CHAPTER II

Social Divisions

1. Division of People according to Caste and Profession:

The social life of the Indians were fundamentally based on Varna and Asrama dharma, i.e., on the system of caste and the division of works and the duties and rites to be performed in different stages of life. According to Asrama dharma, there are four stages or Asramas in life, such as Brahmacharya, Garhasthya, Vānaprastha and Jati. But strictly speaking, in Assam, there were neither these four Varnas nor the Varna and Asrama dharmas were properly observed as they were observed in other parts of India. However, being an integral part of India, Assam could not remain in isolation. Its social life was, however, based on 'Varnasrama dharma' to a certain extent, in spite of the fact that the outlook in Assam as regards caste system and occupation were more liberal than in any other parts of India. In fact, as stated by Dr. Choudhury, austere discipline in respect of food, occupation and marriage relations observed by any caste, is not seen in India at any period. Many sub-castes have duly been permitted to enter into the fold of the orthodox Hindu Society at different periods of its history and many changes have been accepted in its different codes of social and religious life. But as a result of an attempt to form a homogeneous society and a synthetic culture out of diverse racial and cultural elements, certain latitudes were given in respect of caste rules and social observances. In the copper-plate grants issued by the kings of the ancient Kamarupa, references to four 'Asramas' and four 'Varnas' are found. For example, in the copper-plate of Valavarma, Bhagadatta is mentioned as the controller of all the 'Varnas' and 'Asramas' and an unequal hero. In the Nidhanpur copper-plate, * Varṇasramanām gururekavirah." - (verse 7)
it is said that Bhāskara was created (by Lord Brahmā) for the proper organisation of the duties of the four castes and stages of life that had become disordered. In the Gauhati grant of Indrapāla, it is said that during the reign of Indrapāla, the laws of the four classes and stages were observed in their proper order.

From the grants of the early Kāmarupa kings, we should not assume the existence of the 'Varnāsrama dharma' in proper order in ancient Assam. The very reference to the 'Avakīrṇa varṇāsrama dharma', that is, disordered 'Varnāsrama dharma', in the Nidhanpur grant of Bhaskarvarman, convinces us that it was not in proper order in that period. That the castes and stages of life were not strictly adhered to in the Medieval period, is certain. In 'Buranjī Vivekratna', Maniram Dewan observes that "amongst the four castes of the Hindu society, there are only two castes in Assam, viz, the Brāhmaṇas and the Sudras. There are no Kṣatriya and Vaiśya. In the long past, a Kṣatriya boy, Jitari by name, came to Assam from the land of the Drāvidas and established himself as a king of a small territory. Except him there was no Kṣatriya, only Brāhmaṇas and Sudras." Dr. P.C. Choudhury also broadly divides the Hindu society of Assam into two classes, viz, the Brāhmaṇas and Sudras; but he does not deny the existence of Vaiśyas totally, which is supported by Haliram Dhekial Phukan also. So, like Maniram Dewan and Dr. Choudhury, we can broadly divide the Hindu society of Medieval Assam into

* Avakīrṇa varṇāsramānām dharma probhibhāgāya nirūtto—

verse line- 35.

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+ Samyag vibhakta chataurāsramavarnadharmā /
a (ā)nandinā sakala kāmaśudhā prajñā(ng)

Pṛthvi prthoh punariba prathito-dayasi(t) //

verse- 18.
two classes, viz, the Brāhmaṇas and the Sudras. Besides these two broad divisions, there was a large number of unclassified professional Hindus who were given very low status or no status at all, at the time. The term Śūdra was used very widely and it included several gradations of people. As is evident from discussions made elsewhere in the Book that in the early and in the Medieval period, the kings and the Brāhmaṇa priests tried to introduce and maintain Varna and Āśrama dharma in Assam. It is further evident from the discussions made in connection with these points that the classifications are made in a conventional way to make the divisions of people at a par with the All-India divisions. In some cases there is a deliberate attempt of the Brāhmaṇa priests to elevate or upgrade the non-Aryan royal dynasties by giving divine pedigree or Kṣatriya origin.

The historians are not in a position uptill now to ascertain how and when the 'Varnāsrama dharma' was first introduced in Assam; but maintain the view that it was introduced by the Aryas after their migration to Assam. Further, they are of opinion that the local non-Aryan kings laid the foundation of it. In the Medieval period, the non-Aryan kings, particularly the Koch and the Ahom kings, extended patronage for the establishment of the caste system on a strong basis, in Assam. Now, we will proceed to discuss about the different castes and communities of Assam, one by one.

2. Brāhmaṇas and Daivajnas:

(a) Brāhmaṇas:

Our predecessors in their works have elaborately discussed about the existence of Brāhmaṇas in Assam. From these discussions, it is known
that the existence of Brahmanas in Assam can be traced back to the days of Naraka. Since the days of Naraka to the later part of the Medieval period the road from Mithila to Assam had been open to the Brahmanas. Naraka brought from Mithila many Brahmana families and established them in Assam. As it is gathered from legendary accounts, Parashurama brought before Naraka some Brahmanas along with him and established them here; but in course of time they degenerated. The Nidhanpur grant of Bhaskarvarman provides us with names of two hundred and five Brahmanas to different 'gotras', 'Veda-sakhās' and 'Pravaras'. The early Kamarupa kings showed great respect and regard to the Brahmanas and lands and other properties were donated to them. Coming to the period of our discussion, we know that the kings of Kamarupa-Kamata invited Brahmanas from other parts of India and gave them all sorts of facilities for permanent settlement. As stated above, one of the kings of Gauda, at the request of a Kamarupa-king sent seven families of Brahmanas and seven families of Kayasthas to the kingdom of Kamarupa-Kamata for settlement. From the records it is known that many Brahmanas from Kanyakubja, Benaras, Navadvip and other parts of India came to Assam in the Medieval period, specially during the reign of the Koch king Naranarayana. King Naranarayana invited many scholars and writers to his court and established them in the capital. Amongst these scholars and writers there were many Brahmanas. Prior to this, references of the existence of Brahmanas are found in the Kalita and Chutia kingdoms. The Ahom kings showed respect to the Brahmanas and invited them to settle in their kingdom. After the annexation of the Chutia and the Bhuyan territories, to their own, the Ahom kings brought many Brahmanas families from their territories to their kingdom. Amongst the Vaisnavite preceptors of the
Medieval period, a considerable number belonged to the Brāhmaṇas. The Ahom king Rudra Singha, towards the later part of his life, showed his inclination to the Śākta faith of Hinduism and he sent men to Navadvipa, for one Kṛṣṇarāma Bhattacharyya whom he established at Nilachala hill. In the Ahom court many Brāhmaṇas held responsible offices. In his 'Eastern India' Martin observes: "there are Brahmans called Assamese. They are Baidiks of Kanyakubja and one of them told me that they were introduced from that place by Biswa Singha, the Koch Raja."

The Brāhmaṇas occupy the first place in the Hindu Society amongst the four traditional castes. The Brahmana-society is based on Veda-sakhas, gotras and pravaras. From the Veda-sakha and gotra of a certain Brāhmaṇa, his position amongst other Brāhmaṇas and marriage relations in the society is determined. Gunabhiram Barua speaking about Brāhmaṇas in Assam says that there is no Bāllaḷi Brāhmaṇa (?) in this country; almost all of them belong to 'Yayurveda' and 'Kāṇva-sakha'. There are very few Brāhmaṇas belonging to 'Sāmađeda'. A large number of Brāhmaṇas came to this country from Mithila. Those who came to Assam from Bengal and Srihatta were all Vaidik Brāhmaṇas.

