Chapter I

Introduction

In order to understand the history of the Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries and their activities in the three districts of Barak Valley viz- Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi it is necessary to understand the origin and development of the Missionary enterprise in Welsh, where from they could spread and established their Methodical project in Barak Valley.

Wales is one of the four constituent countries of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and is usually described as a principality. The total area of Wales is 8,000 sq miles. As an upland country most of is 600 feet above sea level and a quarter above 1,000 ft. (305 m). The three most important rivers are Dee, Severn and Wye. The Bala Lake is the largest natural lake. The Cardiff is the capital province of Wales. Their state religion is Christianity.1 Its people are called ancient Celtic People. Until the 6th century AD their ancestors occupied the whole of Great Britain. But when many invasions took place by the Saxons and Angles of North West Germany they lost their native place and accepted the mountainous area now known today as Wales. In that Hilly place they maintained their own custom and tradition as well as their own language and became independent until invaded and conquered by the English King Edward in the 13th century. By the Germanic term ‘Celts’ were chose to call the invaders ‘Wallesi’ for foreigners. This Germanic term ‘Wallesi’ later evolving into the English term ‘Welsh’. By their own language they themselves called ‘Gymru’ and their Country ‘Cymru’.2

Although, the Conquest of King Edward I had a devastating effect upon Wales but it could not pulldown the sense of national identity, distinct culture and language of the Celtic people. By this conquest they lost ownership of land to become only tenants of their English master and were denied the right to trade. The invaders did not allow them to live within the walled towns which was established by them. They also lost their own Church which had been inherited from the Romans called ‘Celtic Christian Church, was to out by the Catholic faith under the direct rule of Rome.3

3. Ibid p. 9
In 1536, Henry VIII passed an act, called the Act of Union by which England and Wales were formally united. Scotland and England were unified in the 1707 by the Act of Union. This Act of union setup the Anglican Protestant Church in England and the King himself became the head of the Church. By this act people of Wales also came under the control of Anglican Church. Christian worship outside the Anglican faith was heresy and punishable by death. The act also authorized English upper class people to control the hierarchy of the Church. Priest of the Church was appointed by the land lord and they also appointed one of their sons as the Church vicar. They received good reward for their services in the Church. On the other hand, common people became sufferers due to the fact that the maximum taxes of the Church Vicar was paid by the common people and poor community. Moreover, as an English man the Church Vicar had no interest to reside in backward Wales as a clergy man, then he too would be absent from his parish besides this, Welsh speaking people could not able to know any word of English vicar who used English language in the Church affairs. In addition to this, often a curate would be appointed by the absent vicar to carry out his parish duties. Paid a pittance and ill educated, such men often became notorious for drunken and corrupt behavior. This intolerable social and religious condition of Welsh was said by Morris like this:

"Ignorance, superstition, infidelity, flagrant desecration of the subbath a land without schools or teachers, books or bibles such were the conditions of Wales life"

In such social and spiritual disorder two Methodist leaders flourished in welse namely George Whitefield and John Calvin, they hit Wales in the form of the evangelizing by their teaching of predestination and original sin. They were called "Methodist" by their wicked and careless friends for their orderly and methodical lives. Initially, the Methodists were not sectarians or a denominational group. It was only a way of living. They also did not like to open a new or a separate Church. Their main aim was that individual conversion and experience of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. This movement in Wales laid great stress on Calvinistic theology of

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4. Marvallous Mission p.1
5. Basil Griffiths p.10
7. Marvallous Mission p.7
original sin, Salvation of the elect through the redemptive work of Christ, interpreted chiefly as an act of Substitution to meet penal necessitate and reconcile for Sin.

When the number of Methodist became more, they formed an organization called ‘Society’, which was opened in 1773 at Wamos. This organization took proper care of the new converts. The Society was looked after by one leader called “Exhorter”. The duty of the exhorter was to conduct meetings and taught the people. Several societies were grouped together and were placed under one superintendent. The district societies were looked after by the “Moderators”.

When the numbers of Methodist were increased in Wales, there desired to call a general meeting. The first General meeting was called “Association”. The first Association of Welsh Calvinistic Methodists held at Dygoedydd in January 1742 and it was presided by Rev George Whitefield. In January 1743, another meeting was held at Watford, in the country of Glamorganshire. In this meeting Daniel Rowland, Howell Harris, William Williams Peter Williams, George Whitefiled and other preacher and exhorters were present.

According to Lefferts A Loetscher, “The Church of England soon showed hostility to the new Movement and attendance at the meetings of the societies was punished with fines and imprisonment. In view of this unfriendly attitude, when the revival movement needed more workers its only available solution was to ordain its own ministers. Thus in 1811, the Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales was organized”.

The first ordination of Methodist preachers took place at Bala, on 20th of June 1811 by which eight brethren chosen from among the preachers of North Wales were ordained. From South Wales thirteen numbers were ordained at an Association at Llandilo Fawr on 7th of August in the same year. This incident was the beginning of separation from the old mother Church of England and the Calvinistic Methodist Church was born with about 22,000 members.

Calvin’s teaching became very popular in Welsh and most of the Methodists received his teaching of predestination. So, within a very short period the Calvinistic Methodist denomination came into being and in 1823 a new confession of faith was accepted. It is worthy to mention here that the majority members of Calvinistic Methodists came from the Church of England, from the Presbyterian, congregational

8. Marvellous Mission p.8
9. Ibid p.8
and Independent Churches. In terms of creed and Rules, the Methodists were a mixture of these denominations. As they followed the Presbyterian form of administrations they were later known as “The Presbyterian Church of Wales”\(^\text{11}\). In this Church so many ‘revival’ took place. The revival means ‘coming back to life and vigor’. It comes to renew the life of the Church. The revival took place in Wales were 1735, 1779, 1791, 1821 and 1859 etc.\(^\text{12}\) Due to the experience of several waves of revival it is also called the ‘Revival Church’. For example, in many places of Northeast India like Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Mizoram and North Cachar Hills etc in their Mission fields still this revival fire is burning.

When revival wave covered the whole country all dirty things like theft, robbery etc. were swept away, drunkenness gradually stopped and seriousness came into everyday life of the people. There were no cases in the courts and many broken homes were united. People took share with each other’s joy and sorrow, they also began to learn to help the poor and the needy and to support their own Churches. The whole social atmosphere was changed and produced many good fruits.\(^\text{13}\)

Griffiths says-“The result of the propagation of this new faith in Wales had an effect akin to the application of a lighted match to a petrol soaked bonfire”\(^\text{14}\)

In the early part of the 19\(^\text{th}\) century there had been set up some 400 Calvinistic Methodist (later to be renamed Presbyterian) Congregations within Wales. The main aim and activities of CMC was to set up schools and preaching centres through which they wanted to make social betterment, self improvement and the living of a frugal and moral life. They also gave more importance of Welsh Language by doing the Bible translation in that language. As a result of this Welsh language became the language of heaven. In this language they also recorded social and family incidents like births, marriage and deaths. A prime example of the marriage of these teachings can be seen in the life of one David Davies of Llandinam. He was “Born in meanest of circumstances, a sawyer of wood by trade, he became self educated and was a fervent Calvinistic Methodist. Following the precepts of self improvement he rose to become the richest man in Wales”\(^\text{15}\). Although, the Church of Walsh Considered war

\(^{11}\) Marvellous Mission p.10
\(^{12}\) Ibid p.11
\(^{13}\) Ibid p.15
\(^{14}\) Basil Griffith p.10
\(^{15}\) Ibid p.11
or revolt like as Godlessness and also condemned the growth of trade union but not surprisingly much of the revenue of their Church and Missionary work came from the likes of Industrialist David – Davies.

The London Missionary Society which was founded as a non-denominational society on 21\textsuperscript{st} September 1795, and within one year in June, 1796 it published an annual report where the society mentioned the name of Rev Mr. Jones, Llangan, who paid £-s-d 1/01/0 which was the first recorded contribution from Wales towards foreign Mission. In the same report the first recorded Missionary collecting from the principality appear.

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When London Missionary Society was formed the two ministers of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist were present there. They were Thomas Charles of Bala and David Jones of Llangan. The formation of London Missionary society afforded to the Churches of Wales their first opportunity of joining in Missionary efforts. Therefore, they took active co-operation with the LMS Continued until 1840, a period of 45 years.\textsuperscript{17} They contributed this society in terms of finance and man power. They gave to the society four Missionaries namely – John Davies of Montgomeryshire, Evan Evans of Llawrwsst Isaac Hughes of Manchester and Josiah Hughes of Liverpool. But unfortunately, within a few years most of the larger branches of the Christian Church in Britain had open societies of their own. Due to the theological differences Calvinistic Methodists of Wales also took agitation against the London Missionary Society which was almost entirely in the hands of the independents. As a result

\textsuperscript{16} The Story of Our Foreign Mission p.8
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid p.9
of this, in January 1840, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist foreign Missionary Society was formed. At first, they established their head office at Liverpool then in Cardiff, the capital of Wales. After wards it had direct links with the council for world Mission. The Presbyterian Church of Wales had no separate Mission field of its own.

For choosing the Mission field in the part of the world a meeting was held in Roseplace and immediately after the meeting the Liverpool committee was called upon to select the newly established societies field of operation. The name of the two places of India had presented by the two salvaterian fathers namely- the first, Gujarat by Dr. Wilson and the second, ‘the Khassiah Hills’ suggested by the Rev. Jacob Tomlin, B.A. His description of the mountainous area of Assam as “an exceptionally needy and an exceptionally promising field” led the Directors unanimously to accept the Khasia and, Jaintia Hills as their sphere of labour. Accordingly, Thomas Jones, the prime mover of the formation of the WCMFMS happened to be its first Missionary. On the 23rd day of April 1814, Mr. and Mrs. Jones arrived in Calcutta where Mr. Grey a respected elder of the Baptist Church cordially welcomed them. After a stay of a few weeks in Calcutta they arrived at Cherrapoonjee on the 22nd of June in small river boats, where they were welcomed by Lieutenant Lewin. He granted them the use of a part of his house until a suitable residence might be obtained. A few months. After they got a suitable house in the market and there they started Mission work.

The welcoming address of Dr. Alexander Duff, “the Gallant little Wales had awakened to its Missionary responsibilities” on reception of Thomas Jones in Calcutta truly represents the exhilaration of world wide Christendom. Thomas Jones, in his latter to the Director, said that he was very glad to tell him that every thing was looking most cheerful and promising with regard to the good work on these Hills.

Khasihills proved true of Mr. Jones’ first comment, “A more pitiful, lamentable, and

at the same time a more inviting field for the Christian can not be found. Rev. Angharad Roberts, rightly calls the field, “a home a way from home” for the Welsh because of its similar climatic and physical features with Wales. As a matter of fact, Shillong served as the head quarters of the WCMFMS for the whole Mission period.

Thus, it is an undeniable fact that Northeast India has been a fertile region for Missionary work since the nineteenth century. Many Missionary societies came to operate in this region and to a large extent, they were successful. According to Dr. F.S. Downs, “the earliest known Christian contracts with Northeast India were made by the Roman Catholic Missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries, and that happened in the Cachar District of Assam. But since no significant progress was made and nothing more is known about such contacts, the history of Christianity in North-East India could be traced only to the 19th and early 20th centuries”. The Badarpur Catholic Community is one of the oldest Christian communities the whole of the Northeastern region (1890). The Christian presence in the area began in the eighteenth century with the advent of the Portuguese soldiers. The New settlers formed a small Christian community which was rarely visited by the Missionaries. As the community grew larger, their visits became frequent and regular. In the year 1861, Msgr. Dufal, the prefect Apostolic of Dacca, paid his first pastoral visit to Bundasil and made arrangements for annual visits of the area by priests from Dacca Gradually, Bundasil became the centre from where the visiting priests would tour the Catholic centres of Shillong, Cherrapuni, Gauhati, Tezpur, Silchar, Damalia, Lalsingha, Sonacherra. Badarpur parish has 690 Catholics. Most of the Catholics are Khasi, Garos and Adivasis. They are leading a humble life in the interior forest lands and tea gardens.

