CHAPTER - 1
## CHAPTER - 1

### INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER-1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA:

1.1. (A) Location:

Hajo, a revenue circle of Kamrup district, Assam, is a part of the lower Brahmaputra river basin composed of alluvial deposit carried by the mighty river and its tributaries i.e. the Puthimari river, the Baralia river and the Sessa river. It indicates to the fertility of the soil of the study area. Situated on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river, the area covers half of the northern part of the Kamrup district of Assam (Figure-1). It is surrounded by the Kurujini and Chaulkhowa rivulets in the north, the Ajnathuri hill in the East, Nalbari district in the west and the mighty Brahmaputra in the south. The circle extends from 26°10’N to 26°20’5”N and 91°25’5” to 91°40’ East. The maximum east-west extension is 22.2 km. while the north-south extension is 19.2 km. and is almost circular in shape, it has a total geographical area of 360 square km. (36070 hectares). The region comprises seven Gaon Panchayat, four Mouza and 135 revenue villages with a total population of two lac fifty thousand people. The area falls under Guwahati Civil sub-division in Kamrup district of Assam. The rural area covers 352.68 square km. (35268 hectares) representing 97.78 percent and the urban area comprising 2.22 percent of the total geographical area. The literacy rate of the study area is 70.94 percent.
LOCATIONAL MAP OF STUDY AREA

Fig. 1: Locational Map of Study Area
The very location of the area on the outside of the Guwahati city exhibits urban character as a result of outward growth of the city. The urban community as a whole is undergoing a significant transaction in socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects. As most of the villages of the study area are located near a growing city, the pattern of changes are multifaceted. It is related not only to the socio-economic but also to the behavioural aspects of the local people.

1.1. (B) Climate of the area:

The climate of these region does not differ from that of other parts of the lower Brahmaputra Valley and in the tropical monsoon climatic zone. The climate of the study area can be broadly divided into four distinct seasons viz. a) Spring, b) Summer (monsoon), c) Autumn and d) Winter. In general the climate is characterized by relative coolness, extreme humidity, heavy summer rainfall and winter drought. The mean temperature is estimated as 23.97°C, the mean relative humidity is 82.5 percent and the average rainfall is 1550 mm. Rainfall generally occurs for eight months in the year from March to October with some variation, which is favourable for agricultural activities, specially floriculture and rabi crops.

The winter season starts from November and continue upto February-March. During this season the weather is cool and pleasant with little rainfall. The average winter temperature varies between 12°C and 20°C.
and the average rainfall is less than 5cm. January is the coldest month with a maximum temperature falls upto 8°C. Winter season is characterized by a clear sky with occasional morning and evening fog. The relative humidity of the area varies from 60 percent to 90 percent during the year, and lowest being during February-March and highest being during June-July. This type of climate has boosted up the production of seasonal flowers which is being supplied to the religious centres for ritualistic purposes. During the spring period which starts in March and continued upto May is characterized by a type of squall, generally accompanied by violent thunderstorms and heavy rainfall and hail showers. Sometimes it may continue till the end of the rainy season. The average rainfall during the time exceeds 15 cm. The summer, the real monsoon period, starts in the month of June and continues upto the month of September. This is the season of heavy rainfall and more than 70 percent of the total annual rainfall is received during this period. The mean summer temperature of the area is found to be 27°C. The highest temperature is found during the month of June and July experiencing a maximum daily temperature of 38°C. This period witnesses a large production of rice cultivation in the broad area. By the middle of September, monsoon starts to retreat not only from the study area but also from Assam followed by a fair cool and weather of the autumn season for three months, with the advance of season the temperature falls and morning mist and fog appeared. In this autumn season the *Tulsi* cultivation taken place at large scale in the area.

In some years the annual distribution of rainfall becomes so uneven
that about 90 percent of the annual rainfall occurs during the month of June-July and August creating natural calamities like flood which directly effects cultivation and yields of the kharif crops. On the other hand Rabi crops cannot be grown successfully during winter season when drought prevails creating scarcity of soil moistures which is very much essential for the growth and development of crops. Even during the summer season monsoon may fall to such an extent that it causes summer drought also. This summer drought is harmful to the Salı paddy. The irrigation facility which is highly essential for efficient cultivation of crops is too meagre to meet the need of the peasants. As a result there is a marked decline in production of food crops of the peasants at their subsistence level leading to acute shortage of food. Out of bare necessity a good number of cultivators and agricultural workers have left cultivation and take some other kind of occupation in order to get rid of poverty and starvation. They usually opt for the profession of cottage industries like brass-metal industry, pottery making, carpentry etc. Thus the climate of the region has influenced the occupational structure of the locality, and found friendly in the development of economic scenario of the region.

1.1. (C) Beels and Swamps:

The beels and swamps of Hajo has an important role in the economic development of the area specially in the field of pisciculture. The beels and swamps of the area is extended upto 18-20 km. These area is comparatively fertile due to the presence of both old and new alluvial
soils deposited by the tributaries of the Brahmaputra like, Chaulkhowa, Puthimari and Sessa river. The lakes or swamps are also locally known as *beel*. Several small streams locally known as *jan or suti* originate in these *beels* and flows through this region till they meet a river.

