxury-item-markets, people might have bargained against coins.\textsuperscript{43} The Häyunthal grant lets us know that the princes of noble birth together with merchants sprinkled Harjjaravarman with water of all sacred places, contained in a silver pitcher at his coronation ceremony. This invariably points to the high status enjoyed by these classes in society as well as the administration. Obviously, both these classes supplied a considerable amount to the state revenue.

The wealthy merchants, used to live in the cities as is referred to in the Bargāon grant. Both the Tezpur and Parbatīyā copperplates of Vanamālavarmanadeva mention rows of decorated-speedy boats that used to adorn both the banks of the Brahmaputra. All these indirectly testify to the brisk nature of internal trade. New observations are on the look out for a dockyard in the ancient city of Prāgyotisapura in the

Ambari ruins. "Pragjyotiśpura lay under today’s Guwahati?"

pub. in *The Assam Tribune*, Nov.1, 2000. Dr. Dilip Medhi of Gauhati University observes, ‘Assam had an excellent river transport system in the past and the connection of Ambari to the Brahmaputra river via the Dighalipukhuri tank points out to the possibility of Ambari functioning as a dockyard of the Prāgjyotishpur city.’ The principal centres of inland trade of course, were the towns. Here, it is to be noted, as no single inscription refers to a market in connection with a village, it is possible that no big market existed in the rural areas. Such markets grew up only in the cities.

As mentioned above, the chief routes of internal trade were obviously the water ways of the land. To be noted, the four great ancient capital cities, viz., Prāgjyotiśapura, Hadappesvara, Durjjayā and Kāmarūpanagara grew up in proximity to the river Brahmaputra. A certain amount of inland traffic must have taken place along the land-routes.

The petty village traders brought necessary commodities to the villages from the cities in exchange of agricultural
products, raw-materials for manufacturing industries like textiles and forest produce.

Foreign or External Trade

Archeology traces the history of Assam’s external trade back to 1st century A.D. The discovery of the 1st century A.D. Roman or the rouletted pottery at the Ambari site unquestionably confirms the land route between India and China via the North-East. No doubt, Ambari or in that matter, the ancient city of Prāgjyotīṣapura acted as the transit point in the trade between the Roman empire and China, during the first two centuries of Christian era. The demand for Chinese silk in the west obviously worked behind the opening of this route as in the case of the other routes. Such contacts with China must have contributed in the growth of Prāgjyotīṣa-Kāmarūpa itself as a centre of best quality silks. The antiquity of silk industry of ancient Assam has already been discussed earlier. This will not be out of place to mention here that Ramie, a good ingredient for high quality paper pulp, hard board is believed to have migrated to Assam from the eastern
most part of South-East Asia with the Tibeto-Burmese people and the Tai-Ahoms several centuries back.\textsuperscript{44} It is possible that the Ramie fibre came to Assam before Ahom rule. Ramie is called \textit{rihā} in Assamese, \textit{Kunkura} in Kamrupi and Bengalee and Kunkha in Chinese. In the Ahom age, Ramie fibre was used to make high tension ropes and nets for capturing tigres and fish, and to prepare the \textit{kabach kāpor} which the Ahom warriors used to wear as armour. Then its gum was used as a cementing element for brick structures.

Aloe wood called \textit{agaru} and \textit{sañci-pāt} in Sanskrit and Assamese, respectively, was another important items of Assam's trade. The same is the case in modern times, too. \textit{sañci} wood is still exported to the Arab countries in large amount as raw material for aromatic industries therein. \textit{Joṅgaka} and \textit{Doṅgaka} were two such aloes exported to the western market as given in the \textit{Arthaśāstra}.\textsuperscript{45} Like aloe, sandal wood was exported to the west. The sandal wood found in Kāmarūpa is mentioned as \textit{pāralauhityaka} in the

\textsuperscript{44} The \textit{Assam Tribune}, Nov.10, 2000

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{TCHA}, Vol. I, p. 257
Besides these, other important export items are to be found in its fauna. First comes the elephant which is so abound in number in the forests of Assam. Kautilya advises the king in *Arthasastra* to maintain elephants in forests. ‘.....for elephants, being possessed of very big-sized bodies and being capable of life-destroying activities pound the troops, battle-arrays, fortresses and camps of enemies.’ In this connection, Kautilya refers to a *pracyavana* (the eastern jungle) lying between Lauhitya, Prayāga, Gaṅgā and Himavat. This *pracyavana*, thus comprised of Assam, east Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and the Garhwal region on the foot of the Himalayas. Kālidāsa, too, refers to elephants caught in the forests of Assam. Thus, the elephants caught in the forests of Assam or in that matter, the *pracyavana*, found their way to the different political centres of the country as its demand was very high for its military as well as political purposes.

Both elephant-ivory and its products appear to have been

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46. *ibid*
47. *AS*, II, 2. 68
48. *ibid*, cf. 69fn.
49. *Raghuvamśa*, IV,83
exported to other parts of the country. Kālidāsa in
Raghuvarṇa's again refers to seats made of ivory.\(^{50}\)

Harṣacarita's reference to rings of hippopotamus ivory and
ploughs made of animal skin tempts us to believe that traders
of Kāmarūpa did business with the other places in these items
too.

