CHAPTER - III

THE STUDY AREA
In this chapter, detailed discussion was done on the study area.

The North East India comprises the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. They form part of the East Himalayan region which extends from Sikkim eastwards and embraces the Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal. The location of the region is strategically important as it has international borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Tibet.

The area is characterised by rich bio-diversity, heavy precipitation and high seismicity. It is endowed with forest wealth and is ideally suited to produce a whole range of plantation crops spices, fruits and vegetables and flowers and herbs. The rich natural beauty, serenity and exotic flora and fauna of the area are invaluable resources for the development of eco-tourism. Total area of the region is about 2,55,168 sq.k.m.

The region has a high concentration of tribal population. The states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are mostly inhabited by a number of native tribes. Each tribe has its own district tradition of art, culture, dance, music and life styles. The numerous fairs and festivals celebrated by these communities and their friendly nature are irresistible attractions for the visitors.

The North East is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions in India. Each of the states that form this part of India has its own culture and tradition. Assam occupies the lush lowlands of the Brahmaputra Valley and is the most densely populated. Arunachal Pradesh occupies the densely forested and
sparsely populated foothills of the Himalayas, and is one of the major tourist attractions because of its Buddhist influence. Meghalaya, with its pine clad hills and lakes, is famous as the wettest region of the world. Nagaland has a rich war history that attracts tourists. The other three states Manipur, known as the ‘land of jewels’, Mizoram and Tripura make up a fascinating area consisting of green valleys, lush hills with variety of flora and fauna.

There are about 220 languages spoken these states, belonging mainly to three language families, namely Indo-Aryan, Sino-Tibetan and Austric. The Indo-Aryan represented mainly by Asamiya and Bangla, Austro-Asiatic represented mainly by Khasi and the Sino-Tibetan and the Siamese-Chinese sub families also there are languages of the Tea-Tribes. However, the majority of languages spoken here belong to the former and the latter is represented spoken here belong to the former and the latter is represented by a few Thai languages like Khamyang, Khamiti, Aiton, Phakyal and Turung. It is worthwhile to mention here that Ahom a language belonging to this Thai group, has over the years merged and Asamiya.

Since India’s independence in 1947, Northeast India has been split up into smaller and smaller states and autonomous regions. The divisions were made to accommodate the wishes of tribes and ethnic groups which want to assert their sub-national identity and obtain an area where the diktat of their little coterie is recognized. New Delhi has yet to comprehend that its policy of accepting and institutionalizing the superficial identities of these ethnic linguistic, and tribal groups has ensured more demands for even smaller states. It has also virtually eliminated any plan to make these areas economically
powerful, and the people scientifically and technologically advanced.

A situation has now arisen in which New Delhi’s promised carrot of economic development evokes little enthusiasm in the North east. Money from New Delhi for “development” serves to appease the “greed” of a handful and to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, fresh separatist movements bring the closer to the precipice.

Assam has been cut up into many states since Britain’s exist. The autonomous regions of Karbi Anglong, Bodo Autonomous Region, and Meghalaya were all part of pre-independence Assam. Citing the influx of Bengali Muslims since the 1947 formation of East Pakistan, which became Bangladesh in 1971, the locals demand the ouster of the “foreigners” from their soil.

Two violent movements in Assam, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the Bodo Security Force (BdSF), are now practically demanding “ethnic movements, both the ULFA and the BdSF have been trafficking heroin and other narcotics, and indulging in killing sprees against other ethnic groups and against Delhi’s law and order machinery. Both these groups have terrorist groups operating in the area, including the national Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isac-Muivah) and the People’s Liberation Army in Manipur.

Unlike most other areas of the Northeast, Assam was better integrated with mainstream India prior to independence; Assam participated in the national independence movement and contributed much to India’s intellectual and cultural wealth. Today, however, instead of encouraging its sons and
Figure 4
daughters to train themselves in science and technology, and entrepreneurship, Assam has engulfed itself in mindless bloodletting.

The spin-off effect of continued Naga insurgency has been witnessed in the adjacent Mizoram. At its peak, insurgency in Mizoram even surpassed Nagaland in sheet intensity. That is why Aizawl retains the dubious distinction of being the only town in independent India to have been staffed by the air force. The Mizo insurgency lasted for over 30 bitter years of fighting from bases in Burman and maintaining links with Pakistan. The Mizo leader, Laldenga, signed an accord with the central government 1986, effectively ending the insurgency through dialogue and emerging Chief Minister in the newly pacified state. In the latest development package to the North-East, Mizoram has been a $38-million “peace bonus”.

MIZORAM

Mizoram occupies the north east corner of India. In shape it is rather like a narrow and inverted triangle. It is bounded on the north by the district of Cachar (Assam) and the state of Manipur, on the east and south by Chin Hills and Arakan (Myanmar) on the west by the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and the state of Tripura, Mizoram borders three states of India - Assam, Manipur and Tripura.