In his book 'A Descriptive Account of Assam', W. Robinson says: "A number of Rarhi Brāhmaṇas of Bengal have migrated into the country and to them were formerly committed the spiritual guidance of the king and principal officers of the court. Those, usually known as the Assamese Brahmins, are Baidiks of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa; and were probably introduced by Biswa Singha, but having penetrated into the upper parts of Assam, they no longer intermarried with the families in Bengal. A great number of these are said to be learned in Hindu Science. A very small portion are Saktis; they are chiefly of the sect of Vīṣṇu. They have a few academies or Chauberries"
(chātra sāl) where 'Ratnamala Byakaran', law and metaphysics are taught. Some few pretend to a knowledge of astrology and magic. The chief study, however, of the spiritual guides, is the 'Shri Bhagabat'. The persons who instruct the worshippers of Vishnu, that is most of those who have adopted the Hindu creed, are called Mohajans and live in Chatras (Satras)."

Here, by the term 'chauberi', Robinson means 'Chātra-sāl' or Sanskrit 'Tol' or 'Chatuspāthi'. Under the patronage of individual Brāhmaṇa scholar and the Vaisnavite Satra institutions, academies known as 'Chātra-sāl' or 'Chatuspāthi' had been maintained. Hamilton remarks that very few among, either the Vaidikas of Assam or of Kāmarupa, worshipped the 'Saktis' or female destructive spirits.

The customary rules and duties to be observed by a Brāhmaṇa are Yajna, Yajana, Adhyayana, Adhyapana, Dāna, and pratigraha. The Brāhmaṇas of Medieval Assam more or less observed all these rules and duties. They were well-versed in the Vedas and other scriptures, composed treatises, taught students, performed and conducted sacrifices, received gifts from the kings etc. We have said above that the Kamata, Koch and Ahom kings had many learned Brāhmaṇas in their courts, who being patronised by their respective kings, composed and translated a large number of Sanskrit works. In one of the Govt. Collections of Darrang, it is said that the Brāhmaṇas of Kāmarupa were beautiful to look at and each of them led a happy life discussing the Vedas at home. Speaking highly about the Brāhmaṇas living on the northern bank of Brahmaputra, the Yogini Tantra, it is said: "The northern bank of Brahmaputra, up to the Visweswara (i.e. modern Vishwanath), is indeed the land of the virtuous people endowed with

* Kāmarupi dvijagana parama sobhana /
  Vedachāra kari grhe thāke ranga mana //

Darrang Rajvamsaṭhali - Assam Govt. Collection No. 2
Verses - 130
all good qualities. The Brāhmanas, born and brought up in this land, are
restrained in passions; they are well-versed in the vedas, perform all
the six customary duties of a Brāhmaṇa and are best for conducting the
customary and the ceremonial functions. They are well-versed in all the
Sātras, including Itihāsa and Purāṇa, know the meaning of the scriptures,
expert in performing sacrifices, truthful, devoid of jealousy, charitable
and well-to-do and are happy with their wives and children. The
Brāhmanas of Kamarupa belong to different respectable gotras, such as
Agasti, Saunaka, Bharadvaja, Kapila, Ātraya, Bāṣya, Parāśara, Karnandalu,
Garga, Kausika, Śāndilya, Sehyavana, Angirasa, Krisnatreya etc. The
Brāhmanas of the southern bank, flooded by the Brahmaputra, specially
of the eastern portion should always be avoided. But Maniram Dewan, on
the contrary, praises the Brāhmanas of the southern bank. He remarks that
before the Vaisnavite movement, those very few Brāhmanas who lived on the
northern bank of the Brahmaputra, within the small holdings of the Bhuyan
chieftains, could manage to worship the Sivalinga only. Due to the influence
of the Buddhist esoteric sects, they degraded themselves from pure castes.
They did not know the worship of Vīṣṇu nor the worship of Goddess according
to prescribed procedure laid down in the Āgamas. After the Vaisnavite
movement, Vedic rites and rituals came to be prevalent in the country in
greater emphasis. Suryya Khari Daivajna, the author of 'Darrang Rājvamsa-
vali', says that the two great scholars Purosottam Bhattacharyya and
Pitambar Siddhanta Vagisa composed many works for the spread of Sanskrit
learning and Hinduism as well in the country. At the period, the Brāhmanas
were in over-all charge of education. It is no need of dilating upon the
point here, as it will be discussed at length in a separate chapter.
were educational institutions at the capitals of the kings, at the Satra institutions and at different places of the country conducted by the individual Brahmin Scholars. Brahmin teachers, like Mahendra Kandali of Batadrava, Rajendra Adhyapak of Bāṅdūkā and Jadavendra Adhyapak of Srijāti, were famous at the time of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva. Elsewhere we have discussed that Vaisnavite preceptors like Baikunthanath Bhattacharyya and Banamāli Gosain of Daksinpat taught students daily for certain hours. 19

From the records it is learnt that the Brahmanas of Medieval Assam observed ten purificatory rites (Samskaras) like, Pumsavana, Jāta Karma, Nāma Karana etc. But they were not very rigid as to their food and adoption of occupation. They take fish and meat and adhere to cultivation for livelihood. Of course, they do not plough land themselves. Gunabhiram says that a large number of religious preceptors of both Vaisnava and Sākta faith belonged to Brahmana caste whose duty was to preach their respective religions. They were known by the terms ‘Mahājan’ or ‘Satrādhipī’ or ‘Gosain’. The kings of ancient Kamarupa and Medieval Assam on many occasions bestowed sacred threads* of gold and granted lands and properties to learned Brahmanas. 22

Besides their usual duties, the Brahmanas showed efficiency in political matters also. Some of the Bhuyan Chiefs were Brahmin by caste. The prime minister of the last Kamata-king Nilambar of the Khen dynasty was a Brahmana. In the court of Naranarayana there were Brahmin Scholars appointed by the king to help in judicial and socio-religious matters. There was a Brahmin officer known as ‘Sabha-pandit’ in the court of the Ahom kings who gave verdict on necessary judicial matters. Since the days of the Ahom king Pratap Singha, Brahmanas were appointed in the post of envoys, generally known by the term ‘Katakā’, and the Brahmanas also proved their efficiency.
in the above assignment to the best satisfaction of the kings. The other important Brahmin officers, appointed by the Ahom kings, are Parbatiy Phukan, Tamuli Phukan, Dhekiyal Phukan, Duariya Barua etc. After their conversion to Hinduism, the Ahom kings had Brahmin priests to perform their functions, observed according to Hindu customs. The Brāhmaṇas were generally not required to render physical services under the Ahom rule.

(b). The Daivajnas or Ganakas (Astrologers) :-

The popular terms by which the Daivajnas (astrologers) are commonly known in Assam, are 'Grahavipra' and 'Ganaka'. But they often introduce themselves as Suryavipra. In Assam, unlike other parts of India, the Daivajnas occupy a higher position in the society, just next to the Brāhmaṇas. In other parts of India they are not considered so high and occupy a much lower position in the society. In the last part of the Ahom rule, a conflict arose when the Daivajnas claimed equal status with the Brāhmaṇas. After a general discussion in the court of the king Siva Singha, it was decided that the Daivajnas would use the surname Sarman like the Brāhmaṇas and would conduct 'Graha-puja' or 'Graha-yajna' but not 'Prāyagchitta', Śraddha and other functions. The Brāhmaṇas were also forbidden to perform 'Graha-yajna'. According to 'Brahmanda Purāṇa', the Daivajna was born of a Sakadviṣa father and Vaiśya mother. Further, as to the origin of the Sakadviṣa Brāhmaṇa, some scholars hold the view that they arose from the Maghis, who were none but degraded Zarathustras. They worship the planets, specially the Sun-God; hence they are called Grahavipra or Suryya-vipra. In Assam they are popularly called 'Ganaka'.
because they read the future of the people calculating the movements and position of the stars in the sky. Rai Gunabhiram Barua believes that they came to Assam long long ago; they are like the Brahmanas and live on the study of the Astrology. A number of manuscripts, written in Assam, on the solar cult and planatory worship are attributed to them. From these words, it is revealed that a system of calculation, different from that of the other parts of India, had been in use here since long past and it makes us inclined to admit the theory of Rai Gunabhiram Barua Bahadur that the Daivajnas have a very long antiquity in Assam. We are rather more inclined to connect the Daivajnas with the Iranian-Magians, who are allied to the Alpines. We have discussed the point above and inferred as to the possibility of Iranian-Magian settlements in Pragjyotispur. It is believed that the place got its name Pragjyotispur from the settlements of the Magians, who were the worshippers of planets. Dr. P.C. Choudhury assumes admixture of Alpine blood with the Daivajnas of Assam.

