

Epigraphs, Brahmanas and Settlements : A Note on the Settlements and Social Formation of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa on Epigraphical Perspective

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The Pauranic sources like the Harivamsa, Vishnu Purana, Bhagavat Purana, and the Kalika Purana (Shastri 1993) referred to the legends of Naraka-Bhagadatta as the progenitor of the Aryans of this part of India. The Kailka Purana depicts the story of Narakasur. The text shows that Naraka was born of mother earth (*bhumi*) through Vishnu in his Boar incarnation. As born of earth (*bhumi*), Naraka came to known as *Bhauma* and it has observed that subsequently all ruling families of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa claimed their descent from Naraka- Bhagadatta. The study of the early settlement pattern in Assam indicates that the majority of people belong to the Indo-Mongolian group of people along with Proto-Mongolian, Tibeto-Burmese, Proto-Austroloid, and Alpine group of people before the advent of Naraka-Bhagadatta. Recently, scholars have started a debate on the antiquity, origin, and continuity of Aryan way of life and mode of cultivation in the Northeastern India. Boruah (2007: 30) is of the opinion that the advent of Naraka makes a tentative demarcating line for the advent of Aryan culture in this land. It seems that Alpines were responsible for the spread of Aryan culture prior to the coming of Narkasur. Our extant sources, which are mainly the epigraphs, show that it was the Brahmanical class with their own social norms and behaviour had initiated the process of social change through a process of acculturation and assimilation amongst the local people.

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Introduction

Till early sixties, archaeological research and allied development in Assam vis-à-vis Northeast India has suffered from pragmatism and dogmas of Colonial historiographers and archaeologists. Few serious attempts have been made to study the process of social formation from the point of view of the people like modes of production and land, social and natural environment. The progress of material culture is a very recent development where scholars like D.D. Kosambi (1994: 6-8) and R.S. Sharma (1997: 121) observe the whole process as historical development. In Assam, where most of the people were predominantly agriculturists, land system and its study appear as one basic pre-condition of the study of early social formation. Therefore, the land system of early Assam is closely related with the issues of emergence of early settlements, caste, class, relation between individual and society, social environment and relation between land and its holdings. Since the sources of the study in these aspects of the history of early Assam are meagre, we have at our disposal the records of royal grants of lands to the Brahmans and other priestly class and by the rulers of early Assam right from 4th/5th century CE onwards. The land grants and associated data appear as one of the prime factors for understanding the process of historical developments in Pre-Ahom Assam. No serious attempt has so far been made to understand the historical and archaeological significance of these scattered grants of three important dynasties. It is important to note that we have at our disposal only the writings of M.M. Sharma and P.N. Bhattacharjee and later on by Sarahuddin Ahmed and Dharmeswar Chutiya who mainly interpreted these grants numbering nearly thirty-eight/forty. However, unfortunately no attempt has made to understand the basic analysis of these grants, which were supposed to have been an integral part of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa, Harupeswara and Kamrupanagara. Most of these grants were chance discoveries.

With the advent of new agricultural technology which in all probability entered north-eastern India with the hands of Sanskritised Brahmins (based on the extensive use of iron and cattle powered plough) were introduced new patterns of agricultural settlement and socio-cultural ethics in early Assam under the royal patronage of the Varmanas, Salastambhas and Palas of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa. A few stone inscriptions (Boruah 2007: 84-91) discovered in the Golaghat district, Assam, tell us about the impact and wave of Sanskritisation and Brahmanical mode of appropriation in the forest-clad region of Brahmaputra valley amidst the non-Aryan settlements.

The basic question that often comes to our mind is that - what happened to the people whose mode of subsistence depends on earlier food gathering and later food producing economy. However, the sources of the period do not denote any single reference to these people who were original dwellers of the region except some occasional references. It appears that the historic period of the Northeast India is likely to have started with the process of Sanskritisation and the emergence of new settlements under the patronage of

the first historical dynasty of the region i.e. Varman dynasty which was founded by Pushya Varman.

The Pauranic sources like the Harivamsa, Vishnu Purana, Bhagavat Purana, and the Kalika Purana (Shastri 1993) referred to the legends of Naraka-Bhagadatta as the progenitor of the Aryans of this part of India. The Kalika Purana depicts the story of Narakasur. The text shows that Naraka was born of mother earth (*bhumi*) through Vishnu in his Boar incarnation. As born of earth (*bhumi*), Naraka came to be known as *Bhauma* and it has been observed that subsequently all ruling families of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa claimed their descent from Naraka- Bhagadatta. The study of the early settlement pattern in Assam indicates that the majority of people belong to the Indo-Mongolian group of people along with Proto-Mongolian, Tibeto-Burmese, Proto-Austroloid, and Alpine group of people before the advent of Naraka-Bhagadatta. Recently, scholars have started a debate on the antiquity, origin, and continuity of Aryan way of life and mode of cultivation in the Northeastern India. Boruah (2007: 30) is of the opinion that the advent of Naraka makes a tentative demarcating line for the advent of Aryan culture in this land. It seems that Alpines were responsible for the spread of Aryan culture prior to the coming of Narkasur. Our extant sources, which are mainly the epigraphs, show that it was the Brahmanical class with their own social norms and behaviour that had initiated the process of social change through a process of acculturation and assimilation amongst the local people.

Amalendu Guha (1991: 34) opines that Aryanisation of Brahmaputra valley was completed as early as second century CE. Guha (1989: 87) also thinks that it was the Aryanised sons of the soil, who formed the first state organisation in Assam. However, our extant sources lead us to believe that the process of Aryanisation or Sanskritisation took quite a lot of time to spread in different parts of the region in its fullest form. Banikanta Kakati (1989: 13-14) thinks that the story of Naraka, which is described in the Kalikapurana, is different from Naraka of epics “an adventurous royal prince from Mithila and who played a quite significant role in the spread of Brahmanical culture in Eastern India”. Kakati writes “...then Kalika Purana tells the story of certain, Naraka (different from Naraka of the epics) of Mithila, leading a colonizing expedition into ancient Pragjyotisha kingdom. Referring to its previous history, the Puranas says that Sambhu formerly preserved the kingdom (Pragjyotisha) for his own domain. The aboriginal inhabitants are Kiratas with shaven heads and addicted to drink and flash. A Vaishnavite religious guide (Vishnu) accompanied Naraka in this expedition. Naraka settled twice born people within his kingdom and he was suggested by his Vaishnavite guide not to worship any other deity except Kamakhya, a yoni goddess. He could not transfer his devotion to any other god or goddess except on the penalty of death. Siva is evidently ignored and being classed with other gods. It would appear that aboriginal Kiratas were under the protection of Siva because it is said that they were expelled to the eastern sea with the consent of Sambhu. Divested of symbolism, this means that the Kiratas under their Saivite leader voluntarily withdrew towards the eastern Sea” (Kakati 1989: 13-14).

