CONCLUSION
From the foregoing chapters it can be concluded that the history of different religious sects as well as the indigenous or folk and tribal religions in Barak Valley has evolved throughout the ages and has a long history of absorption and assimilation. From 7th Century onwards Barak Valley was under the state formation process of different kingdoms of Southeast Bengal like Samatata, Vanga and Harkela. Different dynasties ruled Barak Valley at different points of time. The Tripuri state formation, started in Cachar plains in 5th Century CE and gradually covered modern Syhlet or western part of the undivided Barak Valley and ultimately moved to modern Tripura region. The Chandrapur area of Syhlet was mentioned as a vishaya of Kamarupa in the Nidhanpur Copper-Plate of Bhaskar Varman in 7th Century CE. From the Chinese accounts, literary works and a large number of Harikela coins with Vereka/Vireka (Baraka) legends, it is known that in the 8th-9th Century CE, the valley formed part of the Harikela state. The political domination of the different dynasties over Barak Valley from 7th Century onwards had obviously an influence on its socio-religious background. Apart from the other evidences, the main sources which gives us information regarding the religious history of Barak Valley from 7th Century onwards are the five Copper Plate Inscriptions of Syhlet-Cachar region. These are the Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription of Bhaskar Varman, Kalapur Copper Plate Inscription of samanta Marundanatha, Paschimbagh Copper Plate Inscription of SriChandra and the two Bhatera Copper Plate Inscription of Govinda Kesava Deva and Ishana Deva.

The prevalence of Brahminical religion in Barak Valley can be traced from 7th Century onwards. This is proved by the information gathered from different epigraphic sources like Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription of Bhaskara Varman, Tipperah Copper Plate Inscription of Samanta Loknatha. Both the inscriptions reveals that lands were granted to Brahmanas well versed in four Vedas to start a new settlement. The prevalence of different Brahmanical sects like Saivism, Saktism and Vaisnavism in Barak Valley can also be traced from the different Copper Plate Inscriptions from Syhlet-Cachar region and different areas of South-East Bengal. Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription is the first Inscription which gives traces of the prevalence of all the three religious sects i.e Vaisnavism, Saivism and saktism during 7th Century C.E. Besides these the Gunaigar Copper Plate Inscription of Vainya Gupta and the Ashrafur Copper Plate Inscription of Khadga rulers of Samatata also gives us information about the
prevalence of Saivism. The Gunaighar Copper Plate of Vainya Gupta records a grant. In this record, a temple of Pradyumneswara has been mentioned, rather incidentally, in connection with the demarcation of the boundary of the land grant. Most scholars have taken Pradyumneswara as a combined form of Hari Hara i.e Vishnu and Shiva. The combination of Hari and Hara in one image forms the theme of this icon. In this aspect both Shiva and Vishnu are united in one image. Another important information of saivism is that the seal of the Gunaighar inscription bears the figure of a bull which is the vehicle of Lord Shiva. The Khadga rulers were Buddhists by faith but their Saiva leanings are proved by Ashrapur Copper Plate Inscription. Each of these plates bears a royal seal which contains in relief the figure of a couchant bull along with the legend Srimad Devakhadga. Moreover, the Saiva leaning of this royal dynasty is known from another inscription, where Prabhavati, the queen consort of Devakhadga, is said to have covered an image of Sarvani with gold. Sarvani is the Sakti of Sarva, one of the eight distinctive forms of Rudra mentioned in the Atharva-Veda. That Sarvani is the Sakti of Siva is also corroborated by a verse in the Khalimpur copper-plate of Dharmapala, where Sarvani is explicitly called the wife of Siva. Two archaeological and religious cult sites bearing Saiva influence found in Barak Valley are Bhuvan hill and Siddheshwar Kapilashram.

