CHAPTER- I
CHAPTER-I

BACKGROUND OF THE ASSAMESE SOCIETY

1.1. Location and Divisions

"Hemmed in between the Eastern Himalayas, Southern Tibet, China, Burma and Nepal, and the hills and valleys of the Brahmaputra, occupy a somewhat secluded and inaccessible portion of Asia... The upper central valley throws out on either side into the adjoining mountains hundreds of rugged glens.... Then rounding rocky promontory of the Garo Hills, the valley turns at a right angle sharply southern to the Delta of Bengal, extending a branch eastwards to the Cachar Hills."¹

Geomorphic studies conclude that the Brahmaputra, the life-line of Assam is an antecedent river, older than the Himalayas. The river with steep gorge sand rapids in Arunachal Pradesh entering Assam becomes a braided river and with tributaries, creates a flood plain (Brahmaputra Valley: 50–60 mi/80–100 km wide, 600 mi/1000 km long). The hills of Karbi Anglong, North Cachar and those in and close to Guwahati now eroded and dissected are originally parts of the South Indian Plateau system.² In the southern side, the Barak originating in

¹ T1550
the Barail-Range flows through the Cachar district and enters the region called Bangladesh with the name Surma. They have associated the name with the 13th century Shan invaders the precise origin of the name is in vague. It was suggested by some scholars that the word is derived from the Sanskrit word *Asama*. The word is an Anglicized form of the Assamese word *Asama*. It is curious that while the Shan invaders called themselves Tai, they came to be known as *Asam*, *Asam* and *Acam*, a name, which is believed to have been derived from the Ahoms. Gait writes that the term in the sense of ‘the peerless’ was applied to the Shans by the local people. He further adds that Assam was known to the Burmese as *Athan*. B.K Kakati points out that *Asama*, peerless, may be a Sanskritisation of some earlier formation like *Acham*. In Tai, *Cham* means to be defeated, and with the prefix *A*, the formation *Asam* would mean undefeated. The word *Asama*, first given to the Shans (Ahoms), was later on applied to the country.

1.2. History

Assam province and its adjacent regions have numerous evidences of human settlements from all the periods of the Stone ages. But, there are no archaeological evidence of Bronze or Iron Age culture about human settlements. The hills at the height of 1,500–2,000 feet were popular habitats probably owing to availability of exposed dolerite basalt useful for household tool-making.

According to the *Kalika Purana*, written in Assam, the earliest ruler of Assam was Mahiranga Danav succeeded by Hatak, Sambar, Ratna and Ghatak.
Naraka removed the Danav line of rulers and established his own dynasty. It also mentions about the end of the King Naraka. He was slain by Lord Krishna. Naraka's son Bhagadatta, spotted in the Mahabharata, fought for the Kauravas in the battle of Kurukshetra with his army consists of Kiratas, Chinas and dwellers of the eastern coast. Later rulers of Kamarupa frequently drew their lineage from the King Naraka. However, there is evidence that Mahayana Buddhism was prevalent in ancient Assam province. After Hi-uen Shang's maiden visit Mahayana Buddhism came to Assam. The relics of Tezpur, Malini Than, Kamakhya and Madan Kamdev Temple are the evidences of Mahayana Buddhism spread in Assam province.

The historical account begins with Samudragupta's 4th century Allahabad inscription which mentions that Kamarupa in Western Assam and Davaka in Central Assam as frontier kingdoms of the Gupta Empire. Davaka was soon absorbed by Kamarupa kingdom which grew into large kingdom that spanned from Karatoya river to Sadiya. The Kamrupa kingdom covered the entire Brahmaputra valley and, at times, North Bengal and Northern Bangladesh. The kingdom was ruled by three dynasties Varman, Mlechchha and Pala. They ruled the region from their capitals in present-day Guwahati (ancient Pragjyotishpura), Tezpur and Durjaya respectively. The kingdom entitled as Kamarupa was 10,000 li in circuit. The capital called Pragjyotishpura was about 30 li. The Kamrupi kings claims their descent from Narakasura (Naraka), an immigrant from
Aryavarta. In the reign of the famous Varman king, Bhaskar Varman, the Chinese traveller Hi-uen Shang visited the region. He has beautifully recorded his travels. Later on, weakening and disintegration the Kamarupa tradition was started. The tradition was somehow extended till 1255 A.D. by the Lunar I and Lunar II dynasties. The region was ruled by three dynasties Varman, Pala and Salstambhas from their capitals in present-day Guwahati (Pragiyotishpura, Durjaya) and Tezpur (Haruppeswara) respectively. The region covered the whole Brahmaputra valley and at times, North Bengal and Northern Bangladesh.

The two later dynasties of Assam were the Ahoms and the Koches. The Ahoms (a group of Tai people) ruled Upper Assam for nearly 600 years span. The Koches (a Tibeto-Burmese group) established their sovereignty in 1510 AD in Assam province. The Koch kingdom in western Assam and present North Bengal was at its zenith during the reign of King Naranarayana. It split into two in 1581 AD. The western part of the region is known as a Moghul vassal and the eastern part as an Ahom satellite state. Till the 3rd AD, the main centre of Ahom polity was upper Assam. The kingdom was accordingly extended till Karatoya River in the 17th–18th century AD. The place was at its zenith during the reign of Sukhrungpha or Sworgodeu Rudra Simha. The Chutiya kings ruled north-eastern Assam and some parts of present Arunachal Pradesh. The Kachari kings ruled from Dikhow River to central and southern part of Assam. The expansion of Ahom kingdom by 1520 AD, the Chutiya ruled areas were annexed and since century
1536 AD Kacharis restricted only in Cachar and North Cachar by the Ahoms. No western power ruled Assam despite numerous invasions, chiefly by the Muslim rulers until the arrival of the British. Mir Jumla, a governor of Aurangzeb was the most successful invader of Assam. He briefly occupied Garhgaon the capital of Assam. But, he found it difficult to control people who made guerrilla attacks on his forces. It forced them to leave the region. Lachit Borphukan was known for his decisive and convincing victory of the Assamese people on the Mughal. Raja Ram Singha's army at Saraighat battle (1671) had almost ended Mughal ambitions in this region. Mughals were fully expelled from Lower part of Assam during the reign of Swargadeo Gadadhar Singha in 1682 A.D.

Religious tensions and atrocities of nobles led to the Moamoria rebellion in the late 18th century. It resulted tremendous casualties of lives and property in the region. The said rebellion was dominated but the kingdom was severely weakened by the civil war. Political rivalry between Prime Minister Purnananda Burhagohain and Badan Chandra Borphukan resulted the invitation of Burmese to the region. King Chandrakanta Singha tried his best to check the Burmese invaders. But, Singha was defeated after fierce resistance. A reign of terror was unleashed by the invaders on the Assamese people. Most of the locals fled to neighbouring kingdoms and British-ruled Bengal. The invaders reached upto the borders of the East India Company and the First Anglo-Burmese War ensued in 1824. The war ended under the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 with the Company
taking control of Western Assam in 1833 by installing Purandar Singha as king of Upper Assam. The arrangement lasted till 1838. The British rulers gradually annexed the entire province of Assam. Firstly, Assam was made a part of the Bengal Presidency. In the year 1906 it was a part of Eastern Bengal and Assam province. In the year 1912 it was reconstituted into a Chief Commissioner's province. In 1913, a legislative council and in 1937, the Assam Legislative Assembly were formed in Shillong. The British tea planters imported labour from central part of India adding to the demographic canvas. After several unsuccessful attempts to free Assam during the 1850s, the Assamese people finally joined actively the Indian National Congress against the British.

During the 20th century, British India made of eight provinces that were administered either by a governor or a lieutenant-governor. The Assam Province was one amongst those major eight provinces of British ruled India.

