CHAPTER ONE

LAND AND PEOPLE
CHAPTER I

LAND AND PEOPLE

There cannot perhaps be two opinions on the question of the importance of land in moulding the character and destiny of the people inhabiting it. For an intelligent study of the history of any territory, a thorough knowledge of the country - of its geography and physiography is indispensable. It is impossible for any one to follow the course of events unless he has accurate information about the location of the various places which figure prominently in the narrative.

Again, the History and Culture of a country is built up by various communities and so for its proper study, a knowledge of the origin, migration and composition of those communities is essential.

'Assam' was known by different names at different times and its territorial limits also varied from time to time. There was a continuous process of integration and disintegration of the region as a whole. Pragjyotisha, Kamrupa are the geographical names given to a kingdom

which eventually came to be known, in later times, as Assam with expanding and contracting boundaries, according to political conditions prevailing in different periods.²

Fragjyotisha was a famous kingdom in ancient times and is often mentioned in the Mahabharata. Bhagadatta was the great king there who was surrounded and supported by the Kiratas and Cinas and many other soldiers who lived in the marshy regions near the sea. Bhagadatta was called Caitalaya (dwelling among the mountains).

The extent of the early kingdom of Fragjyotisha shown by Pargiter and referred to by K. L. Barna in his 'Early History of Kamrup'⁴ has not been accepted by D. C. Sardur.⁴ Without entering into a detailed discussion of this controversial subject which space does not permit, it may be stated that the Kiratas were, no doubt, the Himalayan tribes of Mongolian affinity, and the Cinas were the Chinese, who must be his close neighbours. So it is clear that the kingdom of Fragjyotisha was situated in the North-east of India and touched the

³cit.
We find both the words Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa in the later Puranas as well as the Raghuvaama of Kalidasa suggesting the name of the old Province of Assam. It included in the west the portion of North Bengal, viz., part of the Koch Bihar State and of Rangpur district besides the whole of what is now known as the Brahmaputra valley. Its western boundary was the river Karatwa and according to Yegini Tantra, Kamrupa comprised the territory between Karatwa and Dikrai.  

Hsiian Tsang placed the circumference of the country when he visited it at 10,000 li. General Cunningham inferred that the country must have comprised the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley as well as Koch Bihar and Bhetas.  

Pragjyotisha, Kamrupa or Kamrud as it was called by the Muhammadan historian, came to be known by its modern name of Assam sometimes after the Ahom had occupied and subjugated the land. Long before the advent of the Ahom, Pragjyotisha or Kamrupa was ruled by a long line of

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many important kings of whom Bhaskara Varmen (600-650 A.D.)
of the Varmen dynasty was the most illustrious.

The invasion of the Ahoms, a Shan tribe from the ancient Kingdom of Feng which was situated in the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy, early in the thirteenth century at the eastern extremity of the valley was destined to change the whole course of Assam history. Sukhapha, one of the rival claimants to the throne of Feng after wandering about the country between the Irrawaddy and Patkoi mountains for some years crossed the range in 1228 A.D. with a small following and entered the tract which now forms the southern part of Lakhimpur District and the Southeast of Sibsagar, which was inhabited by petty tribes of Bodo affinities (Morans and Borahis), who were easily subdued. The country round Sadiya, the northern portion of the headquarters subdivision of Lakhimpur and the north eastern part of Sibsagar, as far as the Disang river, which had previously been governed by a line of Pala kings, were then under the rule of the Chutiyas, who had established a Kingdom of considerable power. The Kacharis occupied the western part of Sibsagar, the valley of the Bhansiri and the greater part of Hugong. Sukhapha finding his further progress barred settled down among the Morans and Borahis, who were gradually absorbed in the Ahom community. In this
way, aided probably by fresh streams of immigrants from
Pang the Ahoms increased rapidly in numbers and power. 8

Even after the arrival of the Ahoms in Assam in
1226 A.D. who gradually extended their authority over
different parts of Assam, portions of non-Ahem territories
of Assam to the west remained under the control of the
rulers of Kamata in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries down
to Kilamter 9 and subsequently under the Koch Kings Visva
Singh and Narasarayan Singh in the 16th century; and to
the east ruled the line of Cimita Kings between 13th and
16th centuries (Ratnasdhvaj Pala to Dhiranarayan) 10
following the Hindu dynasty founded, according to tradition,
at Kundil near Sadiya by Bhismak, the father of Rakmini.