Kakati's argument regarding the historicity of Narakasur is debatable. However, here we can believe that this story of Narakasur certainly speaks about the nature and pattern of extension of Aryan culture in Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa. Since the human habitation and settlement pattern of early Assam shows that most the parts of the region were under the occupation of Indo-Mongolian, Austrics and Tibeto-Burman groups of people. The male god evidently dominated the religious beliefs of the first group of people whereas cult of Mother Goddess was quite popular among the second group of people. Whether the story of Naraka reflects the myth or historicity is quite debatable; but it is almost certain that the story of Naraka reflects political and cultural extension of the Indo-Aryans in this region, and the time was approximately nearer to the beginning of the Christian era. We may presume that coming of Naraka from Mithila as an adventurer can be taken as clear indication of apparent clash of stone tool using Neolithic people with the users of plough technology. The possible conflict and later on assimilation between plough and hoe is perhaps natural situation during the time. Whether Naraka brought with him the tradition of plough culture amidst the hoe user non-Aryan tribes is still a matter of controversy. Thus in historic period, i.e. 4th century CE onwards when rulers of early Assam started systematic grants of lands to the Brahmanas along with *Agrahara* settlement, the technology spread more extensively with the emergence of new settlements. However, the aboriginal people whose mode of subsistence depended on shouldered celts and slash and burn methods were quite unfamiliar with the new technology of production and were habituated and happy in their life style in hilly terrain in natural environment. We may presume that the *Kiratas* with whom Naraka clashes were perhaps Austrics and Indo-Mongolian groups of people. The process of Sanskritisation in the Brahmaputra valley gradually became stronger and perhaps left tremendous imprint among the aborigines with the introduction of new religious ideas, language and more advance production technology. Those who could not survive went and settled down in the small hilly pockets of the regions and others assimilated with the new wave. The story of Naraka perhaps indicates the same process.

As discussed earlier, the aboriginal people who were not Sanskritised known as *Kiratas* in early literatures and they continued their old tradition, settled in different hills or hilly pockets of the region, and practiced animism. Their mode of cultivation and subsistence pattern was fundamentally different from those people who newly arrived with mature knowledge of *Sanskrit*, plough based agriculture and season. We are not sure about the tentative date of spread and extension of Indo-Aryan cultural influence in this part of India, but in all probability, we have to believe that it is not earlier than 1st/2nd century CE, as we have material evidences bearing Brahmanical character discovered in the Barpathar-Duborani area of Golaghat district of Assam (Dutta 1997). It seems that the plains of early Assam became open for new mode of cultivation and settlements what was fundamentally different from earlier one.

The extant inscriptions of our period speak of donation of lands by the royal authority to the Brahmanas and other priestly class. It seems that in those days, the classification

of land depended on natural and physical features; share on land and its occupancy; and levy of taxes depended on income generated from land and these incomes depended on nature of land and production from land.

Along with the formation of state (Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa) and with the pressure of population of different social categories, demands on land increased. It may be believed that these demands were generally applicable to all types of land *vastu*, *kshetra* or *khila*. The extant grants of our period occasionally mentioned about *vastu* and *kshetra* (Sharma 1978: 146). The study of the inscription shows that the settlement consisted not only of *vastubhumi*, but also of *kedarasthala* (paddy fields) and ponds, mounds, wasteland etc. that surround them. Nayanjyot Lahiri (1991) thinks that it was the homestead land (*vastubhumi*), around which all production activity was organised. We may observe that settlements and agrarian activity mainly centered on the sources of water like river, stream, lakes, etc., which in all certainty facilitate irrigation for agrarian activity that was the base of state system of early Assam. Hiuen-tsang who came to Kamarupa in the middle of 7th century AD says that '*water led from river or banked up lakes flowed around the town*' (Watters 1904: 185). It seems that Hiuen-tsang might have mentioned about sources of water. Since agrarian activity was the base of early Assam, it will be logical to think that all these activities mainly depend on sources of water rather irrigation facility. The land grants that were found in the Golaghat region are definitely a strong indication of the spread and extension of Brahmanical settlements in forested regions and hilly areas.

A critical survey of the land grants of early Assam shows that the king was the ultimate owner of the land, however, it does not necessarily mean that he could donate or sell out or lease the lands without consulting the person concerned with the land. It was not only the responsibility of king or state, sometimes the village headman or higher officials also looked into the matter. We may argue that kings informed the people who settled in the donated lands about the transfer of land and urged them to serve the donee. Perhaps, the land donation process completed in early Assam through the interference of *Mahattara* (the village headman or a higher official) (Sharma 1978: 304-305). The term *Mahattara* probably means village headmen through whom the land donation was completed in early Assam. Momin (2006: 25-26) thinks that this practice primarily served the problem of labour scarcity of the region. Thus, it appears that it was a common practice of land donation in early Assam that the King at the time of donation informed all headmen of donated villages for their concern to help temporarily the new Brahmana settlers of the land.

The epigraphs of the period also indicate that lands in early Assam were granted based on *nibidharma*, *aparadhadharma*, *akshayanibi* and *aparadhakhaynibi* (Roy 1382: 104-105). According to ancient Indian literatures, '*nibi*' means revenue. When a land is donated to Brahmana basing on '*nibidharma*' it means the donees can enjoy income from land or produce the land, but cannot destroy the land by any means.

In ancient Indian context, particularly in the Gupta period we find that when the king donated lands he also transferred all income from the land to the donees. In the context of early Assam, the same case can be observed. It seems that kings of early Assam donated lands in the settled areas where agriculture had long been practicing. The study of our extant inscription shows that though the king donated lands in settled areas, he also at the same time, settled the Brahmans in those areas where advanced agricultural production-technology can be applicable. Regarding the donation of lands in settled areas Nayanjyot Lahiri (1991: 101) thinks that the peasants were supposed to give to the king. As stated earlier that the king donated lands to the Brahmanas not in the wastelands but in settled areas that had earlier contributed revenue to the state. There are references of *kshetraalis* (Sharma 1978) in the inscriptions, which probably provided necessary support to the water irrigated in the paddy field.