At the time of partition of Bengal, the new province of Assam and East Bengal was created as a lieutenant-governorship. In the year 1911, East Bengal was reunited with Bengal. It resulted the new provinces in the east: Assam, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

1.3. Demography

As per 2011 census, total population of Assam is 31,205,576. The total population of the state has increased from 26,638,407 to 31,205,576 in the last ten years with a growth rate of 16.93%. Of the 27 districts of Assam, eight
districts registered rise in the decadal population growth rate. Amusingly, religious minority dominated districts like Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Morigaon, Nagaon, Hailakandi etc. recorded growth rates ranging from 20 per cent to 24 per cent during the last decade. On the other hand, eastern Assam districts like Sivasagar, Jorhat etc. registered around 9 per cent population growth and for the record, these districts do not share any international border.\textsuperscript{5}

Total population of Assam was 26.66 million with 4.91 million households in 2001 Higher population concentration was recorded in the districts of Kamrup, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Barpeta, Dhubri, Darang and Cachar. Assam's population was estimated at 28.67 million in 2006 and at 30.57 million in 2011, 34.18 million by 2021 and 35.60 million by 2026.\textsuperscript{6}

In 2011, literacy rate in the state was 72.19%. Male literacy rate was 78.81% and female literacy rate was 67.27%.\textsuperscript{7} In 2001, the census had recorded literacy in Assam at 63.3% with male literacy at 71.3% and female at 54.6%. Urbanization rate was recorded at 12.9%.\textsuperscript{8}

The increase of population in Assam has experienced a very high trajectory since the middle of the 20th century. Population grew steadily from 3.29 million in 1901 to 6.70 million till 1941. Population has increased unprecedentedly to 14.63 million in 1971 and 22.41 million till 1991 to reach the present level. The high increase in the western and southern districts was extremely owing to the rapid influx of people from East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). An estimated
400,000 people have been displaced in the recent ethnic violence between indigenous Bodos and Bengali-Muslims.9

Assam has numerous ethnic groups and the People of India project has studied 115 of these. Out of which 79 (69%) identify themselves regionally, 22 (19%) locally, and 3 trans-nationally. The earliest settlers were Austro-Asiatic, followed by Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan speakers, and Tai–Kadai speakers. Forty-five languages are spoken by different communities, including three major language families: Austro-Asiatic (5), Sino-Tibetan (24) and Indo-European (12). Three of the spoken languages do not fall in these families. There is a high degree of bilingualism. In Assam, there are 23 notified Scheduled Tribes (ST) with the Bodos (40.9 per cent) making half of the total ST population (around 13 per cent) of the state. The other STs (both plains and hills) include Miri, Karbi, Rabha, Kachari, Lalung, Barman in Cachar, Borokchar, Deori, Hajai, Mech, Dimasa, Hajong, Singhphho, Khampti and Garo, Biate, Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, Kuki, Chakma, Hmar, and War, Bhoi, Lyngngam.

1.4. Religion in Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>64.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>30.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>03.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>00.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the 2001 census which is now 10 years old, there were 17,296,455 Hindus, 8,240,611 Muslims, 986,589 Christians, 22,519 Sikhs, 51,029 Buddhists, 23,957 Jains and 22,999 belonging to other religious communities. The latter includes Animism Khamti, Phake, Aiton etc in communities.

a) Hinduism

The Hindus of Assam perform several dances to practice their devotion to their Gods. One category of them is the Sattriya Dance. Kamakhya temple dedicated to Mother Goddess Kamakhya is the eastern-most pilgrimage of Hinduism. Well known saints and philosophers from Assam include Srimanta Sankardeva, Gurudev Kalicharan, Madhab, Mahadeb and Kumarila Bhatta.

Assam is the home land of Kalicharan Mech, a Bodo Hindu who stopped the British Christian missionaries. He spread ahimsa and vegetarianism. He was highly influenced by the Brahmo Samaj. He later on became popular as "Gurudev Kalicharan Brahmachari" or "Guru Brahma". His principles were known as the Brahma Dharma. We can summarize his teachings by his given phrase, "Chandrama Surya Narayans Jyoti", meaning, "light" (jyoti) from the sun is capable for dispelling darkness and taking people to Brahma (Narayans).

As a result of the teachings of Guru Brahma, the "Bodo-Brahmas" have boycotted heavy dowry, alcohol and meat-eating. This sect is termed by scholars to be the Vedic and the Upanishadic. As per the Vedic rituals, the priests perform
horn yajna, which was started by Guru Brahma to organize the Bodo ethnic group. Today, the Bodo Christians are laying stress to adopt a Roman script for the Bodo community. But, the Bodo-Brahmas prefer the Bengali-Ahomiya script in their mode of communication.

Out of the 3,308,570 Assamese tribals reported in the 2001 Census, 90.7% were Hindus and 8.8% were Christians. There were also 6,267 Muslims, 5,153 Buddhists and 3,574 Animists.¹¹

b) Islam

Islamic people constitute the second largest religious group in Assam with 8,240,611 Muslims. In the 16th century, an Islamic saint Ajan Fakir Shah Miran (Ghiyasuddin Auliya) came to Assam from Baghdad to preach Islam. The famous mosque constructed by him is well-known as the Pao Mecca mosque. Poa Mecca literally means one-fourth of Mecca. The foundation of the mosque is believed to have been laid upon a handful of earth brought from Mecca. The Poa-Mecca mosque was partially destroyed by a strong earthquake that occurred in 1897. Ajan Fakir was buried on the hills of Gaurachol and hence the tomb on the hill is dedicated to him, are considered holy not only by the Muslims but by people of other religion. Panchpeer Dargaha, in the Dhubri district is a mazar sharif of five Sufi Saints who accompanied Raja Ram Singh at the time of his invasion to Assam. Historical Panbari Masjid (Rangamati Masjid) is a famous mosque near Panbari situated about 25 km east from Dhubri
town, and is considered to be the oldest mosque of Assam.\textsuperscript{12}

c) Christianity

The holy Bible was translated into Assamese in the year of 1819. In 1827 an attempt was made to start a Baptist church in Guwahati. But, it resulted no permanent convert in the area. Later on, the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society was successful to make some headway in Guwahati. These earliest Christian missionary endeavours were purely focused in the north-eastern part of India. The Protestant missionaries succeeded in their campaign in North-East India in last decades of 19th and the first decades 20th centuries. They were successful primarily in areas such as Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya which were no longer part of Assam anymore.

In 1991, only Tripura of the seven eastern states of India had a lower percentage of Christians than Assam. Mizoram was the second most Christian state in India at the time.

Besides the Protestants there are Catholics also. There is a Roman Catholic Archdiocese in Shillong. According to the 2001 Census, there are a total of 986,589 Christians in Assam. Out of this, 291,000 (29.5%) are tribalS.\textsuperscript{13}

d) Sikhism

The first Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak Dev had visited Kamrup in the
year 1505 which is recorded in *Purantan Janam Sakhi*. Guru Nanak had met Srimanta Shankardeva, the founder of the *Mahapuruxiya Dharma* on his way to Assam Dhaka. Unfortunately, no historical shrine dedicated to him survives till today.

Ninth Guru of Sikhs Guru Tegh Bahadur visited Assam in the year 1668. This place is also famous for the Sikh Gurdwara Thara Sahib or Gurdwara Damdama Sahib which was constructed in memory on the hillock, the place of meditation of the Guru in Kamrup, Dhubri. The historical site and places are many times referred to as Gurdwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib situated in Dhubri on the bank of the Brahmaputra. The grateful Ahom King invited Guruji to Kamakhya shrine, where he was honoured with great respect by the king.

In the year 1820, few hundred Sikh soldiers came to Assam at the initiative of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to help Ahom rulers in a war. Their descendants are mostly concentrated in Lanka in Nagaon district of Assam. Sikhs have been living in Assam from two hundred years ago.

e) **Buddhism**

This religion is practised by approximately 51,029 persons in Assam. Amongst them are the Chakma, Mutsuddi and Boruas. The Chakmas of Assam are located mainly in Cachar and Karbi Anglong with very small presence in Nagaon district. The Chakmas of the said area are originally belongs to the Chittagong area of Bangladesh. Guwahati has lots of Buddhist temples, the most
prominent being the Bamunimaidan Buddhist temple.

The indigenous Tai tribes like Tai Phake, Tai Aiton, Khamyang, Turung, Singpho and Khampti are also Buddhist by religion. These people mainly inhabit in Upper Assam and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam.

There is also a small Bhutanese and Tibetan population in Assam.

1.5. Languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td>(49.44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>(27.91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodo</td>
<td>(4.93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>(2.15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>(5.97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>(9.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assamese and Bodo are the major indigenous and official languages of Assam. Bengali holds official status in the three districts in the Barak Valley and is the second most widely spoken language of the state (27.91%). Traditionally Assamese was the language of the commons in ancient Kamarupa. In the medieval kingdoms of Kamatapur, Kachari, Chutiya kingdom, Borahi, Ahom and Koch Assamese was the language spoken by all. We found traces of the language in many poems by Luipa, Sarahapa, etc. in Charyapada. Modern dialects like, Kamrupi, Goalpatriya etc. are the remnants. Moreover, Assamese in its traditional form was used by the ethno-cultural groups in the
region as lingua-franca, which spread during the stronger kingdoms and was required for needed economic integration. Localized forms of the language also in vogue in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. The form used in the upper part of Assam was enriched by the advent of Tai-Shans in the 13th century.

Linguistically modern Assamese owes its origin to the version developed by the American Missionaries based on the dialect in vogue near Sibsagar district. Assamese is a rich language owing to its hybrid nature with its typical characteristics of softness and pronunciation. Assamese literature is one of the richest literatures of India.

