CHAPTER II

SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE OF ASSAM AND FRANCE
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A. Socio-cultural Life of Assam

North –East India is the land of diversity. ‘Topographically North East India lies in the eastern extension of the sub Himalayan zone consisting of lofty mountainous terrains and moderately high hill, inter spread with plateaus and river fed valleys. Due to its location the region has served as a corridor for the movement of human groups as well as cultural stimuli both from the Indian mainland to the west and the neighboring lands in the north and east’ (Datta, 2012:13). Geopolitically, North East region of India is situated in very sensitive area surrounded by Tibet and Bhutan to the North, East by Myanmar and South and West by Bangladesh. In respect of its population component, bewildering racial variety, cultural pattern, this region has referred to as the paradise of Anthropologists and Folklorists. North East has been the home of Kiratas or Indo Mongoloids since early times. ‘There is no denying that there are Considerable diversities within the region, yet the fact remains that there is a basic unity characterizing the seven units making up North East India – Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Mizoram. Presently there is also a realization of this unity among the
people of the constituent units and the term ‘seven sisters’ to designate the seven units reflects that sense of unity and togetherness running through them’(Datta et al.,1994:2).

‘According to Karmakar (2013:19) Assam is India’s most beautiful place after Kashmir, said 19th century monk philosopher Swami Vivekananda. He probably did not explore the essence of Assam-Axom, as pronounced in Assamese to find out why it means unparelled or incomparable with Kashmir or anywhere else’. In this chapter an attempt has been made to discuss about the various aspects of socio-cultural life of Assam and France.

Among the states of North Eastern region, Assam is the most populous covers the areas of 78,438 square km as per 2011 census. Located in between the latitude 24° N to 28° N and longitudy 90° E to 98° E of north east corner of India. Assam is surrounded by Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Bangladesh and West Bengal. ‘The name of Assam appeared for the first time in Dutch book ‘Verarelyke schipbreuk vasn’t Oast-indisch Jacht Ten Schelling’ (A relation of an unfortunate Voyage to the kingdom of Bengal) authored by Frans van Der Heiden of Netherland and published in 1675. Heiden got shipwrecked off the coast of Bengal and then joined the army of Mir Jumla, governor of Bengal under the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and fought in Assam (1661-62)’ (Goswami, 2013:1). The Varman Dynasty (C355-650 A.D), Salastambha Dynasty (C 650-990), the Pal Dynasty (C 990-1140) are some of major dynasty that
Mizoram has the second highest literacy rate in India with 95%.

The Loktak Lake, near Moirang in Manipur.

The Kohima war cemetery, situated on the slopes of Garrison Hill at Kohima, Nagaland.

The Majuli island situated in the river Brahmaputra.

Tawang monastery.

Nathu La Pass.

The Ujjayanta palace of the Manikya Dynasty.

Nartiang monoliths at Law Mulong, Jaintia Hills.

Mizoram has the second highest literacy rate in India with 95%.

Fig. 2: Map of North East India showing the position of different states.
ruled over Assam. Then Ahoms came and settled for 600 years. Jayantia, Kachari, Bara Bhuyan, Chutiya, Kamata, Koch are the contemporary kingdom of Ahom period. Then at the end of 19th century, British entered Assam and in 1826, after the treaty of Yandebo, they officially begin to control over the region. Britishers divided the Brahmaputra valley into lower Assam, upper Assam and Matak Country. But after a few years, against the British process of annexation and occupation of different territories, anti-British movement began. Gomdhar Konwar, Peoli Phukan, Maniram Dewan, Mukunda Kakati, Kushal Konwar were some personalities who fought against the British and sacrifice their lives for the land. Assam freed from nearly hundred and twenty years of British occupation on 15th August 1947. Sir Akbar Hydori was the first Governor and Gopinath Bordoloi was the first Chief Minister (then known to Prime Minister) of independent Assam.

Assam is known as the land of magical rituals, animism and wild tribe. ‘From ancient time Assam to known far and wide as a land of tantric faith; it is a primitive doctrine with a crude spiritual bias. It had its origin in the cult of blood and sacrificial rituals of the primitive tribes. The tantric faith is often described as a product of the vulgarized forms of Saktism and the decadents Buddhism and the ‘nocturnal forces’ of Saktism coalesced, and gave birth and life to the religion of tantraism’ (Baruah, 2010:4). Existing tradition said that originally Kamakhya temple was progenitor of this cult.

Assam is a paradisiacal state for anthropologists and sociologists. Emerald green plain and blue hills make the land of breathtaking scenic beauty. Mountains, valley, deep ravines and impenetrable forests give this sub-continent a panoramic view. The
mighty Brahmaputra runs through the valley provide Assam a tremendous water power potential. The Brahmaputra valley in the North, Barak valley in the South and the hilly area of Karbi Anglong and North Cacher localize between Brahmaputra and Barak valley are the three natural units of the state. Majuli and Umananda are one of the largest and smallest river island of the world are in Brahmaputra. Subansiri, Bharali, Manas, Sankosh, etc. are the tributaries of Brahmaputra on the North. South tributaries are Disang, Dikhau, Dhansiri and Kalang. Assam has a very rich treasury of flora and fauna. World famous one horned rhino is the national animal of Assam. Every year, thousands of local and foreign tourists use to visit Kaziranga to see this one horned rhino. Assam’s climate is humid in general and invariably moist and swampy also. Along with the rare variety of timber, a number of orchids are found here. Assam is a land of peasants. About 75% of the people of the state are agriculturist. Agriculture is not only a source of income; it is integrally related to socio-cultural life of the inhabitants also. Most of the festivals and rites and rituals of Assam are go round the agricultural activities. Rice is the staple food of the people of the state. ‘Industries in Assam are mainly confined to tea, mineral oil, natural gas, coal, forest products, rice, jute and textile sectors. At present Assam has got more than 1000 tea gardens covering about 2,27,000 hectors of land’ (Goswami, 2013:48-49).

‘According to Karmakar(2013:22-23), Assam’s asymmetry is evident from its ethnicity. The people, language, custom,culture, craft and cuisine changes in every 50 km. From a village (Kamrup) of localized Sikh to Afghans in southern Assam and Chinese in eastern Assam’s Makum town, many Asian communities have
Fig. 3: Map of Assam showing the different districts of the state.
settled down across its 78,438 sq. km area. Inevitable Assam has four official languages—Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and English. Inhabited by 3.11 crore people, 73.18% of them literate as per 2011 census.

2.1 Origin of the Name of Assam

‘Assam is the anglicised form of Assamese word ‘Asom’, which means ‘uneven’ or ‘unparalleled’. According to another interpretation ‘Asom’ is the phonetic variation of the word Ahom, a Tai Mongoloid race ruling over most of present Assam valley for almost 600 years till the advent of the British in 1826’ (Deka, 2008:13). ‘According to Borah (2005:1), originally Assam was known as Pragjyotishpura, the ‘city of eastern lights’ or ‘city of the astrologers’. In medieval age it was commonly referred to as Kamrupa. The modern name Assam is of comparatively recent origin. It is associated with the Shān invaders who entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of 13th Century AD and were called Āhoms. The nature of the Āhom was also as per the present name of the State, which has been derived from Asama and means ‘unequalled’ or ‘peerless’. Kakati suggests that ‘Asama’, ‘peerless’ may be a later day Sanskritisation of an earlier form ‘Āchām’. In Tai 饬chān means ‘to be defeated’ with the Assamese prefix ā Asam would mean ‘undefeated’, ‘Conquerors’. If it is originated from the people, the name was subsequently applied to the country. However another derivation has been suggested the name (Āsām), observed Baden Powell is most probably traceable to (the Boro) Hā-Com the low or level country’ (Barua, 2003:4). Kakati (2004:1-4) said ‘The province was differently called in different historical period. Its most ancient name was Pragjyotisapura. By this name it is referred to in the two great epics- The
Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the principal Purānas. In classical Sanskrit literature both Pragjyotisa and Kamarupa occurs as alternative names of the country. Gait writes: Prag means ‘former’ or eastern and Jyotisa, a star astrology shining. Prag-jyotispura may, therefore, be taken the mean the city of Eastern Astrology’.

