CHAPTER THREE

POPULATION BASIS OF SADIYA REGION

3.1 PROCESS OF PEOPLING

The Sadiya Region records its name in the history of peopling from the time of the Mahabharata, the great epic of the Hindus. The Bidarva kingdom located in the Sadiya Region and administered at times by the king Vishmaking gives evidence of the processes of peopling and cultural habits in the eastern part of present Assam during pre-historic times. During recent past, Sadiya (town) was a transhipment point which acted as a factor responsible for the growth of the town at the bank of the Kundil. It was one of the oldest towns after Shillong and Guwahati in Assam.

The Bodos were the aboriginal settlers of the region. The Chutiyas (a comparatively advanced group of the Bodos who got converted into Hinduism) ruled this land for many years. Actually this was practically the land of the Chutiyas. It was later captured by the Ahoms and finally by the Britishers. It was a land of struggles and fights. The hill tribes, especially the Khamtis and the Singphos who used to reside in the hills of present Arunachal Pradesh, were the main trouble-makers in the region. Actually the base of the Sadiya town was worked out by the Khamtis, which was later developed by the Britishers for their administrative and strategic needs. In the recent days, people from other parts of Indian sub-continent came to settle here. Thus the process of peopling over this region is still going on. The peopling tendency has many ebbs and tides throughout the history. Because of repeated barbaric fights, flood havocs and administrative compulsions, people had to vacate sometime this land, while in another time, they had the chance to settle over the region.

The age-old cultural framework of the region will be discussed in the following few paragraphs.
3.2 POPULATION STRUCTURE

The Sadiya Region has been inhabited by a good number of groups of people of divergent origins, as already mentioned, like the Bodos, Kacharis, Chutiyas, Deoris, Mishings, Khamtis, Muslims, Ahoms, Nepalis, Kaibartas (Scheduled caste) and Tea-garden labourer families. The modern immigrants like the Biharis, Rajasthanis, Punjabis, Bengalis also used to settle here. The divergent composition of population in the region deciphers a good deal of linguistic, cultural and religious heterogeneities. The racial, linguistic and some other social characteristics of the people of the Sadiya Region are, however, enumerated in table 3.1.

According to renowned Indologist, S.K. Chatterjee, 'the Bodos were the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in Eastern India and form the main population bases of these tracts' (Chatterjee, 1974). Of course, when did they come to settle down in this region is not known. Their habitation, however, may be traced back to the time of Mahabharata. The Bodos then were known as the Kiratas. They were the members of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic sub-family. These Kiratas were spread over the Sadiya Region also. That they used to settle in the region may be ascertained from the names of the rivers like Dibang, Dihang, etc. The part di (prefix or suffix) in all the names of the rivers carries the meaning of 'water' as per the Bodo dialect.

According to 1971 census, the Sadiya Region has 703 Bodo persons out of 1083 in the Dibrugarh (now divided into Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts) district.

The Kacharis, another group of the Bodos, ruled the region from the headquarters at Pat Sadiya by giving the name Hemali or Halani to their kingdom. The Kingdom was extended up to Myanmar. They had to move southwards because of repeated attack by the Ahoms and the Khamtis. Of course, some descendants are still living in the Sadiya Region.

The Chutiyas conforming to the Bodo family migrated from the Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh, later occupied the Sadiya Region and established their Chutiya, or Chudiya or Sadiya
Table 3.1

