CHAPTER IX
Preliminary Discussions

1. Geographical Aspect

(a) Physical features

Assam is a State of India, situated on its north-east frontier. The present boundaries of Assam lie between latitudes 28° east and 24° north and longitudes 89° 46' and 97° 4' east. Assam is girded by mountains on its three sides, viz., the north, east and south. The fertile Brahmaputra valley begins from the confluence of the rivers Lohit, Dibang and Dihang in the east and stretches through a vast tract of land about 450 miles in length from east to west and about 50 to 100 miles in breadth between north and south. The Brahmaputra river passes through this valley.

On its north, the country is guarded by Bhot, Akā, Daflā, Miri and Mishimi hills of the Sub-Himalayan ranges; on the east Mishimi, Singpho, Pātkāi and Naga hills and Burma; on the south, East Pakistan and on the West, East Pakistan and North-Bengal. Assam can be subdivided into three divisions according to its physical features; (1) the hilly regions of the north, (2) the Brahmaputra valley and the (3) hilly regions of the central Assam and south-east side. Towards the north, the Bhot, Akā Daflā, Miri and Mishimi hills are the offshoots of the great Himalayan ranges. The Naga, Pātkāi and Lushāi hills separate Assam from Burma. The Gāro and Khāsia Jayantiā hills are situated in the centre of Assam and are working as great water-sheds. In the midst of the two rows of hills on the north and the south, is the luxurient Brahmaputra valley bisected...
by the great river of the same name.

The Brahmaputra and Sri Lauhitya are Sanskritised names. Its popular and household names are Lohit, Luit and Sri Luit. The Brahmaputra valley begins from the confluence of Dibang, Dihang and Lohit in the east and than gradually extending towards west, suddenly becomes narrowed because of the Mikir Hills in between modern Sibsagar and Nowgong districts. Down stream towards the west, the valley again thins near Kamakhya at Gauhati on account of the Khasia Jayantia and Garo hills situated on the southern side of the river. The valley widens as far as Goalpara where it is again narrowed by the Goalpara hill on the south and Jogighopā and Fāglātāk hills on the north. Just after this point, the valley again widens and at Dhubri finally opens out into the great delta of Bengal. Thus the Brahmaputra valley is a compact geographical unit by nature itself.

In the economy of Assam, the river Brahmaputra plays a very important role. Like other places in the world, here on the cradle of this valley was reared a nation and a culture nurtured which mingled up with the heterogeneous elements pouring from different parts of the world. It is the fertile soil and the luxuriant growth of the vegetation of the valley that attracted people from different parts of the world. In short, the Assamese life is intimately associated with the river Brahmaputra. As to the number of rivers, Robinson observes that: "Assam may be said to exceed every other country of equal extent; including the Brahmaputra and its two great tributaries sixty one have been ascertained to exist,
of which thirty-four flow from the northern and twenty-four from the southern mountains, besides numerous others of less concern.\footnote{1} The northern rivers, compared to the southern rivers, are more rapid and harmful; they are shallow and in the rainy season they easily inundate. But the rivers issuing from the southern mountains are very deep and do not usually overflow and are therefore not very harmful. The people of the valley are very much grateful to the great river Brahmaputra and its many tributaries for their gifts of alluvial deposits. But in spite of such benefits they very often do immense harm to the people by floods in the rainy season. There are many records of such incidents. Many a time, the rivers including Brahmaputra, changed their courses devastating the corn fields and settlements of the inhabitants. The present island Majuli, which is the greatest river island in the world, was formed as a result of such a change in the course of the river Brahmaputra. In the Medieval period the rivers were the main arteries of transport, commerce and communication; but most of the tributaries were navigable during the rainy season only. All the main towns of the country are situated on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. The river Brahmaputra, from time immemorial, has been serving as the main artery of internal and external trade of the country. Some of them were gold-bearing rivers for which Assam was famous throughout the world. Taking Brahmaputra in the midst, the valley can be divided into two, viz., the \textit{Uttar kol} (the north bank) and the \textit{Dakshin kol} (the south bank). With reference to the level of the waters of Brahmaputra, the lands in Assam may be divided into three classes: (1) the hilly regions, (2) the plain or the alluvial deposits of the Brahmaputra and the (3) diluvial plains of the valley.\footnote{2}
The first division (i.e. the hilly region) is composed of hills. There are two such regions of importance; the first one is that of the Mikir Hills and the second one is that of the Kamakhya hills. Both the Mikir hills and the Kamakhya hills are prolongations of the Khasi hills. There are other minor hilly regions, such as Hajo, Sualkuchi, Rudreswar, Singari, Kaliabar and Hatiimira. The Mikir Hills composed the largest hilly region along the valley of the Jamuna river. The second division, viz., the alluvial deposit of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries is the most important division of lands, so far the economic condition of the Assamese people is concerned. Extensively lying on both banks of the river Brahmaputra, these lands are very fertile, but they are subject to annual inundations. In the third division we get the diluvial plains of the both banks whose levels are "generally above the ordinary inundations of the Brahmaputra and its tributary streams." In the districts of Darrang, Nongong, Kamrup and Goalpara, a considerable portion of the lands is low and marshy. Almost the whole year, some of them remain under water. According to Gunabhiram, it is a strange phenomenon of the nature that the total area of the low and diluvial lands on the north bank is equal to the area of the high and alluvial lands on the south bank and vice versa.