At the far south of the area there is a depressed section consisting of a chain of *beels* like Deghali, Pandhoba and Duramari *beels*. These merchy lands lies at the foot hills of Ajnathuri-hill, where the famous ‘battle of Alabai’ was fought between the Ahoms and the Mughals. From the south of the Barombai Hill in the north-east to the far west border of the circle there lies an extensive chain of *beels* and swamps. Important *beels* of the region are Pitkati, Itani, Chatala, Satdala, Kayajani, Mellora, Gaurijan etc. To the south of this chain another concentration of *beels* and swamps are found in and around Hajo township which are economically more viable for their favourable geographical location. Among these Panikhati, Pateni and Honka *beels* are notable. One *beel* known as Nite *beel* extends upto 18 square km. from Sualkuchi to Dampur Bongsor. This built up zone became rich rice growing region of Hajo locality with a high population density on the shore of the *beels*. Above all pisciculture of Hajo area is concentrated around these *beels* and swamps which has contributed a large share to the economy of Hajo.

1.1. (D) Plain area and waterbodies:

The plain area of the northern bank of the Brahmaputra including the whole western part of the revenue circle is moderately high and
extensive plain spreading north-west to south-west. The flood plain area has consolidated a lot to the agriculture and pisciculture of the area. Geological history and the geomorphological evidences reveal that this belt had been built up on the river basin of the Brahmaputra which had been left in the pre-historic era. Identity of these ancient course of the Brahmaputra can be assumed from the mythological evidences. Ananta Kandali, the reknown literature of ancient Assam, rightly pointed out in his Assamese version of *Ramayana* that the river Brahmaputra was flowing near the foot hill of Manikuta hill where the Hayagriva Madhava temple is located.

The name of some surrounding villages of the area also bear some significance from mythological, geographical and historical point of view. The name of the village Ekadatia indicates that once it was a bank of a river. Another mythological saying is that the area from Manikuta hill and Dowani-Mowani hill in the north to Ekadatia and Dampur hill in the south was said to be the Kakrai 'Sagar' (*sagar* means sea). This mythological faith is also supported by the facts that most of the villages within this belt bear the names ending with the word *Dia*. The term *Dia* represents the landmass in the active flood plain area of the river, the agricultural lands donated by the kings to the *paiks*. So, the villages like Tokradia, Ramdia, Bongsordia, Hardia, Nadia etc. all indicates that these are of riverine origin. This belt is very much fertile, as a result one may observe green agricultural field in the erstwhile *beels* and swamps during autumn season. Now-a-days, it really stored the economic stability and development of the area as a whole.
Among the waterbodies and drainage the mighty river Brahmaputra that flows along the southern boarder of the area is the main one. Other important rivers that intersect the region are Puthimari river and Sessa river, which flows sub-parallelly to the Brahmaputra. They originate in Himalayas near Bhutan and meet the Brahmaputra in the south. Though these rivers caused floods havoc in most of the areas, fertile agricultural fields are built up by the deposition of alluvial soil and silt during the flood season.

The river Sessa has different names at different places. On its way to the Brahmaputra it is called as 'Kalajal' in Kamalpur and 'Mudung Kani', in Borka, 'Kurijini' near Alaboi and 'Sessa noi' near Kulhati and Sessamukh. Again it is known 'Kalajal' near Bongsor. From Bongsor to the west it is called 'Hajo Sutinoi', from Alaboi to its north, the river flows meandering and meets some small streams or rivulets locally known as jan.

Puthimari is another important river of the region which is also originates in Himalayas and flows through the area with a good number of tributaries. It also takes different local names at different places. Beyond Barombai, it is called ‘Barsala Nadi’ and near Hajo it is called ‘Lakhaitara Nadi’. ‘Mowamari Nadi’ a tributary of the Pagladia river which is flowing through the western boundary of the revenue circle Hajo. In such a way the active flood plain area and the waterbodies has influenced the socio-economic status of the locality.
1.1. (E) The charlands:

From the western border of the revenue circle to the 91°30' East longitude between the active flood plain and both the banks of the Brahmaputra there lies a strip of low lands called charlands. It includes all the river island of the Brahmaputra within the territory of the locality Hajo. The belt as a whole is a low lying one flooded by the river waters every years and termed as flood plain of new alluvium and silts. This transitory river stands and low lands in the middle of the river Brahmaputra are called charlands or chapori which are ideal place for agriculture and horticulture. They generally remains above the water level during the winter season but submerged underwater during the summer flood season. So they are suitable for agriculture only for Rabi crops and floriculture during the winter season. These lands earlier occupied by indigenous peasants but gradually abandoned by them due to the flood havoc. Later on gradually these chapori was settled by the immigrant Muslims peasants. This lead to the decline of public grazing land and dairy farming but enhance the capacity of total production of food grains.

1.1. (F) Hillocks of the area:

The hillocks of the area represents strong linkage of cultural heritage as the religious centres of Hajo are found on these hillocks. A chain of discontinuous hillocks are notable located on the northern bank of Brahmaputra river running almost parallel to its course. These hillocks of almost equal elevation are standing here and there in the whole parts of
the revenue circle. The chain is almost continuous from the 'Ajnathuri' on the east to 'Hatimura' on the west including other hillocks like 'Gandhamadan' (93.58m. high), 'Baromboi' and 'Siddheswari'. Other hillocks are located towards north of the chain. To the north of these chain lies the Bongsor-Dampur strip of hillock. The chain comprises 'Bringeswar' hill (176.06m.), 'Sanpara' (145.85m.) and 'Dampur' hill (140m.). To the south of the built-up plain lies a chain of hillocks among which 'Alabai' hill (46.0m.) and 'Ganesa' hill (45.72m.) of 'Pacharia', 'Dowani Mowani' hill (68.89m.), Hajo reserve forest (45.72m.), 'Poa-Macca' (231.65m.), 'Manikuta' hill (220.21m.) and 'Kulhati' hill (16.94m.) are worthmentioning. 'Baromboi and Malong' hill (46.0m.) are the long hillock that are located on the northern and north-eastern boundary of the circle respectively.