Another important export item of ancient Kāmarūpa was
lac, which is produced by its trees in abundance. It is possible
that Duryodhana's lac-house built for killing the Pāṇḍavas got
its material from Assam.\(^{51}\) In the beginning of the Christian
era, the Classical writers refer to the existence of a profitable
trade in lac.\(^{52}\) The reference is clearly to the country of
Assam as it is a famous lac producing country. Mostly, red
dye is prepared from lac in Assam. This reference is made by
Ctesias and Aelian according to whom this lac was produced
from the fruit of a tree called *Sipatachora*. Actually, a small
insect yielding a purple dye was noticed on the fruit of the

\(^{50}\) ibid, XVIII, 21
\(^{51}\) TCHA, Vol. I, p.257
\(^{52}\) Choudhury, P.C., *HCPA*, p.384
tree from which amber exuded. On the basis of these Classical accounts, Wilford believes that it was the hill people who collected the amber and prepared materials with the purple dye and carried the whole in boats along with the dried fruit of the tree to other parts of India including Magadha.\textsuperscript{53} P. C. Choudhury takes these hill tribes to be Bođos of Assam.\textsuperscript{54} According to us, it is difficult to name the tribe, but certainly it was the Brahmaputra valley people and not the hill tribes who traded this item with the other peoples of India, simply due to transport facilities. Furthermore, as Prāgjiyotisapura was the transit point between Sino-Roman trade in the early Christian era (this point has been discussed elsewhere), the export items of Assam found an easy access to the outside markets within and outside India. The above mentioned two Roman writers give the credit for rearing the siptachora lac insects to the people of Seres. According to P. C. Choudhury, Seres stands for Assam.\textsuperscript{55} In \textit{TCHA} Vol-1,

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{ibid}, p.34
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{ibid}
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{ibid}
Seres has been taken to mean Asia beyond the Himalayan mountain from where the practice of rearing lac insects on the *siptachora* tree came into Assam. Now, Ctesias and Aelian mention a river, called *Hyperchos* and say that the country of Hyperchos river produced all good things. This Hyperchos river for us is the river Brahmaputra. The Brahmaputra is the only male river in India signifying its greatness and extralargeness. Now this meaning goes very well with the term ‘hyper’. Thus, river Hyperchos was a great river and its land that is Assam produced a great many good things. Truly, North-East India is very rich in natural resources. Thus, rearing of the insects on the *siptachora* or other trees seem to be an indigenous as well as ancient practice dating back to 1st century A.D. or beyond. At present, lower Assam, Khasi, Jaintia and the Garo hills are the prominent seats of lac industry. By, ‘all good things’ of the Roman writers, Taylor refers to silk, lac and other dyes, including musk, ivory, gold, silver and iron, which were exported to India *via* the Brahmaputra.56 According to Tavernier, Assam exported lac

56. *ibid*, p.387
to China and Japan. This single piece of information is sufficient to negate the view that the practice of rearing of lac insects originally came to Assam from any other land beyond the Himalayan mountain.  

Besides lac and silk, it seems that China also imported iron, hide, buffalo horns and pearls (which must have come from the west, preferably Bengal) through Bhutan and Tibet. In later years, too, (in the 18th century), the Tibetan merchants exchanged silver bullion and rock salt from China with the Assamese traders for rice, silk, lac, hide, buffalo horns, pearls and other commodities.

Malabothrum was another commodity of Prāgjayotisa-Kāmarūpa which had an international market. As mentioned above, early Kāmarūpa traders exchanged home products for silver bullion and rock salt from China. As passage to China was open both from Lower Assam (through, Bhutan) and upper Assam (through Assam-Burma route and others) salt

57. ibid,
58. Pemberton, R. B., Report on Bootan, p.144
from China and Tibet which was a much needed commodity was in use both in Lower and Upper Assam. A considerable amount of salt also came from Bengal. The manufacture of salt by means of evaporation from both sea-water and sub-soil brine was known to the people of Bengal. The Irda plate (10th century A.D.), the Rāmapāl plate of Śrī-Chandra (11th century A.D.) and the Belāva plate of Bhojavarman (12th century A.D.) mention the grant of villages along with salt-pits (lavaṇākaraḥ) and with salt (sa-lavaṇaḥ) in different parts of Bengal like Vardhamāna-bhūkti and Puṇḍra-bhūkti. But against this fact, salt is not mentioned in the Pāla and the Sena inscriptions, thus leading to the conclusion that from 10th century onward, the salt industry had not developed into a prominent industry. Most probably damp climate and the discharge of a considerable amount of fresh water into the sea by both the Ganges and the Bramhaputra obstructed the growth of large-scale salt manufacturing industry in the early medieval period. Thus, the exported salt could not meet the

59. HB, p.656
60. *ibid*
demand for it. After considering all these factors, it is not that difficult for us to ascertain the fact, why the people of Assam resorted to the manufacture of home-made salt (kalākhār) made of banana trees and have stucked to that practice down to the early decades of the 20th century.

Besides salt, some other sea-borne objects or goods came to Assam from Bengal in the ancient period. These are conches (used in both political and religious matters), kauris (used as medium of exchange) and the precious pearls which formed an important part of Kāmarūpa jewelley as shown earlier. Like pearls, many other semi-precious stones must have come from other parts of India like Rajasthan, Sindh and Gujarat. The local epigraphs name a number of such semi-precious stones.

Likewise gold jewellery has always been considered the most important form of jewellery down to this day. In fact, rich people, the royalty and the nobility etc. used gold and silver utensils both in the ancient and medieval ages. As shown earlier, the practice of washing gold from rivers was
prevalent in ancient Assam. Therefore, it is very much possible that the people of this land had used indigenous gold till the modern age set in. As it was a very hard and lengthy manual process, the people gradually forgot the practice in the face of the invading modern machine age. As mentioned already, Roman Classical writers referred to gold amongst the ‘all good things’ produced in Assam.

