

Swadesh Adhyayan

A Text Book for Higher Secondary First Year



Assam Higher Secondary Education Council

Bamunimaidam, Guwahati-21

Swadesh Adhyayan : A Text Book for study of the history and geography of the state of Assam for Higher Secondary First Year of Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (***Effective from 2018-2019 academic session***)

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A Few Words From The Desk of The Chairman

Adoration towards its own history is the life-blood of any breathing community. One which is unaware of its history, in the course of constructing the present, has to relinquish its uniqueness and hence its future has to be rootless. Even since the beginning of the 13th century tremendous diligence and several formed the initial stage of moulding a mighty Assamese community– one far from being dominated, was instead appreciated by the robust Mughal troupe before they left untriumphant. Needless to say that the community had been entirely self-dependent as nothing besides salt was to be imported. Even that dearth too was tuned by procuring alkali.

By nature history is cruel. It scarcely pardons anyone. On the knees of baseless religious fundamentalism there came the insurrection while the vanity of supercilious personality brought home almost a familicidal incursion. As such, the Mowamoriya Revolt and the Burmese Invasion paved the way for the such, the Mowamoriya Revolt and the Burmese Invasion paved the way for the British. The English rule of one hundred and eleven years (including ten years of tributary period) in Assam had almost pushed the community into the brink of devastation. On the other hand, under the post-independent 71 year homerule by the sentimentally overwhelmed Assamese, the community got rather fully dependent on others.

It is undeniable that along with historical, geographical knowledge too is essential. One must have the knowledge of geography to relish and cherish the cultural gamut created by the geographical location, by the affluent stockpile of nature, by the climate including its birds and animals and by the enormous potential of the rivers and rivulets, all enriched by the fragrance of the fertile soil, natural beauty and by the congregation of numerous tribes and classes. If taken into account in the manner one does with Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the upliftment of the puny lanes in Assam seems untenable, at least whatever has been perceived presently.

Having completed the meticulous deliberation on all such issues with the intellectuals of both the disciplines, an effort has been taken, of course in compliance with everybody's opinion, to prepare the study of the subject called "Swadesh Adhyayan". Two remarkable higher education institutions of Assam, namely Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University, have already granted permission to make this subject one of Honours. We sincerely hope that the new generation of the state will attain the erudition over the history and geography of Assam, thus contributing to the overall development of the state.



Dr. Dayananda Borgohain
Chairman

Dated : 20th June, 2018

Assam Higher Secondary Education Council

Introduction

Education is undoubtedly the primary force behind keeping the development of our society on. It is a pertinent obligation on the part of the Assam Higher Secondary Council to revise and renew the syllabus from time to time. Accordingly, the Council has, combining Geography and History together, included a new subject called “Swadesh Adhyayan” in H.S. syllabus so that the newer generation of Assam gets to know about Swadesh, i.e. one’s own country. The students to be admitted into H. S. 1st year (Eleventh Standard) in the Academic Session 2018-19 will be able to study the subject. Subsequently the same can be studied by the students of H. S. 2nd year in 2019-20 session.

The sincere willingness as well as motivation from the Chairman of the Council and ceaseless toil of Anurupa Choudhury, Deputy Secretary (Academic) combined with the cooperation of the members of the Editorial Board played their respective parts to prepare the mentioned syllabus. I offer my gratitude to all concerned.

While preparing the syllabus of H. S. 1st year Swadesh Adhyayan, each and every area of Assamese History and Geography has not been taken into account. Those will be included in the syllabus of the twelfth standard.

Should the well-wishers find any subject-related lapse or mistake, those are to be directly communicated to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary (Academic) so as to rectify such lacunas in the next edition.



(Kamal Gogoi)
Secretary

Dated : 20th June, 2018

Assam Higher Secondary Education Council

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC** and to secure to all its citizens :

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity, and to promote among them all;

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

Syllabus

FIRST PART : GEOGRAPHY

		Marks	Class
CHAPTER ONE	ASSAM : LOCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE, PHYSIOGRAPHIC DIVISIONS, CLIMATE, SOIL	12	18
CHAPTER TWO	POPULATION OF ASSAM AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS	08	12
CHAPTER THREE	RESOURCE	11	17
CHAPTER FOUR	ECONOMIC BASE OF ASSAM	12	18

SECOND PART : HISTORY

		Marks	Class
CHAPTER FIVE	STATE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT	12	18
CHAPTER SIX	SOCIETY AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS	10	15
CHAPTER SEVEN	INTELLECTUAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS HERITAGE	10	15
CHAPTER EIGHT	MATERIAL HERITAGE	11	17
Total		86	130
CHAPTER NINE	FIELD STUDY	14	

Total Marks : 100

Marks distribution

First Part : Geography – 43

Second Part : History – 43

Filed Study : Total – 14 (10 + 04)

{

Filed Study : 10
Viva : 04
}

Contents

PART ONE : GEOGRAPHY

		Page No
CHAPTER ONE	: ASSAM : Locational Significance, Physiographic divisions, Climate, Soil	11
CHAPTER TWO	: Population of Assam and its Characteristics	29
CHAPTER THREE	: Resource	39
CHAPTER FOUR	: Economic base of Assam – Agriculture, Industries	51

PART TWO : HISTORY

CHAPTER FIVE	: State and its Development – Beginning of State – Ancient Kingdom of Kamrupa – Formation of the Ahom Kingdom in the Medieval Period	77
CHAPTER SIX	: Society and Social Characteristics – Social Formation : Social System of Castes and Tribes – The Paik System of the Medieval Period and its Impact – Social Characteristics of Assam	101
CHAPTER SEVEN	: Intellectual, Cultural and Religious Heritage – Intellectual Heritage – Cultural Heritage – Religious Heritage – Religious Tradition- Tribal Traditions, Buddhist-Saiva-Sakta Traditions, Vedic Traditions, Bhakti Movement, Islamic and Christian Traditions	116
CHAPTER EIGHT	: Material Heritage – Historical Monuments of the Ancient and Medieval Period	136
CHAPTER NINE	: Field Study – Need of Field study and its scope – Survey Schedule	162

PART ONE

GEOGRAPHY

CHAPTER ONE

ASSAM : Locational Significance, Physiographic divisions, Climate, Soil

IMPORTANT POINTS

- Total geographical area : 78,423 km²
- It covers 2.93 per cent of the total geographical area of India
- Total land area of North East India : 2,55,083 km² (Seven States)
- North East India covers of the total land area of India : 7.7 per cent
- Total number of districts (as on 30th June/2018) : 33 districts of which 3 Hill districts
- Major physiographic divisions : 3
 1. The plateau region
 2. The folded mountain
 3. The plains
 - (a) The Brahmaputra plain
 - (b) The Barak plain

Locational Significance :

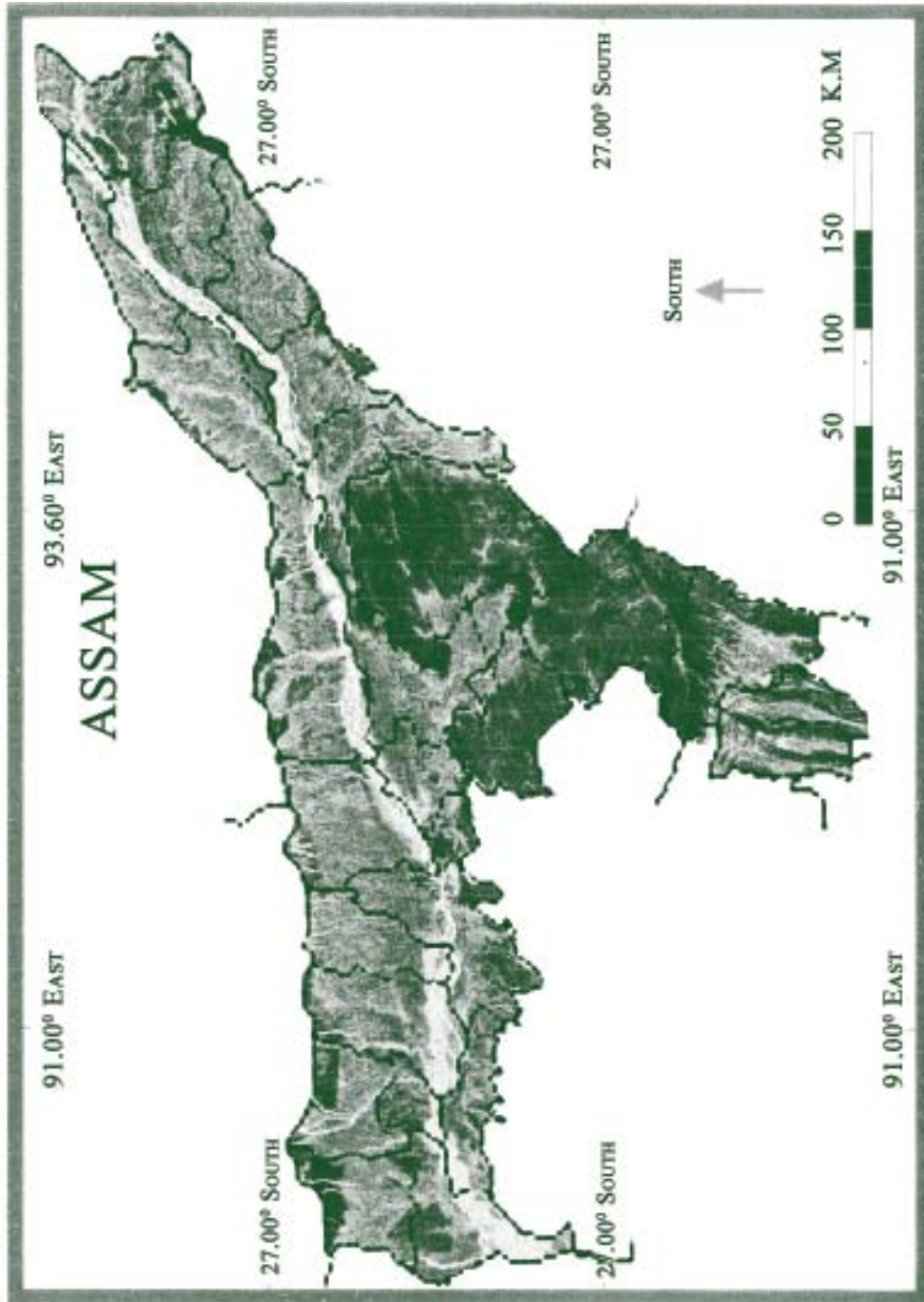
Contemporary Assam and so called Assam of about fifty years ago, are not the same and has a marked difference so far geographical area and the political aspects are concerned. Untill seventyth decade of 20th century, all the seven states (North-East States or Uttar Purbanchal) formed a signle entity. Manipur and Tripura, although were not politically united with erstwhile Assam but they were economically, socially and culturally linked with the region and are considered as an integral parts of Assam. Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram were curved out of Assam according separate political states under the democratic administrative system of the Republic of India.

The whole of UttrraPurbanchal (Noroth East India) is surrounded almost from all sides by foreign countries. The foreign nations sharing common boundaries with the region are Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The whole of the region is connected with the rest part of India by a narrow corridoor of built up plain known as the 'Bengal Duars' having an average width of about 27 kilometer.

The total geographical area of erstwhile Assam was 2,55,083 square kilometer and it accounts for about 7.7 per

cent of the total Indian Union. But the Asam as on today has a total land area of 78,823 km² recording only 2.99 per cent of the total geographical area of India.

The contemporary Assam shares common boundary with two foreign nations. They are Bhutan and Bangladesh. On the other hand, Indian states sharing common boundaries with Assam are Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and the West Bengal. Hence, present Assam includes the 30 districts of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley and the 3 hilly districts of residual Assam. the 'Bengal Duars', of course has connected Assam with the mainland of India. Any Indian legally entering into the north eastern states by land route has no other way but to cross through Assam. Assam under the sovereign jurisdiction of India is bounded in the north by Bhutan and the Arunachal Pradesh, eastern side is bordered by Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur to its south lies Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya state; and the western side is bounded by Bangladesh and the West Bengal. Geometric location (calculated on the basis of latitude and longitudinal extention) of entire Assam is extended between 24°3' North to 27°58' North Parallels and from 89°5' East meridian in the west to 96°1' North longitude in the East. (Map 1.1)



(Map 1.1) Land-sat imagery, Assam

Geological, physiographical and physical characteristics of Assam reveal that the whole state is covered with geophysical features like fertile plain, marshy land swamps and wetlands, scattered hillock and hills, folded mountains and old crystalline massifs of Gondwanaland. More specially the Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, southern margin of Morigaon district, and the highlands features of Kamrup (Metro) district have been considered as the outlying segments of Chhottanagpur plateau. The rock characteristics of Shillong or Meghalaya plateau resembles with the hills and the hillocks of the lower part of the Brahmaputra valley. The Barail range located towards the east of the Cachar and the Hailakandi district are parts of Young folded mountain Patkai or Arakan Yoma which again in turn is an extensional part of the Himalayan mountain system. The valley region of Assam namely the Brahmaputra and the Barak are composed of the aggradational works of the master streams Brahmaputra and the Barak and their tributaries and sub-tributaries thereof. On the basis of geophysical structure the whole of Assam can be divided into the following three major physiographic divisions. (Map 1.2)

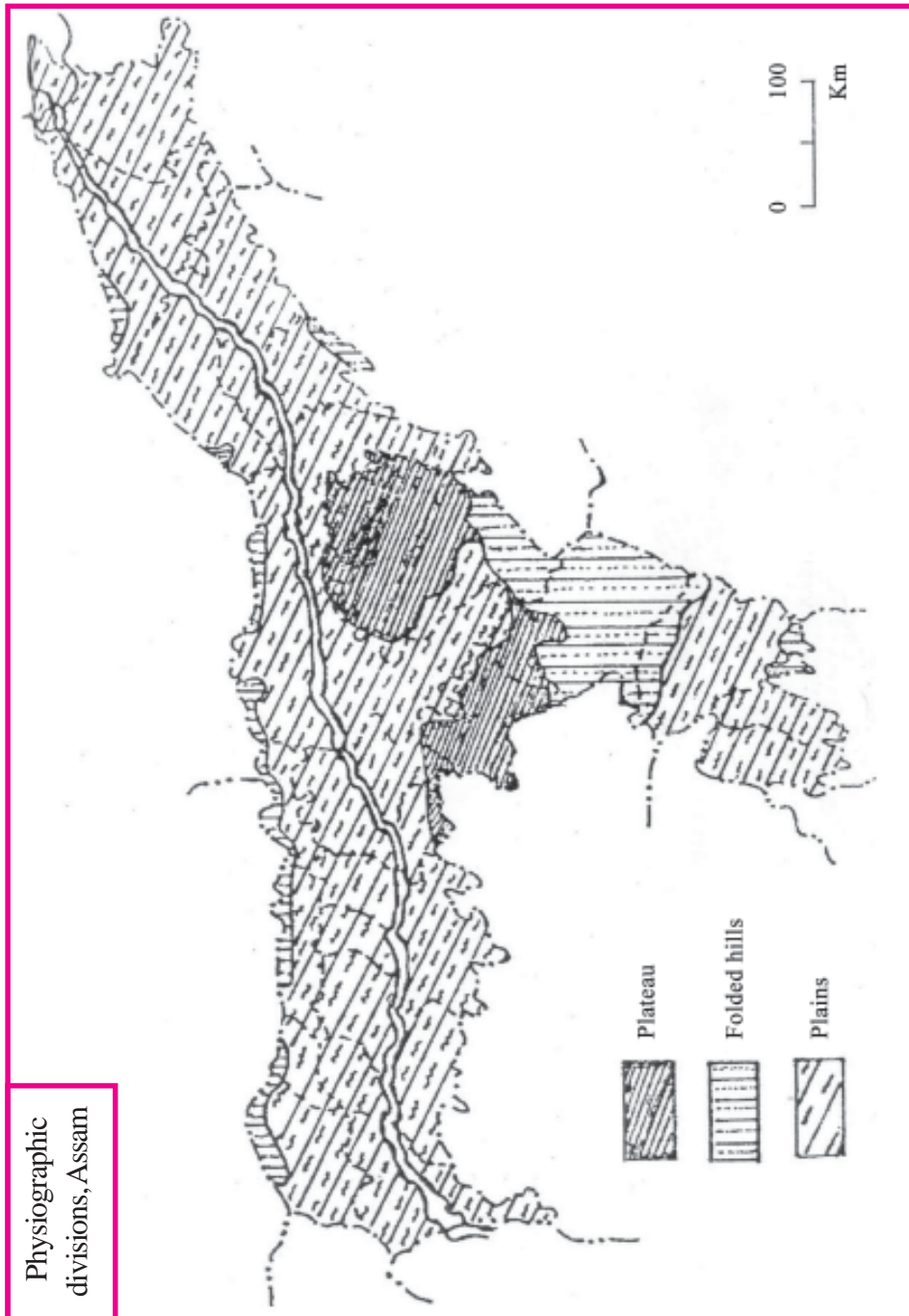
- 1) The plateau region
- 2) The folded mountain region
- 3) The plains

1) The plateau region : The plateau region of Assam is genetically a part of the Shillong or Meghalaya plateau. The Karbi plateau

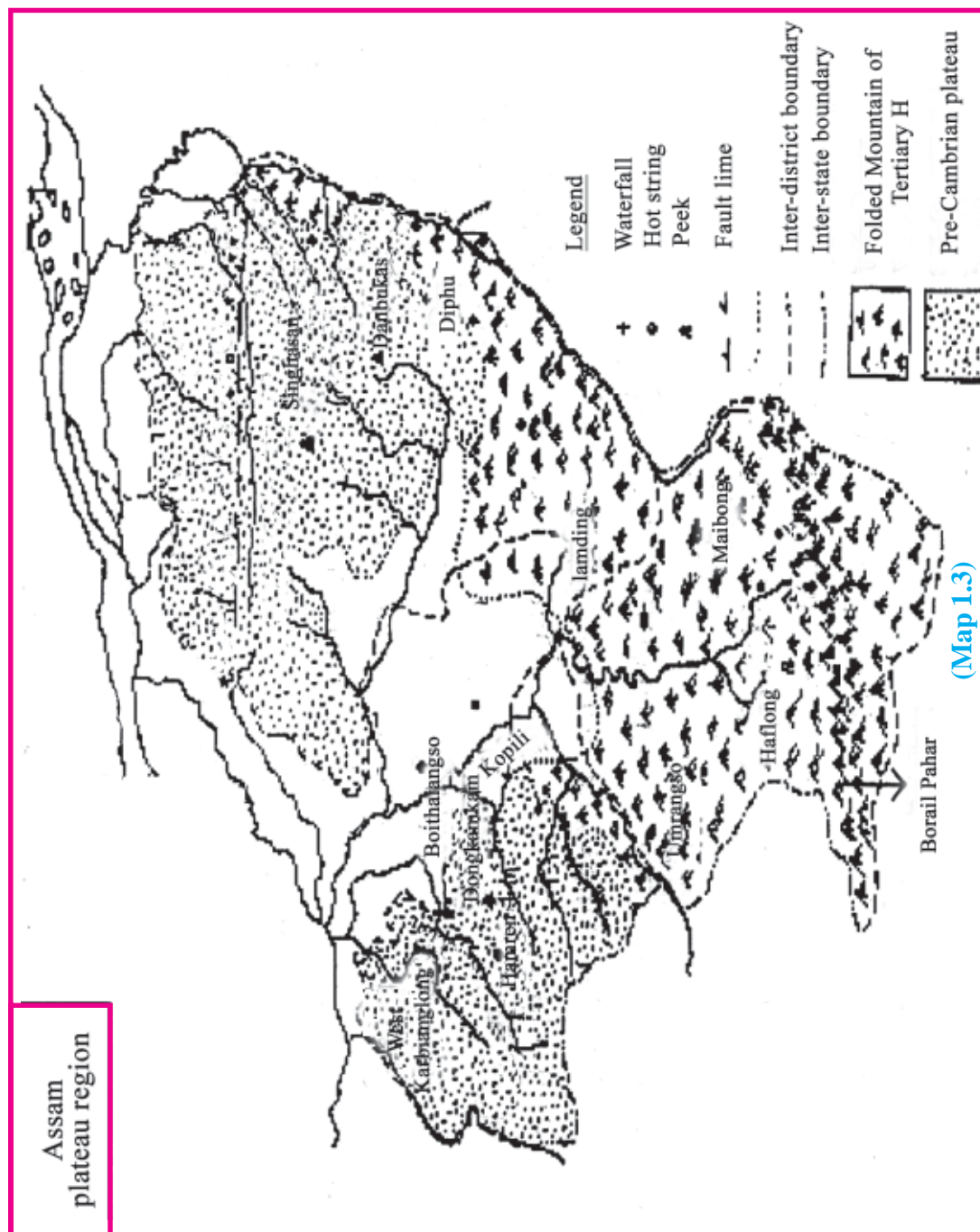
(Chenghei-Arnam) extends upto Kopili and Kakodonga, a sub-tributary to Dhansiri in the east and from the Brahmaputra in the north to the folded mountains of Cachar in the south. The plateau region of Assam covers an area of 74,000 km². The Kopili-Dabaka platform separates the Karbi-Rengma plateau from the Barail Range of Dima-Hasao. On the guava fruit-like physiographic expression of the plateau there lies the Rengma hills in the central part. Simhasion (1359 meters) and the Danbukso (1363 metre) are two important high peaks of Karbi-Rengma plateau. (Map 1.3)

Western part beyond Kopili basin the rest segment of Karbi plateau is known as the Hamren plateau and lies within the west Karbi Anglong district. It covers an area of about 3000 km². Average altitude of the Hamren plateau from the mean sea level (MSL) is around 500 meter with its highest peak Umlapar (1220 meter)

Almost all the drainages originated from the Karbi-Rengma plateau are centrifugal or radial in pattern. Diphu (north flowing), Nambor and Kolioni (east flowing), subtributaries like Dilai, Longnit, Disobai, Patradisa etc. are south flowing, while Na Noi, Misa, Dikhow etc. are west flowing drainages. Due to the degradational processes of all these drainages since long past the topography of the plateau region has been subjected to intense change. The scattered peaks and the hills on the northern side of Meghalaya plateau from Morigaon district to



(Map 1.2) Physiographic divisions, Assam



Mancachar from geological perspective are parts and parcel of the Meghalaya plateau. The scattered hills and hillocks located in and around Guwahati like Panbari, Thakurkuchi, Amchang, Narakasur, Rani, Nilachal, Chakardoi, Zirang, Khargapahar, Dudhkonwar, Tukreswari etc. are in reality proved to be the innermost extension of the Meghalaya plateau.

2) The folded mountain region : The folded hilly region of Assam is confined to the Cachar district of Barak valley. Popularly known as the Barail Range the folded mountaineous region in reality is a part of the Patkai hills. Patkai is again a part of the great Himalayan Mountain system. Patkai Range in Myanmar is known by two different names. They are Arakan Yoma in the north and Regu Yoma to the south of Patkai-Barail knot. The Barail Range divides the Dima Hasao dikistrict of Assam into two parts.

About 30-40 million years ago i.e. during Eocene and Oligocene Geological period, the entire Barail Range was formed and the active normal cycle of erosion processes have dissected the hilly region to transform into agglomeration of features like deep valleys, gorge, steep slopes etc. Theipibang (1865 metres), Mahadev (1739 m) Kaukaha (1736 m), Jatinga etc. are some of the important peaks of the Barail Range. Lubha a tributary to Barak separates the Meghalaya plateau formed by the Gondwana series of rocks from the Barail Range formed by the stratified sedimentary rocks of Tertiary period.

3) The plain region : The plain region of Assam is the outcome of the aggradational process of the master streams, tributaries and the sub-tributaries some of which are rainfed, some are snowfed and some receive water from both the sources. The plain region of Assam can be subdivided into two regions. The Barail Range divides the Brahmaputra valley region from the Barak valley region. The Barak valley is also known as the Surama Valley.

(a) The Brahmaputra plain : The Brhmaputra plain is the largest among the plains of north east India. Extending from the Lohit plain near Sadiya in the east to the Sonkosh plain in the western margin of the state, the Brahmaputra plain covers a total length of about 720 km and width varies from 20-100 km and an average the plain is about 80 meter wide. The plain has an altitude of 174 meter from mean sea level (MSL) on average in Sadiya region, 58 meter in Guwahati, it records only 30 meter altitude on average near Bangladesh border 12 km west of the Dhubri town. The average gradient of the entire plain is only 13 cm per kilometer. From Sadiya to Dhansirimukh the Brahmaputra plain has a gradient of 17 cm/km, from Pobitora National Park near Guwahati to the Indo-Bangladesh boundary line the gradient is only 11 cm/km. The northern margin of the Brahmaputra plain is almost straight in stretch while the southern

margin is a curved one and to the west of Jakhalabandha there in lies several (14 numbers) hillocks and hills besides many wetlands scattered in the region.

The Brahmaputra plain is considered as one of the regions having the highest drainage frequency in the world. The plain is builtup largely by fluvial aggradation of a geological trough (*fore-deep* or *sag*). About 57 northern tributaries and 32 tributaries from the south carrying boulders, pebbles, cobbles, sand, silt and soil have formed the fertile plains. The charlands on either sides of the main channel and the riverine islands and the mid channel bars are major part of the plain. The land-sat-imagery reveals that there are at present about 540 riverine islands in the bed of the Brahmaputra. Some of these are above the highest flood level and some are annually denuded by flood. These areas are mostly congenial for Rabi crop cultivation.

In the northern part of the Brahmaputra valley specially on the foothill zone from Murkokcheleng (Jonai) to Sonkosh in the western margin there in lies a narrow fertile belt called the Bhabar Tarai Zone. The strip is composed of older alluvium called alluvial fans and is composed mainly of sands and pebbles. The strip is pervious throughout and the water generally percolates down the

surface. The drainages carrying down the materials are deposited here due to abrupt fall of the slope between the foothills and the plains.

The Bhabar-Tarai zone gradually merges with a relatively high and compact ground called the builtup zone on which the mighty King Naranarayana constructed the Gohain-Kamal Ali from Coach Behar to Narayanpur. The British called it the North Trunk Road. The National Highways and the railway tract from Srirampur to Murkongselek pass through this tract. The builtup zone merges towards the south with the Brahmaputra flood plain zone.

In the south bank such vast flood plains are limited in their area and confined to the immediate bank of Brahmaputra. From Bagori of Golaghat district eastward up to Dibrugarh the foothill plain zone like the northern bank foothill belt is congenial for cultivation of tea and paddy with bumper harvest. The foothill-belt of Nagaon, Morigaon, Kamrup (Metro), South Kamrup and Goalpara are very suitable for raising orange on commercial basis along with tea and paddy.

The Dihang, Dibang and Lohit culminate to form the Brahmaputra/Luit or Louhitya (The Burlungbuthur according to the Kiratas) at Parashuramkund near Sadiya.

(a) Dihang

(b) Dibang

(c) Lohit

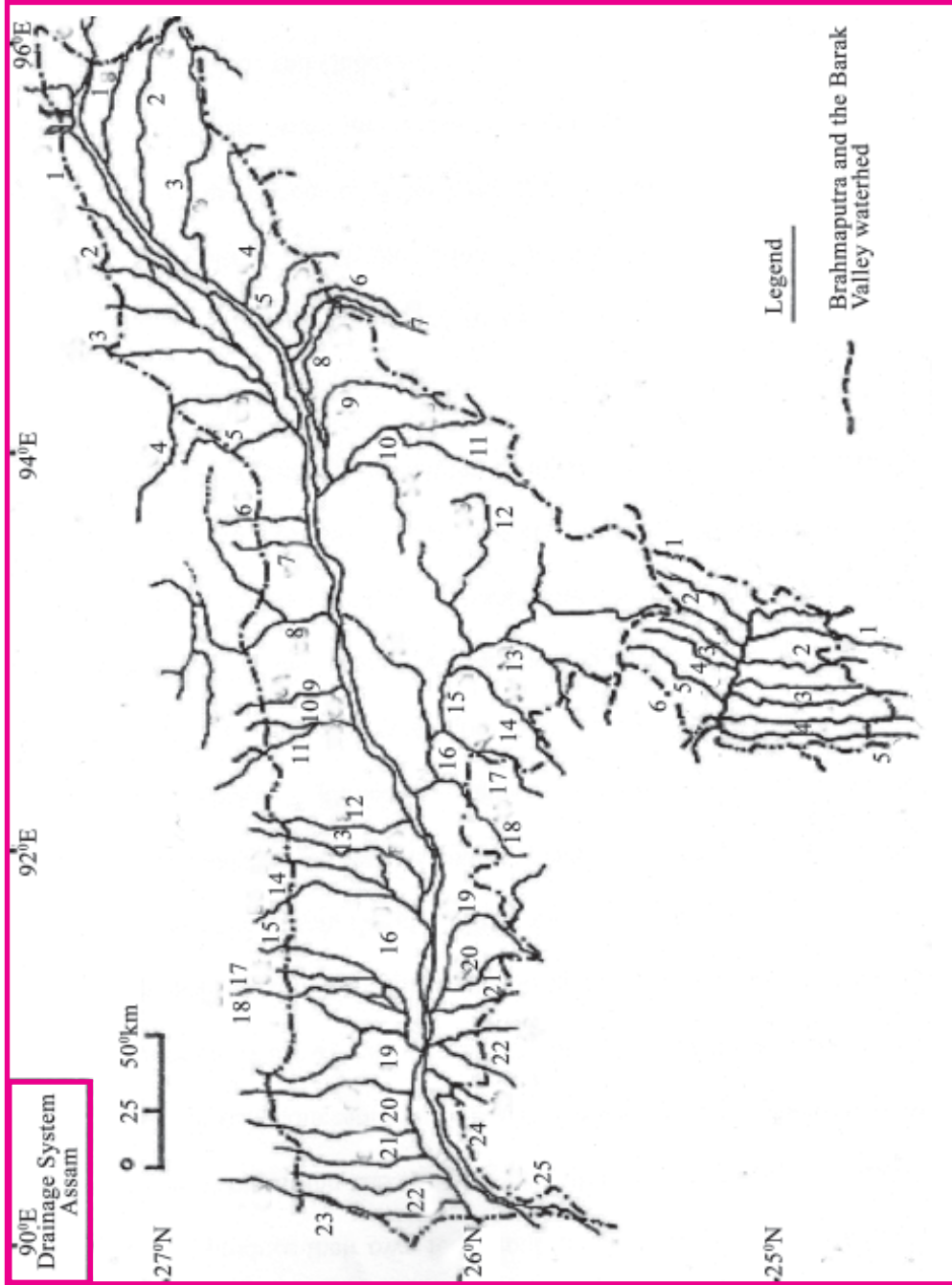
The northern major tributaries of Brahmaputra from east to west are –

- | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1) Gai | 9) Gabhoru | 17) Pahumara |
| 2) Jiadhal | 10) Pach Noi | 18) Beki-Manas-Ai |
| 3) Subansiri | 11) Jia Dhansiri | 19) Champawati |
| 4) Ranga Noi | 12) Bor Nadi | 20) Saralbhaonga |
| 5) Dikrong | 13) Puthimari | 21) Gadadhar |
| 6) Buroi | 14) Baralia | 22) Gangadhar |
| 7) Borganga | 15) Pagladia | 23) Sonkosh |
| 8) Jia Bharali | 16) Kaldia | |

The south bank major tributaries are –

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1) Dangori | 10) Dhansiri | 19) Kushi Kalbog |
| 2) Dibru | 11) Diung | 20) Boko |
| 3) Burhidihing | 12) Kolong | 21) Singra |
| 4) Disang | 13) Jamuna | 22) Dudhnoi |
| 5) Dikhow | 14) Kopili | 23) Krishnai |
| 6) Janji | 15) Daiyang/Diyung | 24) Jinari |
| 7) Teok | 16) Borapani | 25) Jinjiram |
| 8) Bhogdoi | 17) Kiling (Umium) | |
| 9) Kakadonga | 18) Digaru (Umtru) | |

(Map – 1.4)



(Map 1.4)

(b) The Barak plain : The Barak plain has been formed by the Barak and its tributaries through their aggradational activities. The horseshoe shaped basin lies within the Barail Range in the north, Manipur hills in the east, Lushai (Mizoram) hills in the south and gradually merges with the Sylhet plain of Bangladesh in the western margin. Barak plain covers an area of about 6962 km² with a gradient of 20 cm/km. the plain has a low altitude from mean sea level (MSL), it is recorded in Jiribum area in north eastern part as 75 metre, Silchar (73 meter) and only 51 meter is Karimganj in the south-western part of the basin.

Like the lower part of the Brahmaputra the Barak plain on its foothill region exhibits isolated low hillocks. Altitude of none of these hillocks is 50 meter above the MSL. These are composed of silt, sand, pebbles cobbles and boulders. Moreover the plain supports seven numbers of wetlands.

The Barak or Surama valley has been formed by the master stream Barak and its tributaries and sub-tributaries thereof. The major north-bank tributaries of Barak are—

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1) Jiri | 4) Dalu |
| 2) Lobok | 5) Jatinga |
| 3) Madhura | 6) Larang |

The major south-bank tributaries are –

- | | |
|---------------|-----------|
| 1) Sonai | 4) Singla |
| 2) Katakhal | 5) Longai |
| 3) Dhaleswari | |

The low hills within and in the periphural area of the Barak plain untill recent past were covered with dense forest. The Barail Wild-Life Sanctuary in the northern part, North Cachar Hills Reserved Forest; Upper Ziri Protected Forest, Barak Reserved Forest in the eastern part; and the Inner Line Reserved Forest, Sonai, Katakhal, Singla, Badshah tila and Longai Reserved Forest located in the southern part of the valley, the rocks of which are composed of deepsoils and coalescence of silt, sand, pebbles and cobbles with pervious character. Based on the rock characteristics and the climatic conditions Tropical Monsoon Forest has flourished luxuriously on each and every hills and hillocks in the valley.