Dimasa is one of the oldest languages spoken in North East India especially in Assam. The word 'Dimasa' etymologically translates to "Son of the big river", the river being the mighty Brahmaputra. The Dimasa word 'Di' for water forms the base word for many of the major rivers of Assam and North Eastern India. For example: Dikrang means green river, Dikhow means "fetched water", Diyung (huge river) etc. The mighty river Brahmaputra is known as Dilao (long river) among the Dimasas till date. Many of the important towns in Assam and Nagaland took their names from the Dimasa word such as Diphu, Dimapur, Dispur, Hojai, Khaspur, etc. It is a matter of fact that the Dimasa language is one of the last languages of the North Eastern India which still has undiluted rich in vocabularies.
Bodo is an ancient language of Assam. Spatial distribution patterns of the ethno-cultural groups, socio-cultural traits and the process of naming all the major rivers in the North East Region with Bodo-Kachari words reveal that it enjoyed the place of most important language in past. The Bodo language is presently spoken largely in the Western Assam (B.T.A.D). After years of neglect, now-a-days Bodo language is getting attention and its literature is in developing posture. Other native languages of Tibeto-Burman origin and related to Bodo-Kachari are Deori, Mising, Karbi, Rabha, Tiwa, etc. Rajbongshi also known as Kamatapuri or Goalpariya. It is also widely spoken by the people of western part of Assam.

Nepali is also spoken in almost all parts of the state. There are approximately 30 lakhs of Nepali speakers spreading in different areas of Assam. Nepali people are well versed in Assamese language because it is the state language of Assam. Assamese language is the main medium in educational institutions. But, Nepali is also included by Assam Higher Secondary Council and Gauhati University in their higher secondary and graduation level as MIL and elective subject respectively. In some higher secondary schools and colleges, Nepali teachers and lecturers are also appointed.

We find speakers of Tai languages in Assam. A total of six Tai languages were spoken in Assam, although two are now extinct.
• Tai Phake
• Tai Aiton
• Khamti
• Khamyang
• Ahom (extinct)
• Turung (extinct)

The Tai Ahom language is no longer in vogue today. But, it is receiving increased attention for research after centuries of long care and preservation by the Bailungs (priests). We find a small groups of people speaking their own dialects such as Manipuri, Khasi, Garo, [Biate language], Hmar, Kuki, Zeme Naga etc in different parts.

Bengali is the official and widely spoken language in the Barak Valley. There we find Sylheti, a dialect of Bengali. Bengali language is also largely active in the western districts of Dhubri, Barpeta and Goalpara. On the 19th of May, 1961, 11 persons were killed by police firing in Silchar of Barak Valley, when they tried to protest the state government's decision to make Assamese the official language throughout the state. The day is observed as bhasha shaheed diwas in Barak Valley every year.

Santali or Santhali is also widely spoken by the tribal population in the tea garden districts of Assam. These people were initially brought as tea estate
labourers by the British. They have now made Assam their home state. Bishnupriya Manipuri language is also spoken by a small minority of people in Barak Valley. Some of the other languages spoken in Assam are Missing, Rabha and Karbi.

1.6 **Ethnic Composition of Assam**

Assam is the gateway to the enchanting and unexploited north-eastern part of the country. It is one of the most beautiful states of India. With the mighty Brahmaputra River, magnificent hills and its rich flora and fauna, the state is a tourist paradise. The vibrant life style, the presence of diverse tribes and cultures, are the main focus of the wonderful Assamese society. The history of Assam dates back to the time of the Aryans. It has found its place in the Epics, the Tantric, the Vedic and Buddhist literature. The land has been ruled by great rulers of many dynasties. The people of the state are friendly and they belong to different races.

Several religions are practiced in the state. It proved its secular outlook. Some of the religions followed in the state are:

- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Islam
• Vaishnavasim

Apart from the Assamese, the Bengali speaking population and the Nepalees also form a major portion of the state. The diverse culture of the state has brought a rich treasure of art, craft and music with them. Assam is famous for its wood, cane and bamboo crafts, pottery, handlooms, jewelry and colourful masks. The feet tapping dances like, *bihu* and *jhumur* of the state are no more bounded by its borders. They are quite popular in all parts of India.

The social history of Assam covers a very long period of six centuries. It witnesses the rise and fall of several kingdoms and dynasties. During this period far-reaching changes in the sphere of politics, social, religious and cultural took place.

Austrics is the first race of people who inhabited the province known as Assam. This race of people who came to Assam belonged to the same stock that inhabited the vast country comprising the present Indonesian Islands and Australia. These people were divided into several tribes; viz. Khoso, Synteng, Kol, Ho, Gond, Moria, Munda etc. and each tribe designated itself by a term which meant 'man'. The people from Kham-ti (Kham-Gold) were later known as Khamtis. Moreover, people of *Ts’in-taing* were well known as Syntien. Now these people were popularly known as Jaintias. The people who lived near the river having bloody water the Kha-chais. Later, they were known as Khasis or Khasias. The Moria class of the race was originally settled in the north-eastern side of the
country. They were later known as the head or the Mahtak country. With the passage of time they assimilated with the Bodo and other tribes. They were known as Morans. They were later Hinduized and played important part in overthrowing the Ahom Empire. A part of Zuhthis people migrated to the Valley of Lohit River. They started cultivation in the eastern part of India. The kind of cultivation is known as zuhm cultivation. The male members of the group ran after wild animals. They considered women were most precious creature of God. So, they adopted the matrilineal structure.

These Zuhthis people were flourished and increased in numbers. They migrated to the west-wards and reached upto Afghanistan. They settled in three centers- in the east in Assam, in the centre in present Bareilly district and in the north in Afghanistan. These thee centers were later known as Prag-zuhthis, the Madhya-zuhthis and Uttar-zuhthis. The word Zuhthis later took the shape of Jyotish in Sanskrit.

The season of cultivation started in Assam just after the monsoon broke usually in the middle of May. It is a necessity to pray Mother Earth to rouse the propensity for fertilization. It was done in a systematic manner by rousing the feeling of excitement in the women folk, for they possessed the same psychological insight like Mother Earth. In the month of Bohag (April-May) males and females dressed beautifully congregated in a festive mood in an open field. They indulged in songs and sex-appealing dances. The songs were
extemporary. It referred natural environments and everyday life. After Mother Earth had been excited, the flowers of Asoka plant were applied to her by floating them through Lohit River. Later on, this ceremony has adopted by Hindus as Asoka-asthami. It is celebrated in the same fashion only in the Brahmaputra valley. These people also observed Kati Bihu when the seed had been shown. They believed that they should do something to take care of Mother Earth during her pregnancy. The ceremony is modified by the Nagas as their great festival for seven days. The Hindus of the region now adopted the Durga puja as a main stream festival. Kola-bou, the chief deity of the feast is the ancient form of the Austrics. These people also observed Magh Bihu during the time of harvesting. They regarded it as the delivery of child by Mother Earth. All these ceremonies related to cultivation of Austrics are observed now in the entire valley of Assam.

The cultivation process started in a great hurry. In the month of June when the time of sowing the seed came, it was believed that Mother Earth should menstruate. The auspicious ceremony was observed on the Nilachal hill.

The virgin girls of the group wearing their beautiful garments performed a dance with very slow movements. They put on a red pigment on their foreheads. It was the symbol of their attainment of puberty. The joys were expressed by the slow dance. The ceremony is preserved in the Nongkrem dance of the Khasis. The modern scholars ridicule the dance as an artless and ant killing feast. The
Mikirs were influenced by the Khasi culture. They performed *Chamangkan* dance at the deaths of their people. Unmarried boys and girls who attain puberty go round in a circle at a slow pace, each one holding the waist of the other. The dancers sung sex appealing songs. This ceremony purely belongs to Austrics.

The next ethnic group who entered and influenced India was the Negrito strain. The strain confined them to the southern part of India and reached the Indonesian islands. The people of this race mixed freely with the Austrics in that area. The people of mixed blood then entered in Assam. They settled on the hills of eastern border of the country. These people were Nang-gas or those who coming from heaven. Now, they are known as the Nagas. They keep their tradition of habitation on sea-shores. Still they regard prize conch-shells and cowries as valuable decoration for their persons are in vague. These people have adopted the *zuhm* and the terraced cultivation. They retained the cultivation festivals along with the installation of stone monoliths in a modified form. They believe that they are born from stone.

Spears are their weapon of war Austrics. Drums are their instruments of music. The traditional *zuh* (rice-beer) belongs to Austrics is their national tonic drink. The spears and *daos* are well built with properly tempered steel. Their handles are artistically decorated with fast coloured hair. They are expert in weaving their own cloths. The Angami Nagas are at their best in the ivory works. They used an iron coin called Jabilee.
The Nagas have migrated to Assam at different times. The trend was started before about 2000 years of the Christian era. But, there is no trace about what relation they have with the then rulers. It is worth to be mentioned here that Nagas has no trait of Kamrupi culture of any dynasties. These people have divided their administration into several *khels*. Each *khel* has a headman. Some of the chiefs have close connection with the rulers of Manipur and Kamarupa. These rulers have certainly influenced the Nagas in trade, industry, art and warfare. Ahom king Gadadhar Singha took safe shelter in the house of a Naga chief during his political incarceration. Moreover, the powerful King of Manipur Garib Newaz had the tradition of Naga lineage.

