CHAPTER I
Introduction

Scope of the Work—nature of treatment:

India is a great country and Assam is an integral part of it. The life, language and culture of the Indian people have been an assimilation and synthesis of the life and culture of the diverse peoples, living in the different parts of the country. The life and culture of the people of Assam also have been contributed to the flow of Indian culture and life through the ages. Therefore, the study of the history of India and its language is incomplete without a study of regional histories and their languages including the history of Assam, which is necessary, important and component of the history of India.

The people of Assam with their success and failures, their qualities and fallings, their customs and habits are as the products of their history, environment and other circumstances as any other people living in any part of this country or Indian as a whole. To be able to gain knowledge, therefore of different aspects of life as it was lived in Assam in the past, a critical study of her history is indispensable.

The unity of Indian culture is reflected in Indian literature, which has a strong underlined oneness, although its outward expression exhibit considerable variety and complexity.
through different languages and scripts. Two significant elements that we see in all the modern Indian literature, are the deep and abiding influence of Persian. The influence of Persian on modern Indian languages is clearly seen not only in the literary form but in phonology and vocabulary as well.

It is in this perspective that in the following few pages an attempt will be made to study and examine the influence of Persian on Assamese language and literature and its impact on the prevalent events, trends and customs in Assam.

The subject of Persian language in India has a long history to study. It was started with the arrival of Muslims in India. India and Persia were commercially, politically and culturally connected from ancient times, even as early as Achaemenian period. In the *Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru defines the nature of this relationship between India and Iran, he writes:

"The Persian language like French in Europe, became the language of cultural people across wide stretches of Asia. Iranian art and culture spread from Constantinople in the west right up to the edge of Gobi desert. In India, the Iranian influence was continuous and during the Afghan and Mughal period, Persian was the court language of the country."

The influence of Persian on Assamese language, literature and culture offers an almost unexplored and uninvesti-

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gated field of study. The scope of the present work is 'Persian influence on Assamese' from the earliest time to the present. To investigate the nature of Persian elements in Assamese language and literature is one of the most difficult as well as interesting field of research. Assamese scholars having knowledge of Persian, have generally remained aloof from writing on this important subject of interest. This humble attempt, we think, is the first to be made to reproduce in comprehensive manner as based on original sources, the influence of Persian on Assamese language, literature and culture.

The development of Assamese language in the Indo-Islamic environment, with thousands of Perso-Arabic words, phrases and thought forms naturalised in them, is an interesting point that needs to be noticed. In all the local languages of northern, southern, western and eastern parts of India, such as, Punjabi, Bengali, Kashmiri, Marathi and Assamese etc. there are, in varying degrees of admixture, large number of Persian words and expressions not only in the spheres of poetry and literature, but in popular proverbs and daily speech as well. The assimilation has been so perfect and natural that the speakers, except the specialists and the scholars may be aware of this admixture. This large scale linguistic assimilation points out that there was a considerable flow of cultural and linguistic elements from outside, oneside to other; for when a language receives words and expressions into its own system from another language, it takes
not only a number of sounds and syllables, but areas and conceptual networks they contained. This shows furthermore the process of cultural synthesis took place not only in the higher level of the society, but also and more intimately, amongst the common people and as a result of their intimate social intercourse.

Geography:

India presents a picture of great variety. The same is true in the case of Assam, where people of diverse religion, language and customs lived through the ages. It has hills and forests, rivers and streams, plain land and wide valleys and in a very real sense it seems to be a India in mini nature.

Known by different names at different times, Pragjyotisa, Kamrupa or Assam, this state is as old as India and had political, cultural and commercial contact with the rest of the country throughout the ages and as it has been recorded in the history from times to times.

The geographical factors have made Assam an anthropological museum, having the diverse races and tribes living in the hills and the plains. Yet the geographical barriers have not been an obstacles to successive streams of migration into the land through the various ways. Assam has been a place of diverse racial strains and cultures and the intermingling, assimilation and synthesing have been proceeding through the centuries, slowly.
but surely making Assamese life and culture a distinct, typical strain,\(^1\) in the great pattern of variegated but basically unified Indian way of life and culture.

The typical geographical condition of Assam in the past helped the Ahom rulers in repelling the attempted Muslim invasions, mainly the difficult communication. Mir Jumla's chronicler Shihabuddin Talis complains\(^2\) of the unbearable climate, prevalent disease, excessive rains and floods and consequent difficulties of movements.

