CHAPTER - II

LOCATION AND PEOPLE

Dhubri district is situated in the western most part of Assam. It is the entrance point of the State for people of other parts of India lying to the west and thus serves as one of the gate ways of Bangladesh, West Bengal and Meghalaya to the State of Assam. This district is situated along the border part of the former Goalpara district and touches border lines of all the three newly created districts, namely, Goalpara, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon.

The District of Dhubri is lying on both the sides of the river Brahmaputra and the distance of the district Head Quarters of the district from the capital of Assam by road is 287 km. It covers an area of 2,838 sq. km and is the second largest area in the former Goalpara district. The district lies between latitudes 26°-12° and 26° - 27° north and longitudes 90°-11°-90°22' east. Physically the larger part of the area consists of level plains, the lower portion of which is intersected by the Brahmaputra. A few outlying spurs of the Meghalaya hills are projecting towards the river Brahmaputra from the south and this appear on the north bank also. The northern and western part of the area is flat but the central portion is made up of a number of small ranges of low hills near the Brahmaputra. Much of the localities are exposed to flood and is covered by dense growth of grass and reeds.

Scattered all over the district there are people of various communities popularly known as Goalparia or Deshi Manush meaning indigenous people. Besides, a good
number of people who migrated from both inside and outside of the country have been settling here since the beginning of the British period.

BOUNDARY

The district is bounded by the Kokrajhar district of Assam, the Cooch Behar and Jolpaiguri district of West Bengal on the north, the Bongaigaon and Goalpara districts of Assam on the east, a part of Goalpara district of Assam and Garo hills district of Meghalaya on the south, West Bengal and Bangladesh are situated to the western border of it.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME OF DHUBRI

The name Dhubri is associated with the term Netai Dhubuni, a Dhubuni, the washer woman of Lord Siva. There is also a legend that the name Dhubri is derived from the term Dhubuni mentioned in an episode of the Padmapurana, a folk epic related to the snake Goddess Manasa.

As regards the placing of the name Dhubri, the Sikh Pratinidhi Board Eastern Zone has interpreted the following story connected with the Sikh Saint Guru Teg Bahadur.

In 1505 AD. Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism, came to Assam via Dhanpur near Dacca and stayed with Srimanta Sankardev, the greatest vaishnavite reformer of Assam, at the present site of Gurudwara, Dhubri Sahib under Goalpara district (Assam culture by S.K. Bhuyan). Now this place is situated under newly created Dhubri district.

In course of time, Guru Teg Bahadur Sahibji was installed as 9th Guru of Sikhism. In order to spread the name of the true God, Guru Teg Bahadurji started his missionary tour and crossing river Brahmaputra, he reached Deudema Sahib (visiting
place of Guru Nanak), On the bank of the river, which was named as Dhubri by the Guru Teg Bahadur —a mysterious incident occurred.

'When Raja Chakradhar of Kamarupa heard of Raja Ram Singh’s arrival to attack him, he vowed to destroy him and his army. He ordered all women who were famous for their magical skill. One such woman was Netai Dhuboni by name. On the other side Sri Guru Teg Bahadurjee altered Raja Ram Singh to shift his army, camped along side river bank to higher place, as a created flood is likely at night. Thus the flood created at night with the power of black art had washed away those who did not shift to higher attitude and those shifted were saved. By seeing the power of black magic the soldiers in the camp of Raja Ram Singh were extremely demoralised but the Guru assured them that nothing would happen to them. They should simply concentrate on almighty and repeat the name of God. When the magical attempt could not do much harm due to the presence of Guru Tag Bahadur, She (Netai) became furious and hurted a judge stone (several meters long) at Gurujee but with the spiritual power of Guru, the stone fell aside with such a force that more than half of it was penetrated into the ground, failing in her attempt she uprooted a 'Pipal tree' and riding on it, made another attack on Guru. The 'Pipal Tree' stopped in the air before it reaches him. When Netai felt powerless grew weary of her efforts, she was convinced of the divine power of Guru Teg Bhadur and begged to be pardoned, she fell down on her knees, openly accepted her defeat and prayed that her name should remain and people should remember her name. The Guru told her that this place will become big town and will be known as Dhubri on your name provided you do not indulge in such black acts in future' (Singh S.K : 1995 : 5).