Regarding the prevalence of Vaisnavism, besides Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription which gives us information that, seven shares of the granted land were donated for bali-charu-satra of god AnantaNarayana, the Kalapur Copper Plate Inscription of Samanta Marundanatha and the Tipperah Copper Plate Inscription of Samanta Loknatha gives information regarding the grant of land for the construction of temple of AnantaNarayana in atavi bhukhanda. The other records from east Bengal which gives us information regarding the prevalence of Vaisnavism are the vaisnavite record from Kailan issued by the Paramavaisnava king Sridharana Rata. The orthodox Brahmanical dynasty of the Varmans of east Bengal were undoubtedly staunch Vaishnavas which is proved by the the Belava copper-plate of Bhoja Varman. Though the Chandra kings were staunch followers of the Buddhist faith but from the Mainamati plates of Ladaha and Govinda Chandra it becomes clear that in later years they granted lands in favour of a Vaisnavite or Saivite deity in the name of Vasudeva-bhattaraka or Siva-bhattaraka. However, Vaishnavism as an effective social and religious force
emerged in Syhlet-Cachar region in the 15th and 16th century after the advent of Sri Chaitanya (1485) in Bengal.

Vaishnavism in Cachar began to flourish thereafter and during the medieval period especially during the last part of Dimasa rule in 18th century Vaishnavism patroned by the Dimasa court gained intense popularity. Maharaj Krishna Chandra after his marriage with the Induprabha showed inclination towards Vaishnavism at the influence of the queen Induprabha. GovindaChandra embraced Vaishnavism whole heartedly so much so that he arranged Rasho Utsav, composed a whole music of era ‘RashUtsav Lilamrita’ depicting Radha Krishna lila which marks a significant stage of Vaishnavism in the Dimasa Court as well as in Cachar in the 19th century. Numerous Akhadas and Shrines of the Vaishnavas began to crop up in various places of Cachar (Barak Valley) and Radha Krishna began to be worshipped in the Hindu families with a new vigour which continuous even today. Another most important notable thing is that Vaishnavism in Syhlet-cachar region gained popularity not only among the hindus but also among the muslims. There are over hundred muslim poets composing poems (kirtans) on Radha-Krishna theme in Syhlet-Cachar region.

Based on epigraphical evidences it has been pointed out earlier that till the late 11th Century Barak Valley constituted an integral part of Samatata kingdom of South-Eastern Bengal. Throughout the early medieval era, Samatata remained a stronghold of Buddhism where the Brahmanical orientation was correspondingly less in evidence. We get evidence of the prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Barak Valley from the two statues of Buddha discovered from this valley, one in Badarpurghat and the other from Karimganj. The two Buddha statues found near Badarpur and Karimganj towns render definite proofs of the penetration of Vajrayana pantheon into this area. This is due to the fact that the first statue shows resemblance with the Dhyani Buddha Akshobhyva and the second statue shows resemblance with a Buddhist statue from Yunan. Moreover ,from the gist of the verses reffered to in the Puranas, where we get reference of Badabakra, Siddheshwaro Hara and “kapalikam tirtham”, it can be said that the auspicious pilgrim-site Badabakra carries the legacy of saint Kapila and is known as the “kapalikam tirtham”and the narrated Siddha-base within and around the present Siddheshwara Shiva
temple site may be taken as a pointer to the site’s past linkage with the Vajrayana cult practices.

The Sakta literature of Bengal generally belongs to the type of Mangala literature. The Sakta cults of Bengal represent a particular distinctive feature of the religious life of Bengal and the extent of literature which flourished under the direct influence of those cults is also fairly large. Among the Sakta Cults, the more important are the cults of Candi, the consort of Lord Siva, and the cult of Manasa, the serpent goddess. There are also Mangala-kavyas belonging to the cult of Goddess Sitala, Kamala or Laksmi, Sasthi and others, but the literature belonging to such cults is comparatively negligible both in quality and in quantity. So far as the religious history of Bengal is concerned, of the two saivism seems to be the older and the sakta cults, which are more often indigenous than Puranic, sprang up later in strong opposition to the former. In our literary records we find the Sakta cults often with daggers drawn with the cults that centred round the male deities. In this conflict with the other systems, particularly with the Sakta, Saivism, the religion centering round the most indifferent and inactive, had to give way and the Sakta cults gradually gained ground. We get evidence of the prevalence of Saktism from Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription and Kalapur Copper Plate Inscription of Marundanatha.