In the local language, the term ‘Mizoram’ means the land of Mizos. Mizo itself means highlander. The state has the most variegated hilly terrain in the eastern part of India. The hills are steep and are separated by rivers which flow either to the north or south creating deep gorges between the hill

(35)
ranges. The average height of the hills is about 900m. The highest peak in Mizoram is Phawngpui (Blue Mountain) with a height of 2210m.

History:

The origin of the Mizos, like those of many other tribes in the North Eastern India is shrouded in mystery. Historians believe that the Mizos are a part of the great wave of the Mongolian race spilling over into the eastern and southern India centuries ago.

The Mizos, so goes the legend, emerged from under a large covering rock known as Chiinlung. Two people of the Ralte clan, known for their loquaciousness, started talking noisily while coming out of the region. They made a great noise which leg God, called Pathain by the Mizos, to throw up his hands in disgust and say enough is enough. He felt, too many people had already been allowed to step out and so closed the door with the rock.

History often varies from legends. But the story of the Mizos getting out into open from the neither world through a rock opening is now part of the Mizo fable. Chhinlung however, is taken by some as the Chinese city of Sinlung or Chinlingsang situated close on the sino-Burmese border. The Mizos have songs and stories about the glory of the ancient Chhinlung civilization handed down from one generation to another powerful people.

The earliest Mizos whomigrated to India were known as Kukis, the second batch of immigrants were called New Kukis. The Lushais were the last of the Mizo tribes migrated of India. The Mizo history in the 18th and 19th Century is marked by many instances of tribal raids and retaliatory expeditions of security. Mizo Hills were formally declared as part of the
British-India by a proclamation in 1895. North and south hills were united into Lushai Hills district in 1898 with Aizawl as its headquarters.

Under British rule the state was named as Lushai Hills. In 1954 by an Act of Parliament, the name was changed to Mizo Hills district. In 1972, when it was made into a union territory, it was named Mizoram, Mizoram became the 23rd state of the Indian union on February 20, 1987.

The Mizos are a close-knit society with no class distinction and no discrimination on grounds of sex. Ninety percent of them are cultivators and the village exists like a big family. Birth of a child, marriage in the village and death of a person in the village or a community feast arranged by a member of the village are important occasions in which the whole village is involved.

The People

The total population of Mizoram as of March 2001 stood at 891,058 as per the provisional results of the Census India 2001. The State has density as low as 42 persons per sq. km. of area.

The inhabitants of Mizoram are known by the generic name of Mizo, which literally means people (mi) of the hills (zo0). There are a number of separate tribes under the general ethnic broad group of Mizo. Mizos included the following tribes -- Ralte, Paite, Dulien, Poi, Sukte, Pankhup, Jahao, Fanai (Molienpui), Molbem, Taute, Lakher, Dalang, mar, Khuangli, Falam 9Tashous), Leillul and Tangur. The main sub groups are Lushais, Pawis and Lakhers.
Languages:

Although several languages were spoken in the Lushai Hills, the main language was Lushai. Other languages of the Kuki-Chin groups spoken by the different tribes were Zahao, Lakher, Hmar, Paite, Lai and Ralte. Many of the smaller tribes used their own language amongst themselves but used Lushai for conversation with persons of other tribes or with outsiders. Lushai language was a spoken language and did not have any written literature.

Culture:

In Mizoram people are getting the best possible education and the process of modernisation has enveloped all aspects of life in Mizo society. But it still has its traditional dances and festivals which are preserved. The dances are common to the Mizos, the Lakhers and Pawis, the main tribes in the state, along with the Chakmas who are believed to have migrated there from the neighbouring Chittagong hills of Bangladesh much before independence. Many more Chakmas, who are Buddhists, came as refugees after independence because of religious persecution by the Muslims in the Chittagong Hills and because their lands have been taken away by the land-hungry people from the plains of Bangladesh.

Mizos are well advanced and have taken up occupations and services in neighbouring states and at the centre. They can thus be seen in sufficient numbers in places far and near their state. Wearing of hats is common and these are made of bamboo and cane. The villagers carry an artistically designed and handwoven shoulder bag in which they carry their tobacco pipe and other equipment. Both men and women smoke although the pipes for the two are
different. Zu is an alcoholic drink brewed indigenously from rice. There were several occasions when the entire village would indulge is an orgy of drinking and Zu would flow like water. Now the spread of Christianity, the modern ways of living and the impact of education have all helped in curbing drinking among the people although it cannot be said to have been eliminated.

