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Nature and Extent of the Aryanisation of North East India

Sahab Uddin Ahmed

Associate Professor, Dept. of History, Karimganj college, Dist-
Karimganj, Assam

Abstract

The ancient names of Assam were Kamrupa and Pragjyotisa, which had been inhabited by the Kirata or Mongoloid people before the Aryan culture could spread its influence over the North Eastern part of India. Before the advent of the Aryan civilization, the Austric-Mongolian and Dravidian culture was the prevalent culture of the people of this area. According to some scholar, the Aryans advent in North East India was occurrence of the pre-Buddhist period. The period of the Brahmins was followed by the Buddhist period, so far as the cultural history of India is concerned. In comparatively, ancient inscriptions of Assam, we find that, the high caste Aryans like Brahmans, Shatriyas and Kalitas entered into Assam and began to settle here even during the Pre-Christian era.

The mention of Kamrupa and Devoka in the Allahabad pillar inscription of the Gupta king Samudragupta has an important bearing on the Aryanisation of North East India. In the domain of political system, it is all probable that the ancient Assam populated by the non-Khmer group of the Austric and the Tibeto-Burman people was in tribal state of society. Narakasura and Bhagadutta, the legendary kings of Assam were probably the first monarchical rulers and they were in all probability the Aryanised or Hunduised Mongoloid persons. In other words, the tribal political system of Assam was changed into monarchical system by the influence of the Aryan culture.

The ancient names of Assam were Kamrupa and Pragjyotisa, which had been inhabited by the Kirata or Mongoloid people before the

Aryan culture could spread its influence over the North Eastern part of India. Before the advent of the Aryan civilization, the Austric-

Mongolian and Dravidian culture was the prevalent culture of the people of this area. When and how the Aryans entered North-East India and spread their culture is uncertain. However, we find, there are references in the Vedic and later Vedic literature. The gradual advance of the Aryans to the North-East India is described in these works, the Sathapata Brahmana for instance, records the progress of the Aryans up to the Sadanira, identified with the Karatoya, and to the east of that river, the Karatoya as to Dr. P.C Choudhury was the ancient boundary of Pragjyotisa in the west and the source perhaps points to the spread of the Aryan culture to the land before the Buddhistic period. The Aitareya Brahmana gives further indication of the spread of that culture to Kamrupa. The Gopatha Brahmana records a tradition of the origin of the name of Kamrupa indicating an early contact of the Aryan and non-Aryan elements. Moreover, the internal evidences of the Vedic literature itself not only throws light on the question of Aryanisation of Eastern India at an early period, but also gives an indication of the composition of certain portions of the Vedic texts by the Risis from said region. However, it is an undenyng fact that, the Aryan- migration in to the North East India was held during a comparatively earlier period of History.

According to some scholar, the Aryans advent in North East India was occurrence of the pre-Buddhist period. The antiquity of the Aryanised name Kamrupa that finds mention in the Gopatha Brahmana and that of Pragjyotisa, which occurs in the Sankayana Grahya Samgraha and the Ramayana points to the early migration to the Aryans. Nevertheless, simply the mention or references in some ancient scriptures and legends do not hold good that this portion of India was Aryanised at the time of the composition of those books. Again, some scholars are in the opinion that the name Pragjyotisa in the Ramayana was a later interpolation.

The period of the Brahmins was followed by the Buddhist period, so far as the cultural history of India is concerned. The important mention of the names like Lauhitya in the Nikayas, Udayachala in the Samhitas and Pragjyotisa - Kamrupa in the Puranas, preserve the tradition of the introduction of Aryan culture into the land. In some contemporary literary works like Kautilya's - "Arthasastra", refers to the Aryanised place name like Suvarnakudya, Paralauhitya, etc. in connection with the economic products of Kamrupa also points to the conclusion that, during the Maurya-period, an Aryan wave entered into the land.

The details of the Aryanisation of North-East India are referred to in the “Mahabharata”. There is also a controversy about the interpolation of the name or Pragjyotisa in the Mahabharata. However, in the history of the Aryanisation of the North-East India, episode of Narakasura forms a significant symbol. Even though he might be purely legendary, it is told that, Naraka was an adoption of Janaka, the Aryan King of Vedeha. He had to leave his ancestral house and came to Pragjyotisa with an Aryan culture.

Just before and after the beginning of the Christian era, we have some literary evidences regarding Aryan’s advent in Assam. The Brithat Samhitas reference to Pragjyotisa and Lauhitya on the geography of the Parasara-Tantra of the 1st century A.D had an important bearing of the entry of the Aryans.

The Puranas definitely point to the settlement of the Aryans at least into the Brahmaputra Valley. The reference may be made here of the Markendeo, Skando and the Vayupuranas. The Markandeya Purana (57-

58) mentions Pragjyotisa along with Udayacala, Lauhita and Kamrupa as countries in the East. The Skando Purana refers to the prevalence of the Sakti faith in Kamrupa. The Vayu Purana (45)

includes Pragjyotisa and Lauhitya along with others among countries in the east.

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The “Accounts of Hieua Tsang” and the Nidhanpur inscription of the Varma king Bhaskaravarman definitely points to the settlement of the Aryans in ancient Assam of Kamrupa. According to Nidhanpur inscriptions, the king donated or granted land to the Brahmans in which more than two hundred groups were present. This is an indicator to the Proof that before the 6th century AD, the Vedic Brahmanas were the dwellers in the region surrounding Nidhanpur in the Chandrapuri visaya.

As has generally happened all over non-Aryan India that the acceptance of the composite religion and culture of the Gangetic India and its way of life by the ruling classes brought an easy and inevitable merger of the entire non-Aryan Tribe or people within the ever expanding Brahminical Hindu world which

had the Aryan Language “Sanskrit” as its vehicle.

In the process of Sanskritisation, the place name in non-Aryan territories would normally be translated in Sanskrit or Sanskritised. Brahmaputra and Lauhitya, names of the Province are all likelihood approximation to Sanskrit of Pre-Aryan names.

In fact, when the Aryan entered into Assam, the modern form of Hinduism had developed with elements from the indigenous belief and highly philosophical Vedic faiths. In Assam, before the advent of the Aryan religion, the worshipping of “Mother Goddess” and the Kirata Mahadeva was in vogue. The Aryan culture with its belief in “Trinity” and the idea of “Mother Goddess” could easily make its headway in the life of the people of Kamrupa.

In the domain of political system, it is all probable that the ancient Assam populated by the non-Khmer group of the Austric and the Tibeto- Burman people was in tribal state of society. Narakasura and Bhagadutta, the legendary kings of Assam were probably the first monarchical rulers and they were in all probability the Aryanised or Hunduised Mongoloid persons. In other words, the tribal political system of Assam was changed into monarchical system by the influence of the Aryan culture.

Over and above, the character of the script and language of the inscription of ancient Kamrupa clearly prove that, the Aryan language Sanskrit make its place most prominent due to explanation of Aryan culture in over this “Land of blue hills and red rivers”.

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