During the 1530 century A.D. the Angami Nagas who lived in Kohima became powerful. It was the time when the downfall of the Kachari King at Dimapur. The chiefs Khonomah and Mozomah and their followers infiltrated to Sibsagar and Nowgaon. The British came into conflict with the Nagas in 1831. As a result of the conflict Gambhir Singh, the king of Dimapur led a huge army against the Nagas. He subdued them all and expanded his Kingdom and included the whole Naga Hill area in 1833. But, after the death of Gambhir Singh in 1835, the Nagas again became turbulent. Numerous expeditions were sent by the British officers against Nagas staying at Nagaon. But, it did not bring any result. Meanwhile, the Chiefs of the two groups started fighting among
themselves. In 1849 Lt. Vincent led a successful expedition against the Nagas. It paved the way of inclusion of Naga Hills under British rule.

All the ancient records describe an ethnic group called the Kiratas living on the Himalayan border and also in Assam. The *Kalika Purana* describes the Kiratas as having short stature, golden colour, shaven head and rough skin and addicted to meat and drink. According to *Mahabharata*, Bhagadutta of Pragjyotishpura joined the battle of Kurukshetra with a strong army of Kirata and Chinese soldiers. The Indo-Mongoloids were usually designated as Kiratas in the epics and *puranas* and even the *Yogini-tantra*. Apart from the tribes of Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya neighboring Assam, the predominance of Mongoloid elements are noticed in all tribes of the present-day Assam. The Bodos, the Chutiyas, the Rabhas, the Dimchas, the Mishings, the Rajavamshis, the Karbis and the Shan tribes including Ahoms and many more are Mongoloid people. During the passage of time, contact with other racial groups, some amount of fusion or racial admixture can’t be ruled.

The next race is the Caucasoids who came in different waves. Anthropologists have noticed strains of three Caucasian types in the ‘Indid’ Assamese, represented by upper caste Hindus and Muslims. Another element known as Alpio-Armenoid has entered into the Assamese population. These Alpio-Armenoid people are broad-headed people and thereby they are distinguished from the Mediterranean.
Finally, the Indo-Aryans with tall stature, long head, fair complexion and pointed nose entered India. The migration of the Indo-Aryans to eastern India could be traced back to the early centuries before Christ. Both Aitareya and Satapatha Brahmana refer to the migration of the Aryans beyond the Sadnaira (Karatoya) river. The Yogini Tantra and the Kalika Purana stated unequivocally that the western boundary of ancient Kamarupa was marked by the mighty river Karatoya. They reached North Bihar at least by the 7th B.C. They migrated to Assam in different weaves. The Aryans had several sects amongst them. One school of thought was of the opinion that the particular elements represented formless (Assura) energies, whether the other school considered them to be many brilliant presiding deities (Devas).

Dr. B.M. Das divided the Assamese people into two major groups, viz. the (Indid) Assamese, and the (Mongoloid) Assamese. The Indid Assamese mostly comprises the Hindu castes and the Muslims who are of the Caucasian blood.15

The social growth and condition of a country is dependent to a considerable extent on the nature of the political power. The beginning of the 13th century is marked by several important events. The dynasty of Brahmapala came to an end with the death of Jayapala. After, Jayapala resulting in the emergence of local kings of whom Vaidyadeva and Vallabhadeva are supported to have ruled over parts of old Kamarupa.

The Ahoms

The Ahom people are originally a Shan tribe professing their tribal
religion. These people followed their traditional customs and migrated from Upper Burma to the North-Eastern Assam by crossing the Patkai range of hills. These migrated people carried their own Tai language and script. They were the worshippers of Phura Tara Along and a few tribal deities including Lengden, the ruler of heaven. The ethnic Tai people accompanied the Tai prince Sukaphaa into the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 and ruled the area for six centuries. Sukaphaa and his followers established the Ahom kingdom (1228 to 1826). The Ahom dynasty ruled and expanded the kingdom until the British gained full control of the region through the Treaty of Yandabo upon winning the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1826. The kingdom established by the Ahom people was famous as Asam from their name.

In medieval chronicles, the kings of this dynasty were called Asam Raja, whereas the subjects of the kingdom called them Chaopha (Chao-ruler, Pha-heaven), or as Swargadeo (the equivalent in Assamese) from the 16th century. The Ahom kings were descendants of the first king Sukaphaa (1228–1268) who came to Assam from Mong Mao in 1228. Succession was by agnatic primogeniture. Nevertheless, following Rudra Singha's deathbed injunction four of his five sons became ruler one after the other. The position of Swargadeo was reserved for the descendants of Sukaphaa and they were not eligible for ministerial positions—a division of power that was followed till the end of the dynasty and the kingdom. When the nobles asked Atan Burhagohain to become the
king, the Tai priests rejected the idea and he desisted from ascending the throne.

The king could be appointed only with the concurrence of the Patra mantris (council of ministers—Burhagohain, Borgohain, Borpatrogohain, Borbarua and Borphukan). During three periods in the 14th century, the kingdom had no kings because no acceptable candidates were not found. The ministers could remove unacceptable kings. It was done by executing the erstwhile king. In the 17th century a power struggle and the increasing number of claimants to the throne. It resulted in kings being deposed in quick succession, all of whom were executed after the new king was instated. To stop this bloody end, a new rule was introduced during the reign of Sulikphaa, Lora Roja—claimants of the throne had to be physically unblemished—which meant that threats to the throne could be removed by merely slitting the ear of an ambitious prince. Rudra Sinha, suspecting his brother Lechai's intention, mutilated and banished him. The problem of succession remained, and on his deathbed he instructed that all his sons were to become kings. One of his sons, named Mohanmala was superseded who was a lead a rebel group during the Moamoria rebellion. The later kings and officials exploited the unblemished rule. Kamaleswar Singha and Purandar Singha came into ruler's office because their fathers were mutilated.

The Ahom kings were given divine origin. According to Ahom tradition, Sukaphaa was a descendant of Khunlung. He had come down from the heavens and ruled Mong-Ri-Mong-Ram. During the reign of Suhungmung (1497 to 1539)
which saw the composition of the first Assamese *Buranji* and increased Hindu influence, the Ahom kings were traced to the union of Indra (Lengdon) and Syama (a low-caste woman), and were declared Indravamsa kshatriyas, a lineage created for the Ahoms. King Suhungmung adopted the title *Swarganarayan*, and his successors were called *Swargadeos* (Lord of the heavens).

The *Swargadeo's* coronation was called *Singarigharutha*. It was a ceremony performed first by Sudangphaa, popularly known as Bamuni Konwar (1397 to 1407). This was the occasion when the first coins in the new king's name were minted. Kamaleswar Singha (1795 to 1811) and Chandrakanta Singha's (1811 to 1818) coronations were not performed on the advice of Prime minister Purnananda Burhagohain owing to the financial constraints of State treasury caused by the Moamoria rebellion. Kings after death were buried in vaults called *moidam* situated at Charaideo. Some of the earlier *moidams* were looted by invader Mir Jumla in the 17th century.

On ascent, the king would generally assume an Ahom name decided by the Ahom priests. The name commonly ended in *Pha* (Tai: Lord), e.g. Susenghphaa. Later generation kings also assumed a Hindu name that ended in *Singha* (Lion): Susenghphaa assumed the name Pratap Singha. *Buranjis* occasionally would refer to a past king by a more informal and colourful name that focused on a specific aspect of the king. Pratap Singha was also known as *Burha Roja* (old king) because when Pratap Singha became the ruler, he was
more advanced in his age.

The Chutiyas

The Chutiyas originally stayed in the Lakhimpur and partly Dibrughar districts Assam and they had their own kings. When the Ahoms occupied their territory, they were dispersed to various places of the region. Ethnologically, the Chutiyas are allied to Bodo-Kacharis. They once spoke a Tebeto-Burman language. This language is being still used by the Deuris who were formerly employed as the priests of the Chutiyas. The Deuris did not completely accept Hinduism; therefore some tribal customs are now in vogue in them.

