CHAPTER II

A SHORT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
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The name 'Goalpara' is associated with the
term "Gwali" or "Goal" which means milkmen. In fact,
there are divergent views and opinions about the origin
of the name Goalpara. It is believed that during the
reign of the Deva Kings of Assam, Goalpara was under
the administration of a Deputy named Iswara Ghosa. He was
influenced by Buddhism to such an extent that he became
over-generous to his subjects and granted a plot of
land to a Brahmin of the then Gwalitippika district
(which presumably included portions of modern Goalpara
district). There is a belief that the name 'Goalpara'
is perhaps derived from Gwalitippika which literally
means Gwali Village i.e. milkmen's village. Another
version is that near the confluence of the Manas river
with the Brahmaputra there was a big char (an island)
which in time became an ideal place for grazing
cattle. It is believed that many 'Goalas' (milkmen)
settled with their cattle on this char and a colony of

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
milkmen popularly known as 'Goaltuli' sprang up. It is said that the name Goalpara is a corrupt form of the term 'Goaltuli'. The district was named after the present Goalpara town which was the first headquarters of the district.1

The Goalpara District had never been a separate political entity under its own king. Its history has to be considered in connection with that of various kingdoms, of which it formed a part from time to time. It was originally included in the ancient Hindu Kingdom of Kamrupa which is mentioned in the Mahabharata and which at one time comprised North Eastern Bengal and a great part of which is now known as the State of Assam.2 Naraka's name is mentioned in the Yogini Tantra as one of the first prospectors of Kamarupa and the builder of the causeway to the southern face of the hill Nilachala on which the temple of Kamakhya stands. His son Bhagadatta is mentioned in the Mahabharata as fighting on the side of the Kauravas at the great

battle of Kurukshetra. Practically nothing is known of the history of the district for the next two thousand years. About the 12th Century A.D., Goalpara is said to have been conquered first by the Sen and then by the Pal Kings of Bengal but there are also practically no records of the period of their occupation. According to the traditions of the Mahapurushia, it subsequently formed part of a kingdom called Kamata whose rule at the beginning of the 14th Century was named Narayan. In the 15th Century the district was included in the dominions of the Khyen princes, whose capital Kamatapur, the modern Lal Bazar in Cooch Behar state, was sacked by the Muslims in 1498 A.D. 1. A few years later it passed into the hands of the Koch Kings, who also established their capital in Cooch Behar. The Koch Kingdom was founded by a Mech named Viswa Narayan. He was succeeded in 1534 A.D. by his son Malla Deo who assumed the name of Nara Narayan (1534-1584 A.D.). His reign represents the Zenith of the Koch power. He received the submission of the Ahom King, the Kachari Raja and the Raja of Manipur and conquered and slew the Kings of Jaintia, Tippera and Sylhet. Thereafter,

Nara Narayan tried to conquer Gaur but failed. Nara Narayan refused to accept his defeat as final and a few years later, joined with the Emperor Akbar in the second attack upon Gaur. This enterprise was crowned with success and Gaur was divided between Akbar and the Koch King. The decline and fall of the Koch Kingdom, which had attained to an extraordinary height of prosperity and power within the space of two generations, was as rapid as its rise, on account of the division of the Kingdom between Nara Narayan's son and nephew.

The Koch Kingdom was divided in about 1580 A.D., and the country east of the Sankosh which included Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang was surrendered to Raqhu Rai, the nephew of Nara Narayan; while the territory that lay west of that river was reserved for the son of that prince. Disputes, however, soon broke out between the two families and Goalpara was conquered by the Muslims who had been called by the Nara Narayan's son to his assistance. The aid of the Ahoms was invoked on the other side and for some years the war was between these two powers dragged on with varying results. In 1631, peace was concluded and the Barnadi, which now separated

