CHAPTER-II
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Dhubri district, which constitutes the western part of the Brahmaputra Valley with its interestingly chequered history, has significant historic bearing on the early growth of population and distribution of settlements. The area, itself was part to the ancient territory of Kamrupa. The entire North-East India, is a great reservoir of a composite population, derived from various ethno-linguistic backgrounds and drawn from different directions at different times. The four major elements of population of the region, includes the Austrics, the Dravidians, the Aryans and the Mongoloids. The people of different ethnic origins, having diversified socio-cultural backgrounds, entered Assam from different directions at the pre-historic and recent past. It was probably from the third millennium B.C., that the great Sino-Tibetan speaking people started infiltrating into the Brahmaputra Valley (Acharyya, 1983). Thus, the population of the valley, is comprised of a large number of Tribal groups of Mongoloid, Bodos with certain Australoids strains, along with the Aryan and Dravidian element. The Assamese speaking masses of the area is a population group formed out
of the cultural synthesis and fusion of all the four major elements of population, mentioned above.

From the pre-historic times to the 12th century A.D., the Brahmaputra Valley was ruled by a number of Tribal Kings. Even, if this was politically stable period, there were influx of different groups of people from the neighbouring Tibetan, Chinese and Burmese territories, as well as, from the North and Central Indian kingdoms from time to time. During this period, groups of people of different origin, started settling in various parts of the valley. There is historical evidence that these tribal groups did not settle down permanently in any particular locality for sufficient long time. Their migration from one part to another in search of better agricultural land, suitable physical environment, can be treated by locating their habitational space in different period of time (Gait, 1967). Thus, the history of land occupancy of this period is a record of evolution and diffusion of settlements of various groups of tribal population in most part of the territory and vast tracts of land lying uninhabited. The adaptational behaviour of most of the tribal population is reflected, even at present, in selection of their habitational sites.

The 13th century political set up of the valley is represented in the figure 2.1. During this period, the
MID THIRTEENTH CENTURY POLITICAL SET UP

ASSAM

BHUTAN KINGDOM

KAMATA KINGDOM

BARA BHUAN KINGDOM

NAGA KINGDOM

CHUTIA KINGDOM

GAUR KINGDOM

JAYANTIA KINGDOM

FIG-21
valley was included under four kingdoms, viz. (1) The Kamata, (2) The Barbhuyan, (3) The Kachari and (4) The Chutia (From the early 13th century to 1504 A.D.) and the study area was part of the then Kamata kingdom.

During the 13th and 14th century, several wars took place among the rulers of the above mentioned kingdoms. Moreover, during the period of 1206-1257 A.D., the Mughals invaded the westernmost Kamata kingdom successively three times and Ahom after conquering the Chutias established their kingdom in 1228 A.D. in the territory previously occupied by the Chutias. The 13th century political set up of the Brahmaputra Valley is shown in figure 2.2. Towards the beginning of the 16th century, the whole valley was included by three kingdoms, such as (1) The Koch kingdom (From the 16th century to 1587 A.D.), covering the present districts of Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur and parts of Nagaon district, (ii) the Ahom kingdom and (iii) the Kachari kingdom.

During the 15th and 16th century, the Ahoms extended their kingdom by capturing most of the territories included under the Koch and Kachari kingdom. By 1587 A.D., leaving a small portion of the valley covered by Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts, the rest of the Brahmaputra Valley was brought under the Ahom rule,
which was invaded several times by the Mughals and thrice by the Burmese, as a result, people mainly from many localities of the South Bank plain of the Brahmaputra fled to safer places for resettlement (Shastri, 1958).

Thus, from the 13th century to the coming of the British rule in 1826 A.D., the Brahmaputra Valley was politically unstable and witnessed many battles. As a result of the political and social instability, the inhabitants migrated from one locality to another in search of security. The political (Acharyya, 1983) situation in the valley did not permit the inhabitants to grow permanent settlement in many places of the region (Due to prolonged rule of the Ahom, in the upper Brahmaputra Valley, which remained relatively unaffected by wars, settlement could grow under stable atmosphere).

