INTRODUCTION

Assam is known by several names since early historical period. *Pragjyotishya* is the oldest name of Assam and is seen used both in *Mahabharat* and *Ramayana*. The then *Pragjyotisya* not only included the present Assam but also some parts of north and east Bengal which are now in present Bangladesh and also hill tracts upto the border China. Kamrup as a name could be seen in Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta. Assam can be identified as a multi-ethnic state as it has diverse people from different places. Migration of people to Assam has occurred for centuries. Misra (1999) in his article “Identity transformation and the Assamese Community: Illusion and the Reality”, explains that the idea of a composite Assamese or *Assamiya jati* or nationality started forming during the latter part of the Ahom rule, which for the first time provided centralised administration over what is today known as upper and lower Assam.

Prior to the advent of the Ahoms, the western part of early Assam (referred to as lower Assam by the British) consisted of several tribal kingdoms and territories.
Gait (1963) in his book *A History of Assam*, mentions that there was a little account on the internal conditions of Brahmaputra valley in 13th century and for sixty years after the copper plate inscription of Vaidya Deb, there was no available records regarding the condition of Kamrupa. Gait again explained that the Buranjis of Ahoms hold that a line of Chutia Kings ruled the country east of the Subansiri and the Disang, excluding a part of the south and south-east, where several small Bodo tribes enjoyed independence. In the west there was a Kachari kingdom on the south bank of Brahmaputra which extended to the half of Nagong district. There were a number of petty chiefs called Bhuiyas in the west of the Kacharis in the south bank, and of the Chutias in the north. Each was independent of the others but whenever there was any kind of threat, they joined their forces against that enemy. The Bhuiyas were ruling north of the Brahmaputra and east of the Chutiya kingdom at the time when Ahom entered Assam.

Muslims came to Assam through various routes and means in the preceding centuries. These Muslims got assimilated with the larger section of the people in course of time. In an article, Udayon Misra, writes about the demography of Assamese society, comprised of “Aryanised Hindus, the Plains tribal and the Assamese Muslims” (Misra1999:99).
During the early seventies, a good number of Bengali speaking people were brought as cultivators from then Western Assam comprising of Darrang (undivided), Kamrup (undivided), Goalpara (undivided) with Habraghat Pargana and also from nearby places. These Bengali speaking were allowed to settle in Assam for the ‘Grow More Food Programme’ campaign. There is also a group of Muslim people migrating from the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh since independence. Their mother tongue is Hindi or Urdu or Bhojpuri. The Muslims of Assam doesn’t consist of homogeneous category but are quite diverse in their outlook and as such the social background of these Muslim communities varies from one another.

**Sonitpur District**

Sonitpur district was created in 1983 after it was split from Darrang district. According to 2011 census, Sonitpur has a population of 19,25,975. The density of population in the district is 365 inhabitants per square kilometer (950/sq mi). Its population growth rate since 2011 is 15.67 percent. Its male-female ratio is 946 female for every 10,000 male. The literacy rate of the district is 69.96 percent. Muslims constitute 15.67 percent of the total population. The administrative headquarters of Sonitpur district is in Tezpur.
Flora and Fauna of Sonitpur District

Sonitpur district became home to the famous Nameri National Park in 1998 which has an area of 200 km². Sonitpur has also become home to Orang National Park in 1999 which is shared by Darrang district and has an area of 79 km². The wild life Sanctuaries of Burachapor and Sonai-Rupai is also situated in Sonitpur district.