Sadiya Region
Peopling and Peoples' Sub-Structure

People of the Sadiya Region

Early settlers of Pre-British period

Mongoloid Descent

Tibeto-Burman Sub-family

A. Very Early Bodo groups
   1. Bodos
   2. Kacharis
   3. Chutiyas

B. Medieval other groups
   1. Mishings

Indo-Aryan Descent

Siamese-Chinese Sub-family

C. Early Medieval Tai-Shan Groups
   1. Ahoms

D. Late Medieval Tai Group
   1. Khamtis

New Settlers of Post British period

Australoid and Mundaris

1. Assamese
2. Bengalis
3. Nepalis
4. Hindustanis
5. Others

E. Medieval Siamese-Chinese settlers

F. Tea garden Labourers

1. Assamese Caste-Hindu
2. Assamese Muslims

kingdom in 1189 A.D. The Ahoms defeated them in 1523 A.D. and brought the kingdom under their rule. As a result, the Chutiyas had to move towards south. The capital of the Chutia kingdom was at Kundil Nagar, somewhere near the erstwhile Sadiya Town. Before the attack by the Ahoms, the Chutiyas used to settle on the banks of the Dibang and the Tengapani rivers and on the places like Borgang and Patarsal (or Pat Sadiya). Subsequently different Deori groups of the Chutia families were known as Dibangia, Tengapania, Borgoya and Patgoya, etc. as per their locations of settlement. Today a large number of Deoris (the priestly class of the Chutiyas) are living in the Sadiya Region.

The Tibeto-Burman families settling from medieval period include the Mishings previously known as Miris. They who used to settle on river banks of the Sadiya Region had their original home in Arunachal Pradesh. They are actually the descendants of the Adis (or the Abors) living as tribal people in Arunachal Pradesh. They had started their habitation first in the Subansiri river banks and then in the Sadiya Region much before the Ahoms came to the Sadiya Region.

The Tai-Shan group of the Siamese-Chinese family comprising the Ahoms in Assam conforms to the Mongoloid stock. They migrated from Upper Myanmar and started settlement in Assam in 1228 A.D. They came to the Sadiya Region in due course and occupied the land by driving some of the earlier settlers as already explained. They are still residing in large numbers in the Sadiya Region.

The late mediaeval settlers of the Tai-Shan group, especially the Khamtis came to the Sadiya Region from the bank of the Irrawaddy river in Upper Myanmar between 1780 to 1794. These Khamtis who accepted Buddhism as their religion, have now a small number settling over the region.

The mediaeval settlers of the Indo-Aryan descent comprising the caste Hindus came to the Sadiya Region in the mediaeval period. The region has also been occupied by some Muslims since the beginning of the 20th century. The Sadiya Region in due course of time, especially after the take-over of Assam by the British, has been spotted by few settlers of tea garden labourers. They are tribals belonging to the Santhal, Munda, Savara and Gonds speaking
Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian languages. They were brought by the Britishers from the Chotanagpur plateau so as to engage them in the tea plantations. In the Sadiya Region they are distributed in the Christian Gohain gaon area. They now engage themselves in agriculture as there is not a single tea garden in the region. A good number of businessmen from Rajasthan was also brought to the Sadiya Region as past as in 1830. Some persons from Bengal were also brought to help the British administration.

The new settlers of the Indo-Aryan as well as of tribal descent came to the Sadiya Region after the Independence of India. At the same time, of course, some people out-migrated to elsewhere from the Sadiya Region. The newcomers belong to both of Hindus and the Muslims coming from different places of India. The region has since this new settlement been spotted by different language speaking people like, Assamese, Bengalee, Bihari, Rajasthani, etc. Thus among the new settlers there are service-holders, traders and businessmen, etc. Most of the people who came newly engaged themselves in ferry service, hair-cutting, washing, sweeping, cart-pulling, pretty business, etc.

The Nepalis forming a large group of immigrant population use to settle in the eastern part of the Sadiya Region. They engaged themselves in agriculture in addition to rearing cattle.

Though the entire Sadiya Region was previously included in tribal belts of Assam, the tribal population in no way is larger than the non-tribals. Now only the Santipur, the Ambikapur and the Amarpur Gaon Panchayats of the region are included in the belt where the tribal population is larger than the non-tribals.

3.3 DISTRIBUTION AND GROWTH OF POPULATION

Today, the Sadiya Region has a population (according to 1991 census) of 77,111, the density of population being 98 persons (approx.) per km$^2$. The density of the scheduled tribe population is 18, while the scheduled castes embrace a density of only 3 persons per km$^2$. 
A picture of the human occupation in the Sadiya Region may be drawn from the administrative records and reports of the British rulers. Mofat Mills (1853) wrote that Sadiya was a speciously level plain and before the insurrection in 1839, it had 3,369 people, out of which 2,073 were the Assamese and 1,284 were the Khantis. From the description of Hunter (1879), it can be known that in the north beyond Sadiya there was no human habitation up to the hills as this tract was full of uninterrupted jungles. Only the southern part had few hamlets. The Sadiya subdivision was then known as Mahul Sadiya (Saddyah) comprising only 19 villages under 23 village headmen. At that time, the Mahul had a total population of 1913.

