CHAPTER 2

BARAK VALLEY: A BRIEF HISTORY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE FIELD OF COLLEGE EDUCATION
2.0: Introduction:

Barak valley is in the southern part of Assam and eastern part of India. From the east to the west a mountain range has divided Assam into two valleys viz. Barak & Brahmaputra. These two valleys are washed by the waters of the rivers Barak and Brahmaputra respectively. The term 'Barak Valley' is of recent origin. Indeed undivided Cachar districts of post partition days sans the northern hills now comprise the Barak Valley districts viz. Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. The latter two districts which were two subdivisions under Cachar district have, of late, been created as new districts.

Geographically, linguistically, culturally and socially, the Barak Valley is an extension of the eastern Bengal. In 1874, when Assam (the then Assam) was originated as a province by the British, Two Bengali speaking districts of Sylhet and Cachar were carved out of the Bengal Presidency and incorporated in Assam to meet the revenue deficit of the newly formed province. The twin districts were then placed under a Commissioner and came to be known as the Surma Valley division. In 1947, the major part of the Sylhet district was transferred to erstwhile East Pakistan. The remaining part of the Surma Valley division is now known as the Barak Valley which has since been reorganized into three districts viz. Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi within the state of Assam. But for all practical purposes, the Surma Valley (i.e. the pre-independence districts of Sylhet and Cachar) forms a single cultural unit since time immemorial.

The principal town, Silchar came into existence in 1832-33 at the behest of Captain Thomas Fisher, the first Superintendent of Cachar after the British
annexation. This district town offers passage to Mizoram, Manipur, N.C.Hills, and is also connected to Tripura and Bangladesh border by road.

2.1 : Physiography :

The Barak Valley is situated between longitude 92.15 and 93.15 east and latitude 24.8 and 25.8 north, covering an area of 6,922 sq.km. of land. It is bound on the north by North Cachar Hills district of Asom, Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya, on the south by Mizoram, on the east by Manipur and Tripura and Sylhet district of Bangladesh on the west.

Barak, the major river of the valley has a number of tributaries covering the entire valley. These are Jiri, Chiri, Madhura, Ghagra, Jatinga, Katakhal, Sonai, Dhaleswari and Harang. Barak river has been separated into two courses-Surma and Kushiara near Katigorah and entered into Bangladesh via Karimganj. The Barail range, Bhuban range, Saraspur, Chhatachura are the major hills of Barak Valley.

2.2 : People :

Although 80 percent of the population is Bengali, yet this valley is the natural homeland of a number of ethnic groups like Kuki, Naga, Hmars, Khasis etc. Besides some Koch(locally known as Dehans) have been residing in the valley since the occupation of Cachar by Chilarai the Koch General. Dimasas have been residing in the valley following the extension of Dimasa rule into the valley from Maibong in North Cachar Hills. Manipuris have been residing in the valley since 1818; a number of Assamese settlements cropped up in the valley following hospitality offered by the
King of Cachar to the victims of Moamaria rebellion in 19th century. The beginning of tea plantation in the 1850s resulted in steady flow of labourers from North Indian provinces, from the south and also from Bengal. They had brought their distinctive dialects, folklores and rites which in totality are significant addition to the unique culture of what may be termed as the ‘anthropological garden’ of Barak Valley. A sizable number of Hindi speaking people are also residing in the valley.

With a rich and diverse cultural heritage, Barak Valley, ‘an island of peace’ as termed by Indira Gandhi, has borne the crux of partition and the social unrest following it and also continued to bear the onslaughts of nature; yet it has been a blissful abode for the divergent population groups. The people of the valley had played their role in the Swadeshi, Non-cooperation and Quit India movement, and the land had been visited by Mahatma Gandhi, Bipin Chandra Pal, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Even Rabindra Nath Tagore too had set his feet in Karimganj for a while on his way to Sylhet in 1919.