The first well recorded attempt to do modern Missionary work in India and Northeast India was made by William Carey of the Serampore Baptist Mission (1793). He employed one Assamese pundit, Atmaram Sarma of Kaliabar in the Nowgong district for the purpose of translating the Bible into Assamese. In the mean time, the Serampore Mission also made contact with the Khasia by sending Krishna Pal to do evangelistic work at Pandua. The first two converts from among the Khasis “U. Duwan and “U. Anna, were baptized. In 1813. Due to various reasons, however,

23. Souvenir Mawkhar Presbyterian Church p.27
24. Ibid p.28
the Serampore Mission both in the plains of Assam and in the Khasi Hills could not succeed 27.

The American Baptist Missionary Union and the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist foreign Mission, as they were then called harmony where the Serampore Mission had separated. The first American Missionaries started their work at Sadiya in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam in 1836. On the other hand, in June 1841, the first Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries arrived at Cherrapunjee in the Khasi Hills for their Missionary work. Although the progress of the work was slow, yet a permanent foundation was laid and gradually the Christian Church was established on a firm footing. The Baptist Missionaries in course of time extended their work to Nagaland, Garo Hills and other places of Northeast India. The Welsh Missionaries, on the other hand, in the initial stage concentrated more on the Khasi Jaintia Hills and later on extended their area of operation to Sylhet district, Cachar district and Mizoram 28. From the above fact it is clear that Missionary of different denominations adopted their work on the basis of their particular areas. But they have some kind of an understanding that they should not go and start work in an area where Missionaries of other denominations were already working.

When in 1849, Rev and Mrs. William Pryse arrived at Cherrapunjee as a Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries, Karimganj district of Barak valley was under the jurisdiction of Sylhet (East Pakistan). The province of Sylhet was a vast plain area. William Pryse paid a visit to Sylhet for opening a Missionary station in the plains. In 1850, he was allowed by the Directors to open a Mission station at Sylhet 29. But unfortunately due to the lack of the Missionary workers the works on the plains was abandoned by the resolution of the general Directors meeting held on December 1872. After fifteen years abandoned the General Assembly of Aberdare held on 13-15, July, 1885 the Directors had several suitable candidates to present for work in India; and it was unanimously decided to resume Missionary works on the plains without delay. Accordingly, Rev. and Mrs. J. Pengwern Jones and Miss Sarah A John arrived sylhet on the 28th November, 1887 and started the Missonary work on the plains.

28. Ibid p.44.
In 1892, the Mission work in Sylhet was carried on by the following Missionaries Rev and Mrs J.Pengwern Jones, Rev Dr.T.J.Jones, Miss. Elizbeth William, Miss Brownlow etc., and they were assisted by Miss. S. Das and Deniel Ghose, the evangelist. Towards the close on the year on 15th December, 1892, two lady Missionaries Miss Laura Evans and Miss Elizbeth Roberts arrived in Sylhet.

By the end of 1897, ten years after resuming the work, three stations had been opened on the plains, viz., Sylhet, Silchar and Karimganj; three Churches had been formed, with 39 communicants, and a total membership of 84. Ten years later again, in 1907, Maulvi Bazar had been added to the number of stations, 10 Churches were established, with 159 communicants, and a total membership of 337, 6 day schools, with 243 scholars, of whom 175 were girls.

During the years 1903-1913 many Missionaries came to the plains and among them the most important names were the Misses E.M.Lloyd, B.A.(1903); Florrie Evans(1908, returned 1911); E:Radcliffe(1909,retired 1914); Lilian Jones (1910,retired1916); E.L.Morgan (1910,nowMrs.T.E.Puga,Shillong); A.J.Reid (1910,retired1917); Beatrice Jones (1911,retired1919); M.A.Jones (1911,retired1915); E.J.Jones (1912, returned home for family reasons in 1929, after 17years devoted labour); the Revs,J.W.Roberts, B.Sc(1906)and Oliver Thomas, B.A.(1913).

The Sylhet Presbyterian synod was formed by the four Presbyterians namely (1) Sylhet-Sunamganj presbytery (2) Habiganj Mouwali Bazar presbytery (3) Srimangal-Burlekha presbytery (4) Juri –Madavpur presbytery.

In 1851 William Pryse moved from Sylhet to Cachar plains for the intention of pushing forward as far as the borders of Manipur (Jiribam area) with an intention to survey the land and the inhabitants. He found Hinduism was strongly rooted here in some form or other land it was a religion of orthodox base mixed with animistic primitive rituals. Mr.Pryse termed the atmosphere as a bull work of anti faith in God. He resolute to do away with the very thought of the people and at a time, he knew, he cannot do the job. To impart modern education of western origin will be appropriate to root out the cause of superstitions in near future. So, he involved himself to expand

30. Souvenir Presbyterian Church Silchar, 1 March 2002. p.18
31. Story of Our Foreign Mission. p.70
32. Ibid p.70
his education mission in collaboration with the British government of the time. The origin of high school both at Sylhet and Silchar townwhip were the result of his toil\textsuperscript{34}.

During fifty five years 1893-1958, twenty Welsh Missionaries came to Silchar among them, nine were married couples and eleven were single ladies. The first Missionary, Rev Dr.T.J. Jones was sent by the American Welsh Presbyterian Church. There was no loss of life in the Mission field \textsuperscript{35}. The important Presbyterian Missionaries of Cachar District were Mr. and Mrs Williams Pryse (1856), Dr and Mrs. T.J.Jones (1891), Miss Williams (1891) MissEvans (1891) Miss.LauraEvans (1892), Miss.E.A.Roberts (1892), Miss.EllenHughes (1899), Miss.E.M.Lloyd (1903), Miss.LoraEvans (1916), Rev and Mrs.T.W.Rees (1919), Miss.I Evans (1924), Miss P.Jones (1924), Miss Olivan Rees (1929), Rev Mrs.Adams (1942), Rev Marwin Jones (1940), Rev.Brewin Jones (1950), Rev.Jankins James, Rev. H.R.Henry Richard James (1954)\textsuperscript{36}. Silchar, the planter's town has always been a cultural and education hub since beginning and that is why the people living here in this part of the country, always considered Silchar an ideal centre to propagate their projects and programmes and the same thing happened in the case of the Christian Missionaries who stepped into this ‘Island of Peace’ to enlighten and elevate the people of this valley in particular and also the people of neighbouring states like Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura in general. Over the years, the Presbyterian Missionaries also planted their camps here at Silchar and after that they exerted themselves to the core to enkindle in the light of education and culture by preaching the sermons of Jesus making them aware of necessity of global good will, peace and understanding in order to make the world an ideal living condition. It is worthy to mention here that in case of Catholic Missionaries the Barak Valley became residents for their Missionary penetration in neighboring tribal states. Fr.Philens Bouly the Vicar General of Chittagoan, stationed in Badarpur took the initiative to preach and propagate Catholic doctrine, to the Lusai Hills area\textsuperscript{37}.

When Welsh Missionaries had established their working centre at Karimganj then it was a most backward rural area dominated by Namasudra people of Cachar.

\textsuperscript{34} Personal interview with Ranjit Goala, Chairman of Barak Presbyterian Church. Silchar Cachar. On 6\textsuperscript{th} July 2008 at his residence.
\textsuperscript{35} Souvenir 1\textsuperscript{st} March 2002, Presbyterian Church, Silchar. p.36
\textsuperscript{36} Record obtained from the Girls Vocational School file, year 1955. Barak valley Presbyterian Church Record Room, Jail Road, Silchar, p.1
\textsuperscript{37} Syiemlich David R.Dr.: They Dared to hope the Fathers of Holly Cross, Bangalore, 1998 p.54
From both the side of Surma river villagers poverty was due to their land mortgage to Hindu and Muslim landlords and businessman. Dr. O.O. William was the pioneer Missionary who started an economic scheme of co-operative society among the Namasudra as to help them to recover their mortgaged land from Zaminders and gear up their fallen socio-economic condition of the time.

Side by side, as the situation of the time was very miserable in regard to health care, child mortality at delivery cases and occasional epidemics lost many lives time to time, Missionary doctors and nurses adopted the medical work at Karimganj and surrounding areas. This was the beginning or initiation of medical mission done by Welsh Missionaries in Barak Valley. Eventually their hospital with trained Indian native male and female nurses and also midwives under the guidance of Missionary leadership was a popular medical work of that time in this Northeast scenario of the past. Their establishment of a medical mission was justified, not only on humanitarian grounds, but it would do much to attract the poor tea garden labourers and tribal people to convert to Christianity.

Likewise, in Silchar, Twenty two Welsh Missionaries came out to Karimganj, four were married couples and eighteen were single ladies. Among the two Missionaries, Rev. Dr. O.O. Williams and Miss Dr. J. Helen Rowlands lost their life in the Mission field. The name of the important Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries of Karimganj were Dr. and Mrs. O.O. Williams (1894) Miss K.E. Williams (1894), Miss S.M. Das (1901), Rev. J. Garlan Williams, B.Sc. (1901), Miss D.G. Edmunds, Miss Gwen Lewis (1924), Miss Arwen Evans (1909), Miss Hetty Evans (1929), Rev. and Mrs. Davis (1926), Dr. (Miss) J.H. Rowlands (1905), Miss Edmunds, Miss Anney Jones (1933), Miss Lewis, Miss G. Evans (1950), Miss L.M. Thomas (1955) Rev. and Mrs. E Adams (1930).

Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries during their period did good efforts for the establishment of higher education and health centre not only of the Barak Valley, but also of the entire Surma Valley and Hill districts of the time. They successfully

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38. Personal interview with S.R. Upadhay Retired Elder of Karimganj Presbyterian Church on 15th June in his resident at Karimganj.
39. Barak valley Presbyterian Church record room Jail Road, Silchar Cachar. Record obtained from the Girls Vocational School file year 1955. p.2
established Presbyterian system of Church government. They thought self support, self government and self propagation right from the beginning. There was a good understanding and a cordial relationship between the Mission and the native Church. Within these years, they had a successful ministry. The native Christians of Northeastern region dedicated centenary Jubilee for their good activities. For example, the council of Baptist Churches in Northeast India celebrated its sesquicentennial jubilee at Dimapur, Nagaland, from 5th to 9th February, 1986, from 4th to 17th March 1991. The Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Celebrated its sesquicentennial jubilee in Shillong and the Mizoram Presbyterian Church synod and Baptist Church celebrated the Gospel centenary jubilee from 10th to 16th January, 1994. Even many non Christian friends and leaders of our country have always paid shining tribute and expressed great admiration of the self sacrifice of many Christian Missionaries and the humanitarian services they have rendered especially in the field of literature and education, medical care and in other areas of social upliftment.

The Land and people of Barak Valley

41. Record obtained from Barak Presbyterian Church record room, Jail Road, Silchar
The three districts of present Assam viz. Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi together constitute the area of Barak Valley. It is situated on the southern most part of Assam. This Valley is such a small landscape in the Northeastern Indian border which has sandwiched the link among the five sister states in the region-Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram, on the one hand and is maintaining an international border relation of Indian with her neighbouring country Bangladesh. Prior to the independence of India, present Cachar and Hailakandi district together were known as Cachar district. Present Karimganj district was not included with Cachar district. It was a subdivision of sylhet district which is at present called Bangladesh. After the independence of India in 1947, Karimganj, the subdivision of Sylhet district as a new born subdivision of Cachar. Hence, after the joining of Karimganj as a Subdivision of Cachar, Cachar became the district of three important Subdivisions viz., Silchar, Hailakandi and Karimganj. Until 1983 Karimganj became a part and parcel Subdivision of Cachar District. On 1st July 1983 Karimganj subdivision of Cachar became a separate District of Assam and on 11th October 1989 Hailakandi sub division also was separated from Cachar district and became a separate district of Assam. At present Barak Valley has three important districts of Assam, namely - Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. The previous Silchar sub division of Cachar has been now bifurcated as Silchar and Lakhipur Sub divisions.