The hills and forests which are very rich with flora and fauna and pregnant with various minerals contributed greatly to the building up of a healthy economy of the State.

(b) Climate

Here we are using the term climate in a very loose sense; it is used to mean the ordinary state of atmosphere with regard to heat and moisture
that prevail in this part of the world. Assam is within the temperate zone. Its climate is equally hot and cold; that is, the intensity of heat and cold are felt almost in equal degree in the summer and winter seasons, respectively. In the summer season, the average degree of intensity of heat is 74°; sometimes it goes up to 80°. In the winter season it amounts to 57°. "With regard to humidity, Assam may be considered as enjoying the maximum". Generally in the lower elevation or in the plains, the temperature is higher and with the elevation of land or near the mountain chains or upon the mountains, the intensity of cold is higher. This, so happens, not because of the difference in distance of the radiation of sun's rays but there are other powerful causes also. The freezing currents of winds that blow from the lofty peaks of the mountains, chill the nearby places. In the plains, the great river Brahmaputra, and its tributary streams and the big forests lying scattered throughout the country have ever been cooling the air in a great measure. The most important winds that frequent Assam are the one that blows from south-west direction called Monsoon and another that blows from north-east direction which are also responsible for the intensity of heat and cold, respectively in the summer and winter seasons. There are other factors which are working in unity to regulate the climate of the land; but the place for elaborate discussion of these matters is very limited here. However, according to W. Robinson, "comparatively speaking, Assam enjoys a far more peculiar temperate climate with a greater equality of temperature, than is general throughout India".

We can divide the seasons of the year very broadly into three:
(1) Grisma (summer), (2) Varsa (rainy) and (3) Sit (winter). Even then, nobody can find out a place like Assam where the complete manifestation of the six seasons, viz., Grisma, Varsa, Sarat, Hemanta, Sit and Vasanta can be witnessed. Assam enjoys the maximum of rainfalls in the rainy season, which continues for a longer period, owing to the predominance of the Monsoon. The highest amount of rainfall in the world occurs in a place called Cherapunji in the district of Khasi & Jayantia hills (now Mausynrum, a few miles away from Cherapunji is considered to be the highest rainfall area). In the year 1861, the rainfall in Cherapunji rose up to 805 inches. Here, usually the rainfall rises up to 12 inches a day. The winter commences from the months of Āsvin and Kārttiika and continues up to the month of Pālguna. The cold is felt in the highest degree of intensity in the months of Pausa and Māgha.

(c) Climate and Health

As to the climate of Assam and its effect upon the general health of the inhabitants, different opinions are found. According to one section, its climate is equal to that of the healthiest provinces in India and according to the other, its climate bears close resemblance to that of Arakan. But their assertions cannot be taken for granted; because the climate of the province is determined by different factors in different localities. Hence, the climate and its effect upon the general health of the inhabitants at different places and at different times, differ from each other. The prevailing winds, nearness of hills and jungles and the low marshy lands are mainly responsible for the ill effect upon the health of the inhabitants of the State. According to Robinson, "the remarkably
varied character of the localities throughout the province may be supposed to exercise a great influence on the general healthiness of the climate, especially with respect of their situation and position in reference to the points of prevailing winds. The influence is more remarkable in the lower than in the upper portion of the valley, which is mainly attributable to the obstruction the wind receives from the vicinity of the great ranges of hills; for this must prevent the dispersion of the noxious exhalations engendered in the low marshy grounds, and extensive dense forests, abounding in their vicinity and give rise to those fevers which are regarded so dangerous and intractable. The southern side of the upper portion of the valley though more open to the prevailing winds, is exceedingly moist and damp; which may be attributed to the winds wafting the exhalations arising from the river and marshes in its vicinity to the adjacent hills, where they are frequently known to rest for several successive days. From the frequent occurrence of high table lands on the northern side of the valley, with less jungle and marshy ground, that side has the advantage of a freer circulation of air, and in consequence, is not productive of the diseases prevalent on the opposite side. Notwithstanding fevers contracted in the neighbourhood of the jungles are frequently of a malignant nature. The commencement and cessation of the rains are considered to be the most unhealthy periods of the year.

About the influence exerted by the climate upon the different classes of people of the State, Robinson says that those people belonging to the upper classes of the Hindu society, who remain almost aloof from agricultural pursuits or physical labour, are very weak and easily attacked by diseases
at the slightest change of the weather. But those, who are engaged in agricultural pursuits or physical labour are healthier, robust and are not predisposed to disease even at the frequent change of weather. They enjoy remarkably excellent health. The strangers, who come from other parts of India, habituated to a comparatively dry climate, cannot easily adjust themselves with the damp and humid climate of the rainy season here. For instance, those who unfortunately came to Assam with Mirjumla, in the second half of the 17th century, during the rainy season, to invade Assam, had to suffer much from fever and dysentery and a large number of them had to die of these diseases. The noted writer Shihabuddin and the contemporary French traveller Bernier, had given vivid descriptions of the hardships met with by Mirjumla and his soldiers in the summer season here. According to Bernier, the whole rainy season, Mirjumla had to remain inactive in his camp and his soldiers became completely tired and lifeless. According to another report, one third of the Mirjumla's soldiers and horses died of diseases, four hundred horse-soldiers believed to have died of Goitres and Mirjumla himself became a victim of cough and fever. According to Shihabuddin, "the climate of the parts on the banks of the Brahmaputra suits natives and the strangers alike. But at the distance from the river, though the climate agrees with the natives, it is rank poison to foreigners."  

