

CHAPTER IV

EPIGRAPHS AND OTHERS REMAINS

In this chapter an attempt is made to focus on the epigraphs, coins, ramparts, tanks and other remains not discussed in the preceding chapters. An attempt has also been made to reconstruct the socio-economic life of the people of the study area on the basis of the information provided by these archaeological remains. The archaeological objects found in the region as discussed earlier, are primarily religious in nature. Architectural components like door frame, lintels, bricks, ruins of temple wall, stone pillars, stone sculptures, *āmalakas*, chiselled stone blocks, and, pottery and a few epigraphs and coins, beside earthen work in the form of ramparts, embankments and tanks and roads formed the basis of the study

Epigraphs

The epigraphic records, although few in number besides furnishing useful light on the development of Brahmanical culture also provide valuable insights into the social, economic, religious as well as the political life of the study area. The epigraphic evidence found in the area is religious in character. The following discussion ensures with a brief description of the inscriptions relating to the study area followed by that of the relevant material elicited from them.

The reference of the study area is found in copperplate inscription granting land to the Dakhinpāt-*satra*¹⁷⁵ in 1671 Saka/ 1749 C.E. The copper plate was issued during the reign of the Āhom king Pramattasinha by Tarun-Duvara Barphukan. This charter renewed a gift made earlier by the Ahom king Jayadhvaja Sinha (1648-63 C.E.) of land in the Darrang-rājya (now Mangaldai sub-division) to the Dakhinpāt-*satra* in the modern Sivsāgar district.

Another Inscription of Land and Servitor Grant to the Dakhinpāt-Gosāi of Mājuli in Darrang-rajya¹⁷⁶ 1707 Saka/ 1785 C.E. was made by the Āhom king Gaurināth Simha to the Sandikai Barphukan. Another copper plate grant made by the same king was in favour of Rudreswar and Tāmreswar Devālaya in 1708 Saka/ 1786 C.E. Through this grant the land and *paiks* donated by Chandra Nārāyan, the Darangi king to Rudreswar and Tāmreswar Devālaya was made permanent during the days of the Āhom ruler Gaurināth Singha in the month of *Bhādra*, in 1708 Saka/ 1786 C.E. Total land granted was 240 *pura* and *pāik* was 15 houses. A third Copperplate Inscription of Gaurināth Singha issued to Madhusudan Mahājan of Māroi *satra* 1710 Saka/ 1788 C.E. donated 36 house of *Bhakats* and 24 *puras* of land to the Māroi *satra*. There are fifteen lines in the C.P. first three lines in Sanskrit and remaining 13 lines in Assamese. The language is medieval Assamese. In the right side the royal insignia of the Āhom i.e, the winged dragon is inscribed.

Besides endowments to religious institutes we find a Copperplate Inscription of the appointment of Katakis (messengers) at Gauhati, dated 1714Saka/ 1872 C.E. in the ASM. According to the text of this record the Āhom king Gaurināth Singha gave orders

¹⁷⁵ *PS.*: p.45-46.

¹⁷⁶ *PS.*: p.66.

to the Barbaruā, the Barphukan, Cholādhārā Phukan. The beneficiary is Niramāya, who is a Bora, an officer in command over 20 *pāiks*, included in the register of hundred *pāiks* of Kharangi. He was granted land by Raja Mahatnārāyan of the Darangi-*rājya* in Darrang. Nirāmaya represented this matter to the Āhom king, then camping in the *Oparnāosali*, the royal dockyard (near Guwahati), in the presence of the Barbaruā and the Barphukan through the Cholādhārā Phukan (Officer in charge of the Royal Wardrobe). The king thereon, ordered that a *tāmrapatra* be issued in Nirāmaya's favour.¹⁷⁷

At a later date we find a copperplate inscription of servitors for the Pahumariyā Sarujanā Gosāi in the Darangi-*rājya*, dated 1738/ 1816 C.E. wherein the Ahom king Chandrakānta Singha commands the Rājmantri Purnanānda Burhāgohain. The beneficiary, Sarujanā (junior) Gosāin of the Pahumarā village is a descendent of Rāmananda Bhattācharya, a sākta, who was accepted as *guru* by King Lakshmingha and came to be known as *Pahumaria* or *Na Gosai*. The whole of Darrang-*desa* under the crown's control was broken up into six units, each called a *hājar* or *sahsra*, as it included 1,000 *paiks*. Each *hājar* had 10 smaller units; each a *sa* or *sayek* (a hundred). The six Darrang-*desa* *hājars* are *Gohain-hājar*, *Kath-hājar*, *Kalita-hājar*, *Khat-hājar*, *Mahimā-hajar* and *Āthiya-bāndia-hajar*, all of which are named in these epigraphs¹⁷⁸.

Another copperplate inscription of *devottara* and *pāiks* towards the *Akhandapradipas* in front of the Gobinda Icon (Āuniati-*satra*, Mājuli, Sibsāgar) 1742 Saka/ 1820 C.E. was made by the Āhom king Chandrakānta Singha awarding 60 *powa*

¹⁷⁷ PS.p.210.

¹⁷⁸ PS.p.212-13.

paiks (60 men) and some land in the name of the Govinda-Thākur of the *satra*. These men belonged to Kāmarūpa and all the 6 *hājārs* of Darrang-*desa*¹⁷⁹.

All these grants exhibit similar features with those in other parts of Assam. All of them were granted during the Āhom period and are dated in the Sake Era. The donors were Pramatta Singha, Gaurināth Singh, Chandrakānta Singha and the Darangi Koch ruler Chandra Nārāyan. They are either *Debottara*, *Dharmottara* or *Brahmottara* land grants. The script of almost all the copper plate inscriptions is medieval Assamese. In some of them the text begins with Sanskrit language and end with Assamese language. Some grants are confirmation by the Āhom ruler of the land donated earlier by the Koch rulers. The grant made to Rudreswar and Tāmreswar Devālaya (Fig.27) is of this kind. Through it the Āhom King Gaurināth Singha confirmed the land donated by the Koch ruler Chandranārāyan in the preceding period.

An interesting feature of the grants discussed above is that they employ abbreviations to denote certain castes or names:

<i>Ka</i>	<i>Kalitā</i>
<i>Ko</i>	<i>Koch</i>
<i>Ke</i>	<i>Brāhmin</i>
<i>Pa</i>	<i>Paraganā</i>
<i>Swa</i>	<i>Swarnakār (goldsmith)</i>
<i>Dho</i>	<i>Dhobā (laundry)</i>

¹⁷⁹ *PS.*: p.213.

<i>Su</i>	<i>Sudra</i>
<i>Tha</i>	<i>Thā kuri</i>
<i>Chou</i>	<i>Choudhuri</i>
<i>Bhi</i>	<i>Bhitarar (interior)</i>

We find reference to Brāhmanas, *Kāyasthas*, *Ganaks* and other castes in the land grants issued by the Āhom rulers. The temples, *satras* and other structures, sculptures, pottery and land grants of early and medieval period prove the existence of different classes of people engaged in different professions. The land grants of the Āhom king Gaurināth Singha provide us details of the existing castes during the 18th century C.E.¹⁸⁰. The Darrang *RājVamsāwali* refers to various castes and sub-castes and their works. During those days Assam was inhabited by the *Mech*, *Kubāch*, Brahmins, *Daibagñas*, Kshatriya, Sudra, Vaishya etc.¹⁸¹. Besides these there were *Kalitā*, *Sāloi*, *Keot*, *Jogi* (*Nāth*), *Hāri*, *Hirā*, *Kamār*, *Kumār* etc. There were also large numbers of Bodos in the Udālguri district.

The Brāhmins were engaged in ritualistic works. The Brāhmins did not plough the land personally but as evidenced by the land grants of the rulers, they derived their living, to a large extent from agriculture. They were also teachers, priests and service holder of the state¹⁸².