By virtue of its geographical situation Silchar sub-division occupies an unique position in the Northeastern region of India. It provides transport and communication channels to the neighbouring states and territories particularly, the state of Tripura and the union territory of Mizoram are geographically linked to the rest of India through this subdivision. The later formed two districts of Barak valley viz. Hailakandi and Karimganj which have equal importance with Cachar district.

**Etymology**

The word Khachar is derived from a Sanskrit word meaning a ‘bordering region’. The district of Cachar may have got its name directly from the word, or it may have been so called after its principal tribe. ‘Cachar’ is also related with the

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name of a ‘Bodo’ group of people. The Bodo Kacharies living in the regions comprising Goalpara and North Bengal on Assam and west Bengal border. They are held as an “Indo-Mongoloid” tribe. Most probably their inhabitants were build in the foot hill regions of Himalayas, so, they were called “Bodo Kacharies” by the neighbouring Aryans. It is perhaps worth considering whether this word ‘Bodo’ may not be related to the old name of Tibet, namely ‘Bod’ the title kachari is usually interpreted as being the Indian term denoting an inhabitant of the Kachh or sub-monstrance marshy tracts. It is pronounced by the people themselves Kasari.

Again, the term Kachari is believed to be originated from the word khrohari. Here ‘khro’ means a head and ‘hari’ means a clan. Thus, khrohari means dominating clan. The Kachari call themselves Bodo or Bodo Fisa (son of Bodo) in the Brahmaputra valley. ‘Dimesa’ or ‘Dim Fisa’ (son of the great river) in the North Cachar Hills. The Kacharis were known to the Ahoms as Timisa, a corruption of word ‘Dimasa’. The Kacharies are allied to the Koches, Chutias, Lalungs and Morans of the Brahmaputra valley and to the Garos and Tippearas of the southern Hills. Later on ‘Bodas’ and ‘Dimasas’ were separated between themselves*. Although the title Kachari suggests that it denotes a native of Kachar, it does not appear that Kachar

*Karimganj, Subdivision comprising four thanas - Karimganj, Patharkandi, Ratabari and Badarpur. The subdivision of Karimganj was upgraded to a district on 15th July 1983 and Hailakandi subdivision was also upgraded to a district on 1st October 1989, vide Govt. of Assam notification No.AAA98/89/Pt/1, dated 29.09.89 Lalhipur subdivision was formed on June/1988 Vide Govt. notification No.A.G.A.544/86/118, dated 20th June, 1988.

* The separation of Bodos and Dimasas- “Long ago the Dimasa fought against a powerful tribe and were beaten in a pitched battle. They were compelled to retreat. But retreat was debarred by a wide and deep river. In despair the king resolved to fight again on the following day. But in the night god appeared before him and told him that the next morning the Army could cross the river if it entered at a spot where they saw a heron standing on a bank. No one was to look back while crossing the river. The dream proved to be correct. A heron was seen standing on the bank. The king and a great portion of the army crossed the river. But one man turned to see whether his son was following when the water suddenly rose and swept away those who were in the river bed and prevented others from crossing. The Dimasa were those who cross the river”. (Rao V. Venkata “Acentury of tribal politics in Northeast India (1874-1974) S. Chand and Company Ltd. Ramnagar, New Delhi. 1976. p.26)

44. Doley D.Dr. and Das M.N. Dr. Plains Tribes of Assam, A Profile. Assam Tribal development authority 1995, Gwuhati, Assam. p.19
was ever the chief headquarters of the tribe within historical times. Kacharies are scarcely to be distinguished by a casual observer from Bangalies in dress, manners, and language, except for their lighter colour and mongoloid eyes. Now, however, that they have fallen to the rank of a caste within the Hindu system, comparatively little intermixture seems now to be going on, although previously there doubtless must have been some leavening with Indian blood. These tribes then appear to be a mixed progeny of the various Indo Chinese, and to a more or less extent also of the Himalayan Mongoloids who swept into the fertile valley wave after wave, and in the flux and reflux of invasion within this ethnological back water they appear to have undergone considerable intermixture, but they now emerge tending to become petrified into hard and fast castes.

To designate Barak Valley as ‘Cachar’ was also due to the fact of the History of Kachari Kingdom of the valley in the past. The Kacharies of Cachar (Dimasa) are generally supposed to be a section of the great Bodo tribe of the Tibeto Barman family. The original place of the powerful race was somewhere between the Yarkhan Ddaria and the Khasgardaria rivers in the Gobi desert of central Asia. They came down to Assam in successive waves and settled down permanently. Gradually their population increased and they traveled to ‘Nilachal’, from ‘Nilachal’, they moved forward and finally settled down at Dimapur. Being harassed by the Ahoms, the Kachari King retreated southwards in the middle of the 16th century AD. to Maibong in the North Cachar Hills, where they build up a capital. This Kingdom of Kachari was also known as ‘Hidambarajya’ or ‘Hidimbades’. In Mahabharata it is said that Haidimba, the demoness resided in this place. While in exile, prince Bhima happened to meet Haidimba as a result of which prince Ghototkach was born to them. He ruled this country during his life time. But according to late Maniram Barman, the word Haidimba signifies a sacred place located between two rives surrounded by banyan trees. The dynasty of the Kachari kings originated from an ousted prince of Kamrup who finally settled down in this place. It is also possible that the name might have been given to this district by the Bengalies of Sylhet because it is an outlying place skirting the mountains. The word ‘Kachar’ in Bengali means a stretch of land at the

47. Ibid p.1.
foot of a mountain. In later time, when the Dimasas of Barak Valley embraced Hinduism (19th century) they assumed the title 'Barman'. Up to the year 1830 this Cachar Kingdom was ruled by the Cachari Kings. The last ruler of this line was King Gobinda-Chandra who was assassinated by a batch of Manipuri murderess very likely at the machination of the Manipuri King Gombir Singh. In the absence of natural heirs his territory lapsed to the British Govt. The district was formally annexed by the proclamation of August 14, 1832. From then on, the first British administrative district was formed as ‘Cachar District’ comprising entire area of present Cachar and Hailakandi districts. At present entire Barak plain is called ‘Barak Valley’ due to the fact that valley is the basin of its central and biggest river Barak. It is the main river of the valley and some important tributary rivers of Barak are flowing on the valley. River Barak is passing through the center of Cachar district. In Karimganj and in Hailakandi districts it passes by touching the boundary of Northern sides of both the two districts. Hence, from river Barak, the entire area of the three districts is called Barak Valley. Again, the name ‘Barak’ is a derivative of Sanskrit word ‘Borobokro’-meaning ‘Zigzag shaped’. The river Barak takes a Zigzag shape in her course within this valley. So the name is ‘Barak’ A village in the eastern border of cachar named ‘Borobekra’ perhaps bears an earliest connotation to this Sanskritization events of the past.

Geographical Background

The Barak plains with an area of 6922 sq. km. According to 1991 census Karimganj 1809 sq km, Hailakandi 1327 sq. km. and Cachar 3786 sq. km. It extending about 125 miles (200 km) in length and 60 miles (96 km) in breath. Geographically Barak Valley is located between 27° – 2° – 25°-3’ North longitude and 92°-3’-93°-4’ East longitude. The entire valley is bounded by North Cachar Hills district in the north, in its southern side Mizoram and Tripura states, In its Eastern side Manipur state and in the western side Bangladesh is situated. The Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya constitute the North western boundary of Cachar District

of Barak Valley. The River Barak, with its several tributaries viz. Jiri, Chiri, Madura, Jatinga, Sonai, Katakhal, Rukni, Daleswari and Longai etc., is the heart line of the valley.

The Surma or Barak River rises in the Barail range to the North of Manipur. Its sources are among the southern spurs of the great mountain Mass called japvo, on the Northern slopes of which are situated the most powerful villages of the Angami Nagas. Thence its course is south, with a slight westerly bearing, among the Manipur Hills, where it receives numerous tributaries before entering British territory. At Tipaimukh, the trijunction point of Manipur, Cachar and the Kashi Hills, it turns sharply to the North, and after emerging from the Bhuban range near Lakhipur, takes a very tortuous course with a generally westward direction, through the district. A short distance below Badarpur, on the western boundary of Cachar, it divides into two branches, the northern branch is popularly called the Surma and flows westwards near to the Kashi Hills, having on its banks the important centres of Sylhet and Chhatak till it turns south wards at Sunamganj; the southern called at first the Kushiara, has a south westerly direction and near the confluence of the Manu river from the south again divides into two branches, the southern of which re assumes the original name of the whole river, Barak, and passing by the towns of Nabiganj and Habiganj rejoins the Surma a short distance to the west of the later place. The other arm called first the Bibiana and after wards the Kalni, also rejoins the Surma, North of the confluence of the Barak at Abidabad.

The Chief affluent of the Surma on the North, after it enters British territory are the Jiri and Jatinga from the North Cachar Hills, the Luba, Hari, Piyain. Bogapani and Jadokata from the Jayantia and Khasi Hills, and the singla or Kachua, Longai, Juri, Manu and Khwahi from the Tippera Hills. At Bairab Bazar, in Mymen Singh, 20 miles below the sylhet frontier at Lakhai, it unites with the old Brahmaputra and becomes known thence forward as the Megna. The Brahmaputra and the Meghna coalesce and discharge the water into the Bay of Bengal. The total length of this river from source to mouth is about 560 miles (901 km.).The Surma is navigable by steamers as far as Silchar in the rains in the cold weather, however, large vessels do not ascend above Chhatak on the northern and Fenchuganj on the southern branch.

Boats of considerable burthen, traverse the whole river system as per as Banskandi, last of Silchar, through out the year, and in the rains are the most usual vehicle of traffic.

The Barak plain is the head water part of the Barak-Surma-Kushiyara plains lying largely in the Bangladesh. This plains dips west wards but has its lower parts in the middle course through which the river Barak flows. It has a sluggish meandering course with numerous oxbow lakes and swamps. It also indicated elevated terraces and flood plains. The flood problem of Barak valley is very similar to that in the Brahmaputra valley. The valley is very low with an altitude of 60' to 70' above the main sea level. Besides, it is surrendered by Hills all round except to the west with unusually heavy rain fall in the Hills.

Physical Features and Topology

The Topography of Barak Valley is formed with mainly four types of lands (1) The Hills, (ii) Plains, (3) Intermittent high lands which is locally called tilla and (4) The low lands full of water called ‘Bheel’ or ‘Haors’. The total area of the valley is generally having these proportions of Land: Hills or Plateau 28%, plains 45% tillas 30% and Bheel or haors 5%. There are 25 parganas and 797 Mouzas in the plan of Barak Valley area. Each pargona has 7 to 140 sq. miles land . Each mouza has not more than one sq. mile of its average land.

The Topography of the Three Districts of Barak Valley

Hailakandi

Rising from Lushai Hills both the two rivers Katakhal and Daleswari flow in the northern side of the valley, creates a middle valley land of the Rengti and Chatachara Hills which are extended in the North southern part of the region meet with the river Barak. Hailakandi district is situated in this vast area. This valley land is slopes downward in the Northern side and extended upto Bakri Haor. The southern Hill side of Bakri Haor gradually becomes deforest and made a good area of agricultural land. The total area of land of Hailakandi district is 414 sq.mile and in

each one sq.mile 2.72 peoples are living. The rainfall is 110°. Six registered Beel, six fisheries and nine registered fisheries are there in the Hailakandi district. According to 1991 census total area of Hailakandi District is 1327 sq k.m. Total Christian population is 5677, percentage 1.26.

