(a) The Historical Background of Assam and Assamese Language

Assam occupies an important place as a constituent State of India in its North Eastern region. The State has a glorious past and is proud of its historical and cultural heritage.

The origin of the modern name of the State of Assam is connected with the Ahoms or the Shan invaders from Burma, who entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. The Ahoms themselves were of the opinion that the present name had been derived from 'Asama' which means 'Unequalled' or Peerless. It was believed that the local tribes attributed this term at the time of their invasion for their conquest and conciliation. Dr. B.K. Kakati is of the opinion that 'Asama' - (Peerless) may be a later Sanskritization of some earlier form like Aeham. In Tai 'Cham' means "to be defeated". With the Assamese prefix 'A' the whole formation Asam would mean undefeated conquerors. The word Assam was first applied to the Shans and subsequently to the country they conquered.

Geography is one of the most important contributory factors in shaping the linguistic and cultural history of this eastern most State of the country. Assam is surrounded on three sides by countries of different races and tongues separated by mountains with passes which are not difficult.
to traverse. These passes from the earliest times to the present day have been serving as trade and cultural routes among Assam, Burma, Tibet, Bhutan and China. The great Brahmaputra river runs through the heart of the State. In Assamese the river is called Lohit or Luit. It enters the north east corner of Assam through the Mishmi hills and turning nearly due west passes through all the districts of north Assam. (3)

Assam always held a distinct and independent political existence, though her political frontiers have undergone a number of changes according to her prosperity and at times her area have varied greatly from what it is to-day. Its geographical limits have been marked out by nature in a way to ensure its cultural identity through ages. The State has experienced various invasions through the ages. An account of its territory may be given from the Ahom rule. Assam was a country under the able Ahom rulers from the beginning of the thirteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century (1826). Its fame and prosperity attracted people from different parts of the country and outside. But the internal dissensions among the Ahom rulers led to the Burmese invasion. The greatest upheaval occurred at the close of the first Burmese war when according to the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 Assam became a British Protectorate. (4) By a proclamation dated the 14th August 1832 Cachar was annexed to it. (5) By
another subsequent proclamation dated 15th March 1835 the Jaintia Hills was annexed to the British territory and in 1839 Assam was annexed to Bengal. It was at the instance of Sir George Campbell, the then Lt. Governor, on 6th February 1874, the districts which now form the province of Assam with the exception of Sylhet and of tracts subsequently acquired were separated from the Government of Bengal and formed into a Chief Commissionership. In October 1905 Assam was amalgamated with the districts of Dacca, Chittagong and Rajshahi Commissionership of Bengal to form a new province known as Eastern Bengal and Assam under a Lt. Governor. In 1911 His Imperial Majesty announced a new distribution of territory, Assam again became a separate province under a Chief Commissioner from 1st April 1912 and in 1921 a Governorship was created for Assam. After India attained independence from the British rule in 1947, almost whole of the predominantly Muslim district of Sylhet was merged with East Bengal (Pakistan). Dewangiri in North Kamrup was ceded to Bhutan in 1951.

The revolution of the Nagas for their independence as a Republic brought the Naga Hill District under the administration of the Union Government in 1957 and finally in 1962 Nagaland as a sovereign State within the union came into existence according to the State of Nagaland Act of 1962. The Autonomous State of Meghalaya within Assam, comprising
the districts of Garo Hills and Khasi and Jaintia Hills came into existence on 2nd April 1970 according to the Assam Reorganisation Act of 1969 and achieved full independent statehood in January 1972. At that time the Mizo Hills district was formed into the Union territory of Mizoram. After all these additions and subtractions the total area of the State of Assam is now approximately 996100 sq. Km. with a population of 14957542 million.

Assam to-day, comprises of the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Nowgong, Darrang, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Cachar, North Cachar Hills District and Karbi Anglong. Its inhabitants form a distinct entity among the people of India, united by a common tongue, an aryan dialect of great antiquity.

The language spoken in Assam is called Assamese. It is to be noted here that the word Assamese is an English one based on the English word Assam by which the state is known, but the people themselves call their State as Asam and their language Asamiya. People speaking Assamese language constitute 57.14% population of the state. According to the Census Report of 1971 the linguistic groups represent the total population as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother Tongue</th>
<th>Assamese</th>
<th>Bengali</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
<th>Khasi</th>
<th>Boro</th>
<th>Garo</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>17.60</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assamese is mainly spoken along the river Brahmaputra Valley districts stretching from Lakhimpur in the east and Goalpara in the west. It is the easternmost New Indo-Aryan language predominating in the plains regions of Assam, while the hilly areas of the state is inhabited by other "speech communities" all of whom appear to have contributed to the enrichment of Assamese language through contacts among the speakers. Assamese is universally spoken in the State. It is also taught in all the schools of Assam. Along with the vast number of Assamese medium schools in the state, there are a large number of schools where the media of instruction are English, Hindi, Bengali, Nepali and Boro. Assamese is also taught in these schools as a language where the mother tongue of the children is not Assamese. Language teachers are appointed in these schools specially to teach Assamese.