At the time, when the British took possession of the region, the entire Brahmaputra valley was thinly populated with vast tracts of waste land lying uninhabited. There were comparatively higher concentration of population and fairly high growth of settlements in the South Bank plain of the Brahmaputra in comparison to the North Bank plain and around the holy sites (Temple, Mosque) and revenue free lands. At that time, there was a common practice among the cultivators that they cultivate over any particular plot of land, only for two or three years and then abandoned the
plot and selected a new one. This practice, created problems in the revenue administration of the British Government. For this and many other reasons, certain steps were taken by the British administration, in the settlement of land during the period 1826-1886 A.D. and through a liberal (Allen, 1979) form of revenue administration and the creation of a stable socio-economic atmosphere, the British rulers would provide a congenial environment for a steady growth of permanent settlement in the whole valley of Brahmaputra. The system of permanent occupancy of land with individual ownership was introduced here by the British, through the proclamation of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886 A.D. Towards the mid 19th century, flood became a common feature, over large tracts of land on either sides of the mighty river Brahmaputra. The earthquake of 1897 A.D. in someway adversely affected the drainage channels and levels of the country and since that date, the floods, especially in lower Assam, have been a greater duration and intensity (Allen, 1979). These flood affected areas have been sparsely populated and poorly settled. During the period, 1881-1901 A.D., there was a considerable decrease of the native population, which in certain areas accounted more than 25 per cent, due to certain deadly epidemic diseases, such as, Cholera, Small pox, Malaria, Kala-azar and Plague (Allen, 1979). The decrease in population, during this period, adversely affected the growth of new settlements. This fall in population figure was compensated within a
a short period of time by the influx of immigration, which exceeded the previous record in 1901 A.D. The majority of these immigrants are various tribal groups, garden-labourers and ex-labourers brought up to the tea gardens, though a certain amount of movement takes place, across the frontiers, where Assam marches with Bengal (Allen, 1979). The immigration were responsible for the growth of a number of new settlements, mainly in the waste land tracts, chars (riverine island) and in and around the tea gardens or forests. Since, the year 1900 A.D., there is uninterrupted flow of immigrants of different origin into the region, which resulted in a faster growth of settlements in the previously uninhabited fallow land or flood prone areas, char and forest areas.

Thus, the spatial organisation of settlements in the study area is related to the history of settlement particularly from the beginning of the British rule in Assam. The tea garden settlements in the region are entirely the product of the British policy of bringing the waste lands under tea plantation. Further, the extension of the railway line connecting Calcutta with the places situating along the tea plantation zones of the South Bank plain of Brahmaputra and of the Central and Western part of the North Bank plain, resulted in the growth of a number of new settlements around the railway stations and termination points. Most of the
present urban centres of the valley and the study district, were either administrative base points of the British administration or the transportation and trade points of the Pre- and Post-independence period.

The present organisational set up of the rural and urban settlements of the Brahmaputra and the Dhubri district is therefore, essentially the product of land revenue administration of the Britishers and the socio-cultural transformation of the area during the 19th and 20th century.

In the pre-historic time, the Dhubri district formed a part of the kingdom of Pragjyotisha or Kamrupa, which extended Southwards, as far as the Bay of Bengal and its Western boundary was, the Karatoya river (Barooah, 1979). According to Yoginitantra, the country lying to the East of the Karatoya river, is called Kamrupa. It is said to extend from the Karatoya river on the west to the Dikkara-basani on the east and from the mountain of Kanjariri on the north to the confluence of the Brahmaputra and Lakhya river s on the south, that is to say, it included roughly, the Brahmaputra Valley, Bhutan, Rangpur, Koch Bihar, the North-East of Mymansingh and possibly the Garo Hills (Barooah, 1979): The whole kingdom was divided into four pithas, viz. (1) Kampith, (2) Ratnapith, (3) Subarnapith and (4) Sourur-pith. The present Dhubri district was a part of Ratnapith.
The neolithic people of the Austro-Asiatic group are the original inhabitants of this region, who lived in isolated dwellings. They are now said to be represented by the Monkhmer khasis and syntangs of Meghalaya, who were driven to the hills by the Dravidian invaders. The Dravidians, supposed to have come from the North-Western part of India. The Dravidians had to bear the Mongolian thrust pouring through the North-East. The Mongolians are Tibeto-Burman of Indo-China group and are now represented by the Kacharis, Koches, Rabhas, Mechis, Mikirs and Garos, Lalungs, Nagas, Kukis and Chutias. The Aryans, entered Assam from various directions and pushed the Dravidians and Mongolians towards hilly areas. It is said that Naraka invited the Aryans to settle over Pragjyotisha. The successors of Aryan inhabitants still predominate in the plain area including the study region and left their marks over the earlier settlers (Barooah, 1979).

