CHAPTER – II
LOCATION AND PEOPLE

Garigaon, a village situated on the south bank of the Brahmaputra in the western most locality of the greater Guwahati city in the district of Kamrup is one of the most significant places in Assam.

Garigaon is bounded by the mighty river Brahmaputra in the north. The N.H. 37 and Jalukbari village are situated to the south-west boundary of the village. Gauhati University and Sadilapur village are situated the east of Garigaon while the Khanazan river is snaking its course along the western boundary of the village.

The total area of the village is six square kilometer approximately with 3,096 households and the total population of the village may be estimated at sixteen thousand. (16,000/-).

Table No: 1

Showing Total Area, Unirrigated, Cultivabale and Uncultivable land of Garigaon – Dehan Garigaon and Kachari Garigaon:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Total Area (Acres)</th>
<th>Land (Acres)</th>
<th>Unirrigated</th>
<th>Cultivable</th>
<th>Waste</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dehan Garigaon</td>
<td>1383</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>703</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachari Garigaon</td>
<td>1260</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the medieval period, the area of the village was under the reign of the kingdom of Rāni. After that, in the sixteen century A.D. during the reign of the Koch King Raghudev Narayan (1581-1603 A.D), the area of the Village was under his rule.

Moreover, during the reign of Mughāl rule in the sixteenth century, the whole area of the present Jalukbari area was under the control of the Mughāl Faujdar, Sayed Firoj Kha. In the first half of seventeenth century, the Ahoms had captured the whole area of Jalukbari villages and they had built many stockades in this area. Regarding the stockades, I shall discuss in the next chapter. However the whole area was the historical war place in the past.

**The People:**

The population structure of the village Garigaon is a complex one, which may broadly be divided into two religious groups- Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus includes a number of castes and Communities, viz- Kālita, Koch, Kāivārtă, Nāmasudra and Kāchāri etc. In the recent time many Brahmin families Coming from the different parts of Assam have settled in the area. The Muslims consists of two Communities, viz- Fākir or Gāriā and Māriā.

The Hindu settlement at the present Garigaon area began at least from the time of the epics and Purānās. It may be mentioned that there
are a number of old shrines and temples in the surrounding area of the village. One of the such Shiva temple is situated at the South-West side of the village or in the present Gauhati university side. There are many Pot materials scattered in the surrounding side of the temple which name is Temple of Kāleshwār Hill. If we deeply examine the scattered pot materials then it gives us the idea that there were lived many Hindu Peoples in that area from the earliest time. These people are re-settled in the present Garigaon area when in 1948 A.D. the Gauhati University was established. But the Kālikā Purāṇā does not provide any information regarding the population structure of this village.

Lānkeshwār thān is one of the old shrines of the people of the village. It is situated to the east of the Assam Forest School at a hilltop. It is believed to have been established about 450 years ago. It is also believed that the people of the surrounding area of the Thān were settled from the earliest time. But there is no written evident regarding the settlement of the people of this area.

Bāsudevā Nāmghār, popularly known as Burhā Nāmghār is the oldest known religious institution in the locality which religious institution set up for preaching the religious teachings of Sri Sankardeva is believed to have been established about 355 years ago. It is also evident from the name of the Nāmghār that it was set up long back. If we deeply
examine it then it gives us the idea of the settlement of the Hindu people of this area. So, it is believed that the Hindu people were settled from the Purānic time. We have collected some family chronology (Vāmsālātā) from the families of the various communities. The division and distribution of the people of the area can be drawn as follows:

**Ethnical Division**

- Hindu
  - Brahmin
  - Koch
  - Kalita
  - Other Castes
- Muslim
  - Maria
  - Garia (Fakir)
  - Keot
  - Namasudra
  - Kaivarta

1) **Brahmin:**

In the recent time many Brahmin families coming from the different parts of Assam have settled in the area. There are approximately two families lived in the village. One of the such chronological of the family is:

- Late Manik Chakraborty
- Parvati Chakraborty

  1. Pankaj Chakraborty
  2. Prasanta Chakraborty
  3. Amitabh Chakraborty
This family is coming from the present Nalbari district of Assam due to search of occupation. But they are not involved in public puza works.

2) The Koch:

After the death of the koch king Narnaryan’s brother Chilarai in 1581 A.D. The Koch kingdom was divided into two parts, viz.- the Koch Hāzo was under the rule of the son of Chilarai, Raghudeb. The entire Jalukbari villages were under the reign of the king Raghudeb. Most probably, the Garigaon area was in it.

The Koches constitute a sizeable Population of Kamrup. “The Koches are frequently referred to as Kuvāchā in the Purāns and Tāntrās. The historian of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji’s invasion at the end of the 12th century says that the features of “the Koch, Mech and Thāru, tribes” resembled those of a tribe of southern Siberia. That acute observer Bryan Hodgson classed the koch with the Bodo and Dhimāl, and the same view is taken by Buchnān and in the Dacca Blue book. On the other hand, Colonel Dalton. Considered them to be Drāvidīān, and Risley, While admitting an intermixture with Mongoloid stock held that Drāvidīān Characteristics Predominate. The divergence of views seems to have arisen from the confusion caused by the use of the term Rājbānshi. It originally referred to an entirely distinct community of Drāvidīān
affinities, but was afterwards adopted by the *Koches* west of the *Monās* river, who, when they attorned to Hinduism, appropriated the caste name of the most numerous Hinduized Community in their neighbourhood. So long as the *koch* kings ruled, there was a considerable intermingling of the two races in the country subject to their domination. There seems, however, to be no doubt that the true *koches* were a *Mongoloid* race very closely allied to the *Meches* and *Gāros*.