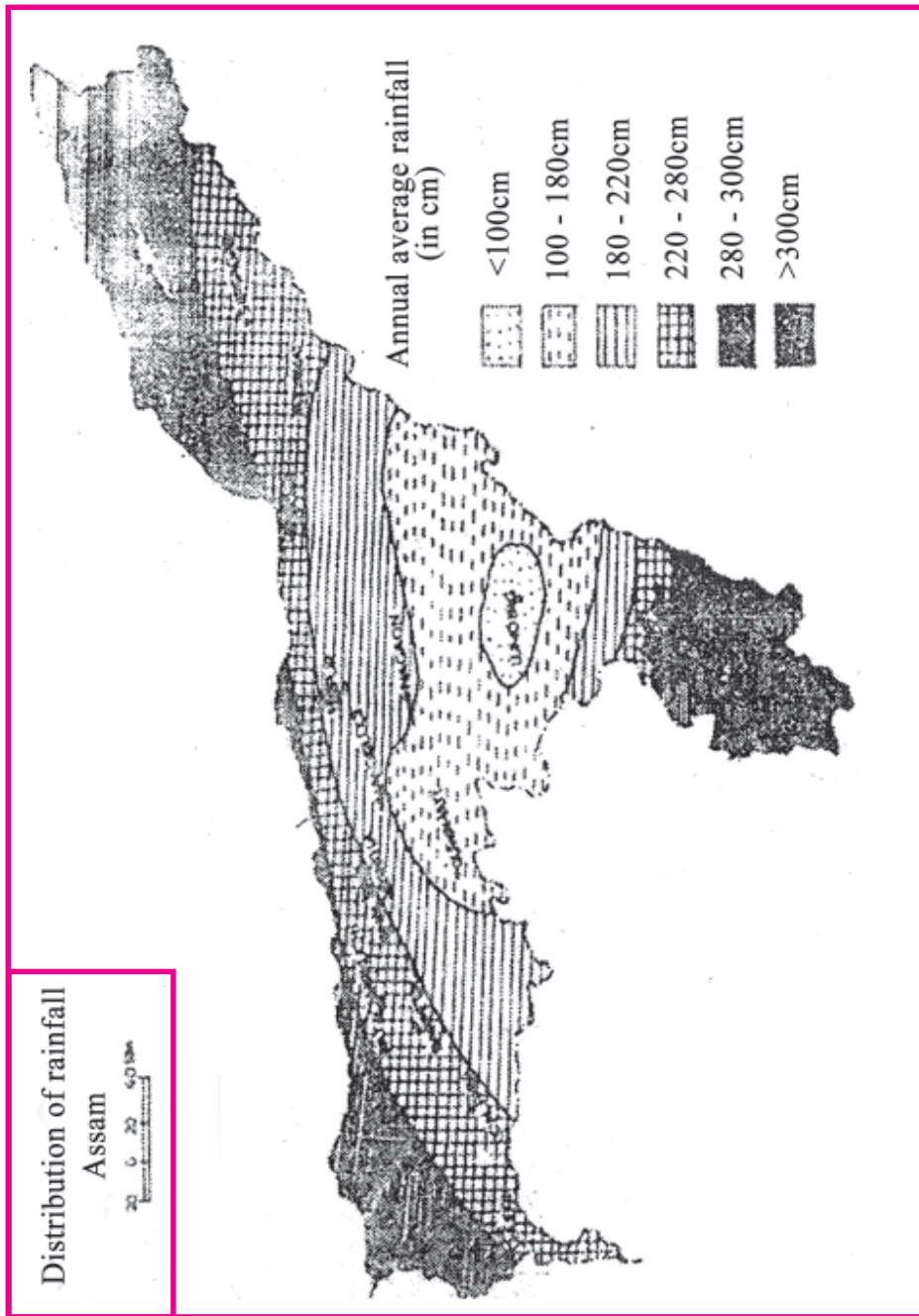
CLIMATE

Assam as a whole falls within the sub-Tropical Monsoon regime. Heavy downpour with high temperature during summer and low rainfall associated with low temperature is the special climatic characteristics of Assam. High humidity and low temperature determines the climate of Assam. During summer the mean atmospheric temperature is about 28° celsius and during winter, on average is recorded to be 13° celsius. Temperature and precipitation, of course, varies spatically according to the influence of geographical factors. In Assam, four climatic regimes are district – Pre-Monsoon, Monsoon, Retreating Monsoon and Winter.

The renowned climatologist Vladimir Koppen and Thornthwait both have suggested models for classification of climatic types of the entire world. As such, Assam enjoys Humid Mesothermal Gangetic type of climatic (Cwg). But the true model can only be applied with certain modifications. For example, instead of dry winter some parts of Assam experience rainfall amounting on average 13 cm during December and January and temperature also recorded below 10° celsius on average with spatial variations. Geographical factors influencing the climate of Assam mainly are – (a) Sub-tropical location, (b) Physiography and relief, (c) The alternating pressure condition over the north-west India, and the Bay of Bengal

and north-eastern part of India and their seasonal shifting nature, (d) The predominance of tropical maritime airman (south-west monsoon) that move over the state, (e) Local mountain and valley wind. Moreover, the eastern Jet stream, high level western disturbances and water vapour extracted from local sources and their influence on the peripheral area (vicinity) vast forests, local cyclonic development etc. are noteworthy.

In the first-half of April owing to the development of high temperature in the northern side of Assam (Central Asia) low pressure system begins to develop and so this attract the warm moisture bearing monsoon wind from the Bay of Bengal with high velocity locally known as the ‘Bordoichila’. Sometimes even the wind velocity exceeds more than 120 kilometer per hour and brings disastrous effect on the nature, man and animal life. It is called Tornado. In and around Rongali Bihu both the Bordoichila and Tornado ravages Assam as a whole and certain parts in particular. During summer monsoon season i.e. from mid-June to first-half of September high temperature associated with heavy rainfall predominates the weather. From the mid-September to November the climate of Assam is neither hot nor cold (temperature) and pleasant. Autumn (Retreating monsoon)



(Map 1.5)

is the season of flowering sewali and kohua (according to the romantic poets) and then the winter season followed by spring. After Magh Bihu i.e. from the last part of January to the first-half of March the weather is clear.

The lower reaches of the atmosphere over Assam still remain covered with fog with high visibility range. Then again spring comes after winter and thus the six seasons reflect the weather and climate of Assam.

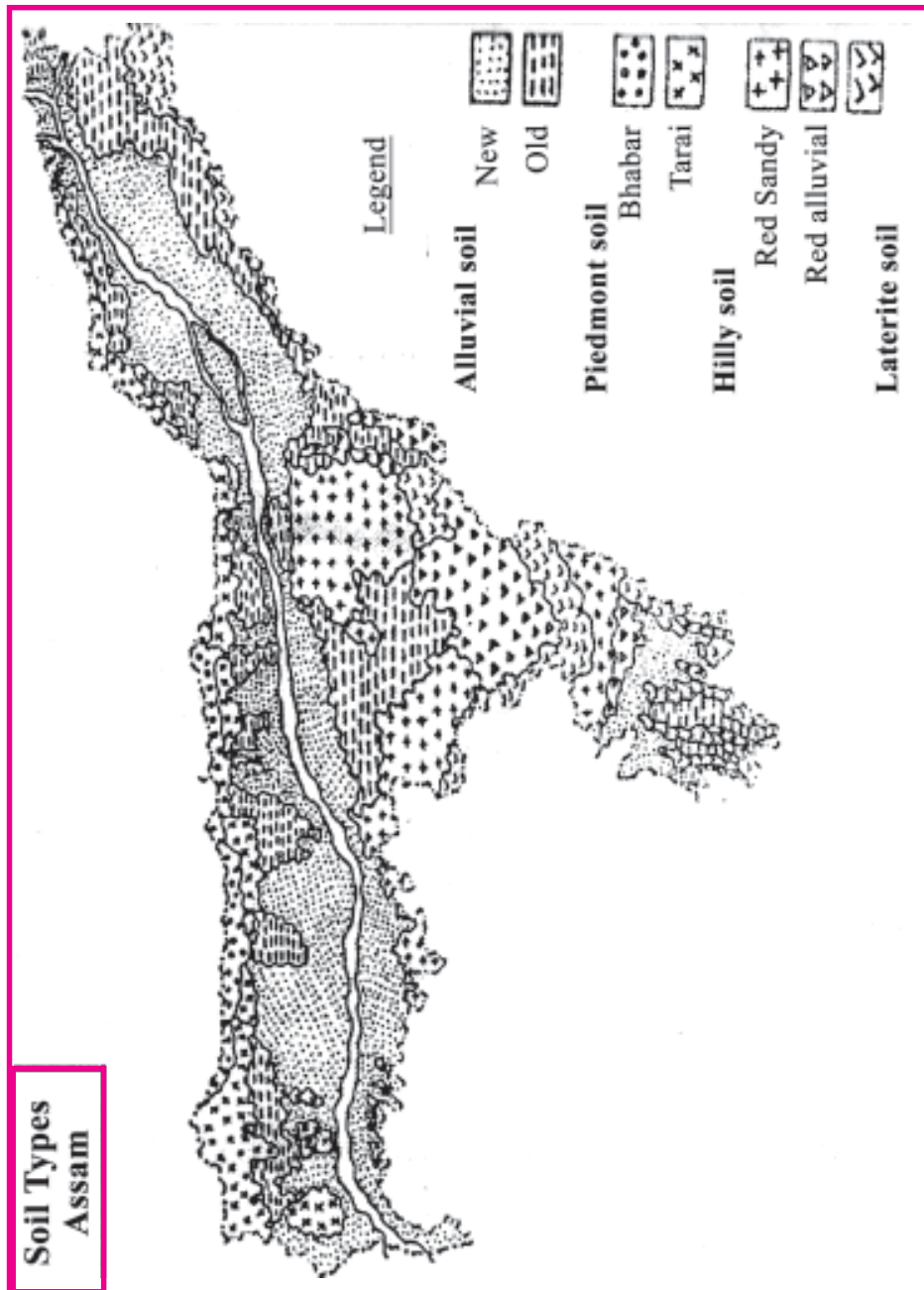
Soils of Assam

The thin outer layer of the earth is called soil. Soil is the ultimate product of the mechanical disintegration and chemical decomposition of rocks mixed with humus. Soil is the natural medium of plant growth and for sustenance of many organisms. Soil contains bacteria and micro-organisms and hence, is considered as organic entity. The general characteristics of the soil of Assam is its acidity. The soils of hilly areas are less acidic than the plain areas. The soils of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley are less acidic. The soils within the valley differs in character. Upper Brahmaputra valley region soils are more acidic than the soils of the western part of the valley. On the other hand, within the valley the soils of flood-plains are comparatively less acidic. In fact in some areas alkaline soils are also found. Soils of the three hill-districts of Assam contain more alkaline and less acidic.

On the basis of characteristics the soils of Assam may be grouped into the following categories—Alluvial soil, Red sandy soil, Red soil and laterite soil. In both the Brahmaputra and the Barak valley usually the alluvial soils are common in occurrence. After the flood

the materials carried by the drainages are deposited in the flood-prone areas and after the flood those are observed deposited in the form of levees with high humus content. Soils are naturally acidic and spread upto the flood-prone regions. In the upper part of the valleys high phosphorous content support tea plantation specially in the areas with older alluvial soils. In the foothill areas on the alluvial cones these older alluvial soils are common. On the other hand in the lower Brahmaputra valley region frequently denudated by flood and with deficiency in phosphorous content discourages tea cultivation. The new alluvial soils are found on either sides of the masterstreams in the middle and lower course. These are called levee.

The Hilly red soils or red loamy soils composed of silt, sand, grit, gravels, pebbles etc. are rich in humus, oxygen and acid content, but deficient in phosphate and potash. This soil is generally pervious and becomes sticky in presence of water but it develops cracks in absence of water. This type of soil in Assam contains organic matter and nitrogenous material. The redish colour of the soil is due to the oxidation of the iron



(Map 1.6)

content in the parent rocks. This type of soil is found in West Karbi Anglong, Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao and the foothill region of Upper Brahmaputra valley. In the eastern part of Nagaon, southern part of Morigaon and the foothill regions of Kamrup (M) south Kamrup, Goalpara, Dhubri district, red soils are common in occurrence.

The red loamy soils composed mainly of sand, pebbles, cobbles, gravels etc. are also found in the extreme northern part of the BTAD districts south of Bhutan and the southern margin of Arunachal Pradesh which

are naturally soft and sticky. The soils of this region is wet and covered with tall grasses.

The laterite soils extensively found in Assam except the above mentioned locations are very important so far the agricultural activities are concerned. This soil generally deficient in nitrogenous materials, phosphorous, acid and lime including iodine. The south eastern part of Nagaon, central part of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, Golaghat, Jorhat foot hills of Charaideo, and the Barak Valley foothill belt are bestowed with laterite soil.

EXERCISE

1. (a) What is the percentage of area occupied by Assam of the total area of India?
- (b) Name the two foreign countries sharing common boundaries with Assam.
- (c) Name the Indian states sharing common boundaries with Assam.
- (d) What is the total area of plateau region in Assam?
- (e) Name the plain separating the Karbi-Rengma plateau from Barail range.
- (f) Name the highest peak of Assam located on Rengma Hills.
- (g) By which name the part of Patkai range in southern part of Myanmar is known?
- (h) The foot-hill belt in the northern part of the Brahmaputra valley extending from Jonai in the east to Sonkosh in the west is known by which name?
- (i) Borgonga is a subtributary to which tributary?
- (j) Name the sub-stream of Brahmaputra flowing through the northern side of Majuli.
- (k) What is the average gradient of the Barak plain.

2. In which two geological periods the Barail Hills System was formed?
3. Which two rock systems forming two different landforms have been separated by the Luva drainage?
4. The Bhabar-Tarai belt in Assam is located in between which two places?
5. The foot-hill plain in the southern part of the Brahmaputra is located between which two places?
6. Draw a sketch-map of Assam and insert there in the major physiographic regions.
7. Vladimir Koppen has included the climate of Assam under which type?
8. The wind with very high velocity that ravages Assam in and around Rongali Bihu is known by which common name?
9. The velocity of monsoon wind in Assam is dependent on—
 - (a) Intensity of pressure
 - (b) Physiography
 - (c) Relief
 - (d) All of the above
10. The Tropic of Cancer passes through which side of Assam?
 - (a) Northern side
 - (b) Southern side
 - (c) Through the middle
 - (d) Extreme east
11. What is the temperature in Assam on average during summer and winter?
12. What is the average rainfall in Assam during summer and winter?
13. Mention the factors on which the climate of Assam depends.
14. In which parts of Assam soils composed of sand, silt, cobbles, pebbles gravels etc. are found?

15. In which soil extensively found in Asam there is deficiency in lime, iodine, potash, phosphorous?
16. What is Humus?
17. Which soil of Assam is very congenial for the plantations?
18. In which two major floodplains of Assam levee is found?
19. What are the major soil types of Assam?



CHAPTER TWO

POPULATION OF ASSAM AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

IMPORTANT POINTS

- Total population as per 2011 census : 3,12,05,576
(accounts for 2.59 per cent of the total population of India)
- Density of population : 398 per km²
- Rural population : 86 per cent
- Urban population : 14 per cent
- Sex composition (per 1000 male) : 958 female
- Literacy rate : 72.18 percent
- Male : 77.84 percent
- Female : 66.27 percent
- Urban : 88.47 percent
- Rural : 69.34 per cent
- Number of towns : 214
- Number of village : 26395
- Total number of districts : 33

The population of a region, its characteristics and pattern of distribution determines mostly the economic and level of social development of the area. Therefore, the population, growth rate, density, distribution, and other characteristics of a state or political and other administrative regions are studied seriously.

Population of Assam, its growth and development :

The study of population of Assam its growth distribution and other related characteristics are getting more importance

for various reasons. High growth of population, pressure of man on land, decreasing man-land ratio, decrease in per capita cultivable land etc. are some of the problems faced by the state in contemporary time. Assam has been experiencing arapid growth of population since its annexation by the British in 1826. A British officer estimated the population of Assam to be about seven lakhs in 1830. The first ever census of Assam in 1872 recorded its population at about 22 lakhs which rose to 3,289,680 in 1901. It may, however, be noted that Assam's

TABLE-1

Year	Population in lakh		Density (Per km ²)		Growth (in percentage)	
	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India
1901	33	2384	42	77	–	–
1911	38	2521	49	82	17.0	5.8
1921	46	2513	59	81	20.5	0.3
1931	56	2789	71	90	19.9	11.0
1941	67	3186	85	103	20.4	14.2
1951	80	3611	102	117	19.9	13.3
1961	108	4392	138	142	35.0	21.5
1971	146	5881	186	177	35.0	24.8
1981	180 (approx)	6833	230	230	23.4	24.7
1991	224	8463	286	267	24.2	24.7
2001	266	10,270	340	325	18.9	21.5
2011	312	12,106	398	368	17.1	17.7

Source : Census of India - 2011, Govt of India.

population has grown by about 9 times from 3.29 million in 1901 to 312 million in 2011 against the Indian population growth by about 5 times for the corresponding period. Assam gives home to about 75 per cent of the total population of North-East India. The various major reasons for such high concentration of population are— plains land, fertile alluvial lands suitable for agriculture and other purposes on either sides of the Brahmaputra and the Barak river and its tributaries healthy climate, developed infrastructural facilities rapid urbanisation etc.

Population census in Assam, like other states of India, are held after every ten years. The record reveals that the rate of population growth in Assam is above the national average (Table-1) the high growth rate in Assam is not due to natural cause. Birth rate is high but death rate is low. Besides, there has been a continuous immigration both from other Indian states as well as from neighbouring foreign nations.

The whole of Assam, until recent past, was covered with dense Tropical monsoon forest and along with this it was surrounded by hills and mountain terrain and hence, the density of population was low in comparison to other parts of northern India. Later the fertile soil, river valleys and numerous tributaries and healthy climate gradually attracted the outsiders. Ever since the British annexed there occurred immigration from Bengal, north India, Nepal, and Chhottanagpur plateau. The first ever such

major wave of migration entered in to Assam is the Ahom who through Patkai pass (Hukwang la) from Shan Inn Plateau. The Ahoms with strong cultural base said to have united the local kingdoms and ruled Assam for about 598 years with dignity. After Ahoms, the Tai Buddhist community, Tibeto-Burmans, Indo-Arsian community etc. entered into Assam and settled in different parts of the state according to their choice and security.

The second group of migrants entered into the states during the British regime i.e. after 1826 (Treaty of Yandaboo). They are identified as the Kukis, Singphos etc. followed by the Munda, Santhal, Gond etc. in 1855 from the Chhottanagpur plateau. They were brought to Assam to work as labour in the newly established tea gardens, coal and crude oil, mining regions. The British brought along with them some people from Bengal to assist them in the office and courts. They were the Bengali speakers. The British also chose to bring some Nepali people from the northern part of Bengal who were brave and honest to man the British posts.

The third major important stream entered into Assam after India achieved her Independence. Some Hindu refugees were given assylum politically who entered into Assam and occupied the areas suitable for agricultural purposes. The then political leaders encouraged such migration and kins and kiths of such migrants later thorned the specified vacant lands (Lebensraum). In later

period people from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Odissa, West Bengal and neighbouring state Nepal entered Assam with distinct motive. According to 1961 census report about 13 lakh such people were given warm welcome out of which about five lakh Indians were accommodated and the rest numbering about eight lakhs were from neighbouring foreign states. For such unchecked influx the density of population in 1971 census, was higher than the national average.

Expectation of better economic opportunities and avenues along with reluctant nature of the youths to work of erstwhile Assam is considered as major pull factors of migration into Assam. Establishment and expansion of tea, crude oil based and other industries, coal mining, brick-kiln industry, constructional works (roads, bridge, building etc.) demand more manual labours. More than 80 per cent of the total labour force constitutes from outside the states. Such quasi, semi or permanent immigration contributed and added impetus to the total population growth of Assam.

Density of population : Land has a special capacity to hold population so far the supply of food, residents etc. are concerned. But it is limited. Therefore, in comparison to size of an area, the total number of population in that particular area is counted. This man-land ratio is called population density. It is measured in terms of total population per unit of area (Density = 5000/per 100 km² area

= 50 persons/per km²)

In our state the regions where migration of population is high, the density of population is also very high. For example, the districts like Kamrup Metro (1313), Dhubri (896), Barpeta (742), Nalbari (733), Nagaon (711), Karimganj (679) etc. have population density more than average density of Assam as a whole (Assam records 398 km²). Assam ranks 15th in respect of population density among the Indian states.

The frequent flood-prone and the three hilly districts of Assam have a low density of population. Dima Hasao (44), Karbi Anglong (90), West Karbi Anglong (97) and Dhemaji 212 are comparatively sparsely population. As oppose to this, the districts having more number of towns, industries have flourished, the area under fertile land have been utilised for cultivation more than two times (multiple cropping) – crop rotation and interculture) such districts reveal high density of population. Cachar (449), Hailakandi (497), Lakhimpur (458), Udalguri (451), Kamrup (489) and Bongaigaon records high population density above states average.

Religious composition : Like most of the states of India Assam is also a Hindu dominated state. It has a substantial number of population belonging to each of the major religions pursued in India. Districts of Assam having high density and growth rate of population, the followers of Prophet Mahammad is more. These districts are

TABLE-2

Religion	Population in per cent	
	2001	2011
Hinduism	80.05	61.47
Islam	13.04	34.22
Christian	2.3	3.74
Shikh	1.9	0.07
Buddhist	0.8	0.18
Jainism	0.4	0.04
Others	0.6	0.09
Denied to divulge (0.1)	0.1	0.16

Source : Census of India - 2001 and 2011, Govt of India.

Dhubri, Goalpara, Nagaon, Barpeta, Karimganj and Hailakandi. It is due to the immigration mainly from the neighbouring state Bangladesh. In 2011 census the religious composition has changed in 11 districts of Assam in comparison to 2001 census record.

Sex composition : The sex ratio of a country determines the population composition of a country or a region. Sex ratio is expressed as the number of females per thousand males in a community or a region (number of females/number of males \times 1000). It reflects socio-economic stability and welfare or otherwise of a population. It is always better to have an even sex ratio of 1000 females per 1000 males. It is an ideal situation and rarely reached.

The status or respect to females is determined by sex ratio. The developed nations have always high literacy rate, they are healthy and mostly self dependent and per capita calory available per day is above 2200 (Cal/day) and hence, mortality rate is also low. But in developing nations, on the otherhand, literacy rate is lower, mostly dependent on others, poor health quality Cal/day is below 2200 and female mortality rate is high. Abortion after determing foetus if found female, negligence of female-child resulting in death, reluctant to send for formal educational institute and overall expiry of women during advanced stage due to various social and economic reasons. For such reasons some states in India the sex-ratio is low and in some countries of the world the

sex-ratio is very low (Saudi Arabia 500 females per 1000 males)

One of the major causes of low sex ratio is the migration of higher percentage of male than female. The receiving centres or the destinations like the urban centres generally males outnumber females because of the facts that the bulk of working population and earning members including daily wage earners for livelihood mostly constituted by male members. In Assam, Kamrup Metro district centering Guwahati has only 936 woman per 1000 males. Assam as a whole has only 956 women per 1000 male population. The districts having higher number of males than the state average are—Baksa (974), Udalguri (973), Lakhimpur (968), Chirang (960) and Golaghat (964). According to the census report of 2011 the number of female-child per 1000 male-child is 962 which is not only higher than some of the Indian states but also higher than the national average rate.

Age composition : The age composition of a country reflects the number and the percentage of people at different age group. High percentage of children below 14 years of age reflects higher birth rate, low mortality rate and higher dependency rate. Likewise, lower percent of people above 60

years of age reveals higher mortality rate and low dependency ratio. On the other hand higher percentage of people between 18-60 years of age reflects larger number of satisfactory working population force.

In Assam, according to the 2011 census report male child between the age group 0–6 years of age is 23 per cent while female child of the same age group for the corresponding census is 22 per cent. On average considering male and female child between the age group 0–6 years in the districts of Morigaon (17.11 per cent), Nagaon (16.29 per cent), Dhubri (18.90 per cent), Goalpara (17.03 per cent), Karimganj (17.25 per cent) and Darrang have higher than the state average (Assam records 14.86 per cent) and the districts having the lowest percentage of children are Kamrup (Metro) (10.00 per cent), Jorhat (11.41 per cent) and Cachar (11.79 per cent) according to 2011 census. The district having more percentage of children below 6 years of age are also the districts having higher growth rate and having high density of population. This is one of special characteristics of developing nations i.e. higher number of children with higher growth rate and high density of population.

In Assam, according to 2011 census about 38 per cent of the total population are

engaged in productive activities. This was be called as 'working population group'. Higher percentage of working population has a special implication on the production and economic development of a state.

Literacy : Level of education and percentage of literate people is one of the important social characteristics of population of a state. The quality of population of a state is dependent on educational level and literacy rate. The proportion of literate population of a state is considered development index so far both of socio-economic factor of a state is concerned literacy and level of education determine the standard of living, socio-economic states of women, skill development, occupational structure etc. In our state literacy person means persons of above seven years of age who know reading and writing together with numerical works.

According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate in Assam is 72.19 per cent,

occupying 26th rank among the Indian states (National average literacy rate 72.00 per cent) the highest literacy rate occurs in the districts of Kamrup (Metro) recording (88.66), Jorhat (81.36) and Hailakandi (94.67). The lowest literate districts are Dhubri (59.36) and Darrang (66.88). A remarkable variation occurs between the rural and urban areas. The urban areas of Assam has recorded 88.47 per cent literate people. On the other hand rural areas of the state as a whole calculated to be as 69.34 per cent. There is a gender variation in case of literacy in Assam. The female literacy for the state as a whole is 66.27 as against 77.85 per cent for males. The gap between the male-female literacy has substantially declined now due to awareness created and incentive offered by both the central and the state government concerned. It is a matter of satisfaction for Assam. The male-female literacy gap at national level is very high.

TABLE-3

State	1991		2001		2011	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Assam	61.87	43.03	71.28	54.61	77.85	66.27
India	64.13	39.28	75.26	53.67	80.89	64-64

Source : Census of India - 2001 and 2011, Govt of India.

Distribution of population : The distribution of population in a region is dependent on many geographical factors. Generally river valley, plain area, fertile soil suitable for agricultural practices, settlement easily available potable water, safety and security determines the distribution and density of population in a region. The distribution of population is not even throughout Assam. This is mainly because of various physical and socio-economic reasons. About 20 per cent of the total area of Assam is covered with hills and plateau where distribution of population is sparse. The Brahmaputra and the Barak valley districts reveal high concentration of population and more specifically in the urban centres. The three mega cities of Assam i.e. Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Silchar have better transport network, well-developed education and modern health facilities, employment avenues and opportunities and hence, high concentration of population is found. Horizontal expansion in these urban centres have become limited and therefore, vertical

expansion have started. This has limited the existing facilities made for the permanent residents provided by the authorities concerned. This has created a lots of problems. The districts having rapid urbanisation process the density of population has exceeded capacity level. The districts having rapid growth of urbanisation process are also the places of high density of population. For example, Kamrup (Metro) (density 1313 per km²) has more than three times density of population than the state average.

The districts having lowest density of population are – Dima Hasao (44/km²), Karbi Anglong (92/km²), West Karbi Anglong (90/km²) and Dhemaji (212/km²). Out of these, the first three districts are having hilly terrain character and Dhemaji is annually ravaged by flood for which the settlement is sparse. Likewise, five districts of Assam as mentioned above shows alarmingly high growth rate of population due to migration unchecked during last three decades.

IMPORTANT POINTS

- Population growth – Birth rate (\sim) death rate (\pm) migration = immigration (\sim) emigration)
- Causes of migration – healthy climate, plain fertile land, social security in the area in comparison to existing place.
- Three types of migration – (a) Permanent, (b) Temporary (c) Daily commuters.
- Density of population – Total number of persons per unit area.
- Sex composition – number of females per 1000 males.
- Occupational structure – number of people engaged in different economic activities.
- Working population – Young energetic people engaged in productive occupation.
- Dependent population – Children and aged people who are not able to take the responsibility properly or not engaged in any productive occupation. The high percentage of such people in a state in comparison to working population hinders or affect the economic development of the region concerned.

EXERCISE

1. Write briefly on the following –
 - (a) Density of population
 - (b) Sex structure
 - (c) Age structure
 - (d) Occupational composition
 - (e) Migration
 - (e) Working population
2. Answer the questions shortly –
 - (a) What is the number of total population according to 2011 census?
 - (b) In which district of Assam the density of population is the highest?
 - (c) In which district of Assam the density of population is the lowest?
 - (d) What are the major causes of population growth in Assam?
 - (e) Name the district of Assam having the highest literacy rate.
 - (f) Give an example of permanent migration into Assam.

3. The population density in Assam is more than the national average rate, what are the causes behind it?
4. Write short notes on the following :
 - (a) Working population
 - (b) Distribution of population
 - (c) Literacy of Assam
5. Write a short account of sex structure and religious composition of Assam.
6. What is sex structure? Write about the sex structure of Assam in brief, according to 2011 census.
7. Write briefly the influence of geographical factors on populations distribution in Assam.



CHAPTER THREE

RESOURCE

IMPORTANT POINTS

After studying this lesson you will be able to learn

- What is resource
- Classification of resource
- Characteristics of different types of resource
- Use and need for conservation of resource
- Distribution and utilisation of national resources of Assam
- Impact and development of Human resource in Assam

Anything available in nature or artificially produced and utilised by man may in broad sense be termed as resource. All material and non-material means of satisfying human and social needs are resources. The materials surrounding us like air, water, soil, flora and fauna etc. all have functionability and directly or indirectly utilised to satisfy our needs. These are called resources. All products of the world, as a whole although considered as resources, its evaluation is dependent on our depth of knowledge level and levels of social and technological development. For example, before learning to take or consume tea as a refreshing drink (for its flavour, aroma and taste) tea plants available in the Singhpholand of erstwhile Assam were not considered as resource. It was, like other plant species considered as source of oxygen and agent of maintaining ecological balance of nature. Tea plants were growing in the forest of Assam unidentified and no importance was paid. But after Robert Bruce along with Maniram Dewan identified tea plants in Assam and the British patronised its processing procedure for ultimate product (tea) the importance and role of 'tea' in the economy of not only Assam but also the nation as a whole is well-known to all of us. Likewise 'chinkona' plant

abundant in the natural habitat of Assam was not given importance until 'quinine' was processed administered and utilised as drug to get cure from Malaria. Now chinkona as medicinal plant has attained immense importance as precious resource.

Hence, all gifts of nature will only be considered as resource when we learn the use, utility and the functionability. To clarify more, let us cite an example. Pieces of ice we use in our day-to-day use for various purposes is no doubt is almost an essential item. But the mass of ice accumulated on the high peaks of the Himalayan or the unexplored minerals available at the interior of the earth we do not consider them as resource at all. Because, these are although the gift of nature, but not available for use. For future generations, of course, these maybe very important resources. Therefore, all gifts of nature at present, we cannot consider as resources. Commodities which are beyond our reach or beyond our knowledge of use although at present those are not considered as resource but maybe recourses for future generations to come provided scientific knowledge and proper technological development is applied. Professor E.W. Zimmermann, one of the exponent of

resources, considered resource as – ‘Resource does not mean any commodity or matter, but if that has utility and functionability can be regarded as resource’. Professor Zimmermann also defined resource as ‘means attaining given ends’, the ends being the satisfaction of individual wants and attainment of social objectives. That is the say, resource satisfies human wants be it individual want or social want. As it satisfies wants it is something useful and possesses utility as an attribute. Resource relates to man and it is functional.

Anything to be considered as resource must be available and should have the knowledge of method of use.

Classification of resource : Resource may be classified in many a ways. On the basis of origin resource may be classified as land, water, solar, atmospheric, flora, fauna human resource etc. On the basis of availability resource may be renewable and non-renewable. On the basis of use– land, soil, water, flora and fauna, mineral, material, non-material (education, skill, economic plan etc.) oceanic, energy or fuel, human culture etc. Besides, resource may be classified as biotic and abiotic resources.

Biotic resource : These resources are plants, animals and micro-organisms. Both the producers and the consumers are present here producers means all green vegetables. Consumers may be divided as primary, secondary and tertiary. Herbivorous animals like cattle, goat, sheep, deer, zebra, bison etc. are primary consumers. On the otherhand carnivorous animals like tiger, lion, fox etc. are secondary consumers. Again some carnivores consumer the other carnivores. For example hayena, eagle, owl, mongose etc. The dead animal consumers are vulture, crow etc. Dead bodies and decomposed plants again are consumed by various types of bacteria. In an ecosystem starting from plant kingdom, herbivores, carnivores, bectaria etc. are useful and the intra and interrelationship among them are of utmost need. Any change (increase or decrease) may bring about ecological imbalance.

Ablut 80,000 species of flora have so far been identified on the face of the earth. About 75 per cent people depend on medicine extracted from vegetative sources. The animals mainly the herbivores may be used as sources of red-meat, a major source of protein for non-vetetarian people. Through conservation practices of vulture, crow etc.

can contribute a lot for making our environment clean and green. The micro-organisms both the bacteria and worms by consuming the decomposed matters enrich the soil fertility. Fertile soil contributes to plants health and grow more food and other crops production.

Abiotic resource : Resources which are non-living or without having life or death, do not consume any type of food or do not grow naturally are categorised under non-living resources. The abiotic resources include all non-living elements of the environment. Land, water, air, rocks and minerals both metallic e.g. iron, copper, gold, silver, tin etc. and the non-metallic i.e. coal, limestone, dolomite, siliminite, crude oil etc. are materials either in solid or in liquid form. But carbon oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, phosphorous, potassium etc. are always found to be in gaseous state and chemical action and reaction of which help in growth and development of plants and organism. The abiotic elements like fresh air is essential for health, we cannot live without water which should be fresh with mineral rich for used for potable purposes, supply of water for agricultural and industrial use including hydro-electricity generation. Likewise, land is needed not only for construction of houses

and other establishments but also for production of crops especially the fertile soil. They are exhaustible and non-renewable as they cannot be regenerated or reproduced.

With the development of skill level of technology has also developed and the base of civilised society including the infrastructural development etc. are all important resources for us. Some of the resources although are the gift of nature but human being through their relentless endeavour have created some of the resources like the dwelling houses of different types, vehicles for movement and carrying goods and services, cello phone for communication, computer, laptop, software to be used for various purposes. Human Resource Development (HRD) attached mainly to the skill development has given rise to development of technology. Technology development again has made the infrastructural development thereby processing and using the biotic resources to enhance the level of civilization. For such knowledge, intelligence and expertised skill, human being, therefore, has also been considered as very important and special resource. The future of the world is entirely dependent on Human Resource Development (HRD).

Conservation of Resource : The

resources, more particularly the natural resources are not found uniformly on the earth. The conservation of resources mean the judicious and planned use as well as reuse of natural resources by avoiding their wastages misuse and overuse. Depletion of resources is a matter of great concern today. In order to reach the maximum production limit, we are using all those resources which are infact the property of the future generation. In fact as the concept of sustainable development, resources are the inheritance which are generation of human society has to pass on to next one. Non-renewable resources may come to an end after sometime, therefore, striking a balance between the growth of population and utilisation of resource is absolutely necessary. Of course such a balance is found to vary in time and space. Obviously, we have to look at the balance between population and resources in a region or country as dynamic rather than static one. Any imbalance between either of the two may disrupt the continuity of our economic, social and cultural development. So resources should be used in a planned way that imbalance does not take place in Assam. The biotic resources maybe conserved in two ways. One is the *in situ* (as in where condition) and the other is the *ex situ* (transferring to other place) conservation. In situ conservation means to flora and the fauna green and nourished in

natural habitat is conserved as in where condition without being affected by any external factors. In such a conservation practice each and every biological agents will grow maintaining a natural or physical balance besides fulfilling our needs.

Biotic resources conserved as in where condition is called in situ conservation and the conservation in other place changing the place of origin is called ex situ conservation.

Generally the endangered and likely to be endangered species are preserved by adopting some modern conservation practices. The varieties of plant species can be conserved in the Botanical Gardens. Endangered species as identified by the 'International Union for Conservation of Nature' (IUCN) and enlisted in their 'Red Data Book' may be conserved in Zoological Park or Garden. For conservation and preservation of flora and fauna now a days Gin Bank, Seed Bank and Organism Nourishing Centres (ONC) have been established. This will help the future generation to use them as resource, besides seeing identifying, touching and overall fulfilling their unlimited needs.

National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries : The in situ conservation are of various types like the Reserved Forests, Wild Life Sanctuary, National Park, Biosphere

Reserve etc. Besides these in order to conserve and preserve some of the fauna special attention have been paid through IUCN schemes like the Tiger Projects, Rhinoceros Project, Crocodile Project etc. Among all these conservation systems, National Parks and Wild Life Sanctuaries are prominent so far in situ conservation of flora and fauna are concerned. People can enjoy the plants and the animal in their natural habitat forming an ideal ecosystem and biodiversity. Out of a total of 166 National Parks in India, Assam possesses 5 parks and 18 numbers of Wild Life Sanctuaries out of a total of 543 in the country. Another two forests areas are in the process of declaration as wildlife sanctuary. National Parks and wild life sanctuaries etc. are in reality protected forest areas. One of the major purposes of delimiting National Park boundary is to protect not only the inmates and the environment but also to give a natural abode to some special varieties of flora and fauna including the orchids. The tourists, both domestic and the foreign should have the minimum facilities to visit the parks including the fooding and the lodging arrangements besides Provisions of tourist operators and proper guides. The Parks should have the facilities of Research Oriented Activities. While doing so the environments should be free from any sort of pollution (ecofriendly). In view of the protection of flora and fauna,

some of the wildlife sanctuaries have been upgraded to the status of National Parks of Assam.