The *Daivajnas* or *Ganak* were professional astrologers. “*Daivajnas* well versed in astrology were given the title *Khari* by local chiefs of Darrang and *Doloi* or Bordoloi

¹⁸⁰ Neog, M.(ed): *Prāchya Sāsanāwali*, 2nd edn., Publication Board Assam, Guwahati , 2003, p.72.

¹⁸¹ Sarma Nabin Chandra (ed):*Darrang RājVamsāwali*, 1st edn., Guwahati. Bani Prakash, 1973.p17.

¹⁸² *CHAI*, P170.

by the Āhom Kings. The Āhom king appointed learned *Daivajnas* in the court for consultation before commencing any auspicious work or starting a war against enemies”¹⁸³. For example, Baldev Suryakhari *Daivajna* composed Darrang *Rāj Vamsāwali* under the patronage of Darrangi Koch king Samudranārāyan. The Vaishnavas were engaged in *Nāma-kirtana*, the *Nāta-Vātas* in *kirtana*, the Vaishyas in trade and commerce, and the peasants in agriculture. Besides these the *Deodhāi* and *Nata-Nati* also worked in a joyful manner”¹⁸⁴.

Inscriptions invariably refer to *pāiks*, the commonest subject under the Āhom rule. They constituted the foundation of the entire Āhom social organisation. The copper plate inscription¹⁸⁵ of the Dhāreswara temple of Saka 1660, corresponding to 1738 C.E., refer to the *pāiks* employed in the temples to perform different activities and named different categories of *sudrapāiks* as given below:

<i>Athpariā</i>	Watchman
<i>Camradharā</i>	Holder of yak tail fan
<i>Catradharā</i>	Holder of umbrella
<i>Dandadharā</i>	Holder of <i>Danda</i> or staff, a policeman
<i>Trisuladharā</i>	Holder of <i>Trisula</i> or trident, an attendant at a Siva shrine
<i>Dhuliā-Dagariya</i>	Drummer
<i>Pāli</i>	Singer of hymns and dancer
<i>Thalasarā</i>	Cleaner of courtyard, a sweeper
<i>Duvari</i>	Door keeper
<i>Garakhiā</i>	Cowherd

¹⁸³ *CHA-III*. P.171.

¹⁸⁴ Sarma Nabin Chandra : *Op.Cit.*p17.

¹⁸⁵ Neog Maheswar(ed): *PS*. P.29.

<i>Barichowa</i>	Gardener
<i>Khari chowā</i>	Fuel supplier
<i>Mudier</i>	Supplier of ritual material
<i>Ojā</i>	Leading hymn singer
<i>Cāulkarā</i>	Rice cleaner
<i>Pānianā</i>	Supplier of water

Following the installation of Bali Nārāyan alias Dharmanārāyan by the Āhom king Pratāp Singha as the ruler of Darrang, three thousand Chutiyās were sent from upper Assam and settled as *pāiks* in the Mangaldai sub-division¹⁸⁶.

In the *Brahmottara* grant to Pahumariā Sarujanā Gosāin, the Ahom king Chandrakānta Singha dedicated different categories of *pāiks*¹⁸⁷ for his service. The copper plate inscription of *saka* 1738 (1816 C.E.) records the grant of six *powās* of *pāiks* granted to the Pahumariyā Sarujanā Gosāin from the unit of six *hāzār* (thousand) of the Darrang-Desa. The *pāiks* were specially granted to bring fuel (*khari*) and supply leaves (*pāt*) to the *Gosāin*. These *pāiks* were brought from different *Khels* and granted separately for performing various tasks¹⁸⁸.

Thus it is revealed that for the maintenance of the temples, the *devālayas* and other religious institutions like *satras* and *nāmgharas*, sufficient grants and donations, in the form of men, money and landed properties, were made by the Āhom and the Koch rulers. The rulers of the area were liberal in their socio-religious outlook. The common people also displayed great devotion to religion. Most of the Koch rulers were worshipper of the mother goddess. There was wide prevalence of Tantric rites. Buffalo,

¹⁸⁶ *AHA*: p.68. 1963.

¹⁸⁷ Neog Maheswar(ed): *PS*.p.142-44.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.142-44.

goat, duck, pigeon, fish, turtle, deer etc. were sacrificed before Kāmākhyā, Durgā and Mahadeva. At the time of declaring war mother goddess Kāmākhyā was worshipped by offering sacrifices. However the Koch rulers followed the policy of religious toleration. A *Deuri* was appointed in each temple. Various types of musical instruments were used for the religious rituals, such as *sankha*, (conch shell) *ghantā*, (bell) *kartāl*, (cymbals) *dunduvi*, *dhāk*, *dhol*, *dagar*, *nāgarā*, *rāmbena*, *kabilās*, *khanjarikā*, *mohair*, *dotorā*, *rabāb*, *sārinda*, *bānhi*, *zhili*, *zhinjirika*, *rudraka*, *tokāri*, *mridanga*, *khol*, *borkāh*, *rāmtāl*, *tāl*, *mādal* etc¹⁸⁹. These were different categories of percussion, wind and stringed instruments.

It is revealed from the study of the inscriptions that the rulers of the Āhom and pre-Āhom period made large scale land grants for various purposes. Grants of land to be held revenue free (*Lukherāj*) for religious and charitable purposes were classified as follows:

(i) *Brahmottara*, lands given to Brāhmins;

(ii) *Dharmottara*, lands for the support of religious institutions, like the *satras* or Vaisnavite monasteries;

(iii) *Devotarra* lands given to temples, which were again of two types - *Bhogdāni* and *Pāikan*. The *ryots* on the former were bound to supply *bhog* (one daily ration) to the temple for each unit of land. The *ryots* on the latter were required to render certain prescribed personal services to the state, for which he could enjoy three *purās* of land on revenue-free system¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁹ Sarma Nabin Chandra (ed): *Darrang Rāj Vamsāvali*, 1st edn., Bani Prakash, Guwahati 1973.p.19.

¹⁹⁰ Gait, E.A. : *A History of Assam*, 3rd revised edn., Thacker Spink & Co. (1933) P. Ltd, Calcutta, 1963. p.270.

It is known from the copper plate grant of Māroi *satra* that the land granted is termed as *purās*¹⁹¹. In the eighteenth century the Āhom ruler Siva Simha (1714-44), Pramatta Simha (1744-51), Rājeswar Simha (1751-60) and Gaurināth Simha (1780-95) granted vast areas in revenue-free estates for religious purposes to temples and Brāhmans mostly in Kāmrup and also in Darrang¹⁹². The revenue administration of Darrang was in the line with that of Kāmrup. In Darrang and Kāmrup following Mughal pattern, cultivable lands for revenue purposes were divided into three categories - namely,

- (i) *Kherāj* or revenue paying,
- (ii) *Nisf-kherāj* or half-revenue paying and
- (iii) *Lākherāj* or revenue free¹⁹³.

Land revenue appears to be the main source of income of the state. It was the ruler, i.e. the king who granted land and his subordinates could in turn endow grants only from the land granted to them. Tax from the land was calculated from its produce, mainly paddy¹⁹⁴. The Rājās of Darrang who made their submissions to the Āhom king were transformed into governors acting on their behalf. They administered justice and collected revenues in their own district, but an appeal lay from their orders to the Barphukan¹⁹⁵ who was Governor of the Āhom territories west of Kaliābor. Towards the end of the Āhom rule, some kings of Assam imposed a capitation or pool-tax on all

¹⁹¹ Bhattacharya Satish Chandra: Maroi Satrar Bhumi Danar Fali in *Prantik* edited & published by Pradip Barua, Guwahati, Vol.xxviii No. 16 16-31 July 2009,p.34.

¹⁹² Barpujari, H.K. (ed): *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol-III*, 2nd edn. Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2004,p.92.

¹⁹³ Barua, S.L: *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, 1st edn. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt.Ltd., New Delhi, 1985.p.410-11.

¹⁹⁴ Das Paromita: *History and Archaeology of North-East India*, 1st edn., Agam Kala Prakashan, New Delhi, 2007.p.65 .ISBN: 81-7320-071-8.