'There is another linguistic interpretation regarding the origin of the name of Dhubri that ' the Koch Rajbonsi people of this locality were originally Bodo people and they spoke Bodo Language. So etymologically 'Dhubri' is the corrupt form of the Bodo word Daihari (Dai means water and bari means land) i.e. a land by the water'.
Some of the intellectuals of this locality argue that the very name Dhubri has been derived from the word *Dabri* which means a land surrounded by water from three sides. And the location of Dhubri is also like a *Dabri*. It may be mentioned that there is a village in this locality popularly known as major *Dabri*.

**HISTORICAL BACK-GROUND**

The Dhubri district has never been a separate kingdom. So its history has to be considered in conjunction units of which it formed a part from time to time.

'In ancient times it was included in the kingdom of Pragjyotisha mentioned in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata as well as in some principal Puranas. It is believed that Dhubri comprised a large part of North East India including most of Assam, North-Bengal and a part of East Bengal' (Choudhury, Ahmed Khan;1936:1-13).

Subsequently, the region formed a part of the kingdom of Kamarupa which later on came to be known as Pragjyotisha. The Kalika Purana and Jagini Tantra, both the works devoted to the religious history and geography of mediaeval Assam, it is established that the western limit of the old kingdom of Kamarupa was the Karatoya, a river which rises in the extreme north west of the Jolpaiguri district. The kingdom included not only Assam valley, but also part of Northern Bengal, part of Bhutan, the Khasi and Garo hills and the northern portion of the district of Sylhet' (Barua, K.L.: 1933: 10).

'Old Kamarupa was divided into four parts, demarcated by river, namely, Kampith from the Karatoya to the Sankosh, Ratnapith from the Sankosh to the Rupahi, Suvarnapith from the Rupahi to the Bharali and Soumarpith from the Bharali to the Dikrang, Elsewhere Ratnapith is said to include the tract between the Karatoya and the Manos, Kampith that
between the Manos and Silghat on the north Bank of the Brahmaputra and Bhadrapith, the corresponding portion of the south Bank, while Soumarpith as before, is the most easternly tract' (Gaits : 1992 : 10).

Thus, whatever the alignments of the borders of these portions, the Ratnapith division of old Kamarupa included the present Dhubri district. The name Ratnapith indicates that this region was paradise of resources. It is also true in the field of Folklore materials both verbal and nonverbal. The present Dhubri district was the most important part of the ancient Ratnapith.

In the seventh century Kumar Bhashkara Varman was one of the most remarkable kings of Western and Northern Assam (the Brahmaputra Valley), during his period (606-648A.D.) Assam’s dominion extended over the greater part of Bengal. Undoubtedly, the vast territory included the present Dhubri district. After that, according to the tradition of the Mahapurushiyas, it subsequently formed a part of kingdom called Kamata, whose ruler was Durlabh Narayana at the beginning of the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth century this district was included in the dominions of the Khyen prince and its capital was Kamatapur. This district is more definitely connected with the fortunes of the Koch kingdom that made its appearance after the fall of the khyens.

In 1580 A.D. the Koch kingdom was divided and the country east of the Sonkosh, which included former Goalpara district including the Dhubri was surrendered to Raghu Rai, the nephew of Naranarayan, while the territory that lay west of the that river (Cooch Behar) was reserved for the son of that prince. Disputes, however, soon broke out between the two families, and Dhubri was conquered by the Mughals who had been called in by Naranarayan's son to his assistance. The aid of the Ahoms was invoked on the other side, and for some time the war between these two
powers dragged on with varying fortunes. In 1637, peace was concluded and the Barnadi, which now divide Kamrup and Darrang was fixed as the boundary between Mughal and Ahom territory. In 1658, the Ahom advanced again, occupied the earlier Dhubri district and held it for three years, but were compelled to retreat by Mirjumala's Army. From that time onwards, the district formed a part of the Mughal dominion till 1765 A.D. together with the rest of the Bengal. Under the Mughal administration Koch Hajo was divided into four Sarkars or divisions, namely Sarkar Bengalbhum, Sarkar Dhekuri, Sarkar Kamrup and Sarkar Dakhinkul. Sarkar Dhekuri included more or less the whole of the present Dhubri district.