Conservation of flora and fauna as one of the major objectives of wild life sanctuaries poaching, disturbing of animals in any form or cutting or destruction, collection of floral species or even the entry is restricted and controlled by the authorities concerned.

About 0.40 million hectare of land is covered by the 18 Wildlife Sanctuaries and the 5 National Parks. This accounts for about 4.98 per cent of the total area of Assam. North Karbi Anglong and Bordoibam Bilmukh forests, if upgraded and accorded the status of wildlife sanctuaries will definitely be a welcome move for protection of endangered species. Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong have the largest area under forest in Assam. Marat Longri (4.15 km²) is the largest and the Deepor Beel (4.14 km²) is the smallest wildlife sanctuary in Assam. Deepor Beel is primarily a bird sanctuary and has been declared as 'Ramsar site'.

In 1971 the UN sponsored conference held at Ramsar city in Iran discussed the importance of wetlands and took certain resolutions to protect and develop the already identified and enlisted 1200 nos. of wetlands of the world. Deepor Beel in Assam is one of such recognised Ramsar sites.

Table-1**Wildlife Sanctuaries of Assam**

Sl.No.	Name	Location (Districts)	Area (in km ²)
1	Holongapar Gibbon	Jorhat	20.98
2	Garampani	Karbi Anglong-Golaghat	6.05
3	Burha Chapori	Sonitpur	44.06
4	Bornadi	Darrang	26.22
5	Sonai-Rupai	Sonitpur	220.00
6	Pobitora	Morigaon	38.80
7	Panidihing	Sivsagar	33.93
8	Bherjan-Botjan-Padumani	Tinsukia	7.22
9	Nambor	Golaghat	37.00
10	Karbi Anglong	Karbi Anglong	222.81
11	Laokhowa	Nagaon	70.13
12	Chakrasila	Dhubri-Kokrajhat	45.57
13	Marat Longri	Karbi Anglong	451.00
14	Nambor-Daigrang	Golaghat	97.15
15	Dihing-Patkai	Dibrugarh-Tinsukia	111.19
16	Barail	Cachar, Dima Hasao	320.25
17	Amchang	Kamrup (M)	78.64
18	Deepor Beel	Kamrup (M)	4.14

Table-2**National Parks of Assam**

Sl.No.	Name	Time of Recognition	Area (km ²)
1	Kaziranga	1974	858.98
2	Manah	1990	500.00
3	Nameri	1998	200.00
4	Orang	1999	78.81
5	Dibru-Saikhowa	1999	340.00

The National Parks, in reality are characteristics forests which are proud of Assam. Thousands of tourists both domestic and foreign, visit Kaziranga and Manas National Park. There are at present about 2000 one horned Asian rhinoceros in KNP. Both the Manas and KNP have been declared as 'Project Tiger' in 1973. Manas besides having one horned rhinoceros also gives shelter to buffalo in national habitat at large.

Non-renewable and Renewable resources : All abiotic resources found in nature are non-renewable or exhaustible, i.e. continuous use of these results in depletion of the same. These are the gifts of nature and man cannot create them. For example, we are using mineral oil, natural gas, coal etc. Continuous use of these resources, at one time will deplete their natural reserve and in course of time will totally exhaust. If these resources are not used judiciously the future generation will be deprived of and will suffer badly. Hence, the concept of sustainable use has been suggested by the renowned economists in 1889 crude oil was stuck in Digboi and Digboi refinery was started in 1901. It produced fuels lubricants and other items. Besides Digboi there are 3 more refineries in Assam, i.e. Noonmati, BRPL and

Numaligarh. BRPL produces petrochemicals and many an allied industries have been established based on the products of BRPL for human use. As man cannot create crude oil but use them for multipurposes, in long run all these will exhaust. Thus crude oil and coal are ideal examples of biotic but exhaustible or non-renewable resources.

In contrast to it, the resources which can be renewed or renewed by nature even after continuous use are abiotic or renewable resource. For example, solar energy, water, forests and forest products, crops, birds, wildlife, fishes etc. are examples of biotic resources. The Sun provides us energy continuously and we are using sunshine for various purposes but never exhausts. Thus the hydro-electric power projects generating electricity based on the running water or vast storages with inlets flowing continuously are running and will operate till the water source continues. Plantation of saplings and nourishment have helped in replacement of depleted and deforested areas. Producing food crops using modern and scientific methods. People are getting required calories for survival. Poultry, goat, fish etc. are consumed by a major section of the people of Assam. Scientific rearing of all these have helped in vigorous renewal of these resources.

If imbalance occur between use and production i.e. low level of production and excess consumption a time will arrive where the future generation will be deprived from the consumption or use of the resource. Some resources have been exhausted and extinct from the earth because of immense need and greed. For example, many a local varieties of precious and flavoured tasty paddy (like different type of Joha, Bokul Bora, Aam pakhi, Boka etc.) whose hectarage is low and, hence, have ben replaced by High Yielding Variety (HYV) paddy. For conservation of all local varieties of paddy and flora including local fish fauna, the central, state government and the NGO's are working hard spending time, energy and cost.

Energy and Human Resource : The day on which the human being learnt the art and use of fire, marked the begining of use of energy. Toasting and roasting of hunted animals red meat, sitting by the fire to get rid of from severe cold during winter days learnt the beginning of the art of use of energy as resource. Slowly man discovered coal and crude oil and their multipurpose uses. Generation of electricity from different sources, solar energy etc. helped in establishment of various industrial units, manufacturing of variety of products etc. for

various uses etc. have changed the face of the earth.

Energy resources may be grouped under two heads– non-renewable and renewable. Energy resource once used if exhausted forever and can never be renewed are called exhaustible energy source. Such energy resource include coal, crude oil, natural gas, nuclear energy like the uranium, thorium etc., the enhance use of which has led to the depletion of some of the energy sources.

Contrary to this the renewable sources of energy are almost inexhaustible. Solar energy, wind energy, hydro-electricity, geothermal eneregy etc. are renewable sources of energy. The plast and the animal kingdom are using the solar energy according to need but the energy mainly obtained from the sun are intact. Thus hydrological energy, wind energy etc. have been used applying available technological expertise. With the development of science and technology the extraction of energy sources have also made easier. The technology is yet to develop through research and experiment to find substitute to exhaustible energy source i.e. coal, petroleum products etc. to run not onloy our vehicles but also use for many other purposes. Like other developed nations of

the world India has of late also started the use of alteration source of energy and partially made successful. But Assam, in this context is lagging for behind due to poor attention by authorities concerned.

Human Resource now a days has drawn the attention of all the nations of the world and India is no exception to it. The government of India for the human resource development has taken keen interest through proper education at different levels and trades creating scientific temper, technological innovations and application for welfare activities, work culture incentives etc. The nations of the world which have succeeded in HRD are also the states among the developed nations of the world.

Till 1990 per capita income of a state was considered as the sole indicator of HRD index. But exponents like Mehabul-ul-Hoque and Amartya Sen considered education, health, capacity and mental satisfaction etc. as some of indicators measuring Human Resource Development.

Equality, duration/durability production and rights – These concepts are the four pillars of Human Resource Development. HRD is achieved through increase in income ability and capacity to fulfill primary needs, skill development and capacity building etc.

A peep into the HRD in Assam reveals that it occupies about 2.93 per cent of the total area of India and gives home to 2.59 per cent of the total population of India. Population growth rate during the last decade in Assam was 8.1 times against 4.31 times for India. The infrastructural facilities and other resources have not developed according to the needs of the people and hence, Assam is not at par with the other developed states of India so far economic condition of the state is concerned. Per capita Annual Domestic Product is one of the measures of standard of HRD. Per capita Annual Net Domestic Product is Rs. 60,952 as against Rs. 1,12,764 for the nation as a whole. Literacy rate in Assam was 72.19 per cent against 72.99 per cent for India according to 2011 census. In comparison to some of the states of India like Kerala (93.91%), Mizoram (91.54%) etc. the literacy rate is low. People below poverty line at national level is 21.92 per cent while for Assam it is 31.98 per cent according to 2011-12 estimate. All these prove that the HRD in Assam is low. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more importance on development of education, per capita income, health resource and skill development sector of Assam by the authorities concerned.

EXERCISE

1.
 - (a) Quinine an antimaterial drug is extracted from which flora?
 - (b) What is biotic resource?
 - (c) How many National Parks are there in Assam?
 - (d) How many wildlife sanctuaries are there in Assam?
 - (e) What is exhaustible resource?
 - (f) What is a resource?
2.
 - (a) What according to Professor Zimmerman is a resource?
 - (b) Why Human Resource is given high position among the resources?
 - (c) Write the difference between the natural and man-made resource?
 - (d) Name two biotic resources which are non-renewable.
3.
 - (i) Explain how resource may be classified?
 - (ii) Explain with suitable examples the difference between the biotic and abiotic resource.
 - (iii) Which are the producers and consumers of biotic resource?
 - (iv) Distinguish between the renewable and non-renewable resource.
 - (v) Classify with examples the energy resource.
 - (vi) What system and efforts are needed for the development of Human Resource in Assam?
4. Find out the correct answer from the following alternatives.
 - (i) Flora is not included under which of the following resources?
 - (a) renewable resource
 - (b) biotic resource
 - (c) exhaustible resource
 - (d) productive resource
 - (ii) Which one of the following is an exhaustible resource?
 - (a) wind energy
 - (b) coal
 - (c) agricultural product
 - (d) poultry
 - (iii) Which one of the following at present we donot recognise as resource?
 - (a) human
 - (b) heat from the sun

- (c) Nickel available in core of the earth's interior (d) bectraia
- (iv) Which one of the following take active part in absorption of plants and animal in earth
- (a) tiger (b) man
(c) vulture (d) bacteria
- (v) What according to 2011 census the percentage of literacy in Assam?
- (a) 72.99 (b) 72.19
(c) 91.54 (d) 93.91



CHAPTER FOUR

ECONOMIC BASE OF ASSAM

IMPORTANT POINTS

- Economic condition and development trend
- Types of crops and their production
- Production of cash crops and its impact on state economy
- Importance of medicinal and horticultural crops.

Economic Condition :

The plain state of Assam in North-East India is surrounded by the hill states on its three sides. Assam has only three hill districts—Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hassao. The Brahmaputra is the life line of the state. The overall economy of Assam depends on its human resources. All the economic activities including agriculture, industries, trade and commerce etc. are controlled by a number of physical and socio-economic factors.

The domestic production of the state in the case of agricultural and industrial sectors, except the service sector was more or less same during 2011-12 and 2015-16. There is, however a slight decrease from 19.89 per cent in 2011-12 to 18.66 per cent in 2015-16 in the agriculture and allied production sector. In the case of industrial sector also, the income decreased from 30.66 per cent in 2011-12 to 28.82 per cent in 2015-16. During this period the income from production of minerals indicated a decreasing trend from 33.4 per cent to 25.0 per cent. Against this, the income from service sector had increased from 43.97 per cent to 46.7 per cent during this period. Taking 2011-12 as the base year one report has revealed that the total value of state's domestic production was estimated at rupees 179394.73 crores

in 2015-16 against Rs. 166708.85 crores in 2014-15. As such, the rate of economic development of the state stands at 7.73 per cent during the period. But, this development rate of the state is less than that of India by 0.15 per cent. During the above mentioned period, as published in a government rapid survey report there were development rate of 9.41 per cent in the industrial sector and 8.21 per cent in the service sector against 3.88 per cent development rate in all the sectors.

As per these statistics, there was notable development in the industrial sector in 2015-16 as compared to that in 2014-15. During this period there also increased from 10.55 per cent to 12.75 per cent in the construction sector.

Occupational Structure

Majority of the inhabitants of Assam primarily depend on agriculture. Agriculture has become the main occupation of the people of Assam due to its fertile soils, vast water resources of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries and the climate congenial for agricultural activities. Since early time the people of Assam have been carrying out agricultural practices for their livelihood. During the post-Independence period, especially from the seventies, some changes

have taken place in occupational structure of the state. Such changes in the occupational structure have occurred due to growth of agro-based and forest-based industries along with agriculture and more employment generated in the service sector.

Agriculture

The land area used under the agricultural sector is more than that used under all other sectors of the state. About 54.11 per cent of land of the state is used for agricultural activities. Considering the entire agricultural sector including the plantation agriculture, about 80 per cent of the people depend on agriculture. Along with population growth, changes in the methods of agriculture are also observed. The amounts of actual and total crop lands have increased more during the last few decades (Table-1)

Out of the total land area of Assam, about 54.11 per cent land is brought under agriculture and about 80 per cent people of the state are dependent on agriculture. Because of expansion of agricultural activities due to high growth of population, the forest lands are decreasing. Although agricultural production has gone up, consequently there is adverse impact on the environment.

Agricultural Production

The favourable factors affecting

agricultural production of Assam are the alluvial plains, fertile soils, adequate rainfall and congenial climate necessary for agriculture. Paddy is the principal crop of Assam and thus rice happens to be the staple food of its people. Besides rice, jute, sugarcane, tea, pulses, potato, cotton and horticultural crops are also produced. As per data of 2015-16, paddy cultivated area in Assam is 24.84 lakh hectares which accounts for 12.96 per cent area of the total food crops producing areas of the state. There are significant differences in production as well as areas under paddy cultivation as found in seasons like summer, autumn and winter. The areas under paddy cultivation during autumn season had decreased from 4.36 lakh hectares in 2004-05 to 1.96 lakh hectares in 2014-15. Similarly, the areas under summer paddy also decreased from 4.16 lakh hectares in 2014-15 to 4.05 lakh hectares in 2015-16. Against this, the areas brought under winter paddy cultivation had shown an increasing trend from 24.85 lakh hectares to 24.95 lakh hectares in 2015-16.

As compared to that in the earlier years, the areas producing wheat and pulses increased in 2015-16. On the other hand, the oil seeds producing areas were increasing from 3.07 lakh hectares in 2014-15 to 3.11

lakh hectares in 2015-16.

Assam records significant growth in foodcrop production especially after 2007-08 (Table-2). However, during last few years some ups and downs have been observed in the production of foodcrops. There was foodcrop production of 54,18,000 tons in the year 2013-14 which increased to 54,59,000 tons in 2014-15. But, this production had decreased to 53,59,000 tons during 2015-16. In the case of paddy production, the amount decreased from 52,23,000 tons in 2014-15 to 51,25,000 tons in the year 2015-16. In contrary to this, production of wheat and oilseeds had shown an increase. Wheat production rose to 34,000 tons in 2015-16 from 29,000 tons in 2014-15. Similarly, the oilseeds production also increased from 2,06,000 tons to 2,15,000 tons during the same period. On the other hand, the production of pulses declined to some extent. During the above mentioned period, the production of pulses decreased from 1,11,000 tons to 1,08,000 tons.

Cropping Pattern

Cropping pattern in Assam depends on a variety of factors. Wet cultivation is practised depending on climate, physiography, soil characteristics and particularly the availability of water. The

principal crop in wet cultivation of Assam is the paady. Again depending on the crop production season, Assam's agriculture can be divided into three types : (i) Kharif cropping system, (ii) Rabi cropping system and (iii) Zaid cropping system.

Kharif crops are grown during April-May when rain starts and the same are harvested during November-December. The principal Kharif crops of Assam are *sali* and *baorice*, jute, sugarcane etc. (Table-3)

Rabi crops are sown during the early part of winter season, i.e. during October-November and harvested during the later part of spring season, i.e. during April to June. The major rabi crops are *ahu* and *Bodorice*, mustard, pulses, tobacco, wheat, maize and various kinds of vegetables and fruits.

The crop cultivation carried out during the period between the kharif and rabi crop production, i.e. during March to June is called zaid crop cultivation. This kind of agriculture is dependent on irrigation. The major zaid crops grown in the state include peas, potato, onion, cabbage, water melon, pumpkin, cucumber, bitter.

A different type of traditional agriculture is prevalent in the three hill districts of Assam. The hill dwellers clear the forest and vegetations of the hill slopes through cutting and burning methods. This kinds of agriculture

is known as *jhum* cultivation. It is also called shifting cultivation due to the method of shifting involved in this cultivation system. In shifting cultivation crops like paddy, maize, pumpkin, chilli etc. are produced in the same plot of land. Cultivation of crops on the hill slopes leads to erosion of the top fertile soils washed away downslope due to rain. As a result, the crop production decreases as soil fertility is lost. The hill farmers are thus compelled to select a new plot of land. Following the same procedure, the newly selected plot of land is used for carrying out the *jhum* cultivation. As a result of *jhum* cultivation practised in the three hill districts of Assam, the hill ecology has been changing.

The statistics of agricultural production of Assam are recorded and published by the Economics and Statistics Department, Government of Assam. Such statistics and data provide information to the government and also the farmers for the development of agriculture in the state.

The trend of foodcrop production is presented in the table-2

Problems of Agriculture in Assam

After analysing the trend of agricultural development, data on crop production etc., some problems of Assam's agriculture are observed. The major problems are :

- (a) Agriculture land plots are small in size and so tilling using tractor and other mechanical tools is difficult.
- (b) The farmers face difficulties in meeting their livelihood needs as the per head agricultural land is very less.
- (c) Agricultural production per hectare of land is very low due to age-old methods of cultivation adopted by the farmers.
- (d) There are limited irrigation facilities extended to only 15% of agricultural area for which agriculture is largely affected due to scarcity of water.
- (e) Heavy damages of crops are caused every year by recurring floods.

Besides these, there are also many other causes like lack of required amount of manures, lack of experience of farmers etc. which offer hindrances to expected growth in agricultural production.

Cropping System in Assam

In some parts of Assam mono cropping (cultivation of only one crop) is practised, while in different parts duo-cropping and multiple cropping are practised. Moreover, interculture and crop rotation are also adopted by the farmers in some areas. Cultivation carried out for several years in the same plot of land causes reduction in soil

fertility and thus there is need to use fertilizer. But, in the case of rotation of crops, several crops are grown in the same plot of land and different other crops may also be cultivated in the next year. As a result, the fertility of land remains unchanged for several years. The problem of crop damaged by insects is less in the case of rotation cropping system as compared to that in mono-cropping system.

Cropping Intensity

The method of assessing crop intensity is—
Crop intensity

$$= \frac{\text{Total crop producing land}}{\text{Actual crop producing land}} \times 100$$

In order to meet the scarcity of food necessary for growing, population, there are two measurement which are (a) to increase crop production through expansion of agricultural land and (b) to increase the fertility of agricultural land than before. But, there are disadvantages to expand agriculture land because it will cause destruction of forest lands and degradation of wetlands leading to decrease in forest cover and wetland areas. So, as an alternative measure the crop production can be increased following scientific methods

of multiple cropping and intensive agriculture. In order to met the required need of food for the fast growing population the duo-cropping and multiple cropping system have been introduced instead of mono cropping system. Moreover, rotation of crops is also being taken up.

Irrigation is necessary in the traditional methods of agriculture and also in the advanced methods of agriculture like intensive agriculture and crop rotation. Irrigation is essential, especially in agriculture practised using high yielding seeds. Agricultural fields are irrigated from the small, medium and major irrigation projects. Surface water, i.e. water from rivers, tanks, wetlands etc. are transported to agricultural fields through drains or supplied from underground water source through power pumps. Irrigation is performed in the state by the three departments such as, State Irrigation Department, irrigation department under Panchayat and the department for rural development. The Irrigation Department of Government of Assam is specially engaged in construction and management of the minor, medium and major irrigation projects.

Crops Production :

Paddy

Paddy is the principal crop of Assam. Paddy is cultivated in 64.52 per cent of total agricultural land of the state and out of the total foodcrop producing areas, 91.43 per cent areas are used only for paddy cultivation. Four varieties of paddy are generally produced in Assam— *Sali*, *Ahu*, *Bao* and *Bodo* paddy. The method and trend of paddy production in the state are noticeable. Paddy producing areas as well as paddy production per hectare are gradually increasing (Table-3)

It has already been mentioned that majority of the people of the three hill districts of Assam, i.e. Karbi Anglong District, West Karbi Anglong District and Dima Hassao District are engaged in shifting cultivation or jhum cultivation. As a result of this method of cultivation, soil fertility decreases and soil erosion increases. Due to these two reasons, the concerned government has laid emphasis on conversion of jhum lands into terrace cultivation lands. Terrace cultivation is carried out making steps on the hill slopes. The method of terrace cultivation is scientific and loss of soil fertility and soil erosion are less,

but crop production is more in this method of cultivation. In terrace cultivation the same plot of land can be used for cultivation every year. But in jhum cultivation forests are cleared to get a plot of land on hill slopes and after few years the plot is abandoned due to loss of soil fertility and the earlier jhum plots are again reused for cultivation.

Jute

Jute is the highest cash earning fibre crop. Temperature and moist climate of Assam is suitable for jute cultivation. Generally the low-lying fertile land, where water remains for considerable time is used for jute cultivation. Temperature range from 20°C to 40°C, weekly rainfall from 5cm to 8cm and relative humidity range from 70 per cent to 80 per cent are congenial for jute production. All these conditions prevail in the plain districts of Assam, especially the districts of western Assam and, so jute cultivation is suitably done in these districts. The stems of mature jute plants are kept generally under stagnant water for about 20 days. The rotten and soft are removed from the stems which are then washed and dried to get the jute fibres. Jute is mostly cultivated in Nagaon, Morigaon, Goalpara, Dhubri and Barpeta

districts of Assam. Generally, the jute plants grow in Assam upto the length from 1 to 4m.

Tea

Tea is the principal cash crop of Assam. Assam enjoys agro-climatic conditions suitable for tea cultivation. Almost all the districts of Assam enjoy annual rainfall from 150cm to 200 cm, temperature more than 30°C and acidic soils of low slopes. Thus Assam happens to be an important tea producing region in the world. There are more than 850 large tea gardens and several thousand small tea gardens in Assam (Table-4)

Assam has 304,133 hectares of land under tea cultivation. The state produces 642 million kilograms of tea annually. Next to tea producing region of South China, Assam ranks second position as tea producing region in the world. There are, however quality differences between the tea produced in the highlands of Darjeeling and Nilgiri hills and the tea produced in the gentle slopes in the plains of Assam. Colour of Assam tea is deep in comparison to teas produced in different region of the world. Assam tea has occupied unique position in the international market as it provides pleasant taste and freshness.

In Assam tea leaves are plucked for two times in a year. First time plucking is done during March-April, and second time plucking is done during June-July. Tea leaves plucked during the second time provide deep colour and more taste. This kind of tea gains more popularity in the international market.

Medicinal Plants

Varieties of medicinal plants are found in the hills and forests of Assam. About 300 species of vegetables and edible plants are available in Assam. Commercially about 5 to 10 per cent plants are grown in the state. As many of these plants have medicinal value, there is ample scope for establishment of plant-based industries in the state.

Horticultural Crops

Horticultural crops of Assam can be divided into three types—

(1) **Major fruits** : Pineapples, bananas, coconuts, jack fruits etc.

(2) **Major citrus fruits** : Orange, lemon etc.

(3) **Major spice-fruits** : Ginger, turmeric, *bhot* chilli, chilli, peper etc.

Production of fruits in Assam is presented in Table-5

Table-1**Agricultural Land Use ('000 hectares) in the Districts of Assam**

Sl. No.	District	Actual Cultivated Land	Total Cultivated Land	Cultivated Land sown more than once
1	Kokrajhar	86.6	172.6	86.1
2	Dhubri	134.3	173.1	387.1
3	Goalpara	80.8	125.2	44.5
4	Barpeta	159.3	254.7	95.4
5	Morigaon	92.0	127.8	35.8
6	Nagaon	235.6	299.3	637.0
7	Sonitpur	165.1	270.8	105.7
8	Lakhimpur	100.2	223.2	123.0
9	Dhemaji	67.5	121.2	53.7
10	Tinsukia	104.7	143.5	38.8
11	Dibrugarh	139.5	166.1	26.6
12	Sibsagar	136.8	149.9	13.0
13	Jorhat	120.2	174.9	54.0
14	Golaghat	119.0	182.0	62.3
15	Karbi Anglong	126.4	201.7	75.3
16	Dima Hassao	28.1	54.2	26.0
17	Cachar	115.1	163.1	47.7
18	Karimganj	76.0	104.1	28.1

Sl. No.	District	Actual Cultivated Land	Total Cultivated Land	Cultivated Land sown more than once
19	Hailakandi	50.3	77.3	27.0
20	Bongaigaon	67.6	105.4	378.0
21	Chirang	46.8	88.7	42.0
22	Kamrup	177.3	186.6	9.8
23	Kamrup (M)	43.3	50.0	6.7
24	Nalbari	67.7	120.8	53.0
25	Baska	66.1	133.8	67.7
26	Darrang	103.8	145.6	41.7
27	Udalguri	99.9	158.9	59.0

Source : Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam

Table-2**Food Crop Production in Assam ('000 tons)**

Year	Rice	Wheat	Pulses	Total food crops	Oil seeds (Except coconut)
2001-02	3854	85	66	4023	156
2002-03	3738	78	60	3894	149
2003-04	3880	73	63	4034	157
2004-05	3470	68	61	3617	146
2005-06	3552	54	56	3680	114
2006-07	2916	67	59	3060	134
2007-08	3319	71	61	3468	139
2008-09	4009	55	62	4142	141
2009-10	4409	65	66	4557	147
2010-11	5033	56	72	5178	159
2011-12	8716	49	73	4857	156
2012-13	5128	44	84	5279	187
2013-14	5193	40	104	5418	186
2014-15	5223	29	111	5459	206

Source : Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam

Table-3**Season-wise Pice Production in Assam (kg/hectare)**

Year	Autumn rice	Winter rice	Summer rice
2004-05	667	1598	1959
2005-06	1016	1543	1780
2006-07	899	1321	1017
2007-08	999	1380	2267
2008-09	1084	1641	2133
2009-10	982	1894	2180
2010-11	1155	1993	2577
2011-12	1242	1785	2744
2012-13	1317	1998	2965
2013-14	1340	2002	2981
2014-15	1454	2005	2940

Source : Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam

Table - 4**Number of Tea Gardens, Areas under Tea Cultivation and Tea Production (kg./hectare) in Assam)**

Years	Number of tea gardens (larger than 10.12 hectare)	Area under tea cultivation ('000 hectare)	Total tea production ('000kg.)
2007	825	311.3	511885
2008	760	321.4	487497
2009	760	321.7	499997
2010	760	322	480286
2011	765	322	589110
2012	78856	322	590120
2013	69220	322	629050
2014	77710	304	610970
2015	83566	316	526185
2016	85344	304	642180

Source : Tea Board, India 2017

Table - 5

Production of Fruits in Assam During 2012-13 and 2013-14
(Production in '000 metric tons)

Fruits	2012-13	2013-14
Banana	837.0	857.7
Pineapple	269.0	288.6
Papaya	175.5	149.1
Guava	105.8	43.8
Lemon	125.9	103.5
Litchi	49.6	48.1
Jack fruit	224.2	192.5
Mango	55.3	44.6
Orange	195.8	188.8
Others	36.8	33.0
Total	2073.8	2025.4

Source : Statistical Hand Book, 2014

(Economic Base of Assam)

Industries of Assam

IMPORTANT POINTS

- Trend of industrial development in Assam since the past.
- Causes of backwardness in the industrial sector.
- Types of industries developed in Assam.
- Importance of cottage industries.

Any activity associated with production is called industry. Assam is a backward state in industries as compared to some states of India. Besides the major industries like tea and mineral oil industry, there are some industries which contribute to the economic development of Assam to certain extent. Although there are plenty of forest, mineral and agricultural raw materials necessary for establishment of industries, Assam has not progressed much in the field of industries.

Assam is famous for handlooms and bamboo-based cottage industries since the past. Assam has earned national and international fame for hand-woven **Eri, Muga and Pat cloths**, various utensils and

decorative materials made of brass and bell metals, articles made of tusks and handicraft products of bamboo-can industries.

First mineral oil production in 1901 at Digboi, first tea industry established 1833 in old Lakhimpur district and production of plywood for the first time before independence were some of the achievements of Assam in the field of industries. But, the state is lagging behind in industrial development during subsequent period due to various reasons. The reasons may be as follows :

1. Assam and the entire North-East India (former seven states) are located at a far distance from the other regions of India. The 21-40 km narrow land

- corridor of Siliguri area connected with the other parts of the country has caused difficulties in road and rail transport connectivity to Assam. Therefore, the cost of transportation of raw materials and finished products becomes high and as a result, Assam and the entire North-East India lag behind in industrial development.
2. Assam and the North-East are bordered by the foreign countries Myanmar, China, Bhutan and Bangladesh. As India's relationship with some of these countries is not cordial, the foreign investors and industrialists hesitate to come forward for establishment of industries in Assam and the North-East.
 3. It is really difficult to import the raw materials and export the finished products to the large cities and markets in India due to distance factor. For this reason, expenditure involved is more and so reasonable prices for the produced commodities are not obtained.
 4. Assam is industrially backward because of non-availability of necessary machines and tools and some special type of raw materials and also due to irregular supply of electricity and other sources of energy.
 5. Due to lack of huge capital necessary for establishment, of large and medium type industries, Assam has been suffering from industrial backwardness.
 6. The people of Assam are largely dependent on agriculture. Lack of skills, experience, courage and mental set-up necessary for establishment of industries also offered hindrance in industrial development of the state.
 7. Defective government policies, lack of proper motivation and orientation to be extended to the young generation by the concerned families and societies also discourage people to come forward for industrial entrepreneurship. Thus majority of the youths have interest in government job.
- In spite of the above-mentioned problems associated with industries of Assam, some small and medium size industries are being registered in the districts of Assam annually (Table 1). The noticeable point is that the number of registered industries has generally increased from 2011-12 to 2013-14. But, comparatively employment in industrial sector has not increased so much during the period, rather it is decreasing. Data record shows that the newly registered industries have limited employment opportunities. As published by the Industry and Commerce Secretariat of Assam, all total 5799 industries were registered in 2015 in which a total of 2,19,903 persons got employment (Table 2). Taking Kamrup and Kamrup (Metro) districts together the number of such registered industries is 1505, while Dhemaji district has only 8 industries. The one-fourth of the people engaged in industrial sector belong to Kamrup (Metro) district alone. Data on industries of Assam reveal that there are gross disparities in establishment of industries in the state. It is, indeed imperative to remove such disparities for eradicating the overall backwardness of industrial sector in Assam.

Table 1
Number of minor, small and medium registered industries and industrial workers in Assam

Serial No	District	Number of registered industries			Number of industrial workers		
		2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
1.	Kokrajhar	10	13	5	72	106	25
2.	Dhubri	35	56	83	251	314	414
3.	Goalpara	34	26	89	198	139	494
4.	Bongaigaon	53	48	36	396	258	222
5.	Barpeta	33	54	59	240	555	371
6.	Kamrup (Metro+Rural)	318	297	283	4274	3051	2381
7.	Nalbari	70	89	78	399	439	375
8.	Darrang	57	43	107	253	310	452
9.	Morigaon	25	37	22	143	189	171
10.	Nagaon	74	123	180	603	718	1286
11.	Sonitpur	89	54	89	608	319	532
12.	Lakhimpur	18	23	53	87	141	457
13.	Dhemaji	41	27	39	209	104	156
14.	Tinsukia	47	81	98	336	473	649
15.	Dibrugarh	58	118	154	625	470	1705
16.	Sibsagar	35	81	100	2646	760	632
17.	Jorhat	69	82	86	985	565	471
18.	Golaghat	62	42	63	390	245	609
19.	Karbi Anglong	6	6	15	69	75	154
20.	Dima Hassao	2	3	2	21	36	16
21.	Cachar	62	50	72	524	1802	494
22.	Karimganj	23	25	24	132	133	184
23.	Hailakandi	23	37	47	100	155	263
24.	Chirang	22	11	41	208	80	246
25.	Baksa	7	11	32	44	134	166
26.	Udalguri	11	14	3	73	99	28
	Total	1287	1451	1860	13886	11671	12971

Source : Industry and Commerce Secretariat, Assam

Types of Industries :

Based on raw materials used in industries, the industries of Assam may be divided into three types :

- (i) Agro based industries
- (ii) Mineral based industries
- (iii) Forest based industries

Agro based Industries :

The agro based industries can again be divided into two types :

- (a) The industries based on tea, sugarcane, oilseeds, milk, rice, wheat and fruits.
- (b) The industries based on jute, cotton, **pat-muga-eri** and other fibre crops.

Table 2

Number of Registered Industries and Industrial workers in the Districts of Assam (2015)

Serial Number	District	Number of registered industries	Number of industrial workers
1.	Kokrajhar	42	1812
2.	Dhubri	95	2762
3.	Goalpara	23	598
4.	Barpeta	71	2069
5.	Morigaon	64	2352
6.	Nagaon	373	16920
7.	Sonitpur	475	19567
8.	Lakhimpur	70	2148
9.	Dhemaji	8	124
10.	Tinsukia	641	25192
11.	Dibrugarh	695	28495
12.	Sibsagar	388	13639
13.	Jorhat	348	9483
14.	Golaghat	317	8185
15.	Karbi Anglong	40	1254
16.	Dima Hassao	27	591
17.	Cachar	343	11,808
18.	Karimganj	121	3950
19.	Hailakandi	50	3450

Serial Number	District	Number of registered industries	Number of industrial workers
20.	Bongaigoan	67	5559
21.	Chirang	21	1139
22.	Kamrup (Metro+Rural)	1505	50,673
23.	Nalbari	33	1086
24.	Baksa	16	1047
25.	Darrang	92	2773
26.	Udalguri	74	3227
	Total	5799	2,19,903

Source : Office of the Chief Inspector of Industries, Assam

The major mineral based industries of Assam include the oil refineries, petrochemicals, cement and LPG bottling plants.

Paper industries, plywood and furniture manufacturing etc. are the major forest based industries of Assam.

Major Industries of Assam :

Tea Industry :

Tea industry of Assam is based on the tea leafs produced through large scale tea plantation in the state. It is the highest foreign currency earning industry of Assam. India's 54 per cent tea is produced in Assam. In the tea industry of Assam more than 6 lakh people are employed and among them 2.7 lakh or about half of the people are women. During the last few years serveral thousands of samll tea gardens have grown up and a good number of families are getting economically benefited. Among the total number of

registered industries of Assam, 30 per cent industries produce tea. Since inception Assam's tea industry has been producing black tea, but since 1980 green tea production and export has increased, thereby earning more foreign currency.

Tea industry is the highest foreign currency earning industry in Assam. Out of India's total tea production 54 per cent tea is produced in Assam.

Among the mineral based industries, the oil refineries and petrochemical are the major industries. Based on refining mineral oil and different petroleum by – products, some allied industries are set up and among these the plastic (polymer) industry is the major one. The Assam Petro-Chemical Limited has been able to establish fertilizers and thermal electric power producing plants by using natural gas found in upper Assam region. In order to check wastage of natural

gas the Assam Industrial Development Corporation (AIDC) has been established under government sector in 1971 and thereby the gas-based petro-chemical production plant, the first in the country was established in Assam.

The first mineral oil based industry under government sector is the Guwahati petro-chemical industry. Its main industry is oil refinery. Moreover, based on various by-products obtained during refining of mineral oil, a number of small industries have been set up in the state. The major chemical substances produced in Guwahati petrochemical industry are – naphtha, LPG, motor spirit, petroleum coke, kerosene and high speed diesel.

The Bongaigaon Refinery and Petro-Chemical Limited was established by the Government of India on February, 20, 1974. But in 2001 this industry was brought under Indian Oil Limited. In view of demand in the country the Indian Oil Limited had established one large methanol production unit in 1989 and one formaldehyde production unit in 1998 in collaboration of England and the Netherlands. The products and substances produced by the Bongaigaon Petrochemical industry are exported to West Bengal, Bihar, Delhi, Haryana, Uttaranchal and even to the neighbouring countries like Bhutan and Nepal.