As we have seen while discussing about the local epigraphs relating to the granting of land, they frequently refer to two domesticated animals such as horses and camels. Horses were used in all the battles, described in the epigraphs. However, unlike horses, camels are mentioned only in connection with the prohibition of animals from grazing inside the donated plots of land. Both these animals are not found in Assam. The horses must have come from Tibet. Similarly, camels, too, must have come from other places like Rajasthan. It seems that only the merchant class used camels for carrying their business loads.

Trade Routes

The geography of Assam puts her in the middle of two great nations and their respective civilizations. This is the reason, as we have noted in Chapter I (Introduction), why our land has become the meeting ground of various peoples, tribes and races and their respective cultural traits. Coming of different peoples through different routes to Assam must have kept them open for business purposes. The river Brahmaputra made the water-transport system a convenient and accessible one towards the west. Besides it, land routes were also there both in the west and east to conduct export and import business in the ancient period.

The Ambari excavation had unearthed, as mentioned earlier, physical traces of trading between Prāgjyotiṣa-kāmaūpa and the Roman world dating back to the 1st century A.D. At last the Classical Roman accounts which had till recently single-handedly tried to establish the truth of existence of trade relations of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa with the other world viz., the Roman empire and the Chinese empire.
found a strong support on its side. Here, it is to be also noted that Chinese kaolin ware belonging to the 7th century A.D. have been scattered all over the Guwahati city including the Ambari excavation site. The city of Prāgjayotisapura was beyond doubt, acted as an entrepot between the Roman world and the Chinese empire.

Taking Prāgjayotisapura as the centre, it appears that atleast three principal land routes radiated form it. “............. one by the valley of the Brahmaputra upto the Patkai range and then through its passage upto upper Burma, the second through Manipur upto the Chindwin valley; and the third through Arakan upto the Irrawaddy valley. All these routes met on the frontier of Burma near Bhamo and then proceeded over the mountains and across the river valleys to Yunanfu i.e., Kunming, which was the chief city of the Southern province of China.”62 The first one is called the Assam-Burma route which started from the Magadhan capital of Pātaliputra

62. Bagchi, P.C., *India ans China, a thousand Years Cultural Relations.* p.6
(Patna), passed by Champā (Bhagalpur), Kājaṅgala (Rajmahal) and Puṇḍravardhana (North Bengal), proceeded towards Prāgjyotisapura.63

P. C. Bagchi has three testimonials to support this theory, i.e., the accounts left behind by I-Tsing and Hiuen Tsang both belonging to the 7th century A.D. and Chang-Kien. I-Tsing refers to a Buddhist monastery named China Saṅgharāma which was built by Gupta king Śrī-Guṇṭa for the use of some twenty Chinese monks who were supposed to have entered India through the Assam Burma-South China overland route in the middle of 3rd century A.D. It is also mentioned in his account that ruins of this monastery were visible in the 7th century A.D. On the other hand, Hiuen Tsang reported that the South Chinese province of Sze-Chuan was distant by two months’ journey from Kāmarūpa. However, the route was if not inaccessible but a difficult one owing to the presence of high mountains, pestilential vapours and poisonous snakes and herbs. Hiuen Tsang’s next

63. *ibid*
information are: firstly, Kāmarūpa king Bhāskaravarman was aware of the exploits of the early rulers of the Tang dynasty of China (681-907 A.D.), and secondly, Hiuen Tsang himself found that a Chinese song commemorating the victory of a Chinese prince (second son of the Tang Emperor Kao-tsu) over some rebels in 619 A.D. was very popular in Kāmarūpa and China. These facts are given in detail in Chapter-III, Sec-A.

Bagchi's third evidence, i.e., the evidence of Chang Kien, reads thus:

"When I was in Ta-Hsia (Bactria), I saw there a stick of bamboo from Chiun (Chiun-chowin Szechuan), and some cloth from Shu (Szechuan). When I asked the inhabitants of Ta-Hsia how they had obtained possession of these, they replied, the people of our country buy them in Shen-Tu (India). Shen-Tu may be several thousand li to the South-east of Ta-Hsia. The people there have fixed abodes, and their customs are very much like those of Ta-Hsia, but the country is low, damp and hot. The people ride on elephants to fight in battle. The country is close to a great river.
According to my calculation, Ta-Hsia must be 12,000 li south-west of China. Now the country of Shen-Tu being several thousand li to the south-east of Ta-Hsia, and the produce of Shu being found there, that country cannot be far from Shu.⁶⁴

The testimonial of Chang-Kien is of great help for the historians to establish the fact that 'India maintained her contact with China through Kāmarūpa which was connected by eastern routes, difficult to traverse although they were, with north Burma and south China and the bamboos referred to by Chang-Kien evidently passed through Kāmarūpa which, it may be presumed, also carried on independent trade relations with these countries.'⁶⁵

Needham, too, even after calculating the fact that emperor Wuti had to call off an expedition while attempting to find a way round to Bactria without having to cross either Hunnish or Tibetan Territory, 'in spite of heavy expenses incurred' in

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⁶⁵. *TCHA* Vol., p.258
it, did not altogether negate this possibility and thinks that small quantities of goods probably came over it from very ancient times.\textsuperscript{66}