The Daivajnas had a very prominent role in the social and cultural life of the Assamese people. 'Darrang Rajvamsavali' states that the Koch king Naranarayana, after the completion of the construction of the Mamaakhya temple, engaged many professional people to serve there which included Daivajnas also. 'Darrang Rajvamsavali' further asserts that some of the Bhuyan Chiefs were Daivajnas by caste and they flourished about the beginning of the 16th century. According to chronicles, some Daivajnas came to Assam from Kanyakubja and permanently settled in Assam during the reign of the Ahom kings. It is said above that from the Chutia kingdom, the Ahom king brought many Daivajnas. From the 'Katha-Guru-Charit' we know about the existence of a village known as Ganak-Kuchi completely inhabited by
the Daivajnas. This place is still in existence in the district of modern Kamrup. Amongst the literary figures of the Vaisnavite circle, a good number of them belonged to the Daivajna community.

Now, as to the duties and functions of a Daivajna, we find sufficient hints in the 'Darrang Rājvamsāvali' by Suryyakharī Daivajnā. It is said: "A Daivajna knows the movements of the stars, planets and can read the past, the present and the future. In the court of the king (Naranarayana), one Sridhara, who was in charge of the Astrology, was a steady and erudite scholar and always thought for the well-being of the king. He ascertained the dates for the performance of all the ceremonial and religious functions of the royal family, after proper calculations. He frankly expressed to the king whatever good or evil he found in his calculations about the king and worshipped the planets for the good of the king who were not found favourable to him (the king), according to his (king's) advice." In the Ahom court, the Majumder Barua, who was generally a Daivajna by caste, was a very responsible officer and was working just like the personal assistant to the king.

( Darrang Rājvamsāvali- verses 177-179)
There were a number of Astrologers known as 'Dalai', appointed by the Ahom kings, in the court. There were three grades of Dalais in the Ahom court; the Bardalai (i.e. the Dalai of the 1st category), the Maju Dalai (i.e. the Dalai of the 2nd category) and the Saru Dalai (i.e. the Dalai of the last category). A set of ‘Dalais’ lived at Gauhati also. The Dalais at Gargaon and at Gauhati were required to attend the court at their respective places. When there occurred a famine, a draught or epidemic or any other disaster in the country, the Daivajnas had to perform 'Homa' and worship the particular planet, due to whose wrath the draught, or the famine, or other calamity took place. When a king or a noble would fall ill, they were required to tell by making calculations at whose wrath the king or the noble had fallen ill and they were entrusted with the duty of pacifying the planet by performing 'Homa' and worshipping him (Planet). When a war broke out in the country the 'Bardalai' had to go with the general to the battle field, where his duty was to ascertain the time and direction of the movement to the field of action and the exact and the accurate time of the first shot to be fired. When a 'Saru Dalai' could prove his efficiency in calculation he was promoted to the rank of the 'Maju Dalai' and so on. The 'Bar Dalai' was an expert Astrologer in his field. At the patronage of the Koch and Ahom kings, Astrology was deeply and extensively studied in Assam and many original works were composed in the country.

5. Ksatriyas and Vaishyas:

It is commonly held by the historians that there is no true Ksatriya in Assam. As stated above, the historians broadly divide the
inhabitants of Assam into two classes, viz, the Brahmaas and the Sudras. However, in one of the chronicles we find reference to two Ksatriya kings in Assam. At the end of the Naraka-Bhagadatta line of kings, a Ksatriya named Dharmapala coming from Gauda became king of Kamarupa, with his capital at Godanda. He brought Brahmana, Kayastha and Kalita from Gauda, Mandartal, Kanauj, Tirhut, Jabaisahan and Barak and established them in Kamarupa. Another Ksatriya boy named Jitari, an inhabitant of the land of the Dravida, in the past, became king of Kamarupa at Kuberachal. His descendants, for seventeen generations, ruled over Kamarupa. Maniram Dewan in his work 'Buranji Vivek Ratna', refers about this Ksatriya king Jitari. But this is all in the early period. Even then, they could not keep the purity of their Ksatriya blood in tact, as there were no Ksatriya inhabitants in larger numbers to establish matrimonial relations. They soon got mixed up with other Kayasthas and Kalitas and lost the purity of their blood. In the Medieval period also, our records donot reveal any information about the existence of Ksatriyas in Assam. During the lifetime of Sankardeva, Gunabhiram says, a few Ksatriyas came to Assam with Bansi Gopaldeva, but they merged with the Kalitas later on. It is believed that Gaudadhvaja, the first ancestor of Maniram Dewan, in Assam, was a Ksatriya by birth. It was natural, that his descendants being mixed up with other Kayasthas and Kalitas, came to be regarded as Kayastha in Assam. As regards Vaisyas, Haliram Dhekial Phukan in his 'Assam Buranji' mentions about twenty to twenty-five families of Vaisyas in Assam. Dr.P.C. Choudhury also admits the 'evidence of Vaisyas' in Assam. But the admixture between the Vaisyas and other Kayasthas and Kalitas is a common phenomenon and it is better to recognise them within the category of the Sudras than to make a separate class of people as Vaisyas.
4. **Sudras:**

In the Medieval period, the term 'Sudra' was used in a very wide sense; besides the traditional 'Sudras', it included all those people who have adopted the Hindu ways of life in Assam. Most of the writers believed that the origin of the word 'Sudra' is uncertain and they want "to give it an aboriginal or non-Aryan origin." Whatever the origin, the term is used in Assam in a very wide sense. Besides the Brāhmaṇas and Daivajnas, all those Hindu people, including the newly Hinduised non-Aryans, were included within the 'Sudra' category in Assam. Amongst the 'Sudras', the Kayasthas are considered the best and are given the position in the society next to the Brāhmaṇas and Ganakas. Adherence to a better profession for their livelihood and observance of certain Vedic rites or Samskaras have placed the Kayasthas on a better social footing.

(a) **Kavastha or Satsudra:**

There is no definite opinion about the origin of the 'Kavasthas'. Some held the view that they are Sudras, others held that they are Kṣatriya. The Kayasthas are found both in Bengal and Assam. Evidences of the existence of Kayasthas in early Assam are available in the local epigraphic records. The chronicles and the biographies also inform us about the existence of Kayasthas in Medieval Assam. Besides the local ones, many Kayasthas, either came of their own accord or were brought over to Assam for permanent settlement from different parts of India, during this period. In Bengal, the Kayasthas had their own surnames, but in Assam they had no such surnames, but only the designation of their respective offices in which they had to
As regards the origin and meaning of the term 'Kayastha' there are various interpretations. The term 'Kayastha' is first noticed in the Nidhanpur copper plate of Bhaskar Varman. In some other contemporary epigraphs the word 'Kayastha' is found to be used in the sense of caste name but our local epigraphs do not suggest such an idea. Some writers affiliate the term 'Kayastha-Ksatriya' and admit it to be a separate caste, and later on it came to indicate a scribe. Dr. D.R. Bhandarkar and Mr. Ghose believe that the 'Kayasthas' are descendants of Nāgara Brāhmaṇa. Dr. B.K. Kakati derives the term 'Kayastha' from Austric formations like 'Kātho' (to write), 'Kaiathoh' (to keep account). If we accept the derivation of Dr. Kakati, then the term 'Kayastha' should be accepted as having been associated with writing. Therefore, the origin of the Kayasthas is uncertain and it is not possible to arrive at any definite conclusion on the point. From the references of some of the Kayasthas along with some Nāgara Brāhmaṇa like Datta, Soma, Nandi, made in the Nidhanpur copper plate of Bhaskar Varman, we are also inclined to believe, as Dr. Choudhury does, that they are a class of people who have got mingled with the Alphines and are allied to the Nāgara Brāhmaṇas, having a long history in Assam from the early Christian centuries, generally adhering to the profession of legal practitioner or some sort of clerical jobs or writers for their livelihood.