"But to the Europeans," Robinson says, "the climate is not so harmful as it has frequently been reported to be."  

The more harmful diseases of the epidemic nature are cholera, dysentery and small-pox. Many a time cholera broke out in the province and at every time many people lost their lives. W. Robinson has given us
a graphic account of such cases of mortality. History also records
many such cases of cholera that occurred epidemically in the province. In
the reign of Shutamla, alias Jayadhvaja Singha (1650-1663), cholera
broke out twice in the province; once at the time of Mirjumla's invasion
and it carried off twelve thousand Assamese soldiers. About small-pox,
although Robinson says that it did never appear in epidemic nature except
in the year 1832, "when it raged with uncommon virulence from the
February to the end of July", there are references in the records, that
it appeared at other times also. In the year 1574, during the reign of
Chāophā Shukham, alias Khorāraja, small-pox appeared throughout the
country and a great number of the victims were swept away. The disease
from which the people chiefly suffered, was Dysentery. Every year it
carried off more victims than "almost all other diseases put together."
Robinson says that those who were addicted to the use of opium were more
liable to the disease than those who abstained from it and a larger
portion of the former proved fatal in such a disease. It is recorded,
that during the reign of king Gaurinath Singha (A.D. 1780-1795) cholera
and Dysentery broke out simultaneously in the country and many people died.
The other diseases that were prevalent in the country are fevers, bowel
complaints, pulmonic affections, verminous diseases, venereal and cutaneous
complaints, rhematism, enlargement of the spleen, goitres, elephantiasis
of the leg, bronchitis, asthma, pneumonia and leprosy. Amongst these
diseases the fever was the most common. They were much more of the
malignant nature in the neighbourhood of the hills, jungles and low marshy
lands, than in the plains. In fact, the climate of these places was very
much uncongenial to health and the common diseases in these localities. 
were goitres, elephantiasis and leprosy. The females were the chief victims 
of goitres. About venereal disease, it is said that soon after the Burmese 
invansion it began to spread in this country; in this connection it should 
be noted here that the system of prostitution, a social evil responsible 
for venereal disease, became prevalent in this country only after the 
Burmese invasions.  

References of pestilence in the country. are also found. For instance, 
in the reign of Chāophā Shuseng, alias Pratap Singha (A.D. 1603-1643), 
cattle diseases broke out in the country and many cows and buffalos died 
of the pestilence.  

(d) Natural Calamities: 

Besides epidemics, the other notorious natural calamities which 
frequently and greatly tormented the people of Assam during this period, 
are earthquake, flood, violent storm and lightnings. Shocking descriptions 
of earthquakes of different times are recorded in various chronicles. 
Rai Gunabhiram Barna is of opinion that earthquake occured here very 
frequently, because the country is surrounded with hills, with minerals 
in them. As to the frequent occurrence of earthquake, Robinson says: 
"....... as connected with volcanic sources the frequency and severity 
of earthquake may here be noticed. Few months passed without one or more 
shocks being experienced, which, owing to the circumstance of their 
proceeding from north to south, have been supposed to originate in still 
active volcanoes in upper Tartary. These earthquakes are commonly preceded 
by close, calm, and sultry weather, a phenomenon which though commonly
remarked in connection with earthquakes in general, would nevertheless, rather militate against the supposed distant source of the volcanic shock." Sometimes the earthquakes changed the surface of the country to such an extent that temples and houses tumbled down to the dust and hills and tracts of lands sank down to the earth below along with the inhabitants living there. Rai Gunabhiram Barua mentions that a terrible earthquake occurred just before the first invasion of the Burmese. In the year 1846, another great earthquake occurred, the tremors of which were felt for many days; it broke down the trident of the Umānanda temple. The other tremendous earthquakes recorded are those occurred in the years A.D.1759, (during the reign of Rajeswar Singha), 1869 and 1897. Gunabhiram points out that the temple discovered under earth in a village called Matharguri, near Dabaka police station in the district of Nowgong, might be one which had gone down in such an earthquake. Speaking about the quake of 1897, Edward Gait remarks: "There are few masonry structures, which could resist a shock like that of 1897, which not only laid in ruins the towns of Shillong, Gauhati and Sylhet but also overthrew many of the monoliths, which are so marked a feature of the Khāsi and Jayanti hills and brokedown most of the piers of the Sil-Sāko, an ancient stone bridge, not far from Hajo, which makes the bed of a river that has long since left it and taken another course." 20

There are numerous references of storms and lightnings recorded in the chronicles which made uncommon devastations and caused terror in the hearts of the people. In one chronicle, it is recorded that in the reign of king Pramatta Singha (A.D.1744-1752), the royal palace was struck by lightning once and during the reign of Rajeswar Singha (1752-1762) twice.
The same chronicle records that in the reign of this king a great storm swept over the country from west to east.  