Like the Assam-Burma route, the route through Tibet also started from Pataliputra, the hub of political and economic activities of contemporary India. However, it is also to be taken into account that the routes from India to Tibet extended from the portion adjoining Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. The shortest route to China from Arunachal Pradesh is the Lee Pass which is just two days walk from a place called Anini in the Dibang valley, to a place called Alepho in China. Anini is presently the headquarter of the Dibang valley which is the habitat of the Idu tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. It has been accused of the Indian security forces that they are not aware of this pass. Another easy access to China is from the Dri valley or the Agula Pass. The journey on boat from this place to China’s Bapa village takes four days. From there, it takes a day’s walk to cross Rohilpo; from there, three

\textsuperscript{66} Nedham, J., \textit{opcit.}, p.174
hours to Alepo and then a day's walk to Beijing. Another route to China is from Talo valley or Keyla pass that reaches Alepho after two day's walk. (The informations regarding the passes from Arunachal Pradesh to China have been extracted from *The Assam Tribune*, 23rd Nov., 2000). The existence of these age-old passes reveal nothing else but the possibility of the existence of close and intimate intercourse between these two glorious nations.

**Medium of Exchange : Currency System**

The kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa was one of the important border states of ancient India. Economically, as Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa was a leading silk-manufacturing centre and homeland of numerous medicinal and amoral flora, and had a suitable geographical position having connections with the three leading trade routes of ancient India.

In the previous section, we have discussed different products both man-made and natural of ancient Assam known from various sources belonging to Assam as well outside the state including the two epics and the *Arthaśāstra*. We have
also discussed about Kāmarūpa’s trading contacts with other states and the neighbouring hill tribes as well as the Roman world. The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea testifies to the prevalence of a gold coin called caltis in the market town of Gange or Tāmralipti around first century A.D.67 The same source also testifies to the existence of trade relations between this part of India and the Roman world. P. C. Choudhury takes this information to mean that caltis was a gold coin of Kāmarūpa supposedly issued by the Kalitas.68 But insufficient data fails to prove his statement right now. K. L. Barua’s view is that these gold coins were either issued by the Kalitas who were supposedly merchants or came to be known by this name by their connection with the Kalitas.69 Later, P. C. Choudhury has also tried to establish the Kalitas as rulers of ancient Assam.70 Anyway, the present state of our knowledge, does not say that caltis belonged to ancient Assam. In the same manner, Arthaśāstra’s Gaulikam or

67. Schoff, opcit, pp.523-528
68. Choudhury, P.C., HCPA, p.33
69. Barua, K.L., EHK, p.28
Gauḍikam, too, does not evidently refer to an early silver coinage of the region. Some historians took it to be a silver coin belonging to Kāmarūpa. Kangle reads it as Gauḍikam, meaning silver of Gauḍa. However, in both the cases, some concrete evidence will be needed to arrive at a conclusion.

The discovery of the rouletted ware in Ambari excavation evidently proved the Classical writers’ testimonials regarding Kāmarūpa’s trading contacts with the Roman world. But no contemporary coin has been discovered at the site or anywhere else. This lacking preferably puts weight in our observation that this profitable trade was carried on through barter. Following this, it may be held that in the pre-Christian period also, barter was the medium of economic deals.

In neighbouring Bengal, however, coins were evidently used before the commencement of the Christian era. The Caltis were in circulation in Bengal (in the market town of Gange). The Mahāsthān Brāhmī inscription mentions two

71. SEHA, p.225; Barua, B.K., ACHA, Vol.I, pp.113-114; Choudhury, P.C., HCPA, p.388
types of coins, called gaṇḍaka and kākanika. The gaṇḍaka was a small piece of coin of the value of four kauris while kākanika is referred to in the Arthaśāstra as a sub-multiple of the copper kāṛṣāpaṇa (Arthaśāstra, tr., p. 95). More importantly a number of silver and copper punch-marked and cast coins have been discovered in many places of Bengal, mostly belonging to the pre-Christian age. Although, no copper coin, struck by any Kushana king has been discovered in Bengal, some gold coins have been discovered. With the beginning of the Gupta age, Bengal followed the currency system introduced by the Guptas. The case is different in case of ancient Assam. Till now quite a good number of both gold and copper coins have been discovered in different places of Assam all belonging to post-Gupta age. All copper coins belonged to the 9th century A.D. These discoveries have been made in Kampur, Dhulapadung, Neogpara, Tulip Tea Estate in Dhekiajuli and Bargaon (Kamrup district). As early as 1972, thirty-one gold coins have been discovered at Paglatek.

73. HB., p.664
near Goalpara. Unfortunately, the State Museum could recover only 14 pieces as other coins have already been melted by the villagers for their metallic value. These coins belong to 7th century A.D.74

At Dhulapadung all together fifty one copper coins, thirty-three intact and eighteen broken pieces were found. These coins (mostly) bear one letter legends in the Proto-Assamese script. The reverse of the coins are plain. Twenty six coins bear latter व = va. Three of the 18 broken pieces also show व = va on the obverse. Four of the coins show the letter ह = ha. Five of them bear similar but some uncommon letters on them. Details of the coins are given in an article by R. D. Choudhury.75 The numismatists of the region have come to the conclusion that these coins belonged to the Sālastambha dynasty.76 va (व) is taken to refer to Vanamālavarmman and Balavarman-III and ha (ह) for Harjjaravarman. D. C. Sircar,

who had examined those coins believes that the single letter on the coins dates back to 9th century A.D. on palaeographical grounds. S. K. Bose had found the $\pi = ta$ on two coins and has taken it to refer to the last king of the Sālastambha king Tyāgasirīha. S. K. Bose has also found in one of the Tulip Coins, the name “$Tu, Sia$” which he has also taken to mean Tyāgasirīha. He has given the following list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issuer</th>
<th>No. of pieces</th>
<th>Places of Deposit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harijaravarman</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>(i) State Museum, Guwahati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) District Museum, Tezpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanamālavārman</td>
<td>1,530</td>
<td>(i) Library of Numismatic Studies, Dhubri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Balavarman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) In Police custody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) In possession of 4 individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in Tulip Tea Estate, Dhekiajuli, Sonitpur District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyāgasirīha</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(i) in possession of 3 individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>at Bargaon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