Tezpur: Tezpur is situated beside the river Brahmaputra and have a number of small hillocks and so the problem of flood in mansoons doesn’t occur. Tezpur is the administrative headquarters and also the Municipal board of the Sonitpur district in Assam. Tezpur is also regarded as the cultural capital of Assam. During the World War II, the refugees entered from Burma, specially the corps of Anglo-Burmese and Anglo-Indian nurses. After independence of India, Tezpur still was the administrative headquarters of Darrang district. But during the Sino-India war in 1965, the Chinese came upto the Tawang of Arunachal Pradesh. For that reason Tezpur had to be evacuated and all the gates of the jail was opened and the prisoners was set free. It was only after 1983, that a separate district was carved from the then Darrang district. Tezpur then became the headquarters of the new district of Sonitpur. The population of Tezpur is largely heterogenous in nature. Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Bihari and Marwari form the major communities. According to the 2011
census, the total number of population in the Tezpur M.L.A. constituency is 1,65,872. Male constitutes a population of 89,436 of the total population and female constitutes 76,436 of the total population. And in the Tezpur Municipal Board, the total number of population is 82000, out of which male is 52,000 and female is 30,000.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It can be noted that Tezpur town in Sonitpur district of Assam is a home to diverse Muslim communities. The Muslim population in Tezpur town is again seen to be growing in numbers as people are moving from Northern India and also from various other places. Consequently over time, the increase in population has also resulted in the growth of diverse occupation and profession. This has further led to many processes of marriage and kinship. All these factors make it compelling to undertake this study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of studies have been carried out to find out the social concerns which brought about major changes in the Assamese society.

Edward Gait (1963) in his “A History of Assam,” provides an account of the pre-historic and traditional rulers. This book gives an account of the events occurred in the 14th century till the growth of the tea industry of Assam. It also covers in the appendices dates of dynasties
in Assam, the Ahom system of chronology, a translation of old copper plate inscription describing Ahom manuscripts which record formalities observed by Ambassadors, explanation of titles of Ahom Kings and nobles and even the origin of the word Ahom.

Amalendu Guha (1977) in “Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947”, provides the background for an understanding of the colonial socio-economic structure. In the last five chapters he emphasizes more on the politics of anti-imperialism. He also lays stress on political activities involving around the legislature in Assam. He discusses waste-land settlement rules: 1838 and 1854, for the cultivation of tea. The formation of tea committee in 1834, the status of the Government Experimental Tea Gardens in 1836 and first successful manufacture of Assam Tea in 1837 made the colonization scheme more acceptable. This has led to the change in social and cultural life of Assam with the emergence of the tea community.

Amalendu De (1982) in his book, “Islam in Modern India”, examine the factors that has led to the growth of Muslim population since 1826 to 1947. This book also describes the role of Sufis in the spread of Islam in Assam. Sufism was introduced in Northern India in the 11th century A.D. and it entered Bengal and from Bengal it was introduced in
Assam. The writer also focuses on the distribution of Muslim population. The percentage of Muslims was highest in Punjab, Bengal was second in rank and Assam was ranked third highest in regard to Muslim population.

B.J. Dev and D.K. Lahiri (1985) in *Assam Muslims, Politics and Cohesion* analyse the development of Muslim politics in Assam. This book is an attempt to understand the social climate of Assam. It provides an understanding of the social and political consciousness and involvement of the Muslims of Assam in political arena. The writers also describe the discussion in the Assam Legislative Council concerning the Line System held in 1936. The line system through which the Muslims from then Bengal, especially from the district of Mymensingh, were allowed to settle in definite areas of the Assam valley district. This book also focused on the social setting and sentiments of the Muslims of Assam.

M.L. Bose (1989) in *Social History of Assam*, spells out the changes in the social structure of Assam during the British Period. This book analyses many of the present social and political upheavals which has brought about the creation of new states of the North-East. The structure of Assamese society changed too. The British provided new administrative arrangements, employments and occupation and as such new social organization evolved. Homogeneity in Assamese society was
lost. The writer mentions that the population of Assam estimated at 4,132,019 in 1874 came to 75,930,000 in 1941.

V.V. Saiyed (1995) in his article “The Muslim family in transition, orthodoxy and change in a minority group family” in the edited book of A.R. Saiyed, discusses the rights of Muslim Women in her family. He also explains her rights in relation to property and also in selection of her husband. This chapter also notes that there is transition taking place in Muslim families. Though a Muslim women is vested with property rights, the Muslim families are patrilineal and patriarchal. Though males are allowed to marry non-Muslims but the women are not allowed to do the same.