‘Scholars are not agreed on the origin of the name Assam. The Mahabharata, Vishnupurana, Kalika Purana and Yoginitantra referred to the state of Assam as Pragjyotisha and in the medieval period it was called Kamrupa’ (Sen, 1999:26). ‘The process of emergence of the word ‘Assam’ started from the early part of the 13th Century when a band of hardy warriors wandered in to the eastern extremity of the Brahmaputra valley. The local people, Morans and Barahis called the visitors ‘Haa Saam’-the people of sham (The word ‘sham’ for the land of shan). The word ‘Ha Sam’ went through a number of modifications and produced words like Aasom, Assam, Axom, Ahom, Asomiya and Assamese. At least up to the end of nineteenth century, the word Aasom was used to mean the Tai people only and not the territory. However the Government of Assam adopted a resolution on Feb 27th, 2006 to change the name of the state from Assam to Asom’ (Goswami, 2013:1-2).

2.2 Geography of Assam

Assam is the most vibrant of seven states of North East India. It lies approximately between latitude 28° 18’ and 24° North and longitude 89° 46’ and 97° 4’ East. The frontier province of North East bounded by its six sister states. Assam is bounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on North, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur on the East, South by Mizoram and Tripura and West is
bounded by West Bengal and Bangladesh. Assam is connected with other parts of India with a narrow corridor running through West Bengal. 'With criss-crossing hills; mountain valley, dales, forest and river represent Assam an enchanting geographical region of the country. The plain and hill are two physical divisions of Assam spreading over 78,523 sq. km. This province is dominated by the mighty Brahmaputra. 'Brahmaputra, Barak and their tributaries totaling 120 ensure fertile land dotted with more than 3500 wetlands, 800 expensive tea estates and 20 major sanctuaries having rare species of flora and fauna' (Karmakar, 2013:19). Brahmaputra, Barak and Karbi Anglong are three physiographic units of plain and hills. The great river valley of Brahmaputra comprises the Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nagoan, Sivasagar, Lakhimpur, Sadiya and frontier tracts of Balipara (Sonitpur). 'Surrounded by seven Indian states and two foreign nations, Assam’s geographical position in the context of India and south East Asia naturally offers great potentialities and promises future development. The peculiar geographical location of Assam in the North East bordering south East Asia may be boon or a bone depending up on the country’ scapability to appreciate the potentialities and to manage the problems amicably from sustainable perspective' (Deka, 2008 : 44-45).

2.3 Climate

Assam’s climate is moderately hot with humidity. Winter, Pre-monsoon, monsoon and retreating monsoon are the primary seasons of Assam. Winter season covers December to February middle. The time of December to January is the coldest month of the year. In the winter time, the atmosphere become very humid
and foggy and scarcity of rainfall creates dryness at this time. March and April month brings pre-monsoon when temperature gradually rise and become windy. Monsoon season (June-September) is the extremely high temperature season. At the retreating monsoon, (September-November) hot temperature gradually decreases and the weather become sunny and pleasant. From the month of June to November flood comes to Assam due to heavy monsoon rain. As because, Assam is located within the belt of the eastern earthquake zone, Earthquake is almost common phenomenon to Assam.

2.4 History

In early days, Assam and its surrounded areas were known as Kamrupa and Pragjyotispura (modern Guwahati) was the capital. 'The earliest organized political system of prehistoric Assam (Pragyotisha) is attributed to the Danavas, of whom Mahiranga is referred to as the original monarch. A descendent of Mahiranga, Ghatokasura by name is said to have been slain by Naraka, who consequently become the king of the region' (Deka, 2008:15). Naraka was belong Bhauma Dynasty in the Mahabharata period and his son Bhagadutta fought at the battle of Kurukshetra in 1449 BC alongside the Kauravas. After Bhauma Dynasty, Kamrup was ruled by Varman Dynasty and Bhaskar Varman (594-650 A.D) was the most reputed king of this dynasty. Chinese pilgrim and traveller Huen Tsang visit Kamrup and made significant reference to different aspects of life in Kamrupa. Different kingdoms ruled over Assam before the advent of Ahom (from 1228 A.D- 1819 A.D). Ahom ruled Assam for about six hundred years till the British conquest of the state. Sukapha was the founder and first ruler of Ahom Kingdom. In different
aspects like art, architecture, music, literature, develop a rich culture during the period of Ahom kingdom. Ahom king Rudra Singha was one of the patron of art and culture. To subjugate Assam, Mughals attacked the territory seventeen times and temporarily take over once in 1685 AD. But at the battle of Saraighat in 1591 A.D., Ahom army general Lachit Barphukan defeated Mughals and glorified the history by his bravery. Naranarayana (1540-1586) was undoubtedly most famous king of Koch Dynasty founded in 1515 AD by Viswasingha. Battle was also took place between Koches and Ahoms, but after Naranarayana, Koch Dynasty gradually declined. British came to the region towards the end of the 19th century and stayed for a long time. But Assamese bravely fought against the British and freed the region from their hand. After many years of independence, the whole state divided into seven different states and now these states are collectively referred as seven sisters of North East.

Since 1947, Assam has witnessed many geo-political changes. Just prior to independence on 16th July 1947, major parts of the district of Sylhet were removed from Assam. In 1951 Manipur was separated from Assam. On the other hand, Sadiya Frontier Tract and Balipara Frontier Tract and Naga Tribal belt were added to Assam. On 1st December, 1963 the state of Nagaland was formed with Naga Hills district and a portion of Tuensang division formerly belonging to the NEFA. On 11th September 1968 the Government of India decided to create an autonomous state within the state of Assam Comprising the Garo Hills and Khasi and Jaintia Hill district. Then it was converted to the state of Meghalaya on 2nd April, 1970. On the 21st January 1972 under the reorganization scheme of North Eastern Areas, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya were granted full sate hood, on the 20th February
1972, both Arunachal and Mizoram obtained full statehood’ (Goswami, 2013:43-44).

2.5 People of Assam

From a long time, Assam is being a land and meeting point of different cultures and languages of different races. ‘The earliest inhabitants of Assam were the Kiratas, Cinas and other primitive tribes commonly designated as Mlecchas and Asura. Kirata according to Samhitas is a name applied to a people living in the caves (guhā). In Purānas, Kirātas are designated ‘foresters’, ‘barbarians’ ‘mountaineers’. The Kālikā purāṇa describes these original inhabitants of Assam as Kiratas with shaven heads and yellow skins. They were strong ferocious, ignorant addicted to meat and drink’ (Barua 2003:5). ‘According to Chittattukalam (2002:9) Assam was situated at the central crossing of land routes from eastern Kamboj to western Kashgar and from northern China to southern Ceylon. For nearly 2500 years, from 900 BC to 1600 AD, it was placed in the midst of world Commerce. It gave shelter to streams of human waves, Austro-Asiatics, Mongoloids, Negritos, Dravidians, Alpines, Indo-Mongoloids, Tibeto-Burmese and Aryan infiltrated into Assam through different routes and Contributed in their own way towards the unique fusion of a new community which come to be known in later history as Assamese’.