All the religious centres of the locality are located on the top of these hillocks and these hillocks are historically significant as most of the activities of the soldiers and generals of Ahoms, Koches and Mughals centred round these hillocks. These hillocks offered strategical position to the ruling dynasties and attracted the attention of royal powers during the 'battle of Alabai' and 'battle of Saraighat'.

1.1. (G) Vegetation:

The hilly and sloppy soil of Hajo favours the growth of forest wood like Sal, Teak, Gomari, Sonaru etc. In the upper part and the lower part is covered with mixed deciduous varieties like Mango, Banana, Bakul,
Jam, Makari etc. with high economic values. The char area of the locality has extensive grass land with rising floriculture. On the settled areas of the charland, bamboo, mango, jack fruit, simul and other types of local varieties are common whereas the total forest area is 779 hectares (2.16 percent), barren and uncultivated land - is 2,720 hectares (7.55 percent). On the other hand cultivable waste land is 1,440 hectares (4.00 percent) with permanent grazing land of 3,669 hectares (10.19 percent).

Agriculture is the main occupation of the area. It absorbs 63.26 percent of the total workers as cultivators and 4.46 percent as agricultural labourers. The per capita agricultural land of the area is only 0.14 hectares. Three varieties of paddy - winter paddy known as Sali with 57.43 percent of the total paddy field, summer paddy known as Ahu with 36.41 percent and spring paddy known as Boro with 6.16 percent are grown as a whole. Apart from rice cultivation wheat is another food crops grown into the agricultural system as a profitable one. It covers only 4.2 percent of the total area and is sown in November and harvested in March-April. The cultivators uses cent percent of the seed of high yielding variety of wheat.

Different types of pulses are also grown in the area and most of them are cultivated as mix cropping and covers an area of 7.6 percent of the net pulses sown in the area. ‘Khesari’ and Pea are grown along with the winter paddy. Pea is best grown in waterlogged Bao paddy fields and low lying Sali paddy fields. It has became one of the important money making crops. Huge area of charland specially the eastern low lying
areas are now flourished by Pea cultivation. Mustard is grown on high lands and covers 5.6 percent of the total cultivable land.

Jute is another cash crops on which the local people is concentrating a lot. It now covers 7.0 percent of the total land. The same plot of the Jute land is used for potato cultivation during winter season which is another money making crops covering 1.44 percent of the total land. The successful cultivation lies around Singimari village on the bank of Brahmaputra and on the bank of other small river. In such a way production of vegetable is the chief concern of Hajo locality. It produces huge quantity of potatoes, radish, chillies, brinjal, tomato, onion, garlic cucumber etc. The 'Singimari Brinjal' has its own brand name and reputation and became an important cash crops. Cabbage becomes another cultivation gradually replacing other long term cultivation. Each potato plot is used for cucumber as rely cropping in the pub-Bongsor Mouza. In such a way all the crops - reddish, cucumber, pea, carrot, cabbage, brinjal, tomato etc. are of high economic values and starts replacing the traditional long term crops.

1.1. (H) Population composition and the society:

Hajo revenue circle with four mouzas namely - Hajo, Ramdia, Pachim Bongsor and Pub-Bongsor has total population of two lac fifty thousand people with a total land area of 360 square km. Hajo offers limited diversities in respect of population composition in comparison to that of Assam as a whole. Rural population of the study area composed of different ethnic, cultural and religious groups reflecting the social outlook
of the locality. The locational diversity of the society of Hajo can be identified to some extent, for example in the riverine tracts of the mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries where the immigrant people are concentrated using the new alluvial soil and fertile lands of agriculture. The Scheduled caste people are mostly found in the areas near the beel, swamps and rivers, where fishes are found at large scale. On the other hand, indigenous non-tribal and schedule-tribes people are concentrated in the built up areas connected with better transport network and in the areas having virgin agricultural land. Among the non-tribal population Kalita, Koch, Keot, Baishya, Yogi and the indigenous Muslims constitutes 88.87 percent of the total population, of the study area. Schedule caste population consists of Kaibortya, Nama Sudra, Hira, Dhubi, Mali and Chamar. This group of people represents only 9.75 percent of the total population, while the immigrant Muslim population accounts for 14.81 percent who have a good bearing on the social an population composition of Hajo area. The Bodo Kachari is the only ethnic group which constitute the scheduled tribes population accounting for a mere 1.38 percent of the total population. Among the different ethnic groups the Hindu is the predominant section accounting 63.71 percent of the total population. The second largest group is the Muslim which represents 36.26 percent. The brass-metal industry is dominated by this community.

Linguistically the area is homogenous in nature. The language of the communities are Assamese, of course, culturally there are some distinction not only between the Hindu and the Muslim but also between
the indigenous scheduled tribe and indigenous non-tribal. Hajo represents social and population composition and plays the key role in the development of the society with a growing economy. The economy of the area is primarily influenced by the temple activities. The small business of the locality is depended upon the religious centres and presently the people are shifting their attention towards cultivation of seasonal variety mainly the cash crops on the granted land to the temple which were in their custody generations before. Thus the population composition reflects the economy of the area also.