Epigraphs and Settlements

At present at our disposal, we have at least forty-two records of such grants of land and settled villages covering the period from 4th/5th to 12th century CE. The functional parts of most of the inscription record the details of the donated lands and these were measured in terms of the production capacity of paddy (*dhanya*), along with the name of the donees, their *gotras* and *pravaras*. These inscriptions were inscribed mainly on copper plates and bigger or smaller stones. It has been observed that copperplates were usually bundled with a ring of copper and the two ends of which were secured in a half shaped made of bronze or sometimes alloy of copper and bell metal. In most cases, copper plates were used for donation of land in early Assam.

The epigraphs of the period that have so far been discovered can be divided into – four rock inscriptions, two stone inscriptions, four clay seals and remaining are copper plate inscriptions. Umachal rock inscription of Surendravarman is the earliest known rock inscription of early Assam, located in the Northeastern slope of the Kamakhya hill. The inscription was discovered in 1955 and studied systematically for the first time by D.C. Sircar and P.C. Choudhury (Barua 1969: 84). The language of the inscription is Sanskrit in prose style. The script is eastern variety of the Gupta alphabet. The inscription, which speaks about the construction of a cave temple of Lord Balavadra, is very important in aspect of the agrarian history of the region. Some scholars (Rao and Sircar 1987: 292) identified King Surendravarman with Mahendrarvarman of Varman dynasty, which is quite debatable.

The next important inscription of 5th century CE is the Nagajari-Khanikar Gaon stone inscription. The inscription is important because it records for the first time the spread of Brahmanical culture up to Sarupathar area of Golaghat district. The inscription was recovered in damaged condition and the inscribed five lines contain the description of the boundary of a donated land. The inscription, concerned with the donation of lands to most respectable Mahattara Brahmadata (Sharma 1978: 305). The donated land is bounded by '*Dibrumukhadda*' in the east and by a banyan tree in the west. M.M. Sharma

(1978: 305) thinks that '*Dibrumukkhadda*' was either the name of person or locality, which can be dismissed on several grounds. In a recently study, Nirode Boruah (2007: 93) tries to identify '*Dibrumukkhada*' with the confluence of river Diphu or Diphupani of the Doiyang-Dhansiri valley. Boruah states that '...it may be safe to claim that Dibu was the name of a river and '*mukkhada*' means mouth and thereby the whole word means confluence of the river Dibu nearby which the donated land is situated (Boruah 2007: 93). The discovery of the second fragment of the inscription informs us that the land was donated at *Gaurivataka* and the donor was Vasundharavarman.

Two recently discovered inscriptions of 5th century CE bear special importance. These are Alichiga Tengani Stone inscriptions of Sri Ratnavarman and Alichiga Tengani clay seal of Vasundharavarman. These two were found at Alichiga-Tengani near Barpathar in the Golaghat district (Dutta 1997: 5). The first records the construction of *Setubandha* at Alichiga Tengani as described by H.N. Dutta as *pattana* (Dutta 1997: 5). The second refers to a perpetual endowment comprising some eight plots of land donated by one king named Sri Vasundharavarman. The names of these two kings do not appear in the known genealogy of the kings of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa.

The next is the Barganga rock inscription of the time of Bhutivarman (Sharma 1978: 4-9). The find spot of the inscription is a natural rock that lies by the side of Barganga, 25 km north-east of modern Doboka town. N.K. Bhattasali first studied the inscription. The language of the inscription is Sanskrit prose with eastern variety of Gupta alphabet. The inscription records the construction of an *asrama* (hermitage), by *Vishyamatya Avaguna* for king's longevity.

The Dubi copper plate inscriptions were the earliest of all the copper plates issued by the kings of early Assam so far discovered. The inscription was discovered in 1950. The inscription records the donation of lands by Bhaskarvarman, which were originally donated by Bhutivarman of Kamarupa. The donated land was located somewhere in the Kamrup district as the western boundary did not extend beyond Karotoya during this period as indicated by Apsad inscriptions of Aditya Sena (Chabra and Ghai, 1981: 206).

The most important inscription of the 7th century, which speaks of the creation of *agrahara* and large settlement of Brahmanas, is the Nidhanpur grant (Sharma 1978: 38-81) of Bhutivarman that was re-issued by Bhaskarvarman. The inscription had been found in the Panchakanda pargana within Bianibazar Thana of Sylhet district of present Bangladesh. The inscription speaks of the transfer of a large tract of land known as *Mayurasalmala agrahara* in the Chandrapuri Vishaya. It was issued from Karnasuvarna, the *jayaskandhavara* of King Bhaskarvarman of Kamarupa. The inscription had been extensively studied by P.N. Bhattacharjee (1999: 1-43), Kamalakanta Gupta (1967: 56) and recently by Sujit Choudhury (2006: 50-73) and others. The boundaries of the donated land are as follows: to the south-east that very dry *Kausika* marked by a hewn fig tree; to the west now the boundary of *Ganginika*; to the north-west a potters' pit and the said *Ganginika* bent east ward; to the north a large *Jatali* tree; to the north-east the pond of controlling tradesman *khasoka* and dry *kausika* (Barua 1935: 421-32).

There had been much controversy amongst scholars regarding the location of donated land. Some scholars think that the donated land was the continuation of western boundary of Kamarupa, others viewed it as Panchakhanda Pargana of Sylhet, yet others claimed it to have belonged to the district of Purnea in Bihar. P.N. Bhattacharjee (1999: 32), N.K. Bhattasali (1935: 419-27) and K.L. Baruah (1935: 421-32) respectively propounded these views. Their opinion created much confusion among the scholars regarding the location of donated lands. However, the discovery of Paschimbhag copper plates of Sri Chandra (Gupta 1967: 56) has provided solution to the problem and could draw concrete evidence in support of the view of N.K. Bhattasali. By this, Sri Chandra of Vikrampur donated major portion of the land of Chandrapuri Vishaya with Srihatta mandala under Pundravardhana Bhukti to six thousand Brahmanas (Gupta 1967: 56) of different *gotras*. Thus the land is in all certainty located in Sylhet in present Bangladesh.