Kamrup from Darrang, was fixed as the boundary between Muslim and Ahom territory. In 1658 the Ahoms advanced again, occupied Goalpara and held it for three years but were compelled to retreat before Mir Jumla's army. From that time onwards, the district formed part of the Muslim dominions till, with the rest of Bengal, it was ceded to the British in 1765 A.D.¹

The two distinct portions of the district are the Northern part and the Southern part. The Northern part is a modern accretion of the District. The Southern part was included in the Permanent Settlement of 1793. In later years, the Southern part was known as Parganas and the Northern part as Duars. The Southern part of the district came under the East India Company in 1765, but the Northern portion (the Duars) came under the British administration after the Bhutan War of 1864. From 1765 to 1822, the old Thanas of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari formed a part of the Rangpur district of Bengal, which was known as Rangamatti district. But in 1822, those Thanas together with the Garo Hills were made into a new district called "The North-East Rangpur" (afterwards Goalpara District). In 1826.

this district was transferred from Bengal to Assam, but in 1867 those three thanas mentioned above were re-transferred to Bengal to form a part of Cooch Behar Commissionership. These changes took place shortly after the Duars were annexed to British India. In 1894 the Duars along with the said thanas were again transferred to Assam to form the Goalpara district. It again became a part of the then Eastern Bengal in 1905. In 1912 the whole district was permanently transferred to Assam. According to the Census Report of 1951 the district had two sub-divisions, viz., Dhubri and Goalpara. For efficient administration, a new sub-division was created on the 9th February, 1957 with the Gossaigaon, Kokrajhar, Bijni and Sidli Police Stations from the old Dhubri sub-division. At present the Dhubri sub-division consists of the Police Stations of Golakganj, Dhubri, Bilasipara, South Salmara and Mankachar. Under the Goalpara sub-division fall the Police Stations of Lakhipur, Goalpara, North Salmara and Dudhnai.

POPULATION GROWTH IN GOALPARA DISTRICT

THE DISTRICT FROM GEOGRAPHICAL AND
SOCIO-CULTURAL VIEW POINT.

Geographically the district is bounded on the
South by the Garo Hills district of Meghalaya, on the
North by the mountainous regions of Bhutan, on the
East by Kamrup, and on the West by Bangladesh and East
Bihar and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal. The
district lying on both sides of the Brahmaputra is the
westernmost district of the State of Assam. It lies between latitudes 25° 28' and 26° 54' North and
longitudes 89° 42' and 90° 06' East. In shape, the
district may roughly be described as a square of side
102 kms. with a strip of 64 kilometres in length by 11
kilometres in breadth appended to its South-West corner.
Its area according to Central Statistical Organisation
on 1971 is 10,359 square kilometres. And as per the Census of 1971, the district had a population of 22,27,413,
consisting of 11,54,449 males and 10,72,964 females.
The district's position from the fifth place in the
1961 Census, moved up to fourth place in the 1971 Census in respect of density of population among the districts of the State.1

1. Assam District Gazetteers, Goalpara District,
Physically the greater part of Goalpara consists of a level plain, the lower portion of which is intersected by the mighty Brahmaputra. A few outlying spurs of the Assam Hills Range project towards the river from South and even appear on the North bank of Brahmaputra. The Northern and the Western portion is much broken up by small ranges of low hills. On the East and the South there are several ranges projecting from the Garo Hills which reach right down the Brahmaputra river. Near the Goalpara town there are isolated hills projecting above the district which was formerly known as Eastern Duars at the foot of the Bhutan hills, is a sparsely populated area and is mostly covered by grass and dense forests.1

In the district, the Brahmaputra is the principal river and flows either through or along the boundary of the district for about 116 kms. The whole drainage of the district ultimately finds its way to it.2 There are large number of reserve forests fairly distributed all over the district.