1.2 THE RELIGIOUS CENTRES OF KAMRUP:

Kamrup being the most prominent place of Assam witnessed steady growth of religious centres and Hajo which is lying inside the geographical term 'Kamrup', and consolidated the growth from ancient period. Kamrup as the name of the district suggests is a remnant of the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa and the religious centres flourished here at different stages of time. In ancient literature of Assam religious centres of the Hindu people is popularly expressed through the words like - Dol, Dewal Devalaya, Than, Pitha, Tirtha, Matha and Mandira\(^1\). These centres with structure of building materials is in standing order or in ruins with endowments of land, people and other valuables where daily and regular worship was performed or still being performed\(^2\). As a religious institution and place of worship, the temple has a structure enshrines God or some other
objects of worship. It had a varied growth in different times and phases according to the needs and requirements of the people of the area with great devotion and exchanged of thoughts and ideas. Gradually the people of that area started the decorations of a structure with iconic and sculpturals establishments³.

As referred in *Pobitra Asom* there are references in *Agni Purana* that in ancient Assam there were at least 45 different categories of temples and shrines⁴. However, slowly most of them has lost into oblivion due to many reasons. Ancient literary and archaeological evidences proves that the ancient Kamrupa had many temples which received royal patronage in forms of land and people to perform religious rites and rituals. The *Kalika Purana*, written in 11th century, and *Yogini Tantra* of 14th century offers a list of *tirtha* like Asvakranta, Siddhesvari, Hayagriva Madhava, Kedaresvar, Manikarnesvara, Pandunath, Ugratara, Kamakhya, Sandhyacala etc.⁵.

The Vedic scripture and the treaties of Hindu faith lay some condition to construct a temple or selection of sites. The site to be a *tirtha*, must be a place of pilgrimage on the bank of a river or similar to that nature. According to *Visnu Dharmottar Purana* a sacred image should be installed in a auspicious place with straight-lined street, of river sides, in forest, on the hill top, in beautiful valleys and in caves with possibility of sufficient water⁶ and most important, in and around a temple or *tirtha*, presence of water is must. The temple is regarded as the ultimate aim to get the
Moksha (salvation) by worshipping the icon and the place as union of earth and heaven. These principles was followed at the construction of a temple or religious centres in Assam in general and in Kamrup in particular.  

The religious trends in Assam and Kamrup in particular is very antique in nature. As per the description in Kalika Purana, Saivism is regarded more ancient than the Saktism, which was popular in Assam in later period. Before the reign of Narakasur, the mythological king, witnessed the rise of Saivism. From 4th century A.D. to 12th century the Kamrupa rulers belongs to Varman dynasty, Salstamva dynasty and Pala dynasty were the acute followers of Saivism.  

The first reference of construction of a temple in Assam has to be found in the Umachai Rock inscription of Surendra Verma which has references of about a cave temple for the worship of Balabhadra. Another inscription Barganga Rock Inscription refers about a religious 'Asrama' (asylum) for worshipping the paramesvara or God. Copper-plate grant of Tezpur offers a fine description regarding the temples of Kamesvara and Maha-Gauri of Kamakuta hillock. These kind of inscriptions and copper-plates depicts the religious trends and shrines of the ancient period. Infact the Vanamalas copper-plate mentioned about Saivism in Assam elaborately. The Bargaon copper-plate grant of Ratnapala reveals that there was a big Siva Temple in the capital city of Durjaya. His son Indrapala granted Guwahati copper-plate, Guwakuchi copper-plate
and subsequently referred that his father Ratnapala actually covered his whole kingdom with ‘white-washed temples’ and they were dedicated to Lord Siva\textsuperscript{12}.

The \textit{Gachta! Stone Pillar Inscription} of king Gopala records that Indrapala constructed a beautiful white-washed temple which were dedicated to Lord Sambhu\textsuperscript{13} (Siva). This is a fine example of spreading of royal patronages of Saivism in ancient Kamrupa. The \textit{Gachta! Stone Pillar Inscription} has given not only the religious perspective of Kamrup but also it offers a good idea about the evolution of the literature on Kamrupi dialect and of the Sattra institution of the Vaishnava period to that of the tantric Buddhist establishment\textsuperscript{14}. According to the archaeological evidences available in the 8th century A.D., during the reign of King Srikumara, many temples were built in Kamrupa and dedicated to the deities like Visnu, Ganesa, Manasa etc. The remainings of temples like Kamakhya, Madan Kamdeva, Pingaleswar etc. also indicates to the existence of ancient temples in Kamrup and in the course of time these temple buildings gradually fell into ruins due to natural calamities like floods and earthquakes\textsuperscript{15}.

As a result of destruction of these temples or shrines it were deserted by the thirteenth-fourteenth century by the local people and lost its royal patronage. In Kamrupa after the rule of Vaidyadeva there was lack of central authority and the state witnesses the rise of petty chieftains as political power. Hence the period was not conducive for restoration and
reconstruction of the ruined temples and they were deserted by the local folks. By this time the political condition of Kamrupa changed totally and the Muslim invasion started by *Saka* 1127 (1205-06 A.D.). As per the records available in *Tabaqat-I-Nasiri* of Minhaj there were few temples available in Kamrupa. He refers that general Bhaktiyar Khiliji and his distressed army took shelter in a temple which was situated at high place like hillock. It was like a palace and the temple shrines were made of gold and silver\textsuperscript{16}. Local traditions identify this temple as the Hayagriva Madhava temple of Hajo. Because it was the nearest spot of North-Kamrup where the Muslim General Bakhtiyar Khiliji had the fight with the king of Kamrupa. Considering the circumstances E.T. Dalton opines that Hayagriva Madhava being the shelter place of Bakhtiyar cannot be ruled out\textsuperscript{17}.