Marriages are generally arranged by parents among the Mizos. Among them there is yet another interesting custom of inheritance. The youngest son inherits all the movable and immovable property of the father. The elder sons are supposed to move out of the paternal home after marriage. The youngest son has the responsibility of looking after the parents in their old age. There was no system of making a will in the Mizo society but an Inheritance Act was passed by the Mizo District Council in 1956 under which a will could be made by any property holder.

There are some very good principles of self-help and co-operation in the Mizo social customs. The Mizos are expected to contribute labour for the welfare of the community. Services are rendered to the people in distress as a social obligation.

Religion:

Majority population of the state is under the religious fold of Christianity. According to the 1991 Census report, about 85.73 per cent of the total population is Christians. Christianity in the hill tracts of north-eastern region spread as a result of the British religious policy in the area. At present almost all of the hill tribal population is Christian.

The greatest contribution of Christianity has been the spread of
education. The Lushai and other tribal languages. The priests are mostly from South India. The churches are spread through the hills of villagers. Most of these churches have schools attached to them. The tribal Christians celebrate Christmas with full enthusiasm.

There are scattered populations of Buddhists in different parts of the state. Buddhists form the 7.83 percent of the total population. The process of Buddhist festivals sees a variety in religious rites. Festivals and fairs form an integral part of their life.

The Hinduism in Mizoram seems to have been adopted after the period of aimism. The geographical isolation of Mizoram seems to be the major factor to resist the immediate religious transformation from animism to any sect of Hinduism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism.

In ancient period there was a Hindu Majority in Mizoram. After the arrival of Westerners conversion took place in a massive rate and majority of the tribals converted as Christians. Currently there is only 5.04 per cent Hindus are in the State.

The Hinduism in Mizoram has a peculiar character showing the indigenous character. The ritualistic performances are carried out by youngsters especially women. Hindus show warmth of humanity in their hearts. There are no social or religious restrictions to accept any one visiting their homes. Most of them have deep knowledge of the Guru, Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Puranas. They will show their temple, deities and other things without hesitation and queries. If there is some festivals in the temple, they will invite others to witness the festival.
Islam entered through the Muslim migrants from East Bengal, but Muslim population in the valley is very little (0.66 percent). They are a section of people who are Mohammedans. All Mizo Muslims read Koran. The holy books is translated in Mizo languages. The days solemn business of daily routine of Musalman’s starts with the Lord’s prayer. The Mizo Muslims observe two festivals in a year. They are Ramjan or Roza Idd and Bakraid. Haj pilgrimage is performed by several Muslims in Mizoram.

Proving true to its name as "the home of the highlanders," Aizawl, the capital of the northeastern state of Mizoram, is located at an altitude of 3500 feet above sea level. It is the seat of a rich tribal cultural extravaganza and is famous for its handicrafts. The town is blessed with exotic natural beauty. While the river Tlawng flows quietly on the east, on the north one can see the jagged hills of Durtlang.

LOCATION

Aizawl is situated at the central part of the state and is flanked by rivers and rapids. It is at a distance of 466 km from Guwahati, 366 km from Shillong, and 140 km from Silchar. The Durtlang Hills constitute a natural barrier immediately south of Aizawl, their high ridges punctuated by Mizo villages and Christian missions, and provide pleasant rambling country. Aizawl perches precariously on the steep slopes of a sharp ridge, straddling the watershed between the Tlawng and the Tuirial river valleys at an altitude of 1100 m.
HISTORY

Aizawl as a town does not have a distinct past specifically. The whole state of Mizoram was a part of Assam until 1972 when it was made a Union Territory. There were insurgency problems in the region until 1987, when it was declared a State. Unusually enough, almost all problems of terrorism and demands for freedom have subsided since then. The Mizos are Christians by faith and most of them speak English. In fact, Mizoram has a literacy rate of 87%, which is the second highest in the country.

FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

Mizoram is known for its jhum crops and the people of the region
celebrate the festivals related to it with traditional gay and pomp. In the months of February to March the clearing of the jungles to make way for sowing is celebrated through the festival of Chapchar Kut. The harvest festival is celebrated during the month of December and is called Pawl Kut. Another festival, Mim Kut, is celebrated after the maize harvest in September in honor of the departed souls. The birth of Christ, and New Year's Day are also a major festivals.

The Mizos are famous for their Bamboo dance. Cheraw, Chheih Lam, Solakar or Sarlamkai are other famous dances. Encompassing a total population of 3,39,812, Aizwal is the most important administrative districts of Mizoram. Aizwal city is the administrative headquarter of the district of Aizwal. The capital of Mizoram, Aizwal city has all the important administrative offices, Government departments and the Legislative Assembly of the state.

Spread over a total area of 3576 sq. km, Aizwal is administratively divided into three major subdivisions of Sakawrdai SDO (S), Saitual SDO (S), and Aizwal SDO (S). The important towns of the district of Aizwal are Aibook, Saitual, Darlawn, Aizwal, Phullen and Tlangnuam.

