**GHT S5 01(M/P)**

**Exam Code : HTP 5A**

# History of Assam upto the 16th Century AD

## SEMESTER V

## HISTORY

### BLOCK 1

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# BACHELOR OF ARTS

## HISTORY OF ASSAM UPTO THE 16TH CENTURY AD

## DETAILED SYLLABUS
## BLOCK - 1

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## COURSE INTRODUCTION

This Course is meant for the Fifth semester learners of History of BA programme under the revised semester system of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. The course is titled *History of Assam upto the 16th century AD.* This course discusses the history of ancient and medieval Assam in detail. There are fifteen units in this course.

## BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This is the first block of the course and it consists of seven Units. The Block will highlight the history of ancient Assam and establishment of the Ahom rule in detail.

The first Unit is the *Sources of Ancient Assam*. The unit discusses different sources of ancient Assam.

The second Unit *Geographical Outline* discusses the original boundaries and natural features of ancient Assam.

The third Unit *Cultural contact and Migration* discusses the cultural contact of different races and migration of people into Assam in the ancient period.

The fourth unit *Historicity of Naraka and His Sucessors* throws light on historicity of Naraka and his Sucessors in detail.

The fifth unit *Ruling Dynasties of Ancient Assam since 4th century . The unit discusess the* ancient dynasties of ancient Assam- the Varmanas, the Palas and the Salastambhas.

The sixth unit titled *Society, Economy and Religion in the Ancient Assam.* The unit discusses the society, economy and religious condition of ancient Assam.

The seventh unit *Administration in ancient Assam. The unit* deals with the central and local administration of ancient Assam along with the Judicial, revenue and military administration of ancient Assam.

While going through this paper, you will notice that some boxes are put in the left hand or right hand side of the text. These boxes are meant to serve the purpose of in-text glossary for you. Again, you may find some boxes marked with: “LET US KNOW”. These boxes will provide you with some additional interesting and relevant information. The boxes marked with “ACTIVITY” will help you in making your learning more active and efficient. And, at the end of each section, you will get “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. It will be better if you solve the problems put in these boxes immediately after you go through the sections of the units and then match your answers with “ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” given at the end of each unit.

# UNIT 1: SOURCES OF ANCIENT ASSAM

## UNIT STRUCTURE


1.1 Learning objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Sources of Ancient Assam

1.3.1 Literary Sources

1.3.2 Archaeological Sources

1.4 Let Us Sum Up

1.5 Further Reading

1.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.7 Model Questions


## 1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- identify various literary source materials for the study of history of ancient Assam,
- discuss the archeological sources of ancient Assam.

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, this is the first unit of this course. In this unit we are going to discuss about the sources of ancient Assam . The history of ancient Assam roughly covers the period from the days of the Epics to the early part of the 13$^{th}$ century A.D. For studying the history of the ancient period of Assam, we have to depend upon different types of sources, these are basically literary and archeological sources. So, in this unit we shall discuss these sources of ancient Assam in detail.

## 1.3 SOURCES OF ANCIENT ASSAM

### 1.3.1 Literary Source

Literary sources are a very important source of information for the reconstruction of the past. These sources can be further

sub-divided into Indigenous and Foreign literature. We are now going to discuss both the Indigenous and Foreign Literary sources.

- **Indigenous Literature:** The Brahmanical works of the early and later Vedic period are important for the study of the cultural relations between the Aryans and the Non-Aryans of India with eastern India. The gradual advance of the Aryans to eastern India is described in these works. The *Satapatha Brahmana* records the progress of the Aryan culture up to the river Sadanira, identified with the river Karotoya, the permanent western boundary of ancient Assam. The *Aiteraya Brahmana* records the progress of that culture in Kamarupa. The *Gopatha Brahmana* narrates a tradition regarding the origin of the name Kamarupa indicating an early contact of the Aryan and Non-Aryan elements. The *Sankhyayana Grihasamgraha* refers to Kamarupa as the land of sunrise.

The Puranas are invaluable for reconstructing the history of ancient Assam. Most of them like the *Garuda, Markandeya, Naradiya, Brahmana, Skanda, Agni* and *Vishnu* contain references to ancient Assam and her rulers. The *Garuda Purana* mentions Kamarupa and Kamakhya as great centres of pilgrimage. The *Markandeya Purana* mentions Pragjyotisha along with Udayachala, Lauhitya and Kamarupa as countries in the east. The *Varaha* (Boar) incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the killing of Naraka and the enthronement of Bhagadatta in Pragjyotisha are mentioned in *Vishnu Purana*. The latest form of Naraka legend is noticed in the *Kalika Purana*, which was composed in Assam during the $10^{th}$ or $11^{th}$ century A.D. The *Kalika Purana* depicts a clear picture about the traditional boundaries of Pragjyotisha- Kamarupa as well as the importance of Goddess Kamakhya in the religious life of the people of Assam. The *Kalika Purana* is invaluable for a study of the political and cultural history of ancient Assam.

In addition to the Puranas, the Tantrik-Buddhist literature of Eastern India, Tibet and Nepal contain materials relating to the religious and political history of ancient Assam. All of them mention

about Kamarupa-Kamakhya and other *pithas* of Assam. The *Hevajra Tantra* of the 8th Century A.D. mentions Kamarupa as one of the four ***pithas*** of India. The *Kamarupa-Yatra*, a Sanskrit work composed in Assam, deals with the mode of worship of Kamakhya and records the origin of the names of Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa. The *Tikkha-Kalpa* deals with the worship of Tara and the ancient geography of Kamarupa. The *Kamakhya Tantra* gives an account of Naraka-Bhagadatta. The *Yogini Tantra* discusses the ancient geography of Kamarupa and the cultural conditions of the people. The *Yogini Tantra* also mentions the Koch King Visvasimha. Another tantric work *Haragaurisamvada* which gives an account of the early history of the territories of Kamarupa contains the genealogy of the rulers of ancient Assam, and an account of the medieval Kamarupa rulers of the Indra-vamsa (i.e., the Ahom kings). However, the last work while giving details about mythical rulers fails to discuss actual historical rulers.



***Pithas-*** Shakti- Shrines



**LET US KNOW**

Some other Tantrik works containing references to ancient Assam:

- The *Pag Som Zon Zan*
- The *Kahgyur*
- The *Tangyur*
- The *Kamakhya Guhyasiddhi*
- The *Goraksha-Samhita*
- The *Kamaratna Tantra*
- The *Sadhanamala*

Epics provide an illuminating picture of the political and social life of the people in ancient Assam. They are a valuable source of information about the foundation of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa. The *Adikanda* of the *Ramayana* records the foundation of the city of Pragjyotisha by Amurtaraja. The *Kiskindhyakanda* refers to Naraka's

city of Pragjyotisha in the Varaha Mountain. The *Mahabharata* refers to the city and the country of Pragjyotisha, to its ruler Naraka and Bhagadatta, and to the Chinas, Kiratas and other people constituting the army of Bhagadatta, who gallantly fought the Pandavas in the Mahabharata war.

Sanskrit literature from other parts of India is another important source for reconstructing the history of ancient Assam. The *Arthasastra* of Kautilya refers to many places of Kamarupa like Suvarnakundya, Paralauhitya, etc in connection with the economic products of Kamarupa. In *Raghuvamsa*, Kalidasa refers to both Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa as lying to the east of the Brahmaputra. The *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta provides information about the political and cultural history of the 7th century Kamarupa. Bilhana's *Vikramankadevacharita* refers to an invasion of Kamarupa by his patron Chalukya Vikramaditya VI (c.1076-1126). Sandhyakaranandi's *Ramacharita* describes the conquest of Kamarupa by Mayana, the general of Ramapala (c.1085-1130). Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* contains an account of the marriage between the Kamarupa princess Amritaprabha and Meghavahana, the king of Kashmir. It also mentions Lalityaditya's campaign as far as the Lauhitya.



**LET US KNOW**

Some other Sanskrit works along with their authors containing references to ancient Assam:

- The *Brihatsamhita* by Varahmihir
- The *Kavya-mimansa* and the *Karpuramanjuri* by Rajasekhara
- The *Abhidhanachintamani* by Kshemendra
- The *Kathasaritsagara* by Somadeva

The Buddhist or Jain literature does not have any definite mention of Assam. But in the *Nikayas* we find mention of *Lohicca* which is identified as Lauhitya in connection with two Brahmanas who came to the greater kingdom of Magadha. The Buddhist literature

of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan associates ancient Assam with the *Mahaparinirvana* of the Buddha, which is said to have taken place at modern Hajo. But the tradition is yet to be corroborated by any historical evidence.

Although there was no pure historical literature in Assam in the ancient period, yet there were Chronicles having history of the land. Reference has been made to the *Kalika Purana*, *Yogini Tantra* and *Haragaurisamvada.* There is the *Haragaurivilasa* which gives the ancient geography of the land. The genealogy of the rulers of the Dimarua family is also found in the *Haragaurivilasa* and the *Bhuyar Puthi*. Besides, the old manuscripts written in Sanskrit and Assamese cover political and cultural subjects, and supply materials not found in other historical sources.

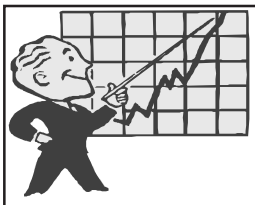
- **Foreign Literature:** Foreign sources are also equally important like the indigenous sources. The foreigners who travelled from one country to another and left an account of political, social, religious and cultural aspects of the country which help us a lot to know about the history of the country.

Among the works of foreign literature, there is a reference to the land of the primitive Kirata people, probably including Assam in the Greek works of the early centuries of the Christian era. But it is difficult to identify the places and peoples mentioned in them. Herodotus mentions the Kalatiai along with Gangaridae and Prasioi of Assam. It is possible that due to their predominance, some part of Kamrupa was known as the land of Kalitas. Probably ancient Assam was known to them by other names or included in the kingdom of the Prasioi and the Gangaridae. Megasthenes and Strabo refer to the Derdai of the east, who were noted for their working in gold. It is probable that the reference is to some hill people of this region. Pliny in his *Natural History* refers to a number of people of the frontier and trans-Himalayan regions, who can be identified with some Tibeto-Burman tribes of Assam. In the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* and *Ptolemy's Geography* we find references to people and

places which may possibly be identified as being located in ancient Assam.

The Chinese works were another important source. The accounts of Chang Kien of the 2nd century B.C. mention the existence of commercial and cultural contacts between ancient Assam and China from very early times. The accounts of the Shung Shu (c.420-479 A.D.) record the sending of two embassies from India to China, of which, one was sent by Yu-Chai of the Kapili valley. Yu-Chai is identified with King Kalyanavarman (c.420-440A.D.) of the Varman dynasty ruling in ancient Assam. I-Tsing in his account refers to King Devavarma of Eastern India who held sway over the Nalanda region. This Devavarma has been identified with King Avantivarman, who may have been a successor of Bhaskaravarman. The most important Chinese source was *Si-Yu-Ki* written by Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang, who visited India during the period 629-45 A.D. It gives us an account of Hiuen-Tsang's visit to Kamarupa and stay at the court of king Bhaskaravarman providing information of the political, social and religious life of the people of Assam. Another Chinese work *New History of the Tang Dynasty* gives us information about the relation between Kamarupa king Bhaskaravarman and the Chinese mission of 648 A.D. The Chinese sources in short are valuable for our period.

The writings of the Muslim scholars are important for the geography of Assam. Among the Arabic and Persian works the earliest one to mention about Kamarupa was a book written by the Arab merchant Sulaiman in 851 A.D. but completed by Abu Zayd in 916 A.D. Another work was Hudud-ul-Alam composed by the unknown author in 982 A.D. Alberuni's Arabic work entitled *Tarikhul-Hind* written about 1030 A.D. mentions that Kamrupa lies to the east of Kannauj. The Persian work *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* of Minhajuddin Siraj gives information about Muhammad-i- Bakhtiyar's expedition against Tibet through Kamarupa and the destruction of the major part of his army in Assam near Guwahati.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Fill in the blanks:

**Q.1:** Yogini Tantra mentions about Koch King ……

**Q.2:** The genealogy of the rulers of the Dimarua family is found in …… and …… .

**Q.3:** Among the Chinese works …….. was most important.

## 1.3.2 Archaeological Sources

Like the literary sources, the Archaeological remains too are an important source for reconstructing the history of ancient Assam. Archaeological sources can be studied under three heads, namely:

1. Inscriptions or Epigraphy
2. Coins or Numismatics
3. Material Remains

**1. Inscriptions**

Inscriptions are writings engraved on copper plates and rocks and impressed on clay seals. The king issued inscriptions for different purposes such as donation of lands, to commemorate achievements along with ideals and also to record diplomatic relations with contemporary powers. No genuine history of ancient Assam can be written without the epigraphic evidences which are reliable to a great extent. Hence, as historical sources inscriptions have great significance. They give us lots of information regarding the political, social, administrative, diplomatic relations and religious conditions of a particular period. They also provide information about the power, policies and achievements of the king and other officials.

The local epigraphs or inscriptions of Assam are found in many numbers. They are engraved on copper plates, stone tablets, rocks, pillars, outer parts of caves, temples and other buildings. They are also impressed on clay seals. Their language is Sanskrit

*and the scripts are Devanagari and north Indian Brahmi. They are composed in verse or* prose or a mixture of the two. Most of them bear no date, and only a single inscription is dated in the Gupta era and three in the Saka era.

More than fifty inscriptions belonging to the early period have so far been discovered. The *Tezpur Rock Inscription* of king Harjaravarman is the earliest known dated inscription of ancient Assam. It is dated 510 of the Gupta era corresponding to 829 A.D. Most of these inscriptions are copper plate grants in which the genealogy of the king, who issued the charter, is found in accordance with an old practice. Among this the *Umachal Rock Inscription*, *Barganga Rock Inscription*, *Doobi Copper Plates*, *Nidhanpur Copper Plates* and *Nalanda Clay Seals* provide information about the Varman dynasty. For the history of the Salastambhas, we have the *Tezpur Rock Inscription*, *Hayungthal Copper Plate*, *Tezpur Copper Plate*, *Parbatiya Copper Plates*, *Howraghat Copper Plates*, *Nagaon Copper Plates* and *Ulubari Copper Plates*. The history of the Pala dynasty can be known from the *Caratbari Copper Plates*, *Bargaon Copper Plates*, *Soalkuchi Copper Plates*, *Guwahati Copper Plates*, *Guakuchi Copper Plates*, *Gachtal Copper Plates*, *Khonamukh Copper Plates*, *Subhankarapataka Copper Plates* and *Pushpabhadra Copper Plates*.

Apart from these dynastic inscriptions, there are some other local inscriptions providing information about ancient Assam. The *Kamauli grant* of Vaidyadeva (c.1126-1140A.D.) found at Varanasi records the victory of Mayana, the general of the Gauda ruler Ramapala, over the king of Kamarupa and Vaidyadeva's conquest of the western part of the kingdom of Kamarupa. The *Assam Plates* of Vallabhadeva (c.1180-1200 A.D.) give the names of three kings who were probably the successors of Vaidyadeva. The *Kanai Barasi Bowa Rock Inscription* dated 1205 A.D. records the destruction of the Turkish army while invading Kamarupa.

Some contemporary inscriptions from other parts of India too contain information on the history of early Assam. In the *Allahabad Prasasti* of Samudragupta the name of Kamarupa occurs as a frontier kingdom, whose king owed allegiance to king Samudragupta of his own accord. The *Mandasore Inscription* of Yasodharman mentions Yasodharman's invasion upto the neighbourhood of the Lauhitya. The *Aphsad Inscription* of Adityasena refers to the conflict between Mahasenagupta and Susthitavarman (c.585-593 A.D.), the king of Kamarupa. The *Pasupati Temple Inscription* at Kathmandu gives information about Nepal king Jayadeva Parachakrakama, who married Rajyamati, the daughter of king Harshadeva of Bhagadatta's family. The *Bhagalpur grant* of Narayanapala of Gauda refers to diplomatic relations between Pragjyotisha, Gauda and Orissa during the reign of Devapala. The *Belava grant* of Bhojavarman records a conflict between Jatavarman of Bengal and a ruler of Kamarupa. The *Silimpur Stone Inscription* of a Brahmana named Prahasa records that the Kamarupa king Jayapala offered 900 gold coins equal to his own body weight to the Brahmana along with other gifts.