¹⁹⁵ Gait,E.A. : *A History of Assam*, 3rd revised edn., Thacker Spink & Co. (1933) P. Ltd, Calcutta, 1963. p247.

pāiks under new names, hitherto unknown in Assam, in order to raise revenue. In Darrang it was a 'Hearth-Tax' or '*chooroo*' or cooking pot tool of Re. 1 on every family or party or person high or low cooking separately¹⁹⁶. Besides land revenue there were other sources of revenue as gleaned from the land grants. Those were as follows¹⁹⁷-

<i>Kar</i>	land revenue;
<i>Kātal</i>	tax to be paid by a <i>pāik</i> in case he cannot render personal service to the state;
<i>Pad</i>	tax to be paid on employment as an officer;
<i>Pañcak</i>	a contribution or subscription to be paid on particular occasions;
<i>Beth</i>	the responsibility of catching wild elephants, buffaloes, etc. for the state;
<i>Begār</i>	the responsibility of having to render physical labour on requisition from the monarch;
<i>Jalkar</i>	tax for fishing in rivers, lakes, etc;
<i>Yavaksāra</i>	the responsibility of supplying nitre for the preparation of gun-powder;
<i>Chor</i>	punishment for theft and pilferage;
<i>Chinālā</i>	punishment for adultery;
<i>Dhumuchi</i>	the confiscation of property, which cannot be inherited by anybody, to the state;
<i>Mārechā</i>	tax for using land for <i>homa</i> in a marriage;
<i>Dāna</i>	sale-tax; tax for ferrying over rivers, etc;

¹⁹⁶ Barpujari, H.K.: *Op. cit.*, p.100-1.

¹⁹⁷ Neog Maheswar: *PS*, 2nd edn., 2003, p132-33.

<i>Khut</i>	revenue on articles other than landed property;
<i>Danda</i>	punishment for crimes;
<i>Bandha</i>	binding down on account of crimes;
<i>Hāt</i>	tax on buying and selling in a market;
<i>Ghāt</i>	tax on ferry crossing;
<i>Caki</i>	tax on land given out of the capital city or a fort;
<i>Phāt</i>	customs duty imposed on marketing places, especially on the bank of a river or lake (called <i>pāni-phāt</i>).

“Temples were maintained from endowments that consisted either of villages and agriculture lands, or else came from the investment of capital. The donor could be members of the royal family, wealthy intermediaries or merchants or guilds. The smaller accessories of the temple, such as subsidiary images, lamps, oils etc., were generally obtained through the individual donations of lesser member of the community”¹⁹⁸. Though generally Brāhmanas could conduct the rituals in the *garbhagriha*, or sanctum sanctorum, in some cases member of other castes were also allowed to perform the rituals relating to the ceremonies in the temple, like lighting the lamps and providing the flowers and garlands necessary for the worship of the images, as well as looking after the cleanliness of the temple. A sizeable increase in the endowments and attendants of the temple usually led to the appointment of a formal managing committee to supervise their administration, members of which were often drawn from various communities.

¹⁹⁸ Thapar, R.: *Early India From Origins to A.D.1300*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, p.357. 2002.

The villages were adorned with many temples. The temples are the centres of many attractions and amusements. It served many more purposes than that of worship. Here village meetings were held, festivals were celebrated, and theatrical performances were shown. The temples were surrounded on all sides by different species of trees for their association with some gods or goddesses. This no doubt enhanced the beauty of the landscape, offered shade but also conferred certain sanctity on the area and special blessings on the plants.¹⁹⁹ According to H.K.Barpujari the village *Nāmgharas* or prayer houses, were set on fire by the Burmese²⁰⁰. The worship of trees can be said to be an early example of conservation of trees or flora “but a more likely explanation of their preservation points to a ritual or medicinal connection”²⁰¹.

Besides architectural and sculptural progress many of the temple complexes also developed paintings, songs and dances. They occupied a prominent place in the social life of the region. Hundreds of labourers were continuously employed in their constructions and maintenance. These temples provided employment to innumerable priests, songsters and songstresses, dancers and dancing girls and gardeners and cooks²⁰².

Industry was highly developed in the study area. “There are references to weaver, spinners, gold-smiths, potters and workers in ivory, bamboo, hide and cane”²⁰³. The reference to various arts and crafts in the inscriptions indicates that villages emerged as a significant self-sufficient unit. Assam is predominantly an agricultural

¹⁹⁹ Barpujari, H.K.: *Assam in the Days of Company*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1980. p.83-84.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*p.11

²⁰¹ Thapar . *Op.cit.* p203.

²⁰² Acharyya,N.N.: *The Legends and archaeological remains of Darrang. A Critical Analysis in Bulletin of Assam State Museum No VIII*, (ed). Choudhury, R.D, Directorate of Museum :Assam, Guwahati, 1986.p.29.

²⁰³ Gait, E.A. : *A History of Assam, Calcutta*, 3rd revised ed. Thacker Spink & Co. (1933) P. Ltd, 1963.Reprint.p.271.

state. Since early times the chief occupation of the people is agriculture. Hence the civilization of Assam is village centred. The people were self sufficient. The works of their kingdom were generally carried out by their own people. The royal court offered patronage to various professional groups like *banduki*, *sonāri*, *kamār*, *kumār*, *gāyan-bāyan*, *teli*, *dhobā*, *tānti*, peasants, *rajak*, *tantubai*, *chāmar*, *muchiār*, *hāri*, *nāpit*, *māli*, *silākuti*, *sutar*, *bārhoi*, *silpakār*, *chuneri*, *hirā*, *kaibarta* etc²⁰⁴. There are also references to the *silākuti*, *sutār*, *bārhoi*, *silpakār*, *chuneri*, *sonāri*, *kamār* and *kumār*²⁰⁵

Brāhman Daibgna Nāt Vāt Tānti Māli.

Kamār Kahār Bārhoi Hāri ādi dila nirantar (verse 550)

Sonari Kumar Hirā Kaibarta Chamār.

Muchiār Hāri ādi dila nirantar..(verse 551)

The above were also involved in the temple building activities and provisions for their maintenance provided an alternative means of livelihood to a good number of people²⁰⁶. Besides these *Bardeuri* (chief priest), *Chandipāthaka* (scripture reader), *Supakār* (cook), *chamār* fan-bearers, umbrella bearers, staff bearers, storekeepers, water carriers, cleaners etc. were generally assigned to the temples. Again officials like Barphukan, Devālayar Katakī etc. were also authorised to look after the temples. The economic condition of the kingdom was strengthened by the contribution of these classes of people. The inscriptions of early Assam furnish us the names of a large numbers of *grāmas* or villages. The grant of Valavarmā refers to the donation of *grāma*. A *grāma* comprised the residential part (*vastubhumi*), the cultivable fields (*ksetra*), land under pasturage, *go-chara*, the wetland that remained untilled, streams, canals, cattle

²⁰⁴ Sarma Nabin Chandra : *Darrang RājVamsāvali*, 1st edn., Bani Prakash, Guwahati, 1973,p.17-18.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*p.18.