2.3 : Brief profile of three districts of Barak Valley:

Barak Valley comprises of three districts. These are (a) Cachar, (b) Karimganj and (c) Hailakandi.

(a) Cachar: The district of Cachar is located in the southernmost part of Asom is one of the oldest districts of Asom. It lies between longitude 92°-24’ E and 93°-15’ E and latitude 24°-22’ N and 25-8’ N and is bound by Borail and Jayantia hill ranges on the north, by the state Mizoram on the south, by sister districts Hailakandi and Karimganj on the west and Manipur on the east. Cachar was created in 1830 after
annexation of Kachari kingdom by British. Karimganj sub-division and Hailakandi subdivision were made separate districts in 1983 and 1989 respectively. There are two possibilities regarding the origin of the name of Cachar district.

(1) The Kacharis gave this name Cachar when they ruled this land.

(2) The word Kachar in Sylhet means a stretch of land at the foot of a mountain. Hence the name Cachar might have been given by Bengalis of Sylhet as the land is surrounded by mountains.

**District Profile of Cachar**

A Location and General Information

(a) Name of the District Cachar

(b) Area of the District 3786 sq.km.

(c) Headquarters of the District Silchar

(d) Distance from Guwahati Rail - 396 km

Road - 343 km

(e) Number of Subdivision 2 no.s

(f) Name of the subdivision 1. Silchar

2. Lakhipur

(g) Rivers of the District Barak, Rukhni, Sonai

B Demography

(a) Population of the District (As per 2001 Census)

(i) Male – 741580

(ii) Female 700561

(iii) Urban Population in % - 11%

(iv) Rural Population in % - 89%

(b) Average annual rainfall 3139 mm.
C. Literacy Rate

- (i) Male - 75.73
- (ii) Female - 59.41

D. Number of educational Institutions

Schools/Colleges/Universities

- (As per 2001 Census report)
  - (i) Pre-Primary - 2
  - (ii) Primary - 1616
  - (iii) Middle - 339
  - (iv) High - 203
  - (v) H.Secondary - 28
  - (vi) Colleges - 7
  - (vii) Medical college - 1
  - (ix) NIT/Engg college - 1
  - (x) T.Training college - 1
  - (xi) University - 1
  - (xii) ITI - 1

E. Language commonly used

- Assamese, Bengali, English, Hindi

(b) Karimganj: The present Karimganj district before independence was one of the subdivisions of the district of Sylhet in the state of Asom. The district is situated between 92.15' longitude & 92.35' east and between latitude 24.15' and 25.54' north. Karimganj is the extreme south western district of Asom. It is bound by river Kushiara & Bangladesh in the north, Tripura & Mizoram in the south, Hailakandi district in the east & Bangladesh Tripura in the west. The economy of the district is predominantly agriculture & forest-based, there has been some development in industries also. At the time of partition in 1947 the district was annexed to East
Pakistan by a referendum held in July that year. Karimganj town along with some adjacent areas were also under Pakistan occupation from August 15 to August 17. However on August 18 three and half thanas are carved out of Karimganj, Badarpur, Ratabari, and Patherkandi were restored to Indian dominion by Radcliffe award that demarcated the borders of newly formed Indian dominion and East Pakistan. This truncated portion of earlier Karimganj sub-division was incorporated within the Cachar District as a Sub-division on August 18, 1948. The Sub-division was up-graded to a district on the 1st July 1983 vide govt. notification no. GAG 215/83/1 Dated 14-06-1983.