The tea garden labourers, who are mostly Adivasis have also taken up Assamese as their language, though they have their own dialects. Gradually, Assamese language has taken the place of their mother tongue.

The lingua franca of the neighbouring State Nagaland is Nagamese which is also a broken form of the standard Assamese language.

Chiefly Assamese is the medium of instruction in the schools of Assam except in the district of Cachar. The language has been developed out of the Sanskrit language as early as
In the 7th century A.D. Its direct ancestor, however is Magadhi Aprabhamsa. Dr. B.K. Kakati has shown that in a Pre-Bengali and Pre-Assamese period there were certain dialect groups which may be designated Eastern Magadhi Aprabhamsa. Each dialect group in due time became clearly demarcated and so Assamese under the independent kings of Assam, and her entirely self contained social life became established as an independent speech. The antiquity of the Assamese language is an established fact from the account of Hieun Tsang. This Chinese pilgrim accepted the invitation of Kumar Bhaskar Varman, the king of Assam. In his account of the kingdom of Kamrup, he said of the language as slightly different from that of mid India.

From the different materials so far discovered it can be assumed that the history of Assamese literature has stated its distinctive period from the 14th century onwards. Dr. Kakati has tried to divide the history of Assamese language for the convenience of grouping linguistic peculiarities into three periods: 1) Early Assamese :- from the 14th to the end of the 16th century. This again may be split into (a) the pre-vaishnavite and (b) Vaishnavite sub-periods. (2) Middle Assamese :- From the 17th century to the beginning of the 19th century. (3) Modern Assamese :- From the beginning of the 19th century till present times.
The earliest Assamese writer is Hema Saraswati the author of a small poem "Prahlada Charita". The greatest of the Pre-Vaishnavite poets, Madhav Kandali translated the whole of the Ramayana in Assamese verse. During Sankardeva's time Assamese language established itself in literature.

The great Assamese thinker, poet and reformer, Sankardeva was born in 1449. Sankardeva, though a distinguished Sanskrit scholar wrote mainly in Assamese with the aim of bringing Sanskrit lore within the reach of the uneducated masses. Sankardeva composed also religious songs and dramas and in these compositions there is a large admixture of what is popularly known as Brajabuli idioms. (18)

From the beginning of the 17th century the development of Assamese could be noticed. The Ahoms had brought with them the traditions of historical writings. When they adopted Assamese as the court language, they began to write the court chronicles in Assamese. The chroniclers drew their materials from occurrence in life and recorded only facts and thus they had to break away from the style of the religious writings. Full of colloquialism the style of writing was homely, idiomatic and racy. (19)

The natural expression of the Assamese language in the chronicles wiped away the difference between the colloquial and literary languages. During this period vocables from different sources started pouring into the Assamese language incessantly. (20)
After the treaty of Yandaboo, in 1826, Assam came under the administration of the East India Company. At first the British used Assamese language in the schools and courts which did not continue long. The British were strangers to this land and had no knowledge of the local tongue. So people from other provinces of India mainly from Bengal began to come over to Assam as interpreters and clerks of the Englishmen to carry on the newly established administration. Under the influence of these men recruited mostly from Bengal, the British administrators made Bengali the language of the court and medium of instructions in the schools of Assam. It was in 1836 Assamese was thrown out of the law courts and Bengali was installed in its place. In 1839 two American Baptist missionaries Rev. W. Brown and O.T. Cotter, with their families arrived in Assam. These missionaries were very much surprised to see that the people of Assam speak a language in their daily life and use another language in the courts and schools. To remove this difference they tried their best and appealed to the administrators to install Assamese in its right place mainly through the first magazine 'Aroonodoi'.

The missionaries came to Assam for the spread of Christianity. They soon realised that to install the love of Christ in the heart of the people they would have to approach through the medium of mother tongue and started learning it.
Within three months they printed in their own printing press the first Assamese Primer for use in the schools which they had established. Even before their arrival, the English missionaries Carey and Marshman had started their work in this direction from Serampore near Calcutta and in collaboration with an Assamese Pandit Atmaram Sarma of Kaliabor of Nowgong district, they had translated the entire Bible into Assamese and published it from Serampore in 1813. This was the first Assamese book in print. (23)

