recognized as being one of the ancient kings of Assam with the name Bhauma (son of the Earth or Bhumi) and *Asura*. He is referred to have stolen Aditi's ear-rings and was slained by Krishna Vasudeva (a form of Lord Vishnu) who recovers the ear rings. In a later stanza, it is narrated that Lord Vishnu killed Naraka at the insistence of Indra, whose status was threatened by Naraka. Likewise, it is also narrated that the Earth, mother of Naraka, secured the *Brahmastra* (a powerful weapon) for her son from Lord Vishnu. It was later passed on to his son, Bhagadatta.

The Mahabharata contains numerous references to Naraka's son, Bhagadatta. Bhagadatta was the ruler of Pragjyotisha and a friend of Indra, king of gods as well as of Pandu, the *Kuru* prince. He is said to have presented an iron vessel and swords with ivory hilts to Yuddhisthira on the grand occasion of the *Rajasuya* sacrifice. He also provided soldiers to the Kuru king Duryodhana which included the Chinas and the Kiratas. He fought for Duryodhana in the war of Kurukshetra. He is said to have been killed by Arjuna and so was his son, Vajradatta while guarding the horse of Yuddhisthira for the *Ashwamedha* sacrifice (horse sacrifice).

It is stated in the Digvijaya section of the *Sabha Parvana* of the *Mahabharata* that Bhagadatta was known as dwelling in the eastern sea with his followers and people who lived along the sea coast. It is said that Arjuna during his march to the north, came across the Pragjyotisha king, whom he defeated. Similarly, Bhima is mentioned as having defeated the *Mlechchha* king and his people of the sea coast, while he was on his expedition to the east. He is said to have reached Lauhitya (Brahmaputra).

The Puranas give a different version of the story revolving round Naraka. According to the *avatara* (incarnation) theory, the Hindu god Vishnu descends to earth in ten different forms or incarnations to save mankind. Rama and Krishna are the two most famous incarnations of Vishnu. The avatara theory traces the legend of Naraka to the theory of him being born of the *Varaha* (boar) form of Vishnu and *Bhumidevi* or Earth. The *Satapath Brahmana* describes the rescuing of the Earth from the ocean by Prajapati in the form of a boar. The *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, of a later date, mentions the boar to be of a black colour and having a hundred arms. In the later mythology,

by Vishnu. Meanwhile, Naraka married the princess of Vidarbha, Maya and soon he was presented with a lance (sakti) and was advised by Vishnu that the weapon was not to be used against men, unless for self defence, that he should worship only goddess Kamakhya and never bring harm upon the Brahmanas, gods and sages lest he should invite his death.

For many years, Naraka ruled wisely and there was prosperity in his kingdom. But soon he came under the influence of the Asura (demon) king Bana of Sonitpur (identified as Tezpur in the district of Sonitpur). Bana was a worshipper of Shiva and soon Naraka started showing disrespect and dishonour towards Vishnu, Kamakhya and the Brahmanas. It is said that once sage Vasishtha came to worship Kamakhya but was not permitted to do so by Naraka. The angry sage cursed Naraka that he would be killed by Vishnu in the human form and that as long as Naraka was alive, Kamakhya would disappear from the earth. Naraka now kept closer terms with Bana and tried to please Brahma by standing for one hundred human years on the bank of Lauhitya. Brahma was pleased and granted him *boons* but with a caution that he was not to molest Tilottama and other heavenly damsels, born on earth before the coming of Naraka to his capital. Acting on the advice of Bana, Naraka soon attacked the gods, sages and others. He was assisted in his activities by his four sons: Bhagadatta, *Mahsirsha*, Madavat and Sumalin and also by Hayagriva, Maru and other demons. Naraka stole Aditi's earrings and perpetrated much havoc on earth and in heaven. At this, Vishnu took the avatar of Krishna and went to Pragjyotisha where he killed Naraka. Naraka's son Bhagadatta was made the king and also received his father's lance. Krishna returned to Dvaraka with the earrings, the Maniparvata and Varuna's umbrella.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Fill in the blanks:

(i) It is stated in the ..... section of the *Sabha Parvana* of the *Mahabharata* that Bhagadatta was known as dwelling in the eastern sea with his followers

his god to be the lord of Uparipattana and also the future lord of Pragjyotisha. Verse 5 of the Doobi copper plate refers to many horse sacrifices being performed by Vajradatta. The myths of Naraka and his successor are also highlighted in the works like *Yogini Tantra, Haragaurisamvada, Ain-i-Akbari (*completed *in 1595 A.D.)* and *Mandala Panji.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q2: When was Kasiram Das's Bengali *Mahabharata* composed?

Q3: Who was Amritprabha?

Q4: Name the Buddhist Tantrik literature which mentions the myth of Naraka and his successors?

Q5: Which Inscription mentions the horse sacrifices performed by Vajradatta?



2.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you will learn about–

- the King Naraka as mentioned in the literary texts.
- the successors of Naraka, and
- the legendary period as highlighted through the Puranas and other texts

2.6. Further Reading

1) Barpujari, H.K.(2003)*: The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. I, II 2nd edn, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati.
2) Baruah, S.L.,(1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi.
3) Bhuyan, A.C., (1999): *Political History Assam*, Publication Board Assam, Vol. I, II 2nd edn, Guwahati.
4) Choudhury, P.C., (1959): *The History of Civilization of the people of Assam to the 12th century A.D.*