SECTILO III: FUSION OF ARYAN AND NON-ARYAN CULTURE.

Assam has exhibited a clear picture of people belonging to various tribes and races of heterogeneous culture. Here the Negrites, the Austro-Asiatics, the Tibeto-Burmans and the Aryans used to live forming a composite people. All these people have contributed to the growth of a composite Assamese culture, which is a "product of a historical process of assimilation and integration of diverse racial elements which has been at work since time immemorial". It is a sum-total of the primitive and the advanced, contributed both by Aryan and non-Aryan elements. The lines below will trace the nature of the culture evolved out of the fusion of Aryan and non-Aryan cultures on historical outlines.

There are some motives behind the evolution of a composite culture of people diverse in race, custom and language. We may classify them as follows:

A. Proximity in dwelling and intimate intercourse among various groups of people,

B. Concessions or relaxations in matters of social relationship among them.

C. Recognition of social status, manners and customs of a

group of people by others,

A. Compromise in all possible spheres of life giving scopes for conversion.

B. Proximity of dwelling and intimate intercourse among various groups of people: "As the logic of geography is unrefutable", observes Dr. S.K.Bhuyan, "the Aryans and non-Aryans have lived side by side in a spirit of accommodation and compromise. The socio-religious customs of the Aryans have been influenced by the habits and manners of their non-Aryan neighbours; the latter, too, have not been able to escape the influence of the Aryans with whom they have held commerce from time immemorial. The two elements have flourished side by side leading to the evolution of a unique civilization which has imbibed and incorporated the assimilable features of both."^237

The non-Aryan tribes of Assam dwelt not only in the hilly tracts but also in the plains side by side with the plainsfolk. The tribes inhabiting the hilly regions always maintained in some way or other a close contact with the plains. That they had formed a solid block under the political hegemony of King Bhagaśatta is evident from the Mahābhārata, which relates to Bhagaśatta's participation in the great war. It is said that Bhagaśatta's troops consisted of the Kirātas and the Cinas^238 and he is described elsewhere in the Mahābhārata as the lord of the Meechas, which evidently stands for the Kirātas and the Cinas, his subjects. "The Kirātas", according to K.L.Baruā, "was perhaps the generic name of the Mongolian people, but the name Cina was probably applied particularly to the Tibetans and the Bhutanese."^239 In another context the learned writer

identifies the Kirātas and the Meechas with the Bo³os who formed the bulk of the population in the Assam Valley during the Mahābhārata war, i.e. in the 10th century B.C. Bhagadatta was himself an Aryanised king, but his subjects composed mostly of Mongoloid people. It can be guessed that by about the 10th century B.C. fusion of Aryan and non-Aryan blood and culture was being headed by a proximity of living and also by a bend of political unity among the people of both the sections. Dr. Chatterjee aptly remarks that the ancient dynasty of the family of Naraka, predecessor of Bhagadatta, consisted of Hinduised Bo³os with possible admixture of Aryan and Dravidian as well as Austric elements.\textsuperscript{242} These Bo³o people were the earliest Hinduised people in the province and they had absorbed in all probability the local Austric and Dravidian elements.\textsuperscript{243} Mankad attributes Aryan origin to Naraka\textsuperscript{244} while Dr. P.C. Chaudhury suggests his Alpine-Aryan origin.\textsuperscript{245} K.L. Barua, on the other hand, associates him kháng with Dravidian origin in view of the fact that he was a worshipper of Mother Goddess Kānakhiya an\textsuperscript{246} of phallus, which are Dravidians.\textsuperscript{247} However, from the linguistic point of view Kānakhiya appears to be an Austric formation.\textsuperscript{248} Button observes that the later monoliths, specimens of which still exist elsewhere in Assam, are definitely phallic and the dolmens have actually been used as saivite temples.\textsuperscript{249} The