77. Sircar, D.C., 'Money in Pre-Ahom Assam And Its Neighbourhood, CENESI, p.3
Doubtful script 35
Unassginable due to rusting and broken condition 335
Yet to be examined 249
Total - 2,915

Discovery of some more coins from Tulip hoard later, has put the total number of Sālastambha coins at 3028.79

It is to be noted that long before the collection of the Dhulapadung hoard, two similar coins came to light through the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, Guwahati.80 In 1991, again, two more coins were found at Neogpara, Kalaigaon which have been now preserved at the Assam State Museum, Guwahati.81

Subsequently 2089 coins were discovered at Tulip Tea Estate and 808 pieces were found at Bargāon in Kamrup district. All the Tulip coins except one has either ḫa or ṝa in the proto-Assamese (derived from Brāhmi) script on the

80. Choudhury, R.D., CENESI, 1980, p.10
obverse while the reverse is blank, as in the case of the Dhulapadung and the other four coins mentioned above; and these letters are also assigned to the 9th century A.D. indicating conclusively that Sālastambha kings especially, Harjjaravarman and Vanamālavarman and Balavarman III had issued the coins.

In support of Harjjaravarman, Vanamālavarman and Balavarman III issuing the copper coins, Bose has emphasised on the developed stage in polity and administration citing examples from various Sālastambha inscriptions, such as:

(i) Attendance of a large number of vassals in Harjjaravarman’s coronation ceremony.

(ii) Participation of merchants in his coronation ceremony.

(iii) Adoption of the imperial title mahārājādhirāja-parameśvarara-paramabhaṭṭāraka by Harjjaravarman (Tezpur Rock inscription).

(iv) Evidence of imposing fine or tax of 5 buṭṭikas for disobeying royal order (Tezpur Rock inscription).

82. ibid, pp. 41-42
(v) Existence of tax collectors for collecting taxes on various matters like catching of elephants, landing of boats at river wharves, etc. and Police officers for catching thieves etc. (Nowgong Plates of Balavarman III).

(vi) Lastly, the Sālstambha capital Haḍappesvara being a developed city had shops, rent houses and wide roads. It also had an easy access to trade and commerce as it was situated on the bank of the river Brahmaputra.

Besides the above mentioned points, Bose has also cited the examples proving the circulation of coinage in the neighbouring areas like Arakan, Chittagang, Noakhali, Comilla and Sylhet (Harikela). According to him, the coins of these places circulated in vast areas including the trade route of the Kāmarūpa traders and it is possible that through these traders coinage came to stay in Prāgijyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. 83 Al-Idrisi (1162 A.D.), an Arabian writer, records that aloe wood has been brought to Samandar (Chittagong) from Kāmrut.

83. ibid, p.42
(Kāmarūpa), by river in 15 days. The river may be taken to refer to Brahmaputra. This indicates Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa's maritime trade with South Bengal.

Minimum use of foreign goods in eastern India seems to be a reason why the Sālastambha kings issued copper coins and not silver—which had also facilitated in the buying of goods by the traders from the interiors for their export through the sea ports to West and South-East Asia. However, here, Bose gets confused as this view goes against the theory of growth of feudalism which was partly due to a comparatively limited use of coins between 6th and 9th century A.D. At the same time, he has also accepted that issuing of land charters to Brāhmaṇas did create a class of feudal land-lords and an agricultural peasant economy. It is also possible that it was a developed satisfactory economy.

84. Elliot, H.M., & Dauson, J., *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, p.90
86. Bose, S.K., 'The Tulip Hoard, NEIHA, VII Sessonion, p.43
87. Sharma, R.S., If, Intr. p.6
88. Bose, S.K., NEIHA. p.43
that encouraged the Sālastambha rulers to issue coins on a large scale.  

In order to get a total picture of the coinage and relative economic condition of Kāmarūpa, gold and silver coinage too come under review. While no silver coin has been discovered belonging to the kingdom of Prāgyotisa-Kāmarūpa, Thirty-one gold coins of the Immitation Gupta type have been discovered in a place called Paglatek about 15 kilometers west of Goalpara. D. C. Sircar studied fourteen of them and has come the conclusion that these gold coins travelled from the eastern regions of present Bangladesh to Goalpara in Assam. The basic factors given in support of his observation are (a) in type and weight, the Paglatek coins are similar to those of Bangladesh and Tripura, such coins were being issued for a few centuries after Śaśānka’s death in the first half of the 7th century A.D. and (b) a numismatic tradition is practically nil in Assam. But the scenario has

89. ibid
90. Sircar, D.C., ‘Money in Pre-Ahom Assam And its Neighbourhood, CENESI, p.3
91. ibid
changed by now with the discovery of 3028 coins (copper) at different places of Assam. Though further investigation is necessary, regarding the issue of these coins, scholars have now taken these coins to be local made. Besides this hoard of coins, two more gold coins have come to light. One is attributed to a king called Harṣa. Ajit Ghose who first published this coin three decades back, had read the legend as (a) śrī (b) mā (c) harṣa- (d) vā- (e) ndeva (f) pāla.92 D. C. Sircar has revised the reading as (a) śrī (b) mā (c) harṣ- (d) va- (e) n=deva- (f) pāla.93

Ghose identified this king with Devapāla of the Bengal Pālas. However, D. C. Sircar has expressed some doubt regarding this identification.