The Deopani Visnu image inscription (Sharma 1978: 306-309) was first noticed by T. Bloch in 1905. Later on the inscription had been studied separately by K.N. Dikshit. (1983: 329-330). The inscription was incised on the back of the stone image of Vishnu on the occasions of its dedication to the devotees. The inscription speaks for the first time that the *Sudras* along with the *Brahmanas* were allowed to worship *Devi* (mother goddess) and at the same time, the inscription stands for as example of religious toleration in early Assam.

Two more inscriptions were found in the Deopani region. These are Sankarnarayan stone image inscription (Sharma 1978: 310-312) and Harihara stone image inscription (Sharma 1978: 312). The first inscription does not mention that the idol was donated to certain donees, whereas the later confirmed the donation of idol. These two inscriptions mentioned the names of two kings, Sri Jivara and Sri Dighalekhavarman.

The next important inscription was a Copper bell inscription of Sri Kumara (Boruah 2007: 99), which was discovered along with icons, and a few articles made of bronze, copper etc. at Narakasur hill. Sri Kumara, the king of Salastambha dynasty, donated this bell.

The fragmentary Copper plate inscription of Sri Jivara (Chutiya 1990: 106-12) was discovered at Palasani in Nagaon district. The inscription was studied critically by Dharmeswar Chutia that shows that it was a land grant charter. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to have a clear idea about the location of donated land.

Another inscription found at Bishrampur in Kasomaripathar of Golaghat district is Krishna Durga stone image inscription (Dutta 1997). The inscription is of two lines. The name of Sri Jivara can be associated with the inscription.

The Tezpur rock inscription of Harjjara Varman (Sharma 1978: 82-88) has been found on a huge rock on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra slightly towards western side of the Tezpur town. This is probably a royal charter and according to some scholars, records the solution of a problem relating to navy and river fishing boats.

The Hayunthal copper plate inscription of Harjjaravarman (Sharma 1978: 89-94) has been found in Hayunthal in the present Karbi Anglong district of Assam. The Plate has been studied first time and deciphered by P.N. Bhattacharjee (Sharma 1978: 44-53). In all probability these copper plates speak of the grants of lands to Brahmanas. Since all the plates could not be recovered, we cannot say exactly about the nature of land donation by this grant. Importantly by this grant, we have for the first time a reference to the 'Mlechcha' dynasty.

The Karuvabahi copper plate inscription of Harjjaravarman (Chutiya 1982: 1-11) has been found at Nagaon in the Karuvabahi Satra. The grant has been studied and deciphered by Dharmeswar Chutiya and says that the grant speaks of the donation of a plot of land to a Brahmin situated in the *Dijjinavishaya* which according to some scholars can be located in present Nagaon district of Assam.

Some years back a miniature inscribed image of Surya was found in Kaki area in present Hojai district of Assam. It has been found that the image has been inscribed to commemorate the donation to the grandson of Vasistha (Brahmana donees).

The Tezpur copper plate inscription of Vanamalavarmadeva (Sharma 1978: 95-113) was found at Tezpur. The inscription records the donation of a village named *Abhisuravataka* situated in the west of *Trisrota* to a Brahmin named *Indoka*.

A set of three copper plates (Sharma 1978: 114-126) along with a seal was discovered at the village of Parbatiya in Darrang district of Assam. The inscription records the grant of a village called *Haposagrama* belonging to *Svalpamongoka* district of *Uttarakula* and which had been rendered free from visits of police, the army, and freed from taxes payable by temporary tenants. Vanamalavarmadeva of Salastambha dynasty had issued the grant for a pious Brahmin Bhatta and his four sons.

Another recently discovered inscription (Chutiya 1986: 37-52) of Vanamalavarmadeva was found in Dighali village of Kaliabor in the Nagaon district of Assam. This is a land donation record to a Brahmin in the *pradesha* called *Puraji* situated in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra. Another inscribed bronze image of Surya was recovered from Amgurikhat in Titabor of Jorhat district. The short inscription consisted of two words that had been deciphered by Dharmeswar Chutiya (Dutta 1997).

Balavarman III of Salastambha dynasty granted lands of *Varesenapattana Vishaya* to a Brahmin named Shyamadevabhata through the copper plate charters (Sharma 1978: 127-141). These inscriptions were recovered at Uttara-barbil village of Howraghat area of Karbi Anglong district. However, P.C. Choudhury (1987: 223) identifies *Varasenapattana Vishaya* with *Bada Vishaya* of Kamauli plate of Vaidyadeva, but D.C. Sircar (1965: 185) likes to identify the location of the district of *Varasenapattana* at Barsai (Borail) range of hills to the South of Silchar of Cachar district of Assam. King Balavarman III also issued another charter in the thirteen years of his reign. The charter was discovered at Ulubari village in Sonitpur district. Again, Balavarman III (Sharma 1978: 127) in the last

quarter of 9th century issued a royal charter in favour of a Brahmana in the *Dijjina Vishaya* in *Dakshinkula*.

It appears that king Ratnapala of Pala dynasty ruled for a quite long period. Until now, we have in our possession three copper plate grants of Ratnapala (Choudhury 1977: 61-69). The Caratbari grant of Ratnapala records the donation of land capable to produce four thousand measures of paddy which were donated in two *patakas* of *Santidasa* and *Bhatta (Charyya)* lying within the *Vishaya* of *Habung*. The second grant of illustrious King Ratnapala has been studied by P.N. Bhattacharya (1999: 89-109) which has been found at Naharabi village of Bargaon *mauja* of Tezpur. By this, the King made the grant of a plot of land yielding two thousand standard measures of paddy. Another grant (Sharma 1978: 110-115) of Ratnapala that has been found at Suwalkuchi speaks of the grant of land in *Kalanga Vishaya*.

Next two inscriptions are of king Indrapala, one is Guwahati copper plate grant (Sharma 1978: 179-192) and another is Guwalkichi grant (Sharma 1978: 193-206). By these inscriptions lands were granted by measures of paddy in the *Happayama Vishaya* belonging to *Uttarakula*. M.M. Sharma (1978: 300) identifies *Happayama* with Changsari area on the northern bank of Brahmaputra near modern Guwahati city. By the second grant, King Indrapala granted plots of land called *Panduri* near Rangia. Another land donation record of eleventh century found at Gachtal area (Sharma 1978: 207-224) near Doboka in the Nagaon district. By this charter, King Gopala donated a plot of land having capacity to yield paddy to some Brahmin families.