As per the historical records Koch king Narnarayana rebuilt the temple of Kamakhya, which the Muhammadans had destroyed earlier, and offered the service of Bengal priest to conduct the religious ceremonies in *Saka* 1487 (1565 A.D.)\textsuperscript{18}. Koch Hajo king Raghudeva rebuilt the Manikuta or Hayagriva Madhava temple of Hajo in 1505 *Saka* (1583 A.D.) which was destroyed by the Muslim general Kalapahar, and endowed it with grants of land\textsuperscript{19}. Epigraphical evidences also shows that king Ranghudeva built the temple of Pandunath at Pandu in the western part of Guwahati in 1585 A.D.\textsuperscript{20}.

After the expulsion of the Mughals from Kamrup in 1682 A.D., the process of construction of temples in Kamrup was started under Ahom
king Gadadhar Singha. Just after the expulsion of the Mughals from Guwahati in 1682 A.D. Ahom king Gadadhar Singha (1680-1696 A.D.) initiated the process. In 1694 A.D. he rebuilt the temple of Umananda and made endowment of land and people. The next king Rudra Singha (1696-1714 A.D.) brought one priest from Bengal, namely Krishnaram Nyaybagis to Kamakhya temple for daily rituals. He also brought one Bengalee artisan named Ghanesyam for erection of building in Rangpur, his capital city\textsuperscript{21}. Most significant contribution of Rudra Singha was the survey of temples and sacred places of Kamrup in Saka 1634 (1712 A.D.). The survey enlisted as many as 84 Tirthas, sacred places for pilgrimage, holy shrines, such as Hajo, Kamakhya, Citracala, Ugratara, Asvakranta, Manikarneswara etc. special mentioned were made for Hajo group of the temples (the study area) and referred the Madhava temple at Manikuta hillock, Kedar temple at Madanacal hillock, Kamesvara temple at Gokarna hillock, and Poa-Macca referred as Mokam at Garurachal hillock\textsuperscript{22} with high regards.

During the reign of Siva Singha (1714-1744 A.D.) massive construction and reconstruction of religious shrines were taken place particularly in Kamrup. Historical records confirms 14 temples to whom Siva Singha made endowments of land with men and utensils\textsuperscript{23}, most of the temples that made endowments were associated to Saivism. Pramatta Singha (1744-1751 A.D.), the successor and brother of Siva Singha constructed as many as 4 temples in Kamrup and granted land and men to the temple. Pramatta Singha’s brother and successor Rajeswar Singha (1751-
1769 A.D.) built 5 temples and kept the building of temple tradition live. After Rajeswar Singha his brother Lakshmi Singha (1769-1780 A.D.) also constructed 3 temples and his successor king Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1810 A.D.) built another 2 temples in Kamrup. The last Ahom king Chandra Kanta Singha (1810-1818, 1818-1822 A.D.) had also extended granting of land and people to the temples. Thus historical records confirms construction and reconstruction of 28 temples in Kamrup during the period of the reign of Siva Singha to Chandrakanta Singha (1714-1822 A.D.). According to the survey of British carried out in 1853 A.D., 35 temples were available, however the survey made in 1954 confirms the number at 38 available temple in Kamrup.

Among the ancient temples of Kamrup, Kamakhya temple is most prominent and celebrated one. Being situated on the bank of the mighty Brahmaputra river and 25 km. away from the Hajo township, the temple has great importance for the worshippers of within and outside Assam. From the early period Goddess Kamakhya has been the most prominent deity in the region among the sakta Hindus. The name of Kamakhya was mentioned in the *Kalika Purana* and *Yogini Tantra*. According to the myth prevails in the *Kalika Purana*, Sati, daughter of Daksha and wife of Siva was unable to bear the humiliation meted out by her father to her husband, Siva, breathed her last. The genital part of Sati whose deadbody was carried by Siva, fell on the Nilacal hillock and thus became a sacred place known as Kamakhya, the Goddess of sexual desire or Kama. According to another myth of *Kalika Purana*, the Nilacal hillock is the body of Lord
Siva and the Goddess came secretly to Lord Siva to satisfy her sexual desire with Siva. Besides the daily worship special rituals are taken place during the time of Ambubachi in the month of Asadha (third month of Assamese calendar). As a result the temple door remains closed for 3 days and on the 4th day pilgrims from all over the world visits the shrines with great devotion and sincerity.

However, by the 16th century the Kamakhya temple building was in broken condition and lost under thicket. It is said that the temple Kamakhya then was first noticed by a women of Mech community and she showed the temple to Koch king Visva Singha, who later promised to build a temple with golden ornaments. Noted historian Gunabhiram Barua believes the similar reason to reconstruct the temple building by king Naranarayana. Two stone inscriptions available at the temple premises confirms that King Naranarayana and his brother Cilarai had built the main Kamakhya temple in Saka 1487 (1567 A.D.). Historian K.L. Baruah, however, has given more credit to Sulkadhaja alias Cilarai than Naranarayana. The Nath-Mandir of Kamakhya temple has two copper plate grant of king Rajeswar Singha and Gaurinath Singha respectively. At the Kedarkhetra of Kamakhya there is another stone inscription of king Pramatta Singha.