The Chutiya kingdom was established on the northern bank of the River Brahmaputra in north-eastern Assam and some parts of Arunachal Pradesh by Birpal. The Chutiyas were a Tibeto-Burmese race who secured power in Assam. They became powerful at the same time of the Khen kings and Barobhuyan chieftains, during the decline of the Kamarupa kingdom. The Chutiyas claimed descent from remnants of the former Mlechha kings of Assam. Unfortunately, there seems to be no list of the Chutiya kings, apart from the three most famous kings who top and bottom the list. Even the name of a king involved in what must have been a major incident in the year 1376 is unrecorded. Gaurinarayan or Ratnadhwajpal brought many other Chutiya groups into the kingdom. Gaurinarayan defeats Bhadrasena, the king of Swetagiri in a battle. He
subjugates Nyayapal and marches to Kamatapur. He forms an alliance with the Kamata ruler by marrying one of his daughters. He absorbs other Chutiya groups during his reign. He also encourages them to join his growing kingdom, providing the basis for its existence. The Ahom kings emerge in Assam. The River Brahmaputra, which ran through the Chutiya kingdom, swells greatly in the monsoons. The Kachari kings emerge in Assam. A second interregnum hits the Ahoms succeeding Sutupha's untimely death at the hands of the Chutiya king. The event sparks a simmering feud among these two kingdoms. The Jayantiya kingdom emerges, perhaps owing to the chaos caused by the Bengalese invasion of Assam. Nityapal was the final Chutiya ruler at Sadiya.

As a partial culmination of the inter-kingdom feud, the Ahoms take Sadiya and killed the Chutiya king. The position of sadiyakhowa gohain is created as the Governor of Sadiya. The Chutiyas, forced away from their capital to the countryside and conducted guerrilla warfare against the Ahoms.

The Chutiyas fall under the domination of the Ahom kings. Finally, they accepting their lordship. The Chutiyas are absorbed into their state. The Kachari and Jayantiya kings remain in power in various other parts of Assam.

The Rajavangshi or Koches

The Rajavangshi or Koches constitute a large number of populations of Kamarup, Goalpara and Koch Behar districts. The perchantage of these people
in other districts of Assam is not negligible. According to the *Yogini-tantra* these people have been designated as *Kavaca*. Ethnologically they belong to the Mangoloid class allied to Bodos. But during the last four to five centuries of their affiliation to the Hindu faith and consequent inter fusion blood, physiognomic change is also noticed in some cases.

After the fall of the Pala dynasty of Kamarupa, the kingdom fractured into different parts in the 12th century. In the extreme east the Chutiya kingdom emerged on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. The Ahom kingdom emerged in the south bank of the river and to their west was the Kachari kingdom. A ruler of Kamarupanagara named Sandhya moved his capital further west to present-day North Bengal in the middle of the 13th century and the domain he ruled over came to be called Kamata kingdom. The buffer region, between the eastern kingdoms and Kamata was the domain of the Baro-bhuyans chieftains. Alauddin Husain Shah of Gaur defeated Nilambar of Kamata in 1498. He occupied the region and placed his son, Daniyal in charge. Within a few years, the Baro-bhuyans, headed by one Harup Narayan of the Brahmaputra valley defeated Daniyal. He captured and executed Daniyal and the region lapsed into Bhuyan confederate rule.

Meanwhile, an alliance was formed when Hariya Mandal, the Mech chief, married two sisters Hira and Jira, the daughters of Haju, a Koch chief. Hariya
Mandal's domain was in Chikna Mountains situated between the Sankosh river and the Champabati River, about 80 kilometers north of Dhubri in the erstwhile undivided Goalpara district of Assam. Bisu, who was to later become Viswa Singha was born to Hariya Mandal and Hira.17

The first ruler of the Koch dynasty was Vishwa Singha, who declared himself as the ruler of the Kamata kingdom in 1515. When Bisu well known as Viswa Singha acquired power, the Brahmins found him out and conferred him the status of the kshatriya varna. His later interaction with the Brahmins lead to the Hinduization of his tribesmen. The proud ancestor of Viswa Singha was his father Haria Mandal inhabitant of the Chiknabari village in Goalpara. He was the head of the twelve most powerful Mech families. Haria Mandal was married to Jira and Hira, daughters of a Koch chief named Haju, after whom Koch Hajo was named. Viswa Singha was the son of Haria Mandal and Hira.

Viswa Singha sought the alliance of tribal chiefs against the more powerful Baro-bhuyans and began his campaign in the year 1509. He has defeated the Bhuyans of Ouguri, Jhargaon, Karnapur, Phulaguri, Bijni and Pandunath (present Pandu). He was mainly stretched by the Bhuyan of Karnapur, and could defeat him only by a stratagem during bihu. After subjugation these petty rulers, he declared himself as the King of Kamata bounded by Barnadi river on the east and the Karatoya river on the west in the year 1515. He shifted the capital from Chikana to Kamatapur which is just a few miles southeast of the present-day
Cooch Behar town.

Viswa Singha's sons, Naranarayan and Shukladhwaj (Chilarai), the king and the commander-in-chief of the army respectively, took the kingdom to its zenith. Naranarayan made Raghudev, the son of Chilarai, the governor of Koch, ruled Hajo, the eastern portion of the country. After the death of Naranarayan, Raghudev declared his independence. The partition of the Kamata kingdom into Koch Bihar and Koch Hajo was permanent.

Naranarayan was impressed by the famous bhakti saint Srimanta Sankardeva. The saint became a member of his court in the last three years of his life and established a sattrā in the kingdom.

Koch Bihar became a vassal of the Mughals. But, Koch Hajo came under Ahom control and was subsequently absorbed. Koch Bihar became a princely state during British rule. It was absorbed after Indian independence. A third branch of this dynasty at Khaspur disappeared into the Kachari kingdom.

The Sonowal Kacharis

The Sonowal Kacharis are Hindus and speak Assamese. Racially these people belong to the Tibeto-Burmese stock and a branch of the Bodo-Kachari stem. They are called Sonowal, because they were employed by the Ahoms to wash gold in a few rivers of eastern part of Assam. They were accustomed to the technique of washing gold. H.Barbarua mentions that twenty thousand Sonowals were engaged by King Chakradhvaja Simha to bring gold from the
The Sonowal Kacharis are from the Mongol and Mughal dynasties people. The works *Tamreswari Mondir* and the *Kesaikhaiti Than* contain the names of the rivers and tributaries that proved to be true of the Sonowal Kachari's kingdom at Sadiya before the Chutias. An opinion has been given by Dr. Lila Gogoi that 'Manik', a king of the Sonowal Kacharis, ruled *Sadiya Rajya* sometime back in the 11th or 12th century AD. Late Benudhar Sarmah, an eminent historian of Assam, says *Kowndilya* or *Kundil* of *Sadiya* was called *Halali* by the Sonowal Kacharis. Although the origin of all Kacharis is the same, there are many clans of Kacharis, among them *Bodowsa, Dhyan* or *Dehan, Lathowsa, Thawthensa, Hafalongsa* and *Hammusa*. The Sonowal Kacharis are descendants of the *Hammusa* family.

**The Lalungs (Tiwas)**

This small tribe of Assam basically settled in the western part of Nawgaon district. These people are also a branch of the Bodo-Kachari racial stock. Originally, the tribe lived in Khasi-Jayantiya region. They came down to the plains. They are Assamized by accepting Hinduism, dress, manners and speech of Assamese people.

The principality known as Gobha was ruled by a feudal king. There were twelve such local chiefs in the Lalung inhabited areas of central Assam.
Hill Tiwas

The Hill Tiwas live in the westernmost areas of Karbi-Anglong. They also settled in the North-eastern corner of Ri-Bhoi district (Meghalaya). They are the speaker Tibeto-Burman language of the Bodo-Garo group. They are divided more than a dozen of clans recognized by specific names which they use as patronymics. Their descent system can be said to be ambilineal. Basically, the husband goes to live in her wife's family settlement. Their children are included in their mother's clan. However, presently about 30% of unions, the woman comes to live in her husband's house. In this case, children take the name of their father. This trend is started under the influence of neighbouring populations of different sates who are mostly patrilineal. About the half of Hill Tiwas follow their "ancestral" religion. It is based on the worship of local deities. The other half has been converted to Christianity since the 1950s. The Hill Tiwa society is organized around seven old villages. It is considered the centre politics as well as ritual. The community harbours a loro (chief) who performs judicial and religious duties for a network of settlements. Old villages are also characterized by their bachelor dormitory.
Plains Tiwas

Plains Tiwas live on the plain areas of the Southern bank of the Brahmaputra valley, mostly in Morigaon and Nagaon districts. The majority of plain Tiwas speak Assamese as their mother tongue. Tiwa language is still spoken on the foothills and in rare villages of the plains. Their descent system is definitely patrilineal. Their patronymics does not consist in their clan's names but in common Assamese names instead (mostly Pator and Bordoloi). The majority practice a form of Hinduism similar to Assamese Hinduism but with some specific features.20

The Morans

The Morans are a tribal group of Mongoloid origin who live in the Northeastern districts of Assam. A small group of the community also lives in the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh. It is believed they migrated from the Hukong Valley in upper Burma. They came to Assam long before the Asom came to dominate Assam. These people moved from centers on the eastern edge of Assam. Then, they moved to the Brahmaputra River and thence to the north where they are found in numbers today. In Tinsukia district, one find families of Morans who chose to stay in some of the early centers of Namrup, Sivsagar, Moran and Moranhat, Dibrgarh and Tinsukia. Tinsukia contains the town of Ledo
which was the beginning of the famous Ledo Road of the China-Burma-Indian Theater in the Second World War.