B.B. Kumar (1995) in his *Re-Organization of North-East India* explains how the state of Assam was gradually re-organised into the states of Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. This book also provides an account on the administrative and constitutional documents. The writer describes that the province of Assam during independence had the following districts: a) the Brahmaputra Valley Districts: Goalpara, Nowgong, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur; b) Surma Valley Districts: i) Cachar and ii) Sylhet; c) Hill Districts: Garo hills, United Khasi and Jaintiya hills; and Lushai Hills.
Udayan Mishra (1995) in his article “Identity Transformation and the Assamese community” in the edited book of Kailash S. Aggarwal discussed about the formation of Assamese identity and community. This book also explains the demographic changes that have brought significant alteration in the cultural content of the Assamese people. The writer mentions that Assam is the melting point of diverse cultural streams, the Aryan and the Austro-Mongoloid being the central ones.


H.N. Das (2006) in his article “A note on the economic consequences of immigration of Bangladeshis into Assam” in the edited book of B.B. Kumar discusses the occupation of the Bengali speaking Muslims who were brought as cultivators from East Bengal and got them settled in Assam for their ‘Grow More Food Programme’.

Chandan Kr. Sharma (2006) in vernacular, Asomiya Kon, discussed on the issue of the formation of the Assamese nationality and the role of
various communities therein. He focuses on the tendencies of the other groups to assimilate into the greater Assamese society.

R.K. Bhadra and Mita Bhadra (2007) in *Ethnicity, Movement and Social Structure*, tries to explore the causes and consequences of the growth of ethnicity, ethnic movement, state formation, inter-ethnic relation and its impact on the social structure. This book also focuses on the economy, politics and religion as a cause of the movements in the North- Eastern States.

Komoruzzaman Ahmed (2009) in *Smritir Jilinganit Keigarakiman Asomor Musalman*, narrates about the lives of some Muslim Personalities of Assam who have contributed to the society and some who were explorers during their times. This book provides the biographies of hundred and twenty two Muslim personalities of Assam contributing to the Assamese society. This book is an attempt to study the social background of the Muslim of Assam through their lives.

Kasim Ali Ahmed (2010) in *The Muslims of Assam* highlights the historical and social aspects of the Muslims of Assam. This book also throws light on the socio-cultural life of the Muslims of Assam on the folk level. This book again makes an attempt to create an awareness regarding the identity of Assamese Muslims. The writer also describes the kinship structure of Muslims of Assam, their status and stratification.
The writer has categorized the Muslim population in Assam: (i) The Assamese Muslims, (ii) The Neo-Assamese Muslims, (iii) The Muslims of Cachar or the Barak valley, and (iv) The Bihari or North Indian Muslims living in Assam. This book also describes the kinship structure and the occupational stratification among the Muslims of Assam.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1) This study further seeks to understand the occupational background of the Muslims of Tezpur town in Sonitpur district of Assam.

2) This study seeks to understand and explain the marriage and kinship structure of the Muslims of Tezpur town to determine whether they had strongly adhered to their tradition or not.

METHODOLOGY

This study would be based mainly on primary sources and partly on secondary sources. Primary sources would include data collected from the field work based on interview schedule. Secondary sources would include reports on elections, Census report, newspapers, books, journals and magazines.

Nature of study: The nature of study would be explorative and descriptive.

The universe of study will be Tezpur town and its nearby areas, which directly comes under Tezpur town’s administration lying within
the Sonitpur district of Assam. The data will be collected from sixty respondents following the purposive sampling. The respondents will be divided into twenty Assamese speaking Muslims, twenty Bengali speaking Muslims and twenty Hindi speaking Muslims. As the exact population of these communities cannot be find out, so twenty respondents from each of these communities has been taken. These each twenty respondents will again be sub-divided into ten male and ten female.

CHAPTERISATION

Chapter-I: Introduction - This chapter includes a brief historical background of Assam, the problem of study, review of literature, objectives and methodology of study.

Chapter-II: The Occupational Stratification among the Muslims of Tezpur Town - This chapter will focus on the various occupations engaged by the Muslims of Tezpur town.

Chapter-III: The marriage and kinship structure of the Muslims of Tezpur Town - This chapter will look into the nature of the kinship system of the Muslims of Tezpur town.

Chapter-IV: Conclusion - This chapter will summarize the major findings and observations of the study.
References


De, Amalendu. 1982. *Islam in Modern India*. Calcutta: Maya Prakashan.