**2. Coins**

Numismatic evidence is one of the most reliable sources for the study of the early history of any land, especially when the coins help us in determining the chronology of a dynasty. But unfortunately very few coins of the early period have so far been discovered. This is no doubt about one of the reasons why we have faced a great difficulty in determining the chronology of the rulers of the period. There is hardly any dynasty in ancient India which did not issue coins of its own, and it is therefore, reasonable to suppose that the rulers of Kamarupa also minted coins of their own.

Among coins of pre-Ahom times found in Assam so far, there are certain gold issues of the type called *Imitation Gupta*, found in a hoard discovered at Paglatek, in the south bank of Brahmaputra. The same types of coins are also found in Bangladesh and Tripura

which gives information of Assam-Bengal trade relationship. Some Copper coins discovered in Dhulapadung Tea Estate near Tezpur are roughly round in shape and of varying weight. These coins have a blank reverse and a single letter 'Va', 'Ha' and 'Ba' on the obverse. It is probable that 'Va' indicates the name of Vanamalavarman and 'Ba' (Ba) Balavarman and 'Ha' indicates Harjaravarman. The *Silimpur Stone Inscription* of Prahasa records a *tulapurush* gift along with 900 gold coins of Jayapala, who is generally identified with the last member of the Pala line of kings of ancient Assam. However, the *Ambari stone Inscription* found at Guwahati issued at a later date records the name of Samudrapala.

**3. Material Remains**

The remains of the undated history of ancient Assam consist of neoliths, megaliths and pottery which help us in studying the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan elements in Assam. Old monuments in between the period 5$^{th}$ to the 12$^{th}$ Century A.D. are found scattered throughout the land. These consist of remains of architecture and fortifications, sculptured designs and icons of various deities. As a subject of historical study, they are useful not only for their artistic value but also for the light they throw on the religious conditions of the people. The temples and images of the various deities of different faiths supply us with information about the state of social and religious life of the people.

Some of the prominent monuments are the door frames found at Dah-Parvatia, remains of a gigantic Sun temple at Tezpur, Buddhist, Saivate, Shakti and Vaisnavite shrines lying scattered throughout the state. Only few places have been satisfactorily excavated. At Dah Parvatiya near Tezpur some early sculptures and statues were discovered of which some belong to the Gupta age. A few years back, a good number of remains were unearthed at Narakasurgaon. Then at Ambari in the city of Guwahati, beautiful architectural remains of the ancient period came to light along with an abundance of icons of Mahisamardini Durga, Surya and Indra.

Thus, the ancient architecture and monuments help us a lot of to understand the evolution of the artistic and cultural development of our ancestors. These also inform us about different schools of art, its development and the amount of foreign influence upon it.



**ACTIVITY-1.1**

Study an inscription located in your locality and write down a few lines about that inscription.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.4:** Match the following:

| | **KINGS** | **INSCRIPTIONS** |
|---|---|---|
| a) | Samudragupta | 1) Pasupati Temple Inscription |
| b) | Bhutivarman | 2) Aphsad Inscription |
| c) | Jayadeva | 3) Allahabad Pillar Inscription |
| d) | Adityasena | 4) Barganga Rock Inscription |

**Q.5:** Fill in the blanks:

a) Some …….. coins were discovered in Dhulapadung Tea Estate.

b) The remains of a gigantic …….. temple is found in Tezpur.



## 1.4 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt-

- various literary sources of ancient Assam and their importance in reconstructing the history of ancient Assam.
- Literary sources are divided into two groups- indegeneous literary sources and foreign literary sources.
- different categories of archeological sources. These are- Inscriptions, Coins and other material remains. All these are of different importance to reconstruct the history of ancient Assam.



## 1.5 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H. K. (2003): *The Comprehenhive History of Assam*, Volume-I, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati
2. Chaudhury, P.C. (1966): *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the 12th century A.D*., 2nd edition, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Gauhati

## 1.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Visvasimha

**Ans to Q No 2:** Haragaurivilasa, Bhuyar Puthi

**Ans to Q No 3:** Si-Yu-Ki

**Ans to Q No 4:** a) 3, b) 4, c) 1, d) 2

**Ans to Q No 5:** a) Copper b) Sun



## 1.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS** (Answer each question within 50 words)

**Q 1:** Who authored *Raghuvansam*?

**Q 2:** Mention oneTantric work of ancient Kamarupa.

**Q 3:** Who authored *Ntural history*?

**Q 4:** Who authored *Si-Yu-Ki* ?

**B) SHORT QUESTIONS** (Answer each question within 150 words)

**Q 1:** Briefly discuss the importance of Sanskrit literature in reconstructing the history of ancient Assam.

**Q 2:** Write a short note on Muslim literature of ancient Assam.

**Q 3:** How coins are important to reconstruct the history of ancient Assam?

**C) LONG QUESTIONS:** (Answer each question within 300-500 words)

**Q 1:** Discuss the importance of literary sources of ancient Assam.

**Q 2:** Analyse the importance of archeological sources in reconstructing the history of ancient Assam.

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 2 : GEOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE OF ASSAM HISTORY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


2.1 Learning objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Geographical Outline of Ancient Assam

- 2.3.1 Assam- Origin of the name
- 2.3.2 Mountain Routes
- 2.3.3 Climate
- 2.3.4 Extent of Pragjyotisha- Kamarupa

2.4 Let Us Sum Up

2.5 Further Reading

2.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.7 Model Questions


## 2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- describe the mountain routes and climate of ancient Assam
- discuss the extent of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa.

## 2.2 INTRODUCTION

As you have already learnt about the different sources of ancient Assam in your first unit of this course, and on the basis of these sources of ancient Assam, in this unit we shall discuss the origin of the name Assam, differnet mountain routes, climate of ancient Assam and the extent of Pragjyotisha- Kamarupa.

## 2.3 GEOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE OF ANCIENT ASSAM

### 2.3.1 Assam- Origin of the Name

Assam is known by different names in the Epics, Puranas and early literature. It is mentioned as Pragjyotisha in the Epics, the

*Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Several theories are put forward regarding the origin of the name Pragjyotisha. According to one theory, a branch of people called *Chao- Theius* of China migrated to India at a very early period. In India, they came to be known as the *Zuhthis* and one of their centres was known as *Prag-Zuhthis*. But this theory is not supported by sufficient evidence. According to another theory, the name Pragajyotisha originates from an Austric phrase *Pgar-Juh*, meaning a region of extensive hills. Another theory associates the name with the astronomical importance of the country. The *Kalika Purana* mentions that the creator Brahma made the first calculation of the stars in Pragjyotisha. In his "A History of Assam", E. A. Gait says that 'Prag' means former or Eastern and 'Jyotisa', meaning a star, astrology, shining. Therefore, Pragajyotisha may be taken to mean the "City of Eastern Astrology" derived from Prag-Jyotisa. Early literature and inscriptions often refer both to the land and its capital city as Pragjyotishapura.

Ancient Assam is known for the first time as Kamarupa in the *Allahabad Pillar Inscription* of Samudragupta (4$^{th}$ century A.D.) and in the early Puranas. Hiuen Tsang who visited Kamarupa in the first half of the 7$^{th}$ century A.D. referred to it as Kamolupo. It is also opined that the word Kamarupa has been derived from an Austric formation like *Kamru* or *Kamrut*. Banikanta Kakati in *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya* states that the word symbolises a new cult, namely the worship of the mother goddess Kamakhya. He also states that the word Kamakhya too was derived from an Austric formation such as *Kamoi* (demon) in old Khmer, *Kamoit* (devil) in Cham, *Kamet* (corpse) in Khasi, *Komui* (grave) in Santali.

The word Kamarupa may have been a Sanskritisation of a non-Sanskrit word. Persian works like the *Tabaquat-i-Nasiri* and the *Riaz-ul-Salatin*, as well as the 19$^{th}$ century Assamese chronicle the *Haragaurisamvada* even refer to this land as *Kamru* or *Kamrud*. The territory is called *Asham* in the *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Asam* in the *Padshahnama*. The origin of the name Assam is uncertain. According

to Bani kanta Kakati, *Asama* may be a later Sanskritisation of an earlier form *Acham*. In the Tai language *Cham* refers to the Tai-Shan people and *Acham* meant those who were not Tai or Shan. These groups entered the Brahmaputra Valley in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. There is another suggestion which states that the word Assam is derived from a Bodo formation like *Ho-Chom* which means low land.

Local legends claim that it was in Assam that the Indian cupid Kamadeva who was reduced to ashes by the Lord Siva regained his *rupa* or form. Hence it was renamed as Kamarupa. The island of Umananda at Guwahati in the midst of the Brahmaputra is referred to as *Bhasmachal* in early literature and is said to be formed of the ashes or *bhasma* of the ill-fated Kamadeva.

The early Persian works like the *Tabaquat-i-Nasiri* and the *Riaz-ul-Salatin* have referred to this land as *Kamru* or *Kamrud*. The territory is called *Asham* or *Asam* in the later Persian works like *Ain-i-Akbari* and the *Padshahnama*. In the *Fathiya-i-Ibbriyah*, the term *Asham* or *Asam* occurs. Tavernier took it as *Asam*. When the term was used in Persian sources, it referred to the people of the Ahom kingdom only and not the territory of modern Assam. Assam is apparently the English form of *Asam*.

### 2.3.2 Mountain Routes

Assam may be broadly divided into two physical units' namely, the North-Eastern and the Central hill tracts and the Valleys of the Brahmaputra and Barak. The Eastern Himalayas lies in the North of Assam. The different parts of the sub Himalayan region are named after the semi Mongoloid tribes who inhabit these hills viz: the *Bhutias*, *Akas*, *Dafalas*, Mishings, *Adis*, *Mishimis*, etc. Assam was linked to the neighbouring countries by several routes. The Patkai hill was a natural boundary between Assam and Myanmar. Assam-Myanmar routes in the East that runs through Cachar-Manipur helped the migration of the racial elements from South-East Asia.

The Patkai hills route was followed by the Ahoms and other Tibeto-Burman migrants from the North- East. The hill passes of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan were also probably used by certain waves of the Tibeto-Burmans. The frequent routes in the West were the Valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Ganges. This is the route through which the Aryan speakers penetrated into Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa.

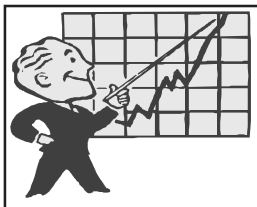


**LET US KNOW**

The physical divisions led to the emergence in Assam of two distinct ethnic groups namely, the dwellers of hills and those of the plains. However there had been a frequent intercourse between the people of the hills and the plains. The hill men by and large depended on the plains for their foods and other necessities and the plainsmen provided them their requirements. Thus, they ensured friendly relations with their neighbouring hill tribes.

### 2.3.3 Climate

Lack of materials makes it difficult to reconstruct the climatic condition of ancient Assam. There is no literary evidence nor any extensive excavation made so far in Assam to arrive at some tentative conclusion. We come to know only from Hiuen Tsang that in the 7$^{th}$ century A.D., the country was low and damp. The Muslim chronicler Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mir Jumla in his expedition to Assam in 1662 informs that it used to rain in Assam for eight months in the year. Even the four months of the winter were not free from rain. Extreme humidity and excessive rainfall are the peculiarities of the climate of Assam. Assam is covered with evergreen forests. References from Hiuen-Tsang and the evidence from the local inscriptions indicate a climate and soil suitable for growing rice, jackfruit, coconut, sugarcane, mango, cane, bamboo, and bay leafs.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answer the following questions:**

**Q.1:** Who authored the book 'The Mother Goddess Kamakhya'?

.....

**Q.2:** Padshahnama called the territory of Kamarupa as.....(fill in the blank)

**Q.3:** ..... was the natural boundary between Assam and Myanmar.

## 2.3.4 Extent of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa

The modern state of Assam is only a part of the extensive kingdom of Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa of ancient times. Political boundaries of the kingdom fluctuated from time to time but there is no doubt that it's Northern and South-Western limits extended much beyond the modern state of Assam.

- **Pauranic Account**

A good number of ancient scriptures have defined the boundaries of ancient Assam. According to most of the Puranas, Kamarupa extended up to the river Karatoya in the West and included Manipur, Jayantia, Cachar, parts of Maimensing, Sylhet, Rangpur and portions of Nepal and Bhutan. The *Kalika Purana* of 9$^{th}$ century A.D. has mentioned Karatoya as its Western boundary. It also mentions that the kingdom of Kamarupa was triangular in shape, 100 *yojanas* in length and 30 *yojanas* in breadth and Devi Dikkaravasini existed towards its Eastern boundary. The river Swetaganga was said to have existed bordering the shrine of Dikkaravasini, identified with her excavated shrine at Sadiya.

The *Yogini Tantra* of 12$^{th}$ century A.D. (with addition up to 17$^{th}$ century A.D.) states that Kamarupa was divided into *Ratnapitha*, *Bhadrapitha*, *Saumarpitha* and *Kamapitha*. It states in brief that the four boundaries of Kamarupa are Karatoya (West), Dikshu river

(East), Kanjagiri (North) and the Laksa river (South) respectively. As for the geometric shape of Kamarupa, *Yogini Tantra* also refers to it as triangular in shape and also gives the same measurement to the kingdom of Kamarupa as stated in the *Kalika Purana* with slight variation in its expression only. The *Haragaurisamvada* also divides Kamarupa into four *pithas* marked by river boundaries. It states that *Ratnapitha* was between the river Karatoya and the Swarnakosha, *Kamapitha* was between the Swarnakosha and the Kapila, *Swarnapitha* was between the river Puspika and Bhairavi, and *Saumarpitha* was in between the river Bhairavi and the Dikrang.

- **Ramayana and Mahabharata**

The references in the Epics indicate that the country stretched as far as the sea and that it was partly a hilly country. The *Ramayana* locates the city of Pragjyotisha on a gold-crested mountain called Varaha which stood on the fathomless Varunalaya. The *Mahabharata* calls Bhagadatta, the king of Pragajyotisha as *Sailalaya* (dwelling among the mountain), *Parvatapati* (lord of the mountain) *Purvasagaravasi* (inhabitant of the Eastern sea) and refers to his troops as consisting of the Chinas, the Kiratas and the dwellers of the sea coast. The Varaha mountain was the Assam range. The sea was the Lauhitya (Lohit) Sagara. The Kiratas meant the Mongoloid people and the Chinas probably meant the Bhutanese and the Tibetans.

- **Accounts of Hiuen-Tsang**

Hiuen-Tsang, the eminent Chinese scholar visited Assam during the reign of king Bhaskaravarman in 638 A.D. He states that the kingdom was more than a myriad *li* or 1667 miles in circuit. He travelled from Pun-Na=Fa-Tan-Na (Pundravardhana) on the east more than 900 *li* or 150 miles then crossed a river Ka-lo-tu (Karatoya). In his records, he mentioned that to the East of Kamarupa, the country is a series of hills and hillocks without any principal city and one can reach the South-West barbarians (of China). He also describes Kamarupa as being 1600 *li* to the West of upper Burma beyond the

black mountains. It was situated in Eastern India, 600 li to the South-East of Pundravardhana with river Ka-lo-tu between the two countries. Thus, it appears that the kingdom of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa covered the major portion of Eastern India.



**ACTIVITY – 2.1**

Locate the rivers and hills in the map of ancient Assam.

a. Patkai b. Barak c. Karatoya



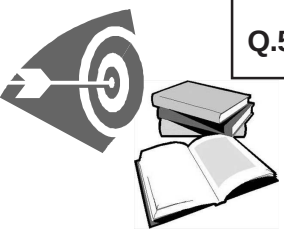
**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Answer the following questions:**

**Q.4:** Into how many divisions Kamarupa was divided according to Haragourisamvada?

.....

