

Administration in Ancient Assam: Special Reference to Inscriptional Evidence

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Abstract

Ancient Assam history roughly covers the period from the days of the epics to the early part of thirteenth century. Assam is a part of the country known in ancient period as a Pragjyotisha. By this name the country was known in the great epics, The Mahabharata and The Ramayana as well as in some of the principles puranas. In early period authentic political history of course may be said to have begun from the middle of the fourth century AD. The reconstruction of ancient Assam history is a difficult work, mainly because of the lack in pure and reliable historical materials. During the time of pre historic analysis neoliths played a very important rule to re-establish and restore the lost history of the period. Even for the historical period of study a few existing or local inscriptions and small architectural remains and scattered literary documents as source of information.

Keywords: Epigraphs, Ancient, History, Administration, Grant

Article Publication

 Published Online: 23-Mar-2022

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 [10.31305/rrjim.2022.v07.i03.007](https://doi.org/10.31305/rrjim.2022.v07.i03.007)

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Introduction

The importance of the epigraphic sources for the reconstruction of the lost history of Assam pertaining to the ancient and early medieval periods cannot be overestimated, since the names of the large number of kings and some of their activities are known only from inscriptions and from no other sources. Inscription of early Assam as those of early India, are generally found engraved and not written. They are engraved on metal plates, usually copper, on stone tablets, on rocks, on pillars and outer parts of caves, temples and other building and also impresses on clay seals. Their language is Sanskrit and scripts Devanagari and north Indian Brahmi. Epigraphs were basically in verse; some were prose and others in prose and verse mix composed in nature. A total of about thirty inscriptions belonging to the early period has so far been discovered. P. N. Bhattacharya in the Kamrup Sasanavali edited more than twenty of them, of the present scholars engaging deciphering and editing the inscription of ancient and early medieval Assam mention may be made of Dr. D.C. Sircar, Dr. P.C Choudhury and Dr. M.M. Sharma. The administrative system of ancient Assam basically based on the epigraphic references and the Kalika Purana, tenth century religious text of Hinduism considered as one of the eighteen upapuranas. Kalika Purana mention as chapter on 'Rajaniiti' which also refers to the duties of the king and his ministers. During the time of Varman line of rulers in ancient Assam, the indication of a well-organized administrative system under them.

Objective:

The main objective of this topic:

- A. To study the administrative structure of ancient Assam.
- B. To explore the inscriptional evidence towards the polity and administration in early Assam.

Methodology:

This research article is basically based on secondary source. Sources are collected from books, journals, articles etc. The research article has been formulated within historical and analytical method.

Epigraph like Bargaon Grant of Ratnapal and the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva indicate that the conception of the state as being constituted of seven component parts, namely The King (Swamin), Minister (Amatya), Territory (Janapada), Fort (Durga), Treasury (Kosa), Army (Danda) and Ally (Mitra) called prakrits in the Hindu law books were known to the kings of Kamrupa. The Kalika Purana lays importance on these elements and calls them Rajyangam. During the time of ancient Assam monarchy was the basic form of government in ancient Assam. The head of the administration was thus occupied by king and his chief title was Maharajadhiraja (King of kings). According to Badaganga rock inscription of Bhutivarman mentions two religious titles were Paramadaivata (the supreme divinity) and Parama-Bhagavata (the devout Vaishnava). Most kings bore high sounding honorifics as Parameswara-Parama-Bhattaraka-Maharajadhiraja (the great God-supreme sovereign-king of kings) evidently in imitation of the imperial Guptas which had different implications at different periods. A set of officials help the king in discharging his duties. It consisted the Rajaguru (royal priest), Bhisaka (physician), Mahadvaradhipati (chief warden of the palace, who probably controlled access to the king), Mahapratihara (head chamberlain) etc.