J. P. Singh has given the following reading:

(a) Śrī (b) mā (c) Harṣa (d) Vā (e) rmdeva- (f) pāla, and identifies this king either with Harṣa of the Śālastambha dynasty or the other Harṣa of the Pāla dynasty.94

93. Sircar, D.C., Studies in Indian Coins, p.383
The other gold coin is attributed to king Prthu of the 13th century A.D. (first half) which is very crude of the Imitation Gupta type. The Imitation Gupta types fall in different categories and seem to have been issued till at least the end of the 13th century in eastern India. The depictions on both the obverse and reverse sides of the Paglatek coins and Prthu’s coin are too similar to reject the view that all these coins belonged to the same region and same period. In the obverse side, the king or the deity (most probably Hayagrīva, the horse-headed deity) is standing. The Śaṅkhadhvaja depicted in front of Hayagrīva also exists in the obverse of these coins. Similarly, a bow is depicted by the side of the standing figure. The reverse side of all these coins show a standing female deity (some form of Durgā) within a border made of lotus petals or thick dots. Weight of Prthu’s coin is 88.3 grains, while the Paglatek coins maintain a standard weight ranging between 78 and 90 grains.

95. ibid
96. ibid
These findings provide weight to the testimony of the Silimpur stone inscription from the Bogra district of Bangladesh that once a Brāhmaṇa named Prahāsa from Bogra area refused a gift of rent-free estate and 900 gold coins from Jayapāla, a king of Kāmarūpa, belonging to the 11th-12th century A.D in connection with tulāpuruṣa ceremony performed by the king. It is quite likely that Jayapāla minted those coins just for the occasion.  

It is also possible that all the coins discovered till now were coins issued for some particular cause. Like silver, Assam also lacks gold mines (except the gold washed from rivers). When gold coins were in circulation in business transactions in the pre-Gupta and Gupta age, in North-Central India, Assam seems to lack a numismatic tradition in gold coinage which may be inferred from total lack of evidence. In the post-Gupta age until 13th century A.D., the Assam kings minted limited number of coins in gold for some special occasions mostly religious.

98. Mukherjee, B.N., Post-Gupta Coinage of Bengal, p.21
Recently, attention has been drawn to one particular coin of the Paglatek hoard by S. K. Bose. Previously, R. D. Choudhury and M. C. Das have stated that they bore undeciphered legend. Sri Bose has described the coin (the best among the lot) as follows:

Metal: gold; weight: 5.7 grams; (intended weight half Satamana); Diameter: 20 mm.

Obverse: with a border of large dots, a royal (male) figure with long hair stands in 'tribhanga'-pose with the head turned to the right. The right hand wields an arrow, while the half raised left hand holds a bow. Behind the right hand stands an object (standard?) raised from a pot. The legend below the left arm elbow reads—Śrū Ku/māra (in two lines) in Prākrit Brāhmī script. The letters, which may be assigned to the 7th century A.D. on palaeographical grounds, are clear and bold.

Reverse: Within a border of large dots and a circle, an eight armed female deity stands to the front in the

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'tribhanga'-pose, with her head turned to her left, two hands holding child Gaṇeša, whose head faces right. There are traces of some letters along the margin.

Sri Bose has identified this king with Bhāskaravarman. He has given several reasons in support of the view. Both Bāna and Hiuen Tsang referred to Bhāskaravarman as 'kumāra' or 'kumararāja'. With regard to the Chinese Mission of 648 A.D., the two names 'Chi-Kieu-mo' and 'Kia-mu-lu' refer, respectively, to Śrī Kumāra and Kāmarūpa. He has also taken note of Kielhon's suggestion that the king's actual name was Kumāra and Bhāskara was his surname. On the basis of these factors, he has drawn the conclusion that the king named Śrī Kumāra of the said coin was none other than Kumāra Bhāskaravarman. Interestingly, a number of gold coins bearing the name-Śrī Kumāra' have also been found at a place called Mainamati in Bangladesh. B. N. Mukherjee, who has read the Mainamati coins in the name of Śrī Kumāra related them to a king who can be placed after Devavarman. This Devavrman ruled in that region in the second half of the
7th century A.D. The latter was the king when a Korean priest named Hui-lun Shih had visited his kingdom in the second half of the 7th century A.D. To note both Mukherjee and K. L. Barua have taken this king to be a successor of Bhāskaravarman. According to Barua, Devavarman immediately succeeded this Bhāskaravarman. But, Sri Bose has rightly drawn our attention to the point that no data till now is available related to a king called ‘Śri Kumāra’ who ruled in Mainamati or Samataṭa region in the second half of the 7th century or thereafter. Sri Bose has also opined in this connection that as Samataṭa at one stage was under the rule of Bhāskaravarman, and as gold coins (including those of Śaśānka) were in circulation in that region, Bhāskaravarman, too, might have started minting gold coins for trade and other purposes like making gift of wealth to Brāhmaṇas and other persons. We have already mentioned that Bhāskaravarman’s offered money to Hiuen Tsang at the time of his departure to China, however the latter accepted only a cap. Here, a question may arise as to why a king who showed utmost
respect to a Buddhist monk, i.e., Hiuen Tsang, could simultaneously depict deities essentially related to Śaivism and Śaktism on the coins. While discussing about the political condition during Bhāskara’s rule, we have come to know that even though he showed utmost catholicity of mind in respect of religious matter, he was personally a devotee of Śiva as is evident from both the *Harṣacarita* and the Dubi and Nidhanpur copperplate grants; Bhāskara has made salutation to Lord Śiva in the very first verse in both these records. (*IAA*, pp. 20, 50, respectively). Neither his subjects were Buddhist in religion. Under the circumstances, the highest possibility is that in an advanced age, Bhāskaravarman (his death is presumably fixed in the year 650 A.D. and Hiuen Tsang visited his court in 641 A.D.) became more lenient towards Vaiśṇavism as his dynasty evidently had claimed descent from Lord Viṣṇu through Naraka, and showed respect to a reputed Buddhist monk out of deep appreciation of the latter’s scholarship. We also do not come across any of his later conquests, if any. Again, it is also now evident that
Bhāskara’s conquest of Karṇasuvarṇa, which was undoubtedly his major conquest, took place early in his life (also referred to in Chapter III Sec-A above), and to commemorate this memorable victory, he issued gold coins as well as for commercial purpose. It is also possible that along with the Nidhanpur charter, he gifted away those coins to the Brāhmaṇa donees. Minting of gold coins by Bhāskara could also have been either a case of ‘drawn inspiration,’ since Śaśānka minted gold coins, or ‘a case of sheer rivalry’.