As to the inundation, the Brahmaputra itself and the northern tributaries are more harmful than the southern tributaries. The rivers issuing from the northern mountains are shallow, easily spated with water and are more rapid. Like the earthquake and storms, flood-disaster is also a chronic disease of Assam. Owing to its effects many rivers of the country changed their courses doing ruthless harm to the cultivators. In the reign of king Gadadhar Singha (A.D.1681-1695), two floods effected the country one after another, at an interval of only three days, in which five stairs of the big staircase ascending to the royal 'Halong' pink palace were submerged under water. The people named them 'Sakā' and 'Sākini' allegorically, to indicate them as ominous. According to captain J.B. Neufville, in the reign of king Rajeswar Singha, a very devastating flood occurred in the country owing to the spate in the river Dihing. The flood engulfed the whole country and it was violent and forceful that a great change in the physical features of the country took place and rivers changed their courses. This flood lasted for fifteen days. The current of the flood carried away animals, agricultural implements, domestic utensils etc.  

The natural calamities like earthquake, storm and flood which so often visited the country brought many changes in the topography of the land. That is probably why we cannot identify many of the places of historical importance referred to in the Purānas, specially in the 'Kālikā Purāṇa', 'Yogini Tantra' and later-day chronicles composed during
the reigns of the kings of the Medieval period. In his attempt to locate
the place Lakhau, to where the Mogul General Mirjumla proceeded, at the
time of his Assam invasion in the second half of the seventeenth century,
Edward Gait indicates such a great change. We get other references of
such changes also; when the Ahoms first entered into upper Assam, the
two rivers Namdāng, a tributary of the river Dikhau, and Chāring which is
now completely dead, were of much more depth and breadth. After an
inquiry the Ahoms found that there were three thousand bathing steps
(ghāṭ) on the bank of the river Namdāng and three hundred on the river
Chāring. That the river Chāring was in existence can be guessed from
the marshy patches of lands lying scattered in the area.

So, while appreciating the natural beauties and resources of Assam,
we cannot ignore the natural calamities which had a great bearing on the
life of the people.

2. The People:

Assam is considered by the anthropologists as the museum of races.
Various races from different parts of the World migrated to Assam, made
their settlements and contributed to the building up of Assamese Society
and culture. We have discussed elsewhere that Assam is situated on one
of the main routes of migration. From the north and east came the Alpines
or non-vedic Aryans, the Austries, the Tibeto-Burmans and the Thai-
Chinese people. From the west came the Negritos, the Drāvidas and the
Aryans. The Negritos and the Drāvidas could not exert their influence
here, and they were probably driven out by the succeeding Mongoloids. Traces of Negritos and Dravidas are found only in some places of Assam, specially in the Naga hills. The other people that have their share in the constitution of the Assamese Society and its culture are the Alpines, the Austrics, the Tibeto-Burmans, the Thai-Chinese and last but not the least, the Aryans. The Austrics, the Kirātas, the Alpines, the Negritos, the Aryans etc. are the earliest inhabitants of the State. Dr. B.K.Barua and Dr. P.C.Choudhury have elaborately discussed about them. Here, we will not discuss in detail about them but we will discuss, in particular, about the people who migrated to Assam during the Medieval period, viz., the Thai-Chinese, the Aryans and the Moguls.

(a) Austro-Asiatics

The Austro-Asiatics are a branch of the great Austric family, of which the other branch is called Austro-nesians. In Assam the Khasis living in the Khasia & Jayanti hills belong to the Monkhmer group of the Austro-Asiatic branch. They were perhaps forced to take shelter in the Khasia & Jayanti hills by the Tibeto-Burman people. They are now, as if, living on an island in the Khasia & Jayanti hills in the midst of a Tibeto-Burman ocean. Though the Khasis are now very meagre in number and living like islanders at a distance from the valley people, yet their contributions to the Assamese culture is not negligible. In the field of Assamese language and other aspects of Assamese cultural life, the Austric elements are far more obvious than the Tibeto-Burman elements, although the Tibeto-Burmans are greater in number and dominated over Assam for a considerable period. The Khasi Chiefs were politically subordinated to
the Koch and Ahom kings, who were dominant rulers of Assam. It is supposed that Austro-Asiatics are the earliest inhabitants of Assam.

(b) Tibeto-Burmans

After the Austrics, that draws our attention, is the Tibeto-Burman people. The Tibeto-Burmans are more numerous than the Austrics and practically occupied the whole of Assam spreading all over in it. The Tibeto-Burmans are a branch of the Tibeto-Chinese people, and in Assam they can be again subdivided into three separate divisions, viz., the Tibeto-Himalayan, the Assam-Burma and the North Assam subdivision. Of the Tibeto-Himalayan subdivision, Assam had close commercial relations with the Tibetan or Bhutia groups of it; but they cannot be included within the political and cultural jurisdiction of Assam. The Bodo, Naga, Kuki-chin, Kochin, Burmese, Lolomochu and Sak or Lui are included in the Assam-Burma subdivision. In fact, the Assam-Burma subdivision is the largest and predominant group of people in Assam. The Bodo group of people again can be subdivided into nine subgroups, viz., the Kachari or Bodo, Lohung, Dimachai, Garo, Koch, Khaba, Tripura, Chutia and Moran. Of these subgroups, except the Tripurās, all are closely connected with the political and cultural activities of Assam. In the Medieval period, Assam had diplomatic relations with the Tripurā kings. The Naga-group of people are again subdivided into five subgroups, viz., the Naga-Bodo, the west, the middle and the east branches of the Nagas and the Naga-kuki. Within the Kuki-chin group the Meithei, the Kuki and the Lushais are included. The Kochins are popularly known as Singphos who were also under the political supremacy of the Assam kings. There are no people of the last three groups,
viz., the Burmese, the Loloimy or Lui, in Assam. The North-Assam subdivision consisted of the Akh, Abor, Miri, Daf, and Mishimi groups of people.