During the reign of the Kamata, Koch and Ahom kings, the services of the Kayasthas were mostly requisitioned in connection with the census works and clerical jobs. There is no need of saying here that during the Medieval period also, Kayasthas from different parts of India were brought
to Assam. Amongst the Bhuyan Chieftains of Assam, there were Kayasthas; in fact, most of the Bhuyan Chieftains were Kayasthas by birth and were holders of small territories under the Kamata-Kamarupa or Koch kings. But in course of time, the Kayasthas that came from other parts, got mixed up either with the Kayasthas or with the Kalitas of Assam and sometimes degraded themselves socially. It is narrated in the 'Katha-Guru-Charit' that Madhabdeva's father Govindagiri, an orthodox Kayastha found it difficult to find out a suitable Kayastha family to arrange matrimonial alliance for his daughter. Those who called themselves Kayasthas, he found to his surprise, that unlike other parts of India, they carry loads on their shoulders. He approached his host Ghagari Mai for a solution, i.e. to show him a pure Kayastha family. The Mai pleaded helplessness, as there was so much dearth of pure Kayastha in Assam. During the reign of the Ahom king Gadadhar Singha and Rudra Singha, a few families of Kayasthas came to Assam in connection with census work. Sri Benudhar Sharma, in his work 'Maniram Dewan', mentions about nine Kakati-Kayasthas who served under the Ahom kings. They were: the Duara Kakati, the Chaliha Kakati, the Kathargharar Kakati, the Gajuri Kakati, the Namthial Kakati, the Salaguria Kakati, the Tukaria Kakati, the Matikhoa Kakati and the Bania Kakati.

The term Kayastha underwent various modifications; it gave birth to popular terms like 'Kaith' and 'Kath'. In the early and Medieval records the terms 'Kayastha', 'Kaith' and 'Kath', all are found used invariably.

The Kayasthas do not plough soil for cultivation themselves, but earn their livelihood by using their pen. Those who plough the land are considered degraded and recognised as 'Barkalita'. Most of the Kayasthas had
sacred threads known as 'Uttarī'. From the 'Katha-Guru-Charit', it is
learnt that the high class Kayasthas, in those days, performed six
reformatory functions (Saṭ Karma), viz, Jata-Karma, Nāma-karana, Chūḍā-karana,
Karna-vedha, Amanprāsana and Upanayana and hence they are called 'Sada-
Karma' Kāyastha. Even to-day some of the Kayasthas, specially the
Vaisnavite preceptors called Mahantas, perform their six purificatory
functions. Among the Kayasthas, there were many scholars and literary figures
in Medieval Assam. Being commanded by the Koch king Naranarayana, one Bakul
Kayastha, rendered the famous Arithmetical work by Lilavati into Assamese.
The Assamese people to-day speak about 'Kāitheli-Vidyā' (i.e. knowledge
to gx be learnt by the Kāyasthas), 'Kāithali-Bhasā' (i.e. a king of old
Assamese language) and the 'Kāithali-Ākharā' (i.e. alphabet found used in
the old manuscripts, believed to be written by the Kayasthas in ancient
Assam). Therefore, it leads us to believe that the Kāyasthas were mostly
associated with penmanship. Gunabhiram Barua also says that as soon as a
Kāyastha gives up the reading and writing works and takes to a cultivation,
he ceases to be a Kāyastha and becomes a Kalita. There is a common belief
that the four Varnas were born of the different parts of the Almighty God.
The Kāyasthas, accordingly, called themselves Kāyastha, as being born of the
'Kāya', i.e., from the body of the Almighty God.

(b) Kalitās

About 'Kalitās' detailed discussions have already been made by different
scholars, especially by Dr. B.K.Kakati. So, it is needless to dilate upon the
point. The Kalitās have a long antiquity in Assam. They had a small separate
kingdom on the north-east region of Assam. Further, we have said above that Kalitās from other parts of India also migrated to Assam at different times and got mixed up with the old ones. Besides, both within and outside Assam, the Kalitās were under the influence of Buddhism for a considerable period and the impact of Buddhism had left some socio-religious effects upon them. According to 'Jātīmālā', an ethnology, the Kalitās are superior to the Kāyasthas, but they came to be regarded as inferior owing to their adherence to the agricultural work for livelihood. According to one section of scholars, they were Ksatriyas. According to Dr. Kakatya, they had connection with the Bauddha Ksatriya caste 'Koliya' by name.

Now, there are several gradations of Kalitās, for example, 'Bar-Kalitā', 'Saru-Kalitā', the 'Kumār-Kalitā', Mitra-Kalitā, the 'Nāt-Kalitā', the 'Dhobā-Kalitā' etc. According to Hemchandra Barua, the renowned Assamese lexicographer, the 'Bar-Kalitās' are degraded Kāyasthas who adhered to cultivation work by ploughing land themselves. The 'Saru-Kalitās' are those Kalitās who became more degraded by making matrimonial alliances with other low caste people.

(c). Keot and Other Kalitās:

There are many sub-tribes who are commonly designated as Kalitās. But the 'Keots' come first who occupy a position next to the Kalitās in the Assamese Hindu Society. The term 'Keot' has been derived from the Sanskrit term 'Kaivartṭa'. According to Hindu 'Smṛti Śāstra', the Kaivarttas are a mixed caste. Manu mentions the Karvarttas as the offspring of a Nisada-father by an Ayagava-mother and 'Brahma-Varvartta Purāna' states a Kaivartta to be born of a Ksatriya father and Vaisya mother. Dr. P.C. Choudhury believes them to be non-Aryan in origin.
Next to the Kalitas and Kayasthas, the Kaivarttas have a long history in Assam. Reference of the Kaivarttas in Assam are available in the local epigraphic records also. From the rock inscription of Harjjarvarma at Tezpur, it is learnt that the Kaivarttas, at his time, collected tax and lived on the bank of the rivers. Fishing is the main occupation of the Kaivarttas.