Without describing in details the subjugation of
Assam by the Ahoms, it may be stated that in the struggle
with their Bodo predecessors, they came out successful
and bit by bit the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley came
under their sway. The integration of the loose units into

8 Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series.


10 Bhuyan, S. K., Deodrai Assam Barsei. Introduction,
XXVI-XXVIII.
a strong political entity and the unification of the country under one strong government that ensured political stability, peace and prosperity despite Muhammadan invasions was the work of the Ahom rulers.  

The Kingdom of Assam as it finally emerged during the Ahom rule roughly comprised the five present districts of the Brahmaputra Valley namely, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Hooghly, Kamrup and Darrang and portions of the Sadiya Frontier Tract which may properly be called the Valley of the Brahmaputra. It was bounded on the north by a range of mountains inhabited by the Bhutanese, Akas, Duphas, Miris, Abors and Mishmis, the first being most westward, and the others eastward in succession. The Khamptis, Bor Khamptis and the Maramias separated it on the extreme east from China and Burma while on the southeast the Nagas and the Manipuris to their east separated it from Burma. On the south again, the Mikirs, the Casharis, the Khasis and the Garos separated it from the Valley of Surma. Being bounded on the west by the Manas or Namaha river and the Habraghat pargana, it was connected with Bengal by the

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district of Goalpara, the then North East Rangpur. The boundaries of Assam which remained unaltered till the annexation of the country by the British in 1836 has been indicated in Map No. 1.

In the following pages, a rapid survey of the physiography of the land and the origin, migration and composition of the people inhabiting it has been attempted.

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12McCosh John, "TOPOGRAPHY OF ASSAM," 1837, P. 3.
Physiography of Assam *

The physiography of Assam is as varied and diverse as the people who inhabit it.

The easternmost stretch of the Himalayas with all the three sections of it, viz, the Sivalik (Outer Himalaya) in the south, the Himashal (Lesser Himalaya) in the middle and the Himadri (Great Himalaya) in the north, lies in the Arunashal Pradesh. The Sivalik hills which rise almost abruptly to 800 metres above the Brahmaputra valley is covered with deep forests. Many ranges of the Lesser Himalaya are clothed with temperate forests. The Assam Himadri with many of its peaks rising to over 4,000 metres extend northeast-southwest.

The North-eastern ranges which extend from Arunashal Pradesh to Mizoram and beyond and include the Patkai range, the Naga Hills, the Manipur Hills, the North-Cachar Hills, the Mizo Hills and the Tripura Hills are only the extension of the Himalayan ranges. But this physiographic region is not all mountainous - it includes low hills, plateaus and even plains. The Naga Hills like

the Patrai form the watershed between India and Burma. The country rocks which are hard slaty shales of the tertiary and pre-tertiary age have, on weathering, given rise to a very rugged topography. The ridge-and-valley type topography which dominates the Naga Hills is well pronounced in Manipur Hills as well. The central part of Manipur is a large basin - 50 km long and 30 km broad - and is surrounded on all sides by high mountains. This appears to be the bed of an old lake still persisting in the Laktak.

The Mizo Hills with long north-south trending parallel ranges and intervening valleys occupy the southern part of the north-eastern ranges. A traverse of this hill would reveal as many as eight smaller ranges and an equal number of valleys. The physiography of the Tripura Hills resembles that of the Mizo Hills though the rise of the hills here is less abrupt than that in the Mizo Hills.

The Meghalaya plateau, though appears to be a part of the north-eastern ranges, is really an eastward extension of the massive peninsular block lying to the east of the great gap in the Arakan terrain, subsequently filled up with alluvium deposited by the Ganga and the Brahmaputra together.
This ancient land was partially submerged by the encroaching sea during the Mesozoic and early Tertiary times and was uplifted slowly from the bed of the sea at the time the Himalayas rose from the floors of the Tethys. This orogenic movement was so slow and free from buckling that the sedimentary beds retained their horizontal character and gave rise to structural platforms, so well developed in the Cherrapunji area. Viewed from the Surma Valley in the south, these platforms in the central and eastern parts of the Meghalaya appear as an imposing tableland, bordered by a great escarp sloping abruptly towards the plain. It is these frontal slopes over which the monsoon clouds have to ascend that compels them to shed their loads of water, thus accounting for the highest rainfall at Cherrapunji and also for the regional name—the Meghalaya. The Gare Hills which occupy the western part of the Meghalaya plateau, are lower in elevation and rise more gently from the southern plains.