Assam is a melting point of various races. The large number of tribal people of the region are belongs to Mongoloid racial stock with flat face, broad nose, short head and yellow skin. The Dravidian and Aryan features are also common in Assamese culture. Long headed with large and dark eyes and broad nosed Kaibartas are the good example of Dravidian stock. Aryan people came to Assam from across
Bihar and Bengal. Long headed, prominent nose, fair complexion and well-built physical featured Aryans were came to Assam from different areas and became mixed with Assamese population. Assam’s social structure is highly complicated. At different points of time, Assam has received people of varied racial and cultural groups from different directions and became the home of various ethnic groups. A large number of Bengali, Bihari, Sikh and Muslim people are also live in Assam from a long time. Hira and Kumar are two different potter communities of Assam. 'According to Das, the migration started, mainly with the coming of the British, after fall of Ahom rule. Some of them have become Assamese and many of them have been Assamized. In some of the districts of upper Assam there are small population of Buddhist' (cited in Sen, 1999:122). Boro, Kachari, Tiwa (Lalung), Mishing (Miris), Karbi (Mikir), Deori, Dimasa, Rabha, Hajong, etc. are some major tribes of Assam. Chakma, Khasi, Kuki, Garo, Jayantia, Mizo are migrated tribe of Assam.

2.6 Economy

Major source of Assam’s economy is agriculture. It is predominantly agrarian in character. Directly or indirectly over 80% of people of Assam depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Wet or Summer crops, Rabi or Winter crops and plantation crops are the major crops harvested in the region. On the other hand, Sali (Winter paddy), Ahu (Summer paddy) and Bao (Spring paddy) are three important varieties of paddy. Tea, jute, sugar cane, maize, tobacco etc. are some of the main cash crops produced by both traditional and modern technology of agriculture. As a principal source of subsistence, nourishment and security, rice alone covers around
6% of the total cropped land. 'Tea cultivation in Assam was started as early as 1835. The undivided districts of Sibasagar, Dibrugarh, Cacher and Darrang are important tea growing areas. Tea of Assam was for the first time auctioned on 10th January 1839 in the London market (Sen, 1999:30). Now the tea plantation covers 2.5% of total area of the region. 'In spite of being blessed with a very high potential for industrial development, the pace of industrialization in Assam has been slow. Before independence, there was no other industry worth the name except the colonial tea industries and refinery of Digboi. At present major industrial establishment in the state include refineries and petro-chemical complex, fertilizer plant, paper mill, jute mill, cotton mill, cement factory etc' (Deka, 2008:51-52). Besides these, Assam is well known for eri silk, muga silk and pat (mulberry silk) industry which is unique in the world. Assam is famous for Brass-metal, sericulture, weaving and handicraft industries also.

2.7 Education

In Assam, Vaishnavite monasteries (satra), Sanskrit Tol (traditional Hindu school), Guru Griha (house of preceptors) were the indigenous foundation of education of Assam and because of those, the education of that period was ritualistic in nature. Guwahati Seminary, now Cotton Collegiate High School was the first High School of Assam, established in 1835 by the Major Jenkins, the then Commissioner of Assam. But the trend of western education established in Assam by the effort of Christian missionaries. Great scholar, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-1859) was the initiator of modern education in Assam. Sanskrit scholar Ananda Ram Baruah was the first Assamese graduate and first Indian Deputy
Commissioner. Manik Chandra Baruah is another personality of that period who leads initiative to establish colleges in Assam. By his support, Sir Henry Cotton opens Cotton college in 1901. After that a lots of higher educational institutions were established and Assamese language become the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. Gauhati University (1948), Dibrugarh University (1965), Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat (1965), Central University of Tezpur and Assam University of Silchar are the main Institutions for higher education in Assam. The Assam Medical College of Dibrugarh, Guwahati Medical College Hospital get great achievement in medical education. Education through distance mood is become very beneficiary for different age group of people. K.K. Handique State Open University and Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) of Gauhati University have achieved great success to educate people through distance mood. ‘The year 1948 is a landmark of great events for the state of Assam; this year witnessed the establishment of the Assam High court and the University of Gauhati. The All India Radio station, Shillong-Guwahati that was established in 1948 adds another landmark to this road of progress’ (Baruah, 2010:169).

2.8 Religion

Religion is one of important and prime aspects of Assamese culture. Animism, Vaishnavism, Saivism, Saktism, Hinduism, Brahmanical religion is the earliest religions of Assam. Besides Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism are the major religious groups that comprise the great Assamese culture. Animism (worship of nature) is originally a tribal religion. The forest areas were mainly inhabited by the tribal people and they believe that, the nature is the supreme power and their
action and reactions were totally supervised by nature god. Though assimilation with other religious groups encourages them to accept other religion, a good number of tribal people still stick to their traditional custom. Brahmanical religion was introduced in Assam by the Brahmins. Brahmanical religion is basically Hindu rites and ritual, practice in other parts of India also. Vrata (fasting) and Dana (giving religious gifts) are two aspects of Brahmanical religion. ‘The Brahmanical religion in course of time, come to be greatly influenced by the non-Aryan culture. Gradually, this led to the rise of numerous sectarian cults connected with Shakti, Siva, Vishnu and Surya. The epics and puranas were mainly composed for the propagation of such sectarian cults’ (Chittattukalam, 2002:135). Saivism means worship of Lord Shiva and it has been practicing in Assam since ancient time. ‘Saktism is the cult of worshipping a female goddess as the supreme deity. The Goddess has been conceived as the ‘Sakti’ or energy of Siva, the supreme Godhead. The ‘Saktas’ or the worshippers of this female deity would claim that the goddess is superior even to the supreme Godhead in so far as he has to remain inert the inspiration drawn from the goddess Sakti’ (Chittattukalam, 2002: 138). Saktism was an important religion cult of ancient Assam and Kamrupa with its chief temple Kamakhya recognized as the chief center of Sakt cult. Vaishnavism was introduced by great saint Srimanta Shankaradeva and it occupies an important place in Assamese society. Mahapurusiya and Damodoriya are two divisions of Vaishnavism in Assam. The satra (monastery, seat of a religious head) and namghar (village level Vaishnavite prayer house) are important religious institutions of Vaishnavism.

In the early part of thirteenth century, the Ahoms entered Assam and formed a kingdom. They had their own religion but by seventeenth century, they converted
into Hindu fold of religion. ‘It is said that, first major stream of Muslims entered Assam in the thirteenth century (1203), when the first mosque came up. Spread of Islam started systematically only in the early part of seventeenth century. A Muslim saint Hazart Shah Milan, popularly known as Azan Faqeer, came to Assam in about 1630 AD. He promoted Islam and helped it to take first roots in Assam’ (Sen, 1999:54). Beside Muslims, a number of Christian, Sikh and Jain people are also inhabit here. Christians are mostly tribal people, because the concept of Christianity brought to Assam by the missionaries and the impact of missionary is prominent among the hill tribes. Under the influence of Christianity, tribal neglecting their indigenous religion. Sikh people are generally found in Nagaon district of Assam. Punjabi Sikh and Assamese Sikh are two groups of Sikh in this state. Though practice of Buddhism is not so wide, small population of Buddhist like Khamyang, Aiton, Tai Phake, Turong, Duania, Phralong sect etc. live in some parts of upper Assam. Jainism in Assam is generally practice by the migrated Rajasthani traders.

2.9 Language

Assamese is the official and premier language of Assam and this language is being included in the eight schedule of the Indian Constitution. Besides the indigenous people, Assamese is accepted as the mother tongue by different migrated religious groups of people. ‘The Assamese language belongs to the Indo Aryan group of language coming directly from the Purba Magadhi prakrit. In course of its development, various Non-Aryan elements have found its way into Assamese. Besides Khasi and Jayantia, other Austric group such as kol and Mundari and even Dravidian words have merged into the Assamese fold’ (Deka, 2008: 25-26).
Different languages and dialects like Tibeto-Burman, Austria-Asiatic, Tibeto Chinese family surrounded the Assamese language and Austro Asiatic family, Tibeto Chinese and Tibeto-Burman family group of people speak this language. Boro language is belongs to Assamese Burmese group of North East. Early period of British rule, Persian was the court language and Assamese was used in indigenous schools. At the time of Lord William Bentinck, in 1835 Bengali was become the court language and after two years, the medium of instructions in schools of Assam also become Bengali. But some eminent personalities like Hem Chandra Baruah, Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan all strongly opposed and as a result, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, George Campbell decided to introduce Assamese as court language as well as use in the schools of Brahmaputra valley. ‘On 10th October 1962, official language Act XXII, 1960 was passed in the Assam Assembly by which Assamese was made official language of Assam with a provision for use of Bengali in the Cachar District and languages decided by the Autonomous district councils in respective hilly districts’ (Goswami, 2013: 57).