Madan Kamdeva is another temple of antiquity of Kamrup. Presently in a state of total ruin is located on the Dewangiri hillock of Madartala Mouza. It is 5 km. away to the east side of Baihata Chariali and 20 km.
away from the Hajo township of north bank of Brahmaputra. The ruin temple was first noticed by E.T. Dalton, and he informed that a total of 18 temple remains are available at the site and the site is popularly known as Madan Kamdeva. The temple has thousands of erotic stone figures lying scattered in the locality. A naked image of a couple is worshipped as Uma-Maheswara, the prime deity of the temple. Expert has opined from the archaeological evidences that the temple was constructed in 9th century A.D. Yogini Tantra also mentioned about the temple on Madanacal hillock. Madan Kamdeva temple has 118 Bighas of Lakheraj land. In beginning of the 20th century the land revenue of the temple was collected by one Muhammedan person namely Niyamat Ali Choudhury and managed the ritual of the temple. This is an unique example of religious toleration of the local people.

Gopeswara Devalaya, a Siva temple is situated to the western part of Madan Kamdeva temple in Madartala Mouza on the Devaduar hillock. The temple building was built in 1725 A.D. by king Siva Singha. According to the records of temple committee Ahom General Tarun Duvara Barphukan issued copper-plate for granting land to the temple. Being the Siva temple, the temple observed Sivaratri with great pomp and ceremony.

Pingaleswar temple is another Siva temple near Hajo which is situated in Karara Mouza of Baihata Chariali. Lying at a distance of 40 km. from Guwahati this temple has great relevance for the people of the locality. Daily rituals are taken place by offering grains, raw vegetables, also fish,
pigeon etc. for sacrifice. Rudra Yajna is taken place in the month of Phagun\textsuperscript{37} (Feb-March). The ruin sculptures of the temple indicates that the temple was built in ancient times, at least in tenth-eleventh century A.D. The temple has copper-plate granted by Siva Singha in Saka 1669 (1747 A.D.) with Lakharaj land of 376 Bigha and Nispkheraj land of 965 Bigha\textsuperscript{38}.

Another important temple of Kamrup is the Dirgheswari Temple which is situated in Barbangeswar Mouza of North-Guwahati. The temple is hardly 10 k.m. away from the study area (Hajo). The temple is situated on the Sitaparbat\textsuperscript{39}. The temple finds mentioned in the survey report prepared by king Rudra Singha in Kamrup\textsuperscript{40}. Dirgheswari temple was built by king Siva Singha in Saka 1657 (1735 A.D.). In Saka 1661 (1739 A.D.) Siva Singha granted copper-plate with paiks, land and money\textsuperscript{41}. King Rajeswar Singha granted an umbrella made of Silver to be placed on the Yoni-Pitha of the Devi\textsuperscript{42}. Dirgheswari is also known as Bagheswari as leopard is the vahana (carriage) of the Goddess.

Umananda is another important Siva temple of the area. The temple is situated on the middle of Brahmaputra river beside the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup. In ancient times, the island where the temple is situated was called Bhasmacala. The British administrators used to referred it as the Peacock Island\textsuperscript{43}. Referring to the Kalika Purana and Yogini Tantra Historian K.L. Barua says that it is an ancient temple belongs to 10th century A.D.\textsuperscript{44}. The present temple was reconstructed with the
icon of Siva Linga and Uma Maheswara by the order of Ahom king Gadadhar Singha in Saka 1616 (1694 A.D.)\textsuperscript{45}. King Rudra Singha in Saka 1617 (1695 A.D.) too granted land and servitor to Umananda temple for its maintenance\textsuperscript{46}.

Lastly, but not least Siddheswari Temple of Sualkuchi is situated at the Bongsor Mouza, on the bank of the Brahmaputra river. According to Yogini Tantra, it is situated on the Bindhyachal hillock, west of Kamesvara\textsuperscript{47}. Siva is the main deity of the temple. Archaeological evidences indicates that the main temple was built in 10\textsuperscript{th}-11\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.\textsuperscript{48}. However, according to the literary evidences of the temple it was built in 1729 A.D. during the reign of Siva Singha\textsuperscript{49}. Being situated near the temple of Hayagriva Madhava, the temple received royal patronage from the time of Siva Singha with land and people. The rock inscription cited in the Prachya Sasanvali indicates that the temple was constructed by Rajeswar Singha in 1764 A.D.\textsuperscript{50}.

Apart from the Hindu temples the area witnessed a few construction of mosque also by the people belongs to the faith of Islam. From the period of 13\textsuperscript{th} century, the Muslim people tried to penetrate in the Brahmaputra valley frequently. Sihabuddin Talish records that the Muslim people who were already established in the area adopted the local system and observed the festivals of the area. In 17\textsuperscript{th} century, the Mughals occupied Kamrup and made Hajo as their headquarter. They established the Muslim population in the nearby areas of Hajo like Pati Darrang,
Mangaldai etc. and also constructed mosque there. In 1654 A.D. the Faujdar of Hajo Lutfulla Siraji has established a mosque which is known as Poa-Macca. The permanent construction was completed in 1657 A.D. by the order of Shah Suja, the son of emperor Shahjahan. An important features of temple affairs of the area is that Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1667 A.D. granted land for the management and ritualistic purposes to one priest of Umananda temple namely Sudamon and his son Kamdeva. It signifies the fact that Mughal Officers stationed in Kamrup and Hajo were tolerant to other religion also. However, in 1681 A.D. Kamrup and Hajo was recovered by the Ahoms, their influence is visible there.