The Kaivarttas in Assam, took to the agricultural pursuit also, for their livelihood; but in course of time some of them totally gave up fishing and strictly adhered to agricultural work. On the basis of this, the Kaivarttas are divided into two sections, viz., the (a) Ḥālowā Keot (Kaivarta) and the (b) Ḥālowā Keot (Kaivarta). The 'Ḥālowā Keots' are those who gave up fishing and took to plough and the 'Ḥālowā Keots' are those who did not give up fishing occupation. There is a class of people called 'Nadiyāls', whose number is comparatively larger in upper Assam. Dr. Choudhury accepts the term 'Ḥom' as the synonym of the fishermen 'Kaivarttas' i.e. the 'Ḥālowā Kaivarttas'. They are called 'Nadiyāls' only because of the fact that they lived on the bank of the rivers in general for the fishing purpose. Haliram Dhekiyal Phukan and Gunabhiram Barua in their 'Assam Buranjis' distinctly point out that 'Ḥālowā Keot' and 'Ḥom' are two distinct tribes though both of them commonly adhere to the occupation of fishing and selling of fish. We also believe that 'Ḥom' and the 'Ḥālowā' and 'Ḥālowā Keots' are two distinct tribes. The physiognomy of the two is also different from each other. Gunabhiram gives a different reason why the Kaivarttas are called 'Ḥom' in Assam. In fact, in other parts of India, the 'Ḥom' Community is a very degraded class of people. Here, in Assam, the Kaivarttas are far more advanced than the 'Ḥoms' of other parts of India. The 'Ḥālowā Keots' who accepted only agricultural work as their only pursuit became much more refined.
and improved in course of time and were given a position in the Hindu Society far above the 'Jalowā Keots'. The 'Hālōwā Keots', in modern times, are simply called 'Keot' and included within the category of Sudras. Their marriage relations and other social rules and customs conform to the Hindu rules and customs. In the village Namghar they occupy a position next to the Kalitas and the Brāhmaṇas, and Kalitas and Kayasthas take uncooked things distributed by the Keots. As revealed by literary records, the Keots in lower Assam, in the Medieval period, had been continuing their profession of catching and selling fish. According to Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, the Kaivarttas are the descendants of the Nigadas, i.e. of the proto-Austroloids, about whom a discussion is made below in connection with the Doms.

The other professional Hindu people who claimed themselves to be 'Saru-Kalitās' and were also recognised by the society as the 'Saru-Kalitā', were the 'Sonāri-Kalitā' (the goldsmith), the 'Kahār-Kalitā' (the braziers), the 'Kamār-Kalitā' (the blacksmith), the 'Kumār-Kalitā' (the potter) etc. According to Maniram Dewan, the Koches were given a position in society, next to the Keots. He, further, gives the 'Sonāri-Kalitā', the 'Kahār-Kalitā', the 'Kamār-Kalitā' and the 'Kumār-Kalitā' each a lower position next to the Keots; nevertheless, they were all regarded as Sudras and they observe the customary Hindu rites and manners. The term 'Kumār' is a deviation of the Sanskrit 'Kumbhakāra.' Reference of 'Kumbhakāra' is found as early as in the Nidhanpur grant of Bhaskarvarman of 7th century A.D.. In the Medieval period, a large number of professional people, such as goldsmith, blacksmith, braziers etc.

* Sakala ṛāchhaya yena nāhike Magur māchha /
   Kādi laiā gaiā kanyā keotānir māchha ||
   Sonekāra bachane Saradāi keotānir /
   Māchha dilā Sonekāka kādi laiā gani ///

(Manasa Kavya - Edt. By Dr. B.K. Barua & Dr. S.N. Sarma - 1951, pp-95,96)
were requisitioned from other parts of India at the instance of the Koch Ahom, Chuti, Bhuyan and the Kalita kings and were established in Assam. In Assam, besides their own profession, they took to the agricultural work also. Prior to the Moamaria troubles, these people had a very busy time in Assam with their own pursuits. But after the Moamaria trouble, the fortune of the country turned from bad to worse and the professional people finding no patron had to resort to cultivation which rather gave them a better status in the society. Again there were gradations amongst the *Kamar* (blacksmith) and *Kumār* (potter) Kalitas. The blacksmith who work on casting and the potter who work on the wheel, are considered lower in purity and rank than those blacksmiths and potters who donot work respectively on casting and on the wheel.

(d). Nat (Dancer):

According to Gunabhiram, the number of this community is very few in Assam. 'Nat' generally means a dancer. In lower Assam people of this class adapted themselves to dance and dramatic performance. In upper Assam the barbers also called themselves 'Nat'. In the Vaisnavite and pre-Vaisnavite literary records, references to 'Natas' and 'Natis' are available. Moreover, from the epigraphic records, it is clear that there were many Siva temples in the country, where dance of 'Natas' and the 'Natis' formed an essential part of temple worship. The existence of the 'Natis' in the temples at Biswanath, Hajo, Neghriting and at Dubi Devalaya, was a known fact till the beginning of the British rule. As mentioned in the 'Assam Buranji' of Gunabhiram, during the reign of the Koch king Biswa Singha and his son Naranarayana, some people of this community came to Assam from western India. Later on, these people have taken to the agricultural work like other
professional people. The women of this class of people who were expert dancers, were called 'Natis' and were employed in the temples, specially in the Siva temples for the purpose of dancing and singing at the time of the daily prayers. *Reax* Francis Hamilton observes: "The 'Natis' or dancers and musicians, are here employed in the temples, are considered as a pure caste and these women are not common prostitutes. Even the purest Brāhmaṇas condescend to give them instruction." Hamilton is to some extent true in his remark that they are considered as pure caste; because we have seen that later on the 'Natas' came to be introduced as 'Natl-Kalitas'.

The Ahom king Siva Singha's consort, queen Phuleswari, belonged to the community of this dancers' (Natās) class.

(e). Mālakar (Garland Maker) :

'Mālakar' or 'Mali', or 'Phul-māli' means garland makers. They make garlands of flowers and artificial flowers and sell it. The officer who controlled and managed the ordinary garland makers and suppliers was known as Māliya Barua during the Ahom rule. According to 'Darrang Rajvamsa-

(f). Nāpit (Barber) :

In lower Assam, as said above, this class of professional people were popularly known by the term 'Nāpit' while in upper Assam they introduced themselves as 'Naṭi'. As there was no strict control as regards adoption of profession, the barbers found it quite difficult to live by their own profession. Naturally they fell upon the agricultural work in course of time. Gradually they began to neglect their profession of shaving and trimming their customers and perhaps, as they were very few in number, they gave it up for cultivation work and began to claim a higher position
in the society declaring themselves as Kalitās. But those barbers who had been engaged in the work of shaving hairs of new born baby and cutting umbilical chord, were regarded as inferior to the barbers who gave up shaving or cutting hair as profession.

(g). Dhobā (Washer-man) :

Prior to Sankardeva, it is believed, there were no washermen in this country. Those who came to Assam found difficult to stick to their profession; because almost all people in Assam washed their clothes themselves; very few among the nobles and royal families had got their clothes washed by washerman or others. Naturally most of them had to shun their profession and take to agricultural work. The 'Dhobās' also, later on, claimed themselves as 'Dhobā-Kalitā' and occupied position below the Keot, Koch and Sonāri-Kalitā. But those, who washed the clothes of other low class people, were recognised in the society as impure and low. Hamilton mentions: "The washermen refuse to perform their office for any person except the royal family and Brahmanas and have been elevated to the rank of purity." There were washermen in the Koch kingdom, according to 'Darrang Rajvamsāvali'.

(h). Chamār (Lime Maker and Cobbler) :

Detail descriptions about the 'Chamārs' are not available. In his 'Buranji Vivekrama', Maniram Dewan describes the 'Chamārs' as 'Chamār-Kalitā'. In the Medieval period, there were probably two classes of 'Chamārs'. Those who prepared and sold lime, used with betel nut, were called 'Chamār' or lime makers. According to Haliram Dhekial Phukan, they were called 'Chumār' or 'Mukhi'. The other class of 'Chamārs' were cobblers who worked on leathers. According to 'Darrang Rajvamsāvali' they were called 'Mushier'. In the opinion of Hamilton there were a very few number of cobblers in the capital,
who had made shoes for the king, whenever he desired to wear a pair of it. It is difficult to determine the origin of the 'Chamār-Kalitās'. On the other hand, it is definite that the cobblers were not recognised as 'Chamār-Kalitās'; only the 'Chumārī', i.e. the lime makers, were recognised as the 'Chamār-Kalitās' who were far above the cobblers. As Hamilton infers, it might be true that the cobblers were very few in number, as the low class tribes had the habit of making their musical instruments, weapons and other things of leathers for themselves. The professional cobblers were perhaps greater in number in the Koch kingdom than in the kingdom of the Ahoms. Therefore, it can be assumed with greater certainty that the lime makers were recognised as 'Chamār-Kalitās', and they were probably a class of people in between the 'Hālowā Keots' and the 'Jālowā Keots'. The 'Jālowā Keots', besides fishing, prepare lime by burning the shells of snails and sell it. It seems that a section of them in course of time adhered to agricultural work and kept the business of preparing and selling of lime, which even, they at last completely neglected for the cultivation work and occupied a position in the society as 'Kalitās' like the 'Hālowā Keots'.

