UNIT 9 : THE PALAS OF KAMRUPA

UNIT STRUCTURE

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9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will able to-

- understand the formation of the Palas Kingdom in Kamrupa,
- discuss the state formation and polity under Pala Dynasty of Kamrupa,
- understand the administrative structure of the Pala Dynasty.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

After the decline of Salastambha Dynasty, Kamrupa was ruled by the Pala Dynasty. The Pala Kings ruled from 10th Century CE. The King Brahmapala was regarded as the founder of the Pala Dynasty of Kamrupa, and under his leadership, the Pala Dynasty of Kamrupa rose to prominence. This unit intends to discuss the Palas' state formation, polity, and administrative system. The Palas played a significant role in the political and cultural landscape of the region during their reign. They patronized Buddhism and Hinduism, which flourished during their rule. The Hindu tradition traced its lineage back to the earlier Varman Dynasty and, ultimately, Narakasura. The Palas also contributed to the development of the Assamese language and literature. It is important to note that the Palas of Kamrupa

and the Palas of Bengal were two separate kingdoms. The Palas of Kamrupa ruled over what is now known as Assam in northeastern India. They supported Buddhism and Hinduism, which flourished under their rule. The Palas of Bangal, on the other hand, ruled over Bengal and Bihar from the eighth to the twelfth centuries. They were well-known for their support of Buddhism and for overseeing a period of significant cultural and intellectual growth. They played an important role in the spread of Buddhism across the Indian subcontinent. They established renowned learning institutions. The Palas of Bengal were also known for their architectural accomplishments, such as the construction of monasteries (viharas) and temples. Inscriptions issued by rulers such as Ratnapala, Indrapala, Gopala and Dharmapala are important sources to reconstruct the history of the Pala kingdom of Kamrupa.



ACTIVITY 9.1

Make a list of the major ruling dynasties of ancient Assam from 6th century C.E. to 12th century C.E.

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9.3 RULERS OF THE PALAS OF KAMRUPA

Based on the available epigraphic evidences, it has been assumed that probably eight Pala rulers ruled in Kamrupa. The following is the tentative chronology of the kings of the Pala dynasty (Baruah, K.L., 2009):

Name of Kings	**Approximate Reign**
Brhamapala	985-1000 C.E.
Ratnapala	1000-1030
Purandarapala (did not rule)	
Indrapala	1030-1055
Gopala	1055-1075
Harshapala	1075-1090
Dharmapala	1090-1115
Jayapala	1115-1125

Brahmapala: Brahmapala was the first ruler of Pala Dynasty of Kamrupa. He became king near the end of the 10th century and might have been a contemporary of the Gauda ruler Mahipala (Baruah.S.L.,2017). He was succeeded by seven kings in the line. He is described as a great warrior in the epigraph of Ratnapala. He assumed the title Maharajadhiraja (Baruah.S.L,2017). The Bargaon grant states that Brahmapala relinquished in favour of his son Ratnapala.

Ratnapala: After Brahmapala, Kamrupa was ruled by his son Ratnapala. Ratnapala was the first powerful king of the dynasty seems to have imperial pretensions. He issued three important grants- the Charatbari grant, the Bargaon grant and the Sualkuchi grant. According to S.L Baruah he had a long reign of at least 30 years. He was probably a contemporary of Mahipala I and Nyayapala of Bengal. Ratnapala was a great conqueror. He defeated the king of Gauda and extended his territory. He might come into conflict with the rulers of Gurjara, Kerala, Bahikas, Taikas and Deccan. But there are no clear evidences of his direct confrontation with these powers. Moreover, he extended his territory towards the extreme north eastern region, presently covered by Arunachal Pradesh through matrimonial relationships. This powerful Pala ruler assumed the title *Paramesvara Paramabhatta-raka Maharajadhiraja*.

Indrapala: At Ratnapala's death, the throne of Kamarupa was inherited by his grandson Indrapala. The Gauhati grant and the Guakuchi grant were issued in his reign respectively. This proves that he also had a fairly long reign of about 25 years. He possibly ruled in the middle of the 11th century and was a contemporary of the Gauda ruler Vigrahapala.