²⁰⁶ Das Paromita: *History and Archaeology of North-East India*, 1st edn., New Delhi, Agam Kala Prakashan,n 2007.p.64.ISBN: 81-7320-071-8.

paths (*go-mārga*), roads and temples (Hāwrāghāt copper plate Grant²⁰⁷). Rice being the staple food, cultivation of paddy was done extensively. Both the summer and winter paddy were cultivated. Cultivation of sugarcane, vegetables and varieties of fruits were also practised²⁰⁸. Inscriptions refer to a number of plants and trees such as jack fruit (*kanthāl*), (Gauhati grant, Khanāmukh grant, Puspabhadra Grant), black berry (*Jāmu*, Uttarbari Grant and Nowgong Grant²⁰⁹ of Balavarman III), mango (Nowgong Grant²¹⁰, Suālkuci Grant²¹¹), Sweet root (*Sarkarmula*, Suwālkuchi Grant), walnut (*Sākhota*, Subhankarapātaka Grant), *lukuca* (*Āmalaka*, a kind of bread fruit)etc. It is mentioned in the inscription that people produced various types of agricultural products such as *dhānya* (rice), *māha* (pulses), *ghee* (clarified butter), *lon* (salt), *tel* (oil seeds), *tāmbul* (areca nut), *pān* (betel vine), *ādā* (ginger), milk, *gur* (molasses), *dhupa* (incensee stick), and *jāluk* (pepper)²¹². All these items were essential for daily use in the *satra* and temples. It is mentioned in the *Darrang RājVamsāvali* that *ghee* was used for frying bricks which are used in temple building²¹³. The inscriptions also refer to *lon* (salt). This may be a reference to the indigenous rock salt or the potash (alkali)²¹⁴. Besides these a large number of trees useful for their timber are referred to in the inscriptions. The most common is the banyan (*Vata*, also called Asvattha, Nawgong grant²¹⁵), *Sataparna* (Ulubari grant), *Jhingani* tree (Guwakuchi grant), *Odlamma* (Subhankarapataka grant), *Madār* (Ulubari grant), bamboo (Parbatiya grant, Cane (Uttarbari grant). Inscriptions

²⁰⁷ KS; p.188,2003.

²⁰⁸ Nath Lokeswar: *Darrang District through the Ages*, 1st edn. Dhekiajuli, Karuna Medhi, 2005,p.29.

²⁰⁹ KS.p.185.

²¹⁰ KS. P.185.

²¹¹ KS, p198.

²¹² PS, 2004, p.184.

²¹³ Sarma NC: *DRV*. 1973.p.18.

²¹⁴ Das,P.: *History and Archaeology of North-East India*, 1st edn., Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 2007,p.63.ISBN:81-7320-071-8.

²¹⁵ K.S.p.185.

also refer to some important plants which had the potentiality of being items of exchange such as betel nut trees (Nowgong grant²¹⁶), betel leaf vine (Uttarbari grant) and *agaru* (aloe).

The extensive remains of temples and buildings give ample evidence of making of stone and brick in Assam. Brick was an important building medium in the districts since remote past. This study reveals that along with stone temple relic like sculpture, *linga*, *yonipitha*, *pranāla* etc. the other element of architecture ere invariably bricks irrespective of religious or secular in nature. While the structures of Darrang and Udalguri districts belonging to the Sālastambhas and Pālas were mostly of stone and brick, the structural remains of the Koches are mostly of bricks. Bricks of different sizes and evenly shaped with smooth surface have been found. These bricks are of pale reddish colour and are well burnt. Bricks found at Tamreswar of Udalguri measure 23cm × 15cm × 5cm and 20cm × 20cm × 8cm. One piece of peculiar brick having step-cut measuring 18cm × 16cm × 5cm is very attractive. Murādewar of Udalguri measure 23cm×19cm×5cm (Fig.28). Bricks found at Deulpur of Udalguri measure 25cm×17cm×5cm. Bricks of different sizes measuring such as 23cm.×15cm.×4cm, 23cm.×17×5cm. and 22.5cm.×17.5cm.×5.5cm. are foud at Jaljali. Some of the bricks of the early period measuring different sizes such as 29.cm5x41.5cm.x6cm, 23cm.x18cm.x4cm, 20cm.x14cm.x3.5cm, 19.5cm.x16cm.x7cm are also preserved at the District Museum, Darrang. The stone inscriptions give evidence of the development of the art of engraving. This is also proved by a number of epigraphs like Nowgong grant²¹⁷, v.14; Tezpur grant, v. 24; Gauhāti grant, v.10, etc. The art of brick making is mentioned in

²¹⁶ KS. p.182.

²¹⁷ K.S.p.183.

Suālkuci grant²¹⁸ of Ratnapāla. It was highly developed at a subsequent period particularly during the Āhom period²¹⁹.

In the Darrang *RājVamsāwali*²²⁰ the process of brick making is mentioned in this way-

Kumār āniā itā sasāibāk dilā.

Pāgiā itāk āni ghritat bhājilā

Karāl pāgiā punu vailā sābadhān.

Mrinmoy math tabe karilā nirmān. (verse 44)

According to the *Buranjis*, the art of brick making was continued with all perfection. The bricks were burnt almost to the consistency of tiles. It is recorded in the *Buranjis* that in making bricks, the white of eggs was mixed to render them harder and smooth. The reference in the inscriptions to several storied palaces and discovery of a large number of stone images, and remnants of stone structures clearly prove the attainment of architect and sculptor of that period²²¹. The existence of large numbers of bricks at the temple premises of Tāmreswar, Murādewar (both in Udālguri district), Ganesh Kuwari, Jaljali (in Darrang district) etc. are the good example in this regard. It is interesting to note that a dwelling house said to have belonged to the Āhom period still exists at Pithākhoā of Hāzarikārā in Darrang district²²². The Public Works Department of the Āhoms was under an officer known as Chāng-rung Phukan. He maintained a

²¹⁸ KS;p.198.

²¹⁹ Choudhur Pratap Chandra : *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the twelfth Century A.D.* 3rd edn, Spectrum Publications, Delhi, 1987.p.352.

²²⁰ DRV.p.111.

²²¹ Gait,E.A. : *A History of Assam*, 3rd revised ed. Thacker Spink & Co. (1933) P. Ltd, Calcutta, 1963. .p.272.

²²² Minaram Deka (89): *Interview*, Hazarikapara. Darrang. 30.12.2012.

record of the details of all constructional works, temples, tanks, and burial-mounds which have been preserved till this day²²³.

The work of brick making was an important activity of the people of ancient Assam. In the Suālkuci grant²²⁴ of Ratnapāla, mention is made of a root of the *Sarkāra* tree and lopped mango-tree on the brick-kiln while describing boundary of a donated land.²²⁵ It is mentioned in the *Darrang RājVamsāvali* bricks fried in ghee were used in the temple building activities (v. 543)²²⁶.

Literary and epigraphic evidence reveals that another professional class known as *kamāras* (blacksmith) who manufactured articles like knives, swords, *daos*, axes, spades, ploughshares, arrow-tips, javelin points, spike nails, clamps and others developed since early times. The *kamāras* also made *hilo* (matchlocks), *top* and *bar top* (Fig.29) (small and big canons)²²⁷.

Black smithy was an important occupation in the study area. The services of the smiths were very important as the agricultural community used many iron implements. Along with the agricultural tools the blacksmiths produced the war materials like swords, arrow, spear, javelin, discus, dagger etc. Numerous stone inscriptions and sculptures are the clear evidence of the development of the art of stone engraving. Tāmreswar and Jaljali ruins are the earliest stone art of the study area.

The study of the temple and *satras* of the region clearly reveals that the art of bell-metal work is very prominent in the economic life of the people. The use of bell-

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ *KS*;p.198.

²²⁵ Sarma,D. ed: *KS*. 2nd.edn., Publication Board Assam,Guwahati, pp.197-98.2003.

²²⁶ Sarma Nabin Chandra : *Darrang RājVamsāvali*, 1st edn., Bani Prakash, Guwahati,1973.p.111.

²²⁷ *CHA Vol-III*, 2004, p.117.

metal in the early period is proved by extant sculptures, utensils and ornaments²²⁸. Reference of assigning *sonāri*, *kumār*, *hirā* etc. to the temple of Kāmākhyā by the Koch king Naranārāyana is found in the *Darrang RājVamsāvali*²²⁹.