The tract that lies between the Meghalaya plateau and the Naga Hills is a belt of hills and plains. Along its eastern border, runs the Barail range overlooking the Diansiri valley in the north and the Silchar plains in the south. Composed of strong sandstones of Oligocene age, it presents a hogback structure with jagged summits and slopes clothed with deep forests which accounts for the
very sparse population in the range.

North of the Basail, lie the North Cashar Hills covering the greater portion of the tract mentioned above. With an average elevation of 800 metres though a few peaks rise to over 1,000 metres, this physiographic section, being drained by the Diyung, slopes gently northwards. The sandstone and conglomerates of the Gurna series that form the bulk of these hills have, on weathering, given rise to the rugged topography.

North of the North Cashar Hills, lie the Mikir Hills - the easternmost section of the Meghalaya. These hills are also rugged and sparsely populated because of the strong sandstones of the Gurna series that underlie them.

Between the two sets of overthrusts, viz, the Eastern Himalayas on the north and the Patkai-Naga-Barail ranges on the east and south, lies the Upper Assam Valley deeply covered under a blanket of alluvium. Beneath the alluvium, lies the Dihing series which rests unconformably on the Tipam series. The Tipam in turn rests on the Barail series which passes down into the base bed of the Jaintia series. The Lower Assam Valley, likewise, is contained between the Himalayas in the north and the Meghalaya plateau in the south.
This valley of Assam, extending for about 600 KM from Sadiya in the east to Dhubri in the west with an width of 76 Km on an average, owes its present form entirely to the aggradational work of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Rising from the snout of the Chemayungdung glacier near the Taoshog Khabab Chhorten, about 100 Km south east of the Mansarowar where it is called Taoshog-Khabab, it runs, taking the name Tsangpo, eastwards for 1280 Km through Tibet over an average height of 5,500 metres and still being placid and navigable, it takes, at the north-east corner of Assam, a sharp hair pin bend by turning its course from southwest-northeast to northeast-southwest, after cutting a deep gorge through the peaks of Namshi-Bowra and Gyalla-Peari and after taking on the waters of the Dihang, the Dibang and the Luhit, it descends unto the plains of Assam near Sadiya taking the name - Brahmaputra.

Carrying more water than any other river in India, the Brahmaputra carried the detritus and the alluvium down the Himalayan ranges and deposited them on the floors of the Tethys whose waters Lermamed the trough-shaped basin to form the land mass that is now the Assam Valley. This process continued for ages until by the middle of the Miocene period when the fluviatile phase had established itself in place of the marine and the sea had finally retreated.
The Assam Valley with its low relief, easy accessibility and extreme fertility of land, is densely populated but the population on the northern slopes of Upper Brahmaputra which are marshy, lowlying and subject to annual floods is only sparse.

The Surma Valley, another extensive plains section of Assam covers the districts of Goalagahar and Sylhet, the latter one now forming a part of Bangladesh. While the Upper Surma Valley is bounded on the north by the Barail range, on the east by the Manipur Hills and on the south by the hills of Tripura and Mizo hills it merges on the west with the lower valley comprising the district of Sylhet which, again, is bounded on the north by the Meghalaya plateau and on the south, by the Tripura hills. On the west, the valley merges with the great plains of the lower provinces of Bengal.

As the Brahmaputra is flowing through the Assam Valley so flows the Barak through the Surma Valley. Rising from the Jayve (2,998 m), the highest peak of the Kohima hills, it flows south-west through Manipur for 180 Kms parallel to the ranges lying on either side before turning its course first to the north and then to the west through the Cachar plains. At Bhang, it divides itself into two branches, the Surma and the Kushiyara and traverses the
whole length of the district of Sylhet only to unite back at Marmuli to form a single stream and then to proceed southward to merge itself with the greatest river complex of the world that flows down Bengal to the sea.

The People

It is not known, when in the remote pre-historic past, Assam was first peopled. Nor is it known who those people were, whence they came from and whither they have gone to. But it may be said that Assam, the easternmost part of India, besides being the main recipient of the racial migration that took place from the east to India, also received its share, though in much lesser proportion, of the racial elements those moved into India from the west, peopled the land, gradually moved towards the east and remnants of which, again, passed out of the country over Assam and the hill ranges.