With the publication of the Bible into Assamese prose by the American Baptist missionaries, the modern period of Assamese begins. The missionaries made Sibsagar in Eastern Assam, the centre of their activities and used the dialect of Sibsagar for their literary purposes. Before that all literary activities were carried on in Western Assam under the patronage of the kings of Kamatapura or Koch Bihar. In 1846, the missionaries started a monthly periodical called "Aroonodoi" (Arunodaya) and in 1848, N. Brown was published the first Assamese Grammar. The first Assamese—English dictionary compiled by M. Bronson was published by the missionaries in 1867. Under the influence of the missionaries, a set of Assamese writers grew up and books and periodicals in the language of Eastern Assam were multiplied. Thus the traditions of Ahom court supported by the mission press established the language of eastern Assam as the literary language of the entire province. (24)
The missionaries were satisfied not only with printing books in Assamese, they also fought hard to re-establish Assamese in the courts and schools of Assam. Anondoram Dhekial Phukan an Assamese gentleman coming from an Aristocratic family educated in English school mainly helped the missionaries in this regard. Dhekial Phukan agitated for the re-instalment of Assamese language in the courts and schools of Assam and published several spirited articles on the subject in the Aroonoday. Phukan's "A few remarks on the Assamese language"— a pamphlet of forceful and powerful pleading for the same cause was published in 1849 from the Baptist Mission at Sibsagar. A clear picture of the situation may be presented through the following words of Anondoram himself— "Since the annexation of the province to the British Empire, Sanskrit education owing to the want of encouragement, has gradually been abolished. A certain number of schools styled vernacular schools has been established in the country. Instructions in these schools are imparted in a foreign language, viz., the Bengalee, which is but imperfectly understood by the teachers themselves not to speak of pupils". In 1853-54 A.J. Moffat Mills in his report supported the views of Anondoram Barua and strongly recommended that the council of Education may favourably consider for "the substitution of the vernacular language and the completion of the course of vernacular education in Bengalee". Missionaries like A.H. Denferth and Bronson
pleaded for re-installation of Assamese language. Rev. Bronson, a missionary wrote—always and everywhere the language used is Assamese, not Bengalee; in our humble opinion, the only way to render any plan of education popular is to give them in their own mother tongue ...........(28)†

The writings of Phukan in the name of "Brown, Bronson and Native" gave a shape to the language movement. Among the British administrators, the officiating commissioner Col. Hutton gave the verdict in favour of Assamese. Thus at last the British realized the fault and felt the necessity of changing their language policy and in 1873 the Lt. Governor ordered the Education and Law departments to re-instate Assamese in the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. (29)

It may be noted here that during this period Assamese language was finding its way out to establish itself as a recognized language but the literary activities were negligible. The Baptist Missionaries published Assamese Grammar,

† Bengal Public Consultations, 1st March 1855 No. 93.
Bronson to the Lt. Governor of Bengal vide Report on Assam 1854, 15th November 1854 Appendix I of pp XXVIII for letter from A.H. Danforth, a missionary to Moffatt Mills pleading for the introduction of Assamese in place of Bengali.
Dictionary, Text books, and other books and the best journal
and newspaper of that time the "Aroonodoi" for thirty-seven
years. Through this journal, missionaries along with Assamese
leaders fought as the valient warriors to re-establish the
language in the schools and courts, compelled the Assamese
writers to write in new Assamese, rejuvenated the Assamese
language by introducing English elements in the Assamese
vocabulary, introducing English influence in the sentence
construction. Above all, they made the Assamese self-confident.
The year 1873 can be said as the distinct milestone in the
history of the development of Assamese language. During this
year Assamese re-established its lost place in the schools
and courts and Hemchandra Baruah began to write Assamese
text-books. (30)

Assamese, the language of Assam with such a background
and originality had to fight hard to pass through several
critical periods to establish itself as the court language
and medium of instruction in the state.

Thus the language, which was once at the point of
extinction, survived, renewed its past glory and flourished
into a full fledged developed modern Indian language. The
constitution of the Indian Republic in its Schedule VIII(32)
has recognised Assamese as one of the fourteen major regional
languages of India.
During this long period, beginning from the 14th century to the present day, the language has experienced various changes simultaneously with its political upheavals. It has enriched itself by accepting and assimilating different vocabularies which are used in everyday speech and writing.

(b) Assamese Vocabulary

Dr. B.K. Kakati in his book, "Assamese, Its formation and Development", the first work of its kind on Assamese has stated that Assamese may be divided dialectically into Eastern Assamese and Western Assamese. The language from Sadia, the eastern most frontier down to Gauhati exhibits a certain homogenity and hardly presents any notable point of divergence from the spoken dialect of Sibsagar, the capital of the late Ahom kings. And for purposes of literature this dialect is generally regarded as the standard language. (31) Comparatively a later study on Assamese phonology (32) has tried to divide the linguistic map of Assam dialectically into two major regions, Eastern Assam covering the whole of the eastern districts upto the districts of Nowgong and Western Assamese beginning with the western half of Nowgong to the district of Goalpara. While the phonological study of the language may be very much concerned with the area of the dialectical groups both eastern and western, it is observed that a spontaneous rapport is being established through a
system of two ways traffic— one, with the spread of education, military service, newspaper and radios, better means of communication and urbanization— the standard Assamese is being used by more and more people belonging to western Assamese dialectic group, while on the other hand the spread of education and growth in the number of literary persons in western Assam and specially in Kamrup, Western Assamese forms and dialects also have crept into the standard literary style. With these dialectical divergences Assamese language like other New Indo-Aryan (N.I.A.) languages has derived its vocabulary from different sources.