The earliest king of this region belonged to non-Aryan tribes, such as, Danavas and Asuras. Tradition easigns Mahirang Danab, as the earliest king, who was succeeded by Hatak Asur: Sambar Asur and Ratna Asur. After them, there was a Chief named Ghataka, the ruler of this region. Ghatak Asur was defeated and slain by Narak Asur, who was the hero of various stories in the Purana and Tantra. After Narak's Bhagadutta Vajvadutta and their nineteen generations ruled over it. The last king of this line being Subahu and Suparua.
The district, which once formed a part of ancient Kamrupa, was ruled by three dynasties e.g. the Varmas, the Salastambhas and the Palas. The Varman dynasty founded by Pushyavarman, ruled over this region for about three hundred years up to 650 A.D. After the death of Kumar Bhaskarbarman, the last king of Varman dynasty. Mechadhi natha of Salastambha dynasty ascended the throne of Kamrupa and this region. Brahmaapala became the first king of Pala dynasty towards the end of the 10th century after slaying the last king of Salastambha dynasty. The Pala kings ruled for about 150 years up to 1138 A.D. During the following hundred years, there was a missing link. In giving an account of this period, P.C. Chaudhury concludes that it was Rayarideva, who after the overthrow and the death of Vaidyadeva, founded another line, towards the close of the 12th century A.D. (Barooah, 1979). Prithu and Sandhya were most probably the rulers of different lines, but they did their duty in repulsing successive Muslim invasions (Barooah, 1979). Sandhya in 1260 A.D. shifted his capital from Gauhati to Kamatapur in Koch Bihar, owing to the extension of the Kachari power up to the Eastern boundary of the present Kamrup district. Since then, old Kamrupa, became known as the Kamata kingdom, which includes the undivided Goalpara and Kamrup districts and part of Northern Bengal and Mymensingh. In this period, people preferred to settle in clustered hamleted type of villages.
The Syndhya, became the first king of Kamatapur and was followed by Sindhu, Rup, Singnadhaj, Protapdhaj, Dharmanarayana, Durlabhanarayana and Indranarayana. In 1581 A.D Nara Narayana, the king of Kamatapur, divided his kingdom between himself and Ranghiders, the son of Chilarai, retaining the portion of West of Sonkosh river to himself and the Eastern portion known as, 'Koch Hero', was given to Raghudev.

Since, then, Goalpara came under Raghudev and his successors. In 1614 A.D., the Koch-Hazo, as far as the Barnadi was annexed to the Mughal Empire. But, the Ahom king, Pratap Singh got upper hand and took over almost all the strong-holds of the Mahammadans in Kamrup, including a large part of Goalpara and Kamrup up to Gauhati and started their settlement. Goalpara remained under Muslims for 20 years and was administrated through a Governor. In 1658 A.D., Pranarayan, Raja of Koch-Bihar and the Ahom drove away the Mughals to Ducca. The Ahoms, drove back Pranarayan to Koch-Bihar and occupied Goalpara up to Sankosh and settled there up to 1661. In 1662, Mirjumla occupied Ahom kingdom up to Gargaon, but, he made a treaty with Ahoms. On the basis of the treaty, the Mahammadans restored their holding over Goalpara and Kamrup. In 1682 A.D., Gadadhar Singha waged war and recaptured Gauhati. Hence forward, the Manas river was fixed as the boundary.
between the two powers. At that time, when there was political chaos, caused by the breakdown of the Koch kingdom and wars between the Mahammadans and the Ahoms, the Bhutiyas brought the Eastern Duars under their control. But, Goalpara remained under Mahammadan rule till 1765 A.D., when with the rest of Bengal is passed into the possession of the East India Company and formed the Rangpur district of the Bengal province. In 1822 A.D., including three Thanas - Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari with Garo-Hills, formed a new district, the North-East Rangpur.

After expulsion of the Burmese from the Assam Valley and its annexation to the British territory in 1826 A.D., a new province was formed and David Scott was appointed as the Commissioner of it. In 1864 A.D., the Eastern Duara were occupied by the East India Company and added to the Goalpara district. Then a new era of settlement started in Assam and in Goalpara district. The British Government constructed several roads to connect inaccessible places for administration and sub-divided the area into administrative divisions and then several rural settlements started around them.

After Independence, on the 9th February, 1947, a new subdivision of Goalpara district was created, known as Kokrajhar subdivision, which occupied the Eastern Duars and enhanced the number of subdivisions in the Goalpara
district up to three, viz. Dhubri, Goalpara and Kokra/ihur subdivisions, in 1983, these subdivisions were elevated into districts up to four in number. That is why, Dhubri subdivision of former Goalpara district, is known as Dhubri district, which was again subdivided into three subdivisions e.g., Dhubri, Bilasipara and South Salma/Makachar subdivisions, in steps. In Dhubri district, there are 8 Land Revenue Circles (Census, 1971) and seven Block Developments with 43 (1971) Gaon Panchayats, Fig.2.3.

However, after Independence, there has been rapid development works in the growth of roads, educational institutions, medical, banking, agricultural, postal services, offices, some minor industries, etc. which transformed the settlements of study area to a greater extent.

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