Now, about the Mishimis and Koches, divergences of opinion are also seen. Some anthropologists find similarities of the people of Caucasian stock with the Mishimis and another section with the Aryans. In the same way the Koches are believed to be of Dravidian origin on the basis of the term Rajvansi used by a section of the Koch people. But except with the similarity of the term Rajvansi, there is nothing to support this view.

(c) Thai-Chinese:

In other words the Thai-Chinese are known as Siamese-Chinese. The Thai people were the inhabitants of the province Unon, in China. Later on, they began to migrate from their original home and in the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Ahoms, a group of the Thai-Chinese people, entered into the valley of the Brahmaputra through the mountain passes of north east-Assam and within a period of two or three centuries, consolidating their power with great struggle, they became the ruling party of the whole of Assam. They ruled the country for about six hundred years and had the lion's share in giving a definite shape of national life of the Assamese people during this period. The different groups of people, living in Assam and belonging to the Thai-Chinese branch, are the Ahoms, the Khantis, the Sams, the Phakiels, the Taiungs, the Naras and the Altonias.

(d) The Alpines:

A section of scholars believe that earlier to the Mongoloids the
Alpines, that is, the non-Vedic Aryans, came to Assam and established flourishing kingdoms here. In the Vedas the eastern region of India is called 'Anupadaśa', i.e., the land of the 'Vrātyas', which confirms the settlements of the Alpines here in this part of India. Now, about the migration of the Alpines, it is believed that they entered into India by the North-west gates, earlier to the people who lived in the Indus valley with a high civilisation. But the Alpines, who lived in the eastern region, particularly in ancient Assam, entered into the Brahmaputra valley by the North-east gates of this region. The existence of the Alpines is believed in connection with the priestly class or the Kāyasthas mentioned in the Nidhanpur grant of Bhaskarvarman and the priestly class of Kalitās, who had been working as priests to the Koches and the Kālvartas and whose influence came to be overshadowed by the Aryan Brāhmanas in the subsequent times. Further, some notable writers believe that the Alpines are allied to the Iranians and there were some early Iranian-Magian Settlements in eastern India in the regions like, Videha, Magadha and Prāgjyotisa. Spooner holds the view that the name Prāgjyotisa, a place of planetary worship, had got its name from the settlements of the Magians, who were the worshippers of planets and is of opinion that king Bhagadatta of ancient Assam was of the same origin. Likewise, the Kalitās are also considered to be of Alpine origin owing to their priestly activities in the past history. But it is the common belief in Assam that ancestors of the Kalitās were Kṣatriyas and that they entered into Assam through the west, but they were degraded. The Kṣatriya origin of the Kalitās is supported by late R.K. Bordoloi, L.N. Bezbarua and A.C. Agarwalla. Late K.R. Medhi considers the Kalitās to be non-Vedic Aryans.
who entered into Assam most probably through the North-east passes of India. In conclusion it may be said that the existence of the Alpines in Assam cannot be discarded and they were the ancestors of the Kalitas and some of the Kayasthas living in modern Assam. But then, in course of time, they had got mixed up with the Kalitas and Kayasthas coming from the West. The Kalitas were perhaps under the influence of Buddhism for a considerable period both within and outside Assam.

(e) The Aryans:

Ancient Assam came into contact with the Aryan-India between the second century B.C. and second century A.D. and this is the common opinion held by most of the indologists. From the records it is learnt that Naraka of Mithila first brought Brahmans, Ksatriyas and Kayasthas along with him and established them in Assam. After Naraka-Bhagadatta, one Dharmapal, who came from Gauda and established himself as king of Kamarupa with his capital at Godanda, brought Brahmans, Kayasthas and Kalitas from Gauda, Kanauj, Mandartal, Tirhut etc. and established them here. The same source mentions about a Ksatriya boy, named Jitari, who came to Kamarupa and became the king of it with his capital at Kuberachal. The linguistic and archaeological evidences of Assam also proved its relationship with the rest of India since a long time. We have further discussed elsewhere that Assam lay at the side of one of the principal routes of migration. The Indian colonists in the early christian centuries proceeded to the far-east both by land and sea.

"The land route passed through Eastern Bengal, Manipur and Assam."
Dr. B.K. Kakati notices that "certain Assamese words have similar or parallel formations in westernmost languages like the Marathi, which intermediate languages like the Hindusthani do not seem to possess."

In connection with explaining the reason of this similarity, Dr. Kakati holds the view that some of emigrants to the far-east, in those colonial days, must have broke their journey on the way and settled in Assam.

Further, the architectural ruins of ancient Assam show similarity with the schools of Bihar, Orissa and Bombay Presidency. Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that the flow of Aryans from the western India to Assam commenced from the colonial days of India, which was not later than the second century A.D. and the settlements of Aryans in Assam might have began to increase from those days.