Digboi Refinery was established in

1901, which is the oldest refinery in India. Initially this refinery was functioning under the Assam Oil Company, but subsequently it was attached to Indian Petrochemical unit. Later on in 1981, the Digboi Petrochemical unit was brought under Indian Oil Corporation Limited. The produced substances and products of the Digboi petrochemical industry are naphtha, high speed diesel, turpine oil, furnace oil, jute batching oil and motor spirit. Wax produced in Digboi petrochemicals is of high quality.

Among the other mineral based industries the three large industries located at Namrup are the Brahmaputra Vally Fertilizer Corporation Limited, Assam Petrochemicals Limited and Namrup Thermal Power Station. The industrial environment created at Namrup through establishment of the first natural gas based fertilizer industry in 1960 was favourable for establishment of these industries at Namrup.

In Assam all total 64 Commercial Estates and 50 Industrial Estates have been developed. Moreover, three industrial growth centres are also established in the state. These three growth centres are located at Balipara in Sonitpur district, Matia in Goalpara district and Chhaygaon-Patgaon-Jambari in Kamrup district. Efforts are made for industrial development in the state by establishing another 11 numbers of Industrial Infrastructure Development Centres. The

Software Technology Park established near the Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport is a significant step towards development of computer and software industries in the state. Under the control of IIT Guwahati, the Bio-Technology Park, the Export Promotion Industrial Park covering 58 units developed on a plot of 68.1 acre land area at North Guwahati, the North-East Mega Food Park at Tihu in Nalbari district, the Food Processing Park, Bamboo Park at Chhaygaon, the Plastic Park at Lapetkota near Dibrugarh established with the by – products of the Gas Cracker industry, the Jute Park at Dhing in Nagaon district and the Agro Food Processing units established at Silapathar, Dalgaon, Dhubri, Samaguri and Pawoi of Tinsukia district are the initiatives in the industrial sector of the state which may be expected to bring about industrial development in Assam in near future. The export and import of raw materials and industrial products to and from the neighbouring country Bangladesh and Bhutan via Assam have been emphasized. In this regard, commercial centres are established at Sutarbandi of Karimganj district, Mankachor and Golokganj of Dhubri district and Darranga of Baksa district.

Forest based Industries :

The medium scale industries based on forest products of Assam are mainly the paper and plywood industries. Based on

bamboos as raw materials the two big paper mills of Assam are the ‘Nagaon Paper Mill’ presently in Morigaon district and the ‘Pachgram Paper Mill’ in Hailakandi district. These two paper mills are under government sector. Presently there is no production in these mills. Due to heavy financial loss, the ‘Ashok Paper Mill’ established at an expenditure of 15 crores during the 4th 5 – year plan period has also been closed. There is also a small paper mill at Amingaon of Kamrup district. Timbers for plywood industries are collected from the forests of Assam. The plywoods manufactured in Assam are mainly used in making the boxes for packing teas. Assam manufactures about 65 percent plywoods of India. However, the government of Assam has taken some measures to reduce plywood production in view of increasing loss of forests. Almost all the plywood manufacturing industries of Assam are located at Margherita and Mariani. In the year 1984, there were 52 plywood industries in Assam out of which 13 were big and the rest were of medium type. But, some of these industries were closed down so as to check tree cutting and thus in 2001 the numbers of plywood industries came down to 46. In these industries, about 5,600 numbers of people are directly engaged, while about one lakh people are indirectly engaged.

Cottage Industries :

During the post independence period, a survey conducted in 1954-55 revealed that there were all total 72 numbers of cottage industries including handlooms and textiles, brass and bell metals, pottery industries etc. Besides these industries, Assamese ornaments manufacturing works, fire works, manufacturing of various items of bamboo - cane and wood, locally manufacturing of silk thread and cloths, preparing and designing of different decorative items made of jute fibre and waterhyacinth etc. are the varieties of cottage industries presently growing in Assam. Among the cottage industries, the silk industries have occupied the leading position. Cloths made of **eri and muga** have been gaining importance in the life and culture of the Assamese since the past. Muga cloths have been able to occupy a special position now in the international market. Presently, different types of hand-woven cloths are produced in about 7 lakhs looms. Sualkuchi is famous for production of **pat and muga** clothes. Similarly, Palashbari-Chhaygaon area is famous for production of **eri** thread and **eri** cloths. On the other hand, the cottage industries of Hajo-Sarthebari are most famous for manufacturing of utensils made of brass and bell metals and varieties of decorative items.

There are also a good number of agro based cottage industries in Assam. Among

these cottage industries, the notable ones are rice milling, oil seed milling, grinding of spices, sugarcane crusher, fibre extraction from banana tree, pickles processing, flour milling etc.

The forest based cottage industries of Assam include the industries which produce the bamboo and cane- made household furnitures, doors and windows, various decorative furnitures made of timbers, oil extracted from different plants and herbal medicines etc.

Footloose Industries :

It is not that footloose industries should be localised in any particular area. These industries can be set up in all places. The factors usually responsible for the growth of industries, such as availability of raw materials, skilled labour, favourable transport system and market facility are not supposed to determine the location of footloose industries. Therefore, such industries can be established at any place and thus these are called footloose industries. Although footloose by nature, these industries also face difficulties without proper transport system, regular supply of electric power and very skillful labourers. In these industries the raw materials required and materials produced are less in amount, but their market values are high. So, the transport cost involved in carrying the raw materials and finished products is less. Pollution is less in these

industries. However, pollution free environment is quite essential for some types of footloose industries. For this reason, many footloose industries are set up in the relatively pollution free outskirts of the cities. The Software Technology Park, India localised near the L.G. B. International Airport at

Guwahati is such an example. Although the footloose industries in Assam are presently less in number, the Government of Assam has been undertaking plans and necessary efforts to establish a number of footloose industries in the state in the coming years.

EXERCISE

1. (a) What do you mean by kharif crops?
 (b) What do you mean by rabi crops?
 (c) What are medicinal plants?
 (d) What is the percentage of people in Assam dependent on agriculture?
2. (a) Where is Jhum cultivation practised in Assam? How is it carried out?
 (b) What do you mean by 'rotation of crops'?
 (c) What is intensity of cropping?
 (d) What are the spices grown in Assam?
3. (a) Write about the drawbacks of the agricultural system of Assam.
 (b) Explain how and in which seasons rice is cultivated in Assam.
 (c) Write about the essential conditions necessary for tea cultivation.
 (d) Give a short account of the economic condition of Assam.
4. (a) Where was mineral oil first drilled in Assam?
 (b) How much percentage of India's total tea production is produced in Assam?
 (c) In which year the Assam Industrial Development Corporation (AIDC) was formed?
 (d) Where was the first fertilizer industry of Assam established?
5. (a) Classify the industries of Assam based on the raw materials used.
 (b) Write a short note on the agro based industries of Assam.
 (c) Write in brief about the speciality of Assam's tea industry.
 (d) Name the foreign countries bordering Assam.
6. (a) Explain the reasons responsible for industrial backwardness in Assam.
 (b) Write about the major industries of Assam.
 (c) Give an account of the mineral based industries of Assam.

- 7. Select the correct answer from the following alternatives :**
- (i) In which one of the following sectors, income increased during 2015-16 as compared to that during 2011-12 in Assam?**
- (a) Agricultural Sector (b) Industrial Sector
(c) Mineral Production Sector (d) Service Sector
- (ii) Kharif crops are cultivated during**
- (a) April-May to November-December
(b) March to June
(c) October to April
(d) January to May
- (iii) Which one of the following is a zaid crop?**
- (a) Mustard (b) Paddy
(c) Pumpkin (d) Wheat
- (iv) In which of the following districts the number of registered industries is the lowest?**
- (a) Goalpara (b) Udalguri
(c) Morigaon (d) Dhemaji
- (v) What percentage of India's total tea production is produced in Assam?**
- (a) 30% (b) 45%
(c) 54% (d) 67%
- (vi) The India's oldest Digboi Oil Refinery was established in the year**
- (a) 1898 (b) 1901
(c) 1951 (d) 1974
- (vii) Which one of the following industries can be set up at any place?**
- (a) Tea industry (b) Forest based industries
(c) Mineral based industries (d) Footloose industries

PART TWO

HISTORY

CHAPTER FIVE

STATE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

The state formation process in early Pragjyotisha –Kamarupa has its own distinctive features. The history of the geographical and political expansion can be known from various sources. In its transition from tribal system to monarchical system, Kamarupa passed through many stages. The contribution of the rulers of the dynasties from the Varmanas to the Palas in the early period, and those of the Ahoms in upper Assam in medieval period was determinative in the polity formation of the region.

BEGINNING OF STATE

Assam lies at the centre of the region of North East India surrounded by its seven other states (in recent times Sikkim has also been added to the north-eastern region of India which has raised the number of states to eight). With an area of about 78,423 square kilometres, the Brahmaputra valley is the principal region of the state of Assam, though, a major part of the Barak valley also lies within it. Though Assam is segregated from the rest of India and lies in the distant impassable region of north-eastern India, it has been known since ancient times of its human habitation. Along the fertile plains on either side of the Brahmaputra valley the ancient civilizations of Assam emerged. It was on these plains that the ancient kingdom of Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa grew. The modern state of Assam is merely a geographical and political evolution of the ancient kingdoms of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa.

In some ancient literature and inscriptions the term 'Pragjyotisha' was interchangeably used for 'Lauhitya' (Luhit, Luit) or Brahmaputra. On many occasions the term 'Lauhitya' was also used to denote the geographical extent of the kingdom of Pragjyotisha. Moreover the term 'Pragjyotisha' was synonymously used for 'Kamarupa'. It can thus be assumed that all the three names were used to denote the

ancient kingdom of 'Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa'.

The names 'Pragjyotisha' and 'Kamarupa' have different etymological origins. According to the legends recorded in the ancient Sanskrit works, Pragjyotisha was the land of astrology and sun worship. However, according to Dr. Banikanta Kakati the term Pragjyotisha has originated from Austric language; the name Pragjyotisha is its Sanskritised form. The *Kalika Purana*, a text composed around 10th-11th century states that it was here that *Brahma*, the creator God of the Hindus, created the stars and the planets.

IT WAS PROBABLY FROM SUCH LEGENDS THAT NAVAGRAHA IN GUWAHATI WITH TEN SHIVA LINGAS GOT ITS NAME

It was after fourth century AD that the term Kamarupa came to be used. This term was first mentioned in Samudra Gupta's (350AD -375AD) famous Allahabad Pillar inscription which is one of the most reliable sources of early times. Among the Sanskrit literature it was in Kali Das's *Raghuvamsam* that the term 'Kamarupa' was first mentioned.

Scholars believe that, like 'Kamarupa', the genesis of the term 'Pragjyotisha' was also consequence of Sanskritisation. According to Dr. Banikanta Kakati the term 'Kamarupa' has come from

the Santhali word 'Kamru' or 'Kamrut' which means magic or the art of invitation of the evil spirits. It may be mentioned that the ancient Sanskrit texts contain legends about the origin of the term 'Kamarupa' like 'Pragjyotisha'. According to the legends, Kamdeva, the Cupid God in Hindu tradition, succumbed to the rage of Lord Shiva. However, he got his life back by the grace of the same Shiva. This was how the kingdom of ancient 'Pragjyotisha' got its name 'Kamarupa'. The *Kalika Purana* states that after the ascendancy of Narakasura as the king of Pragjyotisha, the kingdom came to be known as 'Kamarupa'.

The term 'Assam' emerged around fifteenth- sixteenth century. It denoted the land in the upper Brahmaputra valley over which the Ahoms ruled for around six hundred years. This kingdom in subsequent times became the largest kingdom in the north-eastern region. Presumably the term 'Assam' was first used in Assamese literature by Srimanta Sankardeva to mean the Ahoms. Much later their name became associated with the name of their kingdom.

The Assam that we have today is not a true representative of the geographical space covered by ancient kingdom of Kamarupa or Pragjyotisha and therefore it is not possible to presume the borders of the latter from the context of geographical boundaries of modern Assam. Even the royal

documents do not provide clear ideas about the geographical boundaries of this kingdom in ancient times. Sources reveal that the kingdom of Kamarupa-Pragjyotisha had a fluid boundary over times and this nature of it had failed to give the kingdom a permanent boundary that extended over centuries. However, what is certain is that at the pinnacle of its rise, the submontane regions and a portion of Bhutan in the north had been a part within the borders of Kamarupa and in the south-west its boundary extended as far as to cover some parts of present Bangladesh. It is likely that since at least the first and second century AD the river Karatoya formed the western boundary of the kingdom. Many parts of the rest of India at that time witnessed the growth of some larger kingdoms or small bordering principalities. It may be noted that river Karatoya at that time was located at a considerable distance away on the eastern side from North Bengal. In the forested areas along both the banks of the river Brahmaputra in the east various small tribes dwelt. In the Mahabharata there is reference of people of 'China' and 'Kirata' stock residing in the mountainous region and river banks of north eastern region.

Evidence about the geographical expansion of the kingdom of Kamarupa can be found from around fourth century AD. The western boundary of the Kamarupa during

the Gupta kings extended up to the eastern side of the confluence of Ganga and the Brahmaputra. As stated earlier the name of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa was first mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta where Kamarupa has been mentioned as a frontier kingdom. But still not much expansion of the state had been made on the eastern frontier. Though the kingdom of Sonitpur of the *asur* king Bana, on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra, disintegrated in the wake of the pressure exerted by Kamarupa, the kingdom of Kundil which emerged on the north-eastern frontier continued to flourish extending its boundary from modern Lakhimpur to Dibrugarh-Sadiya. Contemporaneously in the southern bank in the regions around Nagaon there developed the kingdom of Dabaka. Till the sixth century AD the kingdom had not been a part of the kingdom of Kamarupa. Thus the politico-geographic extent of the kingdom of greater Kamarupa remained limited by the growth of these tribal kingdoms since the first century AD. Much later however, the kingdoms of Dabaka and Sonitpur merged with Kamarupa but from the womb of the kingdom of Kundil emerged the Chutiyakingdom of later times which continued to exert its independence till the sixteenth century. The largest territorial extent that Kamarupa had achieved was during the times of king Kumar Bhaskar

Varman of Varman dynasty. During this time the submontane areas of north-eastern and south-eastern region were most likely incorporated within the geographical boundary of Kamarupa or perhaps they bordered the outer frontier of the kingdom. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang stated that he entered Kamarupa after crossing a big river lying (Karatoya) on the eastern frontier of Pundravardhan (east Bengal). This shows that the river Karatoya still formed the western boundary of Kamarupa.

An idea of the distinct geographical boundary of the kingdom of Kamarupa can be had from the *Kalika Purana* composed during reign of the Pala kings around tenth century AD. This became possible because during the period of six hundred years covering the rule of the Varman, Salastambha and the Pala dynasties from fourth century AD to tenth century AD, Kamarupa got an extensive territorial boundary. The *Kalika Purana* states that the western boundary of Kamarupa was Karatoya and at that time the kingdom had a triangular shape. The length of the kingdom from Karatoya to Dikkarvasini (it has also been referred to as river Dikrai or Dikrong) was a hundred *yojana* and breadth was thirty *yojana* (1 *yojana* = 15 miles). Incorporating modern Guwahati and Tezpur along with some territories on the east, the extent of the

kingdom broadened towards the west. It is not known how far the measure of the *KalikaPuranawas* correct. But the length of 30 *yojana* might have meant the length of the median or that of the two equal bases of a triangle. Therefore, the four hundred and fifty miles (1 *yojana* was equal to 15 miles) of area between Karatoya and Dikrai (or Dikong) comprised the kingdom of Kamarupa in the tenth century. In the *Yogini Tantra* composed around sixteenth century and in the *HaragauriSamvad* of the same period, there is mention of four divisions of the state. Ratnapith, from Karatoya to Sonkosh, Kampith, from Sonkosh to Kapili, Swarnapith or Bhadrapith, from Pushpikar to Bhairabi and Soumarpith, from Bhairabi to Dikrai. However, it appears that these segments were not geographical divisions but were some spheres of influence of the Mother Goddess or *Devi*. Be that as it may, the Chutiya dominated areas had not yet been incorporated into the kingdom of Kamarupa. In the south bank of the Brahmaputra and on the eastern side of the Kapili River too, some minor tribal groups resided. These territories in later times were incorporated to the Kachari kingdom.

The Ahoms came to the Brahmaputra valley in the first half of the thirteenth century and set up a small kingdom on the frontiers of the Chutiya kingdom residing in the south eastern part of the valley and in the areas

inhabited by the Morans and the Borahis. With the establishment of the Ahom rule, the region also witnessed a transition in its political and geographical situations. Meanwhile the kingdom of Kamarupa in the western part of the Brahmaputra valley had by now disintegrated and in its place emerged a new kingdom called Kamatapur (or Kamarupa-Kamata). Since then the new kingdom arose centring round Kamatapur or Koch Bihar of modern North Bengal and it survived till 1498. In the same year, in the wake of the onslaughts of the Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah of Bengal, Kamatapur kingdom came under the control of the Sultan. However, the reign of the Sultan over Kamatapur did not sustain for long as within a short period of time, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, a Koch youth from the region Bisu alias Biswa Singha overthrew Daniel, the governor of the Sultan rule Daniel, and put himself as the king. Thus about the year 1515, a new kingdom of the Koches arose in the place of Kamrup Kamata. In the subsequent times Bisu defeated the Bhuyans and extended the boundary of his kingdom to Nepal and Bhutan in the north, including Koch Bihar in the west.

At the time of establishment of the Koch kingdom, the Chutiyas had their kingdom in the extreme eastern and north-eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley. The Chutiya kingdom was also known as Sadiya

or Kundil with its capital at Sadiya. The ruins of the city of Sadiya are still visible in the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. However, in the wake of their failure to compete with the increasing strength of the Ahoms, the Chutiyakingdom merged with the former in the first half of the sixteenth century in 1523. In subsequent times the Chutiyas made a number of unsuccessful attempts to regain their kingdom. The Ahom king *Swargadeo* Suhungmung the *Dihingia raja* (1497-1539 AD) annexed the Chutiyakingdom and appointed an administrator there called *Sadiya Khowa Gohain* and thereby he made the Chutiya kingdom a province or administrative unit of the Ahom kingdom.

During the time when the Koch kingdom was established in the west, on the south of the Brahmaputra the Kachari kingdom arose on the western frontiers of the Ahom kingdom. The Kacharis were a major tribal group among the aborigines of Assam who had inhabited sporadically almost the whole of the upper Brahmaputra valley. At the time when the Ahoms entered Assam the Kacharis had a kingdom in the valley of the river Dhansiri on the western frontiers of the Ahom kingdom. The Ahom king Suhungmung defeated the Kacharis in a battle and annexed the kingdom up to Dimapur by 1536 as he did in the case of the Chutiya kingdom. An officer called *Morongikhowa*

Gohain was then appointed to rule the newly acquired territory by Suhungmung. On expulsion from the Dhansiri valley, the Kacharis left their capital at Dimapur, retreated to Maibang and at last to Cachar. They ruled here independently till the annexation of their territory by the British.

It has already been mentioned how in the western part of the Brahmaputra valley the Koch kingdom emerged on the ruins of the early Kamata kingdom. Among the Koch kings Malladeva alias Naranarayan (1540-1587), son and successor of Biswa Singha was the greatest. During Biswa Singha's times the Koch kingdom extended from Koch Bihar in the west to Barnadi, lying on the northern bank of Brahmaputra, on the east. Moreover, with the assistance of his astute brother and commander Sukladdhvaj alias Chilarai, he conquered almost all the contemporary neighbouring kingdoms including Ahoms, Kacharis and Jayantias and became the sovereign king of North-east India. However, this strength of the Koch kingdom did not last long and it split into two over the issue of succession to the throne in 1581. The region on the east of the Sonkosh river to Barnadi was known as Koch Hajo or Kamarupa and the part on the west of the river Sonkosh was known as Koch Bihar after the name Koch Bihar. Taking advantage of this fratricidal warfare over the issue of succession, the Mughals,

who had expanded their rule over whole of India then extended their sway over Koch Bihar on the west and conquered and annexed the eastern part as well. Since then the Mughals had directly ruled over Kamarupa and Guwahati and established their indirect rule over Koch Bihar in the model of a tributary kingdom. Consequent to the downfall of the Koch kingdom now, the Ahoms came into direct conflict with the Mughals, and during half a century that followed there were incessant Ahom-Mughal conflicts and warfare. As a culmination of half a century of incessant warfare, the Ahoms defeated the Mughals at the battle of Saraighat in 1671 AD and recovered parts of Kamarupa upto Manah in the north and Goalpara in the south of the Brahmaputra from the Mughals. Since then the Ahom kingdom had the Manah in the north and Goalpara in the south as its western boundary.

It has been observed that since the thirteenth century the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa ceased to exist and its place was taken by a number of small kingdoms. Apart from these kingdoms, a few tribal chiefs also established their dominance in the hilly areas of the neighbourhood. The mighty Ahoms however managed to reconstruct the geographical and political conditions of the valley and by the end of the seventeenth century extended their sovereign rule from Sadiya in the east to Manah and Goalpara in

the west. In the subsequent times they brought under their subordination all the neighbouring kingdoms and tribal chiefs and thereby formed a very powerful and extensive Ahom kingdom. In this way they brought under their sway even the submontane regions on both the north and south banks of the Brahmaputra and formed a kingdom by inclusion or by subordination of almost the entire Brahmaputra valley. It was under the rule of the Ahoms that a concrete idea of the state of Assam with a distinct geographical identity emerged. Since then a sense of unity between the two valleys of the Barak and the Brahmaputra, and the inhabitants of the hills like the Khasi, Jaintias, Nagas, Garos, Chutiyas, Adis and Mishings emerged.

The kingdom of 'Asam' of the Ahoms lasted for around six hundred years. The rule of the Ahom kings however came to an end consequent to the Moamariya rebellion of the mid eighteenth century followed by a series of invasions of the Burmese and their atrocious rule (1819-1824). Although the Ahom kings dreamt of regaining their control over Assam with the assistance of the contemporary rulers of Bengal, the British, no kings including the deposed king Chandra Kanta Singha or other claimants to the throne could recover the kingdom. Having defeated the Burmese, the British chased them upto Burma and by the terms of the subsequent treaty of understanding that was signed

between the two at Yandaboo in February, 1826, the British occupied Assam from the Burmese. In fact Assam came under the British rule since then and became an integral part of the British Empire along with other states.

During the British rule, the hills and the plains of north east were merged with Assam for the sake of their administrative convenience, and formed into a greater state. After occupying the kingdoms of Kachar, Jayantiya and Manipur along with Assam, the British divided the entire territory into separate units for administrative convenience. However, as an integral part British India when Assam, along with other parts of the country obtained independence, its structure as state –i.e, modern Assam became clear. In subsequent times, the geographical boundary of Assam, which by now had incorporated the hills and plain areas into it, had been restructured many a times. In the wake of the ‘States Reorganisation Act’ of the National Government, new states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and

Manipur emerged and Assam that was left extended only from Sadiya to Dhubri on the plains of the either banks of the river Brahmaputra. The total area of Assam including the district of Cachar (undivided) into the Barak valley, a part of the erstwhile Kachari kingdom, is 78,423 sq. kms. Of the total area, 63,300 square kilometres in the plains and 15,220 kilometres in the hills. Assam is surrounded on all sides by the states of Bhutan, Bangladesh, Arunachal, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and West Bengal. Consequent to these fragmentations, Koch Bihar, where the great souls Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva had spent some creative years of their lives, became a part of West Bengal. Dimapur, the capital of the Kacharis was ceded to Nagaland. Besides, Kundilnagar, the capital of the Chutiya kingdom, along with a part of the Sadiya territory, ruled by the Sadiyakhowa Gohain, was also ceded to what is now called Arunachal Pradesh. Assam’s territorial limit thus contracted largely thereafter.

ANCIENT KING DOM OF KAMRUPA

There is no detail account of the political history of Assam (i.e. Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa kingdom) prior to the 4th century AD. The few scattered references found in the early Sanskrit literature are also

contradictory in nature. Be that as it was since the middle of the fourth AD, historical narrative about its political developments can be found. Of course even though there is no connected account of pre-4th century political history

of the land, the early Sanskrit literary works contain some legends and myths about Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa. Traces of such legends can be found in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and also in the *Puranas* and the *Upapuranas* of later ages. The legends around Naraka or Narakasura are most frequently found among these legends. From the repeated mention of Narakasura and the importance given to this character in these texts it may be assumed that at some point of time a king called Narakasura ruled over the kingdom of Pragjyotisha. The fact that almost all the kings of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa traced their lineage from Naraka after the fourth century AD may also suggest that he was a historical character. Apart from this the other references in the epics and the *Puranas* and the *Upapuranas* cannot be accepted without inquiry.

There is no evidence to say who exactly the successor of Narakasura was. Certain texts and land grant inscriptions left by some of the rulers put the name of Bhagadatta as his successor. However, no evidence to prove the historicity of Bhagadatta has come to us. No historical evidence about the state, its rulers, and about their rule is available till the time of the imperial Guptas of North India. Therefore the period prior to fourth century AD may be said to be a pre historical era for ancient Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa. The ruins of many ancient

historical remains however indicate that in Assam the state formation process began since much earlier.

A connected account of the political history of the kingdom of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa have however been found since the second half of the fourth century AD. Though the kingdom was known as Kamarupa at that time, it may be noted that in certain records the name Pragjyotisha had been compounded with the name Kamarupa. The kingdom of Kamarupa sustained for about one thousand years, from the middle of the fourth century AD to the thirteenth century AD. And within that period the kingdom was ruled by three major ruling houses. The founder of the Varman dynasty which ruled since the middle of the fourth century AD was Pushya Varman. Thirteen kings of the dynasty ruled over Kamarupa extending over three hundred years till the middle of the seventh century AD. The most famous among the Varman kings was the last king of the dynasty Kumar Bhaskar Varman (approximately 598 AD-650 AD) who was a contemporary of the famous north Indian king Harshavardhana and with whom the former had maintained a friendly relation. Bhaskar Varman ruled till around 650 AD. It was during the reign of Bhaskar Varman that the Chinese Buddhist monk Hiuen-Tsang had visited Kamarupa and stayed in its capital Pragjyotisha for around two months.

However, opinions of scholars vary on the location of the capital of Kamarupa visited by Hiuen Tsang.

The kings of the Varman dynasty claim their descent from Naraka. During their times, kings of the dynasty donated land to the Brahmanas and settled them in different parts of the kingdom. In the same manner, Kumar Bhaskar Varman, in order to renew the grant given by his ancestor Mahabhuti Varman, donated land to more than two hundred Brahmanas in Pundravardhan, a *Bhukti* somewhere in the erstwhile East Bengal now within modern Bangla Desh. In an attempt to maintain friendly relations he made presents of many precious gifts to Harshavardhan among which there is reference to manuscripts written on the barks of the *sancitree*. During the rule of the Varmana kings, Brahmanas were settled through the grants of land which facilitated growth and expansion of Brahmanical Hinduism and many non-Aryan people thus became Hinduized. Consequent to it, the indigenous society of *kirata* or *mleccha* origin had also become a part of the *varnasrama* system. Moreover, during the days of the Varmans, the kingdom of Kamarupa expanded towards the south and the west and included large areas of north-east and south-eastern part of Bengal. Large tracts of land granted to the Brahmanas were in these extended territories. Bhaskar

Varman was also a great patron of learning. Scholars during his times were much revered and received royal patronage, consequent to which there was an expansion of culture and literature in the region.

The rule of the Varman dynasty came to an end by the middle of the seventh century AD. The last king of the Varman dynasty, Kumar Bhaskar Varman, remained unmarried and in the absence of a direct successor, a powerful provincial ruler called Salastambha took possession of the throne. From the records of the dynasty it has been derived that this ruler got its name from his personality which was as strong as the *saltree*. It can thus be assumed that he was known by a different name prior to becoming a king and the new name was possibly as a consequence of brahmanization. Some contemporary land grant charters mention Salastambha as of *mleccha* origin. Like the Varman kings, the kings of this dynasty claimed their descent from Naraka-Bhagadatta. The process of brahmanization got an impetus from the various land grants made by the kings to Brahmanas and their subsequent settlement in the new areas which in the course of time also gave protection to the boundary of the kingdom. Among the many Gods and Goddesses worshipped by the Salastambhas and their predecessors, the Varman kings, Siva was the main pantheon. According to Hiuen Tsang there

were hundreds of Siva temples in the kingdom. In the land grant charters of later Salastambha kings Vanamala Varman and Harjara Varman (Vanamala Varmadeva and Harjara Varmadeva) there is reference to a Siva temple as fair as snow and as high as the Himalayas constructed by them. The temple was located in the capital of the Salastambhas at Harupesvar or Hatapesvar on the banks of the river Brahmaputra. The smell of the incense sticks and the fire altars filled the atmosphere of the capital with fragrance every day. The dancers of the temple lived on the bank of the river. The ruins of some ancient temples on the Bamuni hills on the eastern part of the Tezpur town perhaps point to the Himalaya like temple constructed by the Salastambha kings. Scholars identify the town of Harupesvar or Hatapesvar town with modern town of Tezpur.



Huan Sang

The last king of the Salastambha dynasty was Tyagasingha. In the absence of any successor to the throne after his death, the officers of the capital are said to have selected Brahmapala, a kin of the last Salastambha king, for succession (around the last part of the tenth century). In the land grant charter of Ratnapala, son of the second king of the same dynasty of Brahmapala, it has been mentioned that among the contenders to the throne after the death of Tygasingha, Brahmapala was the most eligible. It can thus be concluded that in the absence of a direct successor to the throne, the nobles and the ministers had the power and discretion to elect a successor of the king. There were eight kings of the Pala dynasty who reigned over the kingdom. It has been mentioned that among them, Ratnapala, the son of Brahmapala, set up his new capital at Sridurjaya (1010 AD-1080 AD) and constructed many magnificent palaces there. In Ratnapala's charter itself it has been mentioned that he had erected fortresses around his capital and made it so much secured that no contemporary kings of India could ever dare to conquer it. Scholars opine that the city of Sridurjaya is in the vicinity of modern Guwahati.

The last Pala king, Dharmapala (approximately 1095 AD-1120 AD), was a great scholar and a poet. He was a very religious man and a patron of Vedic

Brahmanism. Furthermore, he and his ancestors, specially Indrapala, patronised Tantric form of Buddhism. The Pala kings of neighbourig Bengal and Bihar were also followers and patrons of Buddhism. There is reference of a number of Pala kings of Kamarupa embracing Buddhism. It is noteworthy that it was under the patronage of a king by the title 'Pala' in the post Pala dynasty, SamudraPala (around the beginning of the eleventh centuryAD), that a monastery of the Tantric Budhist monks came up in Yogihati in Guwahati (modern Ambari). The stone charter mentioning it is still preserved in the museum at Guwahati.

Following the kings of the Varman and the Salastambha dynasties, the Pala kings also donated lands to the Brahmanas patronising the Indian religious tradition. During their days, culture and literature also flourished. According to some scholars it was under the patronage of the Pala kings that the *KalikaPuranawas* composed by some unknown scholar.

The ancient kingdom ofKamarupa began to decline in the period after Dharmapala. During this time Kamarupa was invaded by the neighbouring Turks for a number of times. There is mention that during the invasion of Mohammad Bin Bakhtiyar in the beginning of 1206 AD, the army of Kamarupa under the leadership of their king Bartu alias Prithu killed the Turkish soldiers

and threw them into the river. Bakhtiyar alone escaped with a few soldiers accompanying him by crossing the full river of the rainy season. The army of the Sultans attacked Kamarupa several times in subsequent times but with failure. At last the kings of Kamarupa plausibly in order to escape the repeated invasions of the Turkish Sultans shifted their capital from Guwahati to distant Kamatapur. As a consequent to this important event which occurred in and around the middle of the thirteenth century, the kingdom of ancient Kamarupa ceased to exist and a new kingdom called Kamarupa-Kamata or Kamata emerged. The reference to this kingdom has been made earlier. This kingdom also failed to escape the onslaughts of the Turkish Sultans and in the wake of the invasion of Sultan AllauddinHussain Shah in 1498 the kingdom collapsed. But within a short period of time their rule ended and its ruins emerged the Koch kingdom.

Most of the kings of the Kamata kingdom were learned and patronised scholars encouraging them to create literature. It was during this time that scholars like HariharVipra, Hem Saraswati, RudraKandali created some of the finest Assamese literature. Among the literary works, the Assamese translation of the *Ramayana* by MadhavKandali significantly enriched Assamese literature. Many scholars are of the opinion that among all the versions of

translation of the *Ramayana* to regional languages, the Assamese version had been the earliest.

Administrative system:

In the state machinery of Kamarupa, the highest position was occupied by the king. Irrespective of his genealogy, the king was always considered as having a divine lineage. This divine origin theory for the family of the kings had evolved from the ancient Sanskrit texts. The lineage of the kings of Kamarupa has been drawn from Narakasura who was mentioned as the son of Vishnu and earth. Establishing this form of relation with some divinity or Puranic heroes in the past was in essence an attempt to legitimise the status of a royal dynasty. In the model of the early Indian kings who were believers in and patrons of the brahmanical traditions, these kings performed many sacrifices like *aswamedha*, and often followed the same tradition of assuming titles like 'maharajadhiraja', 'paramabhattacharak' which signified sovereign power. The founder of the Varman dynasty Pushyavarman assumed the title of 'maharajadhiraja' and Mahendra Varman twice performed the *aswamedhasacrifice*. The king was assisted by a council of ministers in discharging his administrative responsibilities. There were tiers of officers from provincial to village levels in the state administrative system though the king was the ultimate source of power and

authority. The king was entrusted with all rights over land excluding rights over land that was granted in perpetuity.

The expansion and development of the kingdom and the need for its security necessitated adoption of diverse policies by the king. In the frontier and forested territories which were not under the direct control of the king, new villages were set up through land grants. In most cases such villages or territories were offered to the offices in lieu of salary. These policies in essence ensured not only expansion of the states but also ensured its defence. Those land grants with permanent ownership rights often led in parallel, to the emergence of a class of zamindars with absolute power. Towards the later part of the existence of the kingdom, these zamindars (also called Bhuyans), began to rule their territories independently. This led to some amount of decentralization of power. Agriculture was the mainstay of the economy though there was some amount of trade. The revenue generated from the subjects constituted the major sources of the state treasury. Other sources of revenue included taxes levied on different commodities and forest products like elephant, ivory, precious timber, medicinal plants, animals etc. In trade and commerce barter had been the medium

of exchange though there was circulation of some amount of coins. Some of these coins have been discovered. It is not clear if the kingdom possessed a disciplined and salaried standing army. In case of exigencies however, the opportunity of raising an army was maintained. There is reference of a huge navy of Bhaskar Varman in the account of Hiuen Tsang. During the reign of the Salastambha king Harjara Varmana, there is reference of the king framing rules for smooth mobility of the navy on the Brahmaputra.

During the reign of the kings of ancient Kamarupa there was development in the sphere of literature and culture as well. It has already been mentioned that Kumar Bhaskar Varman gifted some manuscripts to Harshavardhana written on the barks of the *sacitree*. The Pala king Dharmapala was a poet and first ten verses of Sridhar Das's 'Suduktikaranamrita' were composed by him. It has already been mentioned that the *Kalika Purana* was composed during their times. There is mention that Bhaskar Varman brought from China a 'Tat', a religious called 'Tao-to-king' and translated in to Sanskrit. The form of art of ancient Kamarupa is not known since no remains of artistic forms have come down to us. Legendary narrations state that Chitrlekha, the daughter of king Bana,

got her name because she was an expert in the art. That sculpture as an art made some progress can be known from the fact that a number of temples were constructed using stones and bricks. The Surya Pahar at Goalpara, Madan-Kamadeva in Guwahati, Hayagriva Madhava at Hajo, Kamakhya temple on the Nilachal hills, the *Siva lingas* of the Navagriha hills, architectural remnants in and around Tezpur, Deopahar at Numaligarh and remnants of Hojai-Dabaka in Nagaon still bear testimonies of heritage in art and architecture of those times.