Silchar

In Silchar Sub Division Chatla Haor is a vast water land. In its south western side Dargakuna Hill tract is situated where at present established a central University called Assam University. In the middle part of Chatla Haor and river Barak, two tributaries of river Barak namely Sonai and Rukni, are there. This in between part of river Barak is called Sonai sub division which is the most important fertile portion of the Cachar District. This part of the valley is called sonai because it is said by the people that from the river Sonai ancient people gathered gold. In Bengali term, gold is called ‘Sona’ and from sona it became ‘Sonai’. Again Sonai has another meaning. The land of the Sonai area is more fertile than that of the other parts of the Barak valley. From this fertile land cultivators product more corps or production. For these reasons this eastern part of the Cachar District is called ‘Sonai’ (Place of gold or fertility). At present it is an important sub-Division of Cachar District. Silchar Sub-Division of Cachar district is the most populous area of Barak Valley. In each sq. mile of Silchar sub division 183 peoples are living and its total area is 1649 sq. miles. The total rainfall is 124°. the total area of Cachar District, according to 1991 census is 3786 sq. k.m. The total no of registered beel fisheries in cachar district were 38 and 43 registered river fisheries. The Bhuban, the Rengti, and Tilain are the important Hills of the Cachar District of Barak Valley. The Bhuban Hills area continuation of the Lusai Hills system. They run north along the eastern boundary of the pre-independent cachar to the junction of the Jiri and the Barak and the main range has peaks some of which touch even a three thousand feet height. The Rengti Hills also like the Bhubans are a continuations of the Lushai Hills system and are separated from the Bhubans by the broad valley of Rukni and Sonai. In the middle of cachar district Tilain Hills are there. Srikona in the Tilain Hills is the gateway to silchar town from the west. On the particular point Silchar cantonment is situated. Moreover, near the cantonment area oil reserve is there in Masimpur which is a piety old one.

The Tilain Hills is famous in history because before 1826 the Burmese encamped there and they fought the British army camping at Bikrampur from Tilain Hills. During the early period of Welsh Missionaries the total population of Cachar district is 3,13,000. The population of Silchar is 7000. According to the Statistic of Dr. Jones, in Silchar, there were 8 communicants, 4 candidates, 10 children; in the Sunday School 50. The day schools are attended by 86.

Karimganj

Karimganj which forms the part of Barak Valley had been the eastern portion of the British district, Sylhet. When it was a district of Sylhet its total area had 1069 square miles. At present total area of district is 1809 sq.km. It is situated at a distance of 49 kms. West of Silchar. On the Southern bank of the Kushiara River the Karimganj town is established. The district of Karimganj is bounded by Bangladesh on the North, on the east by Hailakandi district, on the South by the parts of Mizoram and Tripura States and on the west by the state of Tripura and the Sylhet district of present Bangladesh. It is one of the important district of Barak Valley.

According to the population census of March 1921 the total population of Karimganj District was 480265. But at present total population of the district is more than 827036. Most of the people of the district are Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. According to 1991 census population of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the district is 120602 persons and 1430 persons respectively. The main language spoken in the district is Bengali. The total Christian population of the District at present is more than 4774 and their percentage is 0.6%. It is worthy to mention here that in 1895 Dr.O.O. William reported that in Karimganj District half the people were Hindus, and Count Krishna, Shiva, and the Goddess Kali and Durga as their principal object of worship. There were no Buddhists and no reformed sects. The other half of the people are Mahommedans. Total Hindu Populations are 414931 and they constituted 52% of the total population of the district. In the district total

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54. Personal interview with G. Sinha: Additional Deputy Commissioner Cachar, Silchar. Date of Interview 8th December 2007 at his residence. Silchar.
56. Ibid p. 297.
Muslim Persons are 406706 and their percentage is near 50. In the census report of 2001, total population of Karimganj district is 1003678, Hailakandi 542978 and Cachar 1442141.\footnote{Statistical Hand Book Assam 2002. Directorate of economics and statistics Assam, Guwahati-6  p.16}

Most of the areas of Karimganj district are plain low lands, some tillas (less high then Hills) and vast water land (beels). Sanbeel is the most important waterland of the district. PatharHills, Pratapgarh Hills or Duhalia Hills and Rangamati Hills are the very important Hills of the district. Langai and Kushiyara are the two important rivers of the district. During the rainy season frequent floods are attacking in the district by these two rivers and other tributarie rivers like singla.

**Flood**

Frequent and wide spread floods are among the most menacing problems of Silchar sub division of Cachar district as well as the whole of the Valley. Every year vast areas are inundated by waves of floods causing colossal loss to standing crops, cattle and houses.\footnote{Statistical Hand Book Silchar Subdivision 1976. Statistical office silchar 1977-pr3.}

During the Colonial period heavy floods were visited in this valley. It is well proved from the fact that Welsh Missionaries were frequently attacked by the heavy floods and they also made their centre as the flood relief camp. In 1923, Dr. O.O. William, reported that Karimganj is visited by frequent floods, and all houses have to be built above flood lavel. In 1946, a great flood also attacked silchar of cachar district. In that flood worst sufferers were the inhabitants of silchar town, and the Hmar villages who lived on the banks of the river Barak. In 1941 one after another terrible flood visited cachar area and lost many properties. Again in 1947, three heavy floods attacked karimganj district between June and October. The flood in June was very worst. In that flood most of the rice crops of Karimganj Mission Station were destroyed.\footnote{Report of the Sylhet Cachar 1947 p.456}

**Holy Places**

In the holy places of Barak Valley in Cachar district are- Siva Tilla, Khaspur, Lakhii Tilla, Bhairab Bari, Bhuban hill, Narsingh Akhra, Langar-shah Mokam,
Narayan Dhan etc. the most famous holy places. In Hailakandi district- Siddheswar Shiva temple at Badarpur ghat and Vishnupur shiva at lala bazaar are still existing as the holy places of the district. Important holy places of Karimganj district are namely as Khaki pirs Mokam which is existing at Deorail Village, Imam Mohdi Mohan of Near Tiltikar Village and Shah Arpin’s Mokam of Saraspur hill range etc.\(^{61}\)

**Climate**

The average rainfall of the Barak Valley received in every year is 3400 M.M. The months June - July are the heavy rainy months of the year. Excessive humidity is another important characteristic feature of the valley’s climatic condition. It ranges from 60% during the dry months of 70% during the wet part of the year. In the winter period climate is generally feel cold and dry. The heavy cold months are December, January and February.

**Soil**

Acidity is the general feature of the soil of Barak Valley. Some parts of the valley are capped by red loom soil covered by lateritic soil. The Barak Valley also has numerous lakes and Marshes whose soil contains organic matters. Due to numerous marshes in every year the three districts of the Valley’s fish production is 25574 tonnes.\(^{62}\)

**Crops**

Paddy is the main crop of the Valley. In a year three times paddy cultivation is shown viz. autumn paddy, winter paddy and summer paddy. Total area of crops in the cachar district is 39766 hectors, it is 35780 hectors in Karimganj district and 27578 hectors in Hailakandi district. Other crops of the valley are – maize, wheat, tea, other cereals and small millets, pulses, oil seeds etc.\(^{63}\)

**Occupation**

The rural population is mainly engaged in agricultural cultivation, fishing and

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\(^{61}\) *The Encyclopaedic Northeast Zone* vol. 10 p. 301
\(^{62}\) *Statistical Hand Book Assam 2002* p.79.
\(^{63}\) *The Encyclopaedic Northeast Zone* vol. 10 p. 256.
self employed business. The urban population is engaged mainly in service, business and trade

**Flora**

From total area four fifth of the land is the forested area in Barak Valley. In this Valley, tropical evergreen is confined to the Northern and Eastern aspects of the lower slopes, low tillas and narrow shady banks of the smaller rivers Gurjon (Dipterocarpus), Sundi (Turbinates), Rata, Titasopa, etc are some of the species of the evergreen forest in Cachar. Besides these, Nahor (Mcusa ferrea) Kurta (Palaquium polyanthum), Nagalichi (Nephelium longana), Kondu (Diospyrostoposia), Marhal (Vertica lanecafola) Jinar (Podocarpus Nertfolium) Jaman(Eugenia sp) Dhuna(Cananum sp) chilkeassia (Chikrassia Tabularis) Sundi Cham (Artocarphs chaplase) etc

Different species of Bamboos also are found in the Valley They are chiefly Mul (Melocanna Bambusoides), Pcha (Dendro Calemus Hamiltonil), Dolu (Leinosta chyum dullua) Makel (B.Palida) etc

**Fauna**

Wild life depends directly or indirectly on vegetation for food and habitat. The extensive forests of the valley were the home of different kinds of wild animals like tigers, leopards, bears, elephants, wild dogs, deer, porcupines and foxes etc. There were also different kinds of reptiles and birds. The Valley which was rich in different forms of wild life, even in the early post independent period, has lost most of them because of deforestation and hunting. The only wild animals which are often come across here, are wild elephants.

Some important domestic animals which generate founding are cows, buffaloes, pigs, goats, sheep, dogs etc. Domestic birds are pigeons, ducks and fowls etc.

**Economic Life**

Agriculture occupies the most important position in the economic life of Valley. People earning their livelihood by agriculture which constitute about 66% of

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the total workers. About 31% of the total geographical area of the Valley, 2045.82 sq kms out of 6922 sq kms is under cultivation. Again 25% ie. 510 sq kms are under single crop cultivation. After agriculture tea industry occupies the second most important position in the economic life of the valley. The tea gardens, 115 in number, provide employment to about and over 90% of them are Tea labourers belonging to what is generally known as a tea labours community, a small number of them, landed agriculturists, others are agricultural workers etc. Besides the agricultural product forest product like Bamboo, important trees, pine-apple also earn the rural economy of the valley. Location of a public sector paper mill at Panchgram near Badarpur, Adam tilla, natural gas depot etc. has enhanced the economic importance of entire Barak Valley.

The History of the Advent of the People

The present demography of Barak Valley has been formed through a long historical process. On the basis of the history of Migration of people, the entire population can be divided into two board categories: Firstly, The earliest immigrants or the prehistoric people and Secondly, the later immigrants or the historic people.

Prehistorical Immigrants

These people are also known as the indigenous aborigines of Barak Valley. Their advents were accelerated from the neighbouring hill countries of Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, North Cachar Hills and Meghalaya in the remotest past. The kukis of Manipur Hills, the lushai-kukis and Reangs (Bru) of Mizoram; Halam, Darlong, Sakaachep, Chorai, Tripuri, Hrangkhalwls of Tripura Hills; Khasis (Jaintias) of Meghalaya Hills and Nagas and Hmar-Kukis of North Cachar Hills are now living on the periphery Hills of the valley. They present the earliest immigrants of 13th century AD. It was mainly due to the physical pressures of the stronger tribes in their ancestral homeland that the forefathers of these hill tribe’s people migrated to the jungles and Hills of Barak for their substitute survival. However, the Barak valley in its antiquity, was a undivided landscape for those tribal itinerants, is but a historical fact.

66. Chattarjee Suhash: *A Socio Economic History of South Assam* p.39
Historical Immigrants

From mid 14th century onward, due to various notable historical reasons, some more civilized people migrated into Barak Valley and they will be now termed as the historical immigrants of Barak.

Koch Rajbangsis

The Koch of Cachar are the migrants from the Brahmaputra valley. They entered Cachar during the Chilaray's conquest of Cachar plains. The Koch in ancient Kamrupa formed a large portion of the population of Assam. They called themselves as Koch Rajbangsi. The Koch is the original inhabitants of Assam. They belong to the Mongolian stock. According to B.K. Barua the Koch are mentioned as Kuvacas in the Yogini Tantra. The physical features of a Kachari and Koch are the same.