Gopala: Indrapala was succeeded by his son Gopala, whose mother Rajyadevi was a Rashtrakuta princess. His Gachtal inscription records his donation of lands to a Brahmana in the village Kharikona-Konchi within the visaya of Badasojambuba. The king had personal charm, merit and intelligence, munificence as well as success in war to his credit. It appears that he consolidated his father's conquests in Pundravardhana, which probably accounts for the subsequent invasion of Jatavarman.

Harshapala: Gopala's son Harshapala ruled Kamrupa towards the end of the 11th century. He was a man of learning who is credited with the

composition of some verses in the Kavindra vachana samuchchaya. Harshapala was perhaps a weak ruler. It was probably during his time that Jatavarman, a king of East Bengal snatched away a part of Pundra-vardhana which belonged to his kingdom. The invasion of Chalukya Vikramaditya VI (1076-1126), who is said to have overrun Magadha, Anga, Gauda and Kamarupa, may also be ascribed to the period of his reign. The expedition, however, did not result in the loss of any territory either in Gauda or in Kamarupa.

Dharmapala: Dharmapala, the son of Harshapala, was the last ruler of the Palas of Kamrupa. He was probably in power in the first half of the twelfth century. Dharmapala ruled with great authority. Soon after his accession to the throne Dharmapala was able to extend his by conquering North Bengal. In the west, he was able to extend the boundary of his kingdom up to the Karatoya river. By such conquests he brought back the once-great kingdom. During his region, the Subhakarapataka and Khonamukhi grants were issued. Like his father, Dharmapala was also a person of great intellectual enthusiasm. He himself was a poet and patronized religion and learning. He is described as *Paramesvara Parambhattaraka Maharajadhiraja Dharmapalavarmadeva* in his inscriptions. Dharmapala shifted the capital of the Kingdom from Durjjaya to Kamrupanagara.

Jaypala: Jayapala most likely succeeded Dharmapala and was the last ruler of the Pala Kingdom of Kamrupa. Inscriptions have been discovered issued by Jayapala. However, the Silimpur Stone Slab Inscription mentions about Jayapala. During his reign, probably Ramapala of Bengal with the help of Vaidyadeva, and independent ruler of Kamrupa invaded Kamrupa and earned authority over it.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Which Pala ruler of Kamrupa was known for his imperial pretensions and conquests?

A) Indrapala B) Gopala C) Harshapala D) Ratnapala

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Q 2: Name the two grants issued by Dharmapala.

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Q 3: Which inscription mentions about Jayapala?

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ACTIVITY 9.2

Make a list of the Pala rulers of Kamrupa with the important achievements during their reign.

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9.4 STATE FORMATION OF THE PALAS

State formation refers to the process of the establishment of a political entity. This process involves defining territorial boundaries, establishing centralised authority, creating legal and political institutions, and developing economic infrastructure, etc. Negotiation, colonisation, revolution, or conquest are some of the possible methods of the state formation process. However, we have limited resources available to discuss about the state formation process of Palas.

According to a number of epigraphic evidences the Palas of Kamrupa expand their geographical territory through conquest and other methods as part of their process of state formation. Despite their inability to conquer large areas like the Salastambhas, there are epigraphic evidences of their political dominance over North and South-East Bengal. The Bargaon Copper Plate Inscription of Ratnapala indicates that the king had a copper mine in his kingdom that produced a substantial income, indicating that they held some control over the Khasi-Jayantiya hills, or at least a portion of it. It is imperative that Palas practiced marriage alliances to expand their sphere of influence and foster diplomatic ties. For example, Purandarapala's (Son of Ratnapala) marriage to Durlabha, the daughter of a chief from the extreme north-eastern region, is significant in the period's political and cultural history.

As previously mentioned, the Pala Dynasty began in Kamrupa in the tenth century following the fall of the Salastambha Dynasty. Tyagasingha,the last ruler of Salastambha, died childless. The officers carefully prevented the risk of a rebellion centred on Tyagasingha's heirless

death by appointing Brahmapala to the throne. Brahmpala is regarded as the founder of the Pala Dynasty of Kamrupa. This is evident from the Bargaon grant of Ratnapala, which states:

"Seeing that the twenty first of them (the line of Salastambha), the illustrious Tyaga- singha by name had departed to heaven without (leaving) any of his race (to succeed him), his officials, thinking it well that a Bhauma (of Naraka's race) should be appointed as their lord, chose Brahmapala from among his kindred to be their king on account of his fitness to undertake the government of the country".