**Q.5:** Huen Tsang visited Assam in .....(fill in the blank)



## 2.4 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H.K. (2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam* (Volume- I) Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati
2. Choudhury, P.C.: *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the 12$^{th}$century A. D.*

## 2.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati

**Ans to Q No 2:** Asam

**Ans to Q No 3:** Patkai hill

**Ans to Q No 4:** Four

**Ans to Q No 5:** 638 A.D.



## 2.6 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Very Short Questions** (Answer each and every question within 50 Words)

**Q 1:** What does *Klika Purana* speak about the name *Pragjyotisa?*

**Q 2:** Name the earliest Inscription that mentions about Kamarupa.

**Q 3:** Ain-i-Akbari called the territory of Kamarupa as.....(fill in the blank)

**Q 4:** What was the western boundary of ancient Assam?

**B) Short Questions** (Answer each and every question within 150 words)

**Q 1:** Write briefly about the account of Hiuen Tsang on ancient Assam.

**Q 2:** What did the epics speak about the extent of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa?

**Q 3:** What did Mir Jumla speak about the climate of Assam?

**C) Long Questions** (Answer each and every question in between 300-500 words)

**Q 1:** Discuss the lorigin of the name 'Assam'.

**Q 2:** Discuss the mountain ranges and climate of ancient Assam.

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 3: CULTURAL CONTACT AND MIGRATION

## UNIT STRUCTURE


3.1 Learning objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Cultural Contacts and Migration

- 3.3.1 Negrites
- 3.3.2 Australoids
- 3.3.3 Mongoloids
- 3.3.4 Alpines or Armenoids
- 3.3.5 Indo-Aryans

3.4 Let Us Sum Up

3.5 Further Reading

3.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.7 Model Questions


## 3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss about cultural contacts and migration into Assam
- understand different routes and characteristic features of different groups of people.

## 3.2 INTRODUCTION

Cultural contacts and migrations are the unavidable parts of any historical process. Geographically, Assam contains fertile river valleys surrounded by mountains and hills. It is accessible from Tibet in the north, accross the Patkai in the Southeast and from Burma accross the Arakan. In the west both the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley open widely to the Gangetic plains. Thus Assam has been populated via all these accessible points in the past. Now in this unit we are going to discuss about the cultural contacts and migration of people to this Valley in the different historical phases.

## 3.3 CULTURAL CONTACTS AND MIGRATION

Since very ancient times Assam saw the migration of nearly all the principal human races in different waves and periods of history. The Negritos, the Austroloids, the Mongoloids, and the Alpines, all immigrated to this land in different times and with their mutual inter-fusion the Assamese culture evolved.



**LET US KNOW**

We cannot definitely ascertain the exact date of their migration. It is generally held that the Mongoloids, called Kiratas in literature poured into India from 2000 B.C. onwards. The Negritos and the Austroloids preceded them by two or three millenniums. Many scholars are of the opinion that a wave of Alpines also came to Assam and it is held that the Kalitas, a caste- Hindu community of Assam are Alpine in origin. The Aryan speakers probably migrated to this area in circa 700 B.C. The modern Assamese are mainly the descendents of three major linguistic groups, namely the Mon-Khmer speaking Australoids, the Tibeto- Burman Mongoloids and Indo-Aryan speakers.

### 3.3.1 Negritos

The Negrito element forms one of the earliest strains in the population of the hills, particularly among some Nagas. Both ethnography and material culture of the tribes point to the existence of such a strain. The original home of the negroids was Africa. From Africa they entered India via Arabia and the coastland of Baluchistan and Iran and subsequently spread to different parts of India including Assam.

B.S. Guha refers to the census of India (1931) where there were six main races in the population of India namely Negrito, Proto-Austroloid, Mongoloid, Mediterranean, Western Brachycephal and Nordic. Of these first three elements i.e. Negrito, Proto-Austroloid and Mongoloid are found among the tribal population of India. On

the basis of hair forms and certain elements of material culture, some scholars including Hutton, Mills and others have pointed to the existence of a Negrito strain in Assam. According to Mill inhabitants of the mountains of Assam were almost certainly Negritos. S.K. Chatterjee writes 'first we have in pre-historic times the arrival of the Negritos from Africa traces of them being found as far east as Assam among the Nagas and remnants of them are found in south India among a few wild tribes.

### 3.3.2 Australoids

Australoids deserves careful consideration in the context of studying ethnic history of Assam. They are characterised by dolichocephalic head, broad nose which is depressed at the root, dark brown skin colour and curly hair. They are also known by different names like pre-Dravidians, Nishada etc. In south India there are some important tribes belonged to Australoid group. They are Chenchus of Hyderabad, Kadars of Cochin, Kurumba and Irulla of Nilgiri, Muthuvan of Travancore etc. The tribes having Australoid affinities are known in South India as Pre-Dravidians.

At one time this ethnic element was not concentrated only in south or middle India but also spread to north and north-east India as well. This is evident from the study of the skeleton remains unearthed from the pre-historic times. The Australoids were primarily hunters and gatherers and knew primitive agriculture. They preferred to live in the hill slopes and forests. They made pottery with the help of hand. Their main tool was stick. With the help of the stick they dug earth and practised primitive agriculture.

We cannot say anything definitely about the language spoken by the Austroloids. According to S.K.Chatterjee 'the speech-family known as Austric was associated with the proto-Austroloids and their descendents.' The Austric speech-family can be divided into two main groups — Austro-Asiatic or Mon-Khmer and Austronasian. In India the Kol and the Mundas of Central India, Nicobaries of the

Nicobar Island and the Khasis of Meghalaya speak the language of Austro-Asiatic. The Khasi-Synteng speaking the Mon-Khmer speech is considered as representatives of the Austro Asiatic. Besides the Khasi Syntengs other tribes of Austro-Asiatic stock are believed to have migrated to Assam.

The Wanchoos of Arunachal use certain Austric word in their dialect. Among the various Bodo tribes also there appear certain Austroloid traits. It is interesting that the Rabhas, Garos and the Mikirs have dolichocephalic head. According to Flatz the entire area of Assam, northern Bengal and possibly a part of Nepal were inhabited in prehistoric times by a contingent of matrilineal Austroloids tribes. Thus the Austroloids appear to have come first to Assam and left behind some genetic endowment. They came before the advent of the Mongoloids who partially or fully absorbed the earliar Austroloids traits.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Fill in the blanks:**

**Q.1:** The original home of the Negrids was.....

**Q.2:** Australoids preffered to live in the .....an .....

**Q.3:** .....of Meghalay speak the language of Austro-Asiatic.

**Q.4:** The tribes of north east are mostly .....

## 3.3.3 Mongoloids

The tribes of the north east are predominantly Mongoloid. The Mongoloid populations entered into region through various routes in different times. The Mongoloid could be grouped under a broad heading Tibeto-Burman. Generally they have yellow brown skin colour and flat wavy coarse head hair. The face is broad.

The original home of these Mongoloid people was the upper courses of the Yangtse-kiyang and the Hwang-ho in North West

China. Probably from 2000 B.C. onwards some people of this area migrated towards Assam and hills of Myanmar. The Mongoloid followed the courses of Brahmaputra, Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong and Menam. They used the mountain passes of Assam and Myanmar through the north east and the south east. Another branch followed the courses of Teesta, Dharla and Sankosh to north Bengal. Some of them occupied the hills of Assam and gradually spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley. Most of the tribes and communities of the Brahmaputra valley like Koches, Kacharis, Morans, Chutias, Barahis, Rabhas, Tiwas, and Hasongs are of Indo-Chinese, Tibeto-Burman origin. There was a constant flow of the Tibeto-Burmans of the Indo-Chinese stock to Assam through the mountain passes of the south east. The Ahoms were also members of this family.

### 3..3.4 Mediterranean Races

After the Austroloid a Mediterranean stock came to India. Their original home was eastern Mediterranean region. So they are called the Mediterranean which is a variety of the Caucasoid. Their head was long and narrow. They had narrow faces and low orbits. At one time they migrated from eastern Mediterranean region to south east Asia through India forming a continuous chain. Among the Indo-Mongoloid we find non-Mongoloid elements which is the contribution of the ancient Mediterranean. It indicates that a very early time Mediterranean people migrated to Assam.

### 3.3.5 Alpines or Armenoids

During the period of the third to second millennium B.C. the Paleo-Alpines entered India through the north western route. The Alpine or Armenoid followed the Mediterranean or came almost at the same time from the west or the north-west. It is not definitely known at what time the Alpine people entered into Assam. According to K.L.Barua the Alpines made significant contribution to the culture

and civilization of eastern India prior to the advent of the Vedic Aryans. According to some scholars the Kalitas of Assam were supposed to have been of Alpine origin and they had early settlements near Sadiya. However other reject this view. The Alpine people are characterized by brachycephalic head with flat occiput, whereas the Kalitas by and large are mesocephalic. However, admixture of the Alpines not can be totally ruled out.

### 3.3.6 Indo-Aryans

The Aryans speakers were the last to migrate into Assam. It is difficult to ascertain when and how the Aryans entered into Assam. With the advent of the Aryans or the Indo Aryans a new chapter opened in the history of Assam. The newcomers possessed a culture of their own which was different from those of Austroloids and Mediterranean. Their head was bigger and massive. The colour of their skin, eye and hair are not dark, but lighter.

According to S.K.Chatterjee Indo-Aryans arrived at North Bihar by 700 B.C. At different time they moved towards eastward. Assam had early contacts with the early Aryans. This is proved by Kalidasa's Raghuvamsam (4$^{th}$ century A.D), and the 10$^{th}$ century A.D, Kalika Purana etc. The Doobi and Nidhanpur Copper plate inscriptions of Bhaskar Varman record the presence of Indo Aryans in Kamarupa during sixth century B.C.



**ACTIVITY 3.1**

Prepare a list of some races that migrated to Assam.

……

……

.....



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Choose the correct Answers:**

**Q.5:** Alpines entered India through north eastern/ north western/ South-eastern route.

.....

**Q.6:** Indo-Aryans/ Alpines/ Mediterranean races were the last to migrate into Assam.

.....

**Q.7:** The original home of the mediterranean race was eastern Mediterranean region/ western Mediterranean region/ northern Mediterranean region.

.....



## 3.4 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learn about,

- A proper reading of the unit helps you to understand the migration of some principal human races in different waves to this land. We have discussed the migration of the Negritos, the Austroloids, the Mongoloids, the Alpines, and the Aryans etc to this land in different times.
- Though Assam received a large variety of racial elements, the Austric and the Tibeto-Burman elements have made immense contribution. Assam gave shelter to many races at different period.



## 3.5 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H.K. (2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam* (Volume- I) Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati
2. Choudhury, P.C.: *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the 12$^{th}$century A. D.*

## 3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Africa

**Ans to Q No 2:** hill slopes, forests

**Ans to Q No 3:** Khasis

**Ans to Q No 4:** Mongoloids

**Ans to Q No 5:** north western

**Ans to Q No 6:** Indo-Aryans

**Ans to Q No 7:** eastern Mediterranean



## 3.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Very Short Questions** (Answer each and every question within 50 Words)

**Q 1:** Who were Pre-Dravidians*?*

**Q 2:** What were the primary professions of Australoids*?*

**Q 3:** Mention the tribes of Assam belong to Indo-Chinese, Tibeto-Burman origin.

**Q 4:** The Alpine people were charactrised by .....with ..... (fill in the blank)

**B) Short Questions** (Answer each and every question within 150 words)

**Q 1:** Write briefly about the Mongoloid people of Assam.

**Q 2:** Write short notes on the following:

a) Indo-Aryans

b) Australoids

**C) Long Questions** (Answer each and every question in between 300-500 words)

**Q 1:** 'Since very ancient times Assam saw the migration of nearly all the principal human races in different waves and periods of history'- Discuss.

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 4: HISTORICITY OF NARAKA AND HIS SUCCESSORS

## UNIT STRUCTURE


4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Naraka in Different Texts

4.3.1 Naraka in the Mahabharata

4.3.2 Naraka in the Puranas

4.4 Different Stories on Naraka and His Successors

4.5 Let Us Sum Up

4.6 Further Reading

4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.8 Model Questions


## 4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- know Naraka in different Texts like the Mahabharata and the Puranas,
- discuss different stories on Naraka and his successors.

## 4.2 INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, hope all of you have heard about king Naraka of Kamarupa. But historicity of Naraka is still questionable. Most of the Indian texts and scholars prefer to call him as a mythological king of Kamarupa rather than a historical king. Now in this unit we are going to discuss the historicity of Naraka through different Texts.

## 4.3 NARAKA IN DIFFERENT TEXTS

### 4.3.1 Naraka in the Mahabharata :

The Mahabharata allows an insight into the earlier myths of Naraka and his successors. He is recognized as being one of the ancient kings of Assam with the name Bhauma (son of the Earth or



***Asura-*** A demon.

***Kuru-*** A royal dynasty

***Rajasuya-*** A sacrifice performed by a monarch as a mark of his subduing all other kings.

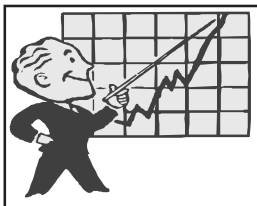
Bhumi) and ***Asura***. He is referred to have stolen Aditi's ear-rings and was slained by Krishna Vasudeva (a form of Lord Vishnu) who recovers the ear rings. In a later stanza, it is narrated that Lord Vishnu killed Naraka at the insistence of Indra, whose status was threatened by Naraka. Likewise, 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).

We must however not attach undue importance to the Naraka legends especially the association of Bhagadatta and Vajradatta with the heroes of the Kurukshetra war, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, as the historicity of the legends of the Kauravas and Pandavas and the war of Kurukshetra has yet to be satisfactorily determined. Moreover, the dates of the war are a matter of confusion as the traditions regarding the war are conflicting.

One very interesting aspect of the legend as mentioned in the Mahabharata is the fact that Naraka is not regarded as the son of Earth or Bhumi, as depicted in the Puranas. But his son Bhagadatta resided in the hilly region of the Himalayas and other hill ranges of Assam can be accepted because his followers, the Kiratas, were Himalayan mountaineers of Mongolian stock, while the Chinas were Tibetan Mongoloids. 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). Historian K.L. Barua suggests that the sea mentioned above should be located in and around the Sylhet and Mymensingh district (now in Bangladesh). He also suggests the connection of the said area, in ancient times, with the Bay of Bengal. Early epigraphic records of the kings of Assam refer to the Lauhitya or Brahmaputra as the Lauhitya Sagara or Sindhu (Sea). There is a tradition in ancient times which mentions of the eastern sea extending to Devikota (West Bengal). This gives an explanation of the mentioning of the Lauhitya along with the reference to the people living alongside the sea coast.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Fill in the blanks:

**Q.1:** Pandu was a ……Prince.

**Q.2:** Naraka is said to have been slained by……..

## 4.3.2 Naraka in the Puranas

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 his 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, the god Vishnu is regarded as Prajapati. The *Harivamsa* gives a hint of the birth of Naraka as a result of the union of Earth and her saviour, Vishnu.



**LET US KNOW**

*Harivamsa* is assumed to date back to the beginning of the 5th century A.D. It is a supplement of the *Mahabharata*, and sometimes called a Purana.

The Varaha Avtara of Book I of the Harivamsa speaks of the Earth being rescued. Book II records the speech as given by Earth to Krishna Vasudeva. This speech can be assumed to be spoken to a husband. She says: “It is you, O Govinda who gave him and it is you who have killed him. The Vishnu Purana too puts similar speech in the mouth of the earth: “He whom thou gavest me has now been killed by thee”.

The Harivamsa version of the legend of Naraka narrates the story as follows. Indra, the king of gods, visits Dvaraka and pleads with Krishna to punish Naraka who was misbehaving with the gods, women, and sages. He tells Krishna about Naraka’s stealing Aditi’s ear rings, the rape of Tvashtri’s daughter, the seizure of 16100 girls, gandharvas, apsaras etc. Hearing this Krishna readily agreed and left for Pragjyotisha on the back of his Garuda along with his wife Satyabhama. Krishna had to wage a war with Naraka’s warriors like Muru and his son, Nisunda, Hayagriva and Panchanda. In the end, Naraka was slain by Krishna. The mother of Naraka returned Aditi’s earrings. Krishna found many treasures of Naraka, among which were Varuna’s umbrella, Maniparvata (a solid heap of precious gems and stones), jewels, a large number of elephants, horses, birds and other animals. These were all sent to Dvaraka.

The Vishnu Purana leaves out many details as given in Harivamsa due to textual corruption. Kaseru is not mentioned in the Vishnu Purana. The girls captured by Naraka, are called maidens

of gods, saints, demons and kings".

The Bhagavat Purana, composed at a later date than the Vishnu Purana, highlights the speech of Earth (Bhudevi) to Krishna. The Maniparvata as spoken in the earlier texts is now called Amaradristhana, meaning some peak of mount Sumeru, the abode of the gods.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Answer the questions:

**Q. 3:** What does the Avatara theory say about naraka?

.....