The climatic features of the district are intermediate between those of the North Bengal plains and the Assam Valley. The year may be divided into three seasons. The cold season is from December to February. The next three months may be termed as the season of thunderstorms. The South-West monsoon season is from June to September. October and November constitute the post-monsoon season. The rainfall increases from the South to North. The average annual rainfall in the district is 2801.3 mm. During the period March to May, rainfall is mostly thundershowers. The South-West monsoon arrives over the district, towards the end of May and continues till early October. June is the month with the heaviest rainfall. The air is highly humid throughout the year.¹

At the turn of the century (1901), the district had 1,461 villages only, which increased to 3,819 villages in 1971 giving a net increase of 2,358 villages.²

There were only two towns in the district in 1901, namely Dhubri and Goalpara with population of 3,737 and 6,287 persons respectively, Gauripur with a population of 4,311 persons was declared as town in 1902.

². Ibid, P. 86.
During the next decade, six new places namely Bilasipara, Kokrajhar, Mankachar, Bongaigaon, Sapatgram and Abhaynagar were shown as towns in the Census of 1961. Thus, in 1961, there were altogether nine towns with an urban population of 1,02,143 persons. The number of towns increased to eleven by 1971 adding two new towns viz. Bijni and Lakhipur with population of 7,999 and 5,021.

According to the Census report of 1961, the people of the district speaks sixty languages and dialects as their mother tongue. Assamese is the predominant language in the district and 66.14% of the district’s total population speaks it as their mother tongue. The next important language according to the Census Report is Bengali which is spoken by 11.98% of the total population. Third comes the Bodo speakers who constitute 10% of the total population. The Hindi speaking people were 2.89% only. People speaking Santhali as their mother language, accounts for 2.36% persons of the total population. There are only 2.16% persons of the total population who uses Garo as their mother tongue. The rest of the people speak either a language or a dialect as their mother tongue but the number

of such groups of speakers was very insignificant groups in the district as each of such groups was even below 2%.

Many other indigenous people due to their long association with Assamese speaking people in various walks of life, adopting Assamese language and culture were returned as Assamese speakers. People speaking other principal languages such as Garo, Rabha, Nepali, Kurukh also increased considerably during the period of 1951-61.¹

The religious life of the district is predominated by Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus constitute the major religious community in the district, their percentage in 1971 being 53.92 of the total population of the district. The Hindus are divided into three principal sects viz., Saktism, Saivism and Vaishnavism. In 1971, the Muslim community in the district had 9,10,000 persons, forming 42.25% of the total population. Christians, Buddhists, Jains etc. together formed a very low percent of the district population. At the end of the last century the population of the district was composed of numerous castes.²

The Hindus in the district observed many festivals, ritualistic and others, of local nature. The biggest festival of the year is the Durga Puja when brisk preparations are made for days in all the community pujapalaces to invoke the Mother Goddess. Another important religious festival observed widely in the district is the Sivaratri. Another religious festival of considerable importance in the district in honour of Lord Krishna are Doljatra, Janmastami, and Rashijatra. Ashokastami is another important festival held in the district when ritual baths are taken by pilgrims in the Brahmaputra. Various other pujas and festivals observed in the district include Kalipuja, Biswakarma puja, Lakshmi puja, Kartik puja, Jagadhatri puja and Saraswati puja. On the other hand, special festivals of the Assamese are the three Bihus and tithis of Sri Sri Sankardeva, Madhavdeva, Demodardeva, Harideva and Gopaldeva. Among the Muslim festivals, the Id-uz-Zuhar, Muharram, Fatiha-i-duazdaham, Shab-e-barat and Id-ul-fitr are important. On the occasions of the Id-uz-Zuhar and Id-ul-fitr, the Muslims wear their new white attire and go to the local Idqhas to hold prayer services. Although some of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses worshipped by the Kacharies, the religious festivals of
the Kacharies of the district are different from those observed by the Hindus. They believe in Bathau who is looked upon as the tutelary 'deity of the house'.