The district of Aizwal has 59.49% of the forest area. Aizwal boasts of a vast resource of minerals of limestone, coal and crude oil which has helped to strengthen the economic base of the state of Mizoram. Most of the native indigenous population of Aizwal is engaged in agriculture. The main agricultural productions of Aizwal are cash crops of rubber, tea and coffee. The native population speaks Mizo, English and Hindi with much ease and
confidence. Endowed with natural scenic beauty, Aizwal draws numerous tourists who are enchanted by the captivating sight of the place. The tourists can experience the colorful and dynamic lifestyle of the several aboriginal tribe of Aizawl.
ASSAM

Assam, one of the eastern most states of the Indian sub-continent is bordered in the North-West and North-East by the Kingdom of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. Along the south lies Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. Meghalaya lies to her South-West, Bengal and Bangladesh to her West. The state is connected with the rest of the Indian Union by a narrow corridor in West Bengal that runs for 56 km below the foothills of Bhutan and Sikkim.

The name Assam is of recent origin. It came into use after the conquest of Assam by the Ahoms. It is also known that “Assam” is derived from the word “Asama” meaning peerless. The land of Assam, is in fact, peerless, judging by her exquisite natural beauty, cultural richness and human wealth. Assam has a rich legacy of culture and civilisation behind her. Home to different races of men— Austric, Mongolian, Dravidian, and Aryan, who came to dwell in this land at different points of time. Assam has developed a composite culture of variegated colour.

The State is famous for its breath taking scenic beauty, rarest flora and fauna, lofty green hills, vast rolling plain, mighty water ways and a land of fairs and festivals. Known in the ancient lore as the kingdom of Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa, the capital having been Pragjyotispura situated in or near Guwahati. It originally included in addition to modern Assam, parts of modern Bengal and modern Bangladesh.

Administratively the state is divided into 23 districts viz, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Cachar, Darrang, Dhemaji, Dhubri, Dibrugarh, Goalpara, Golaghat, Hailakandi, Kamrup, Karimganj, Jorhat, Karbi Anglong, Kokrajhar,
Morigaon, Nagaon, Nalbari, North Cchar Hills, North Lakhimur, Sibsagar, Sonitpur and Tinsukia. Dispur is the capital city of the state. Major towns are: Guwahati, Dhubri, Barpeta, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Jorhat, Nagaon, Sibsagar, Silchar, Tezpur. Guwahati is the capital city of Assam. Assam has one elected legislature which meets in Dispur, a temporary capital region inside the principal city of Guwahati.

The early history of Assam is obscure, although there are numerous references in the Mahabharata, the Puranas, the Tantras to a great kingdom known as Kamrup that encompassed the Brahmaputra Valley, Bhutan, Cooch Behar, and the Rangpur region in eastern Bengal. The legendary king Narakasura, whose son Bhagadatta distinguished himself in the Mahabharata war, ruled Kamrupa from his capital at Pragjyotishpura, the site of a famous temple dedicated to the Tantric goddess Kamakhya, near modern Guwahati.

Among the early sources of the history of Assam is the writings of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang, who in 640 AD, attended the court of King Bhaskar Barman, an ally of the great Gupta monarch Harsha of Northern India. Stone and copper inscriptions dating from the seventh to the twelfth century indicate a succession of Hindu dynasties, but it is unclear to what extent the indigenous population of Kamrupa had embraced Hinduism beyond the royal patronage of brahmans.

The Kalika Purana and the Vishnu Purana identifies this land as Kamarupa saying that it extended for 450 miles in all directions from the shrine of Kamakhya at top the Nilachal Hills in modern Guwahati. Narakasura’s successor, Bhagadatta finds mention in the epic Mahabharata, leading a huge
Kirata army with a large number of elephants in the war between the Pandavas and the Kauruvas against the former.

The records of the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang shed light on the area in the Seventh Century. Pragjyotishpura came to be known as Kamarupa in the medieval period. Kamarupa under King Bhaskarvarman. Kamarupa had perhaps achieved the zenith of its power during the time, for subsequent centuries were witness to repeated on slaughts by aboriginals which reduced the power of the kingdom and led to its fragmentation.

Between the h e l d a y s of the Kamarupa kingdom and the coming of the Ahoms in the Thirteenth Century, the land experienced a spell of turmoil in which no single power could hold away. Thus, when the Ahoms entered Assam through the eastern hills in 1228, they chanced upon a period in its history when it was at its most susceptible.

Among the local tribes, only the Chutias and the Kacharis could offer a semblance of resistance. Thereafter, the next six centuries belonged to the Ahoms who founded a powerful dynastic rule with their capital in Sibsagar of Upper Assam. It was after the Ahoms that the land was named Asom or its more anglicised version Assam.