**Q. 4:** What has the Satapatha Brahmana have to say about the legend of Naraka?

.....

**Q.5:** Name the vehicle of Krishna.

.....

**Q.6:** Satyabhama was the wife of .....(fill in the blanks)

- **Naraka in the Kalika Purana**

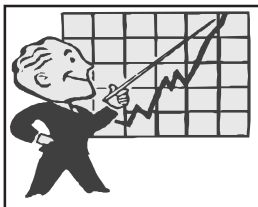
The Naraka story finds more elaboration in the Upapurana entitled *Kalika Purana*. It was composed most probably in the Brahmaputra valley itself. The work dates back to a period earlier than 1000 A.D. as it was quoted by Nanyadeva (c. 1097-1133 A.D.), Apararka (c. 1115-1140 A.D.) and Ballalasena (c. 1159-1179 A.D.). This is refuted by R.C.Hazra who has shown that the Kalika Purana cited by Nanyadeva, Aparaka and Ballalasena was an earlier work composed somewhere during the seventh century A.D. However the extant Kalika Purana is a later work composed in between the tenth or the first half of the eleventh century A.D.

According to the *Kalika Purana*, the result of the union of the boar (*Varaha* incarnation of Vishnu) and Bhudevi, was a powerful

son whose birth was delayed for the good of the world. Vishnu advised the earth to carry the son in her womb until the end of *satya yuga*. Meanwhile Janaka, the ruler of Videha, was issueless and had started a sacrifice for the purpose of having a child. The result was the birth of two sons and a girl. The girl (Sita) had to be dug out as the child lay inside the earth. Under the advice of Narada, Janaka dug the earth and the earth handed over the child to Janaka and requested him that he should bring up her son, who was to be born from the very ground where Sita was born. As said, so it happened, and after the destruction of Ravana by Rama (the avatara or incarnation of Lord Vishnu), the earth went to the very sacrificial ground where Sita was born and gave birth to Naraka. Vishnu blessed the child and said that he would be a ruler of a concealed kingdom and as long as he would possess human nature he would prosper, but once he was devoid of their nature he would bring about his own ruin. The Earth informed Janaka, who adopted the child and Gautama named him as Naraka as the child was found in a skull. For sixteen years, Naraka grew up under the protection of Janaka and nursed by earth (under the name of Katyayani). Shortly after the completion of his sixteenth year, Vishnu took him to Pragjyotisha city. It was situated in the middle of Kamarupa inhabited by the Kiratas who worshipped Kamakhya as the principal deity and also Shiva. Following the advice of Vishnu, Naraka killed the Kirata king Ghataka and drove the Kiratas to the east beyond the Dakkeravasnini (Dikhou river). The coronation of Naraka was performed by Vishnu. The kingdom of Naraka extended from the Karatoya to the eastern territory bounded by the shrine of goddess Dikkeravasini Naraka's kingdom was the place of residence of Mahamaya Yogini (Kamakhya) besides Lauhitya 'son of Brahma' or Brahmaputra and other principal gods and goddesses. The land came to be known as Kamarupa wherein were settled Brahmins who had an expertise in the Vedas, the members of the four varnas and others 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. Brahman 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**

**Q. 7:** Match the following:

| | |
|---|---|
| i) Janaka | a) a sage |
| ii) Katyayani | b) sons of Naraka |
| iii) Bana | c) ruler of Videha |
| iv) Vasistha | d) ruler of Sonitpur |
| v) Bhagadatta, Madavat | e) mother of Naraka |

## 4.4 DIFFERENT STORIES ON NARAKA AND HIS SUCCESSORS

In the late medieval period, the Naraka legend is further embellished by additions and alterations. Based on Kasiram Das's Bengali *Mahabharata*, which was composed about the beginning of the seventeenth century, Bhagadatta is regarded in Assam and Bengal as the father of the wife of Duryodhana (Bhanumati). Some other traditions place Bhagadatta as having married the sister of Duryodhana. Even though such relationship between Bhagadatta and Duryodhana is unknown in the Puranas, yet the people believe that a tank in Guwahati was excavated on the solemn occasion of the marriage between Duryodhana and Bhanumati.

Kalhana's *Rajtarangini* mentions a similar tale where it mentions that king Meghavahana of Kashmir attended the Svayamvara of Amritaprabha, daughter of the king of Pragjyotisha. He then weds her and receives the umbrella of Varuna. When Meghavahana returns the parasol to Varuna, he is told that the umbrella was carried away by the father of his father-in-law. This seems to point that Naraka's grand daughter was Amritaprabha.

Harshacharita mentions the name of Pushpadatta among the lists of the ancestors of Bhaskaravarman and placed him after Bhagadatta and Vajradatta. This is not corroborated however by any other source. Some writers refer to Puspadatta as the son of Bhagadatta, who was killed by Nakula in the Kurukshetra war. As against the early literary and epigraphic

traditions, the medieaval inscriptions of Assam tend to elaborate the myths of Vajradatta. It is said that when Bhagadatta took over as the lord of Pragjyotisha, his younger brother, Vajradatta went to the forest and started penance to his Isvara (Siva). He was successful and he was blessed by 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.*



## 4.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learn about,

- the mention of Naraka and his successors in the Mahabharata.
- a different version of the strory related to Naraka and his successor.
- the Naraka story in a more elaboratie way in the Upapurana entitled *Kalika Purana*, probably it was composed in the Brahmaputra valley itself.
- besides the stories of the epics and the Puranas related to the hist oricity of Naraka and his successors, there were other sources too where we can find the presence of Naraka. These were, Kasiram Das's Bengali Mahabharata, Kalahana's Rajtarangini etc. he 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.*



## 4.6 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H.K. (2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam* (Volume- I) Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati
2. Choudhury, P.C.: *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the 12$^{th}$century A. D.*

## 4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Krishna.

**Ans to Q No 2:** Kuru.

**Ans to Q No 3:** According to the avatar theory, Naraka was born out of the union of Vishnu (in his boar form) and earth.

**Ans to Q No 4:** The Satapatha Brahmana tells about the rescuing of the earth from the ocean by Prajapati in the form of a boar (*Varaha*).

**Ans to Q No 5:** Garuda.

**Ans to Q No 6:** Krishna.

**Ans to Q No 7:** i) -c, ii) -e, iii) -d, iv)-a, v) -b



## 4.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Very Short Questions** (Answer each and every question within 50 Words)

**Q 1:** Who was Bhagadutta?

**Q 2:** What does *Harivamsa* speak about the birth of Naraka?

**Q 3:** The Kalika Purana was composed at .....Valley.

**Q 4:** Who was Naraka?

**B) Short Questions** (Answer each and every question within 150 words)

**Q 1:** What did the *Mahabharata* say about Naraka?

**Q 2:** What does the *Rajtarangini* say about Naraka?

**C) Long Questions** (Answer each and every question in between 300-500 words)

**Q 1:** Discuss the historicity of Naraka in your own words.

**Q 2:** Describe the Naraka story as described in the *Kalika Purana*.

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 5: RULING DYNASTIES OF THE ANCIENT ASSAM

## UNIT STRUCTURE


5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 The Varmans

5.4 The Salastambhas

5.5 The Palas

5.6 Let Us Sum Up

5.7 Further Reading

5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.9 Model Questions


## 5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- describe the ruling dynasties of ancient Assam,
- explain the internal and external policies of the kings,
- discuss the important events of ancient Assam.

## 5.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have learnt about the myths and legends relating to Naraka and his successors which form a part of the pre-historical period of Assam. The legends of Naraka have been related in many of the Puranas, Epics, etc. Naraka is said to be the legendary ruler of ancient Assam.

This unit will acquaint you with the beginning of the political history of ancient Assam. In this unit we are going to study about the ruling dynasties that ruled over the kingdom of ancient Assam known variously as Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa. The internal and external policies of the rulers of ancient Assam and the important events of that period will also be dealt with in this unit. It is to be noted that while the rulers of ancient Assam referred to their land as “land of Pragjyotisha”, contemporary accounts,

including that of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, referred to their kingdom as 'Kamarupa'.

The three main ruling dynasties of ancient Assam were the Varmans (c.350-650 A.D.), Salastambhas (c.655-900 A.D.) and the Palas (c.900-1100 A.D.). The Varmans were the earliest known ruling dynasty of ancient Assam. They started their rule when the imperial Gupta dynasty was ruling over northern India and was the prominent ruling power in India. The Varmans were as such the contemporary of the Guptas.

## 5.3 THE VARMANS

In the middle or later half of the 4th century A.D, the Varmans were able to carve out a kingdom in the Kamarupa region of ancient Assam. The Pushyavarman was the first known historical ruler of the Varman dynasty that ruled for about three centuries. It is interesting to note that the chronology of the Varman rulers of Kamarupa cannot be definitely fixed and hence here, for the convenience of our study, we have taken a fixed period of 25 years as the ruling period of every Varman ruler till Sthiravarman.

The rule of Pushyavarman is generally assigned between the periods 350-374 A.D. He was a later contemporary of the Gupta Emperor, Samudragupta (c.335-376 A.D.) of Magadha. It cannot be said as to when and how Pushyavarman rose to power. His background is obscure but he claimed decent from Naraka. We can only hold that Pushyavarman was an adventurous chief who took advantage of the then prevailing political instability in Kamarupa and made himself the ruler of the land. To justify his claim to the throne, he traced his descent from the family of Naraka-Bhagadatta or Naraka, the ***Bhauma***. As such, the dynasty of Pushyavarman is called the *Naraka- Bhauma dynasty*. Besides, the dynasty is also known as the *Varman dynasty* as the kings of the dynasty had all their principal names ending in the word Varman.



***Bhauma-***Born of the earth.

***Pratyanta Nripati-*** The ruler of a state bordering on the Gupta Empire

Pushyavarman was regarded as a subordinate ally of the Gupta ruler. In the *Allahabad Pillar Inscription* of Samudragupta the king of Kamarupa is mentioned as ***Pratyanta Nripati*****.** As a frontier kingdom, the name of Kamarupa occurs along with Samatata, Davaka, Nepala and Kartipura,

whose kings owed allegiance to Samudragupta by paying all kinds of tribute, obeying his commands and attending his court. But the name of the Kamarupa ruler is not mentioned. Pushyavarman, who was a contemporary of Samudragupta, might have offered submission to the latter of his own accord.



**LET US KNOW**

The discovery of a stone inscription in the Duboroni area of Golaghat district records the name of Maharajadhiraja Vasundhara Varman indicating the presence of other rulers in upper Assam when the Varmans were ruling in Kamarupa Pushyavarman named his son Samudravarman and his daughter-in-law as Dattadevi. It is believed that Pushyavarman did so in imitation of the names of his overlord the Gupta Emperor Samudragupta and his queen Dattadevi.

Again in the seal of Bhaskaravarman attached to the *Doobi Plates*, Pushyavarman is called ***Maharajadhiraja*** and the *Lord of Pragjyotisha.* The assumption of the title of *Maharajadhiraja* indicates the independent status of Pushyavarman. It appears that Pushyavarman was initially a vassal ruler under the Guptas. But later he became an independent ruler and raised Kamarupa to an important position.



**Maharajadhiraja-** A king of kings, implying the presence of subordinate rulers.



**LET US KNOW**

**Vassal**: The word has two meanings

(a) in the feudal system the vassal is a man who fights for his lord or monarch in return for lordship a piece of land.

(b) a country is controlled by and depended on another country.

Samudravarman succeeded his father Pushyavarman (c.374-398 A.D.) as the king of Kamarupa. He further consolidated the rule of the Varmans and ruled without having any kind of trouble. He too assumed the title of *Maharajadhiraja* which suggests that, like his father, he ruled as an independent king. The next Varman ruler Balavarman-I (c. 398-422 A.D.), son of Samudravarman was a man of remarkable abilities. He is credited

in the Doobi plates with the celebration of a number of sacrifices. The *Nidhanpur* grant states that "his force and armour never broke up and his army could easily march against the enemies".

Balavarman was succeeded by his son Kalyanavarman (c.422-446 A.D.). It is possible that Kalyanavarman brought the Kapili Valley identified with the kingdom of Davaka under his control and also sent a diplomatic mission to China. The *Shung-Shu* (a Chinese account) refers to the sending of an embassy to China in 428 A.D. by an Indian king called Yu-Chai, who was the lord of the Kapili country. This king called Yu-Chai could be Kalyanavarman as the date of the mission fits in with the chronology of the king and the king is discovered as "moon faced", an epithet applied to Kalyanavarmana in source.

The successor of Kalyanavarman was Ganapativarman or (c.446-470 A.D.). His rule has not much significance. As a ruler, he was a generous one. Probably Ganapativarman abdicated the throne in favour of his son Mahendravarman or Surendravarman(c.470-494 A.D.) whose reign was quite eventful. It is possible that Mahendravarman extended his sway to South-East Bengal. To consecrate his achievements he performed two horse (*Asvamedha*) sacrifices as recorded in the Doobi seal Inscription. He was the first amongst the rulers of his line to do so, thereby becoming a paramount sovereign in Eastern India. By his brilliant career of conquest and glory, he paved the way for the greatness which Kamarupa attained under Bhaskaravarman. In the Umachal Rock Inscription he is described as a Maharajadhiraja.

Mahendravarman was followed by his son Narayanavarman (c.494-518 A.D.). His reign was one of comparative peace. His successor was Bhutivarman or Mahabhutivarman(c.518-542 A.D.) who continued the policy of expansion started by his grandfather Mahendravarman. Taking advantage of the decline in power of the Guptas, he expanded his territories in Pundravardhana. He probably also brought the outlying regions of Samatata, Sylhet and Tripura under his control. The *Barganga Rock Inscription* credits Bhutivarman with the performance of a horse (*Asvamedha*) sacrifice. He was the first king of Kamarupa to extend the western frontier of the kingdom beyond the river Karatoya. The *Nidhanpur Copper Plates* records that

Bhutivarman had a circle of feudatories. Bhutivarman donated land to numerous Brahmanas in North Bengal which testify to his conquests in that direction and his patronage of learning.

Chandramukhavarman (c.542-566 A.D.) succeeded Bhutivarman as the ruler of Kamarupa. He made no further extension of the kingdom which he inherited from his father. Rather he consolidated his father's conquests in south-east Bengal. It appears from the *Doobi Plates* that Chandramukhavarman voluntary abdicated the throne in favour of his son Sthira varman or Sthita varman(c. 566-590 A.D.). Sthiravarman was a man of knowledge and well-versed in the Vedas. He was the first ruler of Kamarupa to perform his coronation ceremony according to the Vedic rites. The *Doobi Clay Seal* credits him with performance of two horse sacrifices. Sthiravarman also built a new capital city on the banks of the "holy river", probably the Brahmaputra.

Sthiravarman's son and successor Susthitavarman (c.590-595 A.D.) was renowned as Mriganka, the title he assumed after ascending the throne. The *Doobi Plates* represent Susthitavarman as a learned man who is stated to be the master of grammar, polity, logic, etc. The *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta describes him as a powerful monarch and even gives him the imperial title of *Maharajadhiraja*. In the Aphsad inscription of Adityasena it is stated that the later Gupta monarch Mahasenagupta of Malava (East Malwa) led an expedition against Susthitavarman and defeated him on the bank of the Brahmaputra. As a result of this defeat, Kamarupa lost her possessions in North Bengal (Pundravardhana) and the western boundary of Kamarupa was pushed back to the Karatoya. It seems that Susthitavarman died of wounds in the battle.

Susthitavarman had two sons who were very young at the time of his death. The elder one, Supratisthitavarman, ascended the throne (c.595-600 A.D.). As per the *Doobi Plates* at that time the Gauda army was invading the kingdom of Kamarupa. Probably by then Mahasenagupta had already retreated to Malava and it was his Mahasamanta Sasanka from Gauda who led this second invasion of Kamarupa. Supratisthitavarman along with his younger brother Bhaskaravarman bravely fought against the invading army. But they were finally defeated and were taken as captives to Gauda.

However soon the two brothers got back their kingdom and returned to Kamarupa.