During the reign of the early Hindu kings of Kamarupa, beginning from Bhaskarvarma, we get ample references of Brāhmaṇas, Kāyasthas, Kalitās and other professional Hindu people living in Assam, from the different grants, issued by them at different times. Although the major portion of the population of Assam belongs to the Non-Aryan Mongoloid stock, we have seen that Aryan language and culture came to the forefront since the beginning of the early period and during the reign of Bhaskarvarma of seventh century A.D., the Aryan culture arrived at the stage of taking the leadership in the country. In the Medieval period also a large number of Brāhmaṇas, Kāyasthas, Kalitās and other professional Hindu people came to Assam and made their permanent settlements under the patronage of the Kamata, the Koch, the Kachāri, the Chutia
and the Ahom kings. The Roads from Kanauj, Banaras, Navadvip, were always open for the Brahmanas, Kayasthas and other people during the whole Medieval period. The Koch and the Ahom kings showed special favour to the Brahman-scholars, Kayasthas and other professional people coming from other parts of India and offered them all sorts of facilities to settle here.

(f) The Mohammedans:

Historical account of Mohammedans in Assam can be traced back to the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D. According to Tabaquat-i-Nasiri and other old accounts and specially the Rock inscription at North Gauhati, the Mohammedans attacked Kamarupa for the first time during A.D. 1205-1206, under the leadership of Mohammad, son of Bakhtiar, a turk of Khiliji tribe, and all of them perished here. However, Mohammad could somehow manage to escape with his life. Some of the soldiers of the vast army of Mohammad died in the battle field, some were carried away by the strong current of the river Begmati, and some, we may reasonably think, remained captive in the hands of the soldiers of Kamarupa. The rock inscription at North Gauhati says:

Śāke turaga yugmesa madhumasa trayodase /  
Kamarupa samāgatya turuskah ksayamāyayuh //

That is, on the thirteenth of Chaitra, in the Śaka year 1127 (i.e. A.D. 1205), the Turks coming into Kamarupa were destroyed. We are only inferring that some of Mohammedans might have remained captive in Kamarupa in this invasion, but there is no definite record of it. It is only from second
invasion of Mohammadans that we know about Mohammadan settlements in Assam from historical records. In 1498 A.D., Hussain Shah of Bengal attacked the kingdom of Kamata and defeated Nilambar, the last king of the Khan dynasty in Kamatapur, by destroying his impregnable city by a strategem. References of other minor attacks of Kamarupa and Kamata by the Mohammadans are also found, but they are of not much importance so far as the Mohammadan settlement in Assam is concerned. After invading Kamata, Hussain Shah advanced unto Gauhati and posted his son Danial there to govern the territory as his deputy. At this period many Mohammadan families shifted to Kamarupa and made their settlements near about Hajo. The Mohammadan Pir Ghiasuddin Aulia, who accompanied the party of Hussain Shah, constructed a mosque near Hajo and declared the place to be one-fourth the sanctity of Mecca. Henceforth, the place is known as PQ (one-fourth) Mecca. After the death of Daniel the influence of the Mohammadans decayed and those Mohammadans who settled in Kamarupa (near about Hajo) thought it best for them to live in friendship and amity with their Hindu neighbours.

During the long period of the Ahom Rule the Mohammadans were constantly engaged in warfare with the Ahoms. From the chronicles it is known that about seventeen times they attacked Assam but could declare victorious only for two times. Almost at every time of their attack many of the Mohammadans were held as captives. During the reign of the Ahom king Shuhungmung (A.D. 1497-1539) many of the Moguls were made captive in the war which ensued between Ahoms and Turbak.
It is said in the chronicles that the captives were first engaged in feeding the elephants; but they proved quite useless in it; they were then transferred to the paddy cultivation work where they equally proved inefficient and were left to live without any assignment. These Mohammedan people, later on, came to be known as Marías in Assam; most of them now live on as artisans of brass-metal work. Besides the captured Mohammedans, the Ahom kings invited Mohammedan artists and Persian and Arabic scholars to live in Assam and to contribute their skill in the enrichment of the Assamese culture. In the royal court of the Ahoms, there were Mohammedan scholars appointed by the king to read out and to give the meaning of letters, written in Persian and Arabic, that was received from the Nawab of Dacca or from the Emperor of Delhi. There were Mohammedan painters, engravers, experts in ivory works and other arts and crafts in Assam hailing from different parts of India. To enrich the Assamese culture they not only gave their original contribution to it but also made themselves expert in some of the indigenous crafts and industries of Assam. We will show afterwards that in the field of literature and music also, their contribution is of not a mean one. The Ahom kings appointed many of the Mohammedans in responsible offices and entrusted them with tasks of political importance. They also fully utilised these opportunities to completely identify themselves with the people of the soil and played their part well in the activities of the Assamese national life.

3. A brief account of the early period:

The study of the prehistoric and other remains proves that Assam
was inhabited by various racial elements; in fact, the anthropologists considered Assam as a great museum of various human races. Even now, some of the primitive people live in Assam. In comparison to the vast number of Mongolian inhabitants, the Arians are very meagre in number. This leads some writers to assert that, "Assam is a country, which at most periods of its history has remained outside the Indian civilisation." We think this is not a very sound remark. The Assamese nation and its culture are the outcome of the absorption of various races and their culture, with the predominance of Aryan elements. It was the Arians who brought about a synthesis amongst all the racial and cultural elements in Assam with the predominance of their own. In the history of the Indian life and culture, Assam has a significant place, with a culture of her own, contributed by diverse racial elements, which from all angles of visions, cannot but be termed as Indian. From the days of the great epics and Purāṇas, ancient Assam came in close contact with the Aryan-India. Ancient Assam, then known as Prājyotisā and Kamarupa invariably, occupied a prominent place in the Vedas, epics and Purāṇas. Some of the dynasties, kingdoms, important towns, rivers, mountains and routes mentioned in the epics and Purāṇas could be located in ancient Assam.