2.10 Literature

Assam has sound and rich literature. ‘Dr Grierson is of the opinion that, Assamese literature is essentially a national product. It always has been national product. It always has been national and it is so still’ (Baruah, 2010:113). The era of Assamese literature can be divided into- (i) Old Age (initial) 950-1300 A.D. (ii) Middle Age 1300-1830 A.D (iii) Modern Age (Present) since 1830. Pre Sankari , Vaisanava and Ahom period are three stages of middle age literature . ‘The oldest written literature available at present are ‘Charyaacharya Vinishaye’ Composed by
the Buddhist monks in between 8th and 12th century’ (Goswami 2013:58) The old Assamese literature began with folk songs. Shankaradeva (1449 – 1569) and Madhabdeva (1489-1596) were the best poets of later medieval period. The literature based on the Ramayana and Sanskrit Puranas, prior to Shankaradeva is known as pre-Sankari or pre- Vaishnavite literature. Hem Saraswati, Rudra Kandali, Harihar Bipra, Kavi Ratna Saraswati, Madhava Kandali were the famous poets of this period ‘Rudrakandali of the pre-Vaishnavite sub-period translated into Assamese the Drona Parva of the Mahabharata while Madhab Kandali rendered the Ramayana into Assamese under the auspices of King Mahamanikya’ ( Baruah 2010:121)

Shankaradeva is the father and undisputed leader of Vaisnavite period. Literature composed between the last part of 5th century to end of 17th century is known as Sankari or Vaisnava sahitya. Rukmini Harana, Kaliya Damana, Parijat Harana, Rama Vijaya, Patni Prasada are some of famous plays of Shankaradeva. Kirtana Ghosa is the mytho poetic book and Rukmini Harana Kavya, the Bhagabat purana. Bhakti Ratnakara are the poetic works of Shankaradeva. Madhavadeva, Bakul Kayastha, Baikuntha Nath, Bhattadeva, Ramsaraswati, Ananta Kandali, Gopaldeva are the notable writers of Vaisnavite period. Pitambar, Durgabar and Sukavi Narayandeva are some non- Vaisnava writers of Vaisnava period whose works are known as ‘Panchali sahitya’. Assamese literatures of Ahom period are remarkable for writing buranji (history) and historical ballad. The works of translation of Sanskrit epics and Puranas were also held in this period.

Modern Assamese literature begins in growth with the British occupation. American Baptist missionaries are the torch bearers of this period of Assamese
literature. British government introduced Bengali language in school, courts instead of native Assamese language but combine effort of some educated Assamese people and American missioners, Assamese language was reintroduce in 1873. During 1839-1867, few Assamese books on language, grammar, history were written. In 1846 missionaries start first Assamese news magazine named Orunodoi. The magazine ran 36 years from 1846-1882 and this period is known as Orunodoi jug (period of Orunodoi). Hem Chandra Baruah, Gunabhiram Baruah, Bholanath Das, Kamalakanta Bhattacharya, Kaliram Medhi are some of reputed writers of this period. ‘In 1889 Chandra Kumar Agarwala (1857-1938) started the journal Jonaki which played an important role in shaping the Assamese literature. Laksminath Bezbaruah (1864-1938) with his number of books on different topics put the Assamese literature on a strong foundation and enriched it. Banhi (1909-45) the journal edited by Bezbaruah produced a number of Assamese writers. Then Avahan (1929-65) and Ramdhenu (1950-80) the two popular Assamese journal of repute had immense contribution towards modernization of the Assamese literature’ (Goswami, 2013:61).

2.11 Marriage

Marriage is one of an important social customs of each society. Assam is the meeting point of various Communities including tribal and other migrated ethnic groups. So, the rites and rituals of marriage are varies from region to region. Assamese Hindu society is Vedic and patriarchal in nature and marriage by negotiation (arranged marriage) is mostly accepted marriage in this society. Clan exogamy is strictly followed, while caste exogamy is not allowed. Members of the
same clan cannot marry to each other, because they are considered as brothers and sisters. After marriage, the bride stayed at her husband’s house. In early days, child marriage was prevalent specially in Brahmin families, but now this custom is abandoned. Though the light of education brings the widow remarriage custom, but the practice of dowry case has started to come out time to time. Marriage by elopement is common in tribal societies. But they rigidly follow clan exogamy. Divorce is comparatively rare among them. Muslim performs marriage (nikah) in their pristine way.

2.12 Festivals

Several waves of migration, made multiculturalism as an essence of Assam. Bihu is the prime festival for the Assamese people. It is agricultural as well as secular in nature. This socio-cultural celebration performs thrice in a year, by the name Rongali or Bohag Bihu, Bhogali or Magh Bihu and Kangali or Kati Bihu. As the beginning of agricultural period and the Assamese New year, Rongali Bihu is observed in the Spring season. It is the most colourful celebration for the youth. They celebrate this Bihu with 3-7 days duration by singing and dancing. Bhogali or Magh Bihu (mid-January) is observed after the harvesting of paddy. Community feasts are arranged in this festival, where rice, with different curries and various cakes prepared from rice and rice flour are taken. In this Bihu temporary huts and conical shaped structures (meji) are constructed with wood, thatch, etc., which are burnt in the early morning of festival day. Through the burning of meji, they worship fire god Agni. Kangali or Kati Bihu is another form of Bihu observed in mid-October. Kangali means scarcity or almost without food grain. It is celebrated
humbly by lighting earthen lamps under sacred basil plant (*tulasi*) and in the agricultural field, household, etc. Bihu festival is also celebrated by tribal people but with different term and rituals.

Bhatheli or Sori is a festival performed in the month of *Bohag*, particularly by the Hindus of lower Assam. Matheni, Pachati, Moho-ho, Ambuvasi, Doulotsava or Holi are some of the important seasonal festivals of Assam. ‘*Puja*’ is the equivalent term for appeasing a deity in Assamese language. The Assamese Hindus worship different gods and goddesses according to the date prescribed by the almanac, Durga *puja*, Saraswati *puja*, Lakshmi *Puja*, Visvakarma *puja*, Kali *puja*, etc. are some of the rituals cum festivals observed by the Assamese Hindus. Muhorram, Fateha-e-Dowaj Daham, Shab-e-Barat, Shab-e-Qadr, Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid – ul – Zoha are the major celebration of Muslims of Assam. On the other hand, Christmas, Easter, Good Friday are the religious festivals of Christians. Guru Nanak and Guru Tegh Bahadur’s birthday of Sikh, Buddha Purnima of the Buddhist and Mahavir Jayanti festival of the Jains are celebrated in Assam with pomp and gaiety. Death and birth anniversaries of the Vaisnava Gurus are also observed by the Hindus. Tea workers, potters, carpenter, fishermen, Tribal people compose Assam’s demography and they have their own traditional festivals.