Shortly afterwards Susthitavarman died without leaving any issue. So, his brother Bhaskaravarman ascended the throne of Kamarupa in c 600 A.D and ruled till c 650 A.D. for a period of fifty years. He was the most illustrious one of all the Varman rulers. His activities were not confined to the bounds of his kingdom. He played an important role in the political history of northern India in the first half of the seventh century A.D. At the time of his accession, the glory of the kingdom of Kamarupa was greatly undermined with the defeat of Pundravardhana at the hands of Mahasenagupta and Sasanka Bhaskaravarman could not tolerate the rise of Sasanka of Gauda who soon made himself the master of Magadha and Kanauj.

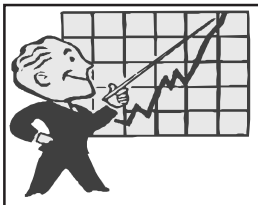
Under such a situation, Bhaskaravarman sought the friendship of king Harshavardhana of Thaneswar who too had enmity with king Sasanka of Gauda. He sent an embassy to Harshavardhana for seeking the latter's alliance against their common enemy. Harsha too was in the need of an ally and he heartily welcomed the offer. Hence, then was formed an offensive and defensive alliance between the two independent monarchs of northern and eastern India. Their combined forces probably launched an attack upon Sasanka. From the west, Bhandi, the cousin and general of Harshavardhana attacked Gauda, while, from the east, Bhaskaravarman fell upon him. Unable to face the combined attack, Sasanka fled away to Orissa where he continued to rule till 619-620 A.D. By this victory Gauda with its capital city of Karnasuvarna came to the possession of Bhaskaravarman. To commemorate the occasion, he issued from his victorious camp at Karnasuvarna the famous Nidhanpur grants reconfirming the land grants made by Bhutivarman in Pundravardhana.



**LET US KNOW**

To make friendship with Harshavardhana, king Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa sent his ambassador Hamsavega, who met Harshavardhana with rich presents like Abhoga (umbrella of Varuna), crest jewels, pearl necklaces, silken cloth, manuscripts aloe bark, drinking vessel, etc.

By forming an alliance with Harshavardhana, Bhaskaravarman not only recovered the lost glory and possession of the kingdom of Kamarupa, but also carried the political glory of Kamarupa to a point not reached ever before. Later Bhaskaravarman too participated in the religious assembly at Kanauj and religious convocation at Prayaga arranged by Harshavardhana. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang visited the kingdom of Kamarupa and stayed at the court of king Bhaskaravarman. The Chinese pilgrim was very much pleased with the hospitality of Bhaskaravarman and with the peace and prosperity prevailing in the kingdom of Kamarupa. Bhaskaravarman was a celibate and died leaving no successor to the throne and thereby marked the end of the rule of the Varmans.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.1:** Who was the founder of the Varman dynasty?

……

**Q.2:** Who was the first Varman ruler to perform horse sacrifice?

……

**Q.3:** Who first donated land to numerous Brahmanas in North Bengal?

……

**Q.4:** Which kingdom was ruled by Sasanka?

……

**Q.5:** With whom did Bhaskaravarman form an alliance?

……

## 5.4 THE SALASTAMBHAS

With the death of Bhaskaravarman, the kingdom of Kamarupa passed under the rule of the Mlechchhas. Actually as Bhaskaravarman died without leaving a successor, an anarchical situation prevailed in the kingdom of Kamarupa. Taking advantage of this anarchical situation as indicated in the *Bargaon Copper Plate* of Ratnapala (a king of the Pala dynasty which succeeded the Salastambhas), the chief of the Mlechchhas, ***Salastambha*** (c. 655-670 A.D) laid the foundation of the rule of a new dynasty called the



**Salastambha:** literarily means a pillar of the Sala tree whose wood is very hard and strong.

Salastambhas after his name. Altogether there were 21 rulers in the Salastambha dynasty and they ruled from c 655 A.D. to 900 A.D for a period of almost 250 years. The *Bargaon Copper Plates* of Ratnapala states that the dynasty of Salastambha had 21 kings, the last one being Tyagasimha. But we know only about 15 rulers of the Salastambha dynasty.

Salastambha is assumed to be an aboriginal chief. However very soon the kings of the Mlechchha dynasty claimed their descent from Naraka. The earliest record of the Salastambha dynasty was a rock inscription and a small fragment of the Copper Plate grants of the time of Harjaravarman. There Salastambha is described as 'a tiger like king" which shows that he was a very powerful king. It is also stated there that Salastambha was followed by Vijaya, Palaka, Kumara and Vajradeva whose rule was not of any consequence. The *Hayungthal Copper Plate* of Harjaravarman (c.815-837 A.D.) too provides a more detailed list of the successors of Salastambha as Vijaya, Palaka, Kumara, Vajradeva, Harshavarman, Balavarman, Chakra, Arathi and Harjaravarman, who is mentioned as the king of Pragjyotisha.

Actually very little is known about Salastambha and his successors till the time of Harjaravarman (c.815-837 A.D.) whose *Tezpur Rock Inscription* is dated 829 A.D. For about 175 years from the middle of the 7$^{th}$ century A.D to the first quarter of the 9$^{th}$ century A.D we lack proper information about the names and numbers of the rulers of the dynasty. Among the pre-Harjara kings of the Salastambha dynasty, other than Salastambha it was Harshavarman (c.725-745 A.D) whose reign formed another glorious chapter in the history of the kingdom of Kamarupa. In the *Hayungthal Copper Plate* of Harjaravarman, Harshavarman is mentioned as a king of great prowess and piety, who protected his subjects as his own children. The *Pasupatinath Temple Inscription* of king Jayadeva II of Nepal describes king Harshadeva as *Gaudradi-Kalinga-Kosala-pati* (lord of Gauda, Odra, Kalinga, Kosala and other lands) whose daughter Rajyamati, a descendant of Bhagadatta's race was married to king Jayadeva II of Nepal. This king Harshadeva is identified with king Harshavarman under whom Kamrupa rose to power for a brief period

After Harshavarman, his son Balavarman (c.745-765 A.D) became

the ruler of Kamarupa. Balavarman was followed by Chakra (c.765-790 A.D) and Arathi (c.790-815 A.D). However, the most important ruler after Harshavarman was Harjaravarman (c.815-837 A.D). His coronation ceremony was performed by his feudatory chiefs, indicating their growing importance. He was the first of the Kamarupa kings to assume high sounding title *Maharaja-dhiraja Paramesvara Paramabhattaraka.* From the *Hayungthal Copper Plate*, it is known that Harjaravarman had occupied a position of distinction as he is said to have been surrounded by subordinate kings and also had been approached by the rulers of the hilly regions for settling their disputes. In the *Tezpur Rock Inscription* we find regulations regarding the plying of boats to settle a dispute between the boats of fishermen and those of the royal navy. This indicates that Harjaravarman had a big navy at his command. He was a contemporary of king Devapala of Gauda and had a conflict with the latter when he tried to invade Bengal, but his attack was repulsed. Harjaravarman built a lofty temple for ***Hetuka Sulin*** and rows of buildings in his capital city at Haruppeswara identified with modern Tezpur.

Harjaravarman was succeeded by his son Vanamalavarman (c.837-855 A.D.). He was a contemporary of Vigrahapala and Narayanapala of Gauda. We have two records of his reign the *Tezpur Copper Plates* and *Parbatiya Copper Plates* where he had assumed high sounding titles. During the weak rule of Vigrahapala of Gauda, Vanamalavarman recovered the lost possession of Kamarupa in Bengal and to signalize his victory donated lands almost in the same area where earlier Bhutivarman had donated lands in the middle of the 6th century A.D which is recorded in *Tezpur Copper Plate* issued in his 19th regnal year. It is also stated there that the dominion of the kingdom of Kamarupa extended over the hilly regions in the north and east as well as over south-east Bengal. Vanamalavarman too like his father tried to spread Aryan culture towards the east and made land grants to the Brahmans in ***Uttarakula***. He too encouraged trade and commerce. As indicated by *Nagaon copper Plates* of Balavarman, there was regular payment of tributes by the feudatories to king Vanamalavarman enriching his material wealth which he spent in rebuilding the temple of Hetuka Sulin and erecting rows of palatial buildings. He was a devout worshipper of Siva.



***Hetuka Sulin-***Lord Shiva styled as Hetuka or Hetukesa.

***Uttarakula-***The northern bank of the Brahmaputra

Vanamalavarman abdicated the throne in favour of his son Jayamala, and fasted unto death.

Jayamala (c.855-860A.D) had a very short reign. He consolidated the conquests of his father and did not make further extension. Being attacked by fatal disease, Jayamala, after a short reign of only five years, abdicated the throne in favour of his son Balavarman. He was also known as Virabahu. Balavarman II (c.860-890 A.D.) was the last powerful ruler of the Salastambha dynasty. He left three records of his reign namely, the *Howraghat Copper Plates, Nagaon Copper Plates and Ulubari Copper Plates.* During the rule of king Narayanapala of Gauda, he made fresh conquests in North Bengal and made land grants in that area as stated in the *Nagaon Copper Plates*. He like his predecessors assumed high sounding titles which shows his prowess and supremacy.

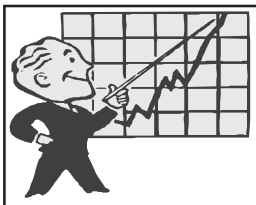
After, Vigrahastambha became the ruler of Kamarupa. But nothing can be said about his reign. Vigrahastambha was succeeded by Tyagasimha (c.890-900 A.D.) who was the last ruler of the Salastambha dynasty. He was the 21st member of the Salastambha line. After him the dynasty became extinct because he died without leaving any children. In the *Bargaon Copper Plate* of Ratnapala he is simply mentioned as an illustrious chief.



**LET US KNOW**

An image of Harihara was found at Deopani with a small inscription in characters of about the 9th century A.D of the reign of *Maharajadhiraja* Diglekhavarman. The royal title attached to the name of Diglekhavarman indicates that he was not a petty chief. But in the absence of further information it cannot be said whether he was an unknown member of the Salastambha dynasty or succeeded in gaining control over a part of their kingdom.

Another inscription on an image of Shanker Narayana at Deopani records the name of Sri Jivera.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.6:** Which source tells us that the Salastambha dynasty had 21 kings?

……

**Q.7:** Name the two grants issued by Vanamalavarman?

……

**Q.8:** Who was also known as Virabahu?

……

**Q.9:** Name the last king of the Salastambha dynasty?

……

**Q.10:** Arrange the following Salastambha rulers in chronological order:

(a) Salastambha
(b) Palaka
(c) Balavarman
(d) Vijaya
(e) Tyagasimha
(f) Vajradeva

## 5.5 THE PALAS

The death of Tyagasimha without leaving any successor brought about a danger of anarchy in the kingdom of Kamarupa. It was decided that someone from the race of Naraka should be appointed as the ruler of Kamarupa. Under such a situation Brahmapala (c.900-920 A.D) was elected as the king due to his proclaimed kinship with the Bhauma-Naraka clan. As the descendants of Brahmapala bore the title 'Pala' in the end of their names, the dynasty was called the Pala dynasty. The Pala rulers to show their relations with the earlier Bhauma-Naraka kings added the word 'Varman' after Pala in their names.

It was probably in imitation of the Palas of Bengal, that Brahmapala took the title 'Pala'. Prior to becoming the ruler of Kamarupa, Brahmapala was possibly a governor in the western part of the kingdom and because of his administrative experience was elected by the officials as the king. There

were eight kings in his line in succession ruling from 900 A.D to 1100 A.D. for a period of 200 years. No record is left of his reign. But in the inscriptions of his son Ratnapala, Brahmapala is described as a great warrior and is styled as Maharajadhiraja. The *Bargaon Copper Plate* of Ratnapala records that Brahmapala abdicated in favour of his son, Ratnapala.

Ratnapala (c.920-960 A.D) was a powerful ruler of the Pala dynasty. He built his capital on the bank of the Brahmaputra and sourrounded it with a rampart and strong palisade which he named as Durjaya meaning "Impregnable". In his three grants namely, *Caratbari Copper Plate*, *Bargaon Copper Plates* and *Soalkuchi Copper Plates* Ratnapala is described as *Paramesvara-Paramabhattaraka-Maharajadhiraja* Ratnapalavarmandeva indicating his imperial status. He suppressed rebellious chiefs within the kingdom of Kamarupa. It is known from the *Gachtal Copper Plates* of his great grand son Gopala that Ratnapala defeated king Rajyapala of Gauda. Ratnapala's son and Pundarapala pre-deceased him, so he was succeeded by his grandson Indrapala.

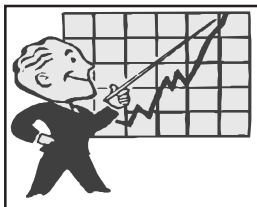
Indrapala (c.960-990 A.D) succeed his grandfather Ratnapala to the throne of Kamarupa and had a fairly long reign. We have the *Guwahati Copper Plates and Guakuchi Copper Plates* of his reign which depict his imperial status with the title *Paramesvara-Paramabhattaraka-Maharajadhiraja*. In the *Gachtal Copper Plates* of Gopala it is stated that Indrapala defeated king Kalyanachandra, son of Sri Chandra of Vanga (Bengal) of the Chandras, who was the vanquisher of a king of Gauda. He also strengthened his position by entering into a matrimonial alliance with the Rashtrakutas. His Guakuchi grant testifies to his control over the North Bengal. From the Gauhati grant it can be inferred that his reign was one of peace and plenty.

The next Pala ruler was Gopala (c.990-1015 A.D.), son of Indrapala born of the Rashtrakuta princess Rajyadevi. The king had personal charm, merit and intelligence, munificence as well as success in the war as stated in the *Khonamukh Copper Plates* and *Subhankarapataka* grant of Dharmapala. It appears that he consolidated his father's conquest in Pundravardhana, which probably led to the subsequent invasion of

Jatavarman, a king of East Bengal in the reign of his son and successor Harshapala. Harshapala (c.1015-1035 A.D.) was a man of learning. But he was not a strong ruler. As stated earlier during his reign king Jatavarman of East Bengal snatched away a part of Pundravardhana which belonged to the kingdom of Kamarupa. The invasion of Kamarupa by the Chalukya king Vikramaditya VI is also ascribed to his period of reign. But this invasion did not result in the loss of any territory.

Harshapala's son Dharmapala (c.1035-1060 A.D.) was the last important ruler of the Pala dynasty. We have three inscriptions of his reign namely, *Khonamukh Copper Plates Subhankarapataka* grant and *Pushpabhadra Copper Plates.* He was very powerful monarch and restored the lost glory of the kingdom of Kamarupa by making conquests in North Bengal and probably towards the sea in the south- west of the kingdom. He was also a great patron of religion and learning. He was himself a poet. Towards the end of his reign, Dharmapala shifted his capital to Kamrupanagara in north Guwahati.

Dharmapala was probably succeeded by Jayapala (c.1075-1100 A.D.). Actually no copper plate grants have so far been discovered of any later ruler of the Pala dynasty. Regarding Jayapala it can only be said that his name occurs in a stone-slab inscription found at Silimpur in connection with a *tulapurush* gift to a Brahmana named Prahasa in Symbaka village of Pundravardhana. This gift was probably made in the first part of his reign when he held control over Pundravardhana. Jayapala may have been the Kamrupa ruler defeated by king Ramapala of Gauda who occupied parts of Kamarupa, and appointed Tingyadeva as a ruler over that area. This is recorded in the *Ramacharita* by Sandhyakara Nandi and the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva. Jayapala was the last ruler of the Pala dynasty. The thirteenth century Ambari stone slab inscription found in Guwahati records the name of Samudrapala, indicating that Pala rule continued till that period.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.11:** Fill in the blanks:

a) Brahmapala was …… as the king.

b) Ratnapala defeated king …… of Gauda.

c) Gopala was born of the …… princess Rajyadevi.

d) …… too shifted his capital to Kamrupanagara.

**Q.12:** Write True/False:

a) Harshapala's son Dharmapala was the last important ruler of the Pala dynasty. (True/False)

b) Jayapala was defeated by king Rajapala of Gauda. (True/False)



## 5.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learned about,

- the ruling dynasties of ancient Assam which included the Varmanas, Salastambhas and the Palas.
- the political developments in Kamarupa between the fourth and the twelfth century A.D. have been discussed in detail so that a comprehensive account is obtained regarding the state of affairs during this period.
- The ancient kingdom of Kamarupa was ruled by the Varman, the Salastambha and the Pala dynasties, besides other minor kings.



