CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The topography of a particular region shapes the transport system and the development of the transport system speeds up the pace of economic development. The transport system which is the principal means of communication and movement of goods and produce can be classified under three broad heads, namely, human, animal and mechanical. With the advent of modern civilisation mechanical transport has been fast replacing the animal and human transport. Modern transport system can be split into water, rail, road and air transport. Water transport which is covered in the present discussion can be studied under two classifications, viz, (a) Inland Water Transport and (b) Coastal or Marine or Sea Transport.

Inland water has been defined as canal, river, lake or other navigable water. So inland water transport means transportation on these waterways by steamers and country boats. Inland water transport has played an important part as the main transport system throughout the world ever since communication and economic activities had begun.
Water transport is very old. Primitive men used canoes. Egyptians used rafts on the river Nile. In the early days of civilisation the Greeks and the Romans navigated the seas in vessels equipped with sails. The Portuguese, the French and the British used sailing ships. In the early period of Indian history our important river systems like the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Indus, the Bhagirathi, the Hooghly, the Mahanadi, the Godavari, the Krishna, the Kaveri, the Narmada and the Tapti etc., played an important role as carriers of men and materials. River transport also helped reciprocity and mutual understanding of people living in different parts of the country. In India river transport was linked with the sea transport that involved various countries.

With the introduction of road, rail and air transport, water transport has been facing severe competition. In spite of this it has not only survived, but continued to play an important role in many advanced countries of the world like the U.S.A., Germany, Poland, France, the U.S.S.R., etc. Improvements are made in the design of ships and engines. This is because of the utility of water transport to carry bulk commodities at the cheapest rate. Water transport satisfies most of the requirements of a good transport system. It is comfortable and has possibility of lesser
accidents. The comparative cost of construction, maintenance and operation of water transport is much less and it is more employment oriented.

The importance of inland water transport in Assam cannot be over emphasised. During the rainy season when overland transport system becomes prone to disruption and delay the communication of North-East Region with the rest of India can be maintained by water transport. For flood control and relief activities water transport can help tremendously. Above all an efficiently operated inland water transport, specially in the North-East Region is indispensable for defence purposes, according to the higher echelon of Defence Authorities.

1 : 1 SCOPE OF THE PRESENT STUDY:

This research project covers the entire state of Assam. The North-East Region is surrounded by hills and mountains. With the solitary exception of Assam the rivers of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya and Mizoram are not navigable. In Assam there are large number of rivers which are navigable throughout the year. So it was decided that the scope of the project should cover
the state of Assam. The Geo-physical condition of the North-Eastern Region have been a serious obstacle to the development of overland means of communication. Topography of Assam which includes hills, rivers, canals and forest etc. and its climatic conditions (i.e., heavy rainfall and the recurrent floods) have also hindered the development of overland transport. The natural waterways in Assam, on the other hand, offers a convenient system to develop surface communication. Assam has a vast course of natural waterways. Approximately, 1000 miles of rivers are navigable by steamers and country boats throughout the year.

In the past the waterways were the principal means of communication, and till the advent of roads and railways important trade centres were generally situated on the water-fronts in Assam. Country boats of different types (sizes and shape) have been plying on Assam's waterways since time immemorial. The river transport was virtually the lifeline of the state. River transport was efficiently run and bulk of goods to and from Assam had to be transported through waterways. The geo-political and socio-economic conditions have compelled to revive water transport with all its ancient glories. As a result both the State and the Central Govt. had increased their investment on water transport in the last few years. So there is urgent necessity of
studying water transport with particular reference to Assam.

It is also recognised at the highest level as evident from below. "Perhaps, the most neglected area is water transport. And it is the cheapest means of transport that is available today specially for heavy goods. We have not paid any attention of all either to inland transport on canals, on rivers or in the backwaters or even along the coasts. This again is part of our water resources. And we see how best we can utilise this." (Prime Minister, Rajib Gandhi, National Integration Through Waterways.)

1 : 2 OBJECTIVE :

The various objectives of undertaking this research project under the title "Prospects and Problems of Inland Navigation in Assam," are stated below.

The first and foremost objective of the study is to review the working and development of water transport in the past and at present time in Assam. It is noticed that the development of water transport is not satisfactory like that of road and rail transport in Assam. Attention is given to study the position of water transport, vis-a-vis, the other modes of transport.
The second objective is to analyse the various difficulties faced by water transport and to find out the factors which are responsible for its slow growth even after independence of the country.

The third objective of the study is to enunciate the future prospects for the development of water transport in Assam.

The fourth objective is to suggest measures for the development of water transport in Assam.

1; 3 METHODOLOGY:

This research work is based mainly on secondary data. For the completion of this project the whole work has been divided into four major stages. The first stage consists of the study of relevant books, reports, journals and other literatures relating to transport. More emphasis has been laid on literature on water transport. Most of the data are collected in this stage. In the second stage I had personally, visited some steamer ghats, ports, rivers and met some individuals who are familiar with the water transport. The third stage comprises of the classification, tabulation, followed by analysis of data both quantitatively
and qualitatively. In the last stage the thesis was written on the respective topic.

The data on transport and particularly on water transport is not easily available in Assam. No intensive study on water transport has been made in Assam till present. Various Departments, offices related to water transport, generally do not maintain regular records. After independence the Govt. of India appointed several Inland Water Transport Committees on an all India level to study the position and working of water transport. The Gokhale Committee (1959), The Bhagawati Committee (1970), The Pande Committee (1980), The Baveja Committee (1971) etc. had studied the working of water transport in India with some references to Assam. These reports provide valuable data for the present analysis. The Administrative Reports prepared for the Province of Assam and the District Gazetteers also give some information. References regarding water transport in various history books of Assam also provide information for this analysis. Some data have also been collected from the files of the Inland Water Transport Directorate, Govt. of Assam and the Central Inland Water Transport Corporation Limited. Valuable records are collected from the various meetings held regarding water transport in the Ministerial, Directorate, and Secretarial level assisted by some experts on water transport.
Data collected from the North-Eastern Council, the Planning Commission, the Ganga Brahmaputra Water Transport Board, Transport Research Cell, Govt. of Assam, and Directorate of Economics and Statistics are valuable assets in this regard. Some data are also collected from the Flood Control Department, the Brahmaputra Board, the Central Water and Power Commission, the Geological Survey of India and the Parliamentary Committee Reports on water transport. Besides these various Magazine, News papers etc. also rendered help in this study.