Assam is the land of the people, who represent a mixture of the different races, speaking various languages like Austric (Khasi), Sino-Tibetan representing Bodo or Kachari speeches and the Tai or Ahom. It is therefore natural that these languages would greatly influence the phonological and morphological traits of Assamese— a branch of Indo-Aryan. Dr. B.K. Kakati traces Austric elements in Assamese and holds that the vocables that are regarded in Assamese as indigenous have mostly been taken over from Austric speakers. The Bodo and Ahom kings ruled over Assam at different times and their rules lead to the enrichment of the Assamese vocables. Of all the modern Indo-Aryan language, Assamese is the most compact and complex being influenced by a large number of Indo-Tibetan tongues and dialect.
It may be stated that the vocabularies of Assamese have largely been derived from Sanskrit and Prakrit. The original Sanskrit words are sparingly used and they are replaced by 'tadbhava' and "ardhatadbhava" words. Assamese being a living and growing language has borrowed a great number of words from other new Indo-Aryan languages. It has also received some Persian and Arabic words, chiefly for administrative and legal purposes. In recent years English words and expressions are percolating into Assamese. All these factors have contributed towards the development of Assamese language and made it a subtle and powerful medium of expression. (35)

Keeping in view the different components, Assamese vocabularies can be divided into four classes according to their sources. They are: 1) tatsama, 2) tadbhava, 3) native and 4) foreign. (36) In conformity with other Indian modern languages the Assamese vocabularies can be further divided mainly into six types. They are: 1) tatsama, 2) artha-tatsama, 3) tadbhava, 4) native and other Indian languages, 5) European and other foreign languages and 6) Non-Aryan words. (37)

The direct Sanskrit words are the tatsamas—namely, Satya, Karma, Dharma etc. In some cases the pronunciation of tatsama words deviate from its original and these words are called ardha-tatsamas.

Viz. Tatsama — Bhakti, Ratna, Jatna, Sapatni.

Ardha-tatsama — Bhakti, Ratna, Jatana, Satini etc.
A good number of Sanskrit words have taken new shape in Assamese while coming through Prakrit. They are called 'taddbhava'. Many words of our daily use are that refer to physical organs, adjectives, pronouns, verbs, numericals relating to animals, nature etc are 'tadbhavta'. They are like Hat, Pav, Mur, Nak, Kan, Dant, Saradh, Bhani, Bhai, Nai, Lora, Bijuli, Loha, Mati, Sap, Ek, Dui, Adha etc.

The native words are: Kharu, laru, Teteli, Khiriki, Gaz, Tupi, Dhol, Pet etc.

The native words further classified into three classes. They are: 1) **Austro Asiatic**: i) Khasi, ii) Kol, iii) Malay.

2) **Tibeto Burmese**: i) Bodo and 3) **Thai**. (38)

A few examples are given here from -

1) **Khasi** - Kingkhab, Khang, Methon, Sokora, Nodaka, Takona, Janjal etc.

2) **Kol** - Atomtokari, Latum, Sikora, Thetuoi, Bhoda, Top, Gohari, Tezpi etc.

3) **Malay** - Asusuta, Boga, Boka, Bilak, Song, Gahari, Gerekani, Teleka, Laopani etc.

From Bodo - Hafalu, Jakhala, Jung, Hoja, Hengar, Haophao, Laokhola, Silikha, Dauk, Dibru, Dihong, Digboi, Mangaldoi etc.

From Thai - Pokha, Pung, Phang, Ban, Buranji, Tan, Teka, Kareng, Rang etc.
Some foreign words have entered into the Assamese language directly. Dr. B.K. Barua tried to classify the foreign words into two types one that have come from outside the country. Some other coming from Hindi, Oriya, Bengali, Gujarati entered into the Assamese language due to educational, cultural and business connections with people speaking those languages. For example, from Hindi, Haija, Chahida, Mahanga Apos etc.

From Bengali - Bhejal, Betar, etc.
From Gujrati - Hartal etc.