(i). Tāti (The Weaver):

The weavers are a very old class of people in Assam. In the local epigraphic records of the early period, references of weavers are found, where they are called 'Tantuvāya' in Sanskrit. The vernacular terms 'Tānti' or 'Tāti' are derived from 'Tantuvāya'. In the Medieval period, many cotton weavers were imported to Assam from other parts of India. Generally the Hindu weavers were called 'Tānti' or 'Tāti' and the Mohammedan weavers were called 'Jola'. In the biographical literature, there are records of villages
completely occupied by Hindu weavers in the Medieval period. Under the Koch king, Naranarayana, Sankardeva, the founder-preceptor of the Vaisnavite cult, was entrusted to supervise the works of the weavers and the 'Vrndavaniya' cloth (that is a woven cloth depicting in pictures the activities of the child Krishna in Vrndavana), was woven by the weavers, under his supervision. Momai Tamuly Barbarua, the Chief Executive Officer and Minister of the Ahom king Pratap Singha, established the weavers in some village in lower Assam.

The 'Katanis' or 'Yugis' are also a class of weavers, but were considered as low and impure. They mainly rear silk-worm, spin its cocoons and weave silk-cloth, for which they were called 'Katanis', i.e., weavers. Although Hindus, the 'Katanis' or the 'Yugis' were considered inferior to the Hindu Cotton weavers. The other Hindus do not take things touched and distributed by the 'Katanis'. Besides their own profession, they have adopted agricultural work also. The 'Katanis', the 'Salais' and the 'Sutas', it is believed, are of the same origin. According to Gunabhiram Barua, the 'Salais' belong to the Vaidik 'Saundika' caste. According to another section of scholars, there is no difference between the 'Salais' and the 'Keot', in origin. But Gunabhiram maintains the view that the 'Katanis' and the 'Salais' are no other than the 'Sutas', who are the illegal progeny of the Brâhmana-widow. The section of this class of people, who took to the rearing of silk-worm and the spinning and weaving of it, were called 'Katanis', while those who took to agricultural work and the bamboo craftsmanship, were called 'Salais' and thus differentiated themselves from the 'Sutas' and the 'Katanis'. Maniram Dewan, in his 'Buranji Vivekratna', divides the 'Katanis' into two divisions, viz., 'Katani-Yugi', i.e., the weavers and the 'Sapuriya-Yugi'.
i.e., the Snake charmers. It is not known why the 'Katanis' are called Snake charmers and we do not find any evidence of their being called Snake charmers. Unlike Gunabhiram, Maniram Dewan recognises 'Sutas' or 'Bariyas' as a separate caste. The people of the 'Suta' community are called 'Bariya' in upper Assam. In the Hindu Assamese Society, the Hindu cotton weavers called 'Tati' were considered as Sudras and were given a far better position than the 'Katanis', the 'Salais' or the 'Sutas' who were considered untouchables. The 'Katanis' had their own Brahmana priests, with whom, the other Brahmanas did not establish any marriage or other social relations.

(j) Sundri or Sudi (Wine maker):

They belong to the Vaidik Saundika caste. According to Gunabhiram, the 'Sudis' were a class of new-comers to Assam. Their pursuit was the preparation and sale of wine. As drinking of wine was discarded and the few who were addicted to it prepared wine themselves, the 'Sudis', later on, had to accept agricultural work for their livelihood.

(k) Patiya (Mat maker):

This class of professional people came to Assam, perhaps during the time of Sankardeva. By profession the 'Patiyas' are mat makers; but coming into Assam, in addition to their own industry, they had taken to agricultural work. The 'Patiyas' had their separate set of Brahmanas for conducting their ceremonial and rituals like the 'Katanis' and the 'Nadiyals'. Those Brahmins were looked down upon other Brahmins.

(l) Dom or Nadiyal (Fisherman):

The 'Doms' or the 'Nadiylas' used the surnames 'Das' or 'Kaivarta'
after their names. We have discussed about the views held by some scholars that the 'Doms' are no other than the 'Kaivarttas' whose references are available in the early epigraphic records. In addition to their main pursuit of catching and selling fish, they prepare lime and sell it or exchange it for commodities and are expert rowmen. Haliram Dhekial Phukan and Gunabhiram boldly mention that the two are distinctly separate. We are also inclined to accept this view. The 'Doms' or 'Nadiyals' who are a numerous tribe in upper Assam, used the surname 'Dasa' in general, instead of 'Kaivartta'; only in recent times they have began to use the surname 'Kaivartta' after their names. Further, the study of the physiognomy of the 'Jalowa Keota' and the 'Doms' or 'Nadiyals' of upper Assam does not lead us to believe that they originally belonged to the same community and to the same stock. The physical features of the latter prompt us to find their connection with the Dravidas while it may be right to assume that the 'Jalowa Kaivarttas' are the descendants of the 'Niṣadas'; i.e., of the Prot-Australoids. About the Kaivarttas, Dr. S.K. Chatterjee remarks, "The exact affinities of these Kaivarttas (sanskritised from a prakrit tribal name Kevatta) is not known. The 'Kevatta' 'Kaivarttas' are found mentioned in the Asoka inscription evidently as an eastern Indian people, whose humble calling (that of fisherman) indicated their non-Aryan origin. They were Austro rather than Mongoloids." Dr. S.K. Bhatterjee, in connection with the Dravidian speakers observes: "The Dravidian speaking people spread from Iran to India and they were at first known to the Aryans by two names which appear to be related, in both Iran and India, viz., 'Dasa' and 'Dasyu' (in Iran these words changed to 'Dēha' and 'Dahyu'). Therefore, we think that the
'Nadiyal' of upper Assam are of Dravidian origin. Edward Galt is also of opinion that the 'Doms' are of obvious Dravidian origin.

Now, it must be admitted that the epithet 'Dom' to this community of people of Assam is quite improper. The 'Nadiyals' (Doms) of upper Assam are far more improved and refined; they do not take the meat of pigs nor burn the dead bodies of the Hindus like the 'Doms' of Bengal and other parts of India. According to Robinson, "They seem to observe the rules of purity, in eating and drinking with a greater strictness than even the Brāhmaṇas of Bengal." Gunabhiram gives an explanation as to why this contemptuous epithet 'Dom' was given to this community of people. He writes that when Buddhism came into prominence during the latter part of the early period, the Kalitās and other low class people, like the 'Nadiyals' (Doms) gladly accepted it and began to torture the high class Hindus, specially the Brāhmaṇas. When Hinduism again rose into power those 'Nadiyals' who embraced Hinduism, were given this neglected epithet 'Dom' as a mark of contempt to fulfill their desire of taking revenge for their past activities and to signify non-Hindus or low-Hindus. After the revivăl of Hinduism the Brahmin priests did not initiate them into Hinduism. So they took the Kalitās as their priests. But as a result of the great Vaisnavite movement, they came to be initiated by the Brāhmaṇas and other Mahantas. Still then the Brahmaṇas, who worked as priests to the 'Nadiyals' (Doms), were regarded as impure and other Brāhmaṇas had cut off all sorts of relations with them. After being initiated into Hinduism, the inferiority complex of the 'Doms', owing to their occupation, and specially for remaining under Buddhism for a considerable period, did not leave them; that is why, Gunabhiram thinks that the 'Nadiyals' (Doms) even after being Hindus,
always call the other Hindus as 'Hindu' as if they themselves are not Hindus. That the 'Nadiyāls' (Doms) were once Buddhists is corroborated by other facts also. Some of the famous 'Siddhas' of the later-day Buddhist sects belonged to this fisherman community of Assam.