The Ahom, a Shan tribe from which the name Assam is probably delivered, crossed the Patkai Mountains from Burma in 1228 AD and by the sixteenth century had absorbed the Chutiya and Kachari kingdoms of the upper Brahmaputra, subdued the neighbouring hill tribes, and integrated the bhuyans into the administrative apparatus of a feudalistic state.

The total population of Assam as of 1st March 2001 stood at
26,638,407 as per the provisional results of the Census of India 2001. As against decadal growth rate of 21.34 per cent at the national level, the population of the State has grown by 18.85 per cent over the period 1991-2001. The sex ratio of Assam at 932 females to 1000 males has increased from 923 during 1991 Census. Similarly, the literacy rate has increased to 64.28 from 52.89 in 1991.

The population of Assam consists of many heterogeneous elements. Since time immemorial Assam has been the meeting ground of diverse ethnic and cultural streams - the principle migrants have been the Austro-Asiatics, the Dravidians, the Tibeto-Burman, the Mongoloid and Aryans. The ethnic origin of the Assamese varies from Mongoloid tribes to those of directly Indian stock. The earliest inhabitants of Assam were probably of Austric stock. They are termed as "proto-Austroloid", because they are said to have migrated from the Australian and some other islands of the Pacific Ocean to the Asiatic mainland.

The inhabitants of Assam can be divided into three categories, namely the tribal population, the non-tribal population and the Scheduled Castes. The Tribals consist of different ethno-cultural groups such as the Kacharis (Bodos), the Khasis, etc. The non-tribal groups include Ahoms, the Kyasthas, the Kalitas, the Motrans, the Muttaks, the Chutias, etc. The Scheduled Castes includes the Basfors, Baniyas, the Dhobis, the Hiras, the Kaibartas and the Namasudras, etc.

The immigration was mostly from Bengal, Bangladesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Nepal and Rajasthan. Another group was known as “Baganias” who were brought from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh by the British
tea planters during the British period for employment. Some of the early settlers of Assam were of Aryan and Dravidian stock.

The original inhabitants were known as the Kiratas of divergent tribal groups as mentioned in the Mahabharata. The fusion of divergent cultures of the Aryan, the Dravidians, the Austrics and the Mongoloid races take shape into composite culture.

**Languages:**

Assamese is the principal language of Assam. Besides Assamese, other recognised Indian languages spoken in the State are Bengali and Hindi. The major indigenous languages other than Assamese are Bodo, Karbi, Mishing and Rabha. According to the 1991 census the population of the Assamese speakers is stated at 1,29,38,088 persons.

The word ‘Assamese’ is an anglicised formation. It stands for the language called Asamiya which is derived from the name of the state, Asom. Asom means ‘unparralleled’ or ‘peerless’. Assamese is an Indo-Aryan language. It developed out of the Sanskrit language about the 7th century AD. Its immediate ancestor was Magadhi Apabhramsa. (Apabhramsa - dialect; Magadhi is the dialect of prakrit (spoken form of Sanskrit) which became the language of Bihar).

Assamese is written by using the Assamese script. Assamese is written from left to right and top to bottom, in the same manner as English. A large number of ligatures are possible since potentially all the consonants can combine with one another. Vowels can either be independent or dependent upon a consonant or a consonant cluster.
Culture:

The culture of Assam is a rich tapestry woven with multicolour yarns of distinct heritage of all the races that inhabit there. An ideal meeting ground for diverse races, Assam gave shelter to streams of human waves carrying with them district cultures and trends of civilization. Austro-Asiatics, Negritos, Dravidians, Alpines, Indo-Mongoloids, Tibeto-Burmese and Aryans penetrated into Assam through different routes and contributed in their own way towards the unique fusion of a new community which came to be known in later history as the Assamese.

Assam however, remained predominantly a land of the Tibeto-Burmese. The vast section of the people of Assam belong either to this stock or owe their origin to the union of this stock with other racial groups. Assam, known in the ancient lore as Kamarupa, originally included in addition to modern Assam, parts of modern Bengal and Bangladesh. Guwahati, the pulsating centre of Assam, is an ancient town whose history goes back to the puranic days.

Religion:

Hindus constitute a majority of the population. They practise different disciplines of Hinduism. Sakti temples such as Kamakhya shrine at Guwahati and the Kachakanti temple at Sadiya stands testimony to a past in which tantricism was the predominant form of Hinduism. This was followed by its modified form Saktism, a primitive faith which like tantricism worshipped the female form of God.

The Vaisnava revival of the Middle Ages brought to the limelight the
great Vaisnavite saint Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1568) who developed and propagated Eka-sarana-naadharma (a faith of allegiance of one God) which was part of the neo-Vaisnavite movement of India and is characterised by absence of the retuals practised by the Saktas and the principle of equality which annuled all caste barriers.