### 2.13 Dances of Assam

Assam is a land of dance and music. Colourful and different varieties of folk music and dance describe Assam as a paradise for Folklorist, Anthropologist. ‘Art form and literature in Assam refers to a vibrant tradition of classical and folk genres of dances. In the 7th century, king Bhaskarvarman entertained Chinese traveller
Hiuen Tsang with songs and dances in his royal court every day for a month’ (Karmakar, 2013: 104). *Satriya, Devadasi, Ojapali*, are some of the major dances of Assam and among these numerous traditional dances, Bihu is the most attractive dance style perform on the Spring time Bohag Bihu. Bihu dance is extremely popular among the young generation. With the rhythm of indigenous musical instruments like *taka* (bamboo clapper) *mahar singar pepa* (flute made of buffalo horn), *dhol* (drum), youngsters express their feelings to lovable ones. ‘The Bihu form of expression must have evolved through the syncretism of the tribal and non-tribal, the Indo- Mongoloid and the Indo Aryan. With the strong neo Vaishnava wave sweeping through Assam, the Bihu form also imbibed some of its spirit which is clearly reflected in the Husori institution that forms an adjunct of Bihu festival’ (Datta, 2012:209).

*Huchari* is a group dance, performed by a group of young and middle aged menfolk, sing hymn like song and blessed the household for the welfare of coming new year. The *Huchari* group visits every household of the village, or area during Bohag Bihu. *Satriya* is one of a classic dance form introduced by Vaishnava saint, reformer Shankaradeva (1449-1568 A.D). *Satriya* dance were originally performed at Vaishnavite monastery (*satra*). Dutta reported that the word *satra* derived from Sanskrit root ‘troi’ (to protect) and prefix ‘sat’ (meaning good) is a monastic centre where the Guru (preceptor) and his *bhaktas* (devotees) reside, devoting themselves to religious practices, studying and discussing the sacred literature and Namkirtana or Congregational Prayer’ (Sen, 1999: 55). The *Satriya* dance is generally performed on the stories of *Bhagavad Gita, Puranas*, etc. It is highly refined dance form. ‘The various elements of *Satriya* dance that are found in a fairly good state of
preservation in satras like Kamalabari can be placed in two broad categories-
(a) Those that are dependent on or derived from the neo Vaishnava theatre form called Bhaona and (b) those theatre are independent’ (Datta, 2012:201). Ojapali is another famous dance form of Assam. This performing art is the Combination of singing dancing, interspersed with frequent dramatic dialogue. It is a group performance consists of oja (master) and number of pali (assistant). Marai or Marigoa, Suknani, Biyah goa, Ramayana goa are some of the varieties of ojapali. The topic of song is completely different from each other. With the rhythmic use of feet and cymbals, Oja or lead dancer narrates the mythological stories and his assistance follow him. Devadasi is a ritualistic temple dance of Assam generally performed by unmarried ladies.

2.14 Performing Art

The Bhaona or neo-Vaishnava form of drama was initiated by Shankaradeva and Madhavadeva. Originally it was named as Nata, yatra or Anka but later designated as Ankiya Nat. Bhaona are presented in Brajabali language and generally performed in village namghar, i.e, village level Assamese Vaishnavite prayer house and satra premises. The theme of the Bhaona is historical, life of deities, gods and goddesses etc. Most of the plays are Lord Krishna and Lord Vishnu centred. Bhaona is a famous traditional Assamese folk art specially staging on the occasion of birthday of Saint. The actors of bhaona are known as natuas. Sutradhar is one of an important character of bhaona. He is initiator and stage director of bhaona. He recites dialogue, sing, dance and narrate the prose of the story at every stage of the play. Leading singer is known as Gayan and the musician is called Bayan.
Putala nach or puppetry is one of the oldest and popular folk performing art of Assam. This folk art has more popularity in lower Assam than the other parts of the state. Generally there are mainly four types of puppets used in puppetry. These are - the string puppet or marionette, the rod puppet, the shadow or leather puppet and the hand and glove puppet. In Assam string puppetry is mostly practiced. Puppetry is also known by putala nach, putula bhaona, putala- bhaoriya and putala theatre in Assam and it is a very old tradition of this region. From pre-Shankaradeva (early 15th century) period, puppetry has been practicing in Assam. This folk art has been more vigorously active in Kamrup and Mangaldai area of lower Assam. In Kamrup puppet shows are known as Bati putla. ‘Taking into account of the themes, technique and outlooks involved, the assortment of puppeteer groups active at the present time could be placed in three categories:(a) those that stick to the traditional pattern more or less strictly (b) those that claim to be following the traditional lines but have in effect absorbed various innovations, often unknowingly and (c) those that have gone for all kinds of patently non-traditional or ‘modern’ things’ (Deka, 2008: 136). Traditionally puppet show group consists of five persons. The leader of the group who co-ordinates the show as Bayan, Sutradhar or oja. His collaborations and helpers are called jogali, bhari. Puppetry art is hardly ever a purely family business. There is no particular caste or professional class associated with this puppetry art. There are some particular areas of Kamrup. Darrang, Nagaon, Jorhat and Dibrugarh where different categories of puppetry groups are functioning.

Oja-Pali is one of an ancient traditional performing art form of Assam. It has a special place in the socio cultural life of Assam. The term oja-pali is a coined
word. It has two parts - oja or ojha and pali. ‘Oja or ojha in Assam signifies the head man or leader of the Oja-pali art form. In a sense, he is a teacher as he teaches the art of music, dancing mudras (poses) and other things to his Palis. He is chief singer (or reciter) of the troupe. The word Pali may come from Sanskrit words like Palita or Pali. In the oja-pali art form, the Palis perform their functions as assistant or helper of the chief singer, i.e., oja’ (Goswami, 1997: 12-13). This performing art form consists usually of three to seven minstrels. The chief singer, i.e. Oja recites theme from the mythological stories with music, mudras and dance and the palis take up the refrain and repeat the songs with playing of cymbals and marking of time with their feet. Oja pali is generally consists of the Oja (leader of the troupe), the Daina pali (chief assistant), the Banadhara gor-palis (chief helpers of the daina palis) and the Sahayak palis or the Sadharan palis (assistant palis).

The Oja leads the chorus. He sings the main body of verses of the narrative and sets the refrain for both the Daina pali and other Palis to repeat it. Oja-pali is a folk art where verses from Epic and Puranas are recited in different religious occasions. On the basis of text, context, structure and performance, Oja-pali is classified into a few classes. It can be categorized into Epic-based oja-pali and non-Epic based Oja-pali. The first one is totally depends on the Epic Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Puranas. Biyah gowa oja pali or Vyasa oja-pali, Ramayana gowa oja pali or Rayman oja pali, Bhaira oja pali, Durgavari oja-pali, Sattriya oja pali, Pancali, Dulladi oja-pali are some of the various Epic-based oja-pali. Non-epic oja-pali is based on the theme of goddess Manasa, the goddess of snake. Suknani Oja-pali or Rang-gowa oja-pali, Bisaharir gan, Mare pujar gan, podda
puranar gan are the sub division of Non –epic oja-pali. Api oja-pali is another form of oja-pali performed by the womenfolk. This form belongs to the Epic-based oja-pali.

Bhari gan is another folk performing art practiced in the undivided Goalpara district of Assam. It is archaic from of folk drama featuring the characters of epic Ramayana. Specific costumes use, of wooden mask is an integral part of this drama. Dhuliya (drummer), bhaoriya (actor) is famous folk theatres of Kamrup region of lower Assam. In these theatres three different types of performance, like gorgeous drum playing, acrobatic feats and dramatic shows are executed. The themes of the skits are mythological, taken from the episodes of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The performer frequently use wooden mask for this type of dramatic show.