The founder of the Ahom Kingdom first subjugated the people who belonged to the Barahi and Moran tribes. They were ruled by local chiefs. The invading army having brought them under the control freely intermarried with them. Although the Ahoms married their girls, the Moran as small tribe but strong tribe did not merge with the Ahoms. They retained their own identity till the end of Ahom reign. The Morans were accepted as a part of that empire that would include Charaidoe, Cheregua, and Gahaon of Sibsagar area. Rangpur was the Ahom name of Sibsagar proper. They also were in Bengmora, the Ahom name for what is now Tinsukia. Scholars express different opinions regarding the meaning of Moran. According to certain numbers of elders, the word owes its origin to a myth. It is widely believed that an old woman belong to the Moran community, a physician by profession, had the supernatural power of giving life to dead ones, for which she was called 'Moran', meaning 'one who can call back a dead'. Etymologically, mor means 'die' and an means 'call back'.

Kedar Brahmachari expresses the view that a people known as Maurang, Muurang or Morang, migrated to Saumar area (easternmost part) of ancient Assam from Nepal and in course of time, came to be known as Morans. There is in the southeastern corner of Nepal a district named Morang. Morang District
of Nepal, a part of Kosi Zone, is one of the seventy-five districts of Nepal. The district, with Biratnagar as its district headquarters, covers an area of 1,855 km² and has a population (2001) of 843,220.21

The name 'Morang' is derived from the name of the Limbu King Mawrong Mung Hang. The King established Morang Kingdom in the first decades of seventh century. His capital and fort was at Rongli, now-a-day known as Rangeli. Morang was then annexed to greater Limbuwan by King Uba Hang in 849 CE. He ruled the kingdom until 1584 CE when Limbu King Sangla Ing made Morang independent. Sangla Ing ruled the region from Varatappa situated east of modern Bijaypur. The Ing Dynasty and succeeded by Sen Dynasty then Khebang Dynasty ruled Morang until 1774 CE. Morang name fell from use after the annexation of all the Kingdoms of Limbuwan including Morang by King Prithivi Narayan Shah of Gorkha. The final King of Morang was Buddhi Karna Raya Khebang. He ruled the region from Bijaypur near Dharan.22

The Hajongs

The Hajong is a small tribal ethnic group of the Indian Subcontinent. These tribal people are settled across north-eastern India and Bangladesh. Along with Karbi-Anglong and North-Cachar Hills they are scheduled as a tribe in various parts of Assam. The main focus is confined to the Lakhimpur area, Udalguri and bordering areas of Meghalaya in the South Salmara sub-division of Goalpara district. A group of people are also living in Arunachal Pradesh.
the independence of India there were several settlements in Sylhet and Mymensing districts of present Bangladesh. But the trauma of Indian independence had resulted in migration of these people to then undivided Assam. The narrow strip of borderland that stretches from Sherpur district in the west as far Sunamganj district in the east can be considered the southern outpost of the greater Hajong community.

Different scholars have opined differently regarding the origin of the word ‘Hajong’. The renowned Hajong scholar Mr. Paresh Hajong opined that Hajongs are the descendants of Karatayabirjarjun, one of the great Khatriyas of the Mahabharata era. The great saint Parasuram vowed to annihilate all the Khatriyas from the earth primarily for taking revenge on Karatabirjarjun who was responsible for killing his father Jamadagni. The saint killed the king in the process. His queen Swarupa Devi was pregnant at that time. She fled away from the capital and took shelter in a hermitage of sage Kamdutta of ancient Kamrup. Her son Padangsu occupied the ancient Hajo township including the temple present there. According to Mr. Paresh Hajong Karatayabirjarjun's descendants included Kumar Bhaskar Barman. During the reign of Bharat Barman the Hajo Township was destroyed and about 12000 people fled away to Garo Hills. In the Garo Hills they established their first settlement at Hajari. From the place they spread over to the other parts of the Garo Hills. These people coined a new
The precise meaning of the word Hajong is very difficult to ascertain since there is no agreed opinion on it. However, according to the majority opinion of the scholars of the community, the word Hajong originates from the Garo word Ha-Jong. In Garo Ha means ‘land’ and Jong refers to ‘the class of people expert in ploughing’. The Hajongs are in fact, very expert in cultivation.

According to Mr. Biren Hajong “The Hajongs are one of the microscopic tribes of north-eastern region. Majority of the community are found in Meghalaya and Assam and a few of them are found in Arunachal Pradesh. There are also a considerable number of Hajongs in Bangladesh. In Meghalaya, as the indigenous tribe, the position of the Hajongs will be fourth, in respect of population. In the Garo Hills district the Hajongs are the second largest tribe in number next to Garos.”

The Hajongs are also settled in Garo Hills. The Garos called them Ajong or Hajong with an amusing feelings. The latter denotation was heartily accepted by the Hajongs for the obvious reasons. On the other hand, owing to faulty pronunciation the word Hajbongsi has become Hajbong. However, since this time onwards the Hajongs are now known only as Hajongs with their own district identity.
Earlier, the Hajongs once practiced animist religion, but now consider themselves to be Hindus. Some of the animistic worship and beliefs are still prevalent among the Hajong society. According to the survey made by the *Hajong Gosthi Sanmilan*, the total population of the Hajong community including Assam, Meghalaya, Bangladesh and Arunachal Pradesh it may be around 1,75,000 lakhs.²⁵

**The Bodos**

The Bodo-Kacharis are the most numerous tribes of the plain districts of Assam. The Bodos (*bo-ros*) are an ethnic and linguistic community, early settlers of Assam in the northeast part of India. They mostly settled in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. The community also settled in Karbi-Anglong district of Assam. The term Bodo means 'man'. Their early history is not found. The word *Kirata* in the *Puranic* literature was used to denote all the Indo-Mongoloid people of the eastern part of India. According to the 2011 census, there are nearly 2 million Bodos in Assam which makes for 5.5% of the total population in the state. Bodos belong to a larger ethnic group known as the Bodo-Kachari. The Bodos are now considered as a plains tribe in the Sixth Schedule areas by the Constitution of India.

The Bodos represent one of the largest of the 18 ethnic sub-groups within the Kachari group, initially classified in the 19th century. Bodos have settled in most areas of North-East India, and parts of Nepal. The Bodo people constitute
a diverse range of the Indigenous people of North-east India. The term "Bodo" is a collective designation to include the people of the region who share some degree of linguistic and cultural heritage. However, the term embraces many distinct populations, societies, and ethnic groups, like, Bodo Kachari, Dimasa Kachari, Sonowal Kachari, Mech Kachari, Rabha Kachari, Thengal Kachari, Tiwa (Lalaung), Sarania Kachari, Moran-Motok, Twipras who have their own specific traditions, language, cultures, and historical identity. Among the Dimasas, who speak a related language, "Bodo" refers to a particular clan. The the former Kachari kings were a part of this clan. Among the 18 groups mentioned by Endle, the Mech in Western Assam, the Bodo in central Assam, the Sonowal and Thengal in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra River are closely related.  

The Bodos represent one of the largest ethnic and linguistic groups of Northeastern India. Typical Bodo last names (surname) are: Brahma, Boro, Basumatary, Bwisumatary, Basumata, Daimary, Swargiary, Goyary, Khakhlary, Mushahary, Mochary, Mohilary, Narzary, Narjinary,Iswary, Chamframary, Hajowary, Hazary, Mech, Ramchiary, Baglary, Islary, Iswary, Bodo, Bodosa, Baro, Borgoyary, Kachary, sainary, Wary, Owary, Lahary, Saiba, Subba, Thakur, Karjee, Mandal ETC. The 1971 census report indicated that Bodos were the 8th largest scheduled-tribe (ST) group in India. In 2011, the national census showed nearly 2 million. 

The Bodo language is a member of the Tibeto-Burmese group. The Latin and Bengali scripts were used by these people in ancient times. Recently, Bodos
adopted the Devanagari script. Scholars opined that the Bodo language had a script of its own called *Deodhai*.

The Bodo community had introduced rice cultivation, tea plantation, pig and poultry farming, and silk worm rearing in North Eastern India. Their ancestral favourite drink is *Zu Mai* (*Zu*: wine; *Mai*: rice). Rice is a staple food of the Bodos. The staple food is often accompanied by a non-vegetarian dish such as pork or fish.