\textsuperscript{240} E.H.K., p 2.
\textsuperscript{241} H.O.P.A., p 115; E.H.K., p 14; अतिसाध्य संस्कृति, p 282.
\textsuperscript{242} A.H.A., p 2.
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., p 2.
\textsuperscript{244} J.A.R.S., Vol. I, pp 20–21.
\textsuperscript{245} H.O.P.A., p 98.
\textsuperscript{246} E.H.K., pp 19–20.
\textsuperscript{247} A.I., p 4.
\textsuperscript{248} A.P.N., pp 48–49; M.G.K., pp 38–39.
\textsuperscript{249} O.I., pp 246–247.
monoliths and the dolmens of Khâsî and Syntenga as well as of the Nâgas represent such a conception.250 The Khâsîs and the Syntenga are Austro in language but Mongoloid in race251 while the Nâgas although Mongoloid absorbed many Oceanic elements.252 According to Dr. L. N. Barnett the home of the cult of Siva was in the Mongoloid tribes of the Himalaya253 As such we cannot ascribe the phallic conception to the Dravidians alone, for which we can construe that at the time of Naraka racial synthesis among the Austria, Dravidians, Aryans or Alpine Aryans and the Mongoloids had taken place and the religion as a part of culture evolved through this fusion.

It has been observed by Mr. S.K. Bhuyan that the process of assimilation between the non-Aryan tribes and the Aryan people of Assam through proximity and contact has been seen in different spheres, such as, linguistic, social, religious and political.253 254

In the field of language the non-Aryan tribes of Assam have contributed a considerable amount of words to Aryan Assamese language. Dr. Kakati deals with this subject and investigates scientifically all in details. According to him modern Assamese language bears the historical impact of the Austro languages in vocables, in terms of relationship of various grades of life and in the place-names.255 The Tâbeto-Burman Broth borrowed words freely from Aryan Assamese and also gave words to it.256 The syntactical device of Assamese as well as of Bengali, as a result, was due to Broth influence.257 The Ahoms,

253. A.I., p 29.
256. Ibid., pp 42-46.
accepting Assamese language as a common lingua franca made a few contributions to its vocabulary. K.L. Barufr cites the influence of the Baltic language spoken by the Alpine Aryans in the Assamese sibilants and the cerebrals. Thus it appears that the modern Assamese language vitalises its growth from the languages of the tribes and non-Aryan races at different stages of its development.

In the sphere of social culture of Assam also can be seen the impact of the non-Aryan tribes upon the Aryans and vice versa. The agricultural civilisation of Assam is basically a contribution of the Austro-Asians. The cottage industries and weaving are also associated with them. The contribution of the Austro-Asians in the field of fine arts, specially in songs and dances is not least countable.

Agriculture is also attributed to the Tibeto-Burman Beas. The superior position of women in Assamese society is in great part a contribution of the Tibeto-Burman people. These people have shown great skill in weaving. They are also responsible for inventing some musical instruments.

It is believed that eating of fish and meat even by the Brāhmanas, the Kāyasthas and the Kalitas of Assam are impact of non-Aryan tribes.

260. असमीया भाषा आस असंस्कृति, pp 74-76.
262. असमीया भाषा आस संस्कृति, pp 78.
264. असमीया भाषा आस संस्कृति, p 83; Kirata, p 36.
266. असमीया संस्कृति, p 113.
The Assamese harvesting festival 'Bihu' has its basis of foundation on most of the tribal agricultural rites. The festival "in its origin was nothing but a solar cult and a cult of fertility, contributed by the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan, such as Austrie, Alpine and Tibeto-Surman elements".

In the field of religion the non-aryan people of Assam had shown a strong tradition in the formation and growth of Saivism, Saktism and particularly of Tantrikism. The non-aryan Kirātas were worshippers of Śiva. The cult of Śiva is associated with phallus. We have already observed that the worship of phallus had been represented by the monoliths and dolmens of some non-aryan tribes of Assam. These monoliths and dolmens as well as the megaliths are associated with magical beliefs. The upright monolith and the recumbent dolmen of some Assam tribes symbolise respectively male and female sexes.