In the district of Goalpara, among the Hindus, the property is generally held by the head of the family and after the death of the father, the sons and daughters inherit the property. In the matter of inheritance and succession, Dayabhaga system holds good in this district. The joint family system which was common in the past, is found to break up into small units under new socio-economic influences of the district. At the same time the average age of marriage for both girls and boys has been rising gradually with the spread of education and change in the social outlook. Monogamy is common among all sections of people of the district, but it was not compulsory among the Hindus till 1950. The Muslims follow the practice of polygamy in the manner prescribed by the Muslim law, but it is not usually preferred by many of them. The tribal people of the district are mostly monogamous. Polyandry is prohibited among all sections of people. Polygamy is allowed by the Kacharis, although monogamy is the general rule among them. The marriage ceremony is

performed observing the rituals as prescribed in the Sastras. Remarriage of widow among the Hindus, although permitted by law, is not looked upon with favour by the high caste of Hindus. But at present widow remarriage is gaining ground with the change in the conservative outlook of society and spread of education. Changes have also taken place in home life and furniture. The old houses are now being gradually replaced by brick houses. Furniture of the ordinary cultivator which consisted of a few boxes, wicker work stools and baskets, brass and bell metal utensils, glass bottles and earthen pots and pans have been changed into tables, chairs, sofa, china clay, aluminium and stainless steel utensils. Male dress includes dhoti, chadar, shirts, kamij, trousers and coats. Female dress consists of riha, mekhela, chadar, sari and blouse and ornaments include necklace, earrings, bracelets etc. Mech and Rabha women's traditional dresses in the district consist of smocks which is called dakhna drawn tightly across their busts and reaching half way down the calves.

Rice is the main staple food of all the people of the district. Vegetables, dal, fish, egg, meat, milk, curd, fruit etc. form the subsidiary items of food. Besides these, Assamese people take Khan, an
alkaline preparation and tenga, a sour preparation made out of sour fruits or vegetables.

During Rongali Bihu festival, groups of people dance and sing the bihuguet. As the girls dance, the boys play on flute and beat drums, and blow the pepa, made of buffalo-horn and toka, an indigenous musical gadget. The Bihugets constitute a prolific variety of songs in Assamese literature. The central theme of these songs is love in its different moods. The Satriya dances are of classical type, introduced by the Vaishnava leaders. The Oja pali dance is also popular in the district. The tribal people in the district perform a variety of dances. The Kacharies have Kachari dance, Bugrumba dance and Maiginai dance, besides the Bihu dance. The tea garden labourers have their traditional Jhumur dance. The exquisite and colourful tribal dances are reminiscent of their glorious traditions.

Among the Muslims, the Jikir, a kind of folk song, coughed in Assamese language is popular among the Muslims. Several scholars are of the opinion that Jikir shows influence of the Nam Kirtan of the Hindus on the local Muslims.¹ The district of Goalpara, particularly Gauhati.

¹ Goalpara District Gazetteer, 1979, PP. 105-113.
is noted for its dance and music. Throughout the district, there are a number of cultural institutions which are Government Registered and getting financial aid regularly for the promotion of Art, culture, music and dance among the people of the district. The Assam Sangha, the Kranti Silpi Sangha at Dhubri is meant for the promotion of literature, music, dance and drama. These institutions hold regular classes on all types of local and classical songs, modern and mythological dances and training in instruments like violin, sitar, etc. In Gauripur the Kala Tirtham is an association which is devoted to cultural activities, particularly to the folk songs and dances. Gauripur is noted for its Goalparia Lokageet in Assam and the Kala Tirtham stands for the promotion of such folk songs in and outside the State. An well-known Bodo-Cultural organisation known as Raisumari Affat was established in 1969 in Kokrajhar, presents various Bodo dances throughout the State. Some other similar cultural organisations of Kokrajhar are Bithorai Affat, Demgalai Affat, Borisum Affat and Reumailou Affat. Sialmari Cultural Club and Koch-Rabha Kristi party are Bodo cultural organisations and they stands for the promotion of Bodo Culture in and outside the State.
In the district, the agriculture is the chief occupation. According to the 1971 Census, out of the total working population of 5,98,886 in the district, 4,67,464 were engaged in agriculture, 3,90,875 as cultivators and 76,589 as agricultural labourers. This shows that more than three-fourths of the working population were engaged in agriculture. After independence, during the first two plan periods there was a considerable change in both rural and urban areas.