It can thus be seen that the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa grew on the traditions of ancient India. Aspects like the election process of the kings, expansion and defence mechanism of the kingdom, formation of the armed strength, the process of aryanisation etc. were very significant. Believer and patrons of Brahmanical traditions, every ruler of Kamarupa gave special emphasis on maintenance and preservation of the *varnashrama dharma*. Consequently on the one hand there was expansion of *varna-jati* system, and on the other hand, society began to be divided on the basis class. A society divided on the basis of class is always congenial for building up of state.

FORMATION OF THE AHOM KINGDOM IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The entire Brahmaputra valley got fragmented politically at the time of the decline of the kingdom of Kamarupa. The Kamata kingdom that grew on the extreme west also became devastated, taking advantage of which the Koches under the leadership of young and valorous Biswa Singha set up the Koch kingdom. Moreover, the Bhuyans, who emerged on the resources of the early kingdom of Kamarupa, spread over different regions of the kingdom and started ruling independently over their respective territories. On the southern bank of the valley, the Kacharis established their kingdom in the region from present Nagaon in the west to Golaghat in the east. Contemporaneously, the Chutiyas established their kingdom in the extreme east and north-eastern region of the valley. It was during this time that the Ahoms laid the foundation of their kingdom in the south eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley inhabited by the Morans-Borahis in the first half of the thirteenth century. The political scenario has already been discussed earlier. It is noteworthy that this fragmented political situation was brought to an end by the Ahom kingdom, which by seventeenth century grew in to an extensive sovereign state. This sovereign state of the Ahoms came to be known as 'Asam' and from it emerged the modern state of Assam.

The Ahoms were the descendants of the Shans of the Tai race. Prior to their coming to Assam they were inhabitants of the state of Maolung which lied in the area connecting northern Burma, and southern Yunan province of China. Chao lung Sukapha, who led the Ahoms in founding their kingdom in Assam, was a member of the royal dynasty of Maolung and a claimant to the throne. Being deprived of the throne, Sukapha left Maolung in 1215 AD along with his family and a few trusted followers and set his foot on the Brahmaputra valley after crossing Patkai hills of Assam-Burma frontiers. Sukapha was accompanied by very few companions and women were almost absent. On the other hand the route that Sukapha took was predominantly inhabited by the Naga, Moran and Borahi tribes which made his journey extremely hazardous. But Sukapha managed to establish friendly relations with the Morans and Borahis, thereby made them his supporters. Further by entering in to matrimonial alliances, Sukapha also established family relations with these tribes. This politics of friendly relations aided Sukapha much in establishing his kingdom in Assam. However, with certain tribes like the Nagas he had to resort to force

and exchange arms to break through their stiff opposition. It is to be noted that to increase his strength and population, Sukapha embraced into his fold almost all of the tribes he came across and made them members of the Ahom community. Consequently, though Sukapha began his journey with few followers, by the time he entered Assam it increased manifold. In 1253 Sukapha laid the foundation of the Ahom kingdom by setting up his capital at Charaideo in the south-eastern corner of present undivided Sibsagar district after long years of involvement in skirmishes and alliances. Sukapha was followed by forty ruling kings reigning over a period of almost six hundred uninterrupted years. In 1826, with the end of the Ahom rule, their kingdom passed over to the hands of the British, and on 15th August, 1947, with the country attaining freedom from British rule, Assam also became a part of independent India.

The Ahoms were known as 'Asam' in Assamese language. In his Assamese translation of the tenth canto of Bhagavata Purana, Sankaradeva has referred to the Ahoms by the same name. This name, by which the Ahoms were then known, in course of time, became the name of the kingdom over which they ruled. The appellation 'Asam' is thus a derivation from the Ahoms.



Swargadeo Sukafa

During the first three hundred years of its existence the Ahom kingdom could not expand much. However, since the reign of *Swargadeo* Suhungmung alias *Dihingia Raja*, the kingdom began to expand towards the west and there was expansion towards north-eastern frontiers as well. It was during his reign that Dimapur had become a part of the kingdom after annexation of the Kachari kingdom. Further the Chutiya kingdom towards the east was also incorporated into the Ahom kingdom, the reference of which

has been made earlier. Apart from that, the feudatory Bhuyans residing on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra were defeated and their territories upto Narayanpur on the west were annexed by him. It was during the reign of this king that Turbak, the Muslim commander from Bengal, invaded Assam, but had to return back after being defeated by the Ahoms. In the battle that ensued with Turbak, the Ahom commander Phrasengmung Bargohain along with his wife Mulagabharu died fighting. Victorious over Turbak, the Ahom army chased the invaders across the river Karatoya and extended their rule on the west up to that river.

The westward expansion of the Ahoms made them contenders of the other political powers on the west. It has already been mentioned that as a result of the decline and division of the Koch kingdom in the 17th century, the Ahom kingdom was brought into direct line of confrontation with the Mughals. Consequent to it, during the reign of *Swargadeo* PratapSinha alias Buddhi Swarga Narayan (1603AD-1641AD), the Ahom-Mughal conflict continued over three decades at a stretch with neither of the powers finally winning over the other. However, *Swargadeo* PratapSinha captured

Guwahati on the southern bank and the area till Barnadi on the northern bank defeating the Mughals. As a result, Emperor Akbar acceded to the conquests of the Ahom king by conducting a treaty at Ghiladhari in the year 1639. However, the contest that began could not be brought to an end by the treaty. During the reign of *Swargadeo* Jayadhvaj Sinha (1648-1663), a subsequent ruler after PratapSingha, Commander-in-chief of the Mughal army of Aurangzeb, Mir Jhumla, defeated the Ahom king and extended Mughal supremacy up to the Ahom capital at Gargaon. However, due to natural calamities and consequent ill health, the Mughal general could not retain his hold for a very long time. After signing a treaty of self-defence in 1662, the Mughal general was forced to retreat from Assam. By the terms of the treaty the Ahom *Swargadeo* consented to pay annual tributes to the Mughal emperor and thereby entered into a relationship of subordination. Apart from that the area upto the riverBharali on the north and to Kalang on the south including Guwahati fell to the hands of the Mughals. Consequently, large territories acquired during the days of *Swargadeo* Pratap Singha, were lost to the Mughals again. Being humiliated at the defeat and

subjugation, *Swargadeo* Jayadhvaj Singha died after a short while to be succeeded by Chakradhvaj Singha (1663-1669). Chakradhvaj Singha was a great patriot. Refusing to acknowledge the subjugation of the Mughals he stated: 'It is better to die than be under the subjugation of the *Bangals*'. He therefore, in consultation with the council of ministers, made plans to recover Guwahati, the plan in which the chief consultant was the Prime Minister Atan Burhagohain *Dangariya*. The two main individuals who were instrumental in this attempt to drive the Mughals out and regain their independence were the Prime Minister Atan Burhagohain and Lachit, the *Barphukan* of Guwahati, son of the former *Barbarua*, Mumai Tamuli. Both Lachit Barphukan and Atan Burhagohain were great patriots and were astute diplomat and strategic fighters. Lachit himself was the General in this struggle to recover Guwahati from the Mughals and regain freedom. It is mentioned that all the neighbouring tribes including the Jayantias and Kacharis joined hands with the Ahom army in this struggle against the Mughals. Thus, a fully prepared Ahom army under the direction of Atan Burhagohain and Lachit Barphukan pulled down the Mughal army camps one after another and brought Guwahati under

their control. However, very soon the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb sent a contingent to Assam under Ram Sinha as the general to recover Guwahati. As it was a contingent sent by the most powerful of the emperors of contemporary Asia, the outcome of the battle could be easily predicted for Assam was no match for the mighty Mughals. However, with the indomitable courage and perseverance of the Assamese army, support from its neighbouring kingdoms, the geographical environment of Assam, and most importantly, the war strategies of the Ahom general Lachit Barphukan and Prime Minister Atan Burhagohain, their political and diplomatic astuteness and deep patriotism determined the result in favour of Assam; they defeated the Mughal army and chased the Mughals to the other bank of the river Manah and determined the western boundary of this state with Goalpara on the south and Manah on the north. The famous battle fought with Ram Sinha was known as the 'Battle of Saraighat'. The fateful day on which the battle was fought was the fifth day of April, 1671. Since then the office of the Barphukan was set up in Guwahati.

Soon after the Battle of Saraighat, Lachit Barphukan died and Atan Burhagohain left Guwahati for the capital at Gargaon.

Taking advantage of the situation the Mughals reoccupied Assam for some time. It was in real sense the internal conspiracies at the capital and subsequent murder of Atan Burhagohain that inspired the Mughals to recapture Guwahati. However, these attempts to recapture Guwahati proved short lived as during the reign of *Swargadeo* Gadadhar Singha, the Assamese army defeated the Mughals and incorporated the territory upto Manah again within the frontiers of Assam. Practically, till the British took over Assam, the western boundary of Assam was fixed at Manah and Goalpara. The area on the western bank of river Manah in Goalpara was earlier, since 1757, under the control of the East India Company as a part of Koch Bihar. It was only in 1874 that this territory was attached to Assam by the British. We need to remember that it was the territory up to Manah and Goalpara on both banks of the river Brahmaputra that formed the foundation of the modern state of Assam. The principal political role in this development was played by the Ahoms. During the British rule certain tracts from the former Koch and Kachari kingdom were added to the state. Thus the geographical boundary of modern Assam was finally formed.

The Ahom monarchy and its state

machinery had certain similarities, at least the theoretical dimensions with the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa. Like the kings of ancient Kamarupa, the kings of the Ahom dynasty also claimed divine origin connecting it with Lord Indra. This theory of the divine origin of kingship was there also in the Ahom traditional monarchical system. They embraced Vedic Brahmanism in Assam and became patrons of this faith. As a consequence of Brahmanisation, the Brahmin priests theorized the relation of the Ahom kings with Lord Indra. Since then the Ahom kings came to be addressed as *Swargadeo*. It was the *Dihingia Raja* Suhungmung (1497-1539), who became the first *Swargadeo* through this divine Theory of Kingship and assumed the title of 'Swarganarayan'. It was he who apart from using Ahom system of dates in all documents, made a rule of using the *sakaera* as well.

The highest position in the Ahom monarchical system was occupied by the *Swargadeo*. But the power to select him was enjoyed by three prime ministers who were the Burhagohain, the Bargohain and the Barpatra Gohain. The king could be selected from among the members hailing from the royal family of Sukapha only. Similarly the

members of the council of ministers were appointed only from the select ministerial families. It may be mentioned that the way the king was selected by the three ministers or the *Dangarias*, the king too had the right to appoint the ministers. Consequently the nature of Ahom monarchical system was like a cooperative system where power never remained centred in the hands of one individual. This prevented the Ahom kingdom from becoming one like the Koch kingdom where anyone who had access to power could make claims to the throne. The rule of succession was tight and unbreakable. This rule of the state machinery was at the genesis of the uninterrupted rule of the Ahoms for six hundred years.

In the state machinery, the king or the *Swargadeo* held the supreme authority and took the ultimate decision regarding implementation of any policy. However, unlike the state machinery in ancient India, in the Ahom state the king did not hold absolute authority. The *BurhaGohain*, *Bargohain* and the *BarpatraGohain* ruled over their individual revenue jurisdictions. The *Barphukan*, who had his office in Guwahati, while discharging his responsibilities, could even use the seal of the *Swargadeo* while executing his official

duty. Similarly, the frontier officers like the *SalalGohain*, *MarangikhowaGohain*, and the *SadiyakhowaGohain* had independent responsibilities. Apart from maintaining political relations with the neighbouring frontier tribes, they also had to shoulder the responsibility of defence of the frontiers and expansion of the kingdom by clearing new areas of land and setting up new villages. The areas ruled by these administrators and the ministers were often called *Rajyas*. The Ahom kingdom thus bore the characteristics of fragmentary administration.

The chief characteristic of Ahom system of administration was their intent to create a self-dependant society. In that it was mandatory for each peasant to possess a plot of cultivable land. As a consequence there were no landless subjects in the medieval Ahom kingdom unlike in the Mughal kingdom. All able bodied men and women had to work to generate independent income and for the development of the state. So no beggars could be seen in the Ahom kingdom except in the times of famine. The Vaishnavite saints did not believe in the ideology of accumulation of wealth through earning and instead relinquished whatever they had.

The state administration was very firm

in its dealings with defence of its frontiers and with foreigners. The king refused to take even a grain of rice in the event of a mere inch of land falling into the hands of the foreigners. Similarly, the subjects were not allowed to mingle with the foreigners; and the latter was allowed to enter the state boundary unless they fulfilled certain rules and norms. But with the neighbouring hilly tribes like the Miri (present Mishing), Naga, Dafla (Nishi), Abor (Adi), Aka (Hras), the Ahoms followed a policy of living in a relationship of fraternal alliance. So the Ahoms framed the state policy in a manner that facilitated these tribes to procure their essential commodities from the plains. This system has been referred to as the 'Posa' system in the *Buranjis*.

The religious policy of the state was one of toleration. Assam being a seat of diverse faiths like Buddhism, Tantrism, Shaivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism, Vedic and non-vedic systems alike, the Ahom kings allowed the followers of each religious faith to practice their own tradition and belief systems. However, there is no reference of the Muslims openly setting up their Mosques.

But the Sufi saints had their own preaching centres. For the sustenance of these centres or *dargahs*, the kings are known to have donated land. The *dargah* of Azan Pir at Saraguri Chapori in Sibsagar and that of Ghiyasuddin Aulia at Hajo were set up as a consequence of the state policy. With the beginning of British rule in Assam, Christianity began to be spread among certain sections of the population. The predominant form of religious belief among the Ahom-Koch kings were Shaivism, Saktism, Tantrism, Vaishnavism and Vedic forms of religion. The Bhakti tradition preached by Sankaradeva was the predominant among them. The *namghars* and *satras* were the main institutions of this tradition. The main institutions of Shakti, Saivite and Vedic traditions were the temples. The Shiva, Devi and Vishnu temples at Sibsagar and the Kamakhya and the Hayagriva Madhava temple in Guwahati are some of the famous temples whose relevance have still not waned. Similarly, the tribal and the non-Vedic people too practiced their religious faiths according to their traditions.

ESSENTIAL FACTS

- The appellation Kamarupa has been first mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta (350AD-375AD). This inscription was composed by Harisena.
- The term 'Assam' has been derived after the name of the Ahoms.
Karatoya river: a big river flowing on the eastern boundary of Pundravardhan (North Bengal) and western boundary of Kamarupa.
- According to the Yogini Tantra the four divisions of Assam: Ratnapith from Karatoya to Sonkosh, Kampith from Sonkosh to Kapili, Swarnapith or Bhadrpith from Pushpika to Bhairabi and Soumarpith from Bhairabi to Dikrai.
- Sadiya Khowa Gohain: the administrative officer appointed by the Ahom king to administer the Sadiya region.
- Marangi Khowa Gohain: the officer appointed to administer the region of present Golaghat to Dimapur.
- The eastern segment of the Koch kingdom from the Sonkosh to Barnadi was known as Koch-Hajo or Kamarupa and the western segment of the kingdom from Sonkosh to Koch Bihar was known as Koch Bihar.
- The founder of the Varman dynasty around the middle of the fourth century was Pushya Varman, who founded the dynasty around the middle of the fourth century CE.
- The capital of the Salastambha dynasty was at Harupeshvar or Hatapeshvar on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra.
- Ratnapala established the new capital at Sridurjaya and built many palaces with much architectural designs.
- Madhav Kandali translated the Ramayana into Assamese and enriched Assamese literature.
- Agriculture was the predominant form of economy of the state in early times though there was some amount of trade and commerce as well.
- Bhaskar Varman brought the Tao To King from China and translated into Sanskrit.
- The Ahoms were descendants of the Shan group belonging to the Tai race.
- In 1253 Sukapha established the Ahom kingdom with Charaideo as its capital on the south-eastern part of modern district of Sibsagar (now Charaideo district).

- The Treaty of Ghilajhari was signed between the Ahom king PratapSingha and the Mughals in 1639.
- It was ChakraddhvajSinha who said “it is better to die than live in subordination to the Bangals”.
- SuhunhmungDihingia Raja first the first Ahom king to assume the title of Swarganarayan.
- In the state machinery the king held the ultimate authority and the decision on implementation of any policy vested on the king.

EXERCISE

Answer the following questions :

1.
 - (a) Who was the founder of the Varman dynasty?
 - (b) Who among the Varman kings established friendly relations with HarshaVardhana?
 - (c) During whose times did Hiuen Tsang come to Assam?
 - (d) Which king transferred the capital of Kamarupa to Kamatapur?
 - (e) Who translated the Ramayana into Assamese first?
 - (f) To which race did the Ahoms belong?
2. Write a note on the geographical boundary of ancient Assam.
3. Describe the role of the royal dynasties in the political rise and fall of ancient kingdom of Kamarupa.
4. What was the political condition of Assam in medieval times? Discuss the establishment of the Ahom monarchy in the Brahmaputra valley.

CHAPTER SIX

Society and Social Characteristics

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

People of different race and ethnicities have migrated to Assam since the ancient times. Assimilation and integration of different groups of people have led to the creation of a unique culture in Assam. The cultural and linguistic diversity was enhanced through the process.

Social Formation : Social System of Castes and Tribes

An observation of the various tribes and communities of Assam can make one surmise that people of different tribes and ethnicities have been living in the area since the ancient times. In the entire North east, people belonging to societies of both very modern culture and ancient tribal culture have lived together. It is for this reason that the entire Northeast is called an “Anthropological Museum”. It is therefore not possible to discuss the tribes of Assam separately from the entire Northeast.

It is not easy to study the history of the different tribes for certain reasons. The difficulty is primarily related to historical sources. Many of these tribes even do not have written literature. The noted Anthropologist James C. Scott has stated that though the hill tribes of South East Asia do not have any written literature, yet their oral traditions are very strong. Therefore the history of these people is studied mainly on the basis of their oral traditions. No fossil or human remains belonging to prehistoric period have been discovered in this region. As a result it is very difficult to ascertain which group of people came first to this region. Nevertheless, the idea that all the people of Assam and the North east have come and settled from other places is not entirely true. There are many indigenous aboriginal groups

amongst the tribes here. Considering the ethnic, linguistic and cultural environment, these people are only part of the mongoloid group that came from neighbouring China, Tibet or Burma (present Myanmar).

Geographically, the entire North east India lies at one of the important migration routes. That is why, migration of people to this place occurred throughout the ages from Southeast Asia, Southern Oceanic places and other parts of India. Scholars surmise that these migrations of people probably took place through three or four entry routes. There is evidence of communication of the region with Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and China through the passes in the northern mountain ranges. Minhaj-us-Siraj in his book *Tabaquat -i- Nasiri* mentions 35 mountain passes through which communication was possible between Kamrup, Darrang, Goalpara and North Bengal with Tibet and other neighbouring South East Asian countries. Moreover, there was communication between Northeast India and Burma through the mountain ranges, especially the Patkai pass, located between the two regions. The migration of the Tibeto-Burmese people belonging to the mongoloid race took place through these mountain passes. It is worth mentioning that even in the present, human migration and assimilation is seen taking place through the borders of Assam-Burma (the present name of Burma

is Myanmar), Manipur or Nagaland. Of course, such continuation of human migration and assimilation is to maintain the social relations between homogenous tribal groups. For example, the Singpho tribe living in Assam and Arunachal may be mentioned in this regard. They have been living on both sides of the India-Myanmar border. The second route was through the Brahmaputra and Ganga valleys. Throughout the ages the waterways of both these rivers have helped maintain communication of the Northeast with other places of India. The Aryan speaking people entered Assam through this route. The third route was the sea route. Many people from Southeast Asia, South India and Coastal areas entered Northeast India through the Bay of Bengal. The people of the Dravidian and the Negrito stock mainly migrated through this route.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the aboriginal people of Assam and the Northeast belonged to different racial groups. Amongst them, the main groups were the Tibeto-Burmans of the Indo-Chin branch of the mongoloid stock, Dravidians, Negrito, Austro-Asiatic and the Aryans. Scholars assume that the Austric speaking Khasi Syntengs were the earliest group of migrants.

Austro-Asiatic Khasi-Syntengs : The Khasi-Syntengs who spoke the Mon-Khmer language of the Austric group originally lived in the islands of South Asia

and India. Scholars also assume that some of these people came from the Pacific Ocean region around Philippines. Discovery of some Neolithic sources prove that once upon a time, these people inhabited a large part of Northeast India. Many Anthropologists assume that some sections of the Naga and Mikir (Karbi) tribes share a common ancestry with the Austro-Asiatic people. The practice of cultivation on hill slopes, domestication of cows and Mithun, use of Megaliths as memorials, etc., are some of contributions of this group of people. The Austro-Asiatics initially inhabited the Brahmaputra valley, though they had to retreat to the hill areas unable to withstand the Mongoloids.

Negritos : Bearing lot of similarities with the inhabitants of Papua and Andaman, the Negritos were one of the earliest to migrate to the region. According to some scholars, certain groups of the Nagas inhabiting the present state of Nagaland located to the South of Assam belong to this group. Their former habitation was in Africa. Physically these people are short, dark-skinned and had curly hair. They entered this area through the mountain passes of Northeast ranges and the sea route. The custom of hanging the hive of honeybee at the entrance to the houses, the custom of keeping the body of someone who dies unexpectedly hanging on a tree, using bamboo to make various fishing implements,

belief in the soul after death are some of the characteristics of their culture.

Dravidians: After the arrival of the Austro-Asiatics a section of Dravidians entered the Brahmaputra valley from the West. Some scholars suggest that the 'baniya' and the 'kaivarta' community are the ancestors of the Dravidians. After the assimilation of the Dravidians and the Mongolians in the later era, the Dravidians lost their unique characteristics. After this assimilation, a new branch came into existence called Mongolian-Dravidians. The use of turmeric in Assamese marriage rituals is adopted from the Dravidian culture.

Mongoloids: Most of the groups from the hills and the plains in the North East belong to the Tibeto-Burmese section of the Indo-Chin branch of the Mongoloids, which is evident from folk culture and anthropological sources. Their earliest settlements were the Hwang Ho valley of North West China and the upper parts of Yangtze River. But the exact period of their arrival in the north eastern region of India is difficult to ascertain. Different views suggest that they have entered this region in different periods and in groups before 2000 BC. At first one section of them had entered the Brahmaputra valley and the surrounding hilly areas and the other section had entered first into Myanmar and then headed to East Assam and in the hilly regions of Assam

through the hilly routes from the East to the South. Some of them migrated from the Northern side moving across Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong and Menam river valleys. One section arrived from the Teesta and Dharla river valley to North-West Goalpara and North Bengal. Then they gradually dispersed in the North West hills and plains. Excluding the Khasi and Jaintia settlement, the present hilly area of Assam and Brahmaputra valley is dominated by the Mongoloids. Bodo, Koch, Kachari, Moran, Matak, Chutiyas, Barahi, Rabha, Mech, Tiwa, Hajong, Mishing, Adi, Apatani, etc., belong to the same group. However, we cannot designate one particular group as Mongoloids in Assam. Interestingly, the assimilations that happened over years make it very difficult to identify people on the basis of race. One cannot depend on the earliest attempts of anthropological classification of the Mongoloids. But the flow of Mongoloids did not cease at any particular period and is still continuing. The Ahoms migrated to Assam in the first part of 13th century. The Ahoms also belong to the Indo-Chinese group along with the Khamtis, Phakials, Aitonias, Khamyangs, etc.. It is also assumed that the earliest indigenous inhabitants of Assam are Mongoloids.

The Mongoloids can be divided into two broad categories. (a) North Assam Category (b) Assam-Myanmar category.

Presently, the tribes of Adi, Apatani, Nyishi, Mishng, Mishmi of Arunachal Pradesh can be included in the first category. The second category includes Ao, Angami, Sema, Rengma, Lotha of the Naga community as well as the Bodos. Different sub-tribes of the Bodo community at some point of time dispersed from Sadiya to Dhubri of the Brahmaputra valley and also to the hilly areas. Garo, Kachari, Chutiya, Rabha, Koch, Lalung, Mech, Dimasa, Hojai, Hajong, etc., also belong to the Mongoloid group. During the ancient and medieval periods they were politically powerful and they extended their kingdom. Scholars state that the Kiratas mentioned in the Ancient Sanskrit literature were the Bodos including the entire Mongoloid and Austric group of people.

Aryans: Among the various migrant communities, the Aryans come last in the order which can be known from various sources like the Ancient Sanskrit texts written by the inhabitants of Kamrup or Pragjyotish. The north east region of India is known as the land of Kiratas or Mlechhas. The entry of Aryans and the increasing use of Sanskrit happened simultaneously along with the process of state formation. This also helped some sections of the Aryans to migrate to the Brahmaputra valley. Many scholars argue that the Aryans were invited to provide assistance in the process of state formation. The Local Kirata Mongoloid kings were

gradually influenced by this first wave of the Aryan migrants to adopt Hinduism which also accounted for the conversion of various tribes to Hinduism. Since then the tribal society has accepted the Sanskrit rituals and practices. This is how the various castes related to Hinduism originated in Assam. The rulers of Ancient Pragjyotish - Kamrup who invited the Aryans also lured them with a number of land grants. With this the number of Aryans increased along with the use of Sanskrit. However, the number of Aryans was comparatively lesser than the other tribes in the Brahmaputra valley.

Some scholars opine that the Alpines having striking similarities with the Aryans also migrated to this valley long before the Aryans. They also argued that the Kalitas of Assam also belong to the Alpine group. According to Dr. Pratap Chandra Choudhury, the evidences related to Aryan settlements were originally Alpine settlements. But this statement is not considered valid.

Culture: From the above discussion it can be understood that Assam and the North Eastern region is a land which witnessed a number of migrations of different communities. However, the Mongoloids are the largest in number in terms of the migrants who entered Brahmaputra valley. This is why they have been in power politically since ages. Interestingly, the influence of the Mongoloids in the indigenous culture of north east in

general and Assam in particular has been greater than the other communities. It also reflects unity in diversity among the different communities in Assam.

With the arrival of the Brahmanas in Assam the traditional culture went through a series of changes. On the one hand the traditional tribal groups became powerful in their locality through their original customs and traditions and on the other hand the Aryans Sanskritized the Non Aryan leaders by converting them as Hindus which somehow ignited tussles in between the Brahman priestly (Purohit) class and the tribals. The Aryans also elevated the status of the Non-Aryan kings and designated them as Kshatriyas. With the help of their economic power and diplomacy, this priestly class established the first Aryan kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley which in turn resulted in the association of the kings and their families with the Hindu Gods and goddesses and they also came to be identified as Hindu. The story of Vishnu making Narakasur the king of Assam and advising him on governance is also a reflection of the process of Hinduisation. This process of Hinduisation is also seen among the Varmans, Salasthambha families and even among the Ahoms, Koches, Chutiyas and Kacharis.

With new ideas of polity and administration, two strong forces emerged in the society. They were: (a) Caste system or

Varnashramadharma and (b) Class division among the people. With the adoption of Hinduism by the ruling ethnic groups, the subjects also became converted to a particular Caste according to the religious policy and such tribal groups were always included in the Sudra caste. Along with the process of Sanskritization, high and low divisions were created among the newly created castes. Those who rose high in the Sanskritisation process were accorded high positions and those who stayed low had to remain in low position. However, it did not change their caste.

The beliefs and practices of the indigenous people were also quite different. The festivities were basically associated with agricultural practices and women were treated with respect. Goddess Kamakhya and Bihu epitomizes such beliefs. Some scholars argue that Goddess Kamakhya was originally a Non-Aryan Goddess and she was incorporated into the Hindu belief system through the process of Sanskritization. The tribal names of rivers and places were also changed to Sanskrit.

The different tribes of North east had their own Non-Aryan languages which is prevalent even in the present times. Most of the scholars believe that Bodo is one of the oldest languages among the ancient languages of Assam. According to Edward Gait, the use of Bodo language in most of the regions

of the North East for a long time is evident from the extensive range of Bodo words in Assamese language. It is to be noted that many names of rivers in Assam have been derived from the Bodo language. Among the ruling communities, the Ahoms and the Chutiyas had their own languages. However, from the beginning of the medieval period, the Assamese language came to be used for

communication between the kings and the Aryan priestly class. Though the Assamese language originated from the Indo-European linguistic stock it is impregnated with words used by the surrounding Non-Aryan people. The alphabets used in the Kanai Barasi Buwa rock inscription of the thirteenth century CE represents the earliest script of the Assamese language.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The Ahom rule gave a new dimension to the society in Assam. Assam's social foundation was reinforced by Pratap Singha who represented the true rural centric culture and Momai Tamuli Barbarua who reorganised the Paik system and introduced other policies. It was social system determined by agricultural and work-based divisions.

THE PAIK SYSTEM OF THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD AND ITS IMPACT

The Ahoms who entered Assam in 1228 CE were primarily agriculturalists. The first inhabitants they met in Upper Assam were mostly tribal and there were plenty of unused fertile agricultural land. As the Ahoms had the knowledge of advanced agricultural techniques, they utilized these lands from the very beginning and introduced settled agricultural practices developing the productivity over time. However, the Ahoms did not have enough manpower required to

carry on the agricultural activities. This is why they had to win the support of the local people to utilize the collective force for agricultural activities which would not have been possible otherwise. Eventually with the increase in the territorial extent of the kingdom, they needed a larger force to protect their kingdom. But the entire force was primarily engaged in agriculture which made it difficult for them to use the same force for military protection. This called for

the compulsory participation of the entire working class for military service. This practice of compulsory military service eventually led to the creation of the Paik system. However, it was not possible to recruit people into military service forcefully in a period when the use of money was not widely prevalent. Even the ministers and officers were paid in kind i.e. through land grants and labour service instead of payment in cash. The Paik system thus guaranteed the regular flow of labour service.

With the increase in the territorial extent of the Ahom Kingdom, it became essential to ensure the smooth functioning of the Paik system too. Eventually the Paik system transformed the tribal society and the production process which gave way to a feudal system in Assam. As a result, the concept of private property came up and the Paiks were systematically arranged in groups for production of different commodities. This arrangement is referred to as the Khel System.

In 1603 AD during the reign of Swargadeo Pratap Singha, Momai Tamuli Barua formally introduced the Paik system. People belonging to age group 16 to 50 were recruited as Paiks and each Paik individually had to provide service to the king for three months a year. This practice is referred to as the Paik system. 3 to 4 Paiks collectively formed one unit called Got and these Gots together were assigned a particular activity.

These Gots together were called Khel. Initially, in a particular area the Paiks of different Gots were assimilated into a local Khel. For instance the Khel of a particular area called Dimaruguri was called Dimaruguriya Khel, the same goes for Chamguri as Chamguria Khel, etc.. But gradually people skilled in one particular activity were together grouped into one Khel.

The Kheldar looked after the overall administration of a Khel. He was required to make sure that the Paiks could be presented for service immediately at the order of the senior officials.

One Paik among the 4 Paiks from one particular Got was required to provide his service to the kingdom. That Paik was referred to as 'Powa Paik'. Initially 4 Paiks together comprised one Got. One Paik each had to work for 3 months a year. But this composition soon changed to 3 Paiks in a Got which means each Paik had to work for 4 months a year. The first Paik of a Got who provided his service was called 'Mul', the second 'Deval', and the third was called 'Teval'. When the first Paik was engaged in his services of the kingdom for 4 months, the Deval and the Teval cultivated the fields of the 'Mul' and also took over the responsibilities of his family. During the times of any invasion, 3/4th or 2/3rd of the Paiks had to provide military service for the kingdom. As the Paiks had to work

compulsorily without payment for 3 to 4 months they were compensated with the benefit of being able to cultivate in a fertile field. This land that was provided to the Paiks in lieu of their service was called Ga-Mati. Those two Puras of land assigned to one particular Paik was under the supervision of the Khel he belonged to. However, the physically weak were exempted from this compulsory service with the payment of a tax in return. They had to pay an amount of 2 rupees per annum to the king for exemption from services. But gathering that amount during that period was not easy for any Paik.

One Khel had upto 3000 Paiks starting from 1000. The significant and large Khels were placed under the supervision of an officer called 'Phukan'. For instance, the boat making Khel was placed under the 'Naoboicha Phukan'. The Khels producing gunpowder was placed under the 'Khargharia Phukan'. The smaller Khels were placed under a 'Rajkhowa' or a 'Barua'.

The state had a very tight control over the Paiks. An officer of a smaller rank was placed above 20 Paiks. He was called 'Bora'. A 'Saikia' was placed above 100 Paiks, a 'Hazarika' above 1000 Paiks and a 'Phukan' above 6000 Paiks. Apart from working for the kingdom the Paiks also helped in the household chores of the officers of their Khel.

The Paiks were divided into two

categories, viz., 'Kari' and 'Chamua'. The Chamua Paiks got relaxation from providing compulsory service to the kingdom after paying a certain amount of tax to the king. The officers like Bora, Saikia, Hazarika and Barua were recruited only from the Chamua category. This somehow led to the creation of a class system among the Paiks because of certain privileges that only the Chamuas enjoyed. But these officers could also be removed and replaced in case they were not favoured by the Paiks. The Paiks who could not avoid compulsory service were called 'Kari' Paiks. Moreover the Kari Paiks like the Xunari, Kohar, Tanti and Katoni had to contribute a particular amount of their production to the king as a tax annually.

A Paik of a particular Khel did not have the right to engage in the activities of other Khels except their own. The Paiks of a particular Khel could not create any collective organization to look after any kind of trading activity. This is why there were no Guilds during the Ahom rule in Asam.

In a period when money economy was not prevalent, land and the materials required to cultivate those lands were the main assets of a person. Some materialist historians point out that the Paik system somewhat resembled the practice of slavery which used people as property. They referred to the Paiks as some kind of organized slave labourers because these Paiks were forced to work adhering

to some guidelines. Though this argument is put forward, the Paiks of the Ahom period cannot be considered slaves. This is because they enjoyed freedom to some extent. They could even escape from compulsory service after paying a certain amount of tax and could even cultivate two Puras of land without paying any revenue. Moreover, the Paiks worked for a period of only three to four months for the kingdom and spent the rest of the time for his personal activities. This is why one cannot compare the Paik system with the barbaric slave system. The Paik system involved the participation of the Paiks as soldiers or labourers but it cannot be socially compared to the slave system. However, the demand for compulsory service for a fixed period of a year somehow curtailed the individual freedom of the Paiks and made them half slaves. Though they were always busy with the production process, they could not enjoy the fruits of production totally. This is why a section of the Paiks turned mutinous towards the king during the Moamoriya rebellion.

The Paiks were not private landholders. They could be transferred from one place to another at the orders of the king. Moreover, the two Puras of land that the Paiks cultivated were not registered in their name but to their Khel. He enjoyed the right to cultivate only because he was a member of the Khel. On the other hand, once the Paik

attained the maximum age as a worker i.e. 50 years, he had to surrender the land to the Khel. However this rule was not very stringent and was not practiced strictly. Instead of transferring the land to the Khel the Paik transferred the assigned land to his son. This is why buying and selling of land was not prevalent. But if one observes carefully, it can be understood that the idea of ownership of land was communal not private.

The Paik system facilitated the exploitation of the peasant labour class. The Paiks lost individual freedom and were constantly kept in check by the officials above them to make them provide compulsory service as soldiers and labourers. This coupled with the mandatory requirement to become soldiers in time of war, frustrated many Paiks who developed escapist tendencies. Rather than regularly providing physical labour both in time of war and peace, many paiks preferred to be menial workers (*lagua likchow*) in the households of the officers or serve as *bhakat* or *devaliya* paiks in the temples.

Thus it is seen that the primary base of the Paik system was the self dependency of the contemporary Assamese society where the economy of the state sustained through the simple barter system without any commercial relations. There was no scarcity or plenty in the society. Overall, the Paik system represented a production system where the agricultural surplus was nil.