"In the Brahmaputra valley *Koch*, formerly the name of a tribe, has become a caste which admits proselytes to Hinduism from the ranks of the *Kāchāri* and other aboriginal tribes".

The *koches* are related to the *Bodo-Kāchāri* group of the Indo-Mongoloid stock. When a section of them after assuming the political power came under the religious influence of Brāhmanas and vaisnava preachers and were converted to full fledg Hindus they assumed the name *Rājāvānshi* or *Koch*. However, the area was under the reign of the *koch* King. Raghu Deb, therefore, we may conclude the people of this area belong to the same category. Although they were not given the status of the *Kālītās* or the *Keots*, yet they were nevertheless assigned a good status in the caste scallions. The *koches* use such surnames as *Dās*.

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5. Gait, E.A: *A History of Assam*, 1926, p-43
Bhårāli, Medhi Nāyāk and Hātkhowā. The Koch people are living in the eastern side of the village and this locality is known as Bezpārā. A minimum size of the population is also inhabited in the south-west side of the village use such surnames as Dās and Rājbonshi. As for example we may quoted such family chronology as below:

Family of South West Side of the Village.\(^7\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sri Rajendra Nath Rajbonshi} & \quad \text{(Husband)} \\
\text{Srimoti Minati Rajbonshi} & \quad \text{(Wife)} \\
\text{Sri Hiran Ch. Rajbonshi} & \quad \text{Sri Jaymoni Rajbonshi}
\end{align*}
\]

Family of the eastern side of the village:\(^8\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sri Paresh Ch. Das} & \quad \text{(Husband)} \\
\text{Srimoti Gangabala Das} & \quad \text{(Wife)} \\
\text{Son} & \quad \text{Daughter} & \quad \text{Daughter} & \quad \text{Daughter} \\
\text{Sri Dilip Ch. Das} & \quad \text{Junubala Das} & \quad \text{Pranita Das} & \quad \text{Karabi Das}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^7\) & \(^8\). Census report; Guwahti Mahanagar District Koch-Rajbonshi Sanmlan, 1977.
3. **Kaivarta:**

The *Kaivārtā* occupy the position next to the *Kālitās*. They are considered as caste Hindus. The origin of the *Kaivārtās* has not been with by any scholar either from the dealt with by any scholar either from the anthropological or from the cultural point of view. “According to Manu, the *Kaivārtā* was mixed castes.” The *Brāhmāvaivārtā Purānā* also characterized them as a mixed people born of a *Kshātriya* father and a *Vāisyā* mother. Allen writes the *Kaivārtās* (*dom*) are the boating and fishing castes of Assam.⁹

Generally, the *Keots* are called as *Kaivārtā*. According to Sir Edward Gait, the *Kālitās* a reputed Aryan descent, and a few others, such as the *Doms*, of obvious *Drāvidian* origin.¹⁰

The *Kaivārtā* are one of the earliest groups of inhabitants in the area. The *Kaivārtās* or *Keot* are sub-divided into two compartments. The *Hāloī, Keot* are treated as upper class Hindu, where the *Jāloī Keot*, who are primarily a fisherman community, are considered as depressed class. In the present situation, the *Jāloī Keots* are turned into as *Hāloī Keot* in the area. The *Hāloī keots* are earliest inhabitant of the Dehan Garigaon area. Cultivation is the traditional occupation of the *Hālowā* or *Hāloi*

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Keots and they are good cultivators. It is not known that when Jāloi Keots have given up their traditional occupation. The Hālo Keots of this area are cultivated in the bank of the Dipār lake in Assamese word Chāpāri of Dipār bil. The Kāivārtās or Keots have been staunch Vāisnāvas since the middle of the 17th century. One of the such family chronology of the Kāivārtā, which is inhabitant of Dehan Garigaon is:

1) **Chronology of Kāivārtā family of Dehan Garigaon:**

   Bishnu Kaivarta (forefather)
   
   ↓

   Dabhagu Kaivarta
   
   ↓

   Shauna Kaivarta
   
   ↓

   Shambhu Ram Kaivarta
   
   ↓

   Gurucharan Kaivarta
   
   ↓

   Saruram Kaivarta
   
   ↓

   Dhani Ram Das
d) Kalita:

There are approximately, thirteen Kālitā families in the Dehan Garigaon area. The Kālitās are the predominant caste in the village Garigaon and socially they rank next to the Brahmins. “The Kālitās of the Brahmaputra valley, who number nearly a quarter of a million, have often a distinctly Aryan appearance and, they are possibly to some extent the descendant of the first Aryān immigrants by women of the century”\(^\text{12}\).