Hutton says that the dolmens have actually been used as Śaivite temples. There are several other superstitions as well as animistic beliefs centering round such objects. The belief in magic associated with these things paved the way for the growth of Tantrikism.

Wilson observes that the Tantrik and Sākta corruption of Vedic as well as Purānic religion evolved chiefly in Assam, or at least in the north-east of Bengal. "Assam forms one of the important areas in which the Śaiva Tantriks have divided India and South-Eastern Asia and Indonesia...... The traditions of Brahmanical Hinduism' and to some

268. Ibid., p 302.
269. C.I., p 246.
270. Ibid.
271. H.C.P.A., p 56.
272. V.P., Preface, p. lv.
extent of Buddhism) were very strong in Assam. The native pre-Hindu myths, legends and historical tales of the Assamese people were absorbed by Purānic Hinduism. Assam was one of the centres of Čāndrika religion and philosophy and of Čāndrika cults and rituals, particularly Brahmanical. Thus Assam has given India the magico-religious cult of Čāndrika. The world of religion in Assam is a product of synthetic growth, a social integration between peoples of non-Aryan tribes and Aryans. The great Vaiśānav reformation, Śaṅkaradeva, gave the non-Aryans an oriented Aryan tone and nature in the 16th century A.D.

B. Concessions and relaxation in matters of social relationship: In matters of cultural evolution among various groups of people importance of concession and relaxation is great indeed. Hutton observes that the people of India both primitive and advanced as a whole have possessed some taboos and the tribes of Assam particularly the Nagas show abundant ‘taboos on certain foods’, of a vivid belief in mana or, as the Ao Nagas call it, arum, and of the magical effects of food on the consumer. In these affairs the rigour of Hindu manners and practices should be relaxed, and Assam has shown a considerable relaxation for free admission of tribal people into this Hindu society. It is seen in the sphere of religion that the Aryan Hindus anticipated the admission of esoteric and secret practices associated with Čāndrika, which concession is believed to be the outcome of the necessity for assimilation. Čāndrika upholds the use of

275 C.I., p 135.
277 Ibid., p 6.
278 Ibid., p 46.
sacrifices and formulates as magical and mechanical devices. Traditional sacrifices are common among Assam tribes; the non-Hindu Garos have the horse-sacrifice as a fertility cult, the Angami Nagas have Sakrengi corresponding to Vedic Sūlagnava ceremony. The sacrifices in Assam and Bengal before Turag and Kelli have no Aryan basis and these are mere inheritance from the Indo-Mongoleids. Mills points to the carved geometrical pattern in the megaliths of Mībeng, which can evidently be taken as symbolizing mechanical principle of Tantrikism.

Assam enjoyed the glory of large-scale relaxation in caste and social or religious taboos. The prevalence of intercaste marriages confirms this fact. An Assamese chronicle describes how assimilation amongst the Ahoms and other ancient tribes such as the Kacharis, the Barahis and the Moroga had accomplished through marriages between the males of the former and the females of the latter in the days of Sukapha (i.e. in the 13th century A.D.). This account clearly shows the early loss of genes amongst the tribes of Assam.

Dr. Bhuyan aptly remarks that the intercaste marriage led to the presence of a perceptible Mongoleid strain in the physiognomy of a large portion of the Hindu population of Assam.

C. Recognition of social status, etc.: Recognition is another factor for the fusion of cultures belonging to various in tribes and races. It includes social promotion of pagan chiefs and of the manners and customs of the people. The L.P. records that Naraka ha

282. तेउधार असम जुरून , p 90.
introduced a non-Aryan cult of the revi in Kamarupa. He, as appropriately observed by Mankad, thoroughly Aryanised the new cult with the help of the Brahmans whom he had settled in his kingdom. Thus it is evident that the Aryan Brahmans coming to this land gave affiliation and recognition to non-Aryan culture and religion, and as a matter of fact, fusion of Aryan and non-Aryan culture, on the whole, proceeded in the state.