NECESSARY INFORMATION

Nation making is an evolutionary process. All the tribes and communities in Assam have contributed to the process of social formation. The cultural diversity has been developed by the different groups of people that migrated in different periods.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSAM

Assam is a state primarily inhabited by tribes. In ancient Sanskrit literature the words Mlecha or Kirata were used to denote the people of the region. Though the words Mlecha and Kirata are literally not synonymous, yet in the case of North east India, the two words are used synonymously. In general terms the words were used to denote those people who were outside the ambit of Vedic or Sanskrit culture. However, by the beginning of the Christian Era, the state formation process began in the Brahmaputra valley and there started a regular inflow of Brahmanical culture to the region that struck its roots with the help of invitation and patronage from the ruling class. Through land grants, state administrative system and rules and regulations, temple building, extension of the state boundary, etc., the tribal society gradually came under the ambit of Brahmanical culture. Royal support slowly led to the growth of the caste system or

Varnashrama, though in a limited way. As a result, the caste system also developed during the period of the ancient state of Kamrup. But the greater society was still dominated by the tribal culture and the Brahmanical culture was not able to transform it completely within a short period and even in the portion where Brahmanical culture could spread, the tribal characteristics did not wither away completely. Moreover, the Varnashrama system did not expand in any significant way in the upper part of the Brahmaputra valley at least till the medieval period as the state formation process was slow and the Kamrup state could not expand geographically towards that direction in any significant way. Moreover, the state formation process was also comparatively weak in this area as a result of which there was no significant progress in the formation of professional castes or guilds. Even the professional castes like the Katani, Sonowal,

Komar, Kumar, etc., which were created during the Ahom rule remained identified by their community and not by their professions. As a result, during the ancient period, the caste or varna system did not mature and in a general sense did not spread in entire Assam. Moreover, from the very beginning assimilation has been an influential element of culture here. Almost every medieval ruler of Assam indirectly encouraged the culture of assimilation. As a result, unlike in other parts of India, in Assam, caste based division and discrimination could not progress rapidly or become sharp and acute. Nevertheless, the Varnashrama religion or caste system was not unknown to Assam. The castes and tribes of Assam together laid the foundation of the Assamese society at one point of time.

An attempt is made in the following to give a historical shape to the process of social formation in Medieval Assam.

Demographic transition - Caste and Class :

The Ahom kingdom was the principal kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley during the medieval period. The foundation of this kingdom was laid in the extreme south-east portion of the Brahmaputra valley that was largely inhabited by tribes like Moran, Barahi, Chutiya, Kachari, etc.. As the Ahom kingdom was established in an area inhabited mostly by tribes like Moran, Barahi, etc., the kingdom initially comprised of a majority of

Moran, Barahi and others as its indigenous population. Though they could preserve their own identity, yet through matrimonial ties many of them got assimilated with the Ahoms. At the beginning, the Ahoms considered all the natives of the mongoloid groups to be equal and so mixed freely with them without any hesitation. In spite of that, the respectable Ahom aristocrats tried to maintain their own aristocracy. There were seven families of Ahom aristocrats who were called as the Satgharia Ahoms. The families were the royal family, the Buragohain family, the Borgohain family and the Deodhai, Mohan, Bailung and the Chiring families. According to some the latter four families were - Lahon, Sandikoi, Dihingia and Dowerah. Moreover, there were native families from other indigenous groups who were promoted to the Ahom Khel .

Amongst the people that were within the pale of the Hindu caste system, the ones who received higher status or positions were the Brahmins, Kayastha, Ganak and the Kalitas. Moreover, there were several other major communities of people like the Keot, Koch, Boria or Sut, Katoni or Jogi, etc.. The majority of the Koches lived in the lower part of the Brahmaputra valley and they were still in the tribal stage. At the time of establishment of the Koch kingdom by a young Koch leader Bishu alias Biswa Singha in the beginning of the fifteenth century CE, the

Koches belonging to the Mech Kachari group inhabited the areas comprising Goalpara, Bhutan border, the present day North Bengal and some areas of Bangladesh. It may be mentioned that many among these people became Muslims after having accepted the Islam religion in the early part of the thirteenth century, when Islam spread to Bengal. The help provided by Ali Mech who accepted the Islam religion and who lived outside the territory of old Kamrup kingdom to Muhammad - bin - Bakhtiyar in his invasion of Kamrup is known from contemporary narratives. Expert Anthropologist E.T. Daton has forwarded some information on the spread of Islam among the Mech-Kacharis. However, with the beginning of the state formation process the Mech-Kacharis who were becoming part of the Hindu Brahmanic fold also started a process of their socio-cultural transformation. It is mentionable that amongst the Mech Kacharis in the initial period, only the members of the royal family who were within the Hindu fold advanced with education and otherwise. It is worth mentioning in this context that during the period of the Kamrup kingdom i.e., from 4th century CE to the end of the twelfth century CE, the caste system developed especially in the lower part of the Brahmaputra valley; as a result of which apart from the Brahmins, some professional and ethnic castes were also created. Mention is made of the

existence of Keot, Kaivarta, Kalita, Jogi, Kumar and such other castes during the period.

During the period of Ahom-Mughal conflict, some Sikhs and Rajputs came from other parts of India. Towards the close of eighteenth century Tai groups like Khamti, Phakial, Aitonia, Kamyang, Turung and others entered Assam from the east. These people were followers of Buddhism religion. Buddhism is prevalent even today among these people. Presently they inhabit parts of Namsai in Arunachal Pradesh and Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Lakimpur in Assam. The Lalungs (Tiwa), Hojai, Hajong, Garo, Rajbonshi, Rabha and other people of the Bodo group inhabited parts of Nagaon district and other areas towards the west. Amongst them, the Rajbonshis or the Koches from early on were comparatively advanced in knowledge of settled cultivation than the others. At one point of time, individual tribal beliefs were prevalent in all these groups of people. Another community or group of people that came to Assam during the medieval period were the Ahoms. The name Ahom is from the Assamese language and the process of their caste formation also goes back to the medieval period. Siukapha and his followers from Maulung comprising of a small number of families incorporated people that they met on their migration route and in Assam within the Ahom fold and thereby

formed the Ahom caste. That is why there are in many ways, differences in ancestry of the Ahom royal family and the aristocracy who came with Siukapha with the other Ahoms. The Paik system of medieval Assam was mainly associated with the Ahoms. The advent of the Ahoms in Assam has already been discussed. (Amongst the numerous old caste and communities of Assam the Ahoms were significant).

The Muslims constitute another community that emerged during the rule of the Ahoms, Koches and Mughals. This caste grew out of the Muslims who came to Assam through Royal invitation, as prisoners of war, as artisans and for administrative assignments. During the time of the Ahom Swargadeos, they were engaged in artisanal and agricultural production under the Paik system. In this way, people of different communities and believers in different religions

lived in Assam during the Ahom period, and under the patronage of the state a process was on to bring the various tribal communities within the fold of Hinduism. The process of incorporation of the tribes within the Hindu society especially under the influence of Vaishnavism continued till the end of the Ahom era.

Most of the people of the kingdom were agriculturalist - artisans. They were the Paiks. Economically this class was very weak and exploited; though they were the very foundation of the state.

In such way, a pluralistic social system developed in the multi-ethnic Assamese society. Nevertheless, the prevailing policy of mutual sympathy, respect and accommodation among all the people has led to the establishment of a new Assamese society based on 'unity in diversity'.

Facts to Learn

IMPORTANT POINTS

- The entire North Eastern region may be considered as an 'Anthropological Museum'.
- People have migrated to North East India throughout the ages from South East Asia, southern coastal regions and other places of India.
- Many Anthropologists surmise that some sections of the Naga and Mikir (Karbi) tribes are descendents of the Austro-Asiatic group.
- Most of the indigenous people inhabiting the hills and valleys of North-East India are Tibeto-Burmans of the Indo-Chin branch of the mongoloid stock.
- Bodo, Koch, Kachari, Moran, Matak, Chutiya, Barahi, Rabha, Mech, Tiwa, Hajong, Mising, Adi, Apatani, etc., belong to this group

- The Mongoloids can be broadly divided into : (a) Northern Assam division and (b) Assam-Burmese division.
- Each tribe of North East India had their own language and all these languages were non-Aryan.
- The alphabets used in the Kanai Barasi Buwa rock inscription of the thirteenth century CE represents the earliest script of the Assamese language.
- The Paik system ensured labour supply in the Ahom kingdom.
- During the reign of Swargadeo Pratap Singha, Momai Tamuli Barbarua introduced the Paik system in an organized form in the year 1609 CE,
- The Paiks were divided into two categories : 'Karhi' and 'Chamua'
- Paiks and slaves were not the same.
- Within the people of the Hindu varna system, the Brahmins, Kayasthas, Ganaks and Kalitas received high status or positions.
- The descendents of the royal family who were within the Hindu fold initially advanced in education and otherwise.

EXERCISE

Answer the following :

1. (a) Who wrote Tabaquat-i-Nasiri?
(b) What were the routes through which the Mongoloid people entered Kamrup?
(c) Who introduced the Paik system?
(d) What were the two categories of Paiks?
2. Give a brief idea of the migration of people to North East India.
3. Write a note on the contribution of the Mongoloid people in the nation-making process.
4. Discuss the changes brought about by the advent of Indian culture in Kamrup.
5. What is the Paik system? How was it necessary for the agricultural society of medieval Assam?

CHAPTER SEVEN

INTELLECTUAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Literature represents an entire community. Literature can be divided into many categories: Ancient Literature, Medieval Literature and Modern Literature. Literary sources help in the study of contemporary social system. Beyond this, paintings, dances and songs are also a medium of expressing the creative human emotions. In Assam from ancient time onwards these arts have flourished which are of a very superior quality.

Intellectual Heritage:

Literature is like the mirror of social life. So, literature belonging to a particular period tells us about the history of that period. The literature of Assam and the neighboring areas are very important historical sources for the study of early Assam. But, compared to the medieval period only a meagre amount of literary sources are available for the study of ancient Assam. Thus to study the history of ancient Assam one has to rely on the Indian Sanskritic literary traditions. These intellectual heritages have contributed immensely to the development of Assamese culture.

The ancient literary traditions of Assam are a significant aspect of the cultural life of the state. In Assam literatures were created in both Assamese and Sanskrit. Many claim that the Upapurana called *Kalika Purana* was composed in ancient Assam itself. Moreover, some scholars would go to say that the Charyapada or Charyagitas too were a part of the early phase of Assamese literature. Scholars of literature are of the opinion that these Charya songs were composed in the period of circa 7th-8th centuries CE. The Hinduized rulers of Assam themselves patronized the development of Sanskrit literature. This patronization of Sanskrit literature was in fact an attempt on their part to attain the highest stage of sanskritisation. The *Ahom* kings got their

Buranjis or chronicles and the *Koch* kings their genealogies composed in the Assamese language. There was creation of literature in the kingdom of *Kamata* as well. The rock inscriptions and the Copper Plate grants written in Sanskrit are still bearing evidence of the art and culture of ancient Assam. It should however be noted that such patronage of Assamese and Sanskrit languages consequently led to the death of many local indigenous languages. The *Kalika Purana* which was composed in about circa 10th century CE in Assam provides us with detailed description of the contemporary political and cultural scenario of Assam. It also throws light on the ancient social and cultural practices.

The sixteenth century text *Yogini Tantra* also written in Assam, mentions about the geographical location as well as cultural life of Assam. Similarly, the *Haragouri Samvada* also supplies us with information about the kings of *Kamarupa*. Another important historical source is the tantric religious text called *Dipikachanda*. We come to know about *Mina Natha* and *Goraksha Natha* through the texts such as *Paag-Soma-Jon Jhan*, *Darkanava*, *Koulagyan Nirnaya*, *Akulbira Tantra*, *Goraksha Vijoy*, *Goraksha Samhita*, *Kularnava*, *Kamratnatantra* and so on. Apart from this, other important historical literary sources are *Haragourivilaas to Bhuyanr Puthi* or *Adicharita* and so on.

The literature of the Ahom period can be divided into the following categories: *buranji* or chronicles, religious texts, translations and other literature, grammar and works on medicine. The writing of history of the state was made a rule by the Ahom *Swargadeos*. During their rule therefore a number of chronicles were written. Initially however, the practice of using *sanchipat* for writing purpose was not prevalent among the *Ahoms*. It is presumable that they followed the same practices as the Chinese did and wrote on bamboo or mat patches. Thus, the early histories of the *Ahoms* were very brief in nature.

The practice of writing *buranjis* was an indispensable part of Ahom culture. In Tai language 'buranji' means storehouse of knowledge for the ignorant (*Bu-* ignorant, *ran-* learning, *ji-* granary). According to the famous linguistic Greerson, it was a custom of the Ahoms that every member of their high families must have knowledge of the *buranjis*. The founder Ahom king Sukapha had instructed the scholars of his court to record each and every significant event of the kingdom including information about births and deaths. As a result, a corpus of the *buranjis* was produced in the period starting with his reign till the end of the Ahom rule. Initially, the *buranjis* were written in *Tai* language and later, once the rulers embraced Brahmanism, they were written mainly in the

Assamese language. Apart from having information about Ahom statecraft, economic and political situation, the *buranjis* also provide us with historical accounts of the contemporary neighbouring kingdoms such as *Koch*, *Kachari*, *Chutiya*, *Jayantiya*, *Tripura*, and so on. During the reign of king Rajeshwar Singha (1751-1769) of the Tungkhungiya family, many *buranjis* were burnt by Kirtichandra Barbarua to satisfy his own selfish motives. Among the published *buranjis* available to us, the most significant are- the *Ahom Buranji* translated (into English from Tai) by Raisahab Gulapchandra Barua, *Purani Asam Buranji*, *Kamrupar Buranji*, *Asam Buranji* obtained from the family of Sukumar Mahanta, *Satsari Asam Buranji*, *Tungkhungiya Buranji*, *Asam Buranji* by Harakanta Barua, *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, *Asamar Padya Buranji*, *Kachari Buranji*, *Jayantiya Buranji*, *Tripura Buranji*, *Padshah Buranji*, *Asam Buranji* by Kasinath Tamuli Phukan and so on. An important *buranji* is the *Weissalisa* which has been translated into English from the Ahom/Tai language and published. There are a number of other *buranjis* which have not yet been published. These unpublished *buranjis* like the published ones are equally valuable as sources.

The Koch kings and some of their feudatories also had the tradition of writing genealogy. These genealogies contain the

historical accounts of those dynasties and the activities of the rulers in a chronological order. Thus under the direction of the Koch King Samudranarayan (1791-1806) of the Darrang branch of the Koch dynasty, poet Suryakhari Daivagya composed the Darrang Raj Vamsavali, a genealogical account of the Koch kings. This genealogical text covers the history of Koch kings from the time of the first Koch king Biswa Singha till Dharmanarayan, who was established as a feudatory by the Ahom King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) in the year 1516. The Darrang Raj Vamsavali throws valuable light on the political, social and cultural life of the contemporary neighbouring states as well. A valuable text among the many unpublished genealogical texts belonging to this dynasty is the '*Rajopakhyana*'. This work has been published from Koch Bihar in Bengali language. Moreover, the tradition of writing genealogical work was also prevalent among the Satradhikars of the various Satras of Assam. These genealogical works are indispensable for a study of the Satriya culture of Assam.

The propagation of Vaishnavism in the land led to the translation of many scriptural texts, such as the Bhagavata Purana into Assamese language. *Sankaradeva's 'Kirtan Ghosha'* and *Madhavdeva's 'Nam Ghosha'* which were written for the common people have become the treasured trove of

the Assamese society. *Charitaputhis* written in both prose and verse forms are hagiographic literature on the lives of the Vaishnava saints of Assam. These *charitaputhis* are very valuable historical sources for the study of the Assamese society and culture of the 16th-18th centuries. Among the published *charitaputhis* the most important are- *Katha Guru Charita (or Guru Charita Katha)*, *Guru Charita* by Ramcaran Thakur, the *Mahapurush Sri Sri Sankardeva and Sri Sri Madhavdeva Charita* by Daityari Thakur, *Guru Charita* by Ramananda Dvija and the *Mahapurush Sankardeva* by Bhushan Dvija and so on. Apart from the *Charitputhis* and the genealogical literature for studying the history of medieval Assam, there are other literary sources such as the Vaishnava literature. The literature produced by *Mahapurusha Sankaradeva, Madhavdeva* and other contemporary saints belongs to this group of literature.

A significant number of translated works was produced in the courts of the Ahom and the Koch kings. The chief among this was the Assamese translation of the '*Brahma Vaivarta Purana*' by Kabiraj Chakravarti. The same poet-writer had translated a text on astrological sciences called '*Suryasiddhanta*' into Assamese and named it '*Bhashwati*'. Apart from this, other Tantrika texts like the *Yoginitantra* and the

Kamarupa Tantra, were also written during the rule of the Ahom kings. During this period Sukumar Barkaith wrote the '*Hastividyarnava*' a medical treatise on elephants similar to Sambhunath's '*Gajendrachintamani*'. The medical text on horses called '*Ghora Nidan*' was also composed during the Ahom period. Over and above these works, many other literary works were produced during the Ahom-Koch rulers. However these literatures produced under the state patronage could not do much for the uplift of the common people. But the tradition of reading and recitation of the religious scriptures in the Satras and the village Namghars that was introduced towards the later part of the medieval period did much for their welfare.

Cultural Heritage:

Men have taken refuge in creative arts in search of recreation, and self-glorification since early times. These creative arts include song, dance, painting, music and so on.

Art of Painting:

Men have been using the art of painting as a medium of expressing their inner thoughts. Apart from decorating parts of their bodies with various paintings the prehistoric men used to etch the walls of caves with paintings depicting hunting strategy, warfare techniques and so on. In case of Assam too we do not see a break in this tradition. In the 7th century CE King Bhaskaravarmana of

Kamrup gifted King Harsavardhana of Kannauj with painting items such as equipments to paint, vases/ pots to contain painting colours and manuscripts written on the *sânci* bark. These items reflect the passion in the contemporary society for the art of painting. Men used *sancipat*, *tulapat* (paper made of cotton lump) and later also cloth. The brushes required for painting were made with locally available resources such as bird feathers, horse tail hair, cotton, and so on. The most ancient text of Assam with paintings which was prepared using such minimum resources is Srimanta Sankaradeva's '*Adi Dasham*' or the 10th Canto of the Bhagavata Purana. But, the original text of the work has not yet been discovered. Scholars say that the manuscript of the '*Chitra Bhagavat*' found at the Balipara Satra is not the original one but a copy of the work done later. There are three schools of paintings found in Assam- (a) Satriya (b) Royal Court and (c) Popular

Srimanta Sankaradeva used painting, dance, music and musical instruments for the spread and popularization of Neo-Vaishnavism which was preached by him. Sankaradeva also used the medium of drama or *bhâonâ* to enable the illiterate sections of the society to realize the Bhagavat (the Supreme Reality) and therefore, he painted the seven vaikunthas and exhibited it to the public. Since Sankaradeva also used the term



Art of Bhagawat

‘Yatra’ to mean drama, the name ‘*sihnajatra*’ therefore means a drama presented through paintings. There are two components within this drama- image of *Vaikuntha* on canvas and presentation of the stories of Krishna. The paintings found on the *Vrindavani vastra* and the *chitrabhadgavata* show that the standard of painting as an art in Assam was at par with the rest of the Indian sub continent of the time. The development in the technique of painting is also represented by the paintings of the various incarnations of Vishnu, trees and vines on the walls of the *namghars*, the wooden images, pillars and plinths of the various buildings of the Satras.

Many texts produced under the patronage of the Ahom kings were also illustrated with paintings. Under the patronage of the Ahom- Koch kings, vast mass of paintings of secular nature developed. Painting as an art reached its zenith during the reigns of Swargadeo Rudra

Singha (1695-1713) and Siva Singha. It is noted that the paintings of this period reflected both local style as well as the influence of the Mughal-Rajput style of painting. This influence can be seen widely in the translated text of Kabiraj Chakravarti’s ‘*Gita Govinda*’ of the time of Rudra Singha and the ‘*Ananda Lahari*’ of Siva Singha’s time. The paintings done under royal patronage reached its zenith in the works of the painters Dilbar and Dosai as reflected in the works like the *Ghora Nidan* and the ‘*Hastividyarnava*’, the latter written by Sukumar Borkaith, under patronage from Rani Ambika. Some of the best examples of such paintings can be seen in the works like the *Darrang Raj Vamsavali* (by Surya Khari Daivajna), *Tirtha Kaumudi*, *Sankhachud Badh*, *Gajendra Chintamani*, *Dharmapuran* and so on.

The common people of Assam too were connoisseurs of the art of painting. Paintings of various types of vine, animal, bird

and human beings were made on texts of the *sânci* bark. Texts which were adorned on all sides with vines or *lata* were termed '*latakata*' text.

To conclude, we can say that the art of paintings in Assam was a mixture of aesthetic beauty, talent and skill wherein the indigenous styles of painting had fully developed.

Use of Colours:

The Assamese painters used to prepare painting material from locally available resources such as *hengul* (vermillion), *haital* (yellow arsenic), *silikha* (*terminalia citrina*) and other materials like burnt clay, *palas* flower, *dhutura*, *majathi*, etc. By using these natural colors with the help of brushes they created various images using the styles of writing or 'lekhoni' and sketching or 'rekhoni'.

Music and Musical Instruments:

Song, dance and musical instruments are included in the broad category of music. From the ancient time onwards within the category of music we find the practices of two distinct types: *Margi* and *Deshi*. The *margi* category of music is strictly done according to certain rules applying on the tune, verse and beat. These rules applying on the *margi* style are unchangeable. On the other hand, *deshi* music is performed for entertainment in the popular level. The historical sources show that both these two

categories of music were pursued in ancient *Kamarupa*. *Margi* music was performed during the religious ceremonies conducted by the royalty, and the *deshi* music was performed in the courts for general entertainment. There is evidence to show that there was cultivation of music in the time of king Bhaskarvarman. The copper plate issued by Vanamaladeva in 9th century CE has given detailed description of the capital city of Haruppesvara which had many temples dedicated to lord Shiva. This copper plate gives detailed description of the music performed in these temples by the *devadasis*. Similar evidence we get from the Bargaon Copper Plate of king Ratnapala, the '*Kalikapurana*' and in the account of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang. Bhaskaravarman received Hiuen Tsang in his court and musical performances were arranged for his honour. This shows the popularity and prevalence of the musical arts in the contemporary society of Assam.

This current trend in the cultivation and pursuit of music became more enhanced and accelerated during the Neo- Vaishnavite Movement. In this context we may bring to light the devotional songs- *Bargits* composed by Srimanta Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva. Composed in the Brajwali language the *Bargits* are performed in specified rhythmic forms (*Aata*) and melodies (*râga*). But Sankaradeva used them popularly for

cultivation by all. Similarly, the popular *Ojapali* and *Charyapadas* of Assam contain traditional styles of rāgas and tâlas.

In such way music as an art form stayed in tandem in Assam since early times.

Folk musical forms too such as *bihu git*, *biya nam*, *ai nam*, *baremahit*, *tukari git*, *loka git* and so on flourished in Assam. Ajan Fakir contributed to spiritual awakening through his composition of 'Jikir' and 'Jari' on the lines of Assamese folk songs. The Hindustani classical music was introduced in the Ahom court by Swargadeo Rudra Singha. The musical instrument *pakhowaj* became popular here from his time onwards. The Ahom Swargadeos also created a post called 'Gayan Barua' to look after the department of music and musical instruments.

Folk Musical Instruments:

Musical Instruments are necessary accompaniments of art forms such as music and dance. From ancient time onwards these instruments are being used in the state till the present day. The most popular among these folk musical instruments are flute or '*banhi*', various types of percussion instruments like '*dhol*', '*khol*', '*mridanga*', '*daba*', '*pepa*' or horn, jaw '*gogona*' or hurp, '*taal*' or clash symbals, chordophone instrument or '*veena*', conch shell or '*shankha*', bells or '*ghanta*', and so on. On the basis of their

differences, these musical instruments have been divided into various categories such as *Avanaddha*, *Susir*, Ghana and Tata musical instruments.

A few of these instruments have been discussed below:

Avanaddha Musical Instruments:

The very famous musical instrument '*dhol*' belongs to this category. From the ancient time onwards the various indigenous tribes of Assam used the percussion instrument called '*dhol*' profusely in their festivals and rituals. For example, during the festivals such as *Bihu*, *Ali-Aye-Lrigang*, and so on the beats of '*dhol*' infuse the spirit of festival in the minds and bodies of the people. Among the various types of *dhols*, the most popular ones are- *Jai Dhol*, *Dhepa Dhol*, *Bor Dhol* and *Kamrupi Dhol*. This category also includes instruments such as *dhak*, *doba*, *dagar*, *dholak*, *nagara* and *mridanga*. One of the most widely used musical instrument within this category is the *khol*. *Khol* played a very important role in the spread of Srimanta Sankaradeva's bhakti movement which used songs and dances as a medium to communicate with the common Assamese masses. *Charita Puthis* mention that *khol* was used by Srimanta Sankaradeva for the very first time in the performance of his *sama sihna yatra* where he got it made by potters

from the bank of the river Kapili. Musical instruments of the Avanaddha category were made with soil, wood, bamboo or metal structure, and animal skin.

Susir Musical Instruments:

Those instruments which produce musical sound through the intake and outtake of wind are called susir musical instruments. The most ancient susir instrument of India is the conch shell or *sankha*. Other important susir instruments are *singa*, *pepa*, *kali*, *gogona*, *sutuli*, *banhi*, and so on. These instruments are used as accompaniments in most musical forms as its tune is very appealing.

Tata Musical Instrument:

This category includes those instruments that produce music through

vibration of strings. In the ancient Assamese literature we find examples of a few kinds of *tata* musical instruments such as *Bipanchi*, *Rudrak Bilas* and *Rudra Veena*. Certain locally popular instruments of this category are *Lao Tukari*, *Khamak* or *Ananda Lahari* and *Dutora* or *Tokari*.

Ghana Musical Instrument:

This category of musical instruments includes the ones made of metal, wood or bamboo, made sometimes in pairs of equal size, which produces musical sound when hit or hit on one another. The most popular *ghana* musical instruments of Assam are *Borkanh*, *Saru kah*, *Tal of various sizes*, *Khanjari*, *Ghanta*, *Nupur*, *Taka*, and *Junuka*.

NECESSARY INFORMATION

The innermost feelings of people towards super human power can be defined as religion. From the time before the advent of the modern legal institutions, religion played the role of social cohesion and moral regulation. Assam too is not an exception to that. Here also religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity emerged and or spread. A major stream of Assam's religious belief is the Bhakti Pantha developed by Srimanta Sankaradeva. Known also as the Nava-Vaishnava dharma, it had its root in Indian religious tradition; but in Assam it is also distinguished by its local elements/ characters.

Religious Heritage

Religious Tradition- Tribal Traditions, Buddhist-Saiva-Sakta Traditions, Vedic Traditions, Bhakti Movement, Islamic and Christian Traditions.

The period of Ahom rule in Assam is a very long period. During the six hundred years of Ahom rule in Assam from 13th century to 19th century a number of changes occurred in the religious beliefs of the people. Initially, the entire region of the Brahmaputra Valley including the present territory of Assam was not under the direct rule of the Ahom kings. In this context, it is necessary to be pointed out that religion plays a very important role in the evolution of a state and its subsequent development in the ancient and medieval times. The establishment of a dynastic or a king's supreme authority and their legitimation was mainly done through religions. During the ancient and medieval times this legitimizing religion was the Brahmanical Hindu religion. Most royal families except the Islamic royal families of the land gained the legitimacy and authority for ruling from Hindu Brahmanical religion. During the ancient or medieval period the rulers therefore always patronized such religions from which they could derive benefits.

In the beginning of the 13th century various tribal religious beliefs existed in the

Brahmaputra valley along with Brahmanical 'Hindu' religion based on *varnasramadharm*. There was the practice of Vedic sacrifices and rituals along with worship of deities such as *Siva, Visnu, Durga, Ganesh, Indra, Lakshmi, Saraswati* and so on. We get references to certain Brahmanical rituals and sacrifices in the land grant charters of the Kamrupa kings of ancient Assam. Some land grants have mentioned that the fragrance of flowers and the holy smoke emanating from the Vedic altars of the Brahmins-Purohites during the religious rituals made the air of Haruppessvara fragrant. In this period there was wide spread practice of rituals associated with Sakta and Buddha religious tradition as well in the region stretching from Kamakhya temple to Tezpur (*Haruppessvara*), Deopahar, Doiyang-Dhansiri valley, Nagaon's Doboka, *Malinithan, Basudevthan* and so on, on the north bank of Brahmaputra. It is however a fact that by the time when Ahom rule was established, and especially by the time of Srimanta Sankaradeva these religious practices did not retain their original status and popularity. It has been mentioned that the Kamakhya temple which was discovered by Biswa Singha (1515-1540), the Koch king, and rebuilt later by his son Naranarayan was discovered in a condition of ruins

surrounded by dense vegetation. Similarly, the *Hayagriva Madhava* Temple of Hajo was also in a state of ruins in this period. During the Ahom war against the Kacharis led by king *Suhungmung* alias Dihingiya Raja, the Ahom *paik* army did not find any evidence of a temple in the area of Deopahar, but they did find traces of existence of a *tantric-yogi* in the area. Gradually, Brahmanical Hinduism was absorbed and adopted by the Ahom royal households and rituals and *pujas* also found spaces there. Even in the king's personal establishment the royal priest performed the religious rituals for the Ahom royal families. The Ahom royal households also patronized the religious rituals and festivals in the temples or *dauls* dedicated to Siva-Visnu and other gods. *Swargadeo* Rudra Singha had brought from Bengal a Tantric *Purohita* Krishnaram Bhattacharya and established him to perform at Kamakhya Temple.

Due to royal patronage to Vedic rituals and norms it became popular among a particular class of people but among the masses a variety of religious practices involving propitiation of the various gods, goddesses and spirits were in vogue. In the lower Brahmaputra valley the worship of *Bathowbrai* or *Sivarai* was popular among the indigenous tribes such as *Koch*, *Mech*, *Bodo* and so on. As a whole, in the entire region of north east the Sakta system of

religious practice was very popular. The worship of various female deities was also equally popular in the society. Thus *Jayanteshwari Devi* was worshipped among the *Jayantiyas*, *Tamreshwari* or *Keshaikhaiti Devi* among the *Chutiyas*, *Kamatেশwari Devi* at *Kamatapur*, *Tripurasundari Devi* at Tripura, and so on. The goddess *Kamakhya* had been absorbed in the pan Indian Brahmanical tradition by this period but certain pre- Brahmanical traditions still continued to thrive there. Evidence suggests that the worship of *Chandi Devi* continued in the region till the emergence of *Mahapurusha* Sankaradeva in the socio-religious scenario of Assam. Men believed in tantra- mantra and magic. It is also known that Goraksha Natha the preceptor of Nathism, had used his magical powers to enter the kingdom of *Kadali* to rescue his Guru Matsyendra Nath from captivity. A fictitious text called '*Adi Charita*' which is believed to have been written during the late 18th and early 19th century, with the pen- name Madhava mentions about a magical work called *Dhatu Tamrakshari* preserved in the family of Sankaradeva. This text further claims that Sankaradeva kept this text close to him till the end of his life when he stayed at Koch Behar. The '*Dhatu Tamrakshari*' written on copper plates is also called '*Kalpataru Sastra*'. It is known to all that the '*Adi Charita*' was a fictitious work

and had been written to spread lies. Still, this text is very significant as it tells us about the magic and occult practices pursued by the people of that period. Many believed that the founder of *Mayamora Vaishnav Pantha* Anirudhadeva gained a large number of followers through his magical powers. Similarly, people believed that the wives of *Nahar Khora*, *Radha* and *Rukmini*, used magic to shield themselves with their *anchal* from bullets during the *Moamaria* rebellion. Another popular belief was that Harihara Tanti, a Moamaria rebel from the north bank of the Brahmaputra, possessed supernatural powers which helped him in acquiring and organizing new forces. This is worth noting that most texts of this period depicted Assam in both inside and outside as a land of magic and sorceress. According to oral sources Ram Singha who came to invade Assam brought along with him five Muslim 'peers and the Sikh guru Teg Bahadur to protect themselves from the impact of magic and other occultist practices pursued by people of Assam. The text called *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* by Mirza Nathan mentions about the various occultist and magical practices prevalent at Kamarupa and Koch Behar.

The practice and belief in human sacrifices in the worship of Devi existed in the temples such as Tamreshwari, Jayanteshwari, and also to an extent at Kamakhya. History tells us that Ahom king

Pratap Singha had sacrificed Ramchandra, son of the Mughal Commander Satrajit to Devi Kamakhya on the Nilachala hill of Guwahati. On the other hand regular human sacrifices were offered at the Tamreshwari temple of Sadiya. Sources reveal that the Ahom Swargadeos used to offer a minimum of 12 people per year as human sacrifice to the goddesses Tamreshwari and Kamakhya. This practice of making human sacrifices to deities caused resentment among the common people. Thus, from ancient time onwards there were efforts being made to stop the practice of human sacrifice and specifically to stop it at Kamakhya. This is worth noting that Gorakshanath (approximately circa 10th-11th century CE), chief architect of Brahmanization of Bauddha-Tantrism had made the first attempt at stopping the practice of human sacrifice at the temple of Kamakhya perhaps with the intention to kill two birds with a single stone. Still, the practice of human sacrifice did not disappear completely at Kamakhya. We come to know about the continuance of this practice till the reign of Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha in the end of 18th century. Eventually, he brought an end to the practice of human sacrifices at Kamakhya. Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha himself has mentioned that to satisfy the goddess Kamakhya he offered 1 lakh animals and birds as sacrifice in 1782.

In the early medieval period the

religious environment of northern India was more or less similar in character. In that period even in Northern India three schools of religious beliefs and philosophies were current. They are Shankaracharya's *Advaita* philosophy, Tantricism and *Yoga* or *Hathayoga*. Shankaracharya's philosophy of *Advaita* had influenced Buddhism and Jainism as well. On the other hand Tantricism made a deep impact on both Hinduism and Buddhism. But, the most popular among the three philosophies was *yoga* or *hathayoga*. The believers in this philosophy of yoga created even a religious community called *Siddha-Yogi* or *yogi*.

Gradually, Shankaracharya's philosophy of *Advaita* became very popular across the Indian subcontinent. The central belief of Shankaracharya's philosophy is this that, there is no separate identity of Siva and the Isvara, the Param Brahma; in every living being there exists God. That Supreme Being is the eternal creator and all pervasive; all deities are under him. Thus, Shankaracharya by establishing the ideas of monism and monotheism in place of polytheism, wanted to reform existing religious systems. The best way to realize the Supreme Being or salvation is through knowledge (*jnana*). But, the question is: whether it is possible for all men to attain that category of knowledge to realize the formless Supreme Being or 'Atman'? Because, the knowledge Shankaracharya

refers to is completely intellectual in character. Thus, his philosophical successors like Ramanujcharya (1017-1137), Nimbarka (1130-1200), Madhavcharya (1238-1317) and Ballavacharya (1479-1531) have questioned the purpose of this emphasis on knowledge. They are skeptical of the outcome of Shankaracharya's Vedantic philosophy of *Advaitavada* and through their different explanations have shown that the idea of Shankaracharya's 'knowledge' is a very high standard of intellectual knowledge. It is not easy and possible for common people to acquire the knowledge for achieving salvation; instead they popularized the concept 'bhakti' in place of knowledge as a medium of worshipping the Lord who is now identified with Vishnu as the Supreme Being. Bhakti is a much easier path to pursue than pursuing the knowledge of Shankaracharya. It not a very complicated concept since it is outside the ambit of intellectualism. Many scholars believe that the philosophy of Bhakti popularised by Ramanuj, Madhavcharya, Nimbark and Ballavacharya laid the ground for the beginning of the all encompassing Bhakti Movement of India in the later times.

The meaning of *Bhakti* is simply: to love. Panini has defined the term *Bhakti* in his text '*Ashtadhyayi*' as to love someone else a lot or to worship someone with love and devotion. He has defined the term by associating it with a specific object or person.