The source of income among various classes of people in the district are agriculture, service, trade and commerce. The Brahmins of the district are mostly engaged in various pursuits of life including agriculture, service, trade and commerce and only a small section is engaged as priests. The Kayasthas do not plough the land by themselves and earn their livelihood mostly by intellectual pursuits. The main occupations of the Kalitas of the district are agriculture besides services, trade, commerce and other pursuits. The Rajbangshis or Koches are engaged in the occupation of agriculture, trade and commerce and other pursuits have also attracted a number of talented and educated

people of this caste. The traditional occupation of
the Jugis and the Katanis are the rearing of silk worms
and spinning and weaving the thread. At the same time
they look agriculture as their livelihood. The source
of income of the Nadiyals of the district are services,
agriculture, trade and commerce. Other classes of people
of the district such as Sonaries, Baniya, Tantis, Dhobas,
Napits, Kamars, Kumars, Sutradhars and Goalas have
now shifted to agriculture as their main occupation.
The source of income of the Kacharies in the district
is agriculture while educated ones are engaged in service,
trade and other pursuits. The Rabhas and the Mechas
of the district are engaged in agriculture as their
main occupation while educated ones are engaged in
other pursuits. 1

In Goalpara, the nature of education in the
early stage of British administration was deplorable
in the extreme. Education lacked patronage unlike some
other districts of Assam. In 1901, 49 males per mile
and 2 females per mile returned as literate in the
district among whom quite a large number were foreigners
and more than half of them were educated in Bengali and

other foreign languages. ¹ A steady rise in literacy was maintained during the next decade in 1911, 74 males per mile and 4 females per mile were returned as literates in the district. The same increasing trend was maintained in the subsequent two Census in the district. In 1921, 112 males and 10 females per mile were returned as literates and in 1931, 145 males and 15 females per mile were returned as literates.² In the 1951 Census, 229 males and 54 females per mile were recorded as literates showing good progress since 1931. Literacy figures continued to further improvement and stood at 303 and 108 per mile for males and females respectively during the Census of 1961. The rise of literacy in the district in the last two decades has been largely due to the efforts initiated by the Union and State Governments specially after independence and in pursuance of the Directive Principles of State Policy to extend


educational facilities at different levels, and practically at the primary stage. Persons receiving higher education i.e., Matriculation and above also increased in number during the period. In the 1971 Census, the person who can both read and write in a language with understanding were also considered as literate. As per 1971 Census, in Goalpara district there were 4,88,989 literate and educated persons of whom 87,567 were in the urban areas. Maximum number of female educated and literate were 52,375 in Goalpara sub-division it's major slice of 41,235 being in rural Goalpara. Highest number of urban educated in the district was 44,212 and they were found in Dhubri sub-division. It is interesting to note that rate of growth of female literacy is higher than that of the males; but the percentage of literates to the total population is lower among the females than among the males. However, with the increase in the number of school going girls, the disparity between male and female is declining and is expected to decline further in the next decade. During the Post Independence period it is seen that the education among Scheduled Castes and Tribes made remarkable progress.
The reason was that after Independence the Government has given much emphasis on the spread of education among these people. The Government provided financial aid in the shape of scholarships, free studentship, accommodation in the hostels etc. According to the Census of 1971, the district had a tribal population of 3,08,287. Out of this, 73,732 were returned as literates. Percentage of literacy among Scheduled Tribes stood at 23.9 in the 1971 Census compared to 26.2% in 1961. Spread of education among the Scheduled Castes has also made considerable headway. According to the Census of 1971, the district had a total Scheduled Caste population of 1,20,006 of whom 24,543 were returned as literates. Percentage of literacy amongst Scheduled Castes improved from 19.38 in 1961 to 20.45 in 1971.