Such recognition had been always at work all through the history of Assam. A study of the Copper-Plate Inscriptions of the kings of Assam from the 7th to the 12th century A.D. would reveal that these kings were Saivas and they had been influenced largely by Tantrikism. Both the cults of Siva and Tantra are non-Aryan, while the kings, who came out Aryanised and advocated Aryan religion as appeared in the case of Bhaskarvarman, had given much recognition to these side by side with the Aryan ideals. The kings were unmistakably Mongoloid and some of them were styled as 'Usarjas or even might be Meshes of the Bejo group; but the inscriptions testify to their profound knowledge in the Vedas and other scriptures of Hindu religion. Further, the inscriptions also testify to the dedication of Devadasi to the temple of Siva. The institution of Devadasi, according to Hutton, is a survival of matrilineal culture and it shows a link between Dravidian India and the eastern Mediterranean. In some form or other, influence of the matrilineal Austro people might fall in the practice in Assam, as the trace of

284. J.A.R.S., Chap. 38.
286. K.P. 38/128-130.
288. Tezpur Copper-Plate Inscription, v 24.
289. O.I., pp 162-165.
Dravidian element is very insignificant in the province. On the other hand, the Bođa-Rākhařis have also an institution, known as Bechañi, corresponding roughly to Behadāśi. However, the dedication of Behadāśis to the temples by the ancient kings of Assam itself signifies recognition to non-Aryan custom in an Aryan society.

Recognition to an admission of non-Aryan cults and practices have been reported to in the Nārāyana Ramāvamsa, a chronicle of the Koches. It states that king Narenarāyaṇa of Koch Behār had legalised both Aryan and non-Aryan practices of worship in his territory. According to Śrī Bequārār Sārmā a few Vaiṣṇava monasteries of Assam have been still following Tantrik initiation in accordance with the ideals of renunciation spoken of by Śiva in the Tantras.

Recognition includes affiliation, i.e., affiliation to the aboriginal cults, shrines and mannaśa etc. by the Aryan intruders. In other words, it is amalgamation of local cults and beliefs into the body of Aryan Hinduism. It is a fact that several local or non-Aryan cults had been absorbed into Hinduism. The traditional local gods and the modes of practices associated with their worship have been identified with Aryan parallels. In this field, the hands of the Aryan priests were possibly strong and uppermost. They knew how to propitiate the gods in accordance with local beliefs and practices in order to bring the tribes into their fold. Late Vīṣṇu Rābha opines that the Bođa had no such god and goddess like Śiva and Śakti, while the Aryans coming in contact with them identified Śiva and Śakti with the traditional gods and goddesses, who were supposed to have possessed the like natures of Śiva and Śakti of the Aryan pantheon.

290. M.G.K., p 21; पुराण कालस्टीम प्रमुख, pp 36–37.
He says, according to this process, Gîrî-Gîrâl of the Chutias have been identified with Mara and Gaurî, and in the same way Abhâdai of the Lâluïga, Bhâkai-Langâna of the Khâbâ-Koche and Bâthau-Cijau of the Bode-Kachâra were equated with Śiva.293 The Aryan ascribing the Aryan colour to the deities of the Bodes made them part and parcel of Aryan society.294 So also the Chutias were taken to the Brâhmanical pantheon through Pâtrikism giving recognition to their Pâtrik Mother Goddess Kesîkhâtî (the Eater of Raw Flesh) as Kâli.295 The process is both evolutionary as well as revolutionary; and in accordance with the same procedure Govinda of the Gâne tribe was admitted into the intimate circle of the disciples of Shankardeva in the medieval period.296 So also through political contact the Āhoms admitted the tribal people into their fold and they "became to all intents and purposes equal in rank and status to the older Āhoms. Some family names of the Āhoms bear traces of this fusion, - Nâga Pater, Miri Sandikoi etc."297 Batten believes that many of the shrines of the Hindus were originally belonging to some ancient indigenous deities and "subsequently Hinduised."298