## 5.7 FURTHER READING

1. Gait, Edward: *A History of Assam*
2. Barpujari, H.K (2003).: *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Volume-1, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati*
3. Barua, K.L (2008) : *Early History of Kamrupa, LBS, Guwahati*
4. Baruah, S.L.(1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam, Munshiram Manuharlal Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi*

## 5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** Pushyavarman

**Ans to Q No 2:** Mahendravarman

**Ans to Q No 3:** Bhutivarman

**Ans to Q No 4:** Kingdom of Gauda, Magadha and Kanauj

**Ans to Q No 5:** Harshavardhana, the king of Gauda

**Ans to Q No 6:** The Bargaon plates of Ratnapala

**Ans to Q No 7:** Parbatiya Copper Plates and Tezpur Copper Plates

**Ans to Q No 8:** Jayamala

**Ans to Q No 9:** Tyagasimha

**Ans to Q No 10:** Salastambha, Vijaya, Palaka, Vajradeva, Balavarman, Tyagasimha

**Ans to Q No 11:** a) elected, b)Rajyapala, c)Rashtrakuta d) Dharmapala

**Ans. to Q.12:** a)True, b)False



## 5.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Very Short Questions** (Answer each question in an about 50 words)

**Q 1:** Who was the first known historical ruler of the Varman dynasty?

**Q 2:** Pushyavarman belonged to which dynasty?

**Q 3:** Who was the last ruler of the Pala dynasty?

**Q 4:** Who was the last powerful ruler of the Salastambha dynasty?

**B) Short Questions** (Answer each questions in an about 150 words)

**Q 1:** Write briefly about Bhaskarvarman.

**Q 2:** Write short notes on-

a) Nidhanpur Copper Plate b) Pala ruler Gopala

**C) Long Questions** (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

**Q 1:** Discuss about the Varman dynasty of Kamarupa.

**Q 2:** Trace the rule of the Salastambha rule over Kamarupa.

**Q 3:** Describe the rule of the Pala dynasty over Kamarupa.

**Q 4:** Make an analytical comparison between the different ruling dynasties that ruled over the kingdom of Kamarupa.

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# UNIT 6: SOCIETY, ECONOMY AND RELIGION IN ANCIENT ASSAM

## UNIT STRUCTURE


6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Society

6.4 Economy

6.5 Religion

6.6 Let Us Sum Up

6.7 Further Reading

6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.9 Model Questions


## 6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- describe the social conditions of ancient Assam,
- explain the economic system prevailing in ancient Assam,
- discuss the religious life and administrative system of ancient Assam.

## 6.2 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier unit we had discussed about the political condition of ancient Assam known as Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa. In this unit we will learn about the social conditions, economic system, religious affairs and administration prevailed in ancient Assam. The sources for the study are mostly the primary sources in the form of epigraphical records, indigenous literature, accounts of travelers and the remains of religious structures, sculptures, etc.

## 6.3 SOCIETY

For depicting a picture of the society of ancient Assam, we have to depend primarily on the epigraphical data. But the literary sources viz. the

*Kalika Purana* and *Yogini Tantra* also supply much information on the social condition of ancient Assam.

Assam was inhabited by Proto-Mongoloid, Proto-Austroloid, Tibeto-Burman and Alpine people. Aryan culture was carried by the Alpines and later by the Brahmanas, who had already mixed up with other racial elements, when they migrated to Assam. The mixed migration began in the later part of the fifth century A.D. and during the time of Bhutivarman as stated in the *Nidhanpur grant*. He attracted the Brahmanas of Bengal by giving rich endowment of land and gifts. These Brahmanas may be regarded as forming an oasis in the land. They influenced the culture of ancient Assam. The original Brahmanas of Assam did not follow the ideal Vedic practices. The Brahmanas studied the Samaveda and Yajurveda and Mimamsa Philosophy, Smriti and Alamkara etc. While gradually the Brahmanical community of Pragjyotisha was adopting itself to the ideal practices. Many other Brahmanas migrated outside and most often got position of honour in other states.

King Vanamalavarman donated lands in the Pundravardhana *vishaya* as *agrahara* gift which attracted Brahmanas of Kamarupa to settle there. Thus, an admixture of the Brahmanas of Bengal and Kamarupa started. It provided from time to time the introduction of orthodox Brahmanical culture in the land.

The caste system in ancient Assam was not strictly adhered to. The society rested largely but loosely on the *Varnasramadharma*. Few functional castes find mention in inscriptions. Thus, Hinduism in that valley was tolerant towards the tribal communities which had not been completely absorbed into its organisation. Epigraphic records of the 6$^{th}$ century referred to classes like *Kayasthas, Karanas, Lekhakas, Vaidyas, Kumbhakaras, Kaivartas* and *Tantravayas*. Gradually the distinction among the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were disappearing and the fourfold caste system, namely the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Sudras were gradually shrinking to a threefold system. Later on the society became broadly divided into two: the Brahmanas and Sudras, the latter embracing all non-Brahmanas.

*Yogini Tantra* though not a contemporary text also provides information about the social conditions of Assam. The society in Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa thus rested largely but loosely on the *Varnasramadharma*. The Brahmanas occupied a position of higher prestige in the society. They enjoyed revenue free land grants as well as high offices in the government. They also played a crucial role in transforming the society. They were entrusted with the duty of diffusion of learning, but also took up other occupations. The establishment of *agrahara* settlement of Brahmanas in the middle of the non-Aryan people helped in the spread of Vedic culture. The Brahmanas also opened new areas of settlement and helped in the growth of production by their knowledge of agriculture and animal husbandry. The Brahmanical mission propagating Aryan culture and social values probably had to face opposition from the non-Aryans. But they made large scale compromise in course of time. As a result strict-observance of caste rules had no place in the society.

The Brahmanas in Assam adopted a liberal policy in the matters of occupation and food habit, and observance of the rules of *Varnasramadharma*. The Brahmana society was based on their *Vedasakhas*, *Gotras* and *Pravaras*. It determined their exogamic marriage relations. They observed the orthodox rules and duties viz the worship, *yajnas, adhyana* (study), *adhyapana* (teaching), *dana* (making gifts) and *pratigraha* (accepting gifts). They also followed other injunctions relating to *snana*, *japa, sandhya* and other sacrifices.

Family was the smallest unit of the society. Joint family was the general practice. The epigraphs mentioned about the joint ownership of landed property. Nevertheless, cases of nuclear families were also not rare.

The institution of marriage was considered sacred. The most practiced form of marriage was *Brahma, Prajapatya, Daiva, Arsha* and *Asura*. Marriage within one's own clan was prohibited not only among the Aryanised Vedic society but also among many tribes.

Motherhood was the outstanding aim of married life for women. Women in upper class were provided education and were expected to be socially accomplished. Sculptures of the ancient period reveal the figures

of women playing musical instruments and dancing which informs us that the womenfolk did engage themselves in such creative activities. The *Purdah* system was not prevalent. The *Bargaon grant* records that public women even took their bath in the open. *Sati* was not widely prevalent in the society and we find only a single record of a concubine of Bhaskaravarman committing Sati. Child marriage was prevalent among the Brahmanas and the Kayasthas. Widow re-marriage was common among the other classes of the people. Inter-caste marriage was prevalent among the lower classes. Polygamy was almost a universal practice. The women enjoyed greater freedom from male domination among certain section of people who were less under the Aryan influence or were the non-Aryans.

The epigraphs also depict the life of the city damsel's, courtesans and *devadasis* or temple girls. The *Tezpur grant* mentioned about the *vesyas* (prostitutes). Similarly the Copper Plate grant of Vanamala refers to the reconstruction of the temple of Hatakasulin where the public women or the *vesyas* lived. The *Bargaon grant* of Ratnapala records that they occupied that they occupied the best place in his capital city Durjjaya.

Rice was the staple food of the people of Assam. Milk, curd, ghee and various kinds of sweets were highly prized. Delicious preparations were made from various kinds of vegetables, fish, meat, pulses, spice etc. Rice Pudding called *Payasa* or *Paramanna* has been the favourite dish of the Assamese people. Drinking wine was common amongst the people of the upper class, while the common people drank *Lao pani* or rice beer. Chewing of raw areca nut with betel leaf and lime was very much popular among the people.

Epigraphs, literature and sculpture provide us information on the types of dress and ornaments used by the people of ancient Assam. The male dress consisted of dhoti and an upper garment called *uttariya*, especially used by the higher classes. Men of distinction also wore a head-dress. Women used to wear two garments in the upper and lower part of the body. Married women of upper classes took particular care of hair dressing. In general Assam was famous for silk cloth of *endi, muga* and *pat* variety. The rich people used ornaments studied with various kinds of jewels.

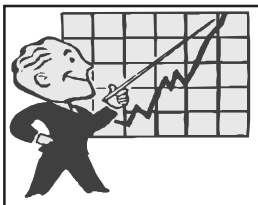
They also used *sandal*, *camphor, musk,* etc. The women used the ornaments like *kasturi, kinkini*, necklace of beads, etc. They used *kundalas* and *nupuras*. Women also used *mani darppana* (jeweled mirrors) as referred in the *Bargaon grant*.

The people of ancient Assam knew about the art of dyeing both yarn and cloth. They also recognized the four colours white, red, yellow and black or blue. The *Kalika Purana* mentions the use of garments of blue and red for religious purpose. The dyeing of cloth was very much common even among the hill tribes of Assam. Embroidered cloth was also manufactured and the gifts of such cloths to Gods and Goddesses were considered meritorious.

The *Kalika Purana* mentioned that playing with doll was popular among children. Among the general indoor games was the dice. Hunting and fishing were very much popular. Dancing and music were popular amusement.

Convenient means of communication consisted of the bullock carts, carriage, drawn by elephants, horses and also by boats. Boats of various types were used. Besides, horses and bullocks, elephants were also used for traveling.

The customs of inheritance and funeral rites varied according to the tribes and religion of the people. There were two types of inheritance system: the *mitakshara* and the *dayabhaga*. According to the *mitakshara* system, a child inherited the ancestral property at the time of its birth, while in the *dayabhaga* system the son could claim the property after the death of his father. The *mitakshara* rules bestowed the right upon the rest of the family members to ask for their share of the ancestral property. In the *dayabhaga* system, the father could disinherit his son from the property, however the son's right to the property could never be prejudiced after his fathers' death. As for the burial practices, the dead body was buried but after the influence of Vedic Hinduism, cremation of the body was practiced. This ritual differed among the different tribes of the region.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.1:** Fill in the blanks:

(a) Aryan culture was carried by the …… and later by the……..

(b) Assam was famous for silk cloth of ……., ……. and …….. variety.

(c) In the …… system the son could claim the property after the death of his father.

**Q.2:** Write True/False:

(a) The people of ancient Assam knew about the art of dyeing both yarn and cloth. (True/False)

(b) Dancing and music were not popular amusement. (True/False)

## 6.4 ECONOMY

The economic life of a country is generally controlled by three factors, the geography of the landscape, the climate and general habit of the people inhabiting it. Inhabited by men of diverse ethnic origin in this topographical set up, the economic pattern of land assumed diverse characters.

Land was the backbone of economic life of Assam. Land was divided into *janapada* (country side), *pura* or *nagara* (city, town) and *vana* (forest land). Janapada was again divided into gramas or villages, which were again subdivided into *kshetra* (arable land), *khila* (waste land), *go-pra-carabhumi* (land for cattle grazing) and *vastubhumi* (building sites). As the all lands were granted by the King, the owner of the soil was the king himself. The forest, mines etc belongs the state. The *Tezpur* and *Bargaon grants* mention the individual donors receiving land with houses, paddy fields, pasture ground etc. from the state. The *Nidhanpur grant* mentioned that while land was given individually, pasture ground, water etc were to be used jointly. The king's duty was to protect the agricultural fields, forests, irrigation works, and mines. The boundaries of denoted lands were fixed and hills, mounds, ponds, tanks, river, beds and such other natural boundaries served

the purpose of demarcating the land. Sometimes artificial boundaries were also created.

Land formed an important source of revenue of the state as well as to the donee. We have no definite information regarding the method of cultivation. Hired labours were probably employed for this purpose. Cultivation was carried on by the jhuming method since very early period. The process of replacing this method by ploughing was very slow. Most of the tribes of the hill areas still follow the jhuming method. The stage by which Assamese people passed on gradually from jhuming to ploughing and the extent of cultivation by the latter method at any of the stages is not definitely known. But our sources indicate that in our period of study Assam was a very fertile land and fit for cultivation of various crops.

Along with paddy of different varieties, people also cultivated other crops like pulses, mustard, sugarcane, and various kinds of fruits and vegetables. The different records mentioned about the plantation of different fruit trees. Apart from cereals and vegetables, the records also mentioned about the betel nut and betel leaves growing in abundance. The *Kalika Purana* mentioned about a large number of precious trees including Pine, Sal, Sandalwood, Agaru, etc. According to *Mahabharata* during the time of *R*ajasuya ceremony of Yuddhisthira the King of Pragjyotisha sent presents which included precious jewels, skin, gold, sandal and aloe wood and heaps of aromatics. Besides, there was fish. A class of people called *Kaivartas* was engaged with the fishing profession.

In ancient Assam the important cities, like Haruppeswara, Durjaya, Kamrupanagara and Pragjyotishpura were decorated with wide roads, through which kings, as well as feudatories used to come on the back of elephants. The *Tezpur grant* mentioned the existence of broad highways through which articles of trade were often brought into the big cities. This naturally helped in the establishment of different types of shops where jewellery works and articles of gold were exhibited attracting the notice of the people. The cities were the centres of the foreign trade. The cities made contributions in the economic field by acting as centres of inter-state and international trade.

The rivers were also used for transportation and commercial purposes. The trade with neighbouring states was mainly carried on by the river transport through the Brahmaputra and the Ganga. Mainly the trade relation of ancient Assam was with the neighbouring states and foreign countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), China and Tibet. The chief articles of trade were silk, silk cloth, lac, aloe wood, musk, gold, ivory, etc. All the business transaction was carried on by barter. There are references to gold coins, but not a single of them belonging to the ancient period has yet been discovered. The earliest reference to the use of cowries is found in the Banabhatta's *Harshacharita* of the 7th century A.D. The *Tezpur Rock Inscription* of Harjaravarman indicates that cowrie shells were used for payment of fines and other petty transactions.

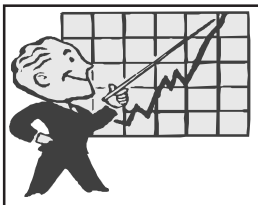
Gold washing and jewellery making seems to be important occupations of the period, Gold was found in abundance in many rivers of Assam. The *Tezpur grant* mentioned that Lauhitya-Sindhu carried gold dust from the huge golden blocks of Kailasa Mountains. The king was in the habit of making gifts of Gold and Silver on different occasions. The *Bargaon grant* mentioned about the jewellery shops in Durjjaya. *Raghuvamsam* mentioned that Kamarupa produced jewels in large quantities. The *Silimpur grant* mentioned that King Jayapala made a *tulapurush* gift of 900 gold coins to a learned Brahmana.

The *Tabaquat-i-Nasiri* mentioned about numerous images of gold and silver and of a huge image of beaten gold. The *Bargaon Rock Inscription* of Ratnapala mentioned about existence of copper mine within his kingdom which yielded him considerable income. The abundance of sculptural and architectural remains indicates the presence of stone masons and stone carvers. Thus a large number of people lived on metal working in ivory engraving and stone carving.

Various minor craft such as the brick making, carpentry, working in ivory, bell metal, and cane were the other occupations of the people. The carpenters of ancient Assam were skilful workers. The ivory and bell metal products of Assam had a great demand both inside and outside the kingdom of Kamarupa. Another important product was bamboo. The epigraphs

mentioned about the bamboo forests as marking the boundary line of denoted lands. Epigraphs mentioned that pottery was an important craft in the villages. The *Harshacharita* refers to leather workers and distillers of wine. The forests of Assam supplied resins, aromatic woods etc to the rest of India and abroad. Pragjyotisha also produced Red Sandal. Agaru was found abundantly in Assam. Musk was produced in Assam.

The people of ancient Assam also knew about the art of dyeing which was made of lac, indigo and other products. The lac culture was a specialty of ancient Assamese people. The epigraphs also mentioned clans of professional weavers called *Tantavayas* who were expert in weaving. The art of rearing cocoons for manufacture of various silk cloths was also known to the people of Assam. The *Harshacharita* refers to three different types of silken cloth.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.3:** Fill in the blanks:

a) The arable lands in ancient Assam were known as……

b) The …….. class depended on fish for their livelihood.