1.3 HAJO AS RELIGIOUS CENTRE:

Hajo occupies an unique place in the history of Assam. It symbolizes communal amity and religious tolerance by its own merit. A large number of population both Hindus and Muslims stayed in an around Hajo and became part of Assamese culture with their own identity. With great historical importance and cultural heritage the area sheltered the Mughals, Koches and Ahoms in different phases of Assam history. The place Hajo has different appellation in different times. The earliest literary evidence relating to the area is Kalika Purana referred it as Apurnabhava and Manikuta an another ancient literary evidence Yogini Tantra called Hajo as Manikuta Grama. Darrang Rajvamsavali, written
in 18th century, also referred Hajo as Manikuta Grama. However, the present name Hajo is more frequently used by the Koches, Mughals and Ahoms than the other appellations.

Hajo is one of the religious centre of Brahmaputra valley in general and west Assam in particular. There are temples of different religious sects of Hinduism like, Siva and Visnu temple, shrines of Buddhist, Satpras of Vaishnava faith and shrines of Muslims are prominent. Existence of these religious institutions reflects the idol worshipping as well as non-idol worshipping character and nature of Hajo. Broadly the area can be divide into two complexes i.e. temple complex and mosque complex. The temple complex collectively known as Panchatirtha (five shrines) comprises with Hayagriva Madhava-Visnu temple on Manikuta Hillock, Kedaresvar-Siva temple on Mandanachal hillock, Kamalesvar-Siva temple on Mandanachal hillock Kamesvar-Siva temple on Gokarna hillock and Ganesa temple of Ganespara.

Apart from these temples there are many other sacred sites in Hajo, such as Gokarna, Vikarna, Joy Durga, Swargadwar and Dhaparguri Sattra and so on. A section of people believe that Hayagriva Madhava temple belongs to the Buddhist faith. The Buddhist people from Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and China used to visit the temple and they believe that Gautam Buddha, the Mahamuni, achieved 'Nirvana' here. A portion of Hajo is known as Poa-Macca, it is situated on the Garurachal hillock and there are a Mazar of Giasuddin Aulia. Poa-Macca is regarded as one of the
most sacred place not only by the Muslim community but the Hindu community too. These religious institutions could attract the attention of the royal dynasties of Brahmaputra valley. Even the Mughal officers who were posted to the area had contributed to these institutions and donated land and people.

Hajo occupies an unique place in the history of Assam with a habitation of contrast religious and social groups i.e. the followers of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The entire social fabric in Hajo is woven by the people having contrast religious beliefs and their social outlook accordingly. The life of these people evolves with the particular religious institutions to which they belonged socially, and the influence is so deep in social life that the titles and surnames of the people of Hajo are determined by the nature of their services rendered to the religious centres.

Historically, Hajo was always the platform for the political and military policy adopted by the Ahom Swargadeos, the Koch rulers and the Mughal nobility. The Koch king Naranarayana conquered the entire north-eastern part of India including Hajo. After the death of Cilarai Koch kingdom was divided into two parts. The region of the east of the river Sonkosh formed the kingdom of Koch Hajo and that to the west formed the kingdom of Koch-Behar. It happened in 1581 A.D. and after that Hajo became the centre of politics of ruling dynasties of Kamrup. In 1613 A.D. Koch Hajo was occupied by the Mughal and it paved the way for direct clashes between the Mughals and the Ahoms. Being situated in a strategic point
Hajo witnessed many important political upheavals and this area was ruled by the Ahoms and Mughals in the subsequent period. This type of influences and royal patronages offered the area ample opportunity to grow as a place of Hindu Muslim co-existence.

The social composition of the study area reflects the social and economic outlook of the locality. Rural population of the circle composed of different ethnic and cultural groups. Among the non-tribal population Kalita, Keot, Koch, Rajbongshi, Baishya, Yogi and the indigenous Muslims constitutes major portion of the total population of the area. The Bodo Kachari represents only a mere percent of population among the scheduled tribe population.

The economy of the area is based on the activities of the different religious institutions. The article required for the religious activities and functions, directly and indirectly, as well as other related articles are produced locally. Hajo became the centre of brass metal work, flower culture, pottery making, weaving, goldsmithy, wood works and such other activities.

A distinct and extensive study on the religious centres of Hajo is very much relevant to understand certain basic elements of socio-economic condition and co-existence of the different social groups with different ethnic identity. These places of worships of Hajo are regarded as the cohesive factor and it has its impact upon the socio-cultural and socio-economic life of the people to a variable extent. It stands as a
representatives of certain community in asserting their social identity. The unique feature of Hajo is definitely an academic platform to study the hidden facts of the region and its heritage.

1.4 OBJECTIVES :

The work is completed in order to enlist the socio-economic elements and condition of different social groups of Hajo locality. The nature of different religious centres of the area is calculated to understand the character and religious beliefs relating to the centres. Above all, the type and degree of royal patronages received by the religious centres has taken into account to understand the relation between the centres and the royal powers. The nature of influence of these religious centres in consisting the society of Hajo is also dealt with specific attention, which represents social identity of some social groups. Finally the feature of economy of Hajo is incorporated with different segments of economic elements regarded as temple economy.