Foreign words coming from outside the country are mainly Persian and European. Persian words include, Persian, Arabic and Turkish, some of these words have changed their original meaning in Assamese. The European words have entered into Assamese through English and other European languages. Of these English, Portugees, French must be mentioned where English occupies the first place for a long list of words. Words from other languages like Chinese, Japanese, and Malay words have come through English also. Above these there are some hybrid words like—— Head Pandit, Police Sahab, Mastari, Garmil, Berasik, Jepghari, Mambati, Rajmehal, Bazarbhao etc.

There are some other hybrid words like—— Garowan, Darowan, Daktarkhana, Chapakhana, Karikar, Sadagar, Ghoskhor, Babugiri, Dalisa, Bagicha, Phuldani, Pkdani, Mauzadar, Ansider, Jabanbandi, Dagabaj, Rangin, Choukhin, Badnam, Garkaptani etc.
To make the meaning more clear two words from two different languages are made into one. Such as— Dhandaulat, Hatbazar, Lajsaram etc. (39)

A living language can be compared with the flowing river. The Assamese language while passing through the ages has enriched itself with the combination of all the Austro-Tibet-Burmese languages. (40) Such a resourceful language has a rich vocabulary which have been assimilated into it from a large number of sources. Assam is the State where such a rich and flourishing language is the main vehicle of communication through which every inhabitant expresses his feelings and thoughts. Though situated at the eastern region of the country, the State has the distinct reflection of the mother country India, because here in Assam people from all the parts of the country, every nook and corner, have come to settle down and mingled with Assamese culture and language. This unique characteristic of acceptance of Assamese people has enlarged the scope of the language all throughout.

The discussion above has reflected that Assamese vocabulary has been derived from so many sources and it will go on processing and coming new vocabularies in the course of time. To compare it with the mighty Brahmaputra, which is flowing through the state, it can be said that Assamese language is being flooded with many vocabularies from a variety of sources and has made the language rich, fertile
and growing through the ages.

(c) Vocabulary as a problem area in reading materials in Assamese for children

Language is the most important means of communication through which the members of the society conserve, transfer and create knowledge and pass on from one to another generation. The epitomized knowledge of the civilization is systematized and divided into different branches of knowledge. It is through language that knowledge may be passed directly from one to another. It seems that to convey an idea into the mind of another, is to convey a sound into his ear. Thus imparting knowledge gets assimilated to a purely physical process. It would probably be admitted with little hesitation that a child gets the idea of say, a 'hat' by using it as other persons do, by covering the head with it, giving it to others to wear, having it to put on by others when going out. (41)

Society exists through a process of transmission. This transmission occurs by means of communication— of habits, of doing, thinking and feeling from the older generation to the younger generation, communication of ideals, aims, hopes, beliefs, aspirations, standards, opinions, knowledge and helps the development of common understanding among the members of the society which is very important for social group living. (42) Language as the most important tool of communication among the human beings both in sounds and symbols has not only helped
in its survival but also developed it. The development and enrichment of language occurs through the new words, better expressions and vocabularies that are coined in the society. Preservation of the vast knowledge is possible only through the written symbols in the storehouse of knowledge—the books.

Books are read for various purposes—for information, entertainment, formation of attitudes, ideas, habits, ideals and interests. While introducing children to the world of knowledge, it becomes essential to have the right kind of books which may cater to their needs and requirements and which greatly stimulate their imagination. Above all, it must be intelligible to the child for whom the book is meant. For this purpose, the book is to be written in a language which is known to the child. When it is said that the language is known to the child, it means that the child understands the language clearly, comprehends the meanings of the words, expressions and vocabularies used in the language so that he can think and imagine.

Books also introduce children to words which are the chief tools of communication among civilized people. The child who has a greater stock of words at his disposal finds it easy to express his feelings, ideas, imagination and also to understand others both in speech and writing. This enables him to pose questions he wants to ask, to find out things he
wants to know and convey thoughts and feelings he needs to share.

Children are extremely susceptible to the power of words and every good mother knows the importance of talking to her infant and the joy and ease that come to both of them as they learn to communicate. As the child learns to read, books open wider avenues to a range of communication far greater than that of conversation within his family or even with his teachers at school. Even at this stage of science and technology when man is exposed to such a varied means of communication media like broadcasting, television, cinema, etc., books are still the primary means by which knowledge is passed from mind to mind, between people who have never met and are never likely to meet, between people of different countries and of different epochs. A child who learns to read and understands and has wide access to books has his own independent road to every kind of knowledge and thereby the child's every day living can be enriched.

Writing for children is an art and it makes great demands on the author. A good writer should know his readers and their likings. He has to captivate them not only with the content but equally with his style of presentation which should be easy, simple, spontaneous and full of charm. He must have a correct idea as to the vocabulary strength of the children for whom he is writing, then only their reading will
be effective. If the author can produce various reading materials according to the vocabulary strength of the children it would be more attractive, appealing and also effective.