A comparative study of the currency system of ancient Assam and neighbouring Bengal shows that in eastern India in post-Gupta period and thereafter, both gold and silver coins were not generally in circulation (already mentioned earlier). Along with barter, if was the kauris (kadi in Assamese), which formed the popular and important medium of exchange.

In neighbouring Bengal, too, kings like Śaśānka, Jaya(nāga ?) Samāchāradeva etc. appear to have minted gold coins of the Imitation Gupta types, but no silver coins bearing
their names have come to light so far. Forces of disruption forced the kings to debase their currency so that they could get hold of as much gold in their own hands as possible, and this period of monetary anarchy paved the way for the entry of the kauris, which might have been in circulation for some time. Hereafter, the Pālas, the herebingers of a new age of political stability in Bengal’s ancient history, re-introduced minted currency,—this time evidently copper and silver coins. A few copper and silver coins belonging to the Pāla period have been discovered in several places of Bengal and Bihar. The coins bear the legend “Śrī Vigra”, and, as such these are attributed to king Vigrahapāla. However, it appears that they soon abandoned this practice which is evident from the extreme scarcity and the generally debased character of some of the coins. On the other hand, no silver coin which can be attributed to the Senas, have come to light so far, while Muslim historian Minhaj says that the Muhammedans in the

100. HB, p.667
101. ibid
102. ibid, p.668
beginning found the use of *kauri* in economic deals in place of silver currency.\textsuperscript{103} The king while making monetary gifts, says Minhaj, the least gift he used to confer was a lakh of *kauris*.\textsuperscript{104} Historians like S. K. Chakravarty, R. C. Majumdar have come to the conclusion that the *kauris* were used in money payments.\textsuperscript{105} To note, the Sena copperplate grants usually mention two terms—*purāṇa* and *kapardaka-puṇa*, most probably for two coin denominations or these were two inter-changeable terms of the same coin type.\textsuperscript{106}

In case of Assam both in Gupta and post-Gupta periods, history has not witnessed even a short period of extreme political instability. The non-existence of gold and silver currency in ancient Assam must have been due to some other reasons. However, we have shown in [Chapter II, Sec-B(i)] that a period of political instability did prevail in ancient Assam from around 4th-3rd century B.C. till 4th century A.D.

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During this period, Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa lacked a united
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\textsuperscript{103} TN, p.556
\textsuperscript{104} ibid
\textsuperscript{105} HB, p.668
\textsuperscript{106} ibid
\end{flushleft}
kingdom. The numerous tribes used to dominate the segments under the leadership of their respective leaders. No doubt, these tribes always engaged themselves in some kind of a warfare for supremacy over others. It seems very likely that under these conditions, the tribes did not issue coins but stuck to the barter system. It is also possible that gold coins used to come to this land, through the Sino-Roman trade. But the traders as well as the ruling families converted those gold coins into ornaments. That is, there was no place for gold, rather any coin in inter-tribe business transactions. Same might have been the case in the period immediately following the decline of the Sino-Roman trade.

In the Gupta age, ancient Assam or the kingdom of Pragyotisha-Kamarupa came politically closer to the Guptas. This political closeness might have definitely provided a fillip to trade between ancient Assam and the Gupta empire. It is quite possible under these circumstances that simultaneously with barter system, Gupta currency (gold, silver and copper) was also prevalent in ancient Pragyotisha-Kamarupa. As usual,
the earlier Varman kings and other petty chiefs converted the gold and silver coins into ornaments and utensils. The ancient inscriptions are full of references to jewels in the crests of the kings, and other ornaments which were evidently made of gold and silver. With these jewel studded crests, the vassal kings kissed the 'lotus-feet' of the kings of Prāgjayotisā-Kāmrūpa (Refs. Uttarbarbil and Nowgong grants of Balavarman III; the Gauhati and Guwākuchi grants of Indrapāla; the Gachtal grant of Gopālavarman etc.). The following references are also of importance in this regard.