The land grant charter of Kamarupa King Dharmapala has been found in Nagaon and Guwahati. The first grant is Khonamukh (Sharma 1978: 225-240) grant of Dharmapala. N.K. Bhattacharya (Bhattacharya, *JARS, IX, 1-3*) made a detailed study of the grant. The charter consists of three copper plates that were issued by Dharmapala in the first year of his reign. By the second charter (Sharma 1978: 241-254) Dharmapala, gifted the land situated in the *Dijjina Vishaya* consisting of the localities called *Kanjyabhitvi* and *Subhankarpataka* having capacity to yield six thousand measures of paddy. The third copper plate charter of Dharmapala is known as Pushpabhadra grant (Sharma 1978: 255-272). The grant was found on the dry bed of the river Pushpabhadra in North Guwahati. Hemchandra Goswami first deciphered it, with a charter king Dharmapala granted to Brahmana *Madhusudana* the land of *Guheswara* joined with *Dighola* in *Puraji Vishaya*.

Another important land grant of our period is Kamauli plate of Vaidyadeva (Sharma 1978: 273-290). The grant was found in the village Kamauli situated near confluence of the river Varuna and Ganga at Varanasi. The granted land consisted of two villages of *Santivada* and *Mandara* in the *Bada Vishaya* with in Kamrup *mandala* of Pragjyotisha *Bhukti*. Another important land grant is Assam plate of Vallavdeva (Sharma 1978: 291-302), which was found at Tezpur. The grant records the foundation of an almshouse (*bhaktasala*) for the hungry in the vicinity of the town of *Kirtipura* situated in the *Happayaka mandala*, endowed the same with a number of villages and hamlets, and assigned the services of five men and their families.

The last two inscriptions of the period under study are Kanai Barashi Bowa rock inscription and Ambari stone inscription of Samudrapala. The first inscription, which has been found at North Guwahati, refers to the incident of a crushing defeat and destruction of Turkish invader in 1206 CE. Since the inscription does not mention the name of the hero of this achievement, but in the opinion of D.C. Sircar, this was probably the combined forces of several rulers of Kamarupa (Choudhury 1970: 97-101).

The last inscription of our period discovered so far, is the Ambari stone inscription of Samudrapala. The inscription records regular ritualistic activities, probably in the Jugijan area of present Hojai district. The author of the inscription has been identified by P.C. Choudhury as Samudra Pala of Pala line of Kamarupa (Dutta 1997).

Land Grants and Early Social Formation

As we have seen that the inscriptions of early Assam so far discovered indicate that the lands were measured in terms of paddy (*dhanya*) and it is not much surprising that it was much before the coming of the Tai-Ahoms, the plough based cultivation was mostly rooted in many parts of the Brahmaputra valley, which ultimately led to a well organised social system, state and polity. The geographical distribution of different grants of the period shows that with the spread of plough technology and with the probable use of iron in many parts of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa there developed a new social system centring around the Brahmanical settlements. Some recent discoveries of archaeological remains in Doiyang-Dhansiri valley indicate that by the 9th or 10th century CE, Brahmanical culture spread up to Tinsukia in upper Assam, which probably resulted from the use of iron. It seems that iron technology helped in establishing new settlement by cutting deep forest (Gurdon 1914: 57-59).

Iron technology definitely helped in the process of state and social formation of early Assam. Gurdon (1914: 57-59) informs us about the indigenous iron technology of the Khasi hills of Meghalaya. H.N. Dutta (1997) who scientifically explored the archaeological sites of Doiyang-Dhansiri valley thinks that the centres of iron in early Assam were Naga hills and adjoining areas of Doiyang-Dhansiri valley. Some archaeologists are of the opinion that from Doiyang-Dhansiri valley, irons were supplied to many places of the region. It may further be presumed that the tremendous architectural development in many parts of early Assam from the 6th/7th century onwards could not have been possible without extensive use of iron (may be crude in form) and support of a well organised state system based on surplus production which was based on extension of agricultural activities with the extensive use of iron.

When did the Aryan culture penetrated into the region is quite difficult to ascertain. It may be safe to presume that the migratory nature of the Aryans to the eastern-most zone of the region led to the emergence of new economy in this part of eastern India. The new comer who came to this part of this region brought with them new production technology based on plough, knowledge of crops and season which inevitably laid the foundation of a new social base. Some schools of scholars raised the points that what

happened to the aboriginals whose mode of subsistence depended on slash and burning method and natural environment. Certain that, most of them came in clash with new method of production, later on accepted, and assimilated with the new comer. The sources of the period under consideration to certain extent indicate that the process of acculturation of ethnic groups who lived in the vicinity of the donated land started perhaps with the settlement of the Brahmanas within their midst as a result of extensive grant of land. Momin (2001, 2002) thinks that the process might have started from 5th/6th century with the beginning of land donation. We have mentioned elsewhere that the Brahmana donees received fiscal privileges and administrative immunity from the kings of Kamarupa. We may observe that the grantees were furthermore empowered to augment production in the donated lands by the terms and condition of grants. Naturally, they employed more efficient method of production in the donated land, and it seems that those occupying the surrounding areas and peripheral zones gradually adopted new techniques. Therefore, it is also probable that the ethnic groups who were living within the donated areas came under the new mode of cultivation.

This probably, mobilised the new fields for production-cultivation and emergence of new settlements surrounding the donated lands (Momin 2001, 2002, 2006: 25-26). It may be safe to argue here that the aborigines who probably surrounded the donated lands in early Assam had gradually adopted the new production technology as a result of assimilation of Brahmanical mode of life with new language and culture and those whose failed to adopt new technology and subsequent process maintained themselves with their own mode of cultivation and eventually led a nomadic life. Kosambi (1994: 132, 147) informed us that, the people who failed to accept new production system and later on new culture, left plains land and settled in hilly terrain. R.S. Sharma (2007: 77-78) studied the situation carefully and states that “Tribalism is universal and continues to be followed by a different form of state and class society-the tribal society can be connected with any mode of subsistence such as cattle and other type of pastoralism and hoe and plough agriculture.” The beginning of new settlement, amidst tribal pockets probably developed territorial idea among the tribal groups that owned and managed the land under production in early Assam. Momin (2006: 25-26) thinks that this socio-economic and cultural phenomenon of Brahmanised ethnic people seems to have provided stimulus for the proliferation of local policies within itself and in certain areas drained by river tributaries and also in other stretches of low-lying land where those techniques of production could be applied.