The reading materials may be presented in a variety of forms—such as an effective conversational form, a simple narration, an interesting story or dialogue and good verses, and activity that involves the child readers—all these can be used with effect, provided the form is comprehensible and suits the purpose. Each of these forms require such vocabularies which can be appropriately used expressing the purpose clearly and effectively. Accordingly, the author must be able to made use of all those vocabularies which are known to the children and also suitable to his form of expression.

Children learn from different sources. The most important formal way in which children learn is the instruction they get in the schools. Through the text-books, reference books, story books, information books, and other reading materials they get in the school library and other informal means of communications like conversations with teachers and students, discussions, where language is the main vehicle of expression.

Text books are the most important techniques of teaching learning process. These exercise a very potent influence in determining the content and method in teaching. The fact that text book is very essential for the teacher and the taught
cannot be denied. If the text book is really useful and effective in fulfilling its role in the process of transmission of education it must be an ideal book, well planned and judiciously selected.

India is yet to catch up with other advanced countries in the field of education, especially in the production of good reading materials at all stages of education. Text books used in most of the states in this country are unattractive, and fail to capture the attention of the pupils. Most of the text books are not written in the style of a good text book and suffer from lack of good diction. The subject matter is presented in a language which is not quite suited to children of different age groups. The chief draw-back of the text-books prescribed for various classes is that writers of text-books make use of vocabulary which are not suitable to the pupils.\(^*\) The defective text-books do stand on the way of proper education of the children.

It is not enough to impose some information about the world around in reading materials for children. What is

\[\text{An example - Sahitya Chayan (For New Class VI) p. 87 Published by the State Text-book Production and Publication Corporation Limited.}\\
\text{রচয়িতা দীপক সূচনালী, প্রকাশনী হস্তাক্ষর কর্তা (এমএসই তুলনা)।}\\
\text{Again in Bhugol Bikash - Published by the S.P. P. C. Limited p. 11 in Fig. 9 the Bengali script is used as in পৃথিবীর প্রত্যেক\\
\text{বিভাগ রচনা etc.}\\
\text{In the same book on p. 52 the word বিশাল is difficult for the particular grade.}\]

\(^*\)
urgently needed is whatever minimum amount of information or knowledge is expected to be given must be presented to children in clear and intelligible language to attract their minds to the reading materials and develop the reading habit to a considerable extent.

A scientific research to find out the suitability of words for various grades has not yet been done for various regional languages of the country. The result is that the books often contain words which actually form a part of an adult vocabulary rather than that of a child. One way of improving education is to put in the hands of children suitable text-books and other reading materials written in a language which is their own language and not that of adults who write these text-books for them.

There are many determinants which constitute together and determine the quality of text-books such as presentation, contents, illustration, layout, get-up, type, size and vocabulary. Out of these determinants judicious, graded and appropriate vocabulary employed in a text-book can rightly be claimed as a spirit in a text-book. Vocabulary is the nucleus or the store of knowledge of words which could be utilized for further learning. It is a vehicle of understanding and self-expression. In order to write these text-books or other reading materials for children it is essential to know as to what words are in the range of comprehension of children of various grades.
The Secondary Education Commission of 1964-66 (47) has rightly observed that text-book writing and production have not received the attention they deserve. In most school subjects, there is a proliferation of low quality, sub-standard and badly produced books particularly in the regional languages. The Commission felt that lack of research in the preparation and production text-books is one of the contributing factors for such a state of condition.

In this background we consider that the basic vocabulary of Assamese language stands as an important problem area. Assamese is a language with a rich stock of vocabulary gathered from different layers of Indo-Aryan speech imported at different periods from people migrating to Assam from different parts of India. The present Assamese language is therefore like a river made up of several streams of dialect which had their origin at different places. (48) The influence of foreign rules also have left their marks on the vocabulary of the language. A careful study of the language will give a long list of contributors that have enriched the stock of Assamese vocabulary. Therefore, the reading materials of Assamese for children offer a wide field for an important study. While producing reading materials in a variety of forms in Assamese for children, the author acquaints them with the various words in the text-books, supplementary books, and work books with the ready stock of vocabulary as his disposal. This contributes to the emergence of vocabulary as a problem area.
As Assamese is the medium of instruction in the schools of Assam, the Assamese reading materials offer a wide field of resource materials for research and the basic Assamese vocabulary promises a fruitful problem area for sincere research work.

(d) **Need for the present study**

An investigation into the basic Assamese vocabulary of a age group will help produce effective reading materials. Assamese being a rich, growing, developing language deserves a good amount of rich and potential reading materials. Whatever is written must be meaningful to the children and the writer should use the words and terms which are known to the children. So, if the writer has at his disposal, a ready stock of the basic vocabulary of the children, he will be able to use them freely to produce the most valuable narratives and descriptions instead of producing with dry, rough, tooth-breaking words.