Evidence of excellent workmanship of the jewellers' art is referred to in the Bargāon Grant (v.14) of Ratnapāla. The Tezpur grant (L.14-20) described the boats decorated with varieties of embellishments. Gold dust was found in almost all the rivers of Assam including Bharali and Dhansiri in Darrang²³⁰. Under the management of the Ahom government, there were *pāiks* known as *Sonowāls* for washing gold dust from the sands of the rivers. Besides making coins, a large quantity of gold was used in making ornaments. Utensils made of gold, mainly used in the religious functions of the medieval period, are still in existence. Besides gold, silver was used in minting coins, making ornaments, utensils, dolls and icons²³¹. Since early times gold-smithy chiefly thrived under royal patronage. King Pratāp Singha (1603-41C.E.) imported gold from Koch Bihar. Gold-smith were organised into functional guilds known as *Sonāri khel*. Wearing of gold ornaments was restricted for the commoners and confined to the gentry and members of the royal family. The articles produced were varied, such as *bhogjarā* (water jar), *māihang* (raised tray), tubs, *botā* (Fig.30), *bāti* (cups), boxes, *khāru* (bracelets), *keru* (ear-rings), *galpatā* (necklace), *ānguthi* (rings), *dugdugi* (pendants) and other ornaments²³². These items were used by the people and are still in use in the temples and the *satras* as well as for private purpose.

²²⁸ Rajguru, S. : *Op. cit.*p.330.

²²⁹ Sarma, Nabin Chandra. (ed): *Darrang RājVamsāvali*, v.551, 1st edn., Bani Prakash, Guwahati, 1973.p.112.

²³⁰ Choudhury Pratap Chandra : *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the twelfth Century A.D.* 3rd edn, Spectrum Publications, Delhi, 1987, p 345.

²³¹ Rajguru Sarbeswar : *Medieval Assamese Society 1228-1826*, 1st edn, , Asami, Nagaon, 1988.p.323-328.

²³² *CHA Vol.III.2004*, p.119.

The study reveals the extensive use of mats popularly known as *pāti* in the temple and the *satras* of the locality. “Mat-making was another allied art. Early literature refers to the well-decorated and coloured *sital pātis* (cool mats) used by the rich people”²³³. Mats commonly known as *dhāri* are normally used in the temples and *satras* as well as household of the study area for different purposes. Generally cane and bamboo are used in mat making. In the medieval period, mats were made of different substances, such as *pātidai* (mat-rush), *Muthā* (a kind of long grass) and *kuhilā* (sola)²³⁴. Various types of baskets and cages are also made.

The art of making pottery in Assam is known from very early time. The Nidhānpur grant²³⁵ mentions *kumbhakāragarta* (potter’s pit), and the Kamauli grant refers to the *kumbhakāras*, who were professional pottery makers²³⁶. Two professional classes of people known as *Kumār* and *Hirā* were engaged in the art of making pottery. The former used the wheel and were divided, into several sections: one assigned for supplying articles to the royal household and state’s requirements; another supplied articles to high officials; some were assigned to *satras*, and temples, and lastly those who made articles for common people in general. The *Hirās* made earthen pots and other articles by hand without the wheel, and made no use of the furnace for baking²³⁷. A good number of beautiful earthen pot known as *nāg-ghat* (Fig.31) have been found at Jaljali. To give *sarana* (initiation) to the *Hirā* community the Māroi *satra* was established in Darrang. The Ahom king Gaurināth Singha made a land grant to the *satra*

²³³ Choudhur Pratap Chandra : *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the twelfth Century A.D.* 3rd edn, Spectrum Publications, Delhi, 1987. p.352.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*p.352.

²³⁵ *KS*;p166.

²³⁶ Choudhur Pratap Chandra : *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the twelfth Century A.D.* 3rd edn, Spectrum Publications, Delhi, 1987.p.352.

²³⁷ *CHA Vol.III*, p.116.

in between 1740-1788 C.E.²³⁸.The clay seals of Bhāskarvarman refer to the fact that the art of clay modelling was developed in ancient Assam. In medieval period, the people generally used earthen pots called *Charu* (vessels) for cooking purpose. A few terracotta objects (Fig.32) such as fish, tortoise etc. has been found at Jaljali.

In the urban areas there are small groups of potters who were specialist in making the images of Durgā, Kāli, Saraswati, Viswakarmā etc. But this very ancient industry of Darrang has lost much of its past glory and is today confined only to making common earthen wares. The principal centres of the pottery industry of Darrang are confined to Sālmārā and Māroi village. Some interesting works on pottery have been unearthed at Jaljali consisting fish, turtle etc. An interesting pottery work preserved in the District museum seems to be that of a turtle of the early period recovered from the Māroi Bijulibāri area.

The archaeological remains of the study area reveal that a section of the people were engaged exclusively in different professions besides agriculture, like the pottery, engraving, stonecutting, ironsmithy, weaving, tailoring, carpentry, image making, goldsmithy, brick laying and other arts and crafts through which they earned their livelihood .

Coins

Only a little numismatic evidence of our early rulers of Assam has come to light. This does not mean that they did not have their own coins. In the seventh century C.E. the art of melting metals and impressing seals on clay or melted metals was known in the time of Bhāskarvarman as evinced by the Nālandā Seal and copper plate

²³⁸ Bhattacharya Satish Chandra: Maroi Satrar Bhumi Danar Fali in *Prantik* edited & published by Pradip Barua, Vol.xxviii No. 16 16-31 July 2009, Guwahati, p.34.

inscriptions²³⁹. Gold and copper could be obtained within the kingdom. So the king must have struck coins of his own. Certain gold coins belonging to the pre-Ahom period of the type called 'imitation Gupta' are found at Pāglātek lying on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra about 15 kilometres west of the (Mangaldai) district²⁴⁰.

In the Silimpur Stone slab Inscription of the time of Jayapāla (1115-1125 C.E.), the last king of the Brahmapāla dynasty of Assam it is mentioned that the king (Jayapāla) offered to gift nine hundred gold coins, equal to his own weight (*tulāpurusha*) to a learned Brāhmin, Prahasa by name. This proves that this Kāmarūpa king minted coins of gold if not silver and copper, though unfortunately no such coins have yet been discovered. The inscription of Ratnapāla mentions the existence of copper mines within the kingdom which the king worked with profit. Ratnapāla might have issued copper coins²⁴¹. Some ancient copper coins were discovered in the Dhulāpadung Tea Estate and Tulip Tea Estate near Tezpur. They are varied in shape and size. The letters like *Va* and *Ha* of the coins may represent Vanamālarman (c.832-55C.E.) and Harjaravarman (c815-32C.E.). Thus the coins may be assignable to 9th century C.E.²⁴² In 1992 at the Chandrajhār village 22 kilometres away from Mangaldai a few silver coins were found. Out of them six have been preserved in the ASM, Guwahati. Two of them were issued by the Nepal king Jay Prakash Malla and the remaining four were struck by Ranjit Malla Deva of Bhātgaon²⁴³. On the basis of the coins it may be

²³⁹ Choudhury, P.D.: *Archaeology In Assam*, Department of Archaeology, Assam, Guwahati, 1964, pp 13-14.

²⁴⁰ *CHA*, vol-I, P.55-56.

²⁴¹ Choudhury, *op.cit*, p 14.

²⁴² *CHA vol.I*,p.56.

²⁴³ R.D.Choudhury & S.K.Bose

.: Chandrajhar Find of Nepalese Coins in *JARS*, Vol-XXXIV,p.10, (ed) Chutia, Dharmeswar, 1998.

presumed that there was commercial contact between Darrang and Udalguri with Nepal. Recently a few Mughal coins have been found at Mangaldai.

Water Tanks

The earth-work, found in the area, was not of less importance than the temple building and other architectural work. The water bodies whether natural or artificial are closely associated with human civilization since remote past. Water bodies like rivers, rivulets, lakes, tanks of India have a history of their own, which reflect the past and all of them bear cultural, geographical as well as historical significance. The tanks of Assam, which are popularly known as *pukhuri* have great significance in the socio-cultural life of the people. However the word *sāgar* (the sea) is also used to denote a huge tank²⁴⁴. viz. Joysāgar tank (155 acres of land under water and 318 acres including the banks), Gaurisāgar tank etc. “A tank is classified as *sāgar* when its area is more than 100 *purās* or 400 *bighās* and its consecration ceremony was performed by at least 100 number of Brāhmins viz. Jaysāgar, Gaurisāgar, Rudrāsagar, Athaisāgar, Lakhimisāgar etc.”²⁴⁵. A large number of historical tanks of the Āhom and pre-Āhom period still exist, which reflects the rich culture and tradition of Assam.