The Mughals had introduced their own settlement and revenue systems in the areas under their occupation. The Zemindari System took roots under their aegis and continued till its abolition in 1957. It may be noted that former Goalpara district including the present Dhubri district is the only region in the Assam to have had such system. It had direct and far-reaching effects on the economic and social life of the people of the region and had moulded, at least at certain levels, the cultural life as well.

Former Goalpara district (including Dhubri district) of Assam have experienced changes in jurisdiction for many times since it came under British Rule. It was added to the Rangpur district of the Bengal province. In 1822, it was formed into a separate district known as North East Rangpur with three thanas of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari along with large portion of Garo hills frontier and was placed under the charge of a Special Civil Commissioners. Mr. David Scott was the first official to hold this charge. After the annexation of Assam to the British territory in 1826 by the Yandabo treaty, David Scott, the Special Civil Commissioner of North-East Rangpur was appointed as the commissioner of the new province. The district of North-East
Rangpur subsequently merged with the new province as a separate district under the name Goalpara. Since then, it had been administrated as a part of Assam till 1866 with its head-quarters at Goalpara.

However, in 1827 the district was transferred to the newly created Cooch Behar commissionership for one year. In the following year, it was placed for judicial purposes under the Judicial commissioner of Assam, and it was finally incorporated into Assam in 1874. In 1879, the head quarters of the district was transferred to Dhubri and Goalpara, the place of old district headquarters was reduced to a sub-divisional head quarters. Since then, the district had been functioning with two civil sub-divisions, namely, Dhubri and Goalpara sub-divisions till 1958.

In 1958, Kokrajhar sub-division was carved out from Dhubri sub-division and in the year of 1983 the district of Goalpara was split into three divisions, and each of the erst-while sub-divisions was made into a separate district of the same name, namely, Kokrajhar, Dhubri and Goalpara districts. Then in 1989 another independent district called Bongaignon was carved out of the then Kokrajhar district.

Dhubri is the district where all the infrastructural facilities are lying under-developed since long past. Although the old Golapara district is no longer exit but the term Goalparia folk are used which have been deeply ingrained in the minds of people both inside and outside of the Dhubri of Assam.
TOPOGRAPHY

(i) Natural Division and Configuration

The larger portion of the district is a level plain. The southern part of it through which the Brahmaputra is flowing down is subjected to regular floods and is covered by dense grass and reeds. Away the river the level of the lands rises and swamp give away to rice fields. The homesteads of the cultivators are surrounded by the dense grass, areca palms, plantains and bamboos. The northern portion of the district is a populated area and is mostly covered by grass and dense forests. Rice and other crops are raised on fields that are irrigated from the hill streams and the western part of the district is also absolutely flat. East portion of the area is also a mixture of plains, and small hills and rivers.

(ii) Hills

Most part of the district a level plain and mountains are conspicuous by their absences. A few ranges of hills run irregularly on the north bank of Brahmaputra and have divided the district in to many drainage sections.

To the east, there are hills like the Chanderdinga, the Dhumeswar, the Chakrasilla, on the edge of the Brahmaputra Dudhnath, Sonanukh and Tokrabandha and on the northern part of the district the Abhayakuti, the Mahamaya hills in Bagribari and a hillok in middle of Gauripur are the western most representative of hills in the district amidst the Brahmaputra alluvium.
(iii) River and Beel System and the Water Resources

(a) River:

The Brahmaputra is the principal river of the Dhubri district of Assam and it flows either through or along the boundary of the district for about 100 kms. The Brahmaputra enters the district a few metres south of chapar circle and from the north bank at the mouth of the Champaboti river just east of chapar town. The initial course of the river Brahmaputra from east to westward, but the last part of it is course is scattered. Oscillating rapidly from side to side of the sandy strath through which it makes its way, the mighty river cuts away a great bank in some places and throws up a char in another. Such char may exist temporarily till swept away by the next flood or may grow into a large island covered with grass and reeds.