The first to arrive in India in the pre-historic times, according to Guha, in his "Racial Elements in the Population," 1944, was the Negritos, a dwarfish Negroid or Negro-like people who entered India from Africa through Arabia and Iran. Though all but extinct on the soil of India, they spread over the greater part of the country including Assam traces of whom have been found in the wild tribes of Kadars and Palayans of Cochin and Travancore Hills,
the Irulas of the Wynad, some hill tribes of the Raj Mahal hills and the Angami Nagas of the Naga Hills. The Negritos appear to have, to a large extent, been suppressed and absorbed by other races which followed them, particularly the Proto-Australoids.14

The next people to come to India after the Negritos were the Proto-Australoids. They were a medium-sized dolichocephalic race from the Eastern Mediterranean area and covered the greater part of India where they still live having been transformed, with the racial admixture with various other peoples, into the mass of Indian people of North India. Very early branches of the Proto-Australoids apparently passed out of India into Australia and Malanesia the people of which have a great deal of Proto-Australoid elements in them.15

The people who next entered India were the Mongeoid and unlike their predecessors, they entered from the east. Of the Mongeoids who extend over a very large area and who are possibly more numerous than any other race of mankind we are concerned with the Tibet-Burman groups and the Ahoos belonging to the Siamese group.

The original home of the Tibeto-Chinese race appears to have been the North-Western China between the Upper course of the Yang-tze-Kiang and the Huang Ho rivers. From there, they appear to have first migrated towards the headwaters of the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin, a tract to the east of Tibet and north-east of Assam, the present day Chinese provinces of Si-Kiang. Forming this as an area of dispersion, these people began to spread east and south down the courses of one or more of the principal streams, the Brahmaputra, the Chindwin, the Irrawaddy, the Salwin, the Menam and the Mekong. "It seems quite probable that long before 1,000 B.C. some of these early Tibeto-Burmans had penetrated within the frontiers of India, either along the southern slopes of the Himalayas, through Assam (and established themselves in the Sub-Himalayan tracts as far west as Garhwal and Kumaon), or by way of Tibet, going up the Tsangpo or Brahmaputra and then crossing the Himalayan barrier into Nepal and Garhwal-Kumaon." Thus, the advent


18 Kirata-Jana-Krti, P. 16.
of Mongoloid people in the east might have been as old as that of the Aryans in the west, at some period before 1000 B.C. by which time they might have established themselves in the Sub-mountain Himalayas. In a similar way, the Chinese province of Yun-nan formed the nidus of the Thai (Dai) or Siamese tribes for their southward track into Siam and Indo-China (Vietnam). A group of these Thai people, the Aboms, acquired, in the thirteenth century, the status of the ruling tribe in Assam for a number of centuries.

The Tibet-Burman tribes who, from their centre of dispersion, occupied the eastern Himalayas bordering Assam are the Akas (Krusses), Abors, Daflas, Miris and Mishmis. With a peculiar head-form resembling dolichocephaly, they represent the more ancient stratum of the population. Though connected with the Vedes and the Nagas living to their south, they have always remained in a very primitive state and had not advanced much in civilisation like some of their cousins and brothers.  

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19 Ibid, p. 22.  
20 Ibid, p. 16.  
22 Kirata-Janakrti, p. 27.
The most important Indo-Mongolian people in Eastern India are the Bodos who form one of the main bases of the present day population of these tracts. They appear first to have settled over the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley extending westward into North Bengal districts of Kesh Bihar, Nagpur and Dinajpur. The Mongolian people who penetrated into North Bihar might have been the Bodos or the Himalayan tribes allied to Nawars (or both). Skirting the southern bend of Brahmaputra, they occupied the Gare Hills where as Garos they live retaining even today their own Bodo speech. From the Gare Hills they spread towards south into Northern Assam where the Hajong tribe is of Bodo origin. From Nonggang district in Assam, the Bodos extended to Cachar concentrating more in the North Cachar Hills and then into Sylhet. The process of expansion did not, however, subside and from Cachar and Sylhet they extended further to the south to the Tripura Hills where as the Tipra tribe they founded their own state forming a Bodo-speaking bloc. From Tripura they spread into Tripura district and also Neakhali and thus extended to the sea occupying the estuary of the Ganga. The Bodos, thus, formed a solid bloc in the North-Eastern India covering the whole of Assam (except the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, Lushai Hills and Manipur) the North Bengal as well as the East Bengal.

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The generic name Bodo which was suggested by Brian Hodgson for the race, being the title given to themselves by the most numerous branch of the race, namely, the Kascharis, covers a large variety of tribes.