2.15 Handicraft

Assam is famous for various handicrafts. In the material culture of Assam bamboo and cane works occupy an important place. Though these are easily available in forest areas, Assamese were not so focused on these works. In rural areas, basketry or cane works were leisure practice. From few years, bamboo and cane industry become a vital economic resource of the region. Besides the construction of traditional house, bamboo and cane are useful in making astonishing range of articles of daily use like – furniture, musical instruments, weaving accessories, various kinds of receptacles etc. The articles made by professionally trained worker specially in rural areas have good demand in national as well as international level.
Mask making is an interesting part of Assam’s traditional art and craft. Masks are generally associated with the traditional theatre (Bhaona, Dhuliya, Bharigan) and dance. Bhaona was introduced by Saint-scholar Shankaradeva in 15th century. Mask culture has immense popularity in eastern and central part of Assam. Majuli is the great practitioner of mask making. Primarily masks are used in traditional theatre to depict the characters of demon, animal, birds from Hindu mythology. It is made of split bamboo, paper or paper pulp, wood, clay, pith plant (Kuhila), etc. According to the character, the size of the masks are varies.

From a long time, doll making or toy craft has been practicing is Assam. There are different type of toys- the toys made of clay, made of pith, made of wood, bamboo etc. In terms of number and variety, the clay toy occupies the foremost position among these. Hira and Kumar are two potter communities associated with the making of clay toys. Hira women make pot by hand, while the Kumar men make pots in potter’s wheel. Figures of human being, specially bride groom, are popular clay toys. ‘Clay crafts probably the earliest of man’s creations and makes his coming of age. Pottery has been called the lyric of handicrafts because of its irresistible and universal appeal. Rural pottery in Eastern and North Eastern India is generally unglazed red, tired terracotta. Assam has some of the largest array of the finest specimens of terracotta products’ (Deka, 2008:157-58). Pith is soft and fibrous as well as extremely brittle material. Today the practices of pith toys are practically confined to Goalpara district. Malakar (garland maker), a group of people, more or less vigorously maintained this tradition. Along with human figure, local folk cult of goddess, birds, animals, flowers, rattles are also designed in pith toys.
2.16 Film

Assamese film industry is contemporary to Indian Film. *Jaimati* (1935) was the first film, based on the historical novel of Lakshminath Bezbaruah. The film was produced by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. *Indramalati* (1939) was his second film. Pramathes Baruah was the first Assamese film Director who directed a number of Bengali films also. Rohini Baruah (1910-68), Parbati Prasad Baruah (1904-1964), Kamal Choudhury were other eminent Assamese Film Directors. Bishnu Rabha and Phani Sharma’s jointly directed film *Chiraj* considered as the turning point of Assamese Film industry. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika introduced himself in this field as a director in 1956 by directing the film *Era Batar Sur*. He directed seven films and achieves the best national music director award in 1978 for the film *Chameli Memchaheb*. He got Dada Saheb Phalke award also. Prabhat Mukharjee directed film *Puberoon* (1959) was the first Assamese language film sent to international film Festival. In the history of Assamese film, *Dr. Bezbaruah* (1969) was the most successful film. On the other hand, the first coloured Assamese film was Kamal Choudhury’s *Bhaiti* released in 1972. Some of the film’s that achieved special award are – Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia’s *Sandhyarag* (1971), Jahnu Baruah’s *Haladhiya Charaye Bao Dhan Khai* (1987), *Sagaralai Bahu Dur, Kushal*. Chandra Narayan Baruah’s – *The Land where Wind Flows*, Bidyut Chakravorty’s *Rag Birag* (1996), Ranju Baruah’s *Baivab*, Hiren Borah’s *Basundhara*, etc. Dr. Santwana Bordoloi won the Asia’s best women conductor’s award for the film *Dantal Hatir Uye Khowa Haoda* in 1997. Besides Assamese language, a number film on other languages like Boro, Mishing, Karbi from Assam have also achieved success in national level also.
B. Socio-cultural Life of France

France is a multiethnic, colourful and culturally rich country. ‘France has often been described as the most beautiful country in the world. ‘Sweet France’, la douce France, was its ancient nickname. This fertile land of flowers and Sunshine, stretching from the Alps and Pyrenees to the Atlantic Ocean and the English Channel, with its rich valleys, its numerous broad rivers, its wealth of minerals, wines the love of all who know it’. (Hammerton, 1985:1381). Immigration from various nations changes the demographic pattern of the nation. Immigrant groups are largely from, Algeria, Portugal, Moroccans, Spain, Italy and Tunisia. French social customs are deeply influenced by the religion. ‘According to 2011 Census the total area of the country is 543,965 square k.m and the total population is 65,447,374. Among which Roman Catholic are 83-88%, Protestant 2%, Jewish 1%, Muslim 5-10%, unaffiliated 1%. The total literacy rate is 99%’. (Monorama Year Book, 2011:349). For a long time the country has been Catholic, but in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Protestant bring to the nation by the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew and the Edict of Nantes. French people follow the Judeo-Christian belief of after life where heaven and hell playing a major role.

French culture is already blended in diverse ethnicities. Roman Catholic is the dominant religion of France. ‘French Civilization is the most unbroken and one of the oldest in the world. Long before the dawn of history on the walls and roofs of caves in South Eastern France; people of the Stone Age were painting pictures of fishes and bison and short frocked women dancing in a round. When France emerge from pre-history, her civilization is found centering in settlements along the Mediterranean coast of which, in 600 B.C’. (Hammerton, 2007:2281). Marseilles,
Lyons, Bordeaux, Lille, Nantes, Toulouse, St Etienne, Strasbourg, Nice, Lev Hare, Rouen, Roubaix, Nancy, Toulon, Mulhouse, Amiens, Limoges are chief towns of France. Paris is the capital and major urban center of the country. Four fifth of the total population of France live in urban area. Though France is one of a leading agricultural producer of Europe, only 3% of the population engages in this sector. Family life is very important for French people. Patriarchal family; stem family and nuclear family are the three traditional domestic units.

2.17 History of France

From untold ages, France has been the land of war. Gauls were believed to the first inhabitants of this country. At about 1200 BC Julius Caesar invaded France which was also known as Gaul. Within the period of eight years Caesar conquered the land and established the Empire of Romans. Lyons was the capital at the time. Under the Romans, Gaul become civilized and absorbed the skill and knowledge of Romans. But from forth to ninth century some tribes like Burgundians, Cymri, Belgare, Teutons, Huns, Goths, Franks, Norsemen swept over the Roman Empire. ‘A group of German tribe, the Franks who had never been conquered by the Romans, Swept over the land, reached the Seine and occupied Paris. Their king Clovis, become a Christian and was noted for his religious fervour. He drove the Romans out of the Northern Gaul and united the people under him. It was his race, the Franks that gave France its present name’ (Hammerton, 1985: 1369).

Charlemagne was one of a greatest ruler of Clovis line. Hugh Capet (in 987) become the king of France and established a new dynasty which was reign till the Revolution. England and France were continually at war for centuries. The ruling
king of France became very powerful during that period. 'When Luther preached against the Roman Catholic Church, a number of French people adopted Protestantism. This led to a succession of religious wars, which landed in the defeat and in the expulsion or the massacre of the protestants' (Hammerton, 1985:1373). During the ruling of Louis XIV, French army established colonies and dominions all conquering area, notably in North America. But the misery of the poor people of France, lead the Great Revolution in 1789. At that time a young soldier, Napoleon Bonaparte led the Republican armies of France to victory and became the emperor of the country. After the death of Bonaparte, a revolt was occurred in 1848 and people establish another republic. Louis Napoleon, one of the Bonaparte family, elected as President and crowned as Napoleon III. He ruled until war broke out between France and the united German States in 1870. French army was defeated on the hand of Germans, and surrendered two richest provinces Alsace and Lorraine to Germany. France with the help of Great Britain and other powers fighting against Germany in 1914 and after long four years of war, France was able to recover her lost provinces.
Fig. 4: Map of France showing some of the important landmarks.
2.18 Geography

France is a North Western European Country officially named as French Republic or Re'publique Francais. France is equally the most important agricultural producer as well as a leading industrial power of the world. The country is bounded by Belgium and Luxembourg on the Northeast, Germany, Switzerland and Italy on the East, Mediterranean Sea, Spain, Andorra on the South and West by Bay of Biscay. France has provided geo-economical and linguistic bridge to Northern and Southern Europe. 'The French landscape for the most part, is composed of relatively low lying plains, plateaus and other mountain blocks or massif. The diversity of the land is typical of continental Europe. Three main geologic regions are distinguishable: the skeletal remains of ancient mountains that make up the Hercynian massifs, the northern and western plains and the higher young fold mountains in the south and southeast, including the Alps and the Pyrenees with their attendant narrow plains' (http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/215768/France).

