

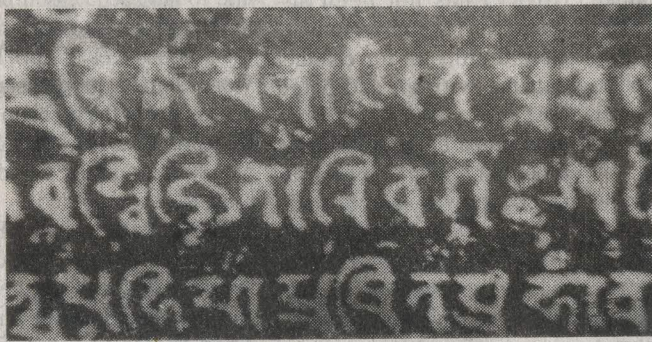
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CITY

Ancient Assamese script specimens found in Myanmar



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GUWAHATI, May 9: Specimens of ancient Assamese scripts have been found in the Arakan/Rakhine State of Myanmar, which establishes the fact that the Assamese script used to have its sway spread over a vast area of South and South East Asia in a historical period. The period has been assigned by the scholars to thousands of years before the birth of Christ.

City-based surgeon Dr Satyakam Phukan, a keen researcher in the historically dispersed Assamese people, Assamese language and script, said, "From the point of view of the quality of the preserved inscriptions in their respective tem-

poral situations, the inscriptions written in Assamese script found in Arakan/Rakhine State of Myanmar are indeed some of the best specimens of inscriptions in ancient Assamese script."

Dr Phukan, after studying the photographs of the inscriptions written in Assamese scripts in the Arakan State and consulting the Arakanese and European scholars' works on these inscriptions, maintained that these inscriptions belong to two ancient civilisations that sprang up in the area of the Arakan State and centred around two sites – Dhanyabady and Wethali (pronounced as Wedali or Waidali in Arakanese and Burmese languages).

The civilisation of the Dhanyabady

era predates that of the Wethali era. Considerable differences exist between the Arakanese/Rakhine and the foreign scholars on the period of these pre-Rakhine (Arakanese) or pre-Bamah (Burmese) civilisations. The British scholars estimate the beginning of the Dhanyabady era to be in 2666 BC and that of the Wethali era to be in 788 AD, while the Rakhine scholars claim the ages to be 3287 BC and 364 AD respectively.

Arakanese researcher U Shwe Zan in his book *The Golden Mrauk U: An Ancient Capital of Rakhine* mentioned (page 149) of an Assamese adventurer 'Kammaraja' who hailed from Kamrup, to set the second kingdom of Dhanyabady.

Significantly, the ancient civilisa-

tions of the mainland Burma/Myanmar were also supposedly started by adventurers from India and the name Kammaraja/Kamaraja is found mentioned in several of the Burmese chronicles. The rulers of these civilisations were invariably followers of the Sanatan (Hindu) religion, while those of their middle and later parts were followers of Buddhism, said Dr Phukan.

Though the scripts found to be in use in the Dhanyabady and Wethali civilisations are all specimens of the Assamese script, scholars are of the view that the languages written with this script are mostly Pali and Sanskrit.

All the scholars who studied the scripts, however, simply concluded

that this script is the specimen of the northern variety of the Brahmi script.

However, specimens of some of the inscriptions on stone, copper plates and coins are some of the perfect and the best specimens of the Assamese script discernible even by laymen, claimed Dr Phukan.

Some of the observations made by scholars like Pamela Gutman, who did her thesis on the civilisations of Arakan/Rakhine State and another scholar named Johnstone in this regard are relevant. Pamela Gutman has referred to Assamese archaeologist Dr Pratap Chandra Choudhury's book *Civilisation of the People of Assam* in one place of her thesis.

Great Assamese historian Kanak Lal Barooah conclusively established the incursions of the Kamrup kings in mainland India beyond the Karatoya river on the west. He also postulated the possibilities of similar eastward advances made by the Kamrup kings.

The presence of Assamese script in the inscriptions chiselled thousands of years before Christ, in the Arakan/Rakhine State may prove the veracity of Barooah's postulations, said Dr Phukan, laying stress on the need to undertake epigraphical study on these inscriptions.