### District Profile of Karimganj

**A Location and General Information**

- **(a) Name of the District**: Karimganj
- **(b) Area of the District**: 1809 sq.km.
- **(c) Headquarter of the District**: Karimganj
- **(d) Distance from Guwahati**: 345 km.
- **(e) Number of Subdivision**: Nil
- **(g) Rivers of the District**: Kushiara, Longai, Singla & Barak

**B Demography**

- **Population of the District**
  - (As per 2001 Census)
  - (i) Male - 517680
  - (ii) Female - 49026

**C Literacy Rate**

- (i) Male - 74.69
- (ii) Female - 57.28
D. Number of educational Institutions

Schools/Colleges/Universities

(i) Pre-Primary - 4
(ii) Primary - 1245
(iii) Middle - 271
(iv) High - 92
(v) H.Secondary - 25
(vi) Colleges - 4

E. Language commonly used

Assamese, Bengali, English, Hindi

(e) **Hailakandi**: The Hailakandi district is situated in the southernmost corner of Assom in North East India. It is bound by river Barak & Cachar district in the north and east, Mizoram state in the south and east and Karimganj district in the west. The inter state border is stretched over 76 km. in the south east. The name “Hailakandi” is derived from the Kuki word “Halam” which means ‘small’ and ‘Kundia’ a Bodo-Kachari word which means a plot of land for temporary ploughing as per the opinion of the historians like Rajmohan Nath and others. According to them the Kukis are the first inhabitants of the district of Hailakandi. Subsequently, the Bodo-Kacharis(Dimasas) entered into the plains and settled in different places scattered in the northern part of the district. For that reason it was called ‘Shailkandi’-Kundi a Kuki word meaning ‘a bunch’- a land of the kukis. From this it came to be known later as Hailakandi.
District Profile of Hailakandi

A Location and General Information

(a) Name of the District: Hailakandi
(b) Area of the District: 1326 sq.km.
(c) Headquarter of the District: Hailakandi
(d) Distance from Guwahati: 330 km.
(e) Number of Subdivision: Nil
(g) Rivers of the District: Dholeswari, Katakhal

B Demography

Population of the District (As per 2001 Census)
(i) Male - 280513
(ii) Female - 262359

C Literacy Rate

(i) Male - 68.24
(ii) Female - 50.46

D. Number of educational Institutions

Schools/Colleges/Universities (As per 2001 Census report)
(i) Pre –Primary - 2
(ii) Primary - 1011
(iii) Middle - 277
(iv) High - 49
(v) H.Secondary - 11
(vi) Colleges - 2

E. Language commonly used: Assamese, Bengali, English, Hindi
2.4 : **Education**:

There was practically no institutionalized education worth the name before the advent of the Britishers here. The education that was prevalent at that time was of religious character. There were only a very few Pandits who had some learning centres of Sanskrit culture in Bengal or other western provinces of the country. During 1853 three schools were started one at Silchar, one at Katigorah, one at Hailakandi. But these schools lost their existence. The period following 1905 had witnessed emergence of more schools in various parts of the districts. At present there are about 5175 no. of Primary, Middle, High and Higher Secondary Schools, and 13 affiliated colleges in all the three districts of Barak valley.

**2.41 : College education :**

In ancient India the learning was closely connected to the religious institutions. Among the well known colleges and universities or the centres of learning of that period, mention may be made of Taxila and Nalanda in the north, Vallabhi in Kathiawad and Kanchi in the south of India. These centres of learning do not exist today. Later on many Hindu temples in south India took the cause of teaching and there were many temple colleges attached with them. They were Sanskrit schools of higher learning. The method of instruction in these temple colleges consisted of individual attention to the student, debates and discussions. During the Muslim rule, its rulers encouraged the establishment of colleges, better known as 'Madarsas' at Lahore, Delhi, Rampur, Ajmer, Lucknow, Allahabad, and few other centres. These colleges specialized in the teaching of subjects such as
Logic, Literature, Law, Astronomy, Theology and Philosophy. The medium of instruction was Persian in these institutions.