The principal tributaries of the district on the North Bank are the Champaboti, the Saralbhanga known as Gaurang in its lower reaches, the Sonamukh, the Tipkai, the Godadhar and the Dudhkumar which fall into the Brahmaputra at a point beyond Dhubri. On the south bank its main tributaries are the Jinjiram and Kaladanie which have now merged with Brahmaputra.

(b) Beels and Tanks:

There are a large number of beels in the district. The bigger ones almost approaching the dimensions of lakes. During rainy season these beels spread to such an extent that they merge into each other and form a vast picturesque sheet of water. The largest beel on the north Bank of the Brahmaputra is the Dhirbeel and besides this, there are various kinds of beels like Dakra, Diplai, Hakma, Nalea, Shaleswar, Chandakhol and Jhagrpar situated in different parts of district. In the south-west of Dhubri district, a few minor beels also exist.
(c) Water resources:

A study of the ground water conditions in the Dhubri district reveals that the district is endowed with a vast potential of ground water resources and that there is vast scope for the development of ground water by both shallow and deep tube wells for irrigational purposes.

(iv) Flora

The vegetation of Dhubri district mainly consists of tropical deciduous and tropical semi-evergreen plants interspersed with grass lands. With its wide range of climatic conditions, this district has a rich and varied vegetation. The vegetation consists mainly of Sal (shorea-robusta). The other dominant trees are Kydia (calycina), Udal (stercutia villosa), Sida (larger stroemia parviflora) alstonia scholaris, adina cordifolia aksi (dillennia pentagyna), bomboo, ceiba, paroli or serpan (stereospermum chelonoides), bahera (terminalia bellrica), terminalia chebula, kumbs (careva arborea) vitex peduncularis and albizia procera.

The common herbs and shrubs are ageratum conyzoides, coffea bengalensis, Lupatorium, odoratum celerodendrum, infortunatum and species of curcuma, carex and crinum etc.

In addition to these, trees like bonsum, igamar, khokan, titasap, neem, raintree, sishu, debdaru, arjun, hartaki and hilly bamboos are also available in this district. But due to deforestation, the variety and their numbers are decreasing day by day. The principal fruits trees like jack fruits, mango trees, bananas, black berry, lichis and guava are available specially in rural areas.

A park named 'Florican Park' has been established in 1983 by the Department of Social Forestry with the aid of the Integrated Rural Development Programme covering
10 hectares of land under 'Gaurang Khas' of Chapar circle which has become an attractive picnic spot.

(v) Fauna

With its wide range of climatic conditions this district has a rich and varied wild animals and birds etc. The hilly part of the region is infested with tiger, jungle bear, deer, fox, monkey, elephant, python, cobra and some birds like sparrow, sun bird, pigeon, crow, owl, parrot, peacock, duck, hen, duckling and kid etc.

But now due to deforestation, the variety and numbers are decreasing day by day. There was a time, when 'wild animals mostly represented by elephants, rhinoceros, bisons, buffaloes, tigers, leopards, wild pigs and deer infested the district in such large numbers that the British offered rewards for their destruction during the nineteenth century' (Barooah D.P. : 1979:30). So substantial was the amount spent on rewards that in the middle of that century 'more money was paid in one year for killing wild animals than was realized from the land revenue' (W.W. Hunter: 1975:13). After independence a drastic measure has been adopted by Govt. of India and State of Assam towards protecting the animal life through various legislations and executive measures. Moreover, some local Non-Government Organisations, such as, Nature Bacon, Sebapay etc. have been working for the protection and preservation of the wild life.