The names and numbers of these tribes as returned in the Census of 1881 stood as follows. 24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kashari</td>
<td>2,65,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoh</td>
<td>57,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lalung</td>
<td>46,077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hajong</td>
<td>3,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garo (plains)</td>
<td>22,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabha</td>
<td>54,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhabhi</td>
<td>13,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahalia</td>
<td>6,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarania</td>
<td>4,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toliya</td>
<td>2,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chutiya</td>
<td>59,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koh and Rajbansi</td>
<td>3,36,739</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 8,75,233

24 Census, 1881.
It would, thus, appear that "the Bodo race alone constitutes more than one third of the population of the Assam Valley. If to these we add 86,731 Garos of the hills and 19,782 Bodo of sorts scattered throughout the rest of Assam (mostly, Kacharis in the North Cachar Hills and the plains at their feet), we have a total of 9,83,716 persons of Bodo origin in the province of Assam. 28

Of the other Tibeto-Burman groups in Assam, the Nagas are the most important. Inhabiting the whole of the Naga Hills and extending well over to the neighbouring hills of Manipur in the south and the Mikir Hills to the west, the Nagas present themselves as the most picturesque people in the Tibeto-Burman group. Being secluded in their mountain fastnesses, they were split up into a number of mutually exclusive tribes who do not understand each other's speech. Though much dreaded and detested as being addicted to head-hunting, they were very much akin to the other Tibeto-Burmans, particularly the Bodos, and, as Hutton said, it was exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, "to propose any test by which a Naga tribe could be distinguished from other Assam or Burma tribes which are not Nagas." 29 S.K. Chatterji.

28 Report of the Census of Assam, 1881, Chapter VI.
29 Hutton, J.H., as quoted by Mariner Lewis in 'Nagaland' 1961, P.5.
pointed out that the Bodos and the Nagas descended from the common ancestors who coming down to Burma (from the North Western China) in successive waves became diversified. 27 Linguistically also, they have the closest affinity with the Bodo speakers. 28

Of the Assam-Burma section of the Tibeto-Burmans, the Kuki-Chin tribes form an important branch. The primitive Kuki or Chin people who are found in south-east Assam and Burma, and for that matter the whole of the Assam Burma section of the Tibeto-Burmans, descended from the Mongoloid people who in remote prehistoric times came down to Burma in successive waves to become diversified as the common ancestors of the Bodo-Nagas on the one hand and, on the other, the ancestors of the Kashins, the Leles, the Nran-ma (i.e., the Burmese proper) and the Kuki-Chins all of whom, together, are classed as the 'Assam-Burma' Section of the Tibeto-Burmans. 29 Leaving their kinsmen in Burma, they appear to have settled in fairly ancient times in Manipur as the Neitheis, in the Lushai Hills as the Nimes (as they now call themselves) as well as in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

\[27\text{Kirta-Jana-Kriti, P.27.}
28\text{Ibid, P.28.}
29\text{Ibid, P.27.}\]
and Lushai Hills they infiltrated in large number into
the Tripura Hills where they form an important section of
the people. Of the Kuki-Chins, the Meiteis or the
Manipuris form the most important group among them.

Of the other Indo-Mongoloids in Assam, the Mikirs
generate a mention. The total number of them as returned in
1881 Census was 77,765 and though concentrated in isolated
mountainous block which fills the triangle between the
Brahmaputra on the north, the Dhamaliri Valley in the east
and the Gopilli and Kalang valley in the west, they were
found to have been widely dispersed over the districts of
Goal, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Bilsagar, Khasi & Jaintia
Hills and North Cashar. The tradition is that their original
home was in Jaintia Hills and after being driven out of that
country they wandered from place to place before they
settled in their present seat in the Mikir Hills.

Linguistically, their position is between the Kukis
and the Nagas.30

The Khasis who inhabit the Khasi-Jaintia Hills
require a special mention. The origin of the Khasis, as
Gorden said, is a very vexed question.31 Equally vexed is

31Gorden, P.R.T. The Khasis (Reprint, 1978), P. 10.
the question as to the place from where the Khasis came to their present habitat and also as to how they have had the Austric language within the original Bodo area.