**Q.4:** Name the author of Harshacharita.

.....

**Q.5:** What was found in abundance in many rivers of Assam?

.....

**Q.6:** Name the foreign countries with which ancient Assam had trade relationship?

.....

## 6.5 RELIGION

Prior to the Aryanisation of Pragjyotisha and the religious influence of the Brahmanical cult and Vedic rituals and culture, the ancient people followed the cult of ancestor worship, fertility cult, etc. The megalithic remains bear testimony to this fact. Pragjyotisha came into contact with Vedic culture with its rulers establishing the Brahmanas in different parts of the country.

It led to the rapid expansion of a new culture and conversion of the non-Aryans to Hinduism. The Vedic culture therefore, flourished with the addition of new deities to its pantheon together with the assimilation of religious myths and cults of the non Aryans. Fetishism, animism, cult of fertility, human sacrifices, ancestor worship, etc of the non-Aryan people of Assam became a part of the Brahmanical religion.

- **Brahmanical Religion**: The religion propagated by the Brahmanas was called the Brahmanical religion. The kings of Assam used to issue Copper plates for granting revenue free lands to Brahmanas thus attracting the Brahmanas to come and settle in Assam. These Brahmanas belonged to different *gotras*. The Brahmanas studied various Vedas, performed rituals and worshipped diverse Pauranic deities. Brahmanical Hinduism found a fertile ground in ancient Assam as early as the beginning of the fifth century A.D. The extent of royal patronage to Brahmans is indicated by the fact that Harjaravarman had an officer exclusively for looking after the welfare of the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas hailing from Pragjyotisha received honour like gifts from rulers of Kalinga and Malwa. The *Doobi grant* of Bhaskaravarman provides a clear idea of the nature and scope of the Brahmanical religion followed in ancient Assam.

The *vrata* (fasting), *danas* (donation) were the important aspect of the Brahmanical religion. The kings donated lands to various Brahmans, which were treated as religious deeds. Thus, the gifts were made on auspicious days. The kings made the gifts for earning religions merits not only for themselves but also for their parents. Brahmanas also performed the coronation ceremony of the rulers.

As a result of the impact of the impact of the non-Aryan culture, some important developments took place in Brahmanical religion. The worship of innumerable gods and goddesses came to occupy important position in the religious system giving rise to special cults and sectarian rites and beliefs. There soon arose various religious myths revolving round these sectarian deities. The extent of Brahmanical religion may be gauged from the extent sectarian cults like those connected with Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu and Surya were practised.

- **Saivism** – The earliest Hindu religion that prevailed in ancient Kamarupa was Saivism. It was the dominant religion of the ruling dynasties. Saivism also incorporated some of characteristics of *vamacara* (left hand procedure) rites of Saktism. Bhairava Siva invariably came to be associated with his female energy. Thus, the sharp distinction between the two sects considerably narrowed down. The *Kalika Purana* mentioned sects of Saivas in Assam, viz, the Kalikas and Pasupatas. The former used to perform gruesome rites. The *Yogini-Tantra* of 16th century tells about the other two sub sects of Saivism namely, the Kaulas and Avadhutas dual worship of Siva and Shakti. The *Yogini Tantra* and *Kalika Purana* mentioned that there two sub-sects of Saivism followed the extreme forms of left hand rituals.

Siva was also worshipped in various forms which were mentioned in scriptures. He was a very popular deity amongst both the aborigines and Aryanised people. Epigraphs also mentioned the creation of Siva temples by the rulers. King Vanamalavarman repaired the lofty temple of Hetuka Sulin (Saiva). In the *Gachtal* inscription, king Indrapala is mentioned as constructing a series of white washed temples dedicated to Shiva. During his visit Hiuen-Tsang noticed hundreds of Deva temples.

Besides the notable temples there were many other minor Siva temples and religions than of Siva. The tradition of Devadasis was one of the special features of Saiva cult that prevailed in ancient Assam.

- **Saktism**: Saktism is the cult of worshipping female goddess as the supreme deity. This deity is variously called. Devi Durga, Kali, Kalika, Kamakhya, Tara etc. Different names imply diverse manifestations of the same goddess. Thus, Sakti may take to the common name for all the various forms of his female deity. The goddess has been conceived as the Sakti or energy Siva, the supreme godhead. The Saktas or the worshippers of this deity claimed that the goddess is superior to even the supreme godhead.

The Goddess is worshipped in various iconic representations or in the form of a Yoni symbolizing the creative principle. The Tantras describe the procedure of worshipping the Goddess. It mentioned broadly two procedures *Vamacara* and *Samyacara*. The Tantras played a great part in the Sakti worship. Tantricism soon became almost a synonym for Saktism.

Ancient Assam was a very important seat of Saktism. Traditionally Kamarupa has been recognized as the principle centre of the Sakta cult with its chief temple at Kamakhya. Kamakhya is distinctly the residence of the goddess. Kamakhya was probably a tribal mother goddess who was assimilated into the Brahmanical fold as Siva's consort.

The *Kalika Purana* refers to many other seats of Devi worship and among them the most important was the temple of Tamreswari at Sadiya, where the goddess in her Kesaikhaiti (eater of raw flesh) form was propitiated with human and animal sacrifice. This goddess is known as Dikkarvasini in the Tantras and Puranas.

Kameshwara Maha Gauri was the tutelary deity of the Pala Kings of Kamarupa. The Salastambhas constructed the second Kamakhya temple on the Kamakuta hill near Silghat. The extensive ruins of Devi temples and numerous icons of the goddess in her various forms proved the wide spread prevalence of Saktism. The God Siva is also invariably named along with the Goddess. There is hardly any reference to the Sakta cult in the later epigraph of ancient Assam. During the period, the cult of Vishnu largely regained popularity and royal patronage.

The worship of Surya or the Sun God was also prevalent in ancient Assam. This is referred in the *Markandeya Purana* where the king Rajyavardhana retired to the forest due to old age and the Brahmanas of the kingdom offered prayers to the sun god to restore his youth. Among the other Brahmanical deities worship of Surya occupied a very prominent position. Taranatha's account also gives evidence of sun worship.

The *Kalika Purana* gives evidences of the worship of the Sun God as it refers to the Raviksetra on the Tattva hill which is now identified as Sri Surya Pahar and Citrasala called Prakparvata latter identified as the Navagraha. Though the present temple was constructed by Ahom King Rajeswar Singha in (1752) but *Kalika Purana* mentions that tradition of the Navagraha worship may be traced back to the $9^{th}$ or $10^{th}$.

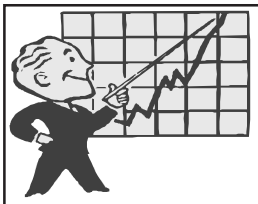
Pragjyotisha was the centre of sun worship as is mentioned in the Griha Sutras. According to Taranath, before the introduction of Buddhism, the people of Kamarupa were sun worshippers. The icons of this deity are found throughout the state.

- **Vaishnavism:** Vaishnavism is the cult of worshipping Vishnu as the Supreme deity any one of his several forms. It existed in Assam from very early times. Many of the rulers of Kamarupa trace their lineage to Vishnu. Pragjyotisha had long been associated with Vishnu worship. Naraka is said to have traced his descent from the Boar incarnation of Vishnu. The Barganga epigraphs mentioned king Bhutivarman as Parama-Daivata-Paramabhagavata. All the records of the period refer to the Boar incarnation of Vishnu and mentioned some of his popular names. In Hayagriva Madhava temple at Hajo the god Vishnu is still worshipped. Archaeological remain and icons of the deity indicate that Vaishnavism prospered fairly well from the 5$^{th}$ century onwards. The Kalika Purana mentioned about the procedure of the worship of Vishnu.
- **Buddhism:** Buddhism was prevalent in ancient Assam before the visit of Hiuen Tsang to the land. According to Taranath it was Dhitika who propagated Buddhism in Kamrupa. Asvabhava spread the Mahayana cult in this land. The tradition that was in prevalence in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Assam mentioned that Buddha died in Kamrupa near Hayagriva Madhava temple at Hajo, which in still visited by pilgrims from Bhutan and Tibet. This proves that by the first century A.D, Buddhism entered into Kamrupa.

In the *Rajtarangini,* Kalhana mentioned that the Kamarupa queen of Meghavahana of Kashmir brought with her a Tibetan Buddhist monk residing in her father's court, which proved the prevalence of the faith about this time. Bhaskaravarman though a Saivite was interested in the faith. He assured Hiuen Tsang to build one hundred monasteries in case the latter agreed to stay in his Kingdom. It indicates Bhaskaravarman's leaning towards Buddhism. Kamarupa is also associated with number of Buddhist scholars and Siddhas.

Besides these major cults, there were other minor religions such as the worship of Ganesha, Kartikeya, Indra, Agni, Kubera and Manasa. We have no definite knowledge of these cults. Perhaps their adherents were very few, although sculptures and icons of these deities have been discovered.

During this period, there was no evidence of major conflicts between the civil authority and adherents of various cults in Ancient Assam. The rulers patronised the Vedic religion and culture. There was no possibility on internecine strife between these sects. There was no warring sect in Ancient Assam. The evidence indicates that there was peaceful co-existence of various cults in Ancient Assam. The rulers patronized all the sects equally. A case in the point is Sri Surya Pahar in Goalpara district where Buddhist Stupas, Jain and Brahmanical Hindu deities still stand today.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.7:** Which cult was followed by the people of ancient Assam?

.....

**Q.8:** Name two important aspects of the Brahmanical religion.

.....

**Q.9:** Name the ruler of ancient Assam who repaired the temple of Hetuka Sulin?

.....

**Q.10:** Kesaikhaiti refers to which cult of religious worship?

.....

**Q.11:** Match the following:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. | Kalhana | 1. | Kashmir |
| b. | Meghavahana | 2. | Chinese Pilgrim |
| c. | Hiuen Tsang | 3. | Rajtarangini |



## 6.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt about

- the social condition that was in vogue in ancient Kamarupa, the caste system, the different types of social rituals regarding marriage, inheritance, the varna jati system, etc.

- economically, barter system was prevalent in ancient Assam but there are also evidences of the use of gold coins and cowries. Trade formed an important aspect of transaction with the contemporary neighboring countries.
- In the field of religion, the primitive religion came under the influence of Hinduism and henceforth the Brahmanas were responsible for bringing a new trend in religion. Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti was worshipped. There are evidences of the sun god being worshipped.
- There are doubts as regard the spread of Buddhism in ancient Kamarupa, but the prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Assam is provided by the literary sources. The Aryanisation process in ancient Assam had its impact on the fabric of the society, be it economy or religion.



## 6.7 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H.K. ( 2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Volume-1, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati
2. Barua, S.L.(1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manuharlal Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi

## 6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** a) Alpines, Brahmanas b) Endi, Muga, Pat c) Dayabhaga

**Ans to Q No 2:** a) True, b) False

**Ans to Q No 3:** a) Kshetra, b) Kaivartas

**Ans to Q No 4:** Banabhatta

**Ans to Q No 5:** Gold

**Ans to Q No 6:** Sri Lanka, Myanmar, China and Tibet.

**Ans to Q No 7:** The Cult of ancestor worship and fertility cult was followed by the people of ancient Assam.

**Ans to Q No 8:** Dana or charity and vrata or fasting.

**Ans to Q No 9:** Vanamalavarman

**Ans to Q No 10:** Saktism

**Ans to Q No 11:** (a) 3, b) 1, c) 2



## 6.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Very Short Questions** (Answer each question within 50 words)

**Q 1:** Who was the tutelary deity of the Pala Kings of Kamarupa?

**Q 2:** What were the most practised forms of marriage in ancient Assam ?

**Q 3:** Mention two important occupations of the ancient Assam.

**Q 4:** .....was found in abundance in many rivers of Assam. (fill in the blank)

**B) Short Questions** (Answer each question within 150 words)

**Q 1:** Write a short note on:

a) Status of women in ancient Assam

b) Caste system

c) Saktism

d) Vaishnavism

**Q 2:** Briefly discuss the economy of the ancient Assam.

**C) Long Questions** (Answer each question in between 150-300 words)

**Q 1:** Discuss the social conditions in ancient Assam.

**Q 2:** Describe the economic condition of ancient Assam.

**Q 3:** Write a critical note on the religious condition of ancient Assam.

*** ***** ***

# UNIT 7: ADMINISTRATION IN ANCIENT ASSAM

## UNIT STRUCTURE


7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Central and Local Administration

7.4 Judicial Administration

7.5 Revenue Administration

7.6 Defense Administration

7.7 Let Us Sum Up

7.8 Further Reading

7.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.10 Model Questions


## 7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the central as well as local administration,
- know the judicial administration,
- describe the revenue administration of ancient Assam,
- discuss the defense administration of ancient Assam.

## 7.2 INTRODUCTION

The polity and administration of a state are inter-related. Polity is in fact the guideline depending upon which the type of administrative machinery of a state is determined in order to preserve the integrity of the state and to look after the welfare of the subjects. The nature or form of the government whether absolutely monarchical or limitedly monarchical varied and depended upon the will of the people which was considered as supreme.

In Assam it is not possible to say when an organized state was established. Due to dearth of source material it is very much difficult to give a clear and precise account of the administration in ancient Assam. Our primary sources of information are the epigraphic references and the *Kalika Purana*, where there is a chapter on *Rajaniti,* which too is only on the

duties of the king and the ministers. But from these sources, it can be said that ancient Assam followed the general pattern of administration that existed in contemporary India.



**LET US KNOW**

According to the *Bargaon Copper Plates* of Ratnapala and *Kamauli* grant of Vaidyadeva, the state was conceptualized as being constituted of seven component parts called *Saptanga* viz, the king (*svamin*), minister (*amatya*), territory (*janapada*), fort (*durga*), treasury (*kosa*), army (*danda*), and ally *(mitra*). The *Kalika Purana* also lays importance on these elements and calls them *Rajyangam.*

- **GENERAL ADMINISTRATION OF ANCIENT ASSAM**

Monarchy was the general form of government in ancient Assam. The king being the head of the administration occupied the commanding position in the State. The chief title of the king was ***Maharajadhiraja***. Most of the kings bore high sounding honorifics as *Paramesvara Paramabhattaraka Maharajadhiraja* (the great God, supreme sovereign, king of kings). The kings were consecrated according to Vedic rites and rituals which formed the pattern of the ruler's life and their achievements. Thus, they performed *Asvamedha* (horse sacrifice) despite the limited extent of their Kingdom as such a sacrifice showed the strength of the king. The symbol of royalty of Kamarupa kings appears to be the royal umbrella of moon like whiteness together with the Chowries. It was known as *Abhoga*.



***Maharajadhiraja-*** A king of kings, implying the presence of subordinate rulers.

In general, monarchy was hereditary. The reigning king himself, nominated his son as successor in the presence of the people. It was done by Chandramukhavarman for his son Sthitivarman when the latter had completed his education. But under exceptional circumstances, like the absence of legitimate male issue, kings were also elected by the ministers and officials. For instance Brahmapala, the founder of the Pala dynasty was chosen by the ministers and officials.

There had to be certain princely qualities in the ruler that included

soundness of health, personal attainments and knowledge of the *Dharmasastras* (law books). In case of absence of princely qualities, the law of primogeniture was set aside and another prince having the princely qualities and considered qualified was made the king. At the death of Balavarman, his two sons Chakra and Arathi were not allowed to rule and the throne was offered to Harjaravarman, son of Arathi. Sometimes there was voluntary abdication of throne by the rulers. The rulers were conscious of their physical limitations. When they failed to look after the interests of their subjects they preferred to step down in favour of an energetic and younger successor. Vanamalavarman, Jayamala and Brahmapala abdicated the throne in favour of their respective sons.

The rulers of ancient Assam associated themselves with the concept of divinity. They traced their descent from *Varaha* or the boar incarnation of Vishnu (the Vedic God). They were sometimes identified or compared with Gods. This divinity attached to the personality of the ruler had two objectives – First, to enjoin the head of the state to function in a paternal spirit providing protection to his subjects and looking after their welfare. Secondly, to demand total allegiance and devotion from the subjects.