The 'Nadiyāls' (Doms) had for sometimes the Kalitās as their priests who were also Buddhists for a considerable period. But later on they took Brāhmaṇas as their priests. The Brahmīnas who have been working as priests to the 'Nadiyāls' (Doms), to them, the other Brāhmaṇas do not give their daughters in marriage. Therefore, the Brāhmaṇas of the 'Nadiyāls' (Doms) marry the daughters of the latter. As soon as married, the newly-married wife is not allowed to remain in the house of the 'Nadiyāl' father nor allowed to take meal after the marriage. On the other hand the Brāhmaṇas of the fisherman community are to give their daughters to the fisherman also, as the number of their community is very meagre. During the reign of the Ahom kings, every fisherman was required to take a totem of the 'Rau-fish' on his forehead so that he could be easily distinguished from others. The Nadiyāls (Doms) are a very numerous tribe in Assam. In the Medieval period, they were considered as untouchables.

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<th>(m) Hādi (Sweeper)</th>
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The 'Hādis' are believed to have a long history in Assam. There were two classes of 'Hādis', one is called 'Marangchowā-Hādi', i.e., sweeper and the other is called 'Baniyā-Hādi', who work on metal like gold, silver, copper and brass. The number of this second class is larger than the former. Intermarriage between the 'Hādis' and the fishermen are in prevalence in Assam.
Assam. For the identity of the 'Marangchowā-Hādis', the Ahom kings ordered them to move in the society with the emblem of a broom stick drawn on their foreheads. The 'Hādis' were considered untouchables. The 'Hādis' have their separate Brāhmanas to conduct their ceremonials and rituals.

(n) Chadal, Hida and Tokar:

All these three communities have a long past in Assam. In the Medieval period, they were all considered as impure and untouchables. Their main profession is fishing, but those who are called 'Hidas', their main profession is pottery. Unlike other potters, the 'Hidas' do not use the wheel for which the earthen vessels made by the 'Hidas' are not used in religious functions. Like the 'Nadiyāls' and 'Hādis', these people have their own Brahmin priests to conduct their ceremonials and rituals.

(o) Teliya (oilman):

Haliram Dhekial Phukan says that there was no separate community like 'Teli' (oilman), in Assam, to supply oil, as in other parts of India. Here the 'Jalowa-Keot' produced oil and supplied it to the people.

(p) The Koch:

The Koches belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of people. The sanskritised name of the Koches is 'Kuvācha'. In connection with Hinduisation in Assam we have already made a detailed discussion about the conversion of the Koches to Hinduism. Amongst the Hinduised non-Aryan people of Assam, the Koches are the most prominent. From the time of the Koch king Biswa Singha, the influence of Hinduism began to spread among the Koches and during the
reign of his son King Naranarayana it made a remarkable progress in the
country. Now we have seen that there are two classes of Koches known
respectively as 'Bar-Koch' and 'Saru-Koch'. The 'Bar-Koches' are Hinduised
Rajvansi or Kachari and the 'Saru-Koches' are converted from Mikir, Lālung,
Gāro and Miri tribes. After their initiation into Hinduism, these non-
Aryan people were named as 'Saru-Koch' or 'Saranīyā'. Of course, like the
Koch, the Kachāri, the Mikir, the Lālung, the Miri etc. are all belonging
to the Tibeto-Burman stock. As the king of Kochbehar belonged to the Koch
Community, so, in Kochbehar proper, and in modern Goalpara and Kamrup
districts, the Koches introduce themselves as 'Rājvansi'. We have discussed
above that the King Naranarayana while ordering his Koch people to act in
conformity with the laws of Hindu 'Varṇāsrama dharma' as regards food,
division of work, social functions, customs etc., he allowed a section of
Kachāri people, particularly of the north bank, to retain their old food
and drink and other tribal customs. The Koches in upper Assam, at present,
are given a position just next to the Kalitās and Keots. The Koch is now
a name of a Hindu caste in upper Assam. A Koch can offer uncooked things
to the Brāhmans, Kayasthas and Kalitās. About the Koches, Edward Gait in
his 'A History of Assam' writes: "At present day the word Koch is a
term of some ambiguity. In Assam proper it has became the name of a Hindu
caste into which are received the converts to Hinduism from the ranks of
the Kachari, Lālung, Mikir and other tribes; and as the process of conver-
sion still continuing, the number of persons, described as Koch are
increasing rapidly." 88 But as we have said above, the Kachari, Lālung,
Mikir converts are called 'Saru-Koch' to distinguish them from the Koch
proper. In upper Assam the marriage and other social customs, ceremonies
and functions of the Koches strictly conform to the Hindu rules and they are considered as Hindus. The Koches are very numerous in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. In lower Assam, those who are connected with the Koch Community, are known as 'Rajvamsi', 'Rabha', 'Mech' etc. The main pursuit of the Koches is agriculture.

(q) The Kacharis & other tribes:

The Kacharis belong to the Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman stock and have different branches, such as Mikir, Lalung, Hajong, Dimacha etc. Those who came under the influence of Hinduism in a regular course are called 'Saru-Koch' and those who were less influenced are called 'Saraniya-Kachari'. In the same way, the Miri, Mikir, Garo and other tribes who have been initiated into Hinduism are called 'Saraniya'. In the last part of the 18th century (1790 A.D.), the Kachari king, at his capital at Khaspur, entered into the affigy of a copper cow and emerging out of it proclaimed himself a Hindu. After the Kacharis we can mention the names of some of the Naga tribes, Singphos, Miri, Naktes etc.

(r) The Chutias:

The Chutias are an ancient tribe of Assam and according to Hamilton, they are the most numerous tribe towards the east of Kalikbar, next to the Ahoms. Hamilton divides the Chutias into two classes, viz., 'Hindu-Chutia' and 'Ahom-Chutia'. The 'Hindu-Chutias' have abandoned their tribal customs and have received degraded Brahmans as spiritual guides. The 'Ahom-Chutias' maintain their tribal customs and follow the dictates of the 'Deodhais' in spiritual matters. The 'Hindu-Chutias' perform their 'Sraddha' and marriage ceremony just like the Hindus; and the
'Ahom-Chutiñas' do not. So far as the 'Hindu-Chutiña' is concerned, Hamilton is correct; but it seems he had no fair idea about the Chutías in general. The 'Ahom-Chutiñas' are those who completely merged with the Ahoms. We have now simply the name 'Ahom-Chutiña' for classification, but a separate entity of them is not possible. According to Sarbananda Rajkumar, the Chutías can be broadly divided into five classes, viz., (1) the Hindu-Chutiña, (2) the Deuri-Chutiña, (3) the Barāhi-Chutiña, (4) the Ahom-Chutiña and (5) the Miri-Chutiña. In modern times one can distinctly point out the 'Hindu-Chutiñas' and the 'Deuri-Chutiñas' only; the other three, viz., the 'Barāhi-Chutiñas', the 'Ahom-Chutiñas' and the 'Miri-Chutiñas', completely merged, respectively, in the Barāhis, the Ahoms and the Miris and cannot be identified separately. About the Miri-Chutiñas, it is said that when the Ahoms overran the Chutīa kingdom, some of the Chutiñas fled to the territory of the Miris and settled among them by taking the Miri girls as their wives and also giving their daughters to the Miris, leaving no trace of their separate identity. So also, the Ahom-Chutiñas are those who mixed and merged in the Ahoms and were included in the 'Ahom-Khels'.

The Barahis are known as the Barāhi-Chutiñas; but most of them also merged in the Ahoms. The 'Deuri-Chutiñas' are popularly called 'Deuri' and they follow their own tribal customs and rituals; but they are mostly influenced by Hindu Tantrik faith.