The earliest evidence of a tank in India is found at Mohejodaro in Indus Valley Civilization, in the form of the Great Bath. It was probably customary to dig a tank near the temple in the pre-Āhom period, as in the Āhom period, because water was necessary for the deity’s worship in the temple²⁴⁶. Almost all the historical tanks of Assam are excavated near a temple. This reflects the religious aspects of the tanks. The same

²⁴⁴ Rajkumar, S.: *Itihase Soaura Chashata Bachar*, Banalata, 1st edition, Guwahati, 2000, p.243.

²⁴⁵ Phukan, S.K.: *Hydronymy of Assam*, Students’ Stores Guwahati, 1st published, 2003, p 77.

²⁴⁶ Choudhury, R.D.: *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 1st edition, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1985, p160.

character is also seen in the temples of Northern and Southern India. The Golden Temple of Amritsar, the Natarāja temple of Chidambaram etc. are the finest examples of this kind which contain a huge tank.

Though the state of Assam is mostly an alluvial plain, criss-crossed with a network of rivers which supply the inhabitants with adequate water, excavation of tank had always been an age-old tradition for them. Even those areas which contain perennial rivers and are victim of regular flood contain man-made tanks in numbers²⁴⁷. Another important aspect of the tanks in Assam is that these are excavated to serve different purposes. “It is believed in the past that excavation of a tank was one of the greatest acts of piety. A good number of tanks of Assam are associated with certain kings and some even contain stone inscriptions from the donor”²⁴⁸. The tanks are the part of the public welfare activities of the kings. Some tanks are commemorative and dug in memory of a king or queen or officials. For instance, Jaysāgara tank to commemorate the name of Jaymati, (the mother of King Rudra Singha), Harjjarā *Pukhuri* of king Harjjaravarman, Jaypāla *Pukhuri* to commemorate the name of king Jayapāla in Darrang, *Rajāpukhuri* and *Rānipukhuri* also in Darrang, Baruā *Pukhuri*, Bharāli *Pukhuri* etc.

Again some the tanks are named after various Gods and Goddesses, i.e. the Sivasāgar tank is dedicated to Lord Siva, Gaurisāgar to Goddess Gauri etc. It is interesting to note that the tanks are also named after some kinds of florā and faunā, i.e. *Padum Pukhuri* (*padum*=lotus), *Metekā Pukhuri* (Hyacinth) etc. The Charāibahi *Pukhuri* (meaning bird sanctuary, *charāi*=bird), Hānhcharowā (for rearing duck, *hānh*=duck), *Senchoā Pukhuri* (*sen*=hawk), *Ghorādhoā Pukhuri* (*ghorā*=horse; *dhoā* =

²⁴⁷ *CHA Vol-III*,: p329.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*: p.329.

washing/bathing) etc are the good example of tanks assigned to fauna. The tanks became important centres for preserving biodiversity. *Kordhoā pukhuri* was used for cleaning the spades (*kor*=spade), *Kāpordhoā Pukhuri* was for cleaning clothes (*kāpor*=cloths), *Chāoldhoā Pukhuri* was meant for cleaning rice (*chāol*=rice) etc. served different purposes. Although all the tanks are primarily dug for providing drinking water to the people, it seems that some of them are also used for irrigation purpose. Tanks are also dug to commemorate victory in war. Excavation of tank is regarded by the king as a sacred work as well as personal achievements. King Ārimatta is said to have adopted a scheme of excavating twelve hundred tanks²⁴⁹. The work was done also with the intention of beautification of the locality.

Thus, tanks were excavated for various purposes: To provide drinking water, for ritualistic purpose, irrigation, beautification, to commemorate an event, preserve biodiversity and also for community fishing etc.

During the Āhom rule the work of excavation of tanks received so much importance that various graded officials were appointed for the task. Chāngrung Phukan was the officer who was in charge of the tanks. Mātichelekā Baruā (soil tester), *Nāgpotā* Baruā, *Rahdholā* Baruā (chemist, *Rah*= para = mercury) and the like were the other officials associated with the task. The specialist knew very well the techniques to find the spring of the underground water. During excavation, certain processes were taken. The tanks were filled with pure water throughout the year to a considerable height

²⁴⁹ Gohain Barua, P: *Asamar Buranji*, 3rd edn., Publication Board Assam, 2004, p.16.

above the surrounding ground level²⁵⁰. This is a notable feature of the tanks excavated by the rulers of the study area.

The *Baghmāri Pukhuri* is situated at Lakhimpur village of Darrang. In the 12th - 13th century C.E.²⁵¹, a Bhuyān chief founded a town and excavated a water tank at Bāghmāri²⁵². The purpose was to provide drinking water. The *Baldev Pukhuri* is situated at Nāyakpārā, Mangaldai subdivision of Darrang. The water tank was excavated by a Bhuyān chief named Baldev²⁵³. As per local tradition it is believed that Baldev was the alias of the Darangi Koch king Dharmanārāyan. It covers about 48 *bighas* of land. The *Burhinagar Pukhuri* is situated at Burhinagar village of Darrang. Burhinagar means a town (nagar), after the designation of an old lady (*burhi*). According to local legend this burhi was the wife of Jitāri king Rāmchandra and mother of king Ārimatta²⁵⁴. The total area of the tank is more than 6 hectares. It is said that the tank was excavated by Jitāri king Ārimatta some six hundred years ago. He built a town near the tank for his old mother who refused to accompany him to the palace of his father who was killed by Ārimatta unknowingly²⁵⁵. The *Jayapāl Phukhuri* is situated in the Kaliājhār village of Darrang. The tank was excavated by king Jayapāla (1120 C.E.- 1138 C.E.), the last ruler of the Pāla dynasty of Kāmarupa. It is about 60 *bighas*.

²⁵⁰ Nath, H : Prasanga: Ahom Swargadeu Sakalar Pukhuri Samuhar Nandanik Pramulya in *Mong Kham* (ed) Gogoi, S. Brihattar Guwahati Sukapha Nagar Me-dam Me-phi Udjapan Samiti Sukapha Nagar, Guwahati, 2008,p.115.

²⁵¹ Phukan,SK.: *Hydronymy of Assam*, Stuents Sores', 1st edn, Guwahati, ISBN-81-7665-140-0,2003,p.119.

²⁵² MB,p.35.

²⁵³ MB,p.34.

²⁵⁴ Phukan,SK.: *Hydronymy of Assam*, Stuents Sores', 1st edn, Guwahati, ISBN-81-7665-140-0,2003,p.134.

²⁵⁵ DDG,p.28.

However, Dineswar Sarma traces its origin to a Bhuyān chief Jaypāl, who excavated the tank to commemorate his name²⁵⁶.

The *Lakhimpur Pukhuri* (Fig.33) is said to have been excavated by another Bhuyān chief in the name of his queen Laksmi in Darrang about 2 kilometers from the Burhinagar *Pukhuri*²⁵⁷. The ruins of an old temple are still found upon its bank. It is believed that *Rājā Pukhuri* and *Rāni Pukhuri* were excavated during the reign of the Pāla king Dharmapāla (1095-1120 C.E.) situated in present Udalguri district. Both the tanks measure 40-50 *bighās* each. The tanks were named after the Rājā (the king) and Rāni (the queen)²⁵⁸. Although a good number of other historical water tanks in Darrang and Udalguri have now dried up, still a large number are still in use. These tanks are believed to have been excavated either by the Bhuyāns or by the Darrang Rājās²⁵⁹.