Bhrahmapal was succeeded by his son Ratnapala. Ratnapala was a very powerful ruler of the dynasty who conquered Gauda and defeated its king. His granson, Indrapala's records describe him as:

"the mighty crusher of his enemies, who studded the earth with white-washed temples, the skies with the smoke of his burnt offerings and all the quarters of the earth with the pillar monuments of it is victories".

His inscriptions describe his military campaigns, which were most likely intended to subdue rebellious chiefs in Kamarupa or in North Bengal. An inscription attributed to his successor, Gopala, indicates that he defeated King Rajyapala of Gauda. Additionally, his son, Purandarapala, married Durlabha, a descendant of the royal race of extreme kingdoms. Ratnapala's domain may have extended to the far northeastern territories that are now part of Arunachal Pradesh, or Purandarapala may have formed a marital alliance with a feudatory or independent chief of this region.

During his reign, Indrapala demonstrated military prowess by defeating his opponents and earning the respect of many vassal chiefs. According to the Gachtal inscription, he defeated Kalyana Chandra, who had previously conquered a Gauda king. Indrapala strengthened his position in Eastern India by forming a marriage alliance with the Rashtrakutas. Records such as the Guakuchi grant show his influence over Pundravardhana, which is supported by land grants in the Pandaribhumi region. Additionally, the Gauhati grant documents his land donation to a Brahmana in Bhavisa village.



LET US KNOW

Indrapala married Rashtrakuta princess Rajyadevi to strengthened the relation with the Rashtrakutas.

Following Indrapala's reign, his son Gopala succeeded to the throne. Gopala was known for his personal charisma, intelligence, generosity, and military accomplishments. It appears that he strengthened his father's conquests in Pundravardhana, which probably accounts for the subsequent invasion of Jatavarman. Harshapal Gopala's son, was a weak ruler. During his reign, Jatavarman, a king of East Bengal, most likely seized a portion of Pundrvaedhana of the kingdom. Chalukya Vikramaditya VI's invasion may also have occurred during his reign.

Dharmapala was a formidable king. He restored the kingdom's lost glory by conquering North Bengal and, most likely, the sea in the south-west of the kingdom. This assertion is supported by his own grants, which clearly state:

He "was the lord of the earth girdled by the ocean: (ambudhi-mekhalaya). In the battlefield decorated with flower-like pearls, struck off from the heads of elephants, killed by the blows of the sword, the king alone remained victorious, who alone made this earth to be governed by one king, and who was the only shelter of the refugees, whose fame was well-known throughout the world, and who was the vanquisher of enemy heroes".

Regarding geographical extension, Dharmapala's second grant also suggests that both Sravasti and Dijjina were part of the kingdom of Kamarupa. Dharmapala's dominance over the ocean-bound region may indicate his political clout in south-east Bengal. Dharmapala thus succeeded in pushing the kingdom's western boundary beyond the Karatoya River.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Pala king Indrapala formed marriage alliance with the Rashtrakutas. (True or false?)

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Q 5: How did Brahmapala accessed the throne?

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Q 6: Which Pala king defeated the Gauda king Rajyapala?

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Dharmapala was defeated by Bengal's King Ramapala. This event is mentioned in the Ramacharita by Sandhyakara Nandi, who claims that a Ramapala general named Mayana conquered Kamarupa. However, it appears that Ramapala did not occupy or conquer Kamarupa, but rather seized her possessions in North Bengal and appointed Tingyadeva as ruler. Jayapala continued to rule over his kingdom. The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva does not mention Tingyadeva as the ruler of Kamarupa, but rather as a prince who ruled to the east of the Pala dominion (Gauda). Vaidyadeva was able of making conquests in Kamarupa proper. The invasion of Mayana may have occurred between 1125 and 30 AD. Following Jayapala's demise, the Pala Dynasty of Kamrupa came to an end.