The great Moghul Empire was extended up to the periphery of Sylhet during 14th century A.D. The Muslim preachers from Iran, Iraq and Yemen arrived in India to spread Islam. As such Sahjalaluddin Tabirji from Iraq first came to Sylhet and made Badarpur his station. The very name Badarpur is after one of the disciples of Sahjalaluddin called Badaruddin who was left as a Muslim ecclesiastical head for the converts around Badarpur of the Maghul Suba of Sylhet. Later, he made Sylhet his basis and he build a historical monument at Badarpur.

However, in the midst of Moghul rule, during 16th century a strongest Indo mongoloid tribe 'Koch' of Bodo group was ruling in Assam and North Bengal based on 'Kooch Bihar. Biswa Singh was the Koch Manarch who deputed his brother and general Chilaray to invade countries ruled by Ahoms, Chutias, Jaintias, Kacharis, Moghuls (Sylhet) and Tripuris (1563-65). Chilaray with his huge contingent of army waged a massive invasion of those Mini Kingdoms in the Northeast Region and finally entered into Barak valley to subdue the king of Tripura who was ruling over southern part (now called Karimganj and Hailakandi district of Barak). In an encounter with Chilaray at Longkhai in south Cachar District, the king of Tripura was killed and the entire Tripura came under the Koch principality. The prince of Tripura was enthroned by Chilaray as his vassal king and the entire Barak plain he subdued and appointed his brother Kamal Gohain as the Viceroy. Thereafter Chilaray left for Kooch Bihar, his capital town. A large number of Chilaray's army remained with Kamal Gohain to settle down in Barak Valley. This army was recruited from the people of Koch Rajbangsis, Chutia Assemese, Dimasa Kacharis, Jaintias, Nagas,
Mikir and Dhoms. These people settled down in the Northern part of Barak Valley. Kamal Gohain made his capital at Khaspur of Cachar plain. From these he ruled the entire south Assam including North Cachar Hills, Jaintia Hills and Tripura. These were his vassal kingdoms. Karmal Goham invited the Yajur Vedic Assamese Brahmins of Kashyapa Gottra on the Bank of Tikal River of Khajpur. They were appointed as the priests of the royal house hold and of the nobility. He also appointed some Koch as the sebaits (ecclesiastical assistants) who were also known as Devagrihi or Deori syama (thali gram), Kancha kanti (Udharband), Ranabauli, Chandai Mala and Bairaba. Were the principal religious shrines established by the Dhean rulers. Koch Rajbangsis were the largest and powerful settlers in Barak forces from Cachar. The neighbouring states Jaintia and Tripura snatched a large portion of their vanquished territories. The Kachari of Maibang also did not lag behind, they descended to the plains and gate crashed into the Koch territory of Cacher. Thus, the Koch principality in Cachar was reduced to a small Zamindar around Khaspur. In course of time they became minorites and now their numbers are very small in Barak Valley.

**Dimasa Kacharies (Barmans)**

At present the Dimasa Kacharies of Assam are chiefly confined to the North Cachar Hills district. They also scatteredly settled in the Karbi Anglong and the Cachar district of Barak Valley. In Cachar district they are known as the Barmans and reside in the village of Dholai, Chakarcham, Bubandahar, Darmi, Rajabazar, Gharerbitor and Udharband etc. The Dimasa Kacharies belong to the Bado group of people of the Tibeto-Burman race.

Although few Dimasa had already settled in Barak Valley during Koch settlement but actually their power was extended to this area during mid 18th century. When King Bhim Singh the last Koch ruler ruling at Khaspur in Cachar the Kachari Kingdom had its strong hold in hill tract of North Cachar based on Maibong. Lakshmi Chandra, the Kachari monarch of Maibong married the only daughter of Bhim Singh.

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67. *A Socio Economic History of South Assam* p.133  
68. Ronjít Goala (edited) *Souvenir Presbyterian Church Silver Jubilee Celebration 1st March 2002, Silchar*, p.4  
named Kanchani in 1745 AD. Soon after the marriage by a diplomatic alliance Lakshmi Chandra settled at Khashpur leaving his own capital Maibong. Ultimately he could manage to transfer his capital from Maibong to Khashpur and annexed the Koch Kingdom to his principality. From 1745 to 1830 as many as ten Kachari Kings ruled from Khaspur. The last two Kachari monarchs Krishna Chandra and Govinda Chandra were very learned persons and had good knowledge of Sanskrit.

The Dimachas were pagans and followed their traditional pagans faith which bordered round animism. Like all other Tibeto Burman tribes they worshipped both good and evil spirits, different Gods and Goddesses in Dykhow (temple), trees and animals, the earth, rivers and the Hills. The chief priest of the Dimachas was Jantima or Bantejajav. Dimasas worshipped for the benefit of their families and also for the benefit of their community. The important tribal spirit worshiping by them are namely- Dilajoj, Landi Raja, Dain Kho, Own Raja and Mangra etc.

During the reign of Krishna Chandra the Kacharis of plains accepted Hinduism through the influence of Bengali Hindus from Sylhet. Some of the Kachari queens were held responsible for embracing the new religion for their princes from Hindu principalities. Among them the most famous queen, was Chandra Prabha. They were the great patrons of sanskritization despite the reluctance of their husband’s accepting the new faith. Before 1765 Dimacha nobility became hinduized. Suradarpa Narayana (1708-32) under the Regency of her mother Chandraprabha was probably the first Kachari ruler to embrace Hinduism. The kachari rulers followed the principles of Tantrism even when they came down to Khaspur from Maibong. Tantrism was replaced by vaishnava faith when Krishna Chandra married the Manipuri princess Induprabha.

The Dimchas coming down to the plains and accepting the Hindu religious culture as their way of life are called Barmans. The Barmans are completely Hinduized. The Barmans call themselves as pitriacharis, which means followers of father Bhima, the second Pandava of Mahabharata, on the other hand the Dimachas of the Hills call themselves the Matriacharis, means the followers of the religious of mother, Hidimba, the Kirata Princess. The Barmans claim themselves as Kshatriyas.

In Cachar District the Barmans, so far the religious Practices are concerned, followed

70. Souvenir Presbyterian Church Silchar 1st March 2002 p.5.
72. Ibid p.31
Bengali Hindu. The Bengali priests perform the yagna during the marriage, funeral, and the sacred thread and ceremonies. At present the marriage system of Burmans are similar to the Bengali Hindu of Cachar but before the first half of the nineteenth century their marriage system are very similar to that of the kukis.

"The Barmans are kacharies of the Cachar district. They follow the Hindu religion. They recognized themselves as Kshatriyas. They are a group of Dimasas. They came down to the plains and started to live with the non tribals. In due course they adopted some of the traits of the Hindu priestly class. In course of time, they gave up some of their original tribal habits such as eating pigs, rearing fowls, and speaking their old Dimasa language. Though the Barman forked from the original Dimasa group yet they did retain some of the basic traditional culture. They worshipped gods and goddess and perform puja with Hindu rituals. The Barman socio culture is primarily patriarchal with a few elements of Matriacha features. Barmans villages constituted by their own communities where they are living together. They keep the name of their villages after the name of the river near which it is situated. Their love for river is traditional. It proved from the nomenclature ‘Dimacha’ where Di- means River, Ma- means big and cha- means children. Thus, the word ‘Dimacha’ means ‘the inhabitant or children on the bank of big river’. They choose to live the wooden and Bamboo houses. Their houses are decorated by gardens and ponds. The house complex is neat and clean. Important house hold articles are made up of bamboos. Even in the remote villages they used the bamboo as the raw materials for their house. Their culture is chiefly a bamboo culture. They used their own making cloth. They build their handloom house separately from the living house.

There is a long history of this people in this area. When in 1708 Tamradhwaj was died, Chandra Prabha the Dowgar queen become the absolute ruler of the Kachari Kingdom and she ruled for next 50 years interfering the administration of the Kingdom both in plains and Hills. She ushered a great many reforms in revenue pattern of land and inviting Bengali Muslim cultivators from Sylhet, she introduced wet cultivation in Cachar plains.

Krishna Chandra, although a learned man, was a weak personality. He had to

73. Chatterjee Suhas: *A Socio Economic history of South Assam*. p.30
74. Doley D Dr. and Das M.N. Dr. *Plains Tribes of Assam, a profile*. Assam Tribal Development Authority 1995, Guwahati, Assam. pp.119, 120
face many aggressions from Ahoms and Jaintia Kings. To make his military power stronger he developed friendship with the king of Manipur. Many Manipuri Young men joined the Kachari army. A systematic Manipuri migration took place into Barak valley. Some Manipuri Princes namely Marjit Singh, Chourjit Singh and Gambhir Singh had been fugitives in Cachar for a long time and they developed a desire to rule over Barak Valley, Krishna Chandra had also married a Manipuri princes named Induprobha and made her his chief queen. Within the Manipuri super influence, king Krishna Chandra died in 1813, leaving Induprobha and a daughter behind. After the death of Krishna Chandra his younger brother Govinda Chandra became the king as per the decision of Kachari Raj council in the Hills. Soon after the enthronement Govinda Chandra married Induprobha his brother’s widow. This caused great resentment among his nobles. Govinda Chandra was a learned man but he was also an extra vagant which caused the economy of his kingdom totally collapsed. Induprobha persuaded the king to shift the capital from Khaspur to Dudpatil, a place near Silchar. Dudpatil was exclusively a Manipuri village. Induprobha was much influenced by Gambir Singh, a man of royal lineage of Manipur. As such, Gambhir Singh and his Manipuri mercenaries played over lordship in Cachar. For fear of life, Govinda Chandra had to take refuge in the British territory of Sylhet in 1818. He shifted his capital at Haritikar, near Badarpur. Indeuprobha with her daughter was left at Dudpatil. At this juncture, Burmese invasion took place in 1824. They took hold of Khaspur and Dudpatil capitals together. Induprova with her daughter became a fugitive to protect her life. Govinda Chandra as a fugitive king at Haritikar was advised by his councilors to seek help from the British power. Badarpur the border of Sylhet was then a British fort. When Capt. David Scott, the Government agent of East India Company was visiting Badarpur then Govinda Chandra met with him there. On 6th March 1824 a treaty was concluded between Govinda Chandra and British Commissioner. According to this treaty Kachari monarch had to pay a sum of Rs.10,000/- (Rupees ten thousands) only as revenue to East India Company and in return company will protect the Kachari Principality from any foreign aggression. Govinda Chandra was restored to his lost throne at Dudpatil. But he did not turn up there, instead he remained at Haritikar. British soldiers protected the king. The Burmese were repulsed from the Boundary of Cachar. In this pursuit of the British the

75. Silver Jubilee Souvenir Presbyterian Church Silchar, 1st March 2002. p.5
Manipuri Prince Gambhir Singh who was then ruling the eastern boundary of Cachar joined the British troops with his Manipuri men and helped to evacuate the Burmese from the territory of Manipur. Gambhir Singh thereby could gain the throne of Manipur as a vassal king under British East India Company in 1825.

Gambhir Singh was knew well the internal affairs of Kachari Kingdom for his long association with Cachar. So he dreamt to gain Cachar from Kacharies with a conspiracy which led to the death of Govinda Chandra as the last kachari monarch. In this episode it is said that Govinda Chandra was staying at his Haritikar palace and the conspiracy to kill him was so widened with its network that he was assassinated in 1830 at his own palace.

The Dimasa rule in Cachar was very short lived. After the death of last Kachari Raja Govinda Chandra Narayan the Cachar plains was placed under the superintendent and eventually made a district in Bengal. When the chief Commissionership of Assam was constituted in 1874 consisting of the Assam Valley and the Hills, the Surma Valley districts of Sylhet and Cachar were transferred to the new province. By this the entity of Kachari Kingdom of Cachar plain came to an end.