These tanks are the important source for reconstructing the history of Assam. The location of the water tanks of the study area provides important data for tracing the settlement pattern of the people. The tanks can contribute to the silence and gap in history. The tanks are closely associated with the socio-cultural life of the people. These tanks are often used as a potential source for pisciculture, agro forestry etc. having great economic value. Besides these, the tanks are the important homeland of diversified flora and fauna. These are also becoming important habitat of migratory birds. These historic tanks are the unique ecosystem of geo-environmental regime. However, encroachment of the people, pollution, other developmental activities and lack of necessary care and

²⁵⁶ *MB.*:p.33.

²⁵⁷ Phukan,SK.: *Hydronymy of Assam*, Students Sores', 1st edn, Guwahati, ISBN-81-7665-140-0,2003,p.163.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*:p.185.

²⁵⁹ *DDG.P.*28.

consciousness of the people for the ancient treasures, many of the historic tanks have been totally lost and many of them are on the verge of extinction.

Ramparts

The late-medieval chronicles mention building of ramparts, fortifications, barricades and road-cum-bunds. The earthen ramparts with flat top and sloping sides are common. To stop erosion by seasonal water and also to save the earth work from burrowing animals, the ramparts were often reinforced at the core with a brick wall. This method is seen both in the case of the ramparts made by the Āhoms as well as in those of the Kachāris. Stones blocks and bricks were widely used in the erection of ramparts. Though most of these structures have been pilfered in modern times and quarried for using in new constructions, some evidences still remain for our examination. The old Kachāri capital of Māibong contains several massive ramparts of bricks. Capital and residential establishments enclosed by high and huge ramparts are noticed in places like Bhaitbarin (Goalpara district), Sāhe Rājā *Garh* (Darrang), Pratāpgarh (Sonitpur), Rangpur and Garhgāon (Sivsāgar), Pratimānagar (Dibrugarh) and Māibong (North-Cāchār Hills)²⁶⁰. The constructions of ramparts are mostly due to political purposes. Rampart are locally known as *garh* i.e., Numaligarh, Marangigarh Rājāgarh, (in Udalguri) Bhurār *garh* (Udalguri) etc.

The ***Rāonāgarh*** is an earthen rampart, 15 metres in width at the base and 3 metres in height. It was found at a distance of 7 km west of Udalguri²⁶¹. Though breached at places, the rampart is approximately 1.5 km. ×1 km. Tradition assigns this

²⁶⁰ *CHA*, Vol-III, P.329.

²⁶¹ Sarma, P.: *A Brief Report on Archaeological Exploration, 1979-80*, Bulletin of ASM No IV, 1982, p.59.

area to one Sāherāja, a legendary king. The *Bhunyārgarh* is situated at Charandharā village just a few kilometres away from Kalāigāon of Udalguri. Bhurārgarh is a huge earthen fortification, standing like a big square enclosing 494 *bighās* of land. Inside the *garh* or fortification there must have been some royal administrative centre or it may have been used to garrison the army²⁶². The height of the *garh* is almost 6 meter. There are four mounds and two water tank inside the *garh*. It was probably built during the rule of the Bhuyāns and the *garh* therefore came to be known as Bhuyār *garh*.

There are two ramparts situated at Howly Mohanpur just 3 km away from Mangaldai of Darrang. One of them was built by Dharmanārāyan the founder of the Darrangi Koch kingdom in 1616 C.E. when he shifted his capital from Keherkheriā of Assam Bhutan border to Howly Mohanpur. The other was built by Bishnunārāyan²⁶³. Popularly known as *Darrangi Rajār garh* the ramparts represent the four hundred years glory of the Darrangi Koch family. It was built surrounding the capital city, to protect it from external threat. There is deep moat around the rampart measuring around 9-10 meters. The construction was done in a scientific way. It was so designed that was not easy to cross the rampart even by a cavalry. There are two entrances on the east and west direction. However, due to lack of necessary care and consciousness of the government as well as general people it is on the verge of extinction²⁶⁴.

Thus the earthen ramparts of the study area can be treated as primary clues for investigation of the archaeological remains.

²⁶² Choudhur, R.D.; *Archaeology of The Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, Agam Kala Prakashan. Delhi, 1985, p.243.

²⁶³ *DI.*: p.199.

²⁶⁴ Special Correspondent: Astitwar Sankatat Rajadinia Darrangi Garh in *Amar Asom*, Guwahati, 26 April,2012,p.10.

Roads

At the time of their military campaigns against the Ahom, the Koches started the construction of an embanked road covering a distance of 350 miles from their capital in Koch Behar to Nārāyanpur in the present Lakhimpur district with a view to keep the flow of provisions to the advanced army regular. This road was called Gohāin Kamal Āli as it was constructed under the supervision of Gohāin Kamal, a brother of the Koch King Naranārāyan²⁶⁵. Parts of this road still exist in Darrang and Udalguri districts and is also known as Kabir Āli. It is also mentioned in the *Darrang RājVamsāvali* that Gohāin Kamal was given the charge of construction of a road from Koch Behar to North Lakhimpur. Gohāin Kamal Āli, which most certainly went through Darrang district was renovated on the order of Naranārāyan, was surely a road used by people since long past. Otherwise it would have been quite impossible to complete about 700 k.m. of its length within one or two years in two dry seasons²⁶⁶. In support of this view, the remark made in the *Kām rūpa Buranjir Ahilāpāti* can be taken into account. It is mentioned in the book that during the time of his invasion of Assam, Bakhtiyār Khalji marched through Gohāin Kamal Āli and this road was built by him (Bakhtiyār Khalji) for his military advancement. As it was later on repaired by Gohāin Kamal, it came to be known after his name. Besides, as Bakhtiyār could not make any indelible mark on Assam, his name did not last long²⁶⁷. In this way it is proved from structural remains

²⁶⁵ Barua S.L.: *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Lawyers Book Stall, Guwahati, 1985, p.208

²⁶⁶ Sarma Nagendra Nath: Few Archaeological Remains of Darrang and Udalguri Clues for construction of history in *Granthaban*, A souvenir of Darrang Book Fair, edited by K.K.Deka & L.S.Deka, 2008, Mangaldai, p.51.

²⁶⁷ Goswami, P.C.: *Kamrup Buranjir Ahilapati*, Bani Praksh, Guwahati, 1986, p.46.

²⁶⁸ Barua, R. K.: Darrangar Deul Utsavar Itibritta. In Nath, A. K. (ed), *Darangar Sahitya Sanskritir Rooprekha*, Sipajhar Sahitya Sabha, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1997, p.39.

²⁶⁶ Sarmah, D.: *Mangaldair Buranji*, 2nd edn, Asom Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1974, p.124.

that the study area had important historical relation with the rest of the country from earlier times.

Deul Mound

Deul is significant socio-religious festival of Assam. This peculiar festival is celebrated usually in the first month of the Assamese calendar year *Bahāg* (*Baisākh*). However, right from the first day of *Bahāg*, *deul* is observed at various places throughout the month. This is a special kind of worship of Lord Visnu which is not prevalent in other parts of Assam²⁶⁸. For this purpose an earthen mound of pyramidal type having seven steps is built and the idol of Visnu is installed at the top of the mound during the time of worship. Generally the idol of Visnu is made of gold or silver or some other metal²⁶⁹. Along with *homa* and other rituals performed in the ‘*pujā*’ a *Byāsar Ojā* is a must. At present however some people do not perform *homa* in certain places²⁷⁰. In the four corners of the *deul* mound four small bamboo trees are posted, over which is tied a *chandratāp* (canopy). The image of Visnu is placed under this canopy. The Visnu image is flanked by two wooden posts sculpted with two *magaras* (crocodiles)²⁷¹. On the day preceding the *deulotsav*, or in some places on the very morning of the *deul*, *adhivāsa* (ritual fasting) ceremony is performed of which *meshdāhan* (ritual sacrifice of a ram) is a part. The *meshdāhan* activity on the day of worship of Visnu and *adhivāsa* of *deul*, marks the assimilation of Aryan and non-Aryan

²⁷⁰Nath, L.; *Darrang District through the Ages*, Karuna Medhi, Dhekiajuli, 2005. 1st edn.p.190.