France is mainly surrounded by mountains. Alps and Pyrenees are the two major mountain range of France which form natural boundary with neighboring nations. Mount Blanc is the highest mountain of France bordered with Italy. France covers five percent of area of European Continent and it is the largest among western European nations and second largest country in Europe. It is one of an oldest nation of the globe. Lyon, Marseille, Nantes and Bordeaux are the four other cities of France. Nantes is an industrial centre and deep water harbor of the nation. The Seine, the Loire, the Garonne and the Rhône are the main rivers of the country.
2.19 Cuisine

French people are very fond of food. Wine and cheese are main export food items of France. Cheese is mainly produced from cow’s milk, ewe’s milk and goat’s milk. France is one of an oldest wine producing country in Europe. Its soil and climate very suitable for farming specially grapes, which are used for making wines. ‘Although French cuisine has a reputation as a grand national feature, regional differences are marked. Some local dishes have achieved international fame, even if they are often poorly imitated. Among these are the seafood soup, bouillabaisse, from Marseille; andouillette, a form of sausage from Lyon; choucroute, pickled cabbage from Alsace; and magret de canard, slices of breast of duck from Bordeaux’ (www.britannica.com/EBecheched/topic/215768/France/237249/Dailylifeand_social_customs).

French people are three times meal taker. Breakfast (petit dejeuner), Lunch (le déjeuner) and Dinner (le diner). Breakfast is light meal of coffee, tea or hot chocolate, bread, cereal, fruit, etc. Lunch and dinner are main meals consists of soup, vegetables, meat, salad, cheese, desert etc. Wine and long thin loof of crustly bread called the baguette are compulsory items for any French meal. Ceremonial occasion and holidays are associated with special foods which are varies from region to region. Beef is also used in preparation of food. Besides these, crêpes with cider (thin pancake) of Brittany (north western France) and special dish made from Lotte fish of Loire river valley is very popular. Sea food like mussels, clams, oysters, shrimp, squid and snails, (escargets) prepare with garlic, butter, toast and rabbit and duck is mostly demanded food item in France.
French people are very conscious about the quality of food. 'French cuisine was codified in the 20th century by Georges Auguste Escoffier to become the modern version of haute cuisine. Escoffier's major work however, left out much of the regional character to be found in the provinces of France. Gastro tourism and the guide Michelin helped to bring people to the country side during the 20th century and beyond to sample this rich bourgeois and peasant cuisine of France. Baque cuisine has also been a great influence over the cuisine in the southwest of France' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/culture_of_france).

2.20 Religion

France is a secular country and based on the principle of freedom of religion (laïcité). Though the constitution of the country declares France as secular, the religion has been dominated by Roman Catholic. About eighty percent (three fifth) of the population belongs to Roman Catholic. After Atheism, Islam is the second largest religion. A large number of people of Brittany- Vende'e (north west), Lorraine, Vosages, Alsace, Jura, Lyonnais and Northern Alps (east), Flonders (north), Baque country and the Southern region and Massif Central of the country practice Roman Catholic. France is one of a largest Muslim populated country of Western Europe. Jews population is also highest in France. Muslims are mainly concentrated at Paris, Lyon and Marseille in South Eastern France. Jews populations are primarily inhabitant of greater Paris, Marseille, Alsace, Strasbourg and towns of large eastern area. Buddhism is the fifth largest religion practiced by Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants. 'About fifteen percent of the population claims the states of non-believer. Religious practice has diminished during the last fifty years and less
than ten percent of the population attends religious services. The dominance of Catholicism is historically linked to the conversion of Clovis in 496. French history is marked by religious struggle between Catholics and Protestant, especially during the wars of religion in the sixteenth century. Many Protestant fled during the seventeenth century, when their religious rights were rescinded by Louis XIV. (http://www.everyculture.com/cr-Ga/France.html).

2.21 Language

French is the official language of France. Since 19th century, it is mostly used language of the nation. French language is spoken as first language by about 136 million people worldwide. Around 190 million people speak French as a second language and an additional 200 million speak it as an acquired foreign language’ (Monorama Year Book, 2011:349). Breton (a Celtic language close to Cornish and welsh), Catalan, Corsican, Basque, Alsatian (an Alemannic dialect of German), Flemish are some of the regional language and dialect of France. Immigration from different parts of the world has introduced a number of non-European languages also. Germanic languages Alsation and Flemish are widely used in Eastern and Northern Part, Corsican, Catalan language of South has the influence of Latin and in some western parts of the British Isles, the Celtic language Breton is spoken. Some of these are very different from standard French language. But Occitan is a Roman regional language which is similar to French. On the other hand, Basque is an isolated and completely different from French language.
In the interest of national unity, the use of regional languages was rigorously repressed during the third republic in 1872. But 'the law of 11 January, 1951 permitted the teaching of regional languages in regions in which they were in use. National identity is closely identified with the French language. The purity of the language is officially protected by the Academic Francais established by cardinal Richelieu in the seventeenth century, whose forty members rule over the inclusion of new words in the language. In 1966, the government instituted a further safeguard by establishing a commission on the French language whose role is to discourage borrowing from English and franglais (the combination of two languages). The Toubon law of 1994 mandates the French to be spoken in all official, public spheres of life'. (http://www.everyculture.com/cr-Ga/France.html). The langue d’oeil to the North and that of the langue d’oe to the South are two linguistic regions of the nation.

2.22 Literature

French literature is considered as one of the richest literature of the world. François Rabelais, Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, Pierre de Ronsard, Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine, Molière, Voltaire, Denis Diderot, Jean Jaque Rousseau, Honoré de Balzac, Stendhal, Gustave Flaubert, Emile Zola, Victor Hugo, Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre are some of the eminent writer, philosopher of the history of French literature. ‘French literature has a long and rich history. Traditionally it is held to have begun in 842 with the Oath of Strasbourg, a political pact between Louis the German and Charles the Bald, the text of which survive in old French’ (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/215768/France/237249/Daily_life_and_soci
al_custom). Up to mid twentieth century, French literature was predominated by folktales and oral tradition. A series of Epic poems, Chansons de Geste of eleventh century is considered as the first literature work in French. During Renaissance, the work of Francois Rabelais, Michel de Mantaigne and Pierre de Ronsard flourished the French literature. In the tragedies of Pierre Corneille and Jean Racine reach the neoclassical drama in apotheosis in seventeenth century. Moliere was cosmic writer of this period.

Philosophical writer Voltaire, Denis Diderot, Jean Jacque Rousseau dominated eighteenth century French literature. Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo, Gustave, Flaubert, Emile Zola, George Sand etc. are the great novelist of nineteenth century who took some social problems like-struggle between social class, conservative liberals as their writing theme. ‘The literature of the 20th century was notable for its openness to nonnative writers : the Irish writer Samuel Beckett, for instance, the Czech expatriate Milan Kundera, the Russian emigrant Andreï Makine and Chinese exile Gao Xingjian have all produced major works in French. The postcolonial literatures of the late 20th and early 21st centuries offered insights into the tension of cross-cultural identity by Francophone writers from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean’. (www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/215768/France/237249/Daily-life-and-social-customs).