Now as stated above, we may divide the whole period of the Assamese life and culture into three periods; the early, the medieval and the modern. Again the early period can be subdivided into two, (1) the pre-historical period and (2) the historical period about which other scholars have discussed fully.
"Real political history of ancient Assam", according to historians, "begins from the foundation of the Barman line of kings" established by the last Naraka-Bhagadatta in the 1st century A.D. But, owing to the dearth of materials, a detailed and continuous history of the period from Naraka-Bhagadatta of the 1st century A.D. to Bhaskarvarman of the 7th century A.D., of this line, is difficult to trace out. However, by the flash of the Nidhanpur grant of Bhaskarvarman many things have come to the light. Yuan Ghwang, the Chinese traveller, came to Kamarupa during his reign and left a valuable account of Kamarupa. After Bhaskarvarman, the political power of the Varman dynasty began to decline and the rule of the country passed to the hands of the kings of the Salastambha line. The Salastambha dynasty ruled over this country from 7th century A.D. to 10th century A.D. Then again the political power went to the hands of the Pala dynasty for nearly about a century. Jayapala is the last ruler of this family. Jayapala ruled over this country between A.D. 1120-1138 A.D. After Jayapala, one Vaidyadeva rose into power and established himself as the ruler of the whole of Kamarupa. The founders of these four dynasties, viz., Bhauma or Varman, Salastambha, Pala and Vaidyadeva or Vallabhadeva are respectively Naraka-Bhagadatta, Madhava, Jitari and Arimatta. The political power of the ancient Kamarupa-kings, after Jayapala, as we have stated above, began to decline and there sprang up a number of small kingdoms within the boundary of ancient Kamarupa, in the 13th century A.D., of which the Ahoms, a branch of the great Tai people, held supremacy over all.

The heroes and kings of this kingdom have been highly spoken of for their valour and heroism, since the days of the great epics and Puranas.
Naraka, Bhagadatta, Ghototkacha etc. were highly and enormously praised in the great epic Mahābhārata for their heroism and valour. Bhagadatta had a vast army consisting of Kirātas, Chinese and soldiers from the sea-coast. From this we can infer that Bhagadatta's kingdom extended over a vast territory including regions beyond the boundary of modern NEFA towards the north-eastern side, besides the traditional boundary of ancient Kāmarupa, mentioned in the Kālikā-Purāṇa and Yogini Tantra. So also during the reign of the later Hindu kings, Kāmarupa was an extensive empire. Bhaskarvarma's empire stretched upto the Karna-Suvarṇa, i.e., Central Bengal. He issued his Midhanpur grant from his camp at Karna-Suvarṇa which was in Central Bengal. About the inclusion of Karna-Suvarṇa within Kamarupa, there are various opinions. D.C. Ganguly rightly points out, that "the larger portion of Gauda which was situated between Kāmarupa and Karna-Suvarṇa was within the kingdom of Bhaskarvarman." Ganguly further asserts with proper arguments that "Gauda, including Northern Rājha, formed part of Kamarupa." As to the area of the ancient Kāmarupa, K.I. Barua in his 'Early history of Kāmarupa' writes: "According to puranic accounts the temple of Kamakhya was in the centre of the kingdom, which extended in all directions for one hundred Yojanas. According to Yogini Tantra, which is clearly a much later work, Kamarupa was bounded on the east by the Dikhow river, on the west by the Karatoya river, on the north by the mountain Kunjagiri and on the south by the confluence of the Lakshya and Brahmaputra. It would appear from these accounts also that, even at a later period, the kingdom included not only the whole of the Assam valley, but also parts
of northern and eastern Bengal, part of Bhutan, the Khasi and Garo hills and the northern portion of the district of Sylhet. In any case, it is clear that Pragjyotisa or ancient Kamarupa was a much larger kingdom than most of the other kingdoms mentioned in the Mahabharata and most of the Mahajanapadas existing during the time of Gautama Buddha."

After Bhaskarvarman also, the kings of ancient Kamarupa could maintain their supremacy and dignity in tact. From the study of the grants issued by different Hindu kings, it can be said that Harjjarvarman, Balavarman, Banamala Varman, Bhashmapala etc. were powerful monarchs. Many of the rulers of this period were efficient and administrators and their armies were composed of expert soldiers. About other cultural progress of the period, preliminary discussions will be made in their respective places.

4. Origin of the name Assam:

In the early literature and epigraphs the name of this country is found as both Pragjyotisa and Kamarupa. Beginning from the 1st or 2nd century A.D., i.e., from the days of Naraka-Bhagadatta down to the 12th century A.D., we find these two names used to denote this land. For most of the times Pragjyotisa was the capital of the kingdom of Kamarupa; still then it was used for the name of the whole country in different sources. According to Dr. B.K. Kakati, its most ancient name is Pragjyotisa, because by this name it is referred to in the two great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and in the principal Puranas. In classical Sanskrit literature, both Pragjyotisa and Kamarupa occur as alternative names of this country. In his works, Kalidasa uses both the names Pragjyotisa and
Kāmarupa. In the epigraphic records, the name Kāmarupa is first found mentioned in the Allahabad inscription of Samudra Gupta, in the 5th century A.D. In later-day works, like Kālikāpurāṇa, Yogīnitāntā and Haragauri-Samvāda, the name of this country found is as Kāmarupa. Dr. Kakati shows that the terms Prāgyotisā and Kāmarupa are of non-Aryan origin and they were sanskritised later on. According to Dr. P.C. Choudhury the name Prāgyotisā is commonly associated with Lauhitya, Kāmarupa and Kāmakhyā.