9.5 POLITY AND ADMINISTRATION

Polity refers to the political structure and organisation of a society or state. Whereas Administration is the process of carrying out and overseeing the management of governmental policies and programmes. Various inscriptions from that era provide us with some information about the administration and politics of the Palas of Kamrupa

As we know, the Bhrahapala's succession to the Kamrupa throne marked the start of the Pala dynasty of Kamrupa. Brahmapala claimed the title "Pala," possibly following the Palas of Bengal and traced his lineage back to Naraka. Brahmapala may have been a governor in the western region of the kingdom prior to his accession; as a result of his background in administration, he was chosen to lead the officers. However, Ratnapala's epigraph describes him as a great warrior,though simply called Maharajadhiraja.(Baruah.S.L)

Ratnapala was a strong monarch who claimed to be an imperial. From the records of Indrapal it can be said that Ratnapala emerged as a

formidable force in defeating his adversaries, demonstrating his prowess by erecting numerous white-washed temples on the terrestrial landscape and erecting monumental pillars across diverse geographical expanses to commemorate his victories.

Administration: The king was the central authority in the Pala kingdom. The king assumed the title of *Maharajadhiraja* which was probably influenced from the Gupta rulers. The king was assisted by a council of local elites. The Pala rulers probably appointed Governors or vassal chiefs to rule in the provinces like the Shalastambhas. As mentioned earlier, Brahmapala himself was a governor under the Shalastambha rule before accession to the throne. The rulers tried to identify themselves as the successors of the Bhauma-Naraka rulers. The kings being the supreme authority fought battles and led military expeditions. At the same time, he was responsible for protection his territory and people. The capital city was the important place for political, commercial and other activities during the Pala rule. Records mention about the beautification of capital cities during the Pala rule. There is evidence of fortified cities in Pala Kingdom. As mentioned in the Bargaon Copper Plate Inscription, the exceptional fortifications of Durjaya city in during Ratnapal's region was a matter concern among several contemporary Indian powers, including the rulers of Gurjara, Gauda, Kerala, and the Deccan.



LET US KNOW

Epigraphic records mention about three capital cities of the Pala kingdom in Kamrupa- Durjaya or Sri Durjaya, Kamrupanagara and Hamsakonci.

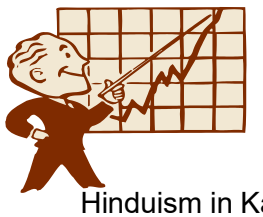
Trade: The Pala kings actively promoted trade and commerce. References are often made to merchants, wealthy individuals and crowds around the streets of the capital city.Among the Pala kings, Ratnapala, greatly encouraged trade and commerce during his reign. The Bargaon grant states his period as: *"It resembles the summit of mount Kailasa in being the residence of the Parameswar (Siva) and in being inhabited by a Vittesa (Kuvera)".* Records mention about significant growth of commercial and

urban centres during the Pala rule. The Pushpabhadra copper plate mentions about existence of board highways for communication helping in growth of trade centres.

Religion and literarture: As mentioned earlier, the Pala rulers greatly patronized Religion and learning in the kingdom. The Pala kings of Kamrupa patronized both Hinduism and Buddhism. Initially they were worshippers of Hara (Shiva) and Gauri (Shakti). From, the reign of Indrapala, Vajrayana Buddhism was patronized in the kingdom. They were also great patrons of Brahmanism in Kamrupa. Making grants to the Brahmans was common during the rule of the Pala kings of Kamrupa.Their practice of establishing agrahara settlements for Brahmins in non-Aryan villages contributed to the spread of Hindu culture within and around the kingdom, as well as the dissemination of learning among the local populace.

The Pala rulers were also greatly patronized learning and literature. Most of the Pala kings were themselves men of learning and their courts were adorned by learned preceptors, poets and scholars. King Ratnapala himself was a poet. The Bargaon grant mentions that his capital city was inhabited by religious preceptors and poets. King Harshapala was another important ruler who had keen interest in learning. He is credited with the composition of some verses in the Kavindra vachana samuchchaya. King Dharmapala was also a great patron of religion and literature. He himself was a poet. He composed the first eight verses of the Pushpabhadra grant and is attributed with ten verses in the Sadukti Karnamrita of Sridhara-dasa. The Kalika Purana was probably written under his patronage.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Q 7: What was the title assumed by Brahmapala?