The vocabulary problem is more acute in the text-books. Many of the books used as texts in the primary and Secondary Schools are written by specialists who have little understanding of the reading limitations of the children for whom they are written. The problems of vocabulary chiefly centre round 'selection and grading'. Selection of suitable vocabulary at a particular age level is of great importance. Graded vocabulary helps the writers to produce reading materials in such a
way which will be understood clearly by the children. A great deal of selection and grading of vocabulary and sentences have been done in the western countries. In view of the importance of graded vocabulary the need is urgently felt for the vocabulary that is systematically controlled and drawn from word lists which can be developed through research.

Since Assamese is the medium of instruction in the schools of Assam, it is essential that a systematic study be undertaken to locate the words which are understood by children. It is a truism that a thing is best understood through the mother tongue, however learned one may be in a foreign language, because it is so firmly rooted that it forms a part of our mental lives. It supplies automatic responses to our experiences. So one's mother tongue, which is the vehicle of all kinds of human thoughts needs to be fairly advanced in vocabulary and syntax and capable of expressing all the nuances required for the expressions of thoughts and feelings. (49)

Assam is a state in the eastern part of India. In the introductory chapter it has been shown how this state has maintained itself through different critical periods both as regards its area and its own language—Assamese. The investigator has taken up only the plains districts of the State where the mother tongue of the vast majority of the population is Assamese. She has not taken the other districts of Karbi Anglong and the Cachar Hills districts where Assamese is not the mother tongue and medium of instruction in the schools.
Fig. 1

1. GOALPARA
2. KAMRUP
3. DARRANG
4. NOWGONG
5. LAKHIMPUR
6. SIBSAGAR
7. DIBRUGARH

STATE BOUNDARY
DISTRICT

MEGHALAYA
BHUTAN
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
NAGALAND
The districts that have been taken into the study are Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur. (Fig. 1). These are the plains districts of Assam where Assamese is the main and only language spoken by all the people though there may be a number of dialectical groups. It is the mother tongue of all the school going children and also the medium of instruction in the schools.

The investigator felt the need of such a study to cover the area so that the problems, which effect the development of this part of the country, especially in the educational field, will be solved. An investigation at the root cause of learning, learning through the mother tongue, it is believed, will contribute immensely to the educational development of the state.

The need of such a study is seriously felt by textbook writers and those who are particularly associated with children's literature of the state. They are of the view that a descriptive study of basic Assamese Vocabulary for different age levels will help the writers in producing fruitful reading materials for children. They expect great help from the glossary of word lists, which is totally absent in the state. (The investigator supplied a questionnaire (Appendix A) and had interviews with them.)

The investigators feel the need to find out the basic Assamese Vocabulary of children of Class VI (Usually 11 +) and
prepare a glossary for the purpose of writing reading materials scientifically.

Why Vocabulary area?

The study on the language particularly in the vocabulary area is totally absent in the state. While vocabulary lists have been prepared in other languages like Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali, Assamese writers are yet to be presented with the basic vocabulary lists for different age groups so that they can prepare better reading materials for children.

Importance of Vocabulary on Education

The present investigator has chosen the vocabulary study as she feels the importance of vocabulary on all the inputs of education such as text-books, teaching, examination, co-curricular activities and other spheres of life.

A list of Assamese Vocabulary

The present study has been made with a view to prepare a list of basic Assamese Vocabulary with the objective to serve for teaching through Assamese. The Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, has undertaken several vocabulary studies for preparing English Vocabulary lists. So also some vocabulary lists on several regional languages have been prepared in different Universities but nothing have been done so far in Assamese language. She feels such a vocabulary list in Assamese will help all the writers
including those of text-books and also to find out the extent of gap between the expected vocabulary and the actual vocabulary, so that a list for a particular age level could be prepared which will help in teaching a particular grade in the schools of Assam.

Such a list of words is needed in schools of Assam on various grounds:

1) Assam is a state consisting of a population whose origin belongs to different castes, creeds, and tribes and of different cultures, but with Assamese as the mother tongue, though it consists of different dialectical groups.

2) Assam being one of the states of the eastern region encounters certain difficulties in its development especially in the field of education where the problem of stagnation and dropouts in the primary level is still to be weeded out. Among the various causes of wastage and stagnation the most important are the educational causes and one of the contributing factors is the unsuitable text-books to the different grades that lead to the cause of dropouts.

3) Quite a large number of pupils at the primary level come from backward areas and are a first generation students, therefore, parents can hardly contribute in their learnings.

Reading materials and actual vocabulary

The text-books for different grades in the schools of Assam are approved by the D.P.I. and produced by the Text
Book Production Corporation. The writers of these text books do not follow any norm or standard for selecting vocabulary for children of different age levels. They mostly use the same set of vocabulary means for adults. Little attention is given into the children's vocabulary of different age levels in preparing the reading materials of different grades. A knowledge of the actual vocabulary of the students of different ages will help a scientific approach in teaching them on psychological grounds. Therefore the investigator felt the need for the content analysis of the text-books and supplementary books in terms of vocabulary for computing the 'estimated vocabulary' and comparing it with the actual vocabulary of the students.