A survey of the extant royal grants of early Assam shows that Brahmanical culture was deep rooted in the Brahmaputra valley along with plough based agrarian technology. The large-scale architectural development of early Assam speaks about human migration and settlement in different part of Brahmaputra valley in remote past. The grants speak of spread and extension of Brahmanical culture and agrarian economy in Nagaon-Tezpur, Doboka, and Doiyang-Dhansiri valley. The purpose of such large-scale donation of lands to the Brahmanas was to bring more and more lands under cultivation. In this context,

Kosambi (1994: 115) says that “plough agriculture greatly increased foods supply and made it more regular”. This means that not only a far greater population, but also one that lived together in greater units. The grants were issued in most cases in the settled areas but sometime in peripheral regions. From the 4th century CE onwards, land grants became a common practice of the kings of Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa. Most of the grants speak of paddy fields and *alis* (embankments). The importance of agriculture and foundation of agrarian society became so strong by 4th century CE that even King Surendravarman did not hesitate to construct the cave temple of Balabhadra in Nilachal hill, the proclamation of which was made by one rock inscription (Sharma 1978). In Hindu mythology, Balabhadra appeared as deity of agriculturists. This is the only example of the construction of the temple dedicated to Balabhadra. However, some historians accepted the matter as different issue, since the genealogy of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa rulers speak of the king named Surendravarman. Nevertheless, study shows that in south-western part of India, during the period, Lord Balabhadra had already emerged as God of agriculture and was worshipped and accepted by the people of the time. This concept may be applicable in the context of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa too. It means that spread and continuation of the worship of Balabhadra and extension of plough-based agriculture in respect of early India and Assam as well are interrelated. It will be more logical to argue that for the reasons that King Surendravarman tried to introduce worship of the deity, and the cave temple was perhaps constructed for this purpose. However, directly we have no reference about the use of plough in this part of eastern India, the technology definitely used in production-cultivation during the period in early Assam without which such a huge production would not have been possible.

In order to understand the nature and pattern of Brahmanical settlements in early Assam the most important inscription of the 7th century CE is the Nidhanpur copper plates (Sharma 1978) of Bhaskarvarman. By this inscription, Bhutivarman, the great grandfather of Bhaskarvarman, donated lands in *Chandrapuri Vishaya* in *Mayurasalmala agrahara*. By this Bhutivarman did not donate any arable lands to the Brahmanas. He donated lands that come out of *Gangini* and dry bed of the river *Kausiki*. There he settled 205 Brahmin families. From the settlement pattern as evident from Nidhanpur grant it appears that huge plots of land was granted away. From the geographical distribution of the donated land and its sizes, it appears that quite large numbers of agricultural labourer might have been employed there for the purpose of cultivation. While analysing the situation in Ganga valley, R.S. Sharma (2002: 156) states that “with the use of iron implements in the middle Ganga plain one of the most fertile parts of the world had been opened for permanent cultivation and settlement.”

Hypothetically, we may say that the donees of Nidhanpur copper plates might have employed labourers in these fields for permanent cultivation of rice by use of power and probably by the application of religious taboos. The land of *Chandrapuri Vishaya* had been granted for new settlement and its development whereby the king (Bhutivarman) exempted all types of taxes on the land on the principle of ‘*bhumichchidranaya*’. Notably

it is mentioned in the grant that seven shares of the donated lands shall be exclusively used for worship, oblation and welfare of people. The production, which will come out of the dry bed of the river *Kausika*, would have to be divided amongst the recipient of the grant. It means cultivators were allowed to cultivate the land and one part of the produced commodity will be divided amongst the Brahmanas. According to the other term of the grant, the land created out of the sand bed of the river *Gangini* and the production coming out from it to be enjoyed by the Brahmanas only.

Thus, it would be nothing wrong to say that settlements of 205 Brahmanas by Bhutivarman paved the way for agrarian revolution in this part of eastern India. We may observe that Brahmins were always acting as a pioneer in introducing plough based agriculture in the remotest part of India. It appears that in most cases, the Brahmanas were granted lands, which were not settled, and most likely, that by the help of the local people cultivated the land and laid the foundation of new settlements. This process of evolution is true in case of Nidhanpur grant. Since the extant grant speaks of '*bhumichchdranaya*', which means principle of revenue free land to those beneficiaries who for the first time brings the land under proper mode of cultivation (Sircar 1966: 58). It means Bhutivarman perhaps granted uncultivated fallen lands to the Brahmanas by making them free from payment of any taxes for the first time.

R.S. Sharma (2003: 148) makes a different opinion. In his opinion '*bhumichchdra*', '*aprahita*', '*khila*', means those lands where revenues were freed in order to bring the land under proper mode of cultivation. In the land grants of early Bengal, these terms were frequently used, which generally means those lands which were not cultivated for long. It was for the purpose of production-cultivation; all sorts of revenue were freed from these lands and under the leadership of Brahmanas new settlement were emerged. The Nidhanpur grant of Bhutivarman reminds us of the same phenomenon.

The next grant is the Parbatiya copper plates (Sharma 1978) of Vanamalavarmadeva of Salastambha dynasty. The grant, in one respect deserves importance, as because for the first time in the history of early Assam we have a concrete reference about the donation of land in connection with the renovation of the temple. In this connection, the inscription records the grants of a village called *Haposagrama* belonging to *Svalpamangala Vishaya* of *Uttarakula*. The study of the grant shows that Vanamala granted many villages, elephants and prostitutes to the temple. The comparative study with other parts of India shows that this had become common practice in other parts of India where *devottor* lands had been donated along with other property in connection with renovation of temples and *mathas*. In all probability, the temple priests were the supervisors of these types of land donation. The rulers of early Assam in all probability donated lands and other property to the development of these temples that might have helped in the spread of new agricultural economy based on plough technology.