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Q 8: How did the Pala rulers help in spreading Hinduism in Kamrupa?

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Q 9: Which ruler composed the first eight verses of the Pushpabhadra grant?

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9.6 THE DECLINE OF THE PALAS

Dharmapala was the last important ruler of the Pala Kingdom of Kamrupa. Dharmapala was succeeded by Jayapala who is regarded as the last king of this dynasty, marking the beginning of Kamarupa's disintegration. Sources mention an independent king in Kamarupa, likely aligned with the Pala dynasty of Bengal, named Vaidyadeva. It suggests that Ramapala of Bengal might have asserted authority over Kamarupa through an ally's military campaign. Ramapala's successor, Kumarapala, seems to have appointed Tingyadeva as a vassal king over these territories.



9.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt-

- Kamrupa was ruled by the Pala Dynasty founded by Brahmapala after the decline of the Salastambha Dynasty, with the Pala Kings reigning from the 10th Century CE.
- The Palas played a significant role in the political and cultural landscape of the region. The Palas of Kamrupa and the Palas of Bengal were two separate kingdoms, with the former ruling over what is now known as Assam in northeastern India.
- The Palas expanded their geographical territory through conquest and marriage alliances, extending their influence over regions like North and South-East Bengal.
- The administration of the Pala Kingdom was centralized, with the king being the supreme authority assisted by a council of local elites and appointed governors or vassal chiefs to rule in the provinces.
- The Palas promoted trade and commerce in Kamrupa.

- They patronised both Hinduism and Buddhism, with Vajrayana Buddhism being patronized from the reign of Indrapala onwards.
- The Palas were also patrons of learning and literature, with many kings being poets themselves and their courts adorned by learned preceptors, poets, and scholars.
- Jayapala most likely succeeded Dharmapala and was the last ruler of the Pala Kingdom of Kamrupa, facing an invasion by Ramapala of Bengal.



9.8 FURTHER READING

1) Barua, K L (2020), *Early History of Kamrupa: From the earliest times to the end of the sixteenth century*, Guwahati, Bhabani Books.

2) Baruah, S. L. (1995), *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.

3) Boruah Nirode, (2010), *Historical Geography of Early Assam*, Guwahati, DVS Publishers.

4) Lahiri Nayanjot, (1991), *Pre-Ahom Assam: Studies In The Inscriptions of Assam Between The Fifth And The Thirteenth Centuries AD*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.



9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: D) Ratnapala

Ans to Q No 2: The Subhakarapataka and Khonamukhi grants

Ans to Q No 3: The Silimpur Stone Slab.

Ans to Q No 4: True

Ans to Q No 5: The last Salastambha ruler Tyagasingha died childless. After his death the officers carefully prevented the risk of a rebellion centered on Tyagasingha's heirless death by appointing Brahmapala

to the throne. According to the Bargaon grant, Brahmapala was a governor under the Salastambhas.

Ans to Q No 6: Gopala.

Ans to Q No 7: Maharajadhiraja.

Ans to Q No 8: By establishing agrahara settlements for Brahmins in non-Aryan villages, the Pala rulers contributed to the spread of Hindu culture in Kamrupa.

Ans to Q No 9: Dharmapala.



9.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very short questions (Answer each questions in about 50 words)

Q 1: The Palas of Kamrupa patronized which two religions?

Q 2: Name two important grants issued by the Pala rulers of Kamrupa.

Q 3: What were the basic differences between the Pala kingdoms of Bengal and Kamrupa?

Q 4: What was agrahara settlement?

Q 5: How did the Pala kingdom of Kamrupa came to an end?

B) Short questions (Answer each questions in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write a short note the Pala administration system.

Q 2: Assess the role of Pala king Dharmapala in expanding his kingdom.

Q 3: Discuss the contributions of the Pala kings towards literature.

Q 4: Briefly discuss the marriage alliances during the Pala rule in Kamrupa.

C) Long Questions (Answer each questions in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss how did the Palas of Kamrupa expand their territory and strengthen their kingdom?

Q 2: “Pala rulers were great patrons of religion and learning.”- discuss.

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