1.5 DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY :

Best effort is made to make the method of treatment on the said subject analytical and historical by taking into account all the available source material. Primary sources in the form of literary and epigraphic records including Buranjis, inscriptions, copper-plates and other records scattered on different sites of the state is consulted. A few of them are
the Record Room maintained by the management committee of Hayagriva Madhava and Poa-Macca, office of the Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup, Library of Directorate of Historical and Antiquarian studies, Assam State Museum, the District Library, Guwahati, Office of the Assam Research Society (KAS), Directorate of State Archives, Dispur, Record Room of District & Session Judge, Guwahati, K.K. Handique Library, Gauhati University, ICHR Library, Guwahati etc. The primary sources collected from these centres are supported by the secondary sources including various contemporary records. These records and informations are substantiated by extensive field work done in and around the study area. Historical method is adopted in the research work with the help of analytical operation method and synthetic operation method. Field work is assisted by interview method and questionnaire.

Knowledgable and resourceful persons in the area were also taken into account with their personal record materials for the study. All the source materials are carefully scrutinised and their authenticity is being cross-examined, conjecture is made where necessary and conclusions drawn there on with the help of some oral literature and by studying certain customs and traditions which still exists in the surrounding areas of the religious centres, for cases where there are no direct evidences in contemporary records. Above all the methodology is supported by Index Card and Reference Card which is prepared for this purpose. In such a way the data source and information so obtained have been summarised
and conclusions have been made with practical suggestions and observations have been put forth at the end of the study.

1.6 REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT WORKS:

In the present day context there is a need to study the religious centres of an area to have a better understanding about the socio-cultural and economic scenario of that locality. The scholars have now directed their attention towards the study of religious complexes or temples because of their cultural potentiality in general and the economic factors in particular. As a result many historical research works have appeared in the forms of books and research papers in different parts of India and the worlds. Study of religious centres has now emerged as interesting subject matter of historical research in different parts of the worlds due to its huge potentiality in growing economic sector like tourism.

Since the medieval period Hajo has been maintaining direct and inherent link with other parts of Assam in the aspects of cultural and economic development, but in most cases the area still retains its distinct identity. But yet no systematic study in the field of religious centres of Hajo and their socio-economic aspect has yet been done by any scholars. Although there are stray references to its kind have been found in the works of certain scholars.

In the field of Temple study Prachya Sasanavali edited by Maheswar Neog (1974) can be treated as the milestone as far as the primary sources
are concern. It has rightly framework the copper-plates and inscriptions relating to temples and shrines of Assam in general. G. Adhikary has dealt widely about the management system of temples of Kamrup district in his book - *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and their Management* (2001). He has specially dealt with the history of management system of the temples of Kamrup as a whole. *Study of the Temple Architecture of Assam* (1981) compiled by P.C. Sarma has contributed a lot to the study of temple architecture and its marvel. It has rightly focused on the structural value of an ancient temple or shrines towards the society. Dr. R.D. Choudhury's book *Asomat Puratattik Adhyantar Agragati* (1992) has also offers light on the temple study of Assam. It has covered the archaeological aspects of the temples of Assam and their features.

A few other books to its kind are - *A source Book of the Archaeology of Assam and other states of North-eastern India* (1984) published by Kamarupa Anusandhana Samiti, *Readings in the History and Culture of Assam* (1984) published by Kamarupa Anusandhana Samiti. Different works in similar way has been done by J.N. Phukan in his works *The Economic History of Assam under the Ahoms* (1973), (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, G.U.) *Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assamese Society* (1989) by S.N. Sarma and S. Rajguru's *Medieval Assamese Society* (1988) has been published. But all these above mentioned works are not directly linked with the society and economy of Hajo as such, but it certainly has some relation in broad sense with the research on religious centres of Assam.
Outside Assam comprehensive works on the topic has been done by many scholars. Scholars like E.B. Havell in his two volumes of *Encyclopedia of Architecture in the Indian sub-continent* (2000), Ludwig Bachhofer in *Early Indian Sculpture* (1973) has analysed the pros and cons of Indian Temples architectural features with the available sculpture of different phases of time. G.C. Chauley has done a scholarly work in *Sun Temple of Konark* (2004) which is most relevant to the present study. Another scholarly work on Temple study is the *Temples of South India* (1998) by K.R. Srinivasan. This work has rightly caused the original characteristics of temples of south India in particular. Another pioneering work in temple study is S.R. Wauchop’s. *The Buddhist cave Temples of India* (1981) by which he has highlighted the Buddhism in context of cave temple ideology.

In such a way of large number of project on temple study is completed in and outside Assam. However, in the case of the religious centres of Brahmaputra valley no such independent study has taken place regarding the socio-economic aspect. This study tries to analyse systematically the hidden facts of the religious centres of Hajo with the context of socio-economic study, with the view to highlighting the royal patronages received by the centres and the socio-economic issues related to the society of Hajo at large.

**1.7 ORGANIZATION:**

To deal with the topic the thesis has been organized in the following chapters:
1. First chapter has been dealt with the introduction of the area along with the geographical and historical background.

2. Second chapter has been dealt with the history of different religious centres of the area.

3. Third chapter has been dealt with the royal patronage to the religious centres at different period of times.

4. Fourth chapter has been dealt with the society of Hajo at large. The religious centres and its social implication has been taken into account.

5. The fifth chapter has been dealt with the economic activities of Hajo and the religious centres.

6. The sixth and the last chapter is the observation chapter with major findings and suggestions based on the study.
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