The language use by the Barman tribes of Cachar Distrist is called 'Dimasa'. In 1961 total Dimacha population of Cachar district was 10,959 and in Assam 32,077. According to 1971 census the percentage of the Barman of Cachar district is 0.61. The Barmans have adopted Bengali language to Contact with the outside world. They even adopted Bengali as a medium of instruction of educational institution. The Burmans are not much behind the general as well as the Schedual tribe population of the Cachar District in regard to the percentage at literacy. According to the census report of 1991 the population of Dimasa (Kachari) of Barak Valley is 12,540. Most of them are the Hindus. Christian fellows are very rarely seen in the Barman community of Barak Valley. They are not more than 500 people in Presbyterian denomination from Barman Community. They are taking matrimonial relation only from their own caste. Other caste marriage is not permissible in this orthodox society since the past to present era. They are highly leg behind in the cosmopolitan custom and followed extremely rigid traditional matrimonial system. So that, if anybody becomes
Christians then he or she should be de-linked with his / her society and family.\(^{77}\)

**Manipuri**

In the book *Srihatter Itibritta* A.C. tattavanidhi said that Manipuri established their colony in Cachar and Sylhet after the Burmese war which was started in 1824 and ended in 1826. But this opinion is historically unsound and not accepted by the historians of present days. L.W. Shakespear, another prominent writer put his argument by saying that Manipuri took settlement in Cachar long before the Burmese war. But the most correct information of Cachar Manipuri relationship is the ‘Nongsamei’, a Chronicle of the Meitei Kings from Khagemba (1517-1659) to Chingthang Khanba (1759-98)\(^{78}\). The Chronicles mainly depicts the Manipuri adventures against the Kachari aggression. The chronicle also speaks of a Meitei queen who happened to be a Kachari princess. Manipuri king Bhagyachandra accompanied by large retinue of men and women stayed in Cachar with his family deity Gobindaji for few years to escape from the wrath of Burmese commander Hsingbyusin. British armed forces advanced up to Lakhipur, Cachar in January 1763. Thus, the Manipuris took settlement in Cachar especially on the Eastern border long before the Bengali caste Hindus made their appearance in the plains of Cachar.

Manipuris, because of their strong physique and valour attracted the attention of the Kachari Rajas since the days of Lakshmichandra. The chief queen of Krishna Chandra was Indraprobha, the Maniuri princes who was the daughter of the Manipuri king Madhuchandra\(^{79}\). This matrimonial alliance brought the two ruling dynasties (Kachari and Manipuri) very close.

Manipuris were the followers of Bi-Caste system. They were a Hindu Vaishnivate community following the Gaudia order. Pitambar Charai Rongba was the first Manipuri King to be formally initiated to Vaishnavism. As a Vaishnava sect they followed the Vaishnava religion and worshipped Image of Lord Vishnu and also other Hindu gods and goddesses. Rasalila and Lai Haraoba (merry making of god) and other games and forms of art such as rowing and fishing are understood on the basis of religious beliefs. The concept of Angels and Devils is a significant tract of Meitei thought. They also worship sanamahi (Sun-god) and Leimarel (earth goddess).

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77. Personal Interview with Jitendra Khesra and Sudipta Khesra. Dolai. On 29.09.08 at their resident.
78. Chatterjee Suhash: *A Socio Economic history of South Assam* p. 93
79. *Ibid* p. 94
marriage system of the Manipuris after conversion to the vaishnava faith of Bengali order closely follows the rituals of Bengali Hindu of Nabadip school. They follow the Brahma Bidhan and the Vedic rules. The marriages were normally arranged. They generally settled in different locations forming social institutions like Shinglup, Khun-phurup and Leipak phurup. They maintained a distinctive Meiteir polity without being assimilated into the rest of the population.

The women enjoy a special status in the society. They are strong, fair and beautiful. They are hardy and industrious. Most of the household works are being done by them. In comparison Manipuri male is lazy and passes his days in sports and pastime. The women discharge their duties at home and also in the field. The Manipuri women love dance and music. Manipuri dances are world famous. ‘Ras’ is the most colourful religious ceremony of both the Manipuris and Bishnupriya Manipuris.

As one of the earliest immigrants of Barak Valley Manipuris took their settlement in many places of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts. In Cachar district Udharbond, Sonai, Lakhipur, Narsingpkur and Silchar Ramnagar etc. are the important places where the Manipuris took their settlement. In Hailakandi district most of their villages have found in Lala and Nimaichandpur area. In Karimganj district few Manipuri villages are found in Patharkandi area. In estimate of Meitei population source it is 10,723 in 1851. In 1931, the total Manipuries Speaker was estimated as 55,550 with settlements in 98 Meitei Villages. According to the census of 1961 total Manipuri population in Assam was 89,053 and 75,116 in Cachar district.

Manipuris of Barak Valley are undoubtedly the people of Vaishnava sect. Since their coming from Manipur to till today they followed Hindu Vaishnava religion very rigidly. But in later part of the 19 century a few numbers of Manipur Christians have seen within the Manipuri Communities who are belonging to different Christian denominations. At present in Barak Valley total number’s of Manipuri Christians are 2000 (including all denominations) and among them 1200 are presbyterian.

80. Sanajaoba Naorem: Manipur Past And Present Vol-4, Miittal Publicaiton, New Delhi, First Published 2005. p.21
81. Sanajaoba Naorem: Manipur Past And Present Vol-4, Miittal Publicaiton, New Delhi, First Published 2005. p.21
82. Church Statistic. Record obtained from Presbyterian Church, Silchar
The Presbyterian Manipuri Christians formed their separate Presbyterian Church at Kabuganj and Bantarapur of sonai area in Cachar. The light of life, Baskandi, Cachar, Published the entire New Testament in Manipuri in 1930 for the students of the Bible correspondence course83.

Manipuri Muslims

In the year 1819 this little Manipuri speaking community taking Manipuri diet, dressing, Manipuri garments, living as manipuri but professing Islam left their place of origin in the wake of Burmesh on Slaught on Manipur. In Barak Valley the first Manipuri Muslim settlement was at Tolenkul, near Lakhipur. In the memory of Tolen Kazi this village is called Tolenpur.84 Manipuri Muslims is an integral part of the meitei society in Manipur and the same is true in Barak valley also. Their early villages in Barak Valley were- Baskandi, Singerbond, Dolugram, Wapokpi, Gobindpur, Bahagarpar, Lalong, Binnakandi, Labak, Lakhipur, Alipur, Moragang etc. They observe the Muslim religion but their mother language is Manipuri. Manipur Muslim women folk are very conservative. Men of this community use the dress like lungi and taki (Muslim hat) etc. But the women do not use the sari as their dresses. They use the Manipuri dresses like ‘Fanek’ (use in the lower portion of the body) and Manipuri ‘Chadar’ (use in the upper portion of the body). Some time women of this community use the Burkha’. They established their settlement in Barak valley during the time of Kachari kings. The kachari monarch of Cachar favoured the Manipuri Muslims and offered them free land to settle down on the north bank of river Barak. Kachari monarch so favoured them for their own trade called veterinary and fracture the rapisis (locally called Khondols). Even to the present day many of them are renounced for these jobs85. The approximate figures of their total population in Barak Valley are not more than one lakh.

Dhamadi

When the Kachari Rajas moved their capital from Maibong to Khashpur the chief priest (Dhamadh Yaksha) locally called Dhamadi also left Maibong for

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Khashpur. The Dhamadis received land grants and got scattered to settle in Jatrapur, Tarapur, Barkhola, Phulbari etc. in Cachar. The notable among the Dhamadis was Guru Sadananda, the Spiritual master of Raja Lakhmichandra and Gaurmani, the Rajpandit (Official priest of the royal house hold) of Raja Govinda Chandra.

**Rajkumars**

Many Hindu Manipuris both Meitei and Bishnupriyas of Barak Valley use the title Rajkumar and Rajkumaries. Rajkumar is the title use by the male person and the female of the same clan use the title ‘Rajkumari’.

It is held that King Bhagyachandra (Garibnewaj) had many wives and through them he had several male issues. The desendents (both male and female) of such male issues in the later days and their lineage claimed the titles of ‘Rajkumar and Rajkumari in Manipuri society. They are regarded as very privileged people amongst Manipuris. During any ceremonies or festivals of both the Bishnupriya and Manipuri communities Rajkumars get the separate sitting place which is called by the term of Bishnupriya Manipuri as ‘Rajar Fita’(place of Rajkumar) till today this traditional privilege is enjoying by the Rajkumar and Rajkumaries. Many such Rajkumar and Rajkumaries migrated to Cachar during mass evaculation in 17th and 18th century from Manipur. These type of title bear people are deprived from agricultural works and also from other works whose directly related with the land. They are next to the rank of Brahmin in the Manipuri and Bishnupriya Society.

**Bishnupriya**

The Bishnupriyas are originally divided into five groups as: -

(a) Khamul
(b) Moirang
(c) Angom
(d) Luwang and
(e) Mangang

These five groups are known as Pancha Bishnupriya. Bishnupriyas trace their origin with Manpuri king Bhagya Chandra (Garibnewaj, 17th century)

86. Chatterjee Suhash: *A Socioeconomic History of South Assam* p.79
87. *Souvenir Presbyteian Church Silechar* p.1
According to Manipuri Historian Dr. N. Tombi Singh "Rajashri Bhagya Chandra who is reported to have married a maiden of this community thereby leading to the birth of a male child who later on become to be known as Kalaraja. The Rajkumar families of ningthoukong. (Moirang) trace their origin to Kala Raja. In due course of time the community left Manipur during Manipur-Burmese war. Hundreds and thousands of people belonging almost to all the clans escaped to the neighbouring territories in Barak Valley, Tripura and Surma Valley. While escaping out of the land, they followed the same land routes which their forefathers followed in ancient times while entering the land. The entire valley presented a very desolate and gloomy appearance. The flight of the people was neither sudden nor accomplished at a time. It took place in batches and waves in different times. In the process, some went to North Assam, some to Burma but the majority of them moved out through the south of the country.

In course of their movement towards the south, some settled in the narrow valleys between the hills of jiribam, but the bulk of these people still preceded further south and developed colonies in the neighbouring territories in the Barak valley of Assam, in Tripura and in the Surma Valley of modern Banglades. 89.

It is claimed that the Bishnupriya Manipuris are the Kshatriyas and a fine stalwart race, the descendant of Babruvahana, son of the third Pandava of Mahabarata. When Vaishnavism entered in Manipur they adopted vaishnavism and became the worshiper of Lord Bishnu. Although, they observe the other Gods and Goddess of Hindu religion but they have the great restriction to obey the worshiping of Goddess Kali. They have some traditional deities called- 'Apakpa and Senamahi'. Both the two deities are the ancestral deities of each clan or 'lokaI' of Bishnupriyas. Bishnupriyas society has so many lokais or clan namely- "Raja Lakai, lampa lokai, Mekhura Lakai and Amunga Lakai etc.'

Ancestral deities – Apakpa, is the forefather of each clan and Senamahi is the God of granary. In a year each or every clan of Bishnupriya used to worship their clan God 'Apakpa' by fish or by vegetarian. Again, every clan used to worship the god of granary in every year when they preserve the harvesting paddy crops in their houses. The Bishnupriyas are extremely religious minded and built many temples after the

89. History of Manipur (Political and social Aspects) p. 71
90. Personal Interview with Pran Kumar Sinha, 85 years old a grand man, at his residence, Singari, Silchar-7 on 28.05.2008.
names of their popular gods and goddesses. However, one Vishnu temple is still there at Bishnupur (Manipur). The Vishnupriyas are the great lover of Kirtan, Singing dance, and Vaishnava theology. Bhubaneswar sadu thakur, a member of this community, is well known for his deep Vaishnava theological knowledge in the learned circle.