However, some grants of the period speak of the donation of lands and other property in peripheral unsettled areas or the border of the kingdom. These types of grants show that in those areas the donees had to introduce new advanced type of cultivation by

employing efficient labourers. The study of our extant inscription shows that these types of lands that had been granted to the Brahmanas were generally rendered free from all types of revenue and payment of taxes and interference of the officials of the state. Tezpur (Sharma 1978) and Parbitiya copper plates (Sharma 1978) of Vanamalavarmadeva, Caratbari copper plate (Choudhury 1970) of Ratnapala, Subhankarpataka (Sharma 1978) and Pushpabhadra grant (Sharma 1978) of Dharmapala and Kamauli grant (Sharma 1978) of Vaidyadeva speak of the grant of settled villages along with lands of different categories. By Subhankar Pataka grant (Sharma 1978) Dharmapala granted lands in *Dijjina Vishaya* consisting of the localities called *Kanjiabhitvi* and Subhankar *Pataka* having capacity to yield 6000 measures of paddy. The study of the inscription of Subhankar *Pataka* shows that it is up to the donees to enjoy the produce of the land by means of introducing new settlement based on advanced producing technology. The Assam plate of Vallavdeva (Sharma 1978) speaks about donation of seven villages in the name of asylum. All these grants show that at first the king freed all types of taxes on temporary tenants. It means that it became necessary duty of the recipients of the land grants of early Assam to employ labour in donated lands for the purpose of production on temporary basis and most probably there was no relation of this temporary labour with the settled labour of the granted lands.

Uttarbarbil (Sharma 1978) and Ulubari copper plates (Sharma 1978) of Balavarman III, Bargaon (Sharma 1978) and Puspabhadra grant (Sharma 1978), Suwalkuchi grant (Sharma 1978), Guwahati grant of Indrapala (Sharma 1978), Gachtal grant (Sharma 1978), Khonamukhi grant of Gopalavarman (Sharma 1978) and Subhankarpataka grant (Sharma 1978) of Dharmapala record the donation of lands to learned Brahmanas. A careful study of all these inscriptions shows that lands, which were donated by these charters are mentioned as '*apakrista bhumi*'. P.N. Bhattacharjee (1999) and M.M. Sharma (1978: 139) think that '*apakrista*' means unfertile land and land for separate cultivation. However, in the opinion of R.S. Sharma (Sharma 2003: 148) the term '*apakrista*' means uncultivable land and it was only to bring the land under proper mode of cultivation that the term was used. It has been observed that it was the general trend in all the land donation records of early Assam that the rulers donated away – homestead (*vastubhumi*), lands for cultivation, ponds, tanks, forest lands, highways etc. along with donated land. The extant grant frequently speaks of *uparikara* (taxes levied on temporary tenants). It means these types of taxes levied on those tenants who for the first time used the land for large-scale clearance and cultivation. However, we have no direct evidences, but in all probability; it appears that in early Assam the producing class who had been employed in royal services, the ruler perhaps granted some lands for their services to the state.

Another aspect of the land grant of early Assam that the main motive behind the grant of land in the peripheral area was generally to spread agricultural activity of the State based on plough economy. Since most of the lands situated near the homestead or already settled areas, naturally it became easier for the Brahmana donees to employ temporary or permanent labour to augment production in the granted lands. The Kamauli

(Sharma 1978) plate of Vaidyadeva and Tezpur plate (Sharma 1978) of Vallavdeva show that with the donation of villages, the resident of villagers were granted for the support of the Brahmanical class. It means perhaps in the absence of labour or even the shortage of specialised class, the villagers could perform their role and therefore could support large number of new settlers (Brahmanas). Again, the Karuvabahi (Chutiya 1982) a copper plate of Harjjaravarman speaks of the donation of refuse lands (island). Since the identification of the donated land is doubtful, here it will be most reasonable to suggest that, because certain water bodies surrounded the land, the scribe did not hesitate to refer the land as island. It is the opinion of some scholars (Dutta 1997: 69), the land of *Karuvabahi* grants was most probably used for the purposes of sacrifice in early time. In all probability, the lands granted to the Brahmanas were created out of the erosion of the river *Diju* (*Dijina*) which presently flows round the modern Nagaon district of Assam. It appears that the donated land created out of the dry bed of the river *Diju*, the principal tributary of the river Kalang that flows in the nearby area of Missa and Kailabor in the Nagaon district. The Austric name of the river *Diju* might have been Sanskritised as *Dijina* at the time of inscribing the epigraphs (Baruah 2007: 102). Similarly, in the Subhankarpataka grant of Dharmapala, there was also reference of *dijina vishaya* where the Subhankar village had been granted away to the Brahmana donee. In the grant, there is also reference of *apakrita bhumi* (Sharma 1978).

By this grant, lands were donated to the learned Brahman family between *Olinda* and *Kanjiaivitti*. In all probability, the producing class who permanently settled there might have helped the new settlers in the introduction of plough agriculture in the donated land. As mentioned in the inscription, the land had the capacity to produce huge amount of paddy, it appears that the donated land might have been much bigger in size and for the production from land, much sizable amount of labour power might have been employed in the land. In the Pushpabhadra grant of Dharmapala (Sharma 1978), there is reference of one Brahmin named Madhusudana (Sharma 1978) who was already in occupation of land that was granted away by Dharmapala to that Brahmana. In the inscription, there is reference of the donation of villages Digdholagaon-Guhasvara. Inscription referred this land as *apakrista*. Here we may think that the donee Madhusudana might have settled the land by introducing new mode of agricultural production.

Donating lands in the peripheral regions, the rulers of Kamarupa not only extended agrarian activity in the peripheral areas but also initiated a process to grow the general cultivators. As regards land grants of peripheral areas, B.P. Mazumdar (1967: 73) a noted historian, states that “it seems that collective lands grants were generally issued when it was considered expedient to defend border of a kingdom by setting a number of Brahmanas there.” But in this context the statement of Mazumdar is difficult to accept as both R.S. Sharma and D.D. Kosambi think that the main idea of such type of land donation was to bring fallen or refuse land under plough based agrarian technology which appears more acceptable in respect of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa. Thus, it appears that the rulers of early Assam might have settled lands in the peripheral area of the

kingdom since the frontier region of the kingdom appears as the best place for the settlement of a large number of Brahmanical community by introducing advance technology in order to augment production. Therefore, it will be more reasonable to suggest here that such type of lands were donated in the peripheral zone only to spread economic frontier and not for the spread of political frontier at the expense of the increase of general cultivators. The probable reasons for the growth of general cultivator, was the inclusion of aborigines within the new method of cultivation based on plough. In this aspect, Brahmanas acted as a pioneer with the spread of new religion and *varna*-based social hierarchy. Here R.S. Sharma (2002: 34) thinks that in the tribal area or area under the occupation of aboriginal people the agriculturists were placed primarily under the control of religious beneficiaries, especially Brahmanas who were granted land on a large scale. Sharma (2002: 34) further states that they practiced modern *jhum* type of cultivation in which aborigines burnt the forest and saw the reclaimed area when the rain sets in, the burnt plants and trees acting as a kind of manure. Having harvested crop, they moved on to another area and adopted same method of agriculture there. This statement is equally applicable to the case of Northeast India.