The word 'Bhakti' has emerged from the root word 'bhaj' with the suffix 'ktin'. The meaning is to worship or praise or loving someone.

According to some historians, the coming of Islam into the subcontinent prepared the foundation of *Bhakti* movement in India. According to them monotheism is the chief feature of Islam. Monotheistic Islam compared to the pluralistic Brahmanical Hinduism was a simple belief system and devoid of complicated rituals and concepts, which attracted people towards it. Further, Islam did not have any practice similar to the *varnasramadharma* of Brahmanical Hinduism. Thus, Islam became a contending force for the contemporary Brahmanical Hinduism of that period. Thus, *Bhakti* movement was a policy of self protection consequent to this expected challenge posed by Islam towards Hinduism. But, this entire argument is wrong to a large extent as *Bhakti* as philosophy existed in the subcontinent from the ancient time onwards.

The *Bhakti* movement contains elements of both reformation as well as protest. Specifically, *Bhakti* movement made the worship of gods a simple and easy process by removing the *Varna*-class differences from the society. They did it by introducing the concept of devotion to the Supreme Deity through the medium of devotion and *nâma- kirtana*. Thus, this

movement was successful in reducing the existing social inequalities of the society by opening its doors for everyone. This movement faced a lot of opposition from the practitioners of Vedic rituals and customs and the Brahman priesthood, as it translated the Sanskrit sastric literature into the local languages and made it possible for common people to access this knowledge. The concept of '*ekdev ek-sev*' (worship of One Sole Supreme God) reformed the plural nature of worship and belief on multiples of deities finally.

The reasons behind the popularity and emergence of the *Bhakti* movement can be found in its above mentioned distinct characteristics. The practice of magic, occultism and other tantric practices within most of the contemporary religious traditions, the complex rites and rituals of the Brahmanical priest-ridden Hinduism, where emphasis was given on following *varnashrama* based social system and the entry of Islam in the Indian subcontinent contributed to the growth of the *Bhakti* Movement. The chief aim of this movement was simplification of the complicated rites and rituals of Hindu religious tradition, and develop a tradition of devotion that will be acceptable to people from both Hindu and Muslim communities.

The chief proponents of this new *Bhakti* Movement within Assam was Mahapurush

Sankaradeva (1449-1568), Madhavdeva (1489-1596), Harideva and Damodardeva (1488-1598). Both Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva were subjects of the Ahom state. Sankaradeva travelled extensively across India for a period of 12 years, during which he collected knowledge regarding the ongoing Bhakti movement of India. After returning to Assam he started his religious reformation movement in Assam during the reign of Swargadeo Suhungmung alias Dihingiya Raja (1497-1539). He started preaching his monotheistic Vaishnavism which was based on the *Bhagavata Purana*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Bhaktisutra* of Narada and Sandilya. His reformatory religious system is called 'monotheistic Vaishnavism' because he emphasizes the worship of only one god (Vishnu or Krishna) with singular devotion rather than worshipping numerous gods and goddesses. This religious tradition is also called 'Bhagavati Dharma' as its idea of monotheism has been derived from the *Bhagavata Purana*. It is also called 'Mahapurushiya Dharma' as the chief proponents Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva were called 'Mahapurusha' by their followers. This religious tradition believes in the path of Bhakti. The chief way to worship in this tradition is to take and remember His name through *nam-kirtanas*. So, sometimes this religion is also called 'Nama- Dharma'.

Thus, we can see that the chief characteristic of this religious tradition is its philosophy of monotheism. This Supreme Deity is Vishnu or Krishna. The followers of this tradition were prohibited to worship any other god or goddesses other than Him. In this tradition all the followers were considered equal, their caste or *varna* or religion was not taken into consideration at all. This ideology of religious and social equality attracted and unified common people from various communities. This religious tradition was very simple; if one completely surrenders oneself to the Lord, the Lord would deliver his devotee from all dangers, and all sins and problems. It is stated that the amount of sin that the Name (pronounced once) of the Supreme Lord could destroy, is more than a sinner can commit.

“Ekenam e Yata Pap Samharite Pare, Tatek Pataki Pap Karite Napare.”

A very important characteristic of Neo Vaishnavism is the importance it accorded to communal worship and other common activities rather than personal devotion. According to Dr. Banikanta Kakoti, “This religion does not consist of secret rites and rituals. It was announced in communal religious gatherings and public places of congregation, when people within their mundane daily lives searched for the contentment of their souls through recital of songs, then this mighty religion emerged”.

Sankaradeva established *namghar* for such communal worship and devotion.



An image of naamghar and its rituals

There was felt the need of certain literature that will help in preaching this religion of *Mahapurushiya* Vaishnavism. Thus Sankaradeva and his followers preached this religion with the help of music, drama, stories, devotional songs etc. Sankaradeva gave public performances through singing songs and acting in dramas. In this way he communicated his religious ideas to the common populace in a language they could comprehend. As a consequence of the Bhakti movement, regional languages emerged all across India and gradually the Sanskrit language lost its predominance in the religious sphere. Apart from the Epics many of the Puranic literature including the *Bhagavata Purana* was translated into Assamese language. The *Kirtan Ghosha* of Sankaradeva and the *Nam Ghosha* of Madhavdeva are gems of the treasure of Assamese literary

traditions which were composed at that time.

On top of that the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and other texts were also translated into Assamese. Sankaradeva and his followers not just composed dramas and other literature but also compiled the important hymns of the *Bhagavadgita*, Upanishads which were written in the Sanskrit language. One such text is Madhavdeva's '*Bhakti Ratnawali*'. This text was originally composed by Bishnupuri Sanyasi of Varanasi in Sanskrit language based on the ideas of the *Bhagavata Purana*. Madhavdeva translated this text into Assamese on the request of Sankaradeva. In a similar way Sankaradeva composed the text '*Bhakti Ratnakar*' in Sanskrit by collecting and collating the substantial verses of the various scriptures. Thus the *bhakti* saints by creating a genre of devotional literature developed an intellectual revolution in Assam.

This tradition of literary creativity continued long after Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva. In the later period Bhattadeva, Gopaldeva or Gopal Ata, Anirudhadeva and others created religious literature. Biographies of the religious leaders were written from circa 17th century onwards. These were called '*Charita Puthis*' or '*Guru-Charita*'. The chief institution through which Sankaradeva preached this religion is *Satra*

or *Namghar*. Through the medium of *Satra* or *Namghar* the people were congregated and then in simple and easy language the teachings of this religion were explained, which made it equally attractive for all sections of the population. But in reality, the full development and establishment of the *Satra* and *Namghar* occurred only after the death of Sankaradeva, during the time of his disciples Madhavdeva and Damodardeva.

The Neo- Vaishnava Ekasaraniya Bhagavati Pantha is a unique contribution of Sankaradeva to the society and culture of Assam. He gave equal status to tribal and lower caste peoples, with the upper castes in his religious tradition and thereby upheld the principles of religious equality. As a result, issues of caste based conflict became greatly reduced. He simplified the difficult ideas of the *Dharmasastras* into easily understood language and thereby he achieved two feats-one, he made the foundation of his Vaishnavism stronger and two, he opened the way for intellectual uplift of the common people. Another valuable contribution of his was the *namghar*, a public place of congregation and worship. It was in these *namghars* that regularly organized *nama-kirtana* was held, and critical and difficult concepts of his religion were discussed and explained.

In the words of Dr Banikanta Kakoti “the *Satras* were established as centers of

this new awareness, the soul and mind were offered to these *Satras*. These regional institutions framed moral laws and kept under its jurisdiction the other activities of the society as well. The *namghars* of the villages were designed as micro forms of the *Satras*. These *namghars* functioned as decision making bodies, village courts, schools and places of worship all at once. These institutions provided some stability to Assamese societies on the face of continuous political changes and instability. ... These institutions became very popular as centers of security and stability during both good and bad days.”

Islam

The Muslims arrived in Assam through the medium of war. In 1205 CE Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiyar, Governor of Bengal, attacked Kamrup with the intention of extending their territory. But he was not successful in his mission. Minhaj-ud-din-Siraj in his work *Tabaqat -i- Nasiri* has mentioned the main motive of Bakhtiyar behind attacking Kamrup was to find a way to conquer Tibet, China and Turkistan through Kamrup. But , the Muslim soldiers were defeated here as they could not withstand the natural disasters and fight in an unknown geographical situation. The king of Kamrup was one Prithu or Bartu at that time. This defeat of the Muslim invaders has been described briefly in the *Kanai Barasi Rock Inscription* of North

Guwahati. There is no evidence to suggest that any Turkish soldier stayed back at Assam after this battle. But, we come to know about a person called Ali Mech who showed Bakhtiyar Khilji the path of invasion and who was converted to Islam. He belonged to the *Mech* community. His conversion to Islam indicates that some local people were later on converted to Islam.

After this attack, there was a series of attack in quick succession, such as those by Ghiyasuddin (1227 CE), Nasiruddin (1228 CE) and Tughrel Khan (1257 CE) one after another. To sum up, we can say that the contact of the Muslims with Kamrup took place through their invasions. During such invasions, the Muslim armies also converted some members of the indigenous people to Islam for their use as guides. Similarly, after such battles many Muslim soldiers did not return, instead they settled down in the Brahmaputra Valley permanently. They also established harmonious relations with the local population and even married locally. Many lower caste Hindus also accepted Islam as it did not have any social stratification like the *Varna* system. And this gave a new dimension to the growth of the Muslim population here.

During the Ahom rule the Muslims also received official titles just like others. One such Muslim officer put in an important military post was Siddique Hazarika or Bagh

Hazarika. Thus, some of the Assamese Muslims fought valiantly against the Mughals in defense of Assam. The feeling of nationalism was given preference over sectarian religiosity. In medieval Assam Muslims had adopted the Assamese identity completely, though the religious differences were there. The best example of secularism can be seen in the example of *Chandsai* who was a Muslim but converted to Neo Vaishnavism preached by Sankaradeva which emphasized on social equality. The essence of Vaishnavism is reflected in the songs composed by *Chandsai* or *Chandkha*. In his devotional songs the tone of the devotional songs of the *bhakti* saints is apparent. Similarly, Ajan Pir or Shah Miran, who came to Assam from Baghdad composed *jikir* and *jhari* on the line of the Assamese '*Dehbicarar Git*'. Ajan Pir or Ajan Fakir thus gave a fillip to the Sufi ideals in Assam.

Christianity

After the treaty of Yandaboo, the British gained political control over Assam, and began the process of religious proselytisation at the name of social reform by inviting the Christian missionaries to the state. Though at that time the religious scenario of Assam was such that the local populace was very much connected with their own religious belief systems, the Christian missionaries were not much

successful in their mission. But, eventually Christianity was embraced by a section of the socially backward and exploited sections of the society. Initially, the missionaries made Jaipur their headquarters but eventually they shifted it to Sivasagar in 1841. The two leaders of the missionaries in Assam were Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson. The first person to be converted in Assam was an orphan called Nidhiram Keut, whom they gave the name Nidhi Levi Farwell after conversion. Later, Atmaram Sarma also converted himself to Christianity and translated the Bible into Assamese. The first book to be published in Assamese was this bible. Though the main motive of the Christian missionaries was to proselytise but it led to the development of Assamese language and literature. They also brought the first printing machine to Assam. The Christian

missionaries published the Arunodoi, the first Assamese newspaper in the year 1846. They also published the Assamese chronicles for the first time. Thus these missionaries by publishing books and journals made a commendable contribution in the field of Assamese literature.

Christianity flourished by making the society's backward sections their social base. They even embraced those who were not accepted within the 'Hindu' religious fold. One can observe that Christianity especially attracted people from tribal backgrounds. They usually adopted Christianity in their attempt at social mobility to a higher position. In many cases it had negative impacts on the life and culture of these people also. Still, one cannot deny that Christianity played an important role in bringing knowledge to the lower classes of the society.

IMPORTANT POINTS

- In Tai language 'buranji' means 'dumb' or a storehouse of knowledge for dumb people (Bu- dumb or without knowledge, ran- learning, ji- granary).
- The early Buranjis were written in Tai language.
- Many valuable buranjis were burnt by Kirtichandra Barbarua to satisfy his own selfish motives.
- The Darrang Raj Vamsavali was written by Suryakhari Daivagya.
- Many translated literature was created in the courts of the Ahoms and Koch rulers.
- Sankaradeva also used the term 'Yatra' to refer to his dramas.
- Ajan Fakir composed the jikir and jhari on the line of the Assamese 'Dehbicarar Git'.

- Religion played an important role in the process of nation building and development in the ancient and medieval ages.
- Sankaradeva's bhakti movement derived its main strength from existing Indian traditions.
- The root of the word 'Bhakti' is 'Bhaj'.
- The founder of Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam was Mahapurusha Sankaradeva.
- The contact between Kamrup and Muslims was initiated through battles.
- The best example of secularism can be seen in the example of Chandsai who was a Muslim but converted to Neo Vaishnavism by Sankaradeva .
- The two leaders of the Christian missionaries in Assam were Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson.
- Arunodoi was the first Assamese newspaper published in 1846.

EXERCISE

1. (a) What is the meaning of the word 'Buranji'?
(b) Who has composed the Darrang Raj Vamsavali?
(c) Who composed the 'Hastividya' ?
(d) Which particular philosophy was preached by Sankaracharya?
(e) Where did Sankaradeva receive the essence of Bhagavata sastra from?
(f) Who made the paintings of 'Hastividya' ?
2. What are the Buranjis? Describe its usage in understanding contemporary social situation.
3. Discuss the growth of religious traditions through time in Assam.
4. Discuss the role of Neo-Vaishnavism in the development of social life in Assam.
5. Provide a note on the importance of art of painting in the cultural life of Assam.
6. What is music? Discuss the chronological development of music in Assam with reference to various types of musical instruments.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MATERIAL HERITAGE

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Our fore-fathers have through their various activities left behind a number of tangible and intangible resources. Their knowledge and intelligence have created cultural excellence, a political and administrative system and numerous architectural monuments, of which we are proud even today. These are our material culture. The sense of pride and love which we have for the objects, instills patriotism and necessitates its preservation.

The material heritage left by our ancestors are observed in the following objects-

- a. Temples, monastries, Mosque, Gurudwar etc.
- b. Royal palace, houses.
- c. Ponds
- d. Roads.
- e. Stone bridges.
- f. Forts

Besides these monuments there are many items made of different metals. Among them are the iron implements like the canons (*Bortop*), sword (*Hengdan*), knife (*Daa*), etc, different type of ornaments made of gold and silver, different type of utensils made of bell metal like *Bankahi*, *Banbati*, *Maihong Bati*, *Borkahi*, *Berakahi*, *Chariya*, *Dhowakhoa*, *Bhogjora*, and a considerable number of gold and silvers coins. All these material remains are found scattered in different places and many of the movable remains are also displayed in the museum.

Historical Monuments of the Ancient and Medieval Period

a. Temples, Monuments, Mosque, Gurudwar etc :

The remains of ancient temples, monuments (*doul-devalaya*) etc are spread over different places of Assam. The existing remains around Guwahati, Goalpara, Kasomari, Deopani, Tezpur, Malinithan,

Numaligarh, Nagaon, etc are examples of a few excellent architecture of the period. These were generally built with stones bricks and mud. On the face of the stones, figures of god and goddesses, tress, animals, birds etc are engraved. In addition to stone, metals like gold, silvers, copper, bell metal etc. were also used to make statues of God and Goddesses. In Ambari, of Guwahati, some terracotta statues of Gods and Goddess have been excavated.

In *Asom Buranji*, Dr. Dambarudhar Nath had mentioned that most of the things of the Ancient period excavated in Assam are not as polished as those found in the other parts of the country. Though the statues were made in the same pattern with the rest of India, they however reflect characteristics indigenous to the region.

Large scale use of bricks are seen in the constructions of temples and monuments of Assam belonging to the medieval period. Stone and terracotta were also used to a lesser extent. In the ancient period, in Assam the bricks were prepared of lime and mortar. But during the reign of the Ahom rulers, a special type of cementing material was prepared using indigenous technology. This indigeneous cement called '*Koral*' was widely used in the construction works. *Koral* was prepared from a mixture of the traditional sticky rice (called *bora-caul*), jaggery, *Borali* fish, one variety of pulse

(*Matimah*), limestone, mustard oil, duck's egg etc. A new trend evolved in architecture. The walls of the monuments began to be decorated with the sculptures made of stone, terracotta, bricks etc. Most of the remnants of the sculptures existing today can be dated to the the Ahom period.

Herein a short description is given of some of the important material remains in Assam of the Ancient and medieval period.

The Kamakhya Temple

The Kamakhya temple is the most important Sakti shrine of Assam and one among the fifty one holy places of India. The temple is situated on the Nilachal hill which exists in the western part of Guwahati. The



Kamakhya Temple

sanctity of the place is explained through different legends. It is believed that when Shiva was moving around carrying the dead body of Parvati, Vishnu with his discus (*sudarshan chakra*) had cut the corpse into different parts. The yoni or the reproductive

organ fell in this place. Hence it is believed to be a holy place of fertility cult. Another legend states that the ruler of Pragjyotishpur, Narakasur built the temple for Kamakhya and the steps approaching the temple within a single night. However *buranjis* mention that the temple was destroyed by Kalapahar, the commander-in-chief of the ruler of Gaura, Suleiman Karani. But there are many opinions regarding the identity of Kalapahar. In a later period, in 1565 Koch king Narnarayan (1540-1587 CE.), got the temple rebuilt by his chief architect 'Meghamukdum'. In the *Darrang Rajbongsawali* it is mentioned that while constructing the temple, the bricks used were burnt in ghee. The temple standing today reveals the architectural acumen of the Koch kingdom.

The copper plates of the Ahom king Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769 CE.) and Gaurinath Singha (1780-1794 CE) are found in the Kamakhya Temple. The statues of Narnarayan and his brother Chilaray exist in the entrance of the temple. Besides the temple is surround by the sculptures of different Gods of the Hindu pantheon and floral and animal representations. Mention may be made of *Bhairav, Vishnu, Shiv-Parvati, Kartika, Ganesha, Gandarva, lotus flower, lion etc.*

Being the centre of Tantric worship, the temple attracts a number of devotees all throughout the year. An important festival

associated with the Kamakhya temple is the annual *Ambubachi Mela*. There is a myth that from the 7th to the 10th day of the month of *Ahar* (third month from the Assamese calendar) mother earth, in order to recoup her fertility, goes through a process of menstruation. Goddess Kamakhya too is considered to be in the same phase, as it is considered to be a centre of fertility cult. The *Ambubachi Mela* takes place during this period. During this period the temple remains closed for three days based on some astronomical calculation. Every year thousands of devotees throng from different places to be a part of the celebration .

Umananda Mandir

The Umananda temple stands on a small rock island, in the river Brahmaputra, towards the north of Guwahati city. According to Hindu mythology, Shiva dwelt



Gate of Umananda Temple in River Brahmaputra

in this island for the pleasure of his wife Parvati. Shiva is said to have resided here in

the form of Bhayananda. There is a legend attached to it. It is believed that, here Shiva burnt Kamdeva, the Hindu cupid God with the sight of his third eye, when he tried to interrupt Shiva during his meditation. Hence the place is also known as *Bhasmachal* or *Bhasmasailya* (*Bhasma*- ash and *Sailya*-Stone). The British named the island as Peacock island as the structure of the island looks like a peacock. In the two ancient text of Assam, *Kalika Puran* and the *Yogini Tantra*, the island of Umananda is mentioned as *Bhasmachal*, *Bhasmasailya* and *Bhasmakut*.

The present temple on the island of Umananda was built by the Ahom ruler Swargadeo Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696 CE.). His minister Gargaya Handique Phukan supervised the construction of the temple. In 1616CE Swargadeo Gadadhar Singha presented a copper plate to the temple granting revenue free lands. Even Swargadeo Shiva Singha also gifted a silver image on a throne with an inscription. Here the Maha Shiv Ratri festival is celebrated with a lot of fervour. Every day hundreds of devotee visit the temple.

Basisthasram

Basisthasram stands on the *Shandhyachal* hill in the south- east corner of the city of Guwahati. The temple and the *ashram* of sage Basistha is situated on the confluence of the three mountain streams

originating in the hills of Meghalaya - Sandhya, Lalita and Kanta. According to the legend sage Basistha was the son of Lord Brahma. He was cursed by the *Suryavamshi* king Nimi and so lost his physical identity. To get rid of the curse he went to Lord Brahma who in turn advised him to meditate Lord Vishnu, seeking his blessings. Basistha started his meditation on the *Shandhyachal* hill. Lord Vishnu was satisfied with his prayer and with the blessings of Vishnu, he brought the waters of the Ganga (a holy river of the Hindus) to the place in the form of three streams - Sandhya, Lalita and Kanta. The meeting point of these three streams is called Basistha- Ganga. Basistha took bath which is called *trisandhya*, as it is on the meeting point of the three streams, and was able to regain his physical entity. Therefore it is believed that one can get rid of his sins by taking bath in this holy water at dusk.

The existing Basistha temple was built during the reign of Ahom king Rajeswar Singha(1751-69 CE.), which is evident from the inscription on the walls of the temple. It is believed that foot prints of sage Basistha exists inside the temple. During solar and lunar eclipses, devotees come in large numbers to take bath in the confluence of the three streams.

Aswaktanta Temple

Aswaktanta temple is one of the oldest

temples of Assam. The temple is situated at *Majgaon* in North Guwahati, on the northern banks of the river Brahmaputra. There are many legends associated with the temple. According to one such legend, when Shri Krishna eloped Rukmini from Vidarbha to Dwarka, the horse fell tired and rested here. Another legend states that after Krishna killed Narakasur, the king of Pragjyotishpur, the horses of the chariot of Krishna felt tired and rested in this place. Therefore this place came to be known as Aswaktanta, meaning the place where the horses became tired.



A Part of Aswaktanta Temple

There are two temples on the hills of Aswaktanta. The temple situated on the lower reaches is the *Kurma Janardhana* temple. A stone replica of the Kurma incarnation of Vishnu is present in the temple. The other temple on the top of the hill is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, in his eternal rest. The existing temple was built by the Ahom King Shiva Singha(1714-44 CE). On a wall of the

temple an inscription of king Shiva Singha is engraved. Besides it also holds the impressions of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. On the day of *Ashokastami*, a large number of people come to Aswaktanta to take bath in the river Brahmaputa.

Navagraha Temple

The Navagraha Temple is situated on the Chitrachal hill of Guwahati. The temple is devoted to the nine (Nava) planets (*grahas*)- Navagraha, associated with Hindu astrology. In the temple distinct spaces are marked for the worship of the nine different planets with one, stated as the sun God, in the middle. Besides being a place of worship it was also the centre for astrology in Ancient Kamarupa. According to the legends, Brahma, the creation God, created the stars and the planets here, and so the place came to be known as Pragjyotishpur.

There is no information regarding who built the original temple, but the existing temple was rebuilt by the Ahom ruler Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769CE). An inscription of King Rajeswar Singha is engraved on a wall of the temple. A large number of devotees come to the temple everyday.

Madan Kamdev Devlaya

The Madan Kamdev Devlaya is situated in the Madanchal or Dibangiri region of North Guwahati. Archaeologist assume that this temple was built around the eleventh

–twelfth century CE., during the time of the Pala kings. On the walls of the temple are seen images of gods and goddess of the Hindu pantheon like Uma, Shiva etc. There are also shiva linga, animal figures, several erotic images of men and women in their intimate relationship etc.



Madan Kamdev Devlaya

From the point of architectural style and the content it carries, many images of the Madan Kamdev temple bears affinity with the temple of Khajuraho at Madhya Pradesh.

Hayagriva Madhava Temple

The Hayagriva Madhava temple is located, on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra, in the Manikut (also known as Maniparbat) hill of Hajo. Based on legends, it is believed to have been built by sage Urva (Urvarishi). The story goes that once when Urvarishi was in deep meditation of Lord Vishnu, he was disturbed by the Asuras. In a fit of anger Vishnu assuming the incarnation of Hayagriva Madhava, killed the Asuras. Thereafter Vishnu remained on

the Manikut hill in the form of Hayagriva (Haya: horse, Griva : neck). The temple of Hayagriva Madhava was built at the place where Urvarishi had meditated Lord Vishnu. According to another legend, when God Vishnu was in deep slumber, two Asuras, namely Madhu and Kaitabh emanated from his body. The Asuras seized the Vedas from Brahma, the God of creation. When God Brahma offered prayer in the name of Vishnu to recover the Sastra from Madhu and Kaitabh, Vishnu took the incarnation of Hayagriva Madhava. He slayed the Asuras, rescued the Vedas and remained back on the Manikut hill.

The present day temple of Hayagriva Madhava was rebuilt by the Koch king Raghudev narayan . Within the precincts of the temple there exists inscriptions of Raghudeva, the Ahom kings - Pramatta Singha(1744-1751CE) and Kamaleshwar Singha(1795-1811 CE). The Fakua Doul situated within the temple premises was built by the Ahom ruler, Swargadeo Pramatta Singha. The deities present in the interior of the temple are *Burha Madhab of Subhrabahan, Hayagriva Madhava, Chalanta Madhava, Basudeva and Garuda*. In addition to these, in and around the temple there exists a number of stone sculptures of *Hanuman*, the ten incarnations of Vishnu, images of different Gods and Goddess and figures of lions besides some stone pillars.

The temple is also a pilgrimage site for the Buddhists. There is a belief that Lord Buddha attained *Mahaparinirvana* in the site. Buddhist followers from Tibet, Bhutan and other places come to visit the place regularly. Everyday hundreds of people visit this temple.

Poa Makka

Poa Makka is situated at the top of the Garurachal hills at Hajo. It is an important pilgrimage site for the Muslims. There is hearsay that the vehicle of Lord Vishnu, Garuda (a bird) consumed meal on the Garurachal hill. Another view holds that on the occasion of full moon day (*Purnima*) of the Assamese month of *Jeth* (second month in the Assamese calendar), the Garuda bird became immobile and took shelter on the hills. Thus the hill came to be known as Garurachal hills.



Poa Makka

Poa Makka was built by Ghiyasuddin Auliya, a Sufi saint. There are different views

regarding the origin of the name 'Poa Makka'. It is held that the preacher, Ghiyasuddin Auliya brought a quarter of earth (*poa*) from the sacred land of Makka and mixed it with the earth on this hillock. That is why, the place came to be known as Poa Makka. Another view holds that the pilgrims who visit Poa Mecca attains one-fourth of spiritual attainment of what could be gained by visiting Makka. In this way, the mosque came to be known as Poa (one-fourth) Makka. There is a mosque attached to the Mausoleum of Ghiyasuddin Auliya. It is believed that he constructed the mosque. Pilgrims belonging to various faiths come to visit the place.

Azan Pir Dargah

Azan Pir Dargah is a sacred pilgrimage site for the believers of Islamic faith. Shah Miran or Milan, came to Assam from Baghdad along with his brother Nabi and other disciples to spread the teachings of Islam. He entered India through the Khyber Pass and first settled at Ajmer. Then he came to Assam via Gauda. He spent a few months at Hajo and then came to Chunpora, a place near the Ahom capital of Garhgaon. He built a mosque there and recited *azan* to call the Muslims living in the area for prayers. He also composed devotional songs to attract the masses living in the nearby villages, towards spiritual pursuits. Gradually, he came to be known as Azan Fakir for his spiritual accomplishments.

Azan Pir also mastered Assamese language within a short period of time and learned about Vaishnavism and the Assamese devotional songs and ballads. He started composing a genre of unique devotional songs where the teachings of the Quran were sung in the traditional rhythm of the Assamese songs. These unique spiritual songs came to be known as 'zikir'. The zikir became popular among the Hindus and Muslims alike within a short period of time.

To prove that Azan Pir was the repository of spiritual power, there exists a number of legends. One such legend says that the minister of the Ahom king, deputed to look after the activities of the Muslim settlers, could not tolerate the popularity of Azan Fakir. Out of jealousy he falsely presented Azan Fakir as a spy of the Mughals. The King assuming it to be true ordered that his two eyes be pulled out and be thrown into the river Dikhow. After this incident the river Dikhow started flowing backwards, submerging the Ahom capital, Gargaon. Even the royal palace *Hollong-ghar* got tilted in the process. But the place where Azan Fakir read the Quran was left untouched by the waters of Dikhow. This made the power of Azan Fakir apparent and the king got a monument constructed at Saraguri Chapari at the confluence of the rivers Dikhow, Darika and Brahmaputra.

After his death, Azan Fakir was buried

at a place adjacent to the monument. Even today Azan Pir's Dargah at Saraguri Mauza of Sibsagar district is considered as a holy place and a place of tourist attraction.

Sri Surya Pahar

Situated near the town of Goalpara, the rock sculptures of Sri Surya Pahar are a notable example of pre-Ahom sculptures.

Circular carvings can be found on the Southern side of the hills which have been associated with Sun (*surya*) worship and the site was thus named accordingly. Consisting of seven hills and hillocks, the site is also known as the *Satali Pahar*.

Numerous rock-cut sculptures, *stupas* and *shiva lingas* can be found dotting the hills. A multi-roomed brick housing structure has also been discovered at the Sri Surya Pahar site. Apart from sculptures of deities of the Hindu pantheon, numerous sculptures relating to Buddhism and Jainism are also found here. On the banks of a stream that flows close by, numerous sculptures have been discovered among which some have been identified to be of Vishnu and Shiva. A rock-cut sculpture of a twelve-armed deity atop a lotus flower holding two *trishuls* (trident) on both sides might be considered as the most impressive one. According to scholars, most of the rock sculptures of Sri Surya Pahar date back to the eight century AD while some Buddhist remains are believed to pre-date the rest.



A view of Sri Surya Pahar

The main attractions of Sri Surya Pahar are the rock sculptures in the rock cut caves for which the site is well-known.

The rock cut cave named *Sepasil* located on the site contains various sculptures, one of which is identified to be of Ganesha and the other has been identified as Chandra, the Moon deity. The *Shivalinga* measuring up to nine feet is the largest one in the site. The various adornments and detailing on the rock-cut altar is a beautiful specimen of sculptural art. The Sri Surya Pahar attracts a number of tourists.

Sikh Gurudwara in Dhubri

Towards the south-east of Dhubri town is located a Sikh Gurudwara which was established by the ninth Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur who had accompanied Ram Singha, the Rajput general of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1658 – 1707 CE), in his Assam expedition. While camping with the Mughal soldiers at Dhubri, Guru Teg Bahadur was mesmerized by the scenic beauty of the Brahmaputra River and its surroundings. He



Sikh Gurudwara in Dhubri

decided to lay the foundations of a Gurudwara here. This Gurudwara holds a sacred prominence among the followers of Sikhism.

Temple Remains of Tezpur

Situated at a central point of Tezpur are the remains of an ancient temple which has been associated with many historic figures like *Banaraja* and fables like the story of *Usha* and *Aniruddha*, the battle of *Hari – Hara* etc. Within the remains of the temple complex, one temple has been identified as a *Shiva* Temple, another as a *Surya* Temple and the deity of the third temple still remains unidentified. This temple complex contains numerous impressive rock-cut sculptures and carvings of *Shivalinga*, deities like *Shiva*, *Brahma*, *Ganesh* and *Surya*, male and female figures, lion, elephant and flower vines among others.

Bamuni Pahar

Bamuni Pahar is located on the banks of the Brahmaputra river towards east of

Tezpur town. In this hill, the remains of seven ancient temples have been discovered which have been assumed to date back to around eight to ninth century CE by scholars. These temples have been associated with *Vishnu*, *Shiva* and other deities from the Hindu pantheon. Among the remains, the notable remains are rock-cut doors, windows and entrances. Moreover, there are numerous rock segments with intricate and detailed carvings of flowers, human figurines, tigers, crocodiles, and a lion mounting an elephant. In one of the segments, there are depictions of different *avatars* of *Vishnu* like *Narasimha*, *Parashurama*, *Varaha*, *Rama* etc, and of *Balaram* carved in the rocks. Other notable rock sculptures include the images of *Nataraja*, *Durga*, *Ganesh* and *Naramundaha Devi / Chamunda*.

Da-Parbatia Remains

The remains of architectural sculptures discovered at Da-Parbatia near Tezpur, are considered as a fine specimen of sculptural art of ancient Assam. Scholars have estimated these architectural remains to date back to around fifth century CE.

The entrance to the rock-cut temple of Da-Parbatia is well known for its display of skilled craftsmanship. The door frame of the entrance gate to the temple is adorned with impressive carvings of goddesses *Ganga* and *Jamuna*, while the lintel is by the *Garuda* bird, flying geese, male and

female human figurines and flower vines. Other notable rock sculptures in this site include those of *Vishnu*, *Har-Gauri* and *Shiva*. The Da-Parbatia temple remains is a popular destination for pilgrims.



Da-Parbatia Remains

Mahabhairav Temple

The Mahabhairav Temple is located in the northern outskirts of Tezpur town. The Shivalinga of this Shiva temple is said to have been established by the legendary *Banaraja*. It is said that it was here that King Bana did penance and was granted the boon to make him a great warrior like *Sahashrabahu* and *Shiva*. *Banaraja*'s daughter, *Usha* is also said to have offered her prayers in this

temple. The ancient ruins of this temple are assumed to have been rebuilt and restored by the rulers of the *Salastambha* dynasty around the fifth to ninth century CE. This temple also attracts numerous pilgrims.

Ranachandi Temple of Maibang

Maibang, located in the North Cachar Hills, was the capital of the *Kachari* kingdom from mid-sixteenth century to mid-eighteenth century CE. It is stated that Maibang was established as the capital at around 1576 CE by King Meghnarayan or Nirbharnarayan. To the north of this historic Maibang town lies the famous *Ranachandi* temple. According to a rock inscription carved in the temple wall, this temple was built around 1721 AD by a king named Hidimbeshwar Harishchandra. This monolithic temple, carved out of the upper portion of a huge boulder on the banks of the Mahur River looks like a complete roofed hut. However the interior of the hut is not hollow. Architectural influence from Bengal is evident in the roof structure of the monolithic hut.

Deo-pahar Shiva Temple

There are remains of a rock-cut Shiva temple at Deopahar, situated about 3 km south of Numaligarh refinery under Golaghat district. The word *Deo* in '*Deopahar*' comes from the words *Deva* or *Mahadeva* which is another name for Shiva. The temple remains contain impressive images of gods and goddesses like Shiva, Vishnu, Lakshmi

etc . Besides there are a doorkeeper (*dwarapal*), *kalamakaar*, flying nymphs, demons (*Yaksha*), sages (*rishis*), mermaid, male and female figures singing, dancing and playing instruments, battle scenes, scenes from socio-cultural life, and animals carved in stone. The stone slab of the roof and base of the temple are also adorned with intricate details.



Shiva Temple at Deo-pahar

There are similarities in the architectural sculptures of Deopahar temple and those situated in various sites of Tezpur. Scholars therefore assume that this rock-cut temple might have been built by a king from *Salastambha* dynasty in around eighth or ninth century CE.

Negheriting Shiva DouL

The historic site of Negheriting Shiva DouL is situated at Negheriting in Golaghat district, a few kilometres north of National Highway No.37.

According to a historical narrative,

once, there existed a Shiva temple on the south of the Dihing (Brahmaputra) River, that flowed through Negheriting. However it got destroyed in the event of a natural calamity and the *Shivalinga* got lost under the dense vegetation of forest. Later this region came under the Ahom rule and when the Ahom ruler Pratap Singha (1603-1641CE) chanced upon this *Shivalinga*, he built a Shiva temple at a place called Sheetal Negheri and re-established the *Shivalinga*. This temple too fell into ruin due to frequent floods of the Brahmaputra and heavy soil erosion. Later, Ahom king Swargadeo Rajeshwar Singha (1751-1769CE) built the currently existing temple atop a hillock. However, he died before the temple could be completed. His successor Swargadeo Lakshmi Singha (1769-1780CE) therefore took up the work and completed it. He established a “*Banalinga*” as the primary item of worship of the Shiva DouL with a tank devoted to it.