Before 1857 the East India Company and Christian Missions established a few colleges in the country. They are Agra college, Agra(1823); Wilson college, Bombay, Christian college, Madras, St. John college, Agra and few others. They are still playing their role in the higher education. It was during the year 1857 that three universities at three Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were established on the recommendation of Sir Charles Wood’s Education Despatch in 1854. The important task of these universities was to provide affiliation and doing the examination work. The actual teaching work at higher level was done later on by the colleges established for the purpose. It was in the year 1917 that the Calcutta University Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Michael Sadlar in its report stressed that the “Universities should take part in teaching and research.” With the result the universities began to share the work of teaching and research. These academic institutions, be it colleges or universities did have libraries to feed back the classroom teaching and research.

Manik Chandra Barua, a highly public spirited man of the age urged the Govt for the establishment of college in Asom. In a strong note to the Govt he pointed out that “Assam is the only province which has not got a college. Indeed it has not a high institution worth the name. A college at Guwahati with an European Principal will be better appreciated by the students.” After a careful consideration Sir H.S.Cotton, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, felt that the time was not yet ripe for a college at Guwahati. He agreed to Mr Barua but he was also disposed to consider the case for a college at Guwahati if the people in general were in its favour. Circulars were accordingly issued inviting public opinion and the response was overwhelming.
Accordingly, on 17 June 1901, a Govt. college was started at Gauhati after the name of Sir Henry Cotton. It was affiliated to Calcutta University up to the F.A. standard.

In 1935 the first college was installed in Barak Valley that is Guru Charan College at Silchar. Before that there was no college in the entire region of Barak valley. Students aspiring for higher education in 1930’s and earlier had to go all the way either to Sylhet Murari Chand College the only college in Sylhet district or to the colleges in Calcutta to get admitted there. But sheer financial constraint and distance stood on the way for most of them (except a few of the elite society) to pursue their studies. As such acute necessity was felt by a section of the elite society at Silchar to consider the feasibility of establishing a college at Silchar. Thus came forward one gentleman Late Brindaban Dey Purkayastha, the Head Assistant in Silchar Local Board, who had fortunately free access to all sections of the society by virtue of his profession. He had two sons Bidyut and Birinchi Purkayastha by name and wanted them to have their graduation at Silchar itself that is in 1933. He started making contact with elite influential people including Kamini Kumar Chanda, the Doyen of Cachar. Kamini Kumar Chanda met merchants and government agencies/bodies and drew a plan for establishing a college. Brindaban Dey Purkayastha actively took part in the project and met Mrs. Kiran Shashi Nag wife of Sri Guruchanran Nag (the then Superintendent of Excise department) and discussed with her about the project. Kamini Kumar Chanda also met Mrs Nag and requested her to finance the scheme in 1934.Kiran Shashi Nag had no son but she agreed to finance the scheme and wanted that the college should be named in the name of her husband and also that women should get chance of admission in the college. She donated a sum of Rs.10,000.00 towards the project. Donations were accepted from other sources also and in 1935 the college was finally established on the other side of Barak river. As was agreed with
Mrs Nag the name of the college being given as ‘Gurucharan College, Silchar’. Originally the college was housed in a deserted bungalow. After two years a land was acquired for the college building. Kamini Kumar Chanda wrote a letter to the Vice Chancellor Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee of Calcutta University for affiliation of the college and thus the college got affiliated to Calcutta University. It was later got affiliated to Gauhati University in 1948 and later to Assam University in 1994. The college began its journey with only 15 students on its roll. Today the college boasts of having strength of more than three thousand students and its alumni spread almost throughout the globe. It was the first step to higher education in Barak valley. Subsequently Karimganj College was also established in 1946 at Karimganj, and Sarada Srikrishna College was established in 1950 at Hailakandi. At present 31 general colleges (both provincialized and private) are in existence in this valley for spreading college education to a large number of population. The growth of private colleges in different parts of the three districts indicates that the demand for higher education is also increasing day by day.