Production of Text-books and the present study

Producing school books is an important task which requires a good deal of thinking from the different angles of educational, psychological and technical knowhow. It is not a combination of a number of lessons but gradation of lessons according to difficulty value.

A list of actual vocabulary bearing the difficulty value of each word will help the writer not only to write school-books but also to grade lessons according to their difficulty value. To put it more clearly, he will use words with less difficulty value in lessons which will come first, and words with more difficulty value in lessons which will
come later.

Illustrations

Words with greater difficulty value may be exposed with elaborate illustrations where words with less difficulty value may go without illustrations.

Required exposures and the present study

The text-book writers need a criterion by which they can ascertain the required exposure of a word in the text book. An actual vocabulary list having difficulty value of each word can satisfactorily meet this need of the text book writers. The words with less difficulty value may not be repeated again and again, whereas the words with great difficulty value would need several exposures.

New words and the present study

The new words are to be introduced to the students. They are to be proportionate and introduced at appropriate situations. So the list will help the text-book writers and others in determining the types of situations.

The backward and the gifted children and the present study

The list of vocabulary will help the teachers to prepare diagnostic tests for children who are retarded in language development, on the other hand separate reading materials may be prepared by writers for the gifted children. The mentally
retarded or the dull child is found to have poor language or vocabulary. They cannot catch up with the normal children in their language development and vocabulary size. On the other hand, the gifted children usually have a large vocabulary and good verbal ability. They are interested in using them in communication with the teacher and the class. Even though what they say may be above the level of comprehension of the rest of the class, gifted children should be given an opportunity to express themselves, particularly in writing in reports and in explanations and discussions in a classroom. (50)

The child with superior intelligence reads widely and requires much more than text-books. Ordinarily he prefers books which would be chosen by older children. (51) This necessitated a wide range of reading materials for the gifted children. The present study will help the text-book writer to prepare graded text-books for the superior, average and below average children.

**Juvenile literature and the present study**

The editors of juvenile magazines may be careful to see that the right words are used from the graded vocabulary so that they may inculcate the magazine reading habit without any difficulty.

**Radio Programme and the present study**

Those who are engaged in Radio Programmes for children will also be helped by such a list. The programme which is
purely auditory requires such words which will make the communication more meaningful. Q. Randolph asserts that "since we wish our words to communicate something, we need to watch that an unfortunate choice will trivially distract attention from what we are communicating to mere words we are using." (Randolph, Q. Op. Cit. p. 122). The findings of the present study will help the Radio Programme Executives in their pursuit of effective communication to the little children.

Child Centric Education and the Present Study

To know the actual vocabulary of the children is to know them. Modern education demands from the teacher knowledge of both John — the educand and Latin- the subject. This necessitates the knowledge of vocabulary of the children which is the vehicle of thought. The effective teaching pre-supposes teacher's knowledge of the capacity of the educand's instrument of thought.

The classroom climate and the present study

The classroom climate which is built-up as a result of the classroom interaction between teacher and students as well as among students, depends to a great extent upon teachers knowledge and handling of the actual vocabulary of the students. Dominative classroom behaviour of the teacher, which may be characterized by excessive use of words that are beyond the comprehension of the students, adversely affect the classroom
interaction. On the contrary the integrative behaviour of the teacher, marked by ingenuous control of vocabulary creates such a conducive classroom climate that the enthusiastic classroom interaction is generated as a result. An ingenuous vocabulary control is the result of an acquaintance with the actual vocabulary of the children. The findings of the present study will put the teachers in a better position to bring effective classroom interaction by keeping their universe of vocabulary in the classroom limited to the actual range of that of the class.

In tackling of new words, the teacher has to decide whether a particular word should be tackled by synonyms or autonyms or by paradigms or by referring to some other word with which it has a sygmatic relation. The decision of the teacher is influenced by the intelligibility of the word he is going to expose to tackle the particular word. A list of vocabulary bearing the difficulty value of each item will help the teacher to take the decision of whether he will go for the synonyms or antonyms, or paradigms to tackle the words.

**Correction work**

For correction work in the classroom, the teacher needs know the actual vocabulary of the students. Absence of such a knowledge will make the teachers use difficult words in correction. The findings of the present study will help the
teacher to ascertain whether the word he is going to use for correction is fit for the age level or not.

**Paper setters**

Unintelligible vocabulary used in the question papers sometimes become the cause of defective evaluation of students' achievements. The findings of the present study will help the paper setters in their use of words in the questions of a given grade.