In the Medieval period the country not only embarked upon a new phase of cultural and political life, but also adopted a new name "Assam" for her. The words "Assam" and "Assamese" are anglicized forms of the respective Assamese words 'Asam' and 'Asamiya'. The English word 'Assam' or the Assamese words 'Āsām' and 'Asam' are used to mean the land and the English word 'Assamese' or the Assamese word 'Asamiya' are either used as adjective or as a noun to mean the people of the land. At first, as it is found in the records, the terms 'Asam' or 'Āsām' were used to indicate a particular sanction of people, viz., the 'Āhoms' only, and later on it began to imply the land occupied and ruled by these people, and the people living in this land came to be known as 'Asamiya', which is comparatively a modern form, formed with the formative affix 'iya' after the word 'Asam'.

Now, as to the origin of the word 'Assam', scholars are not of the same opinion; different interpretations given by different scholars. According to some scholars the name was given to this land by the Bodos, a branch of the Tibeto-Burman people, who came to this land long before
the Shans, or in other words, the Ahoms. They think the name 'Asam' was
derived from a Bodo formation 'Hā-Gom', meaning low land. According
to G.A. Grierson, the word owes its origin to the Siamese word 'Shām',
which gives birth to a Burmese corruption 'Shān'. Again Siam is called
'Āshān', the land of the monks. Therefore, he thinks that the words
'Shām' or 'Shān' or 'Āshān', may have given the name to this land.
Edward Gait writes that the term 'Asama' was first applied to the
Shan invaders by the local people in the sense of 'the unequal' or 'the
peerless'. Hence, according to him, it is a sanskritised word.
But Dr. Kakati thinks that 'Asama' is a later-day Sanskritisation; at
first it was a hybrid formation like 'Āchām'. Dr. Kakati observes:
"In slight amplification of Sir Edward's conclusion it may be added
that 'Asama' perhaps may be a later-day Sanskritisation of some earlier
form like 'Āchām'. In Tai (Ahom) /Chām means 'to be defeated'. With
the privative Assamese prefix Ā, the whole formation 'Āsām' would mean
'undefeated', 'conqueror', being thus a hybrid equivalent of the word
'Thai' (Tai) meaning free as opposed to 'Chamūwā' (Chāmūwā),
an Ahom subject of a respectable status". Dr. Kakati rightly points
out the fact that sanskrit 'Asama' could have given its form like
'Āsām' but hardly 'Āsām'. It is not our business to enter into a
detailed discussion of the philological aspect of the word here. But
this much is certain that the name of this land 'Asam' or 'Āsām' (Assam),
has its connection with the Āhoms or the Tai invaders only. It is only
after the entry of the Āhoms, the land got its name 'Assam' or 'Asam'.
In the chronicles and the biographies, with which we are mainly concerned,
we find the terms 'Āsām', 'Āsam', 'Asam', 'Acam' are used invariably to denote the Tai (Ahom) invaders. In the 'Sātsari Asam Buranji' (a chronicle, Sātsari by name), it is said that the local Barahis and Morāns called them 'Āhom' (Asam), i.e., unequal to others. They (Ahoms) are heavenly beings and not the descendants of human beings. Hence the name 'Āhom' (Asam) became prevalent. Referring to the chronicles Dr. Kakati points out that the Shan invaders called themselves Tai, while the local people called them by terms like 'Āsām', 'Āsam', 'Asam', 'Acam' etc. In 'Darrang Rājvamsavali', a chronicle of the kācāk kings by suryyakhari Daivajna, composed in the sixteenth century, the word 'Āsām' has been all throughout used to mean the Shan invaders. In one of the biography of Sankardeva, written by Daityari Thakur of the 17th century, the Shan invaders were designated by various terms, such as 'Āsām', 'Āsam', 'Asam'. In 'Kāmrupar Buranji', a chronicle of a much later date, the term 'Acam' was used to refer to the Shan invaders. Therefore, we may conclude that the name 'Āsām' originated with the entry of the Shan invaders or 'Ahoms' to this land, and gradually it came to be used as the designation of the whole land ruled by these people.

In modern times the terms 'Āsām' (English-Assam) and 'Asam' both are used to designate the land, and the people living within the land are called 'Asamiya' (English-Assamese), the formation of which is discussed above. But the name of the particular Shan invaders went under more modifications and they came to be known as 'Āhom', as a result of phonetic changes. The words 'Āsām' or 'Āsam' led to the formations of 'Āham' and 'Āhom'. In modern times, the term 'Āhom' is used to denote the community
of the Tais or Shans who invaded this country, and the term 'Asamiyā' is used in respect of the whole people living within the boundaries of Assam, the land once occupied and ruled by the Shan invaders, or simply as an adjective to anything that is related to Assam.

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