The Hayunthal Grant (lines 26 to 28) of Harjaravarman mentions Jayadeva as the Mahadvaradhipati and Janardana as the Mahapratihara. The Nowgong grant of Balavarman mentions one Mahallakapradhika, an old lady who was probably in charge of the royal Harem. From ancient times in India, the Abhiseka (coronation) of the king was an important ceremony. Apart from its mystic value the rite of coronation conferred upon the king the legal title to his office. The Doobi copper plate inscription refers to that king Sthitavarman who enjoyed like Indra the performance of the coronation ceremony by the Brahmanas according to Sastras accompanied by the propitiatory sound of conch-shell and the drum. The Nowgong grant of Balavarman says that Virabahu put his son on the throne in the prescribed form (vidhivat) on the auspicious day. The plate of Harjaravarman reveals the central rite of the Abhiseka, which consisted of the pouring of sacred water on the king's head. This record states that Harjaravarman was crowned king by sprinkling water on him drawn from all the sacred pilgrimage places, in auspicious silver vessels. The practice of conferring a new name on the king at the time of coronation seems to have been prevalent. For instance, on his accession Susthitavarman took the name Mrganka. The working monarchical form of government depends largely on the personal qualities of the sovereign. The officers of the central administration, the most important were the Samantas, Yuvaraj, Mahasenapati and the Amatyas. The inscription state that the Samantas constantly came to the capital, mounted on elephants and horses, or riding in litters, to pay due respect to the sovereign. The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva shows that the sovereign sometimes displaced disloyal feudatory chiefs and established loyal ones in their place. The Nidhanpur grant mentions that *Mahasamanta* Divakaraprabha was in charge of the *bhandagara*, royal store house. According to Tezpur rock inscription speaks of a *Mahasamanta* who was a *Senadhyaksa*, a general. According to Kamauli grant indicates that the office of ministers was hereditary and were held by Brahmanas. The Kalika Puran enjoins the appointment of wise and well educated Brahmanas as ministers. In the case of Vaidyadeva, according to the Kamauli grant, the office of the mantrin descended from father to son for no less than four generation.

In term of local administration in ancient Assam rajya, desa occasionally mandala was employed to denote the kingdom as a whole. It consisted of a well-organized administrative system. The Bhukti or province was the biggest one. According to Kamauli grant Pragjyotisa itself is called a bhukti. The next unit was the Visaya or district. However, a Visaya consist of a number of villages or gramas, for a grama is usually described in the inscription as situated in a particular Visaya. The Visaya was further named after its chief town. Some of the recorded Visayas in the inscriptions were Candrapuri, Kalanga, Puraji, Mandi, Vada, Dijjinna. The Kamauli grant refers to Kamrup mandala, which was in the Vadavisaya within the bhukti of Pragjyotisa. The grant of Vallabhadeva, stated to have been issued in the saka year 1107, refers to the territory Hapyaca as a mandala. According to Ganga copper plate of Anantavarman (8th century AD) refers to learned Brahmana who hailed from Srngatika Agrahara in the Kamrupa visaya. The mandala therefore appears to have included several visayas or districts. There were another smaller units known as Pura and Grama.

The district or visaya was administered by a Visayapati. The office of the visayapati consisted some officers. Those were Nyayakaranika, Vyavaharika, Simapradata, Kayastha, Nayaka, Kosthagarika, Uparika, Lekhaka and others. Regarding the source of revenue and fiscal administration the main source of revenue may be classified into six categories. These are regular taxes, occasional taxes, commercial taxes, fines, income from state properties, tribute from feudatories. Kara and uparikara are the regular taxes and utkhetana are the occasional taxes, exaction at time of the arrival of regular and irregular military and police forces.

The Tezpur inscription refers to the collection of taxes on merchandize carried in keeled boats. It further mentions levying of sulka (toll) and the imposition of fines. The Bargaon grant tells that the state derived considerable revenue from copper mines (Kamalakara). Some of the officials responsible for collecting revenue in ancient Assam. The chief officer of revenue department was Uparika. The duty of the Authketika was to collect utkhetana impost. The epigraphs mention two other officers who must have belong to the department of *Bhandagaradbhikerta* (a large part of government revenue collected in kind and so this title given to the officer in charge of the treasury is significant) and *Kosthagarika* (the word kostha occurs in the Guwahati grant of Indrapal which mean granary). The former was employed to administer the affairs of the district treasury and later was entrusted with the charge of the royal granary or store in the village, where *kara* in the kind of *dhanya* was collected. According to Nidhanpur grant another officer named *Simapradata*, whose duty appear to have been to mark the boundaries of holdings.

According to inscriptional sources the Adhikarana had a well-organized record department with scribes and clerks, who looked down documents and preserved the archives. According to Kamauli grant, Kovida Gonandana is described as engage in the post of dharmadhyakara. In the term of military organization, the commander in chief was known as Senadhyaksa. Under the senadhyaksas other lower officers such as senapati, nayaka, ranaka etc. Besides these there were special officers in charge of elephants, horses and the navy. The Subhankarapataka and the kamauli grants both proved that Brahmanas were experts in warfare.

Conclusion:

The inscription of ancient Assam not only determining the chronology of the kings but also records their gifts of land, their accomplishments and achievements in terms of central administrative machinery and economic administrative structure of the ancient society.

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