Folk or Indigenous religion forms a significant part of the religious history of Barak Valley. Hindu religious practice is simply a synthesized form of Aryan practices with pre-Aryan and non-Aryan practices. The earliest history of Bengali religious practices was that of the reverence and worship, observances and beliefs of the original inhabitants of the different settlements of Bengal. It is generally accepted that the religious practices, funeral rites, such beliefs and ceremonies as those pertaining to marriage, birth and death, the form and concept of the various deities, and restrictions regarding impurity incurred in food and enjoyment to be found among the Aryan Brahmanical. Buddhist and Jaina communities were a legacy from those earlier people. Especially the Hindu theory of rebirth, spiritualism and theories of metaphysics, reverence for ancestors and the offering of oblations to them, and many funeral and pre-nuptial rituals are derived from those inhabitants.
The aborigines of India, like those of other countries, ascribed divinity to certain trees, stones, hills, fruits, flowers, beasts, birds and places and offered worship to them. This is still true of such tribes as the Khasis, Mundas, Saotals, Rajbamsis, Bunos and Savaras. In Bengal, especially in the villages, worship of trees, particularly tulsi, seora and the banyan, is still very popular among the girls of Brahmanical society. In many ceremonies of worship and the taking of vows a branch of a tree is planted and worship is offered to it along with the accepted deities of Brahmanism. Essential elements in all our propitiatory rituals are a pitcher of fresh mango sprigs and the worship of a banana plant dressed as a bride and at avowal ceremonies one of the requirements is a bunch of paddy. These all are aboriginal legacies. The Hindu society of Barak Valley observes rites and rituals which have a Brahmanical origin. But if one gives a close look, it can be seen that most of the rites and rituals of the Brahmanical Hindu Society of Barak Valley have influence of folk elements.

The women folk of Barak Valley perform different rituals or vratas all throughout the year for the welfare and wellbeing of their near and dear ones. All these rites and rituals have some or other kind of belief attached to it and are magical and as such are believed to be very primitive in nature. Some of the significant female folk rites or Vratas of Barak Valley are: Mangal Chandi vrata, Surya vrata, Savitri Vrata, Rupashi Vrata, Shankata Vrata, Thunki Thakurian Vrata. Some of the important Folk Cults of Barak Valley are Nouka Puja, the cult of Badshah, the cult of Manasha, deity Darai, Kartik Puja.

Thus, it can be said that though a systematic and chronological study of history of religions in Barak Valley has been not possible due to dearth of archeological and epigraphic evidences, but from the study it has been revealed that Barak Valley had been a melting pot of diverse religious beliefs and systems. We get the first evidence of the socio-political Aryanisation of Barak valley from Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription. The other epigraphical evidences from Syhlet-Cachar region which have been really helpful in reconstructing the religious history of Barak Valley from 7th to 11th century CE are the Kalapur Copper Plate Inscription of Marundanatha, Paschimbagh Copper Plate inscription of SriChanndra and Bhatera Copper Plate Inscription of Kesava Deva and Ishana Deva. The advent of Islam in the region paved in a new era of religious
history in the valley. Shah Jalal and his disciples preached the tenets of Islam in the valley. Prevalence of Islam in the valley is also known from the remains of mosques discovered in at least three places in the Karimganj district. Sufism, the mysticism within Islam also made its way in the valley as is evident from a large number of Dargahs in Barak Valley where people indifferent of their religion offer their prayer. Buddhism has been a dominant faith here as is evident from different sources. Absorption and assimilation of the different religions gave rise to several syncretic cults such as the Natha religion and the Baul Cult. Besides these the village folk of the valley practice different folk cult which are magical and as such are thought to be very primitive in nature.