It seems that, Sanskritisation left a deep imprint upon the people who were living in the peripheral zone of the kingdom or the land granted by kings. It was Brahmanical religion and social system based on *varna* ideology and advance production technology, which was responsible for the growth of general cultivators mostly from indigenous tribal base. In this way, Brahmanas who came to the land as a pioneer gradually became landed magnate by way of developing the donated land for production-cultivation. Thus, it appears that a large section of aboriginal ethnic people became trained in new production technology and other works related to production who later on served the interest of new landed magnates (priestly class) by providing physical labour to the field for cultivation. In the context of early Assam, we may believe that all the gods and goddesses and other cults and religious beliefs of this newly converted ethnic groups became assimilated and acculturated by Brahmanical social ethos and religious system and became successful in bringing these tribal systems under one religion on the basis of the spread of plough culture and process of Sanskritisation. Gradually it appears that these ethnic communities became involved in Brahmanical religion, *varna*-based social order as new cultivators and in all probability, they ranked as *Sudra* labourer. The earliest and only reference of *Sudra* as a class is found in the Deopani Visnu image inscription where we find that *Sudras* were allowed to worship Devi along with the twice born (Sharma 1978). It means, like other parts of India without employing slaves, the Brahmanical class was able to extend agricultural land by gradual inclusion of aboriginal people. Hiuen-Tsang (Watters 1904) who came to Kamarupa in 7th century CE, records that lands of Kamarupa were wet and fertile and there was regular cultivation of different crops. Here we can infer that by wet land Hiuen-Tsang probably referred to the paddy transplantation that was a common practice among the aboriginal people before the colonisation of Brahmanas. The geographical distribution of the royal grants of early Assam shows that in most cases they were granted in such places surrounded by different ethnic community. A critical study

of the name of the place, river, tree, and sometimes name of person, which reflected in the extant grants of the period, shows that these were altogether influenced by aboriginal formation (Barua 1969).

The royal grants of the period were not only made for the Brahmana or other priestly class alone. We have some indirect evidences of the grants to some secular parties. It appears that administrators might have granted certain plots of lands to a certain section of people, who in time of war or other emergency perhaps supplied efficient force to the state. These sections of people were perhaps known as ‘*Samantas*’ or ‘*Mahasamantas*’ in early Assam. The epigraphs of the period frequently referred to them who were in all certainty helped and counselled by Brahmana priests.

It has been argued that this type of duty was generally assigned on Bramanically acculturated tribal heads and they were also conferred high sounding title like *samantas*, *mahasamantas*, *ranakas* etc. As noted earlier the epigraphs of early Assam are completely silent about the aboriginal ethnic community of the Northeast India. However, it is only in the Subhankarpataka (Sircar and Choudhury 1966: 292) epigraph of King Dharmapala, there appeared the name of one tribal head. In the epigraphs, there is mention of ‘*Vrhadrava*’, which M.M. Sharma (1978: 254) had identified with the leader of a tribe called Rabha of Lower Assam. We may think in consideration of the entire discussion that by the time of Subhankarpataka grant these tribes had become Brahmanically acculturated and acquainted with the knowledge of more advanced mode of cultivation based on plough and were included and settled them in the new fold as ordinary peasants.

The foregoing discussion on different aspects of the land grants of early Assam quite clearly shows that by 12th century CE the Brahmanical culture took a much significant root in different parts of the state, along with its socio-economic and religious establishment and values. It appears that, the impact of Sanskritisation became so deep that it left a deep imprint in many areas of Sylhet, Tezpur, Nagaon and present Kamrup districts and even most parts of upper Assam up to the Tinsukia-Dibrugarh districts. The recent discoveries of different artifacts in Barapathar-Daboroni areas in Golaghat district prove the impact of Sanskritisation in this part of early Assam beyond any doubt. From the nature and context of the archaeological discovery at Golaghat zone, archaeologist became quite interested in further excavation, which may reveal more objects in near future. The process of Sanskritisation in this part of eastern India primarily brought with it the knowledge of iron and iron technology, wet rice cultivation with extensive use of cattle and plough, new religious system and social base, emergence of *varna*-based social hierarchy, new economy which helped in the process supported by the process of polity formation in this part of eastern India. As regards land grants in ancient Indian context, Romila Thapar (1996: 105) writes that “the gift of land and the precedence which began to take over other items increased interest in agriculture ... a gift of land suggest that the record should act as a legal claim of the grantee and his family before future kings. Hence the record should be a permanent, sealed edict referring to the lineage of the king...”

Thapar also argues that the land constituted the germ of what was later to develop into a new agrarian structure with its own implications for social and economic formation (Thapar 1996: 106). By assimilating different ethnic communities with their own socio-religious system, they created a utopian concept of 'varnasamkara'. It can be observed as argued by R.S. Sharma that generally, these mixed aboriginal people were settled with the established *sudras* and sometimes hereditary concept of duties to serve other three higher classes fixed on them. Probably the *varna*-based social order developed quite late in early Assam. It seems that these tribal groups who were the original settlers of the land and of surrounding areas were in all probability converted into agricultural labour by the recipient of the grant Brahmanical priestly class for their own benefits and ranked them as *Sudra*. The mode of land tenure in early Assam shows that it was the Brahmana priestly classes who had appeared as missionary to these land and preached the new concept of life and culture and who were ultimately responsible for the socio-cultural establishment of these community and might have ceased their physical labour for production from donated land. We have no reference about the four-fold division of social hierarchy in early Assam; it will be quite safe to presume that the former system did not develop in the context of early Assam if developed, quite lately. Thus, the *varna* ideology in early Assam is mainly based on Brahmanas and *sudras* the majority of the latter came from indigenous ethnic base. Behind the process, there was the advanced production technology based on extensive use of iron and plough. Therefore, it appears the backbone of the economic structure of early Assam was the rapid spread of agrarian economy. In other words the rice cultivation boosted the economy of early Assam and side by side the process of polity and social formation of the period developed from advanced knowledge of plough, varieties of crops, season, extensive use of iron and overall spread of Sanskrit as language and Brahmanical social order.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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