Like the Manipuris, the Bishnupriyas also constitute an ethnic minority in Barak valley. According to 1961 census in Cachar district the total population of Bishnupriyas were 15,053 but at present total population of Bishnupriyas in Barak valley is more then three lakhs. Most of them are the followers of Hindu religion. But at present a few numbers of Bishnupriyas families are converted into Christian religion. Most of them are the Presbyterian denomination. Bidya Ratan Sinha is the first converted Christian of Cachar district from Bishnupriya Community. In Karimganj district Phoni Bhusan Sinha first adopted Christian religion. Total numbers of the Presbyterian Christians of the Bishnupriya in Barak Valley are not more than 100 in numbers. From the total number of Christians in Barak Valley, Bishnupriya Christians are only 0.3%. Cultivation is the main occupation of this community.

The post annexation immigrants of Barak Valley

After; the annexation of Cachar by the British Government Capt. T. fisher (1832-1857) was appointed as the first English administrator of Cachar as ‘Superintendent. He was a very strong administrator. During his time those people who left the Cachar; due to Muslim invaders and Burmese aggression and took the settlement in the British territory of Sylhet and Tripuras started to return again in Cachar. His good administration restored the peace and prosperity in the valley. Very initial stage of his administration Cachar plain was a non revenue district. The head quarter of the district was established at Dudpatil, on the southern bank of river Barak, adjacent to present Silchar town. For the scope of administration and other Economic purpose Captain Fisher shifted his office from Dudpatil to Silchar. Being a non revenue district doors of Cachar were closed for the immigrants. For making this valley a revenue district Captain Fisher made a master plan to introduce tea

91. Sinha Namadeb: *History of Manipur (Political and social Aspects)* p.23
93. Personal Interview with Tarakanta Sinha. An Evangelist of Karimganj Presbyterian Church. At his residence, Bagatpur, Silchar on 28.03.2008
cultivation in Barak valley. But unfortunately Fisher could not make his plan materialized. In 1857 he was succeeded by captain Stewart as Superintendent of Cachar district. Stewart although a military officer, was a good Economist. He worked hard to change Cachar into a revenue district. According to his plan, Bengal government recommended a 20 years land revenue settlement for Cachar plain in 1859. The commissioner of Dacca recommended to the governor of Bengal for the inclusion of cachar into the revenue category in the same year. So, Cachar became a revenue district in 1859.94

After Cachar became a revenue district its doors again were made open for immigrants. Capt. Stewart was promoted as the first Deputy Commissioner of Cachar. He took decisive steps to increase the revenue of Cachar in various methods.

Bengali Muslims are one of the most important post annexation immigrants of Barak Valley. Stewart invited a large number of Bengali Muslims from Sylhet, Mymensing and Kommila to come to Cachar and to settle in the interior parts for wheat cultivation. Muslims were granted lease of Mirashdaris (Land lordship) in Cachar for agricultural purpose for which they were quite gifted people. During the sixties of 19th century such migration of Muslim cultivators took place in Cachar District. The preaching of Muslim religion was started in Barak and Suruma area in 1400 A.D. under the leadership of Hazarat Shahjallal.95 As early as the 14th century when the sylhet district was conquered by the Mohammedans then good part of the population of sylhet district embraced the religion of the conquerors. Many people from sylhet settled in the nearby discrict of cachar and they brought the religion of Islam to Cachar district.96 Since the Hindus from the majority in Cachar district both the communities are well balanced in the surma Valey. Each community is about one and half million in numbers the Muslims number about 120,000 more then the Hindus. The Mahammedans of Barak and Surma Valley are divided into two sects viz., the Shiites and the Sunnites.

The Muslim Settlements in Cachar were basically the people who migrated during the rule of Kachari Kings. Kachari Queen Chandraprabha had a very high opinion about the enterprise of the Muslim cultivators. She liked their tenacity and hard labour. As a

94. Chaterjee Suhash: *A Socio economic history of South Assam* p.164
defacto queen she granted several land to the solvent Muslim Cultivators and she personally encouraged Muslim settlement in Cachar.  

The Muslim society of this valley composed of Mughals, Pathan, Bengali, Mymensinghia and Manipuri etc. The Muslims made their initial settlements near the western borders of Cachar i.e. adjacent to Sylhet district a portion of which now comprises the modern Karimganj district. They were landed gentry and known as Panchgaria, Bhuiya, Datir Bhuiya, Naktar Bhuiya, Gherati Bhuiya etc. within the two hundred years of their settlement in Barak valley Muslim community gradually would have become a dominant class of this valley. At present in some of the subdivisions of Barak valley they got absolutely majorities viz. at Sonai subdivision of Cachar district, in Hailakandi district and in Ratabari area of Karimganj district. According to 1991 census Muslim population of Barak valley was 7, 75,430 and 34 percent. Trade and agriculture is their main occupation.

**Bengali Hindus**

The Bengali Hindus are another post immigrant people of Barak valley. They mostly came in this area during the time of John Edgar. He succeeded Capt. Stewart as the first British civil administrator of Cachar as deputy Commissioner. Before coming to Silchar he was assuming a similar responsibility in commissary of Dacca. He had many acquaintances of Bengal. So that he invited many Bengali merchants to settle down at Silchar and also at other commercial centres in Cachar. He remodeled the old Silchar market with those Daccaia merchants. The market was named after Jhon Edger as Janiganj Bazar, which is still a biggest market complex in Silchar. He did great contribution to improve the living condition of Silchar town and under his supervision metal roads were constructed in the town and he connected Lakhipur with Silchar by a Pucca Road. During his time, Bengali Hindus became the pilot of local trade and commerce. The Bengali Hindu immigrants after annexation of Barak Valley by Britishers were mostly those merchants and few tea garden baboos (Clerks) and tiny landlords from the lower caste. Hindu Bengali community of Sylhet who came later in this valley were settle in the interior of Cachar and Hailakandi District by taking considerable area of land under lease. At present they are the most

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97. Chatterjee Suhash: *A socio economic history of South Assam* p.92
98. Ibid p.96
99. Chatterjee Suhash: *A socio economic history of South Assam* p.92
100. Ranjit Goala (edited): *Souvenir Presbyterian Church Silchar* 1st March 2002 p.26
dominative people of this valley. They followed the Hindu religion with great order. The Bengalis of Karimganj were divided into caste and lower caste Hindus. The caste Hindus were the Brahmins and Kayasthas. The Vaidyas were included within the Kayastha fold. Sahas also recognized themselves as the Cast Hindus due to their sound finance. The Caste Hindus of Sylhet were mostly Saktas but the other castes followed Vaishnavism. In Bengali society caste system was not so rigid. During the time of Christian Missionaries the Brahmins were the head of the Bengali Society. But they were only a microscopic minority. The most of the Hindu population comprised of the lower castes viz, the boatman and fisher men (Dome patni) were the dominant communities.\(^{101}\)

Most notable dance of Bengali Hindus is the Dhamail dance. The Gazi dance is the very popular dance of the Bengali Muslim of Barak Valley.

During the colonial period few in numbers of them were converted into Christianity. By Church statistic total numbers of Bengali Christian in this valley are at present 2000 and among them 1500 are the Presbyterian. Most of the converted Christian of the Bengali Hindus were came from low caste like-Namasudra and Das communities. Few in numbers converted from Brahmin class\(^{102}\).

Religious wise total population of Barak Valley baed on the census report of 1991 Hindu-12,05,475 (60%), Muslims- 7,75,430 (34%), Christians-23,587 (5%), Jains-897 (.05%), Buddhists-320 (.04%), Sikhs-259 (.01%).

**Tea Garden Labour Community**

Tea Garden labour community is also an important post annexation immigrant of Barak Valley who took their settlement in this area as soon as the tea cultivation was started in the Valley. In 1856 the first tea garden was started in Jatinga Valley and Bhorakhai (Near Silchar) of Cachar.\(^{103}\) The planters soon discovered that the local labour force was not suitable for the rapid progress of the gardens. They felt to import labour from outside. Their head office in Calcutta has coolie recruiting agents over the draught affected areas of India. The immigration of labour was a necessary for the ever increasing tea gardens in Cachar. So, the inflow of large number of labourers took place from 1863 onwards. People from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh,

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101. Chatterjee Suhash: *A Socio Economic History of South Assam* p.127
102. Personal Interview with S.R. Upadhyah at his resident, Karimganj on 30\(^{b}\) March’ 2008.
103. Chatterjee Suhash: *A Socio Economic history of South Assam* p.168
U.P and Andhra Pradesh were imported in Varak Valley through those agents. In Cachar at Dudpatil and Arcuttipore and in Sylhet at Rangpur and Chandpur labour depots were established. From each labour depot the tea garden owners used to purchase labours as per their requirement. In this way more than two hundred tea gardens were established in entire Barak Valley. Labours colonies grew up in these tea gardens surrounding the Banglows, factories and officers lanes in the midst of Hills, mountains and forest. From the inception of tea estates in the country these people became a permanent settlers of Barak Valley. Among the tea garden Community the lower caste Hindus such as Bauris, Bagdis, Mala, Mondol of Bengal origin. Lohars, Kakars, Malis, Kurmis, Rabidas of Bihar and U.P origins; oroans, sanals and Mundas of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh hill tribe origins; Sobor, Das, Karmakar, Nayak, Senapati and Patro of Orissa origin and also Telenga, Mal, Reddy etc. of Andhra origins. There are Cast Hindus like Brahmin; Khatriyas and Vaisyas among the labour community of Barak Valley but their numbers is comparatively small.  

The Missionary activity here faced the same difficulties and troubles as in the Assam Valley, to search and find out the Christian workers and look after their spiritual needs with the passing of time there arose Christian communities in the tea plantation. The first one was the little village of Borongha in Cachar district where Christians numbered were twenty families. They worked their nearby tea gardens and their won paddy land for their livelihood. They emigrated as tea garded workers from chotonagpur. Some of them were already baptized by protestant Missionareis in their native county. In 1900 AD they came to the Mission Centre of Bondashill for the need of pastors to look after them and also expressed their interest to become catholics. They received baptism in 1901. Thus Borongha (Near present Kalain) become a small Christian community centre in Barak Valley. In 1905 Father Marcellinus Molz was informed that in Baitakhal tea garden sixty Christian were living who came from the province of Orrissa. In 1906 another small Christian communities were found in Luckicherra tea garden in the so called Ballaserra Valley at a distance of 150 kms. from Bondashill. Many years earliers they had immigrated in this tea garden from Orissa.  

Nath Community

Nath Community is the very ancient people of Barak Valley area. They considered themselves ‘yugis’. They trace their origin to the ‘Saiva saint’ or ‘Shiva gutra’. From Goraksha nath they assume the title ‘Nath’. They buried their dead bodies and had no Brahmins. Educated person title like Mohanta discharged the function of the priest. The main occupation of this community had been weaving. But now a days they changed their original occupation and become cultivators. One of the important feature of this community is that where they established their villages, there they setup their own circle. In cachar district their settlement was from pre-independent. In Sonai area important villages of Nath community’s are – Narsingpur, Baromuni, Singari, Salipur, Bhokrapar, Salgangapar, Kanakpar, meherpur, Paila number and Majirgram etc. In Dolai area of Cachar district – Malugram, Dulalgram, Panibara, Ramprosadpur and Landtila are the most important villages of Nath people. The yugi migration in Hailakandi district is very late. In this district Betala, sarbandpur, Lala, Lalapar and Umed Nagar are the important villages where Nath community is greater majority. In Karimganj district Kamlanagar, Anipur, Dulabchera, Harinagar and Ramkrisna Nagar etc are the areas where yugi community is enough in numbers then that of other communities. Most probably from Jugi Community people did not accept christianity in Barak Valley during the Missionary era.

Survey of Literature

At different levels of academic pursuit, a number of studies have been done which are related to the present topic of research. The investigator has attempted to review materials which are very closely and directly related to the topic.