Saivaism which holds the procreative energy of males in reverence and is related to the worship of God Shiva a well as Saktaism are other forms of Hinduism still practised in the State.

Islam and Christianity are the two other religions which have a considerable number of followers in Assam. The reformation movement of the Muslim saint and missionary Shah Miran, popularly known as Ajan Fakir, deserves special mention in this context. Ajan Fakir came to Assam from the Middle East about two hundred years after Shankardeva and found that the Muslims who had come and settled in the land as early as in the 13th century A.D. were practising a form of Islam somewhat distorted by elements of the local Hindu religion. He set out to reinforce Islamic ideals and religious practices, and composed religious songs (known as Zikirs and Jaris) in the spoken language much in the same style as the Borcheets of Sankardeva. Very soon he gained popularity and gathered a large following, and Zikirs and Jaris remain unique elements of Islam in Assam.

There are scattered populations of Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains in different parts of the state notable among which are the Buddhists among the Khamti tribes and the Assamese Sikhs of Borkhola in the district of Nagaon.
The district of Cachar which is located in the southern most part of Assam is one of the oldest districts of Assam. It is bounded on the north by Barail and Jayantia Hil ranges, on the south by the state of Mizoram, on the east by Manipur and on the west by sister districts of Karimganj and Hailakandi and Bangladesh. The district was created in 1830 after annexation of Kachari kingdom by the British. In 1854, North Kachar was annexed and tagged to the district. In 1951 erstwhile North Cachar Sub-Division was made a separate district and taken out of Cachar. In 1983 erstwhile Karimganj Sub-Division and in 1989, Hailakandi Sub-Division was made a separate District.

Origin of the name: There are two possibilities regarding the origin of the name. They are:

1. The Kacharis gave the name Cachar when they ruled this land.
2. The word ‘Kachar’ in Syllette (Bengali of Sylhet) means a stretch of land at the foot of mountain. Hence the name Cachar might have been given by Bengalis of Sylhet as the land is surrounded by mountains.

The circumstances under which the Kacharis came and ruled this land is briefly stated below:

In December, 1706 the Kachari King Tamradhaja, whose capital was at Maibong on the bank of the Mahur River, was invaded by the most powerful Ahom king Rudra Singha. Being defeated by the Ahom King, Tamradhaja fled southwards to Khaspur. From this time onwards the Kachari princes seemed to have settled in the plains of Cachar, their capital being located at Khaspur. The Kachari King Suradarpa Narayan set himself to re-organise has people
and madea Brick built palace and temples were constructed in different parts of Khaspur. It is said that the demoness Hirimba, whom the second Pandava Bhima married, resided in this place. Hence the kingdom was named Hirimba kingdom in memory of the demoness.

The first connection of British with the district dates from 1762, when Mr. Vereslst marched from Chittogong to assist the Manipuri king Jay Singha who had been driven from his throne by the Burmese and halted with his army at Jatrapur near the present Silchar town. The army remained there for about a year, but due to death and disease among the army, Mr. Verelst could not proceed further and was ultimately recalled. The next historical event of imporance was the formal conversion of Kachari King Krishna Chandra to Hinduism in 1770.

A few years later, the last prince Gobinda Chandra was driven from throne by Marjit Singha of Manipur with the help of the Burmese. Afterwards the Burmese drove Marjit Singha from this place to Surma Valley. But the British Govt. which was in possession of Sylhet expelled the Burmese and handed back the district to Gobinda Chandra. In return he was required to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 10,000. The king then shifted his abode to Haritikar, but in 1830 he was assisinated by batch of Manipuri murderers. In the absene of a natural heir, this territory lapsed to the British Govt. under the term of a treaty executed in 1826. This district was formally annexed by the proclamtion of August 14, 1832.

The last of the Kachari Kings, Raja Gobin Chandra was assassinated by a group of seditious persons with the help of some of his personal attendants
on April 24, 1830, at Haritikar. In absence of natural heirs, his territory lapsed to the British under the terms of an agreement executed in 1826. Mr. T. Fisher, an army officer was sent to take charge of the territory with the power of a Collector and Magistrate and he took over charge on June 30, 1830, with headquarters at Cherrapunjii. In 1833, the headquarters were shifted to Dudpatil and then to Silchar. Plain portion of Cachar was formally annexed to the British dominion on August 14, 1832 by a proclamation of the Governor General-in-Council. Mr. T. Fisher was gazetted to the first post of the Superintendent of the district. He unfortunately died while in service and was succeeded respectively by Messrs I. G. Burns, E.R. Lyons, E. Pearson, P. G. Verner and others.