There is a tradition that the Ami-Khasis reached their present land from the east and that their ancestors were originally connected with the Mekong river. They indicate that the ancient Khasis might have had their original habitat somewhere on the banks of the Mekong and possibly, within the Khmer-land now known as Cambodia. There is a further tradition among the Khasis that they originally came into Assam across the Patkai range. Considering the affinities which the Khasis were having with tribes of the Non-Anam (Mon-Khmer) family as respects implements, dress, erection of memorial stones and, in particular, their language, Gorden opined that "there were some reasons for supposing that the Khasis and the other tribes of the Non-Anam family originally occupied a large portion of the Indian continent." He, however, hastened to add that it was impossible to state where exactly the cradle of the Non-Anam race was and proceeded to say that in respect of the Khasi branch of the Non-Anam family it would seem

32Barph, E., The History and Culture of the Khasi people (1967), p.10
33Gorden, P.R.Y., The Khasis, p.10.
reasonable to suppose that if they were not autochthons of a portion of the hills on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra (which, indeed, they were not), and if they migrated to Assam from some other country, it is not unlikely that they followed the migration route from the south-east to north-west over the Patkai range which route was followed by the different irruptions of foreign peoples into Assam - the Indo-Mongoloids in the pre-historic days and the Ahoms, the Khamptis, the Singphos in the recent past. 34

Hutton who held a similar view found great similarities among the Khasis and the Non-Khasers. He pointed out further that the groups of stone ossuaries discovered in the North Garoar Hills were clearly associated with the same type of stones at Tonkin - and that those in the North Garoar Hills were the creation of the Khasis who might have halted there before entering their present homeland. 35 The fact that many Khasi tribes settled first in Jaintia Hills and the northern part of the country before they spread to the interior also points to the migration of the Khasis from the east.

34 Ibid, P.11.
According to S.K. Chatterji, the Khasis appear to be Mongoloid in race who had adopted the language of the Austroloids earlier race, the Jh or the Proto-Austroloids after they came down to Burma and Indo-China from the Tibeto-Burman area of dispersion. He suggested that it was possible that very early off-shoots of the Proto-Sino-Tibetan speaking Mongoloids, before the language was fully characterised, came down to the South China and Burma when there lived in Burma and Indo-China speakers of Austroic languages who were largely of the Proto-Austroloid race from India. A mixture of these Proto-Austroloids with Mongoloids in those very early times was very likely, this mixture producing the ancient Mon people of the Central and South Burma, the Palungs and Was of Upper Burma as well as the Khmers, the Chams, the Stiens, the Bahmar and other Austroic or Austro-Asiatic speakers of Siam and Indo-China giving them at the same time a language - the Austroic Mon-Khmer which is so distinct from those of the other members of the Sino-Tibetan family.

From the above, one might venture to suggest that the Khasis might have been a branch of the Khmer people who inhabited the Mekong basin in Cambodia with which their

traditions claim association, and from there they tracked into Assam where they ensconced themselves in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills successfully resisting all attempts by others - particularly, the Bodos to absorb them and in which process they were also able to preserve the uniqueness of their language among the surrounding Tibeto-Burman Bodos and Aryan-speaking Bengalis and Assamese.

The race movements so far described relate to the various Tibeto-Burman groups of people who came to be established on the soil of India, took place in the pre-historic antiquity. Within the historical times, however, there entered in Assam another group of Mongoloids not the Tibeto-Burmans as before but of the Siamese-Chinese in origin. They were the Ahoms who invaded Assam in 1228 A.D. and established themselves in the easternmost part of the Brahmaputra Valley - gradually extending their power and rule westward giving their name to the province. The history of Assam for the following three centuries is, in the main, the history of struggle for supremacy between the Tibeto-Burman Bodos and the Siamese-Chinese Ahoms - the distant cousins, both being Mongoloid in origin. By the middle of the 16th Century, the Ahoms conquered the Bodo Kingdom of the Kascharis and became paramount by which time, possibly, the province became known by the name Assam. The Ahoms ruled over Assam
until it was annexed by the British in 1826.

Apart from the racial elements mentioned above that go to form the population of Assam - the Negritos, the Proto-Australes and the Indo-Mongoloids, there were the Dravidian elements who have been absorbed in the various strata of the population. There had, again, been intrusions of Aryan elements, particularly, the Alpine-Dinaric who also have become part of the people of Assam. In fact, all the racial elements that go to build up the people of India are also present in the people of Assam with the difference that while in other parts of the country the elements like Aryans or Dravidians are preponderating, here in Assam, the prepondering element is the Mongoloid whose presence outside Assam extends only to the Sub-Himalayan tracts.

The British Assam included, apart from the Brahmaputra valley - the Assam proper, the tribal districts of the Naga Hills, the Mikir and North Cachar Hills, Khasi & Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills and, again, the three Bengali speaking districts of Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara. All these elements which had gone into the population of Assam had made it, racially, a composite one and, politically, of heterogeneous character.
With this brief introduction of the land and people of Assam we may proceed to trace the circumstances leading to its occupation and subsequent annexation by the British who determined the fate of the people of this fair land until India attained Independence.