## 7.3 CENTRAL AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

- **Central Administration**

The king as the head of the state looked after the smooth functioning of the administrative machinery ensuring prompt action and maintaining the rule of law. The early inscriptions mention the ruler's easy accessibility to his subjects for the redress of their grievances. The rulers also made personal efforts to protect the established socio-religious order. The issue of edicts (*sasana*) by the ruler signified his highest authority which was exercised even in trivial matters like impositions of fines, etc. The rulers gifted away lands and bestowed grants on the learned Brahmans in recognition of their academic talents and to others for rendering service.

The *Nidhanpur Copper Plates* mention that the rulers of ancient Assam also maintained and protected the Varnasramadharma and established the Brahmanas in different parts of the kingdom, usually amongst

the Non-Aryan people. The kings also patronized learning and education and promoted different arts and crafts. Most of the kings of Pragjyotisha were themselves men of learning.

In the affairs of administration, the king used to be assisted by a Council of Ministers. But the actual strength of the Council is not known. The existing sources imply that the ministership was mostly the monopoly of the Brahmanas. The *Kalika Purana* states that a king should appoint learned and wise Brahmanas as ministers and the *Kamauli* grant shows that these posts were generally held by the Brahmanas and were often hereditary. The ministers are referred to in the inscriptions as *Mantrins*, *Amatyas* and *Sachivas*. The eldest son of the king used to be the Crown-Prince who and he often helped the king in the administration of the land. The Crown-Prince was sometimes appointed as the governor of a province or *Bhukti*.

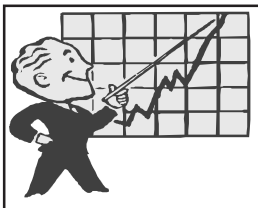
A set of officials used to help the king in discharging the duties which included the *Rajaguru* (royal priest), *Bhisaja* (physician), *Mahadvaradhipati* (chief warden of the passes), *Mahapratihara* (head chamberlain), etc. The *Hayungthal Copper Plate* of Harjaravarman mentions Jayadeva as *Mahadvaradhipati* and Janardana as the *Mahapratihara*. The *Nagaon Copper Plates* of Balavarman mentions one *Mahallakapraudhika*, an old lady, who was probably in charge of the royal harem. There were various classes of messengers called *Dutaka* who performed the duties of couriers and served as peace time messengers and escorts. The *Lekhaka* were the scribes who recorded administrative matters and functions as clerks.

- **Local Administration**

The detailed working of the local administration in ancient Assam is not definitely known. The local units did not enjoy much autonomy and the rulers tried their utmost to extent their influence upon them by insuring *sasanas*, the infringement of which was properly dealt with. The kingdom was divided into several administrative units namely, the *Bhukti, Mandala, Vishaya, Pura* and *Agrahara*. Some inscriptions mentioned about the two main division of the Kingdom the land on the North bank of the Brahmaputra was called *Uttarakuladesa* and the land in the South bank known as *Dakhinakuladesa*.

The *Bhukti* was the biggest administrative division used to denote a province. It was under the administrative charge of the Princes of the royal blood who had his organisation in that area with its headquarters at a convenient place. Another administrative division was the *Mandala*. Corresponding to a modern district, there were many *Vishayas*. The head of the *Vishayas* was called *Vishayapati* who had his *Adhikarana* (office) at the *Adhisthana* (headquarter) and was helped by several officers like *Vishayamatyas* (district officer) *Nyayakaranika* (judicial officer), *Vyavaharika* (a clerk) and *Kayastha* (a scribe). Below it was the *Pura* which was the city. Then was the *Agrahara* which was a unit made up of many villages or *gramas*.

It is difficult to say anything about the municipal administration in ancient Assam as the sources are very meagre. On the basis of the epigraphic and literary sources it can be said that the capital cities were situated on the banks of the river Brahmaputra. They were well fortified and provided with good amenities like a network of roads water-supply, places of amusements and beautiful groves. Haruppeswara and Durjaya had well decorated and extensive buildings, beautiful palaces and white washed temples. The cities and towns were inhabited by learned men and others. But the records did not mention any thing about the offices and officials in charge of urban administration. Same is the case about village administration in ancient Assam. Each village had a village headman who was perhaps helped in the administration of the village by an advisory body or the council of elders. The village officials had to discharge civil, revenue and other duties and were responsible for the internal safety of the village under their jurisdiction.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q.1:** Fill in the blanks:

a) The Kalika Purana has a chapter on ……

b) The chief title of the king was the ……

c) The …….. was the biggest administrative division.

d) ……. was a unit made up of many villages.

**Q.2:** Write True/ False:

a) Monarchy was the general form of government in ancient Assam. ( True/ False)

b) Chandramukhavarman nominated his son Susthitavarman as the king of Kamarupa. (True/ False)

c) Bhisaja used to be the royal priest. (True/ False)

d) Haruppeswara and Durjaya had well decorated and extensive buildings, beautiful palaces and white washed temples. (True/ False)

## 7.4 JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION

The inscriptions of ancient Assam indicate that justice was administered according to Hindu law books. The rulers were the abode of justice. The land grants contain *sasanas* promulgated by the rulers which were binding on the officers and subjects concerned and violation of these was a punishable offence. These *sasanas* had the force of Law. The *Kamauli grant* of Vaidyadeva mentions about one Govinda Govardana, who was probably a judge through whom Vaidyadeva communicated the royal orders.

There were probably courts of justice at the capital and local administrative units. Some officers are mentioned in the inscription namely, *Nyayakaranika, Vyavaharika*, *Kayastha, Dandika, Dandapasika,* etc who used to perform the judicial functions. The *Nidhanpur Copper Plates* of Bhaskaravarman mentioned that *Nyayakaranika* Janardana Swami not only dealt with justice but also acted as an adjudicator who after proper inspection demarcated the boundaries of land and settled all cases of land disputes. *Vyavaharika* was perhaps a judicial administrator or lawyer. *Kayastha* was a clerk. *Dandika* was probably a magistrate who gave verdict in the court with the actual orders being carried out by the *Dandapasika* who inflicted the punishment.

In the epigraphs we also found the name of two types of police officers namely, *Chauroddharanika* and *Chata-bhata*. The former was a junior police officer with the charge of apprehending the thieves and recovering stolen property. The duties of latter had not been well defined.

Probably they had the duty of apprehension of criminals mainly in the country side.

We do not know about the procedure of trials. The witnesses were summoned for trial. Oaths and ordeals might also have been used. Nothing could be said about the nature of punishment given to the criminals, except that fines were imposed.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.3:** Who were abodes of justice?

.....

**Q.4:** Name two officers who used to perform judicial functions?

.....

**Q.5:** Who was the junior police officer?

.....

## 7.5 REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

The rulers of ancient Assam had an effective revenue administration. The principle sources of revenue were regular taxes, occasional taxes, commercial levies, fines, income from state properties and tribute from feudatories. The principal source of revenue was however the land revenue known as *Kara* and *Upakara* or *Upaskara* levied on the cultivators. The share of *Kara* and *Upakara* cannot be ascertained, but it could be paid in cash or in kind.



**LET US KNOW**

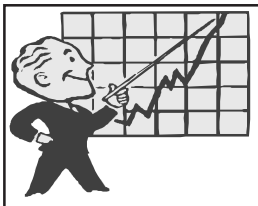
Land was of different categories such as *Kshetra* (arable land), *Khila* (waste land), *Vastu* (building sites) and *Apakristabhumi* (inferior land). These classifications were specifically made for the purpose of proper assessment of taxes.

Apart from the *Kara* and *Upakara* collected in the form of regular tax, some occasional taxes were also levied from the cultivators on special occasions in the form of *Uparikara* and *Utkhetana.* Besides, there was

*Chata-bhata-pravesan* collected at the time of the arrival of regular and irregular military and police forces. The commercial taxes included the custom duties and tolls or *Sulka*.

For the assessment of land revenue, the villages were grouped in units of twelve or less than twelve. We find reference to various types of land officials connected with the realization of revenue, settlement and alienation of land in the records of ancient Assam. Officers associated with revenue administration included *Dattakarapurna* (tax collector), *Uparika* (officer in charge of recovery of the *Uparikara* tax), *Utkhetika* (officer in charge of collecting *Utkhetana tax*), etc. Land revenues were also collected through the heads of the local administrative units. There were also clerks, accountants and scribes attached to the revenue department.

Both collective and individual land tenure were prevalent in ancient Assam. A single donee could hold along with arable land, pastures and water reservoirs. All the land grants were to be registered. All the documents of the land grants were kept in the custody of the *Karanika* (registrar of documents) in the record office called *Adhikarana*. Lands granted to the Brahmanas were called *Brahmadaya* land-grants which were revenue free and immune from all harassments. Land endowments were also made to temples and other religious institutions known as *Dharmottara* and *Devottara* land grants in later times. With hills, mounds, tanks, trees river beds, etc as landmarks, the boundaries of the donated lands were clearly demarcated by an officer called *Simapradatta*.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q.6:** Fill in the blanks:

a) The land revenue was known as ……..

b) Dattakarapurna was a ……

c) The record office is called ……..

d) Lands granted to the ……. were called *Brahmadaya* land-grants.

## 7.6 DEFENSE ORGANISATION

The geographical position of the kingdom of Pragjyotisha demanded a strong defensive system with an organized standing army to meet any external threat or internal trouble. The stakes were rather high for preserving the integrity of the state. The warlike qualities of the rulers and their deeds of heroism distinguished them not only as good kings, but also as great heroes. From the epigraphic records it can be said that most of the rulers were themshelves expert warriors and fought bravely in the battle field.

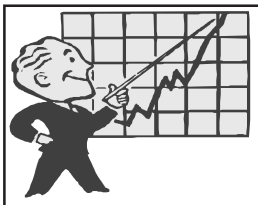
The rulers of Pragjyotisha were not solely dependent on the *Mahasamamantas* and *Samantas* (tributary chiefs) who provided forces to render military service, but also had their own organized military as well. In organising the army, the king was probably assisted by the war minister. Under him there was a *Mahasenapati* (commander-in-chief). Then under the *Mahasenapati* there were other officers called *Senadhyaksha*, *Baladhyaksha*, etc. In times of war, the king was also assisted by the tributary chiefs, who commanded their own detachments.

The division of the army was traditionally a fourfold one consisting of different wings namely, infantry, cavalry, elephants and ships mainly for carrying troops across the rivers. The *Nidhanpur grant* mentions that Bhaskaravarman's camp at Karnasuvarna consisted of splendid ships, elephants, horses and infantry. The soldiers were recruited from all classes of people including the Brahmanas. The *Tezpur grant* of Vanamalavarman states that the foot soldiers along with other units of the army were stationed in the city of Haruppeswara. Elephant formed an integral part of the Pragjyotisha army as there were elephants in abundance in the forests of Assam as referred in the epigraphic and literary evidences. Hiuen Tsang states that Bhaskaravarman went to meet Harshavardhana with 20,000 elephants. But cavalry had a less important position because of want of good horses. Horses in large numbers were imported into Bengal and Kamarupa from Tibet as mentioned in the *Tabaquat-i-Nasiri*. The development of the art of shipping was promoted by the state. Epigraphic evidences contain references to the royal navy and naval victory of the

rulers of ancient Assam *over* their enemies. Hwui li further states that Bhaskaravarman went to meet Harshavardhana up the Ganges with a flotilla of 30,000 ships.

The soldiers were well trained and were capable of handling all types of weapons. The chief weapons of war were *Asi* (sword), *Parasu* (axe), *Khatvanga* (spear) and *Gada* (mace) along with bow and arrow. Then people of Assam were expert archers. The *Doobi grant* mentions *Chakra* (wheel), Discus, Javelin, etc. *Kavacha* (armour) used by the soldiers to protect themshelves while fighting in the battle field. Nothing much can be said about the different kinds of warfare. The rulers and his soldiers adhered to the ethics of warfare. The defeated rulers were accorded proper place and shown due respect. The *Hayungthal* and *Guwahati* grants, mentioned that such defeated rulers were present in the hall of audience of the ruling monarch and at the time of coronation.

The architectural remains and literary references indicate the existence of numerous forts in different parts of ancient Assam. These forts were triangular, semi-circular, circular or square. The cities of Pragjyotishpur, Haruppeswara, Durjaya and Kamrupanagara were well fortified by natural barriers and forts. Actual remains of forts and embankments of the ancient period are found at places like Guwahati, Dimapur, Biswanath, Numaligarh, Tezpur and Sadiya.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q.7:** Write True/False:

a) The rulers of Pragjyotisha were not depended on the *Mahasamamantas* and *Samantas.* (True/False)

(b) The division of the army was traditionally a fourfold one. (True/False)

(c) The soldiers were not capable of handling all types of weapons. (True/False)



## 7.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt about

- There was a strong central government along with local administrative units.
- The judicial, revenue and military administration have also being discussed in this unit.



## 7.8 FURTHER READING

1. Barpujari, H.K. ( 2003): *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Volume-1, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati
2. Barua, S.L.(1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manuharlal Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi

## 7.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1:** a) Rajaniti, b) Maharajadhiraja, c) Bhukti, d) Agrahara

**Ans to Q No 2:** a) True, b) False, c) False, d) True

**Ans to Q No 3:** The rulers were dispensers of justice.

**Ans to Q No 4:** Nyayakaranika, Dandika.

**Ans to Q No 5:** Chauroddharanika.

**Ans to Q No 6:** a) Kara, b) Tax collector, c) Adhikarana, d) Brahmanas

**Ans to Q No 7:** a) True, b)True, c)False



## 7.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

**A) Very Short Questions** (Answer each question within 50 words)

**Q 1:** Who was *Mahasenapati*?

**Q 2:** Who was the head of the administration in ancient Assam?

**Q 3:** Who was *Dandika?*

**Q 4:** Who was *Simapradatta?*

**B) Short Questions** (Answer each question within 150 words)

**Q 1:** Write briefly about the military administration of ancient Assam.

**Q 2:** What do you know about the revenue administration of ancient Assam?

**C) Long Questions** (Answer each question in between 150-300 words)

**Q 1:** Discuss the central and local administration of ancient Assam.

**Q 2:** Describe the revenue administration of ancient Assam.

*** ***** ***



## REFERENCES (For All Units of the Course)


1. Barpujari, H. K. (2003): *The Comprehenhive History of Assam*, Volume-I, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati
2. Barua, S.L.(1996): *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manuharlal Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi
3. Barua, K.L (2008) : *Early History of Kamrupa,* LBS, Guwahati
4. Chaudhury, P.C. (1966): *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the 12th century A.D*., 2nd edition, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Gauhati
5. Gait, Edward: *A History of Assam*

| Name of the Paper:<br>Course Code: |
|---|

**Centre for Internal Quality Assurance (CIQA)**
**Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University**
**City Office, Housefed Complex, Guwahati- 06**

***Learner's Feedback on Course***

Dear Learner,

Regarding the course as mentioned above, we would like to know your opinions and comments so as to improve the quality of self learning materials in future. Please respond to the following statements by ticking the number you feel most reflect your opinion. After completion of the additional comments, please detach the page and send/mail the same to us at the address given below.

**The Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance, KKHandiqui State Open University**
**Housefed Complex, Dispur, Guwahati- 781006**
**(E-mail id: ciqa@kkhsou.in)**

1. Approximately how many hours did you spend for studying the units in the course? | | | |
2. Please give your opinions (by √ mark) to the following items based on your reading of the block:

| Sl. No. | Statements | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I. | The SLMs of the course fulfil the learning objectives set out in the beginning of each unit | | | | | |
| II. | The units of the SLM could satisfy my academic needs and expectations | | | | | |
| III. | The Unit writers have excellent knowledge about the course contents | | | | | |
| IV. | Language and contents of the units were presented at a level which I could readily understand | | | | | |
| V. | Ample opportunity for participation in the activities provided in the units | | | | | |
| VI. | Used enough Illustrations (Diagrams, tables etc.) for conceptual clarity | | | | | |
| VII. | Quality of content is engaging, relevant, and up-to-date | | | | | |
| VIII. | The self check questions are very helpful | | | | | |
| IX. | The Possible/model questions and the answers to check my progress have benefited me a lot | | | | | |

**Additional Comments:** *(Please feel free to provide your open comments)*

1. Which aspects of the SLM, according to you, worked well?

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2. What sort of changes/improvements do you feel KKHSOU could implement to improve the overall quality of the SLM?

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***Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.***

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