Weaving is an integral part of Bodo life, tradition and culture. Many families wear their own silk worms, the cocoons of which are then spun into silk. Bodo girls learn to weave from their young age. No Bodo courtyard is complete without a loom. The crafted women folk weave their own *dokhnas* (the traditional dress) and shawls.

Bodos of Assam practice Hinduism, Christianity and *Bathouism*. Amongst Christian groups some belong to the Bodo Evangelical Lutheran Church. As per census 2001, more than 90% of the Bodos living in Assam were Hindu. However, the percentage of Christians is growing. The percentage of Hindus decreased from 91.13% in 1991, to 90.31% in 2001. Only a few Bodos still believe in the Animist religion.28

In *Bathouism* is a form of ancestral worship known as *obonglaoree*. The *sijwu* plant (*Euphorbia*), is taken as the symbol of *Bathou* and worshiped with dedication. In the Bodo Language *Ba* means 'five' and *thou* mean 'deep'. Five is
a remarkable number in the Bathou religion.

About Bathouism writes historian Sailen Debnath, "According to bathou this world is composed of five elements viz. Ether or Sky, Fire, Water, Air and Earth. Ba means 'five' and thou mean 'idea or theory or philosophy'. Thus bathou means the philosophy of Five. The term Ba is the abbreviated form of minba meaning 'the five basic elements'; and thou are the abbreviation of santhou meaning 'Logos' or knowledge or idea or philosophy or theory. Thus Bathou again is the abbreviation of minbasanthou i.e. minba + santhou = minbasanthou. The world and human life exist because of a balance among and between all the primary elements. If there is any imbalance of the elements, there is the problem of existence. There are deities symbolizing the spirits of the five elements by the propitiation of whom a balance can be better maintained. In Bodo social life, personal life, art and aesthetics the principles of bathou or the principles of Five are always observed and maintained. Nearly in all other arts and expressions of things, always five forms, number and principles are followed as the embodiment of bathou. The Bodos believe that as human beings they too were the outcome or offspring of the combination of five elements of Ether (sky), Fire, Water, Air and Earth in appropriate proportions and that was why they used to call themselves saaba midainifisa in short badosa meaning the offspring of five elements. Bodo or Boro is the further phonetic transformation of the term badosa.29

The ideal place of worship for the Bodos is a clean surface infront of
home or courtyard. Generally, a pair of areca nut called goi and betel leaf called pathwi could be used as offering. On certain occasion, worship offering may include rice, milk and sugar. The Kherai Puja is the most important festival of the Bodos. In the puja the altar is placed in the paddy field. Other important festivals of the community include Hapsa Hatarnai, Awnkham Gwrlwi Janai, Bwisagu and Domashi. A section of the Bodos has embraced a religion called brahma dharma propounded by Sivanarayana Ray.

The Rabhas

The Rabhas are also another Indo-Mongoloid tribe akin to the Bodo-Kacharis. Rabha (also Rava) is a smaller Scheduled Tribe community of West Bengal and Assam. The dialect of language spoken by the Rabha people is also known by their name. In West Bengal, Rabha people mostly live in Jalpaiguri district and Cooch Bihar district. Moreover, almost, 70 percent of them live in Jalpaiguri district. In Assam, the Rabhas live mainly in Goalpara and Kamrup districts. The whole area of Eastern and Western Dooars, may be termed as the cradle land for the Rabhas. The Rabha community refers to themselves as Koch and asserts a connection to the historically famous Koch Kingdom:

A large sect of the Rabhas of Dooars refers to themselves as Rabha. But, some of them often declare themselves as Kocha. In view of Dr. Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, the aspects of socio-religious and material life of the Rabhas have similarities with the Pani-Koch. On the other hand, E. Dalton argues
that the Rabhas and the Hajongs are the branches of Kachari race. They are connected with the Garos. According to B.H. Hodgson the Rabhas belong to the Great Bodo or Mech ft Pani-Koch and the Rabhas have the same lineage and the latter has their connection with the Garo. A. Playfair also has pointed out some linguistic and cultural similarities between the Rabhas and the Garos. He also remarks that there exists a striking linguistic affinity between the A'Tong language and the Rangdania (Rabha) dialects. It compelled him to think that, at certain point of time they lived in contact with each other. The Rabhas of West Bengal and Assam generally speak the Bengali and Assamese dialects. The Rabhas who live in the forest have retained their original Rabha dialect to certain extent. The Rabha dialect, as stated by George Abraham Grierson, belongs to Bodo group of languages of Assam-Burmese branch.

The traditional economy of the Rabhas is based on agriculture in general. There are also forest based activities and weaving to gain economic support. In ancient times the Rabhas used to practice shifting cultivation. They continued to cultivate the land with Gogo or bill-hook. Later on, they took up the job of settled cultivation and started cultivation with ploughing. Besides cultivation, hunting was also an old practice of the Rabha people. Rabhas, who once used to live in the forest and practice shifting cultivation, were deprived of their rights to the forest by the colonial rulers. Since the formation of forest department, banning on shifting cultivation and demarcation of forest boundaries come into
existence. As a result of the colonial land settlement system, most of the displaced Rabhas either adopted settled cultivation as sharecroppers or took refuge in the forest villages as plantation laboures. After independence, Indian Government more or less continued the same colonial system of forest management. The communities like Rabhas could not regain their rights to the forest. Today, one finds Rabhas in diverse occupations from forest workers and cultivators. All modern occupations like school teachers and government office bearers etc., though their number in white-collar jobs would not be very high among them. Rabha people traditionally practice certain animistic rituals. However, today the Rabhas follow a faith, which is a blend of some Hindu and a few animistic rituals. There are remarkable differences in ritualistic practices among forest Rabhas and the Rabhas that live in the villages as cultivators. The forest Rabhas follow traditional animistic practices tinged with some rituals stream Hinduism. On the other hand, village Rabhas have merged with local Hindus as far as their religious practices are concerned.33

The religious world of the Rabhas is pervaded with various spirits and natural objects. The chief deity of the Rabhas is known as Rishi. Rishi is a male deity for the Rabhas. He is also known as Mahakal. The forest Rabhas worship him in all important social and religious ceremonies. Apart from that, there are the deities Rungtuk and Basek. They are represented by two earthen pots of rice placed on the northern side of the store. These two deities of Rabhas are
considered as the daughters of Rishi or Mahakal. Rungtuk and Basek are household deities. They are regarded as the deities of wealth like the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi. The Rungtuk and Basek are inherited by the heiress of the family. Their traditional priest deosi, counts the auspicious day for the foundation of these deities. The room where they are kept is occupied by the head of the family. These deities do not have any idols. The deity Rungtuk is represented by a red coloured earthen pitcher filled with rice. An egg is kept on the neck of that pitcher. Dances and music play are part and parcel in the lives of the Rabhas. After every ritual they perform various dances to ingratiate their deities. Most of the Rabha women can both sing and dance. Like, most tribal dances, those of the Rabhas are connected to some daily agrarian activity. They have a unique dance form named Nakchung Reni. They used to perform this dance to celebrate fishing in the forest rivulets. Rabha women of all ages take part in this dance whole-heartedly.34

The Dimachas

The word Dimacha means the people living on the banks of a great river (dima-great, cha-sons). Here, the river is not the Brahmaputra, but Dhansiri, a tributary of the mighty river. The river is flowing through the Golaghat district. The Dimachas are also a branch of the Bodo-Kacharis. They now mostly settled the North Cachar Hills. The Dimacha Kacharis ruled Kapili and Dhansiri valleys during the beginning of medieval times. But, with the expansion of the Ahom
Kingdom they gradually fell back towards the south. They finally confined themselves within the North-Cachar Hills and some parts of the plains of the present Cachar district. These people are semi Hinduised community retaining their own dialect and ancestral customs and faith. Before the coming of the British, their kings were Hindus from the 17th century. A coin of Pratap Narayana Hachen, dated 1680 A.D. portray the king as Haricharana Madhukarah.

The Mikirs (Karbis)

A small tribe apparently of the Bodo origin settled in the hills between Sibsagar district and Naga Hills. In their own language, they call themselves Arlengs meaning 'men'. The word Mikir may have originated from Mi-kiri, meaning 'hill people'. In origin, they may be a mixture of Austrics and the Bodos. These people are divided in twelve clans. But, they were never of any account during the reign of any dynasties that ruled in Assam. The Karbis are also Mongoloid people speaking a Tibeto-Burman dialect.

The Karbis formerly known as Mikir now mostly settled in Karbi-Anglong district. Besides Karbi-Anglong district, the Mikirs are also found in Nagaon district. The Karbis speak their own language. But, the major portion of them can speak and read Assamese language. A few scholars have achieved distinction in the field of Assamese language and literature. A small section of Karbis has been baptized by the Christian missionaries. The other section is still following own traditional tribal religion along with Hinduism. Before
coming to the British rule, they were sometimes ruled by the Kacharis and the Ahoms. Strangely enough the Karbi people have a version of the Ramayana (Chabin Alun) composed by some unknown village bard in their language.

