

The legacy of Assam

Sanjeewani Widyarathne¹

Abstract

Northeastern India is one of the most ethnically diverse regions of the world. The region shares its border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Assam is one of the eight states in the Northeast Region of India and serves as the gateway to the rest of the seven sister and one brother states (Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Sikkim). Assam comprises three main geographical areas: The Brahmaputra Valley, the Barak and the Karbi Plateau.

The historical account of Assam begins with the establishment of Pushyavarman's Varman dynasty in the 4th century in the Kamarupa Kingdom which marks the beginning of Ancient Assam. The Kingdom reached its traditional extent from the Karatoya in the west to Sadiya in the east. This and the two succeeding dynasties drew their lineage from the mythical Narakasura. The Kingdom reached its zenith under Bhaskara Varman in the 7th century. Bhaskaravarman died without leaving behind an issue and the control of the country. The fall of the kingdoms and rise of individual kingdoms in the 12th century marked the end of the Kamarupa Kingdom and the period of Ancient Assam. In the middle of the 13th century, Sandhya, a king of Kamarupa moved his capital to Kamatapur.

The last of the Kamata kings, the Khens, were removed by Alauddin Hussain Shah in 1498. But Hussein Shah and subsequent rulers could not consolidate their rule in the Kamata Kingdom, mainly due to the revolt by the Bhuyan chieftains, a relic of the Kamarupa administration and other local groups. Soon after, in the beginning of the 16th century Vishwa Singha of the Koch tribe established the Koch Dynasty in the Kamata Kingdom. In the eastern part of the erstwhile Kamarupa Kingdom, the Kachari and the Chutiya Kingdoms arose, with some Bhuyan chiefs controlling the region just west of the Chutiya Kingdom. The founder of the Chutiya Kingdom Birpal formed his first capital in Swarnagiri in 1187. In the tract between the Kachari and the Chutiya Kingdoms, a Shan group led by Sukaphaa, established the Ahom Kingdom.

¹ sanjeewaniuw@yahoo.com