²⁷¹Sharmah, Bijoy.Kumar.: *Darrang Zilar Utsav Anusthanar Adhyayana*, 1st edn, Guwahati, Chandra Prakash. 2005. P.77.

²⁷²Ibid. p.78.

²⁷³Nath, A.K.: op. cit.p.40.

culture. On the same day the idol of Visnu with its throne and *magara* (a crocodile motif) are consecrated by playing devotional musical instruments. The consecrated area is sanctified by the singing of devotional songs in praise of Visnu performed by the *Ojāpāli*, and *Uruli* performed by the *Āyatis*. The *deul pujā* is dedicated to Lord Visnu along with the *Dharmadevatā*. In the evening when the ceremony comes to an end the idol of Visnu is again brought to the temple by singing *Ojāpāli* song and *nāma-prasanga*. The whole night of the day of *adhivāsa* and the whole day of the *deul*, along with *nāma-prasanga* various types of vocal and performing arts like the *Ojāpāli*, *Khuliā Bhāoriā*, *Dhepādhulia*, *Bardhuliā* etc. are performed²⁷². Thousands of people gather together in this festival with great devotional offerings. People observe *deul* at the *Khatarā* and *Porā Satra* with great fervour. In general, *deul* is celebrated by the people for a day, but in some cases it lasts for two days. For example, *Bhekuli-kānda deul* of *Khoirabari* of *Udalguri* and *Ghorābandhā deul* of *Darrang* district are observed by the people for two days. There are divergent views regarding the symbolic meaning of the *deul*. According to one version²⁷³, Lord Visnu, assuming the form of a *Varāha* (boar) rescued the holy Veda from the seven seas. So the seven steps of the *deul* mound symbolises the seven seas. Lord Visnu killed *Hiranyakashipu* and his sister *Holikā* (who had assumed the image of *mesh* or a ram) to bring peace in the earth. The *meshdāhan* activity is the symbol of killing of *Holikā* by Lord Visnu. The *magars* used in the *deul* is also regarded as the symbol of Lord Visnu. According to another version, the seven steps of the *deul* mound symbolize the seven colours of the Sun. The canopy above the

idol of Visnu protects it from the rays of the Sun and the Moon. The white colour of the canopy reflects the honesty and virtue of Lord Visnu.

Regarding the origin and antiquity of this unique folk festival, different beliefs are prevalent among the people. Some says that it was practiced by King Boli for the first time in the earth to worship Visnu. While some others view is that *deul* is celebrated to prevent the epidemic diseases during spring season. Again according to some others it was originally related to the funeral ceremony of the kings and gradually it lost its original symbolism and evolved into a new form²⁷⁴. It is said that this festival in Darrang district was first started by Dharmadeva Bipra Bhuyān at Bardoulguri of Sipājhār area of Darrang district in c.11th century C.E. In course of time the festival was celebrated all over the district including the Udalguri area. The *deul* festival of Bardoulguri is celebrated on the first day of the Assamese calendar month of *Bahāg*²⁷⁵. This festival received royal patronage during the reign of Darrangi Koch ruler Dharmanārāyana²⁷⁶. Some of the places where *deul* festival is performed on the first day of *Bahāg* are Bardoul, Rangāchandan, Lojorā, Khāmpāholā, Murādeo, Rudreswar *Devālaya*, Rājghāt etc²⁷⁷. *Deul* in other places are generally held throughout the other months in different places on different dates. Sometimes more than one also is held in one day. *Deul* of Ghorābandha, Bāmunpārā, Burhāgosāin of Mangaldai town, Mādhagosāin, Lakshimpur are some of the important ones²⁷⁸.

²⁷⁴Nath, A.K.: *op. cit.* p.40.

²⁷⁵Baruah, R. K. *op.cit.* pp. 39-40.

²⁷⁶Sarmah, B. K. *op.cit.* p.79.

²⁷⁷*Ibid.* 84.

²⁷⁸Nath, L.: *op. cit.* p.190.

The traditional worship of *deul* had a significant impact upon the social life of the people of Darrang and Udalguri districts. Through this festival the rulers of Darrang had succeeded in establishing a bond of unity among the people as people from all walks of life irrespective of caste and creed participated in it²⁷⁹.

It is observed from the study of the religious landscape of the study area that the different kinds of festivals are closely associated with the religious life of the people. It is generally found that the ritual portions of these festivals are concerned with a particular religious group but the festivals are open to all as a token of joy. In this way the worship of *deul* played an important role for promotion of cultural solidarity among various communities.

Besides these, *deul* attracts people from different parts of the land. Hence, on such occasions people of different social and linguistic groups are united in these festive gatherings for a common purpose. In this way the *deul* festivals bring the members of a community close together.

Although *deul* is chiefly a traditional socio-religious festival, yet it has some economic aspects too. It is the centre of many cultural and social activities. In fact it is seen that sometimes, many *melā* (fair), local markets have been established near the festival grounds. For example, mention may be made of the *deul* festivals of Ghorābāndhā, and Burhinagar of Darrang district²⁸⁰. In Ghorābhandhā *deul* a big fair is held for two days where big traders from Hājo, Sarthebāri etc. come with utensils and other vessels made of bell metal and brass etc²⁸¹. The local merchants also get the

²⁷⁹Sharma, B.K.: *op.cit.* p.82.

²⁸⁰Baruah, R. K.: *op.cit.* p.41.

²⁸¹Nath,L.: *op.cit.*p.190.

opportunity to exhibit and sell their hand made products of bamboo, cane, wood, like *Kath*, *Dhāri*, *Pāti*, (types of mats) flower vase, etc. and, other food items and household materials. Thus celebration of these socio-religious festivals like *deul* also contributes to the economic life of the people.

Deul is one of the popular and distinct festivals of Darrang and Udalguri districts that the people have been celebrating since the remote past. It is a unique cultural heritage of Assam. Even at present celebration of *deul* is a good example of the art of harmonious living with joy and happiness. A new dimension of this festival is the commercial aspect. The products exhibited and sold in the *deul* fair having important market value, provide economic help to the vendors. *Deul* the unique festival of Darrang and Udalguri districts thus has both cultural and economic significance in the society. Moreover these festivals rejuvenate the minds of common people to pay more attention to their own field of activity with more enthusiasm.

The study of the archaeological remains of Darrang and Udalguri districts reveal that the socio-religious life of the study area is marked by great diversities. The historical background of the region reveals that diverse ethnic and cultural group settled in the area. The religious remains in the form of temples and *satras* are the indicator of the consciousness of the people in the society to preserve and propagate their respective religious faiths. All these reflect the heterogeneous religious behaviour of the society. Their cultural activities bound together the different communities and races into one society.

The study of the remains reveals that the social pattern of the study area is quite similar to those of other parts of Assam. The temple ruins, *satras*, inscription, ponds, other material remains, as well as literary sources formed the basis for this study. The

icons, sculptures and other activities in stone found in the districts bear similar characteristics with those of the neighbouring districts of Sonitpur and Kāmarūp. It can be said that the study area remained as an important link between the lower and upper part of Assam in the field of architectural and sculptural activities. The archaeological remains of the study area indicate a heterogeneous society.

Thus, the archaeological remains reveal that varied industrial arts were developed in Darrang and Udālguri region as in other parts of Assam at an early period and these continued to be practiced till recent times. However, though the cottage industries still play a vital role in the economy of the district, some of the early industries have suffered stagnation while some others are now buried under oblivion. These are mainly due to the fall of the Āhom and Koch kingdom followed by political insecurity that led to the disruption of the social order. Lack of royal patronage and patronage of the nobles, flooding of local markets with cheaper machine-made goods imported from outside by the British, preference for such goods by the people, outdated techniques of production and above all changing attitude of the people towards such goods are the other factors that retarded the growth of cottage industries. Many of the traditional artisans finding other avenues of employment that are more lucrative have left their old craft²⁸².

²⁸² Dutta, N.C.:*Darrang District Gazetteer*, 1975.p.221.