The Karbis of present Assam are a patrilineal society. It comprises of five major clans or kur. These are Ingti, Terang, Inghi, Teron and Timung which are again divided into many sub-clans. These clans are exogamous. In other words, marriages between members of the same clan are not allowed. The traditional system of governance is headed by the Lindok or the king. He is assisted by the Katharpo, the Dilis, the Habes and the Pinpos. The Lindok is based in Ronghang Rongbong in the Hamren subdivision of the district. These posts of administration, however, are now a-days, merely ceremonial with no real power.

The Karbi community celebrates numerous festivals. Rongker is one of such festivals held around January–February. This festival is arranged by the entire village. It is regarded as thanks giving feast to the various gods and for the prosperity and the well-being of the community. The Chamangkan is a unique festival of the Karbis. This ceremony is performed by a family for the peace and the safe passage of the soul of family members who died recently.

The Karbis still practice their traditional belief system, which is animistic called hemphu-mukrang. Now there are Karbi people who also practices Christianity. The practitioners of traditional worship believe in reincarnation
and honour the predecessors.

The Karbi women are expert in weaving. They wear home-made clothes. The Karbi people's main attire consist of the *pekok*, a piece of cloth with designs wrapped around the upper part of the body and tied into a knot on the right shoulder. The attire *pini* is similar to a *sarong* and a *vamkok*. A decorative piece of cloth tied around the waist over the *pini*. Traditional dress for men consists of the *choi*, a sleeveless shirt with a 'V' shaped neck and loose threads at the bottom. They used to wear a *rikong*, which looks like a *dhoti* and a *poho* (a turban).

**The Garos**

The Garos, whatever might have been their origin appear under the Jayantias. This tribal sect known as Garos are a people in Meghalaya, India and neighboring areas of Bangladesh. They call themselves *a•chik mande* ("hill people, from *a•chik* "hill"+ *mande"people") or simply *a•chik* or *mande*. They are the second-largest tribe in Meghalaya after the Khasi. They comprise about a third of the local population. The Garos are one of the few remaining matrilineal societies in the world. According to some anthropologist the Garos are originated from the greater Mongoloid Nation.

According to oral tradition, the Garos first immigrated to Garo Hills from Tibet around 400 BC under the leadership of Jappa Jalimpa. They have
crossed the Brahmaputra River and tentatively settled in the river valley. It is said that they were later driven up into the hills by other ethnic groups. They finally settled in the uninhabited Garo Hills. Various records of the tribe by invading Mughal armies and by British observers in what is now Bangladesh wrote of the brutality of the people.37

In December 1872, the British sent out battalions to Garo Hills to establish their control in the region. The attack was conducted from three sides—south, east and west. The Garo warriors confronted them at Rongrenggre with their traditional war weapon. Togan Nengminja was in command of the valiant Garo warriors. He fell fighting with unmatched heroism and courage in December 1872.38

The Garos are mainly settled in the Kamrup, Goalpara and Karbi-Anglong districts of Assam. The Garo language belongs to the Bodo-Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman language group. Orality is the main basis of the Garo language. It is widely believed that the written language was lost in its transit to the present Garo Hills. Garo language has different dialects, viz- a*beng or am*beng, matabeng, atong, me*gam, matchi, dual ruga, chibok, chisak, gara, gan*ching a*we etc. In our neighbour Bangladesh a*beng is the usual dialect. In India a*chik is more used. A*we has become the standard dialect of the community. A*we is used in Garo literature and hence for the translation of the Bible.

However, the modern official language in schools and government offices
is English. The modern generation of the tribe is more inclined towards English.

The Garos are one of the few remaining matrilineal societies in the world. The individuals take their clan titles from their mothers. Traditionally, the youngest daughter inherits the property from her mother. Sons leave the parents' house and are trained in the village bachelor dormitory. After getting married, the man lives in his wife's house. While property of Garos is owned by the women. The women folk govern the society and domestic affairs and manage the property. This gives a solid security to the Garo women folk. Garo also have their traditional names. However, the culture of modern Garo community has been greatly influenced by Christianity. *Nokpantes* are glory of the past and all children are given equal care, rights and importance by the modern parents.39

The Kalitas

Scholars have put forward several suggestions regarding the origin of the Kalitas of Assam. Assam is known for its large number of groups with their own distinctive culture. It is the cradle of twenty seven indigenous tribes and unique in the world for its position as the home of so many different groups of people. Kalitas inhabited all areas of the plains of Assam. According to Sir Edward Gait, "Kalitas are the numerically predominant caste of the province. They are the enlightened and advanced community".40

The group originally came to Assam from the west along with a minority from the northern parts of India. They were mostly from the ancient kingdom
of Kannauj. Like other Aryan descendants of northern India, they were tall and fair in complexion. The most recent wave of Kalita migration occurred during Ahom rule in the 15th and 16th century. They were the earliest Indo-European migrants to settle in Assam. They are supposed to have introduced Hinduism to the Northeastern part of India. The Koch and Ahom kings also brought Kalita people from places including Kannauj, Kashi, and Mithila to their own kingdoms. They might have possessed capabilities as soldiers, generals, administrators, envoys, and judges. They gave them both honour and prestige. They are claimed to have brought the Indo-European Assamese language to the Brahmaputra Valley.

This group is classified as of Alpine descent based on their broad-headedness in the cephalic index. It is a trait found in all Alpine people from Central Europe and their descendants. Alpines are a subgroup of the Caucasoid race found in Central and Eastern Europe. Aryans are another sub-group of the same race found in Northern Europe. Other Indo-Aryan groups of Assam such as the Brahmins are mostly long-headed having a tall stature and fair complexion. However, some ethnologists disagree as to whether Kalitas should be classified as Alpines. They believe that the group actually has mesocephalic head shapes. The physiognomy of the Kalitas is not markedly different from that of the other Indo-Aryan castes of Assam. Kaliram Medhi is of the view that the Kalitas are a group of Pre-vedic Caucasoids. The type of Hinduism they brought to Assam
was different from that prevalent in other parts of India. The Kalitas worked as priests of the Koch Kings before the arrival of the *Vedic* Brahmins. Later, the Kalitas were displaced from their position by the *Vedic* Brahmins.

The existence of a Kalita kingdom in North eastern India is mentioned in different literary sources. Moffal Mills and Maniram Dewan written during the British occupation of India records, “It appears that there was an Aryan settlement at a distance of 15 days march through hilly roads from the Ahom territory, beyond the regions occupied by the Abors and the Miris. The people bore Hindu names like Vasudeva, Harideva and Sankarsan etc. There was also a Hindu king in the land. The name of the kingdom was Kolita.” Neufville claims that the Kalita kingdom was washed away by the great flood in the middle of 18th century.

*Kalti* coins find reference in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. It is supposed to be some of the earliest coins are also ascribed to the Kalitas.

The Ahom *paik* system surnames of *Bora, Hazarika, Saikia, Kakoti, Barua, Rajkhowa, and Phukan* can all be found amongst the Kalitas of Assam. It signifies that they served the Ahom monarchy. *Bora* was the leader of 20 *paiks* (foot soldiers), *Saikia* that of 100 *paiks* and *Hazarika* that of 1000 *paiks*. The *Baruas* led 3000 men, similar to the *Rajkhowas*. *Phukans* formed the uppermost layers of the Ahom military and judicio-administrative structure, subservient to the Ahom *Borphukans* and *Borbaruas*. Phukans and Baruah
are found in the Brahmins, Ahoms and Kalitas of Assam alike. Different posts like *Boiragi* or envoys to neighbouring kingdoms, like, the Jaintias (Meghalaya), the Kacharis, and the Mughal Sultanate in Bengal, were given to the Kalitas in preference to the Ahoms.

Kalitas also formed part of the revenue system under the Mughal-dominated areas in western Assam. Many Kalita surnames of this type include, Lahkar, Mahanta, Medhi, Barman, Chowdhury, Deka, Thakuria, Tahbildar, and Kakoti. The Kalitas took an active part and supported the *Ek Saran Naam Dharma* propounded by Srimanta Sankardeva after its appearance in Assam. In Assam, the Kalitas are ubiquitous in every subdivision of Assam. Their presence is well reflected in the socio-cultural-literary-economic scene of the state.

The Kalitas of Assam speak Assamese in its various dialects. The *Kamrupi* dialect of Assamese is spoken by Kalitas in the districts of Kamrup, Nalbari, Darrang, and Barpeta. The Goalpariya dialect of Assamese is spoken by Kalitas in Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, and Dhubri districts. Standard Assamese is spoken by the Kalitas of Central and North-Western Assam.

Besides the above mentioned communities there are a few other minor tribes in the region. They are more or less Assamised in the course of time.
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