



**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS**

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SHORT ABSTRACT

The present thesis examines how the idea of the ancient Kamarupa emerged as a complex cultural and historic entity in the 19th and early 20th centuries. A large part of the colonial projection of 'discovery' of the ancient Kamarupa, especially its political lineage was a result of chance findings. The thesis focuses on the agency of Assamese and Bengali scholars in initiating a more systematic, organic and conscious retrieval and (re)interpretation of the great antiquity of Kamarupa situated within the historical and ideological imperatives of regional nation-building. The present thesis aims to trace the underpinnings that guided and shaped the idea of ancient Kamarupa in colonial Assam. A large part of the thesis revolves around the monuments and epigraphs that occupied a central place in the recovery of the antiquity of Kamarupa. But it also engages with diverse premodern forms of recording the past in Assam. In so doing, it delves into the scholars, especially Indian, who engaged with the pre-Ahom (modes of) history, institutions that formalized the search and study, and the ideas that drove these endeavours and institutions. The Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, or the KAS, played a key role, that is often overlooked, in collecting and disseminating manuscripts, inscriptions, coins, sculptures, and other artefacts and traditions that accrued from scientific explorations in the Valley at the turn of the 20th century. Before the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) made headway into the region, the KAS explored much of the Brahmaputra Valley, and its findings often adorned its museum. The ASI, while

establishing this search and recovery of archaeological relics from Assam on a more systematic footing, was also seen to closely collaborate with the KAS, unlike other parts of Eastern India. The outcome of these explorations and excavations was the revealing of a vast and rich cultural heritage of considerable antiquity. This necessitated the formal beginning of the region's first museum. The indefatigable effort of the workers of the KAS brought into being the Provincial Museum of Assam in 1940. The current thesis demonstrates the agency of local intelligentsia in bringing about the practice of archaeology and museums to the colonial province. It further explored their travails and methods in this collecting enterprise. The early initiatives in Assam by British colonial military officials induced the recovery (what the colonial scholars termed 'discovery') of the monuments across the valley. But at that point, it was not in the manner of a systematic and scientific exploration but more in the nature of sporadic chance findings. A more systematic and scientific search and further refinement of knowledge of the recovered antiquities was pursued meticulously by Assamese intelligentsia under the institutional aegis of the KAS.