The 'Hindu-Chutiñas' are now regarded as Sudras in the Assamese Hindu Society and perform their ceremonies and functions like other Hindus.

(s) The Barāhis :-

The Barāhis belong to the Tibeto-Burman stock. They had a small
territory under their own leader, but later on their territory was annexed by the Ahoms and many of them submerged with the Ahoms. It is not possible to say anything whether the Barahis came under the influence of Hinduism or not. The literary records prove that Madhab-Kandi, a Brahmin poet, to whom Sankardeva had paid tribute with great veneration, translated the great epic 'Rāmāyaṇa' under the patronage of one Barahi king named Mahamanikya. Although from the ethnological point, the difference between the Kacharis and the Barahis, is not great, still, they are two separate groups of people. Now a section of scholars believes that Mahamanikya was a Kachari king while another section believes him to be a king of Tripura and the third section believes him to be a Barahi king, who had a small territory surrounding modern Sonari in the Sibsagar Subdivision. The dispute is not yet settled and there is sufficient ground to establish the third view as historical fact in which case it would be possible on our part to say that the Barahis came under the influence of Hinduism, with the evidence that prior to the great Vaisnavite movement, the great Hindu epic 'Rāmāyaṇa' was translated into Assamese under the patronage of a Barahi king.

(t) The Ahoms :

As to the Ahoms and their religious policy we have already discussed in connection with their conversion to Hinduism. The Ahoms of the high families, who became Hindus, in spite of their loose adherence to Hinduism, followed some of their original customs and manners. They invite Brahmana to perform 'Prayashchitta', 'Śanti-svastyana' etc. Most of these Hinduised Ahoms perform Viṣṇu puja, Śiva puja, Satyanārāyaṇa puja etc.
in their houses through Brahmāṇa priests. When a man dies or a new baby is born in the family, they observe a period of one month ceremonial impurity like other Sudras. At the end of the month they become pure by performing Prāyaschitta and other functions, as directed by the Brahmāṇa priests.

During the course of their six hundred years of rule, different non-Ahom families were admitted into the Ahom-fold. But as the convention goes, there are seven principal clans or 'phaisd' of Ahoms of 'Blue-blood'. These seven clans of Ahoms are 'distinguished under the name 'Sat-ghariā-Ahom', i.e., the Ahoms of the seven houses. The first three houses were the Royal family, the Buragohain family, and the Bargohain family; about the remaining four, there is always a difference of opinion. According to one section these four houses are the Deodhāi, Mohan, Sāilung and the Siring, the families of the priests and astrologers; while according to other section they are the secular families Lāhan, Sandikoi, Dihingiā and Durā."

The Ahoms belong to the Thai-Chinese family which have many branches; in Assam we have the Sām, Khāmti and the Ahoms only. The different groups of the Sām branch, living in Assam, are the Phākiāl, Turung, Narā and the Āitaniā. Of all these groups of people, the Ahoms have been maintaining the closest relation with Hinduism. Most of the Ahoms were generally known by their office or 'phels', or the specific service to which they were appointed or engaged; for example, Phukan, Barū, Rājkhowā, or Duliā, Jāpisajia, Sandikoi, Jarādhara etc..

5. Other Minor Tribes :-

Long before the Ahoms, came to this country some other tribes
called Matak or Maraṇ and Narā and made their settlements permanently in the territories of modern Sadia, Dibrugarh Subdivision and in the eastern part of the Sibsagar Subdivision. Sukāphā, the first Ahom king in Assam, coming into this land, established matrimonial relations with the Morāns. The territory occupied by the Mataks or the Morāns was called 'Matakar-Des' i.e., the land of the Matakas. As discussed elsewhere, the Morān and Matak are the same group of people. Besides the views held about the origin of the designations 'Morān' and 'Matak', which we have discussed above, there are other views also. About the designation 'Matak', the oldest opinion is that the term 'Matak' is an Ahom word which means wise and powerful man. The other interpretation wants to connect it with their characteristic attitude towards their religious faith. According to this interpretation, the word originates from the words 'Mata + eka', which leads to 'Matek' and 'Matak'. Hence, the meaning of the term 'Matak' means united or one in opinion in religious faith; Mat = opinion, eka = one or united. If we accept this interpretation, then the 't' of the word 'Matak' should have been dental; but all through, it is spelt as cerebral which does not conform to the meaning 'opinion'. According to another interpretation, during the reign of the Ahom kings Laksminath Singha and Gaurinath Singha, these people killed a vast number of people and some places of upper Assam became completely devoid of inhabitants. So, in order to signify the destructive nature of these people they were called 'Morān'. In this connection it is significant to note that in the chronicles accepted to be written in the early part of the Ahom rule, in connection with the account of the reign of Shkāphā, we do not get any reference to the terms Morān or Matak. As the Mataks are the disciples of the Satra Maya-Maraṇ.
established by Aniruddhadeva, they are known as 'Māya-mara' or 'Mārā'. 'Mārā' also, a discussion of which is made elsewhere in the book.

After the annexation of their territory by the Ahoms, the Morans, gradually mixed up with the Ahoms. The Ahoms offered them high posts, both in the 'Khels' and in the 'Mels.' There was an important military division of Morān archery (Morān Kaḍi) within the Military department of the Ahom kings. The Morāns were initiated to Vaisnavism of 'Kāla-Samhati' sect, under Aniruddhadeva who established a Satra called 'Māya-mara' at the instance of Bhavanipuriya Gopaldeva. The Maṭaks or the Morāns were the most catholic followers of the faith, showing inordinate reverence to their Gurus, who were considered superior or higher than the "temporal overlords". With the accumulation of wealth and disciples the 'Māya-mara' Satra became so powerful that towards the later part of the Ahom rule, they captured the Ahom throne, feeding fat their old grudge of the insults and tortures received by them and their 'Gurus', in the hands of the Ahom Government and some of the high officials of the State.

The other minor tribes who came under the Hindu influence were the Miris, the Āpātānis, the Nakteys, some of the Naga clans of south-east side of the modern Dibrugarh and Sibsagar Subdivisions and the Gāros. Of these, the Miris had close contact with Hinduism as well as with the Assamese Society of the plains. The tribal people living at the foot of the hills, became more improved and refined in their manners and customs as a result of their contact with Hinduism and the civilised people of the plains.
6. Non-Hindus:

The other people who were members of the Assamese Society but not of the Hindu Community are the Mohammedans and the Sikhs. The Mohammedans past have a long association in this country and were connected with the Medieval Assamese Society in all its spheres, except religious matters. Most of the Mohammedans, living in Assam, belonged to the 'Sunni' sect. As they were living under the Hindu kings and amidst Hindu people, many of them, specially those living in the villages, followed the Hindu manners and customs to a certain extent. The Mohammedans of some of the places worshipped the goddess Vişāhari and played the role of the 'ojāh', the head singer, in the 'ojāh-pāli' performance, held in connection with the worship of the goddess Manasa or Viṣāhari. It is believed that the worship of goddess Manasa was first introduced by the Mariās, a section of the Mohammedans who are brass-metal workers by profession. The most popular Manasa-poet Sukavi Narayandeva, introduced the episode of Hasan and Hussain in his work 'Padma Purāṇa', early in the 16th century. Perhaps for these reasons, Shihabuddin Talish writes about the Mohammedan inhabitants of Assam thus: "As for Mussalmans who had been taken prisoner in former times and had chosen to marry here, their descendants act exactly in the manner of the Assamese, and have nothing of Islam except the name; their hearts are inclined far more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims. The Mohammedan inhabitants were popularly known as 'Gadia', as they first came from the Gauda country of the west, and a section of them was called 'Mariā' who are engaged in brass-metal works.

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