Alan Thomson in his Study on ‘The New Movements Church History AD 1500 - 1800’(1976) gives the description of the modern Church of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this period he found that rise of reformation movements, birth of Protestantism and national states, conservatism within the Roman Catholic Church, growth of denominationalism, the spread of new learning, foreign trade and seetravel. All these movements directly or indirectly contributed to the building up of

107. Chatterjee S. *A Social economic history of South Assam.*
108. Personal Interview with Rajendra Lal Nath M.A 80 years old. At his resident Baramuni Cachar on 28.09.08
modern Christianity. The birth of Methodism in England and Subsequent revival of Church life could be attributed to the Evangelical awakening in Europe and other continents like South America, North America and Asia. Again he points out that as a result of the Roman Catholic and Protestant foreign missions Latin and Protestant forms of Christianity had been established in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Orthodox Church of Russia spread the Gospel through Asian Siberia to Alaska. Christianity thus became a world-wide religion.

J.V. Hluna in her study on ‘Education and Missionaries in Mizoram’ (1992 first edition) found that the Missionaries were the pioneers in many fields of education like female education, vocational education and practical subjects. Christianity and education brought a great change in Mizo Society. Under the initiatives of Missions and the encouragement of government, there had been good response from the common people to education. The missionaries divided Mizoram, for speedy evangelical works, into two halves – the North and South. The former was assigned to the Welsh Mission and the latter to the London Baptist Missionary Society.

In the book ‘Catholic Education in Manipur’ (1989) Salam Irene pointed out the Missionaries Contribution in evangelic, humanitarian and educational services of the religion of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual state like Manipur. She also found that besides the regular schools Missioaries established Grahany Schools, to impact non-formal, vocational education to the economically deprived sections of the population. She also found that the primary aim of Catholic mission education is evangelisation includes many things. The very fact that the missionaries in Manipur are expanding so much energy, means and time, for the education of the people of Manipur, indicates they have tried to increase the level of literacy in the state. In the book ‘Doing Mission in Context, edited by Sunand Sumithra and F Hranghkuma (1995) have given the chapters which are papers presented in the first CMS consultation held in 1991. In the second chapter of the book “Indigenization of Christianity” J.W. Gladstone found that the need for indigenization was felt as the identity of the Christians was questioned. In another chapter Sakhi Athyal pointed out the Asian Christian women are on the right track as far as their emphasis on the mutual dependence of men and women and other full humanity of women are concerned and also in their desire to work for social justice and changed attitudes.
They also found that in India there is undoubtedly much caste-discrimination within some mainline churches, particularly in South India.

K. M. Tharakan in his study on “Christian Contribution to Secular Education Jeevadhara Vol-2” (1973) found that Christian Missionaries from the west were the pioneers of modern India education. They set up their own printing presses to publish books in the vernaculars and English. The Missionaries also rendered services to eradicate superstitious practices and beliefs among the people. The missionaries encouraged education for all. They threw wide open their school to everyone without discriminations of caste, colour and sex.

Sebastian, Poonolly in their study “A Brief History of Christian Education in India” (1973) found that the Christian Missionaries were responsible for the introduction of eastern literature and European science in their collages. They setup primary schools, girls education and teacher training institutions etc. N. Mythly (2000) in his book, ‘Delicately Inevitable Private Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, found that mostly Christian Missionaries maintained private education in the pre and post independence period in Sub-Saharan Africa. Kit Elliot in his study on “Between two worlds: the Catholic educational dilemma in 1944” found that Catholic schools contributed much to the social, economic and intellectual life of the majority of the English and Welsh peoples. Girls were educated mainly in Catholic Schools run by religious orders. “The Christian Conquest of Asia” by John Henry Barrows, in this book he found that Christianity was very much necessary for the improvement of the education and socio cultural development of the people of India.

Dr. O.L. Snitang in his book “Christianity and Social Change in North Eastern India” (1993), found out that regarding the creation of written languages, Christian Missionaries were the first to attempt a script for khasi language. The Serampore Mission used the Bengali script for khasi language. But when Welsh Mission came later on in 1841, Roman alphabets were used. Missionaries were the first to establish schools in Meghalaya. First primary school came in 1833 in Cherrpunjee. In 1841, when the Welsh Mission came they established more schools in Khasi Hills. The first school for girls was established in 1843 by William Lewis at Cherrapunjee. He also pointed out that Missionaries also fostered indigenous tribal leadership. Education helped in achieving this. Missionary used native preachers for the preaching of Christianity to the Khasis.
In the book “Christianity world wide Church history 4: AD 1800 onwards” (1993), Louise Pirouet found that the contribution made by local Christians and missionaries to the development of the church in each area of the world. In this book he also describe how the churches were facing a huge task as a result of the Industrial Revolution. He also found that in Asiatic countries like Sri-lanka protestant Missionary work began in 1812 and the British Government gave more encouragement to missions in Sri Lanka than in India. In particular they encouraged education in the English language. Many of the school were run by the Mission. One result of the educational policy was that the late of literacy was comparatively high in Sri Lanka. The second consequence was that Christians who benefited from mission education become prosperous under British rule and formed western educated elite. In India Christian teaching led to a reform movement within Hinduism. In Sri lanka it led to a revival of Buddhism. In Napal Jesuit Missionary started their work in the late seventeenth century but their convert were expelled to northern India. Napal is the only county of Asia where Christian Missionary Could do the Social work but not to evangelize. Missionaries running schools, public health programmes, hospitals and also training people in agriculture. Christianity was brought into South-East Asia by trade, conquest and migrated etc. The pioneer protestant Missionary of Burma was Adoniram Judson (1813). In Burma Missionary work was by the animistic hill tribes like the Karen, the Kachin and the chin. Missionaries established Schools and hospitals were nationalized. Philippines is at present the strongest Christian nation in Asia. In the 16th century. Christianity was brought in this country by the Spanish conquerors. Christianity had come to the Island of Indonesia by the Portuguese in the 16th century and with the Dute from 1605. Trinity College, Singapore is a united and co-educational theological school founded jointly in 1948 by Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian Church in Malaya. In African countries Christianity was spread widely before colonialism largely because so many of the Missionaries were Africans. Samuel Adjai Crowtder (1806-1891) was the first African to be made an Anglican bishop. They opened many schools in Africa. Scotish Missionaries established Lovedale School where many eminent South Africans of all races were educated. Missionary worked for the emancipation of slave. Many forced slaves did become Christians and worked at catechists. Christianity was rapidly spread in Africa due to the fact that by the end of the 19th century, hundred of African were dedicated to spreading their new faith. Moreover, colonial powers also forced the African for
conversion. People were encouraged by Missionaries to give up drinking alcohol, smoking, and other intoxicates habits. Dr. David Livingstone and his writing drew the attention of Europe to the extent of the slave trade and to its cruelties. He said it could not be stopped if other sorts of trade were introduced as an alternative. Best known Mission hospital in Africa was probably Lambarene in Gabon, run by the German theologian, musician and doctor Albert Schweitzer. From 1850 onwards, protestant Churches in Europe and North America became interested in evangelizing Latin America. Presbyterian reached Brazil in 1860, Argentina in 1866, Mexico in 1872, and Guatemala in 1882. Next on the scene were the Methodists, who reached Mexico in 1871, Brazil in 1876, the West Indies in 1890 and Costa Rica, panama and Bolivia in 1895. The Baptist reached Brazil in 1881, Argentina in 1886 and Chile in 1888. Many protestant Missionaries who left China and Arab they found a new sphere of work in Latin America.

H.K. Barpujari, in his book “The American Missionaries and Northeast India” found that Baptist Missionaries established schools in Sadiya, Sibsagar, nowgong and Guwahati. The medium of instruction were Bengali, Assamese and English. They encouraged education for Girls and established boarding for them.

Sebastian Karotemprel, in his book “Impact of Christianity Among the Tribals of Northeast India”(1998) found that Christianity has brought a better world view among the Tribals not only by exposing them to the Indian nation but also to the international community. Other fields where Christianity contributed are preserving tribal uniqueness, language development, literacy, technical education, scholarships, heath care and agricultural training. Sukendu Deb Barma in his study “Origin and Growth of Christianity in Tripura”(1996) found that the Missionaries established Schools in Tripura with a view to provide native leadership and to prepare teachers for Christian teaching. In their education activity, government grant was used to pay the salaries of teacher. Initially Bengali was used as the medium of instruction as there were many languages.

Moreover, some reports book like- ‘Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Sylhet-Bangladesh and Cachar-India 1886-1955’ (2003), Complied by Rev. Vanlalchhunga, Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1894-1957(1997), complied by K. Thanzauva and Report of Presbyterian Hospital, Dutlang Mizoram etc. provide the gist of the letters, reports and the statistical records of the Presbyterian Missionaries
working in Khasi Jaintia Hills, plains of Sylhet Cachar, Karimganj and Lusai Hills etc. The reports compiled in these books are the gist of the reports of missionaries working in Khasi-Jaintia Hills, Sylhet Cachar and in Mizoram during the year 1842-1958. These reports were obviously written from the perspective of Missionaries for the Mission (Wales). In these reports it is found that during one hundred years of Missionary ministry, the whole khasi community and Mizo community has embraced Christianity and formed themselves into a strong self-supporting, self-propagating and self governing church. But in sylhet Cachar Christianity was not successful like that of the Khasi and the Lushai Hills.

Vanlalchhunga in his book “Marvelous Mission” (2008 revised edition) found that Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries are the pioneers of English education in Barak Valley. They established many schools in Cachar district of Assam and Sylhet district of present Bangladesh. They also established many schools in Mizoram. In the social transformation of the tribal people of Khasi Jaintia Hills, Manipur, Mizoram and Barak Valley their contribution is significant one.

From the above review of related literature, it is seen that the Christian Missionaries played a significant role in the field of education in Northeast India and also in the various part of India. They also brought significant changes in the socio cultural life of the tribal people. The present work attempts to investigate their contribution in the field of education, conversion and medical activities to the people of Barak Valley.

Data and Methodology

This work depends upon the two different sources namely- (a) the primary sources which is gathered through direct observation, personal interview, materials from State Archives, Missionary Archives, Records from Missionary Centers and Reports etc. (b) the secondary sources are books, journals, magazines, souvenirs, periodical and articles etc.

So, far as the methodology that has been adopted in preparing the work is concerned, the empirical methodology is basically followed and generally used.

Objective:

In this study the main objectives are

(a) To investigate the advent of Christian Missionaries in Barak Valley.
(b) To examine the impact of Missionary work in terms of conversion and social change.

(c) To investigate the Presbyterian Missionaries contribution for imparting the English education in Barak Valley.

(d) To examine Welsh Missionaries medical activities in Barak Valley.

Organisations of the Chapters

The entire study is organised into six chapters. The first chapter is introductory. The introductory chapter of the thesis gives a brief description of Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries, from where they adopted their methodical project in India, first on Khasi Hills and later they extended their Missionary work on other Hills states of Northeast India and also in the plains of Barak valley. In this chapter researcher also has given the survey of literature, objective, data and methodology of the study.

The second chapter deals with the advent of the Welsh Missionaries in Barak Valley. In this chapter a brief description of different Christian Missionaries of Northeast India and the organization of Presbyterian Missionaries also have included.

Third chapter concentrates on evangelism and Church planting. In this chapter researcher gives the description of the methods of evangelism followed by the Welsh Missionaries in the Northeast India and also in Barak Valley. The need and the important of the Churches in the socio cultural life of the Missionaries as well as the native converts in the Barak Valley also described here.

The fourth chapter dwells on educational and literary activities of the Welsh Missionaries in Indian, Northeast India and also in the Barak Valley. In this chapter researcher described their pioneer educational activities regarding male and female education, vocational education and teacher training education in this valley.

The fifth chapter highlights Medical Activities of the Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries in Barak Valley. In this chapter researcher also gives a brief description of the historical origin of Christian Medical Mission, their methods of work, the medical activities in Northeast India and in the plains of Sylhet Cachar and the present Barak Valley.

The sixth chapter is the concluding one. In this chapter researcher gives the summary and findings of all the fifth chapters.