Sadiya has a history of human occupation constituted both by immigration and emigration as already mentioned. The Sadiya Region was primarily the land of the tribal people. The non-tribal people had used to live here since the time of the Ahoms. The Ahoms used to bring people from their core areas in the present Dibrugarh, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts to rehabilitate them in the Bosagaon and Bhabala gaon at the beginning. Of course, the non-tribal people always had to fight with the tribal people while establishing their occupation on lands. As a result the Ahom rulers used to bring more non-tribal warriors from other areas in order to stabilize the Ahom rules and occupation. Political instability arising out of fights and disturbance had occurred during the British regime also. As a result of this, human habitation during that period could not progress well. However, the political stability after the Independence has pacified the fierce fights as a result of which there was accelerating growth of human occupation in the region, claiming new areas day by day. The incoming of people from erstwhile East Pakistan, graziers and cultivators from Nepal, defence personals, service holders, supporting businessmen during the post Independence period has played a significant role in the changing patterns of population distribution and occupation in the region in recent times.

Though the growth of population in the Sadiya Region has some ebbs and tides, yet it has in general an increasing trend (Fig.3.1) Due to change of administrative or political boundary of this region (of Sadiya Sub-division) for many times, the
SADIYA REGION
GROWTH OF POPULATION

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YEAR
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ACTUAL
ESTIMATED BASED ON
THANA LEVEL DATA.
researcher has to face with population data and information problems. However, an idea of distribution, density and growth of population is given for the region as compared to those of the district and the state (Table 3.2). The table shows different populations from 1835 to 1991 on varying areas of the subdivision as well as those of the district and the state. For this anomaly in area variations, population densities and growth rates (1961 onwards) in the areas have been taken as the indicators of population studies in the Sadiya Region. There is no doubt about the increasing rates either in density or in growth rates in all the above mentioned units.

It is seen that the density of the Sadiya sub-division as recorded in 1872 had increased to about twice the quantity in 1911. On the other hand, there was a density increase of 3.6 times in 1991 as compared to the density of 1961. In the case of the district of Dibrugarh (undivided) the respective increases were 3.7 and 1.79 times marked at the ends of 1911 and 1991. Assam recorded 1.69 and 2.07 times as increases respectively at the ends of 1911 and 1991. The above discussion indicates a comparatively high increase of population in the Sadiya Region amongst all the three units. As regards the growth of population it can be said that the Sadiya Region experienced as high as 12.22 per cent annual growth rate during 1961-71. The rate drops to only 3.13 per cent during 1971 to 1991. The high increase of population growth in the region substantiates that people from other parts of India, Nepal, etc. came in large number to this part after 1951 in order to occupy the vacant land. On the other hand, the growth rates in the undivided district of Dibrugarh were respectively 4.05 and 2.11 per cents during 1961-71 and 1971-91, while the state marked the respective rates at 3.49 and 2.66 per cents.

The density of population shows a rising trend. There were 10 persons per sq.km. during the period of 1847-48 as against today's 98 persons per sq.km. The region comprised 313 persons per km\(^2\) as agricultural density and 329 as physiological density in 1991. The higher agricultural and physiological density reveal the facts of low per capita agricultural land and high
Table 3.2
Population Distribution, Growth and Density in Selected Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1835</th>
<th>1848</th>
<th>1853</th>
<th>1873</th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
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<th>1941</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>1981</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
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<td>1836</td>
<td>2377</td>
<td>6021</td>
<td>9415</td>
<td>9822</td>
<td>15908</td>
<td>22753</td>
<td>2599</td>
<td>5510</td>
<td>2055</td>
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<td>Density (persons/km²)</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>96</td>
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<td>3.13</td>
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<td>Present Dibrugarh and Tinsukia District</td>
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<td>Present Assam State</td>
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<td>Total population</td>
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<td>4657000</td>
<td>5561000</td>
<td>6694000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Density (persons/km²)</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>138</td>
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<td>285</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual growth (percentage)</td>
<td>3.49</td>
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Source: 1. Census of India
2. Statistical Account of Assam - Hunter (1879)
number of agricultural dependent people. The Sadiya Region has more than 90 per cent of the population dependent on agriculture. The agricultural land has become limited due to floods, sand deposits, and lowlying conditions, etc. Therefore, the agricultural and physiological densities are found to be moderately high in the Sadiya Region. The pressure on land is increasing day by day with the increase of population in the region.

