Chapter—III

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The state of Assam is located in the North eastern region of India between the latitude 28 degree 18’ and 24 degree N, and the longitudes 89 degree 46’ and 97 degree 4E. The whole Assam can be classified into two natural regions—the Brahmaputra valley and the Barak valley on the basis of two big rivers the Brahmaputra and the Barak.

Guwahati is the capital of Kamrup district. Kamrup district is under the Kamrup subdivision. It is one of the beautiful ancient cities and seat of learning, art and culture in India, located on the bank of river Brahmaputra.

Kamrup district is situated between 25.43 and 26.51 N latitude and between 90.36 & 92.12 E longitude. The district is bounded by North foothills of Bhutan and Nalbari district, South—Meghalaya, East—Nagoan district and Darrang district, West—Goalpara district and Nalbari district. The climate is sub tropical with semi-dry summer & cold winter with annual rainfall ranges between 1500 mm to 2600 mm. Its average humidity is 75%. Brahmaputra, Kalangsuti, Digaru, Bharalu, Kulsi, Singra are some of its rivers. The geographical area is 4, 34,500 ha. Its area is 4345 sq km. Guwahati is a major city in eastern India, often considered as the gateway to the North-East Region (NER) of the country and is the largest city within the region. Dispur, the capital of the Indian sate of Assam is situated within the city. Guwahati is one of the most rapidly growing cities in India. During the past few decades, it has experienced unprecedented spatial expansion and also sleep rise in
population. Today, the city straddles in between the LGB International Airport in the west to Narengi in the east for almost 45 kilometers and the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River and the foothills of the Shillong plateau for around 15 kilometers. Moreover, the city is also getting gradually expanded to the northern bank of Brahmaputra. Guwahati with population just 0.2 million in 1971 is a million plus city today. Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC), the city’s local government covers an area of 216 sq km. While, Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA), the planning and development authority covers an area of 340- sq km.

It is a major commercial and educational centre of eastern India and is home to world class institutions such as the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The city is a hub for major cultural activities and sports in the North Eastern Region as well as for the administrative and political activities in Assam and transportation in the NE.

Guwahati has been an important administrative and trading centre and a river port. The name Guwahati itself is derived from two Assamese words: ‘guwa’ (areca nut) and ‘haat’ (market place). The name used to be spelled as Gowhatty (pre-colonial and colonial), standardized to Gauhati (colonial-British). The name was changed to the present form in the late 1980s to confirm to the local pronunciation. It was once known as “Pragiyotishpur” or Light of the East. Today, it is the service center for the oil industry and tea plantations, and home to the world’s largest tea-auctions.

Separate income estimates for the city is not yet available as city level income estimation is not a traditional practice in India and not
practiced in a systematic and continual manner. But looking at the agglomeration of activities and employment patterns, it is easily understandable that the city contributes a lion’s share of the state’s income. The major economic activities are trade and commerce, transportation and services. It is a major wholesale distribution centre, a marketing hub and also a retail hub in the region. The Guwahati Tea Auction Centre is one of the largest in the world. As in other cities, ‘mall culture’ is slowly invading Guwahati. Manufacturing is also an important activity although it is not comparable to those of India’s rapidly growing industrial cities. The most important manufacturing industry in the city is the petroleum refinery of IOCL at Noonmati. The city is also the head quarter for regional offices for several manufacturing and business establishments, e.g. Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL). The city is also important for printing and publishing and businesses related to electronic and print media. During the past two decades, businesses such as real estate development, finance, etc., are also intensifying. Tourism and recreation, education, research, cultural activities, and so on are also slowly increasing and are contributing to city’s economy.

Although being a medium sized city ranking around at 50th position (in terms of population) in India, city’s quality of life is comparatively higher. A recent survey (2006) by a popular Indian magazine—Outlook (Money) has ranked Guwahati at 17th among all the major and medium sized Indian cities. The city provides competitive residential and working environments with beautiful landscapes, pleasant climates, modern shopping areas, modern apartments and bungalows and considerably good social infrastructure. But infrastructure in the city requires extensive
attention, which can increase and revolutionize city’s reputation, investment environment and overall growth pattern. Major investments in infrastructure are being planned in the city covering many aspects of utility and transport infrastructures with financial assistance from Assam Development Bank (ADB).