“P.C. Chaudhury is of the opinion that the Kālitās of Assam originated from the priestly order of the Alpines, allied to Nāgārās of Gujrat Kāyāsthās of Bengal. He traces back their existence in Assam to as early as the 5th century B.C. if not earlier”\(^\text{13}\).

H. Beverly records. “The Kālitās are said to have been priests of the Koch, and certainly appear to have been a superior caste. When the Koches, adopting Hinduism have put themselves under the guidance of

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the Kamrup Brāhmānās, we may suppose that the Kālitās sank into subordinate position they now are occupying".14

The Kālitās of Dehan Garigaon are considered as high caste among the people in the society. The many of the Hāloī Keots of this area developed a tendency to introduce themselves as Kālitās. The Kālitā in the area are most probably have been coming from the south Kamrup area. In this chapter we may conclude a family chronology, which is given below:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Late Nabin Kalita15</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Ananda Kalita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahendra Kalita</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bharat Kalita</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bina Kalita</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarojini Kalita</td>
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<td>Putul Kalita</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Diganta Kalita</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simanta Kalita</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saranga Kalita</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nibedita Kalita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upama Kalita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrinmoya Kalita</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sangeeta Kalita</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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e) **The Kacharis:**

The Village Garigaon is sub-divided into two-revenue village, viz: Kachāri Garigaon and Dehān Garigaon. In the southern part of the village, the Kachāri people are lived. They are belonged to the Bodo-group. Therefore, the area is called as Kachāri Garigaon. "The Kachāri may perhaps be described as the aborigines, or earliest known inhabitants, of the Brahmaputra valley. In the Brahmaputra valley the Kachāris call themselves Bodo or Bodo fisā (sons of the Bodo)"16.

"The Kachāris are believed to be very closely allied to the Koches, and also so far at least as language is concerned, to the Chutiyās, Lālungs and Morāns of the Brahmaputra valley, and to the Gāros and Tippers of the southern hills". 17

The Kachāri people to initiate into the Hinduism religion, so they are popularly known as Koch or Rājbānshi. The Kachāri people of the area is same one. The tribal people have settled in the south-west part of the village. The tribal people, have called the non-tribal Assamese people as Dehān or Khenā and it is proved that they are occupying as Dehan Garigaon one of the Kachāri family is given below:

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F. Namasudra:

There are no Nāmāsudrā people in the area in the recent time. But they are settled in the west Jalukbari area which is south west side of the village. In the past, most probably, they were lived in Dehan Garigaon area due to search of occupation and they are settled in the west Jalukbari area. Fishing is the traditional occupation of the people. So, they are settled near the Dipār bill area, which is adjacent to west Jalukbari area.

G. Muslims:

It is difficult to determine the exact date of the Muslims settlement in Garigaon. The Muslims of the pre British period were descendents of these who had taken prisoner in near against the Muslim invaders Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar led an invasion to Tibet through the kingdom of Kamrupa in 1205-06 A.D. In his return journey, Bakhtiyar was defeated and he suffered a heavy loss of his army in the battle. A few

Muslims soldiers who could save their lives stayed in Kamrupa as a hostage of Kamrupa king. It is believed that a small group of these Muslim soldiers stayed in the south bank of the river Brahmaputra in the present Garigaon area. A large portion of the Muslim population of Garigaon consists of Muslim soldier of the Mughal army, who came to Assam during the Ahom-Mughal conflict. Sufi saint Jalaluddin Tabrezi visited Kamrupa in the 13th century A.D. (see Chapter-I; P. 2) People believed that Tabrezi was buried at Garigaon and there is a tomb in the village, which has been identified with that of Tabrezi. The disciple of Tabrezi who stayed in the area is called Māriā. The Muslims of the area can broadly be divided into two groups, Gāriā (Fākir) and Māriā.

In the area, they have a common religion and faith. There is no any difference between the two groups.

**Garia (Fakir)**: The tomb of great sufi saint Hazarat Jalaluddin Tabrezi situated in Fākir Pārā of this village. So, the disciples of Tabrezi called Fākir. The tomb of Tabrezi is maintained by pirpal who are popularly called as Medhi. As for example the following listed men are the pirpal of the tomb.

1. Ismat Ali Medhi.
Fakir is also the pirpal of the tomb, viz- The table of the Fākir or Pirpāl is

1. Dhana Molla Fakir
2. Naser Molla Fakir
3. Butta Molla Fakir

The general Muslims of the area call themselves Gāriā, an indication of their claim of having came originally from Gaur, “Hunter hold the view that the term Gāriā originated from a particular profession which they adopted in Assam. He believed that those who took up tailoring were known as Gāriā”.19

In the census report of 1891, it is stated that the Muslim castes were like Hindus, and hierarchically they were arranged in the following manner- the Sayed occupied the highest status while the Mughāl, the pāthān and the Seikh were placed in a descending status order. The Sayeds of Assam trace their descent from Shah Milan or Azān Fākir, the Sufi Saint who came to Assam and is regarded as a descendent of Ali.20

But in the area, there is no any caste system among the Muslims. The cultivation is the main occupation of the Gāriā and the Fākir.