It is said that the aim of college education is to make a cabbage a cauliflower. This transformation cannot happen without an active role played by the library in addition to what is taught in the classroom. UGC Committee on colleges (1967) observed “The quality of University education in India will largely depend on the standards maintained by colleges and unless it is made possible for them to improve their staff, equipment, libraries, laboratories and other facilities, no real improvement of university education will be made possible.” It is obvious that if we want to improve the quality of higher education in this country more attention must be paid to the colleges. It must go to the credit of the University Grants Commission that they have tried to improve the standard of college education in the recent past by bringing
up the salary of college teachers at par with those of university teachers by laying some minimum standards for recognition and getting aid from the UGC. And by declaring some colleges autonomous, the government seems to have realized the importance of colleges.

2.5: Importance of Libraries:

The present educational system comprises schools from Primary to higher secondary levels, colleges, both academic and professional, offering courses leading to bachelors and master degrees, universities for higher studies and research, agriculture universities, institutes of science and technology, etc. In the last forty years the educational system has been reviewed by high power commissions set up by the Government of India at different periods to introduce appropriate measures to improve the quality of education and make it more relevant to the country's requirements. In recent years, the government has been very much concerned with educational reforms, especially at the school level, which has resulted in the adoption of an educational policy in 1986 to provide the best education to our children, to be in tune with our national heritage as well as modern advances in science, technology and management.

In all these efforts to modernize our educational system, libraries have been considered vital components and integral parts of the entire educational process. Considerable thought and attention have been given to the planning and development of academic libraries at all levels. There is, however, still scope for improvement in terms of their effectiveness, as principal instruments of modern educational system.
James Madison, the Ex-President of U.S.A. remarks, "knowledge will for ever govern ignorance and the people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which the knowledge gives." Considered from this viewpoint library is the most powerful media that promotes self-education to the masses. Even now-a-days the highly developed nations of the world give more attention to the library for their cultural and social growth. According to an eminent library scientist of India, Dr. R.L. Mittal, "A well equipped and well managed library, is, indeed the foundation stone of modern educational structure." In the words of secondary Education Commission, 1952-53, "the library is the hub and the centre of the intellectual and literary life of the recognized school and plays the same part vis-a-vis all the other subjects as the laboratory plays for science subjects or the workshop for technical subjects."

An academic body be it a college, university or any institution of higher learning is rightly described as a community where scholars and teachers are the head, students are the body and the library its heart. The body cannot perform its proper functions efficiently in case its heart is weak and has not developed fully. The important role, the libraries play in the growth of the higher education has been recognized by the Educationists, Librarians and the Committees and Commissions appointed by the Government from time to time after the independence. The University Education Commission (1948-49) under the chairmanship of Dr S. Radhakrishnan in its report has said:

"Teaching is a co-operative enterprise. Teachers must have the necessary tools for teaching purposes in the shape of libraries and laboratories as also the right type of students. The library is the heart of all the university's work; directly so, as regards its research work, and indirectly, as regards its educational work, which derives its
life from research work. Scientific research need a library as well as its laboratories, while for humanistic research, the library is both library and laboratory in one. Training in higher branches of learning and research is mainly a question of learning how to use the tools, and if the library tools are not there, how can the students learn to use them?” President Truman’s Commission on Higher Education says, “The library is second only to the instructional staff in its importance for high quality instruction and research.” Both for humanistic and scientific studies, a first class library is essential in a university.

Similar views have been expressed by Kothari Commission on Higher Education (1964-66) and it has emphasized the role of the libraries for the development of higher education. It says:

“No university, college or department should be set up without taking into account its library needs in terms of staff, book, journals, space, etc. Nothing could be more damaging to a growing department than to neglect its library or to give it a low priority. On the contrary, the library should be an important centre of attraction on the college or university campus.”