The Tezpur and Parbatīyā copperplate inscriptions of Vanamālavarmandeva refer to the gold rocks of Mount Kailāsa while describing the river Lauhitya in the very first verse (IAA, pp. 101, 121). The Gachtal copper-plate grant of Gopālavarman praises the capital city of Prāgjayotisapurapura as having the rising beauty of a pitcher of gold (v 8, IAA, p. 214) when the reflection of the moon at nights fell on the top of the white-washed palaces. In the same inscription the composer compares the site of a fierce battle field of the
victorious king Ratnapāla (where there were rows of blood-stained chopped off heads of enemy soldiers) with red lotuses in silver platters offered to the god of death (v 14, IAA, p, 214). Regarding silver and copper coins of the Guptas, it is correct to say that silver and copper coins of the Guptas did not find a congenial soil to flourish in these parts.

It is also quite possible that in small or local transactions only, barter system was practised. Thus, the use of copper and also silver coins to some extent was minimal. Anyway, numismatic study with regard to ancient Assam still waits for further discoveries.

We have already discussed the discovered hoards of coins mostly belonging to the Sālastambha period.

Apart from coins kauris were used as medium of exchange.

We have shown earlier that Bhāskaravarman minted gold coins on a limited scale. However, it is equally possible that some of his able and powerful predecessors like Mahendravarman and Bhūtivarman also minted gold coins occasionally. Further discovery will help in this regard. A
study of the paucity of coinage in Eastern India in the post-Gupta period,\textsuperscript{107} as we have referred to earlier, will also help us to understand some factors that had adversely affected in the growth of a developed coinage in ancient Assam.

We have already mentioned that barring a few kings like Samāchāradeva, Jayanāga, Śaśāńka and some others, no kings ruling in these regions, i.e., Bengal and Bihar used their prerogative of issuing currency. Similarly, contrary to Puṣyabhūtis and the Maukhāris in the Punjab and U.P., respectively, who devoted their time to such activities, the later Guptas in Magadha and the Varman's in Prāgjyotīṣa do not appear to have followed their contemporaries in this respect.

Decline in the volume of trade with the Roman Empire was evidently the initial cause for this paucity of coinage all over India, particularly Eastern India; the major source of gold being the West.

\textsuperscript{107} The above discussion on the paucity of coinage in the eastern part of India is based on the reasons given by Sushil Malti Devi on the topic named 'Paucity of Coinage in North-Eastern India. After the Fall of the Imperial Guptas' (\textit{Coins and Early Indian Economy}, p. 27).
Trade activities leading to circulation of coins were also adversely affected by the shifting of the centre of trade of the East Indies to the South.

Gold used to come from Rome to different parts of India and from the eastern parts of India it travelled to the island countries in eastern archipelago through the merchants who settled in the western parts, and those who engaged themselves in oceanic trade. The Huna invasions and their settlement in Central and Western India greatly hampered the commercial activities of these traders. Besides, from 7th century A.D. onwards, India lost its direct trade contacts with the Roman empire due to the rise of the Arabs as trading communities in the Persian gulf. Conquest of Sind in 725 A.D. further aggravated the situation. Being contemporary to these events, Kanauj had become the centre of both political and trading activities. Being centrally placed in Northern India, the place was the source of several trade routes. But Northern India taking Kanauj as the centre, soon became an arena of continuous intercine wars. Traders now sought the
shortest routes to eastern coasts. But the rise of several independent kings in Bengal and Bihar made these traders insecure and as an alternative to this situation, they now preferred to go to some Orissan ports instead of Tamralipti.

Hereafter, the Pālas and the Senas established huge empires in Eastern and Northern India. Both of them being eastern powers paid too much importance in the maintenance of huge armies. In the purchase of arms, horses etc. a great amount of gold were drained out to foreign countries. Laksmanasena is said to have mistaken Bakhtyar Khaliji’s horsemen as horse-dealers.

The traders found it too difficult to pay too many heavy taxes to each and every independent king who rose in between western and eastern ports of North India. Obviously, this situation proved to be detrimental to the cause of economy.

Another reason was that due to piracy in Bay of Bengal, the merchants diverted trade routes from the island countries direct to the West Indian ports.
Tamralipti, too, lost its importance due to insecurity of the land routes which was caused by the constant warfare among the rulers.

The Pālas and the Senas could not conquer Kanauj permanently which commanded several trade routes to its credit.

By this time, *kauris* came to be used in business transactions. These *kauris* in great amount came from Lākṣādvīp and Mālḍvīp islands, and Bengal was the greatest customer. These islands did not accept foreign coins at their face value, rather these were cut into pieces and their metallic value was determined and then the prices were fixed. As only debased gold coins were prevalent in India at that time due to the coming of lesser quantity of gold from foreign countries, in the West, Bengal deemed it useless to coin money to serve as standard in foreign trade.

Lastly, a predominantly agricultural economy, on the one land, encouraged cheap and simple living in the villages and also the prevalence of the barter system in transactions, on
the other hand, simultaneously, discouraged the growth of a trading economy and the prevalence of coined money in transactions.

Evidently, the general scene in this respect in Eastern India i.e. Bengal and Bihar had its repercussions in ancient Assam. Ancient Assam seemed to have followed the general track prevalent in contemporary Bengal and Bihar. However, a final conclusion in this regard awaits further discoveries in coins and also other types of data.