The total number of inhabited villages is 142. The scheduled tribes and the scheduled castes populations respectively share 18.6 per cent and 2.9 per cent of the total population of the region. Fig. 3.2 shows a general pattern of population distribution in the Sadiya Region. It is seen that almost all the population is mostly concentrated on the old and young built-up plains of the region.

3.4 LITERACY RATES

The present day literacy rate in Sadiya sub-division is 42.73 per cent. A study on the number of literates shows that there are 3 literates per residential household and 232 literates per village in the Sadiya Region. Out of the literates, the women constitute 35.8 per cent of the total literates. The literacy rate exhibits a somewhat decreasing tendency in recent years. The influx of huge number of illiterate people, lack of infrastructural facilities for well-spread of education amongst abruptly increasing population, emergence of economic problems hampering children from taking education may all be the causes for such decrease of literacy rate in the Sadiya Region.

3.5 ECONOMY OF THE SADIYA REGION

The research has made an attempt to bring to light the nature of economy of the region as it is related to population. The economy of the Sadiya Region is predominantly based on agriculture. More than 90 per cent of the population are engaged directly or indirectly in agriculture. There is no notable industry except some saw mills (which are presently shut down according to Supreme Court's order) and a thermal power station employing only a few people.
SADIYA REGION
DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION, 1991

ONE DOT REPRESENTS 25 PERSONS.

FIG. 3.2
Agricultural crops like rice, wheat, pulses, potatoes, oil seeds, fruits and vegetables are grown. The Sadiya Region has a total crop-area of 28,148 hectares equivalent to 35.69 per cent of its total land area out of which the net sown area records 24,994 hectares or 31.6 per cent of the total land area (Department of Economics and Statistics, 1993). Irrigation is done only for 230 hectares of agricultural land. The autumn paddy area (2400 ha) is much less than the winter paddy area (14,252 ha).

The region uses a substantial proportion of land for sericultural purposes. There are as many as 71 villages out of 142 inhabited villages in the region, the people of which use land for rearing silk worms. Moreover, there are some government sericultural farms which fetch some economy. Fisheries, small-scale animal husbandries and poultry farms are also located in the region. Huge volume of milk is produced by the people to supply most of it to the areas outside the region. It also produces huge quantity of oilseeds, ginger, potatoes, wheat, various kinds of pulses, sesame and other rabi pulses and crops. The Sadiya Region has a good name in the production of big-sized ginger of medicinal value. These ginger pieces are transported even to some foreign countries.

The region has good quality forest resources. It has as many as five reserve forests full of valuable wood as already mentioned. There are also some social and economic forestry comprising valuable trees on 30 hectares of land.

A thermal power station owned by the Assam State Electricity Board (A.S.E.B) at Chapakhowa generates power at the rate of 1 KW per day. Its capacity of power supply cannot fulfil the demand of the whole region. It has a power grid connection with that of Roing in Arunachal Pradesh, from where only a part of the total need is supplied. The rural electrification is negligible. Only 31 villages out of 142 are electrified till today.

The region has five beels out of many under government registration for fishing. These five beels cover an area of 46.2 hectares of land. The non-registered beels numbering 17 altogether cover 64 hectares of land, while 360 private, 6 government
tanks, 10 masauri jals and 5 revenue fisheries are also working for fish production.

The animal rearing, as already mentioned, has great prospect in this region. It has a total number of 2,71,676 cows, 11,961 buffalos, 12,375 goats, 5,041 pigs and 3,60,715 poultry populations.