City suffers from lack of utility infrastructure. Existing water supply system is inadequate. Mostly it is dependent on ground water resources (higher water level) and does not have a comprehensive underground sewerage system. Septic tanks at individual houses are popular. Storm drainage system is comparatively good, although many areas experience water logging due to heavy rainfall in the monsoon. Extensive soil erosion from the hillocks and clogging of the drainage system is frequent and expensive for the city. Solid waste is being managed by the local authority with private partners. It lacks modern equipments, methods and practices.

Lack of sufficient road space is a major problem. Length of surfaced road within the city is presently 218 km (ARSAC). The major corridor roads suffer from insufficient right of way, improper planning and design. The roads in the residential neighborhoods are extremely narrow causing problems related to both traffic and infrastructure installations.

Guwahati has a good public transport system. A government agency—ASTC (Assam State Transport Corporation) and many private operators provide a considerably good city-bus system. It is connected by flights to Calcutta, Delhi via Bagdogra, Imphal, Dibrugarh, Dimapur and Agartala. It is an important terminus on the North-East Frontier Railways
and is connected with all parts of the country by express trains. Guwahati is the hub of the road network to the north eastern region and to centers west of Assam.

The Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati is the recent addition to the high-profile world’s renowned IITs in India. Within a very short span of time, Guwahati IIT is proving itself as an excellent institution for research and education. Its ranking among the IITs in India is increasing every year. The city has Guwahati University in Jalukbari. The century old Cotton College is one of the most reputed colleges in eastern India and possesses great scholastic and cultural values. The Assam Engineering College and the Gauhati Medical College are the two important institutions for science and technology and medical education. Among the city’s many other institutions of higher learning, Gauhati Commerce College, College of Veterinary Science, Government Ayurvedic College, Arya Vidyapith College, B Barooah College, Handique Girls College, Assam Engineering Institute etc. are well known.

The city is an important health centre for health facilities in eastern India. Many government and private specialty hospitals are available. The most important are the Guwahati Medical College and Hospital, Down Town Hospital, B Baruah Cancer Institute, Sankardev Netrayalaya, Guwahati Neurological Research Centre etc. Medical education and research are also important activities. Guwahati has considerably good sports infrastructure. Recently the National Games 2007 was organized at Guwahati at highly constructed sophisticated stadiums. The Nehru Stadium, Kanaklata Indoor Stadium, smaller stadiums in Maligaon and
*Paltan Bazaar* etc provide facilities for various sports. Recently completed sports infrastructure – a large stadium at *Xoruxojai (Sarusajai)*, a new indoor stadium etc., are additions specially constructed for the 33rd National Games. Moreover, along with the Brahmaputra, there are many lakes and rocky hillocks in the city suitable for various water and adventure sports.

Guwahati possesses many places of interests with lively urban activities, ancient temples, attractive natural features and with recreational activity. It is also situated at the centre of an attractive region (within 200 km radius) with natural parks, wildlife sanctuaries, hill station of different types and with a colourful cultural landscape.

The city attractions are a lively part of the city on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, Cotton College, Digholy Pukhury (Dighali Pukhuri). The State Museum, RBI, District Court etc are major landmarks. Moreover, the area has also possesses many libraries, major government offices and a shopping district. Restaurants and bookshops in the area provide a unique environment. It is also a major wholesale market for drugs and pharmaceutical products and a hub for printing and publication. Close to *Digholy Pulkhury*, there are many stores with traditional arts and crafts from Assam and other parts of the NER. *Kachari Ghat*, next to the district court is an important local river port. Situated in the western part of the city-centre is a busy commercial district for both wholesale and retail. *Fanci Bazzar* is the hub for various wholesale products ranging from food and beverages, garments to hardware and building materials. It is also known for the retail shopping areas for clothes and garments. In the central part of the city centre is the
hub for transportation and hotels. With Guwahati railway station, the regional bus stand (ASTC), numerous hotels, restaurants and offices and stops of numerous private bus service (regional) providers, the area is the busiest and congested. There are also many small shops selling traditional garments from various parts of the NER. It is a newly developed commercial node in the south outside the city centre. Its proximity to the state capital complex and rapidly growing southern residential areas has made it an important sub city center. Gonexguri is a busy apart of the city with retail shopping areas, hotels and restaurants and small businesses. There is a traditional weekly fruits and vegetables market with historic importance. The market exists since historic past and is an important traditional trading point between the people from the Khasi hills (Meghalaya) and local people. It is a rich market with various types of local food products, located in Beltola, a predominantly residential area in the south.