The inference, in all possibilities, is reasonable in the case of the shrines of Assam, for in ancient days Assam was particularly inhabited by non-Aryan tribes, who were responsible for the sanctum erection of some of the shrines in ancient Assam. The recognition of such non-Aryan shrines by the Aryans can be noticed in Assam in the case of Kamâkhyâ of present-day pan-Indian importance.299

293. एलिनिक अस्तम, Saka 1888, p 610, 9.
294. Ibid., p 10.
297. Ibid., p 40.
298. C.I., p 231.
Dr. S.K. Bhuyan observes: "Compromise between Aryanism and non-Aryanism led to the numerical expansion of the Hindu fold. Many amongst the present-day Assamese Hindus are believed to be assimilation from the tribes." This compromise is particularly seen in the medieval period of Assam's history. The Puranas also do not lack such informations. The Puranas gave Naraka a divine pedigree by simplifying his association with the Boar incarnation of Vishnu. All the inscriptions of the kings of ancient Assam made the kings of various dynasties related to Naraka. We have already mentioned referred to a few kings who were Kachari or rather Koches of the Koch group. They were evidently non-Aryan. But the Brāhmaṇa-makers of the inscriptions made them related to Naraka, thereby giving them a high pedigree. The process was in vogue and certainly did give vent to this variety in the medieval period. The Koches, the Kachari, the Jayantīśa and the Ahom kings had extended their patronage to the Brāhmaṇas. The Ahom kings and their predecessors built Hindu temples, patronized Brāhmaṇa priests and made endowments to them. In their turn the Hindus attributed a divine origin to the kings and their Ahom dynasties. The Ahom dynasty was thus attributed to Indra, the Koch dynasty to Mahādeva, the Kachari of Mātpur, Āibong and Khāspur to Bhima, according to one account, while they were attributed to Mahādeva by another, the Jayantīśa to Jayantī Dewś, who was none other but Gaurī, the consort of Mahādeva, and the Chutiā either to..."
or to Mahakali. As a result of this acknowledgement not only increased the Hindu population but also made the fusion of different races easier.

Hutton aptly remarks: "The indigenous religion of any country inevitably starts with an advantage over that of an invading people, since it is the priest of the who knows how to approach the gods of the soil and propitiate them, and for that reason there is always a tendency for a local religion to establish its ascendency over an intrusive one." It so happened in Assam, and for this we have seen that the local religions such as Saivism, Saktism and Tantrikism established their ascendency over the Aryans, as a result of which compromise anticipating the religions of the local residents by Hinduism proceeded.

During the Vaisnava movement in the medieval Assam this compromise could be seen in terms of conversion. Saivendra initiated Govinda of the Garo tribe, Paramananda of the Miri tribe, Narahari of Ahom, Joyram of Bhoja and Gaamai, a Javana to neo-Vaisnavism and gave them the status of disciple in his religious circle. Vaisagopaldeva is said to have converted the Buddhists, who were followers of the tenets of Tantrik-Buddhism mixed with Vaisesaara rites and who stood on his way, to Vaisnavism.

On the other hand, the non-Aryan tribes also established a compromise with the Aryans by accepting Assamese language as
medium of exchange not only with the Aryans but also amongst themselves speaking diverse languages unintelligible to one another.

Another form of compromise can be seen in willful abandonment of manners and customs of a tribe by way of conversion, which led to the change or modification in social and religious observances. In this respect Hutton records an event which shows: "The Kasháris of the remote and isolated Thanaíri valley who in 1910 all kept and ate chickens had by 1920 almost entirely eliminated the barnyard fowl from their economy as the result of uplift propaganda received probably from Kasháris living in the Hinduised atmosphere of the plains of Oshá[r]." 315

It has been rightly remarked by Mr. S.X. Bhuyan that "Assam presents an instructive spectacle of the compromise between Aryan orthodoxy and the so-called heterodoxy of the tribemen. Aryan and non-Aryan are the twin pulses of that whole grain of the civilisation which may name the civilisation of Assam." 316

315. C.I., p 114.