2.23 Economy

Economically France is a very rich country. French economy is mixed economy. It is a major agricultural nation and one of a leading economy in Western Europe. During the thirty years of glory (from postwar period to mid-1970) France’s
economy shows an unprecedented growth. But the growth was become moderate when the oil crisis occurs in 1970. Agriculture is an important economic sector of France and it is a major world exporter of agricultural commodities associated with food and drink products. The country has nearly 74 million acres (30 million hectares) useable agricultural land of which, three fifth is used for arable farming, one third for permanent grassland and about one twentieth for permanent crops like vines and orchards. Wheat is the major agricultural crop. Butter, cheese, laber fruit, refined sugar, wines, liquor, cotton, silk, woolen tissues, wool, silk, small wears, millinery, artificial flowers, automobiles are chief export and petroleum oils, machinery, coals, oleaginous fruits, seeds cereals, timber, coffee etc. are the chief imported items. Steel, machinery, chemicals, automobiles, metallurgy, aeronautics, mining textile are the leading industries. Tourism is also a growing industry, specially in country side.

2.24 Cultural Life

France is a land of multiple ethnicities, religion with indigenous and foreign language. The culture of this colourful country can be traced from the ancient civilization formed with Celtic, Greco Roman and Germanic elements. 'Monuments, especially from the period of Roman occupation, are numerous and include the amphitheater at Arles, the arènes (arenas) in Paris and the aqueduct at pant du Gard. During the middle ages, a rich culture developed festered in particular by monks and scholars in monasteries and universities and encouraged well into the 18th century by a system of royal and aristocratic patronage. From the early 1700s and with the development of a middle class, the bourgeoisie, culture became more generally
accessible. This was the age of Enlightenment of inquiry and question' (France.introduction/http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/215768/France/41175/other features)

2.25 Art

Painting, sculpture, architecture are the most important graphic art of France. 'The first paintings of France are those that are from Prehistoric times, painted in the caves of Lascaux all over 10,000 years ago. Gothic art and architecture originated in France in the 12th century around Paris and then spread to all of Europe'. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cultureofFrance). The Gothic art developed as Flamboyant in 15th century and then known to the rest of Europe. This medieval art last for three hundred years. By the end of fourteenth century, Gothic art was evolved as a more secular and natural style and become known as international Gothic. This was further evolving as Renaissance art in late fifteenth century. Sculpture, panel painting, stained glass, fresco and illuminated manuscript are the primary Gothic art. French painting got a distinct identity in seventeenth century and Nicolas Poussain and Claude Lorrain were the famous classic painter of that period. This century regarded as the golden age of French art. The art of this period was under the influence of Dutch and Flemish schools and Roman painters also. Mid to late seventeenth century French art were referred as 'classicism'. Eighteenth century was famous for Rococo style of painting and Antoine Watleau, Francois Boucher, Jean Hunuré Frigomard were well known artist of this era. On the other hand, Jacque-Louis David, Dominique Ingress were eminent painter of Neo classicism. The visual and plastic arts and architecture of late seventeenth to the late eighteenth
century in Europe was called Rococo and Neo classicism. During the rule of king Louis XV in France (1715-1722), a new style of decorative art called rocaille emerged. The painting of nineteenth century period of Romanticism was associated with the peasant life. Jean Courbet, Jean Francois, Millet, Paul Cézanne, George Seurat were the well-known painters of this century. August Rodin was the most famous French sculpture of twentieth century.

2.26 Music

France has a wide variety of indigenous as well as immigrant communities’ style of folk music. Barque, Opera, Musette, Chanson, Yéyé, Variété, Rock, Metal, Hip Hop, Disco, Zouk are some of the famous musical forms of France. Barque is a musical form of late Renaissance and early Baroque period. Opera is one of an important musical form in France. In 1646, first French opera was performed at Carpentras. Jean Baptist Lully was the person who creates the French version of Italian opera for the first time. Carmen is one of the popular French opera composed by George Bizet. Corsican Polyphonic singing sung by male trios is most unusual among the French regional music. It is occasionally dissonant and spiritual, secular in nature. Musette is a French music always use accordion as a main instrument. This style of music was very popular in Paris during 1880s. Émile Vocher (1883-1969) was a well-known artist of Musette music. One of a typical form of French musical entertainment is Cabaret. It is a combination of song, music, dance, comedy and spectacles. Cabaret is performed in a very organized manner in front of audience. One of a typical and popular style of French music is Chanson Français. ‘Chanson’ means ‘song’. This style of music shows its influence on French music.
since 1950s. Yéyé music style was first aired in a radio programme in 1959 and it became one of a famous French music in 1960. Johnny Hallyday, Claude François, Sheilla are some of the famous Yéyé artist. Pop which is called variété in French and Rock are two famous French musical styles. During 1980-1990, Metal band music and electronic music was so popular among music lovers. In the late 90s a new genre of music called Disco house, New Disco, Filter house or Tek Funk came. Hip hop musical style came to France from New York which was invented in 1970s by African Americans. Now France is the second largest country in hip hop market. Zouk, Bouyon, Séga music are some other musical form of the country.

2.27 Cinema

France is one of an initiator of film. In 1895 at Paris, Antoine Lumière released the first projection with cinematograph which was a significant contribution to this industry. First digital projection in Europe was also released in Paris by Philippe Binant in the year 2000. Though the film industry of France is small in terms of revenues and budget, almost every year, French film enjoys special award at international level. Caan film festival held in France is a biggest film festival in the world. Paris is the city with highest density of Movie theater.

2.28 Sport

Sport is a highly appreciable activity in France. The most popular sport is football. France was the winner of 1998 FIFA world cup. Tennis, Rugby union, cycling, handball, basketball, sailing are some other popular sports. Grand slam
tournament of French open is the well-known tournament of international tennis. Since 1970, France has been the regular participator of American cup.

2.29 Marriage

Marriage by negotiation or arrange marriage is mostly practiced in French society. Geographical and religious homogamy is strictly followed in French marriage. Though the age and rate of marriage is depends on socio-economic class and region, the average age of marriage for male is 29 years and for female is 27 years, are being sanctioned in the country. Now, the early marriage rate is declining but the rate of divorce is increased from last few years. Interestingly, the same sex marriage is legal in France. It is permitted by government in 2013.

2.30 Festivals

France is the land of festival. Throughout the year, the nation celebrates lots of festivals. New Year's day (Jour de l'an), Labour day (Fête du Premier Mai), Victory Day (Fête de la Victoire), Bastille Day (Fête Nationale), Assumption of the blessed Virgin Mary (Assomption), All Saints Day (La Toussaint), Armistic Day (Jour d’armistic), Christmas Day (Noel), Good Friday, Easter (Pâques), Ascension (l’ascencion), Epiphany (Fête de Rois), Feast of St.John (Fête de la Saint Jean) are some of the major festivals of France. Feast of King is celebrated in memory of three wise kings of the east. On this day, special cakes are baked where a small China doll or large bean is concealed. The person who gets the bean in his or her cake is become the king or queen of the festival and chooses a consort. This festival is the beginning of carnival and lasts till lent procession arranged where people take part with colourful dresses. The last day of carnival is Shrove Tuesday. Carnival
parade held on this day. 'the fast of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and in many country district it is still strictly observed. Mid Lent or Mi-caréme, is the one break, when there are often feasts, processions and dances. Passion Week and Good Friday are generally kept rigidly as fasts, and the Frenchmen, like the British, celebrates Easter with symbolical eggs. Palm Sunday sees the wearing and hanging in the homes the strips of palm which have first been blessed by the priests' (Hamerton, 1985:1389).

Ascension Day, White Monday are the national festivals of France celebrated with great rejoicing. Besides these, there are many regional festivals practiced in different region of the country.
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