The wide lands of the Brahmaputra valley have been the seat of the growth and decline of civilisation from earliest times. Fertility of area helped the civilisation and progressive life, while on the other hand, due to those advantages which are helpful for easy life in course of time, turning the people of the land lazy and unfit for struggle for existence and continuous progress.\(^3\) In such circumstances the people coming from outside ousted the local people and took possession of the valley and thus entered the fresh spurs of civilisation under them with the setting in of their degeneration with the lapse of time.\(^4\)

The name of Assam has been attributed to two roots.

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1. P.C. Choudhury, History of Civilisation of the people of Assam to the 12th century A.D., p.118
2. E. Gait, A History of Assam, pp. 141 ff
3. Ibid, p.7
4. Ibid, p.8
According to some, the name 'Assam' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'asama' meaning peerless or uneven, unequelled or unparalleled. But the majority of opinion ascribes it to the word 'ahom', apparently the concensus of opinion in the latter as in ancient and medieval times.

Language:

Assamese is an Indo-Aryan language. This language is mainly spoken in the Brahmaputra valley with the Lakhimpur district in the extreme east and the Goalpara district in the extreme west. It is spoken in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. In Arunachal Pradesh, Assamese is the only language for mutual communication among the different language speakers. This language is developed out of Sanskrit language as early as in the 7th century A.D. Its direct ancestor is Magadhi Apabhramsa. According to Grierson, "Magadhi was the principal dialect which corresponded to the Eastern Prakrit. East of Magadhi was spoken Prachya Apabhramsa. It spread to the South-East and here became the parent of Modern Bengali. Besides spreading Southward, Prachya Apabhramsa also spread to the East keeping North of the Ganges and reached the valley of Assam. Each of the three descendants of Magadhi Apabhramsa, Oriya, Modern Bengali and Assamese,

1. B.K. Barua, History of Assamese Language, p.1
equally connected with the common immediate parents.\textsuperscript{1} Dr. S.K. Chatterjee also classified Eastern Apabhramsa into four dialect groups, (1) Radha dialects which comprehend Western Bengali, which gives standard Bengali colloquial and Oriya in the South-West. (2) Varendra dialects of North Central Bengali. (3) Vanga dialects comprehend the dialects of East Bengal and (4) Kamrupa dialects which comprehend Assamese and the dialects of North Bengal.\textsuperscript{2} Austic elements also entered into Assamese language which are mostly derived from Austic speakers. Among all the Indo-Aryan languages, Assamese is at once the most compact and complex, influenced by a large number of Austic and Indo-Tibetan tongues and dialects. In grammar and vocabulary it is nearer to Bengali. Its vocabularies largely derived from that of Sanskrit and its morphological structures is also based on Sanskrit grammar. But as being a living and growing language it has borrowed, a large number of words, idioms and phrases from the other Neo-Indo-Aryan languages. Among whom special mention may be made of Arabic and Persian. The major influence in Assamese vocabulary is no doubt that of Sanskrit. Then we have Persian, Arabic, Hindustani and other oriental languages, which enriched

\textsuperscript{1} G.A. Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol.I, Part I, pp. 125-26 ff; B.Kakati, Aspects of Early Assamese Literature, pp. 2 ff; Assamese its Formation and Development, p.6

Assamese to a recognizable extent.

People:

The majority of the people of Assam are belonged to Mongolian stock. There were apparently wave after wave of immigrants through the North-Eastern routes into Assam. These invaders belonged to what is called the Indo-Chinese linguistic family of which the two most important sub-families are the Mon-Khmer and the Tibeto-Burmo, which includes the Mishmis, the Abors, the Miris, the Daflas and the Akas. The third Siamese-Chinese includes Shan, which was spoken by the Ahoms, who were the most numerous and powerful and became the ruling class of Assam for next six centuries. The Mon-Khemers appear to have come earlier than the others. They were apparently driven by subsequent Tibeto-Burmo horders into the Khasi Hills, which is the only part where this sub-family now exists. Of the Tibeto-Burmo sub-family there are three groups, viz, Naga, Kuki and Bodo. The Naga and Kuki speakers were driven to the hills and Bodo became the dominant language. It includes the Koch, the Meches, the Lalungs, the Dimasas, the Garos, the Rabas, the Tripuris, the Chutias, the Morans and the Borahis. This stock of people are considered to be the original inhabitants of Assam.