The Ahom kings were specially devoted towards the Negheriting Shiva DouL. It was a rule during their time that everyday sacred offerings from the temple would be taken to the king through the road (*Bar Ali*) that connected Dergaon to the capital at Rangpur, without which the king would not partake his meal. Apart from the land grant, the Ahom king also donated a copper *drum* (*doba*), silver coated tray (*xorai*, *bhogjora*) etc.

Around this beautifully adorned temple,

there are numerous other *Douls*, devoted to gods and goddesses like *Vishnu*, *Durga*, *Ganesha*, *Surya*, etc. These *douls* are made of bricks and their pinnacles are fluted/grooved like a starfruit. Many pilgrims visit the *Doul* every day.

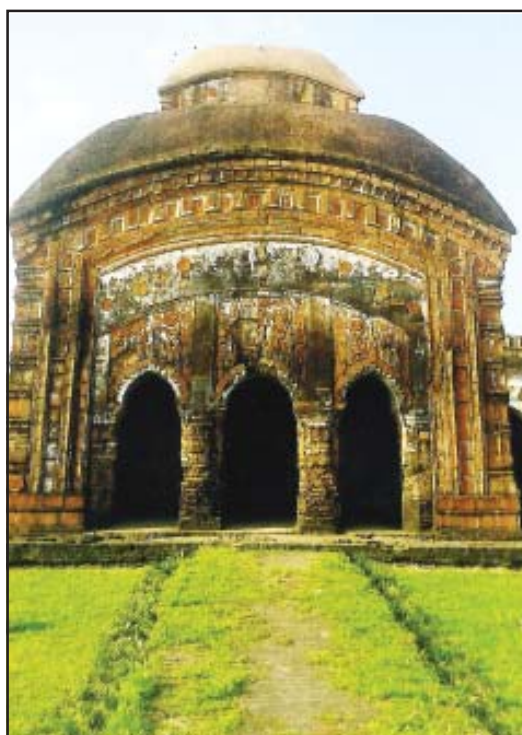
Joydol

In order to commemorate the death of his mother Joymoti, Swargadeo Rudra Singha (1696- 1714 CE) built this temple at Jerenga Pathar and excavated a tank. Named after his mother the temple is called Jaidaul and the tank is called Jaisagar. Jaidaul is also known as *Keshavrai Vishnu Daul*. The chamber of the Daul is covered with flower vines. The façade of the temple is beautifully carved with various images of elephants, horses, deer, tigers, alligators, crocodiles etc, and *Kurma*, *Narasingha*, *Arjuna's Lakshyabhed*, meditating sages, *gandhab*, eunuch, kings and queens etc. There are also scenes of hunting.



Joydol

GhanashyamDaul



GhanashyamDaul

Ghanashyam Daul is located on the western bank of the Jaisagar tank. The structure of the *Daul* does not resemble that of other *Dauls* and therefore it is believed that this dual was used as a residence by the builder architect named Ghanashyam, who was brought by Swargadeo Rudra Singha (1696 -1714CE) from Koch Behar to build the Rangpur town and other structures. According to some scholars, this *daul* is named Natigohain Daul because they believe that this structure was built by Swargadeo

Rajeshwar Singha (1751-1769CE) for Parbatia Gosain's grandchildren from his daughter's side.

Other *dauls* like *Shivadol*, *Devidol* etc. are also located on the banks of the Joysagar Tank.

FakuaDaul

Fakua Daul is located near Borduwar of the capital city of Rangpur. It is known that Swargadeo Rudra Singha (1696 - 1714CE) had made a gold statue of his mother Joymoti Konwari and buried it under a *maidam*, above which he built this Daul.

Ranganath Daul

Swargadeo Rudra Singha built the Ranganath Shivadaul adjacent to the Fakuadol in the year 1704.

Gaurisagar Daul

Devidaul, *Shivadaul* and *Vishnudaul* are situated on the northern banks of Gaurisagar Tank located by the side of the National Highway No. 37 which is about 12 km from Sivasagar town. These *dauls* were built by Bar-Raja Phuleshwari Konwari, the wife of Swargadeo Shiva Singha (1714-1744CE).

Shiva Daul of Sivasagar

The Shiva Daul on the banks of the Sivasagar tank, located at the central point of present Sivasagar town, is considered to be the most important *daul* in Assam. The height of the daul is almost 40 m. The fluted/grooved pinnacle of the temple includes the

gold top, which measures about five hand span in height. There are also Vishnu daul and a Devi daul in the site built during the reign of the same king.



Shiva Daul

Walls of the temples are decorated with floral designs, sculptures of various gods and goddesses, the *avataras* of *Vishnu*, birds and animals, and figures of the yogis.

This important daul was constructed by Swargadeo Shiva Singha's queen Ambika in the year 1734. Thousands of people visit this Shiva Daul every day. The Shivaratri festival is celebrated with pomp and grandeur here.

Malini Than

The Malini Than is an ancient *Shaktipith* located in the southern Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh adjacent to Assam. This *than* is located north of Assam's Dhemaji district. According to the legend, after kidnapping Rukmini, daughter of king Bhismaka of Vidarbha, Krishna had stopped here to rest and was welcomed by *Shiva* and *Parvati* with flower garlands. *Krishna* then bestowed the name *Malini* to *Parvati* and hence this *than* came to be known as Malini Than. According to another legend, this place was named after a woman named *Malini* who, on pursuing Lord *Shiva's* love, invoked the wrath of *Parvati* and was beheaded. This legend exists because remnants of an ancient *Shivalinga* and a statue of a headless woman have been found here.

The region where Malini Than is situated used to be under the Chutiya kingdom and its architectural sculptures are assumed to date back to the pre-Ahom period. Excavations have brought forth remains of a rock-cut temple, *shivalinga*, statues of lions, tuskers and of gods like *Indra*, *Ganesha* along with his mouse, *Kartika* on his peacock carriage (*mayurvahan*), *Surya* in his chariot, *Nandi* wearing a garland of bells, a *yogi* with a *trishul* (trident) and *Kamandalu* (a water pot), and *Durga* etc. The expert

craftsmanship of the sculptor is noticeable in this rock-cut temple.

Hundreds of people visit the ancient Shakti peeth Malini Than every day.

Apart from the afore mentioned dauls and devalayas, there are numerous other monuments constructed by the Ahom kings. Some of the notable ones are *Yogeshwar Devalaya*, *Saubhagya Madhava Devalaya*, *Holeshwara Devalaya*, *Hatigarh Devalaya*, *Rudrapad Devalaya*, *Chatrakar Devalaya*, *Siddheswara Devalaya*, *Agnibaneshwara Devalaya*, *Parihareshwara Devalaya*, *Nagshankara Devalaya*, *Suryamadhava Temple*, *Chandi Temple*, *Dhareshwar Shiva Temple*, *Kamaleshwar Shiva Temple*, *Rudreshwar Temple*, *Manikarneshwara Temple*, *Dirgheshwari Temple*, *Jaidurga Temple*, *Bilbeshwar Temple*, *Dipteshwar Temple*, *Har-Gauri Daul*, *Pandunath Daul*, *Baneshwar Daul*, *Maghnowa Daul*, *Thaora Daul*, *Barpatra Daul of Kalugaon*, *Kenduguri Barpatra Daul*, *Namti Daul*, *Keri Rajmao Daul*, *Bogi Daul*, *Rudrasagar Shiva Daul*, *Sesamukh Daul*, *Guta Daul of Charaideo*, *Katahaguri Daul*, *Dhemesi Bejor Daul*, *Ghughuha Daul of Dhemaji*, *Nafuki Rajmao Daul*, *Raidongia Daul of Lejai*, etc.

Residences, Rajkareng etc

The residences of the common people and the royal palatial houses of ancient and

pre-Ahom period, are assumed to have been mostly built of wood and bamboo. Although the use of bricks was known to the Kacharis before the Ahom period, the remains of residences are that of the *raj-kareng* of the Kachari kingdom in their capital at Dimapur, Maibang or Khaspur have still not been found. The remains of the palace of the Kachari king Sishu Pani found at Rajabari in the Doiyang Dhansiri valley, including certain specimens of architectural work such as, an intricately carved rock pillar, structure of the *Singhadwar*, remains of the fort spanning over 4 kms in Duborani region on the banks of Dhansiri river and the tanks and the remains of the brick houses. These are some of the testimonies brick houses are testimonies of the architectural craftsmanship of the Kachari kingdom.

Apart from the architecture of the temples and religious buildings, there are a few royal palaces where the architectural craftsmanship under the Ahom rule can be well guessed, There are some palace buildings like the *Rang Ghar*, *Talatal Ghar*, *Gola Ghar* at Rangpur and the *Karen Ghar* at Garhgaon which are still found almost in perfect condition.

Some works of architectural value of the Ahom period can still be found in good condition. Despite damages created due to the earthquakes, floods, and other causes, damages done by the invaders and the wear

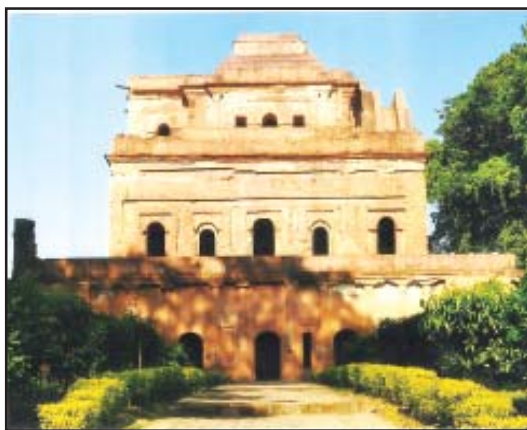
and tear of time, the palaces like the *Rang Ghar*, *Kareng Ghar*, *Talatal Ghar* the forts in various places and some of the stone bridges built during this period still stand as evidence of the architectural standard of the Ahom period.

During the Ahom period, the common people used to live in *duchalia* (slanting roof with two sides) houses made of wood or bamboo. It is said that the Ahoms previously used to reside in the *chang-ghars* (houses built on raised platforms). Even the king's palace consisting of the place for the throne (*Pat ghar*), the coronation hall (*Singari ghar*), the court (*hollong-ghar*) - all were two-storeyed platform houses (*chang-ghar*) made of wood or bamboo. Etchings of flowers, vines and animals were carved into the wooden tie-beams and pillars which were then coated with vermilion and yellow arsenic paint. According to historical sources, the Ahom kings built hip-roofed royal palaces replicating those of the *Borahis*. However the ministers (*dangorias*) were only allowed to build residences with gable-roofs. The Ahom architectural work reflect influence of three style: North India's Nagara style, the Perso-Mughal style and the Bengal style besides their own native style. The bricks and the mortar, locally called *koral*, used during the Ahom period were made of indigenous materials. The bricks were made of different sizes out of clay and hardened in

brick kilns. To make these bricks tougher, wet clay was mixed with mortar and baked in fire. The Ahom kings organized the labour into various guilds, each assigned specific duties like mixing the mortar etc. According to scholars, the temples mainly resemble the Nagara architectural style of North India; but the Nati-Gosain Daul on the banks of the Joysagar Tank resembles the Gauda style.

Kareng Ghar of Garhgaon

Gargaon is situated towards the east of present Sivasagar town. The building of the Kareng Ghar here is almost intact. Ahom king Swargadeo Suklengmung alias Gargaya Raja (1539 – 1552CE) fortified the entire area and transferred the Ahom capital here.



Kareng Ghar

He was therefore called *Gargaya Raja*. The previous royal court (*kareng ghar*) was made of bamboo and wood and was known as *Hollong-ghar*. According to Shihabuddin

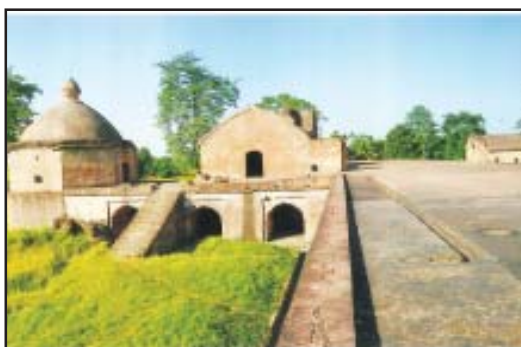
Talish, the Mughal chronicler, who had accompanied Mir Jumla in his Assam expedition, the length of the Hollong Ghar was 120 cubit and the width was 30 cubit. There were 66 pillars which stood at a regular interval of 4 *hand span*. These pillars, walls and doors were decorated with beautiful detailings. It is stated that polished brass mirrors were fitted to the walls and pillars in both the interiors as well as exterior of the Hollong Ghar. According to Shihabuddin Talish, such craftsmanship in wood work was extraordinary; and he could see such craftsmanship nowhere.

The extant building of the Kareng Ghar was built by Swargadeo Rajeshwar Singha in the year 1751. It was then a seven-storied structure. However, at present, only the upper four storeys are visible over ground. The lower structure goes three storeys underground from which the palace is said to have connected to the banks of the Dikhow river via secret tunnels which served as escape route for the king in times of danger. However the underground levels and tunnels of the structure are yet to be completely discovered. Numerous tourists come every day to see the Kareng Ghar.

Talatal Ghar of Rangpur

Swargadeo Rudra Singha after his ascension to the throne, transferred the capital from Gargaon to a place called *Meteka* and renamed it *Rangpur*. Two of the most

famous edifices built at Rangpur are Talatal Ghar and Rang Ghar.



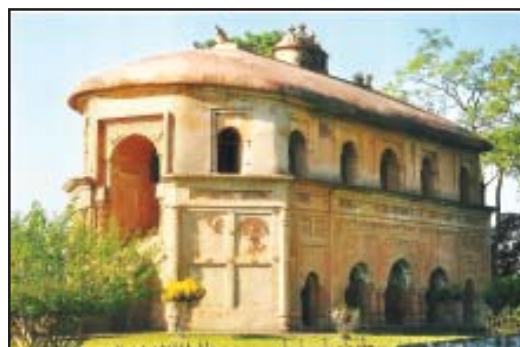
Talatal Ghar

The Talatal Ghar used to be the royal residence of the king. It is said that a part of this structure was built by Swargadeo Rudra Singha himself. But the construction could only be completed during the reign of Swargadeo Rajeshwar Singha (1751 – 1769 AD) only. This brick royal palace derives its name *Talatal Ghar* due to its seven storey (*tala*) structure. Three of its storeys are known to be underground while the rest four storeys are over ground. The *Talatal Ghar* might be considered to be the finest specimen of Ahom architecture. The entry and exit ways of this palace were made using unconventional techniques. Similarly, the lowest underground storey is said to have been connected to the banks of Dikhow River and the Kareng Ghar of Garhgaon via two tunnels. These provisions were made for the security of the king. The palace had

separate rooms for separate functions and activities like *Barcara*, *Bulani Ghar*, *PaliGhar*, *DeoGhar*, *maranghar*, *Puja Ghar* etc. There were also provisions to accommodate the king's bodyguards and soldiers. The walls of this palace are carved with beautiful sculptures. Hundreds of tourists flock every day to see the *Talatal Ghar*.

Rang Ghar

The historic *Rang Ghar* is situated in the southern part of the present Sivasagar town and to west direction from the *Talatal Ghar*. The *Rang-ghar* is essentially an amphitheatre, built on what was the called *Rupahi Pathar*. Swargadeo Rudra Singha (1696-1714) initially constructed it with wood as a raised platform house (*Chang Ghar*). The Ahom rulers with the members



Rang Ghar

of the nobility used to enjoy the exhibition of the various sports, animal fights, Bihu dance etc from here. The Rongali Bihu was provided with a royal status by Swargadeo

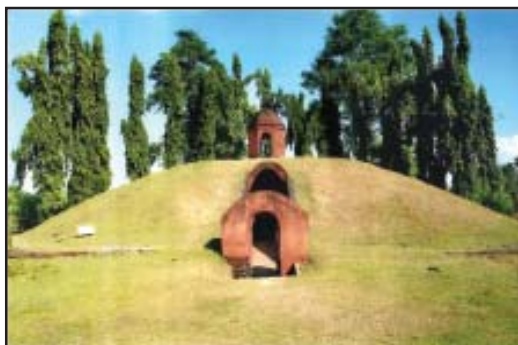
Rudra Singha and it is said that he had organized a seven day Bihu celebration there. The existing two storied Rang Ghar was built by Swargadeo Pramatta Singha(1744-51) in the year 1751. The roof of the ampitheatre was built with two slopes like that of a thatched house. At the tip of the ridge on both the sides there were two statues of crocodiles. Therefore some scholars would like to opine that the building was constructed in the shape of a sports boat of that period. There also exists a picture of *Kaiseng-mungkukura* above the stairs in the West side leading to the second floor. There are two large rooms in the middle of the Rang Ghar on both the floors with two small rooms on the sides .

Everyday a considerable number of visitors come to this place.

Maidam

Word of the Ahom (Tai) language the term *Maidam* means the burial place of the dead. According to the custom of the Ahoms, the body of the dead person is placed in a coffin which is called *Rung Dang*. It is made of wood called *Urium* (*Bischofia javanica*) tree. The coffin is then buried in earth after performing a number of rituals. The top of the *maidam* bears a semi-circular shape. The entire process is called *Maidam Dia*. Therefore *Maidams* are considered as a distinctive class of Ahom architectural monument. But the process of burial differed

between the members of the royal family and those of the common people.



Maidam

For the burial of the king the dead body is carried in the *Rung Dang*, to the burial ground i.e. the place of the *maidam*. There a house was built with pieces from the Sal tree. This is known as *Ka rang rung dam*. Later on when the use of brick became popular, this house was constructed with bricks. Here the body was taken out from the *Rung Dang*, some rituals were performed, the dead body was bathed, dressed with new clothes and then placed on a bed inside the *Ka rang rung dam* with the head placed towards the east while the feet towards the west. Hiteswar Barbaruah in his book *Ahomar Din* mentions that, in the place where the king's body was laid to rest, a number of items made of gold and silver were also kept. Mention may be made of *Sangti Sanduwar*, which is a seven layered gold beaded artifact, usually placed at the top of the coffin or *room* where the

body of the Ahom king was kept. There exists a bed of wood called *Salpira* or a low raised bed embellished with a golden mirror, around which there were four golden stands (*khuti*). A net made of gold too was tied with the help of these four stands. Near the bed are kept a sword (*Hengdang*) with a golden knob studded with diamond and semi precious stones; on the ground are placed four to five gold and silver tray (*Sarai*), a small golden tray (*Bota*), a gold coated box to keep slaked lime, another such box to keep tobacco, a gold knife and betel leaf and areca nut were placed. On the *Sorai's* were placed a gold *Bhog-jora* and few golden jewellery, treasure chest etc. Next to the feet of the body were placed a *Dhowa Khowa*- a tobacco pipe with a long flexible tube connected to a container, made of gold, with a silver covered tobacco pipe. After arranging the above mentioned things and artifacts around the body of the king inside the *maidam*, the door of the “Ka rang rung dam” was finally closed”. Moreover except a few Ahom rulers, the *maidam* of the other kings had brick construction and a hard top. From this it is evident that items of daily necessity like golden utensils, food, clothes, jewellery, along with some persons (men or women) to serve the king were buried along with the dead body in the *maidams*.

After adopting the Hindu religion specially from the reign of Swargadeo

Lakshmi Singha(1769-1780) onwards, the dead bodies of the Ahom kings began to be cremated and the remaining ashes and bones were buried at Charaideo. Thereafter the rituals became Hinduised.

The dead body of a large number of Ahom Kings and Queens were buried at Charaideo, the first capital of the Ahom kings. The Ahom rulers had a special guild called *Maidamia* to look after the maidams. Thieves and plunderers attacked and looted maidams frequently because of the riches which it contained. According to Shihabuddin Talish, Mir Jumla looted gold and silver from the *maidams* worth 90,000 rupees. Strangely, it was mentioned that a betel leaf found in a box from a *maidam* of a queen which were buried 80 years ago was still raw, unripe and fresh (when Mirjumla excavated it).

Charaideo was the main site for building the *maidams* of the Ahom kings. Here is also a worshipping place called *Deosal*, where the kings originally propiated their worshipping deity. Besides charaideo there are still a few *maidams* in different places of upper Assam. Some Ahom families still follow the *maidams* and burial system of the old.

Tanks

While discussing about tanks, one generally recalls the structures of the Ahom period alone like the Jaysagar, Gaurisagar, Athaisagar, Rrudrasagar etc. But there also

exist some tanks called *pukhuri* of the pre-Ahom period scattered over different parts of Assam. Mention may be made of *Dighali Pukhuri* at Guwahati, *Padum Pukhuri* and *Hazarapukhuri* at Tezpur, and a few big tanks at Dimapur dug by the Kachari rulers.

The tank architecture of the Ahom kings has some distinct characteristics. The tanks excavated by the Ahom kings, and which were large enough, were called *sagar* i.e. sea. For instance, the big tanks like *Joysagar*, *Gaurisagar*, *Sivasagar* excavated around 250-300 years back, have never dried up; on the contrary the same level of water still remains. Moreover, the water of these tanks are cleaner and clearer in comparison to the river water. Writing about the architectural technique of the Ahoms, Dr Lila Gogoi had stated in his *Buranjiye Porosa Nagar* that, the royal officers selected land for excavating tanks first by testing the ground through licking it. Then on a dark night, some earthen lamps of mustard oil are lit up at that place. If the candle wipes out even when there is oil, they marked the spot by putting a few posts. Then a bigger lamp filled with more oil and wick is put at the posts and kept under observation. If the same happened also to the bigger lamp, excavation starts keeping the post, with the bigger lamp in the centre.

It is worth mentioning that during the Ahom period there was an officer called

Maticheleka who could find out the water source and was considered to have possessed knowledge of the properties of the soil. Another officer titled *Darabdhora* was also associated with tank excavation work.

When the excavation is almost complete the workers put a large pillar of the sal tree called *Nagmari*. It is stated that immediately after the pillar was posted water starts oozing through it from the bottom. Then *Rah* or Mercury was poured into the copper pots placed on the solid bottom of the tank to keep the water clean. Then the tank eventually becomes filled up with clean water. A few big tanks of the Ahom era are ——

Jaysagar tank

The tank is located at *Joysagar* to the south of the present *Sivasagar* town. *Swargadeo Rudra Singha* (1696-1714 C.E) had this tank excavated on the third day of



Jaysagar tank

the month of *Aghon* in 1619 *saka* (1697 C.E) in memory of his mother *Jaymoti Kunwori* in

the Jerengapathar, to the south of the capital city of Rangpur. This is the biggest tank of the Ahom era. The area of the tank including its banks is 210 *puras* 1 *bigha* 2 *katha* and 10 *lecha*.

Gaurisagar Tank

To the south of the present NH 37, is the Gaurisagar tank. *Bar Raja* Phuleswari Kunwori, the queen of king Siva Singha had the tank excavated near the Namdang *sil sako* on the NH 37. The land area covered by the tank is 113 *puras* 1 *bigha*, 2 *katha* and 15 *lecha*.

Sivasagar Tank

This tank is located in the centre of the present Sivasagar town. Queen Ambika *alias* Madambika Kunwori of king Siva Singha had the tank excavated in the year 1733. The land area of the tank is 194 *puras* 2 *bighas*, 2 *katha* and 6 *lechas*.



Sivasagar Tank

In addition to these, references of many other two hundred twelve tanks of the Ahom era like Rudrasagar, Lakshmisagar,

Bishnusagar, Mesagarh pukhuri, Rajmau pukhuri, Rahdoi pukhuri, Mitha pukhuri, Tenga pukhuri, Sha-Dhoa pukhuri, Petu-Dhoa pukhuri, Nitai pukhuri, Dhitai pukhuri etc are mentioned by Dilip Kumar Burhagohain in his work *Buranjir Paras*.

Roads and Lanes

The roads and lanes of ancient and middle ages in Assam have not been discovered or identified completely till date. There were very few roads and lanes during these periods connecting the important places of the state. It is assumed that waterways were primarily used for communications and transportations. The powerful navy of the kings of the ancient Kamrupa kingdom and of the Ahom era and also the use of various types of boat called *Nao* like *Bar nao*, *Mar nao*, *Chora nao*, *Panchoi nao*, *Gotia nao*, *Hiloi Chora nao*, *Khel nao*, *Par nao*, *Chengeli nao*, *Lai nao*, *Magari nao*, *Bachoru nao*, *Jap nao*, *Chilapatia nao* etc indicate that during those periods rivers and other waterways were largely used for communication, trade and business, warfare etc.

Among the already mentioned limited highways, the discovery of the ruins of three-brick highways of the time of the Kachari kings connecting Tengani forest area to Sisupani, the Dhansiri-Doiang meeting point and the Dimapur in Dhansiri Doiang valley proves the existence of a system of roads and lanes in Kachari kingdom. Likewise, the

Koch king Naranarayan had the Gohain Kamal Ali built from Narayanpur to Koch Behar under the guidance of his brother Gohain Kamal, These roads and lanes show that there were more other roads and lanes in the region.

In Upper Assam ,especially in the erstwhile undivided Sivasagar district, the core area of the Ahom kingdom, and also in lower Assam, many roads and lanes were built. Some of them were-

The Bar Ali

Built during the reign of Swargadeo Pratap Singha (1603-1641CE) this road stretched from the capital Gargaon to Negheriting in Dergaon along the river Dikhow by the south bank of the Brahmaputra. It is said that King Pratap Singha used to receive the holy flowers offered at the Negheriting Siva Doul everyday at the capital at Gargaon brought through the road.

The Dhodar Ali

Swargadeo Gadadhar Singha(1681-1696CE) had this road built from Jaipur near Naharkatia to Kamargaon near Golaghat. It is said that this road was built by the labourers who were reluctant to work (termed *dhod* in Assamese) and so it was called *Dhodar Ali*.

The Cheuni Ali

King Joydhvaj Singha (1648-1663) built this road. It is stated that the responsibility of constructing this road was given by the king to one Baduli Phukan. Popular tradition have it that while building the road, the labourers were kept in camps

built adjacent to the construction site. As camps implied *Chauni* in the local dialect the road was named as Cheuni Ali, according to the popular saying. A part of this road from Kamargaon to Janji-Garmur has now formed a part of the present day NH 37. Likewise Janji –Garmur to Gaurisagar which was called Machkhoa garh has also formed a part of this national highway..

Besides these well known roads there were roads and lanes like the *Naga Ali* , *Chotai Ali*, *Joboka ali*,*Bokota ali*, *Haripara ali*,*Bhomoraguri ali*,*Teliadongar ali*, *Dauki ali*, *Barphukan ali*, *Rohdoi ali*, *Khorikotia ali*, *Dubori ali*, *Bohi Khoo Borphukanar ali*, *Barpatra ali*, *Solguri ali*, *Tarimua ali*, *Meteka ali*, *Deka Barbarua ali*, *Halou phukan ali*, *Romoni ali*, *Nahar ali*, *Shensoa ali*, *Khargharia Doba ali*, *Namti ali*, *Mahmora ali*, *Na ali*, *Mohbondha ali*, *Komarbondha ali*, *Borghain ali*, *Bhadoi ali*, *Teton Tamulir ali* of Tezpur, *Boragi ali* of Guwahati built in different parts of the state. Many of them now cease to exist due to lack of repair and conservation or due to the factors like flood and erosion.

Stone bridges

There were also a few stone bridges built during the Ahom period. Those stone bridges built across tributaries, streams and rivulets are examples of an advanced architectural achievement of this period. It is said that the Ahoms started building stone bridges at least since the 16th century. These bridges were constructed by using piece-rocks of different shapes and sizes. According to Dilip Kumar Burhagohain the stone bridges

of the Ahom era were built out of round stones making steps vertically and binding them with flat stones. Latches were put into the flat stones to keep the structure tough and then they were fastened with high quality mortar. It is often believed that the workers could thus build a stone bridge overnight.

Stone bridge at Namdang

King Rudra Singha(1696-1714 CE) had the stone bridge built in the year 1703



Stone bridge at Namdang

CE over the Namdang river. This bridge near Rangpur is still intact and has been in use. It is said that this bridge was constructed out of a large rock. The length, width and breadth of the bridge are 202 feet , 21.5 feet and 5.5 feet respectively.

Stone bridge on the Darika river

The stone bridge was built by King Pratap Singha (1603-1641 CE) across the Darika river to the east of Gargaon. It is said that there were various sculptural works imprinted on it which have now been washed out..

Dijoikhona stone bridge

King Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696 CE) had this stone bridge constructed across the Dijoikhona river on the *Rohdoi Ali*, a

little to the east from the Darika stone bridge. From the very name of the tributary it gained the name Dijoikhona.

Stone bridge at Naphuk

Bar Raja Phuleswari Kuwari built this stone bridge over the river Naphuk in the year 1723.

Besides these stone bridges, there are references to some other such bridges like several other rock bridges like the Hahchora bridge at Hahchora, the Dimou bridge and others which were built during the Ahom era.

Ramparts:

Assam had made commendable advance in the making of ramparts since early times. Kings of the land had built high and impenetrable ramparts around their capitals for the sake of security. These ramparts were built mainly with earth in strategically important places as a measure of security and defence.

Foreign invaders of the land have high appreciation of the rampart building technique of the Ahoms. In the book *Niti Latankan*, written by one Vagish Pandit under the patronage of King Kamaleswar Singha(1795-1811), we find the building techniques of ramparts and stockades. It is mentioned by Sarbananda Rajkumar that the Ahoms fought with the help of ramparts and stockades. They dug out ditches around the towns and built ramparts and planted a special kind of thickly grown bamboo called Kotoha on it, so that the enemies could not cross the bamboo grooves even though they could cross the ramparts. There were ramparts of this sort around the towns like Barkala, Gargaon, Rangpur etc. The remnants of the ramparts of the Ahom era

are still found in many places of Assam. Most of them were earthen built. But at some places bricks were also used along with earth. Many such bricks are discovered from the site of the rampart in the east of Sarania hills in Guwahati. The ramparts were of sufficient height and width and the top was always plain like a road. Some of them are still used as roads at some places. The Mughal invaders have recorded their praise of the rampart building techniques of the Ahom kings in their books like *Padshah Nama*, *Baharistan-i-Ghayabi*.

Contemporary records name various ramparts of the period such as the Samdhara garh, Suwatal Garh, Rangali Garh, Simalu Garh, Chintamoni Garh, Katarikhamar Garh, Raj Garh, Kotoha Garh, Mera Garh, Nimona Garh, Machkhowa Garh, Hati Garh, Bibuddhi Garh, Momaikota Garh etc. The remnants of some of these ramparts are still found. Many of them have been converted into roads.

Historical sites and monuments are found almost in all the places of Assam. Students can rediscover them through field studies.

THINGS TO KNOW

- Kamakhya Temple is the oldest centre of Shakti worship in Assam.
- The Hayagriva Madhava temple is a holy place of worship for the followers of Hinduism and Buddhism.
- The Siva daul on the banks of the Sivasagar tank is the tallest of the daul / temple of the Ahom period.
- During the reign of the Ahoms rulers, a special type of binding material was prepared using indigenous technology. This indigenous cementing compound is called Karal. Karal was prepared from a mixture of the traditional sticky rice (called bora-caul), jaggery (gur), Barali fish, one variety of pulse (Matimaah), limestone, mustard oil and duck's egg.
- The monuments and temples of the Ahom period were generally constructed with bricks. Sometimes stones were also used. Sculpted panels and terracotta plaques of Gods and Goddesses, flora and fauna and other decorative designs were inserted into the body of the structure.
- During the Ahom period the people constructed their houses with wood, bamboo, straw and reeds. Only the king could construct houses with bricks.

The houses of the common people were like huts. The Ahom kings built hip-roofed (dutupia) royal palaces replicating those of the Borahis. However the officers (dangoriyas) were only allowed to build residential houses with gable-roofs (atopia).

- The Namdang stone bridge is 202 feet in length, 21.5 feet in breadth and 5.5 feet wide. This bridge was so well constructed that till today, it is in use without much repair

- All the monuments of the Ahom period, where bricks were used belongs to the Tunghungkia dynasty of the kings.
- The bricks of the Ahom period were of different shapes and sizes like triangular, quadriangular, round, grooved, studded with holes etc.
- The multi storied royal palace called Talatal ghar, is an excellent piece of Ahom architecture.
- The temples and monuments of the Ahom period bear resemblance with the Nagara style of North India. However local influence too is evident.

EXERCISE

1. Answer the following questions :

- a. On which hill is the Kamakhya temple situated?
- b. Which island of Assam was called the peacock island by the British?
- c. Name the Ahom ruler who built the Basistha temple?
- d. What is the most famous art activity of the Dah Parvatiya temple?
- e. Where in Assam do you find the confluence of the three streams Sandhya Lalita and Kanta?
- f. Name the hill on which the Hayagriva Madhava temple is located?
- g. On which hill in Hajo is the Poa Makka situated?
- h. Which is the biggest man made tank in Assam?
- i. Which Ahom ruler built the Dhodar Ali?

2. Write short notes :

- a. Ambubachi Mela.
 - b. Sri Surya pahar.
 - c. Poa Makka.
 - d. Dargah of Azan Pir.
 - e. Malini Than.
 - f. Maidam.
3. What do you mean by tangible heritage? Write a brief note on the archaeological remains of ancient Assam?
 4. Discuss briefly the archaeological remains of the Ahom period?
 5. What do you know about the tank architecture of the Ahom period?
 6. Write a brief note on the roads of the medieval period.
 7. Write briefly about the ramparts and stone bridges of the Ahom period.

CHAPTER NINE

Field Study

Need of Field study and its Scope :

The Field study makes the students Familiar with the applied knowledge of the subject and the theme. Visual experience in the real world field inspires the students to peep into the depth of the subject matter. Studying the fields of historical and the archaeological sites personally can acquire knowledge on contemporary history-archaeology, technical skill. The consciousness that has developed recently for preservation and maintainance of historical and archaeological sites can only be materialised through gaining personal knowledge of the sites in question. Thus the

students will be attracted towards the sustainable tourism.

The knowledge acquired by the students about the local places of historical importance, the report prepared will definitely reflect from their perspective the technique and skill, personal experience and other related sides. On the otherhand the viva-voce conducted will definitely reflect their way of vocabulary and speaking technique along with the mentality for conservation.

The teachers should give special importance on field study technique and methods.

Survey Schedule

- For geographical study one must incorporate in the survey schedule/questionnaire :
The location, Physiography, Climate, Settlement, Transport and Communication etc.
- For historical field study the report should contain the origin and characteristics, evolution and present status of people and settlement (evolution and pattern) changes through time etc.

Survey Schedule/questionnaire

Schedule No :
 Surveyor's Name :
 Date :
 Place : District :
 Village/Town,
 ward/road
 Lane/House No
 Police Station

1. Name of the household :

2. Family Status :

Use (✓) wherever necessary

Serial No of person	Relationship	age	sex	Educational Qualification						
				Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	HSSLC	Dgree	PG	Other
1			Male/Female							
2			”							
3			”							
4			”							
5			”							
6			”							
7			”							
8			”							

3. Occupation and income :

Household No	Unemployed	Daily wage earner	Peasast	Trade	Govt employee	Private PPP	Monthly income (in Rs.)
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							

4. Residential information :

No of houses	Foundation	roof	wall
1/2/3/4/5	Kacha (not of concrete)/ Concrete	thatch/tin/chat	bamboo/cement/brick

5. Household articles/property :

Car	Scooter/Bike	Bycycle	T.V/cable/ disc	Refrigerator	Mobile	Radio
Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No

6. If agriculture, producing crop (with amount) :**7. Essential primary Facilities :**

- Source of drinking water : pipe / tubewell / well / pond / river
- Medium and means of cooking : fire wood /LPG /electricity
- Sanitary facility : Toilet type
- Bathroom facility : yes/no. (inside / outside / open / closed)

8. Description of pets (domesticated animal) :

Species	Cow	Buffelo	duck	Fowl	others
Number					