The city’s most notable attractions are—Kamakhya Temple, situated atop the Nilaxhal Hills is the seat of tantrik workshop and shakti culture. Any person visiting Assam and Guwahati in particular, invariably pays a visit to this temple. Flooded with devotees throughout the year and mainly during the Ambubachi Mela, Kamakhya temple is the religious heartthrob of the Assamese populace. On the top of Sarnia hill is Gandhi Mandap a memorial built in honor of Mahatma Gandhi, Deepor Beel—is a large natural lake in the western parts of the city, provides quality aesthetics and is popular among the bird watchers, ecologists, etc. Within the city there are many man made fresh water tanks/ small lakes built during Ahom era including Dighalipukhuri, Silpukhuri, Nakkatapukhuri
and Jorphukhuri. During the Ahom period the Dighalipukhuri used to be an inland port for War ships and boats. In those days it was connected to the Brahmaputra River by a channel.

On the western bank of Jorphukhuri (Jor means twin in Assamese), Jorphukri (meaning twin tanks) is the Ugra Tara Temple, dedicated to a form of the Hindu/Buddhist goddesses Tara (Devi). Guwahati Zoo is one of its kinds in India. Major attraction is the one homed rhinoceros. Guwahati is also located centrally to many of the regional tourist destinations and the city provides basic communication services and tours to access these.

Few of these are----

Kaziranga National Park—200 km east, famous for one horned rhinoceros.

Pobitara Wildlife Sanctuary – 60 km east.

Shillong—100 km south, a beautiful hill station and the capital city of Meghalaya surrounded by the forests.

Tawang—200 km north, a famous Buddhist monastery in the snow-clad Arunachal- Himalaya.

Manas/Manah National Park—150 km west, a beautiful wildlife sanctuary in the foot hills of Himalaya.

Moreover, there are several wonderful picnic spots in and around the city. Hundreds of traditional Oxomeeya (Assamese), Bodo, Karbi, Tiwa, Garo, Khasi villages and traditional way of life in 200 km radius of the city can be great interests to tourist. Bamboo and fruit orchards, handloom and handicraft, wet paddy fields, fishing etc., are typical characteristics of local traditional way of life. Xorthebary and Xualkuchi
are two places near the city with tradition of bronze-crafts and silk weaving for thousands of years.

*Madan Kamdev,* at 35 km from the city is an important archeological site with ancient ruins of temples and other structures. *Hajo* and the sacred place of *Hayagriva Madhava* are two important religious places both for the Hindus and the Buddhists. One of the temples, which is known as the *Hayagriva Madhava* temple is a *Bishnu* temple for the Hindus and at the same time an important shrine for the Tibetan Buddhists. The Buddhists believe that the Buddha attained nirvana at this place. The temple was destroyed by *Kalapahar* and was rebuilt by the Koch King Raghudev in 1543. Another temple in proximity was built by the Ahom king Pramata Singha, where ‘doul’ – a grand religious festival is celebrated every year. There is a large pond with a great turtle close to the temple. *Puwa Mecca* in *Hajo* is an important religious place for Muslims with a mosque built in 1657 during the time of *Mughal’s* invasion. The ‘Unique Selling Propositions’, that Guwahati has are - (a) Guwahati is the largest and a growing city in the NER, (b) It is also the commercial capital of the NER and a hub for transportation (c) House the capital of Assam, i.e., Dispur an heart of the political activities, (d) The city is one of the ancient in South Asia with approximately 2000 years of history and provides large opportunities for archeological and historical research, (e) Guwahati is also one of the most beautiful cities in Tropical Asia with the picturesque and mighty Brahmaputra, green and blue hills, natural and man-made lakes, rich tropical vegetative cover, rains and colorful and vibrant people, (f) Guwahati is also the cultural capital of the state with concentration of intelligentsia, media, fine arts, performing arts, etc., and is also a hub for printing and publishing, (h) Guwahati possesses comparatively higher quality of life among the large and medium cities in India.