In 1854, North Cachar was annexed to the British dominion after the death of Senapti Tularam, and tagged with Cachar. In 1874, Cachar was included in the Chief Commissionership of Assam as per proclamation of February 6, 1874, and the post of Superintendent was re-designated as the Deputy Commissioner and Mr. R. Stuart was the first Deputy Commissioner of the district. Hailakandi Sub-division was formed on June 1, 1869. As a result of the partition of India in 1947, four Thanas of erstwhile Karimganj Sub-division of Sylhet district were transferred to Cachar.

On November 17, 1951, North Cachr Sub-division was carved out of this district and made part of the newly formed district of United Mikir of North Cachar Hills.

On July 1, 1983, karimganj Sub-division was taken out of Cachar and declared a separate district. On October 1, 1989, Hailakandi Sub-division
was taken out of Cachar and declared a separate district. The District is a heterogeneous plain composed of both low lands and high hills and level plains. Actually the whole of the district lies at the foot hills. The Bhubhan ranges on the eastern side of the district covers a considerable area. The river Barak, along with the tributaries Jiri, Chiri, Madhura, Jatinga, Sonai, Katakhal and others are flowing through the centre of the plain valley of the district. On the average, the soil of the district is a sandy-loomy and sand-clay and is fertile. Explorations by ONGC in different parts of Cachar have indicated that there are huge mineral oil and gas deposits in various parts of the district. The district covers an ara of 37861.1 Sq Km. With a population of 12,15,385 as per 1991 census. The rural population is 10,96,161 where urban population is only 1,19,224. Thus the majority of the population live in rural area and their main source of livelihood is agricultural activities. Almost 70% of the total population is dependent on primary sector, i.e., on agriculture. According to 1971 census, 42.70% of total workers are cultivators and 19.60% are agricultural labourers. The percentage of workers to total population is 29.16. Other agricultural allied activities such as mining, quarry, livestock, forestry, fisheries etc. are pursued nearly 14.77% of the total workforce of the district. The rest are engaged in trade and commerce, household industries construction, manufacturing, transport etc.

The socio-economic condition of the district remains backward with lack of major industrial establishment in the district. However there are potentialities for improving the economic condition of the district in view of the huge water resources forest product oil and natural gas reserves present
project, exploration of natural, gas and extension of Broad gauge railway line up to the head quarter of the district will help in a great way to accelerate the process of socio-economic development in the district. As in the other districts of Assam, the Govt. has taken up and implemented various developmental schemes/projects through the different departments in the district of Cachar for upliftment of the Socio-economic condition of people.

The District of Cachar lies between longitude $92^\circ 24'\ E$ and $93^\circ 15'\ E$ and Latitude $24^\circ 22''\ N$ and $25^\circ 8'\ N$ and is bounded on the north by the North Cachar Hills District and the State of Meghalaya, on the East by Manipur State, on the South by the State of Mizoram and on the west by Hailakandi District and Bangladesh. It has two sub-divisions Silchar and Lakhipur, named after the Kacharis who once ruled over this part of the State. Cachar district has prominently figured in the histories of Manipur and the Kachari Kingdom. Ruins that still invoke memories of the Kachari’s past glory are scattered at several places of the district.

Silchar, the district headquarter town, situated on the South bank of the Barak river is an important commercial centre of the state. A gateway of Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura, the town naturally plays a vital role so far supply of essential commodities etc. to those states is concerned. A medical college, a station of All India Radio, a TV Station and several other organisations have helped the town grow in imporance. A Central University is also set up in the district. The district of Cachar is the home of a large number of Tea Gardens of the State. Lakhipur is the richest pine-apple growing area in the country. Natural Gas is found in Adamtilla area of Cachar. One
LPG bottling plant is already been commissioned at Harincherrah of Silchar Subdivision. Khaspur, a past capital of the ancient Kachari Kingdom, with numerous ruins and architectural remains, provides nostalgic times to those with historical interest.

The main river of the district is Barak which comes down from the southern slopes of lofty ranges of Nagaland and forms the northern boundary of Manipur. It is joined with many small tributaries from the hills with are Chiri, Jatiga, Sonai, Dhaleshwari, Katakhali etc.

Climate of Barak Valley is significant for excessive humidity and being shut in by ranges of hills on North, East and South, heat during summer becomes unbearable. During rainy season, the air is surcharged with moisture and rainfall is extremely heavy. The winter is not so cold as that of Brahmaputra Valley. The rainy season starts from May and continues upto October.
Silchar

Silchar is situated on the left bank of the Barak river in 24.49°N and 92.48°E and commands a charming view down the river, which is dotted with the sails of native craft and grooves of the areca palm, while, a little of the north, the purple hills of North Cachar rise sharply from the plain. It is surrounded by the Barail Hills on the north, Mizo Hills on the south, Manipur on the East and Bangladesh on the West. The valley is called aptly Barak Valley and consists of three districts:

Silchar is a land of Bengalis contributing to more than 80% of the 1.45 lakhs population. Most people speak Sylhetti, a dialect of Bengali. The Silchar calendar year is full of festivals, the most awaited being the Durga Puja celebrated around October. Another important occasion is the Gandhi Mela, a local fair. Local cultural and sports clubs like Jyoti, Town Club, Cachar Club, Dishari, Bhabhikal, Shanto Sena give the town the much needed cultural relief.