The importance of library has well been recognized by the Government of India. The National Knowledge commission has been set up by the Prime Minister of India in August 2005, with the mandate to transform the country into a knowledge society. A committee was constituted taking all the experts and professionals. The committee submitted recommendations for formulating strategies in the LIS (Library and Information Services) sector. The recommendations were to i) Set up a National Commission on libraries ii) Prepare a national census of all libraries iii) Revamp LIS education, training and research facilities iv) Re-assess staffing of libraries v) Set up a central library fund vi) Modernize library management vii) Encourage greater
community participation in library management viii) Promote Information Communication Technology (ICT) application in all libraries ix) Facilitate donation and maintenance of private collections and x) to encourage public private partnership in LIS development. The Govt of India is taking up the matter seriously for setting up National Mission on Libraries as per the recommendations made by National Knowledge Commission. The Library Mission will ensure proper dissemination of information in the country. The Mission will be converted into a permanent Commission on Libraries in three years.

An American Library scientist “Down” in his book entitled “Status of American College and University Libraries” has rightly said: “Much teaching and research are crippled by poor libraries .......there is no better way to judge the quality of an educational institution than to look at its library. If the library is weak, the institution itself is mediocre; and as a corollary if university or college has a strong library, there is very probability that the institution itself is outstanding. The better the library will be, the stronger faculty, the college will be able to hold and the higher quality student it will draw.”

The above statement very much emphasises the role of the library attached to a college or an university.

College library is not merely a depository of books but an active workshop instrumental in the production of original thinking. College libraries extend opportunities for self education to the deserving and enthusiastic students without any distinction. These libraries stimulate the students to obtain, evaluate recognized knowledge and to familiarize himself/herself with the trends of knowledge and learning new disciplines.
As an integral part of the college the library serves not only as source of information to the members of teaching staff but as means to improve teaching technique. It has also to serve the needs of the students. The importance of college libraries is increasing because of their significant role in college education. It is the function of the Librarian to know what is in the books which are available in the library and to organize these books on proper line.

2.51 : Present scenario of the college libraries in Barak Valley

The existence of the library as a functional service point has not so long been felt in the life and activities of the colleges of Barak Valley. In Barak Valley during seventies and eighties there appeared to have a general notion that a library in any educational institution is nothing but a store house of different types of books and a Librarian is merely a caretaker and additionally an issuing authority of the books to bonafide users(i.e. students and teachers). Such notion not only developed among the layman but strangely, among some highly educated persons as well, which has adversely effected the library to get developed as compared to other states. Then after the introduction of library and information science as a subject in post degree classes the scenario changed gradually and educational institutions of Barak valley like other similar institutions in the country started looking for qualified personnel in Library and Information science for appointment as Librarian in the educational institutions. Now it is rather a blessing that UGC has legitimately recognizes the importance of development of library which is supposed to be the heart of all educational activities. UGC has made good amount of grants for the construction of functional library
building, strengthening of collections. It is allocating a large amount of money for
purchasing not only books but also for procuring of computers, and other audio visual
materials. At present libraries have also started getting more emphasis in the
provincialized colleges of Barak Valley better than the past especially after the visit
of the NAAC Peer Team in the colleges. The situation has not remained the same as it
was before. All these colleges of Barak Valley are making effort to improve library
services for the greater benefit of the users. They are now quite in a position to satisfy
the inquisitiveness for information of the readers to some extent. Almost all these
libraries have installed computer and started maintaining their database. Professional
qualified librarians have also been appointed in these colleges. Libraries are growing
and developing day by day. But it is very sad to note that private colleges in this
Valley are not having proper infrastructure for developing library for the greater
benefit of the students. These colleges are not getting any grant for which they are
facing numerous difficulties routinely. These colleges are run by some occasional
donations received from political sources and from the fees being collected from the
students which are not sufficient to meet the expenses. Due to fund constraints
adequate staff cannot be appointed for running the day to day official works as well
as the library. These colleges are not in a position to acquire more and more textbooks
and also reference books. The situation is utterly deplorable. As such more and more
attention is required to be paid for the development of library in those colleges for the
benefit of the student community and also teachers.
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