Silcharites are mostly rice-eating people and most of the people living in the outskirts rely on farming and tea cultivation. The river Barak is the lifeline of Silchar. The Silchar region has 125 Tea gardens and many of them producing the best tea in the country. Tea, oil and natural gas, bamboo, cane, rice, are the major contributors to Silchar's economy.

Floods, earthquakes, landslides and cyclones, are often happen in Silchar. Silchar like the rest of Assam is a seismic area and experiences earthquakes pretty often. Most tremors are results of earthquakes with shillong as the epicenter.
At Silchar the wind generally blows from the northeast in the morning and from the southeast in the afternoon. About the end of February stormy weather sets in and in March there are often thunderstorms and monsoon rain the water level starts rising in the river Barak. It rains quite heavily in July and August and generally the outskirts of the town get flooded causing extensive damage to the poor farmers. In Summer it's hot and in Winters it's cool... but it never reaches extreme levels. The early rains in the Summer brings in the most needed relief to the people.

Silchar is proud to be endowed with the best educational institutes in the whole of North East India. One of the 17 Regional Engineering Colleges, REC Silchar was the best and only technical institute of some repute till the IIT came up in Guwahati. Silchar after years of struggle got its own university, the Assam University, A Central university which is changing the educational scenario of the whole region. Silchar has a Medical college, a Polytechnic Institute, a BT college, a Law college and an ITI. The schools of repute are Holy Cross School, Adhar Chand School and Collegiate School. Most of the academically better students get to the Guru Charan College and Cachar College, Guru Charan College being one of the most respected colleges in the whole of Assam. Silchar has a male literacy of 66.4% and female literacy of 46%.

Silcharites have always been politically different from the rest of Assam all through out. When its AGP at the state, its Congress in Silchar, when its Congress at the state its BJP at Silchar. Silcharites in the recent years (after the Babri Masjid issue came up) have been pro-BJP and pro Santosh.
Mohan Deb. Silchar is always affected by national issues more than the state issues. The local associations like AC(K)SA (All Cachar Karimganj Students Association) have become big forces when it comes to voice local demands and needs. And you can guess the political uniqueness of Silchar when you come to know that in the 1998 polls it was the only seat that BJP won from the whole of North East. Yes we are different ... we are proud to be ...

In the 1850's British tea planters discovered the game in Manipur (Munipoor) on the Burmese border with India. The first polo club in the world was formed by them at Silchar, west of Manipur.

"In the year 1830 the Rajah, Govindachandra, was assasinated and there being no descendent either lineal or adopted , the country was annexed to the British territories , by proclamation on the 14th of August 1832 , incompliance with the frequent and earnestly expressed wishes of the people."

"The management of the affairs of the district was entrusted after annexation, to Lieutenant Fisher, an officer of approved ability and great local experience. for some months Cachar continued to be administrered from Cherrapunji, the head quarters of the Agent to the Governor General , but in consideration of practical difficulties early in 1833 Fisher had his head quarters at Dudputli which however were soon shifted to Silchar for the sake of convenience."

"Silchar the sudder ie principal station of cachar district is a small place boasting only of a few brick buildings, including the cutcherry or court house, and church. "There is a large native bazaar, the houses in which, as well as those of most of the european residents, are built of bamboo and..."
mud. There are two large European shops, which, taking advantage of the necessities of the troops that composed the Expedition, raised their prices enormously."

"The population of Cachar is entirely engaged either in rice cultivation or on the tea gardens. There is only one town with a population of more than 5000 souls, SILCHAR, the civic station and head quarters of a regiment of Native Infantry, which in 1881 contained 6567 inhabitants. In conjunction with the neighboring villages,

Silchar has been constituted a municipality, a trading fair is annually held here in January, attended by about 20000 people.

The Assam Bengal Railway brought Silchar into the railway map in 1899. The rail line entered into Cachar near Badarpur Junction across Sylhet. A branch line from Badarpur, through the south bank of Barak pushed up to Silchar, past Katahal, Salchapra and Gagra. The main line crossed the Barak crossed the Barak by the magnificent bridge, 454 yards in length immediately after Badarpur and then made its way up the Jatinga valley, through North Cachar Hills, into Assam.