Wild life week is observed in the district during the 1st week of October every year with great enthusiasm. The aims and objectives of this are to create public consciousness regarding the necessity of preserving and protecting the wild lives which are fast diminishing with mounting pressure from population and extensive reclamation of forest areas for settlement and other purposes.
(vi) Mineral and Mining

Minerals or mines have not been found in the district. Clay which is used for the manufacture of bricks and roofing tiles are available in the district. Brick industries are another most important and worker absorbing industries in this district. Scattered all over the area from Chapar to Dhubri. The archaeans, mostly granite, granite-gneiss and the intrusive dolerite are locally worked to be used as road metals. Terracotta works made of clays soils have some influences among certain sections of the people. Spots of chalcopyrite and stains of malacite are seen in the Mahamaya hill in a metamorphosed dolerite of uncertain age.

(vii) Climate and Rainfall

The climate of the district has features that are intermediate between those of the North Bengal plains and those in other places of the Assam Valley. In this district during the day and also some times at night temperature in April, May, June and July are higher than in the rest of the year.

The average annual rainfall in the district is 3257.2 mm. The rainfall increases from the south to north. During the period December to February the actual rainfall is 34.6, March to May 519.7, June to September 2063.4 and October to November 639.5 m.m. as per record listed in 1998.

(viii) Temperature

There is only one meteorological observatories in the district. The data of temperature and other meteorological elements at this station may be taken as representative of the conditions in the district in general. From about the end of February, temperature begin to increase. In April, the mean daily maximum
temperatures at this district becomes 31.6 °C. The highest maximum temperature recorded in the district is 41.4 °C and lowest minimum temperature is 2.8 °C.

(ix) Cloudiness and Winds :

Skies are heavily clouded in the monsoon season. During the rest of the year, moderately clouded skies are common. In the cold season, skies are sometimes obscured in the morning due to rising fog which clears with the advance of the day.

Winds are generally light. North-Westerly or easterly winds are the most common all the year round. But in the afternoon southerly and southwesterly winds also blow in some days in the monsoon season.

PEOPLE

According to the Census of 1991, Dhubri district has a population of 13,32,475 consisting of 6,83,298 males and 6,49,177 females and accounts for nearly six per cent of total population of Assam. Dhubri district has a density of population of 470 persons per square kilometre where as in the state of Assam density of population is 286 per square kilometre.

The Census of previous decades shows that the average density of the district has increased as population increases. This increase in population is due to migration both internal and external. Historically, the Dhubri district is the main gate-way for the influx of the population from East Bengal (Now Bangladesh) and from West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab etc.
CASTES, CLASSES AND TRIBES

The are different castes scattered over different part of the district. Among them as per 1991 Census, Hindus are 28.73 percent, Muslims 70.45 Percent, Christians 0.57 per cent, Sikhs 0.01 percent, Buddhists 0.01 per cent and Jains 0.16 per cent.

Castism is a special feature of the Hindu Social System. But in the modern context of civilisation it lost its former significance. In 1901, B.C. Allen described that, the Rajbonsis alone formed over one forth of the population and they together with some of their kinsmen claimed more than half of total population of the district. It may also be noted that most of the people returned in 1901 as professing tribal faith, have already accepted the Hindu religion. Thus, the Kocharies, Meches, Rabhas and the like accepting Hinduism have added to the caste hierarchy of the Hindu Society. But now-a-days due to extreme and growing regionalism some of the Bodo have felt alienated and accepted Christian religion.

A brief note on different castes strongly representing in Dhubri district have been enumerated below:

Brahmins, the priestly caste is mostly composed of immigrants from upper India in the past. In a later period some Kamrupi Barmins have also migrated from the district of Kamrup. They are mostly engaged in priest profession.

Kayasthas form a very small numerical section in the total population of the district. The local Kayasthas families of Dhubri district claim their origin from Kanauj and Gaur that migrated during the reign of Durlavnarayan of Kamatapur. Some of the Kayastha have got Zamindaries and Jotdaris by establishing good relation with Srimanto Sankardeva. The Kayasthas who do not plough the land by themselves earn their livelihood mostly through intellectual pursuits.
The Kalitas are also not very strongly represented in the district. They sometimes call themselves Kayasthas. Their main occupation is agriculture. Besides a large number of Kalitas are engaged in services, trade and commerce.

As already mentioned, the Rajbonsis or Koehes are most strongly represented in this district. Their tribe had risen into power in the fifteenth century when their leader Biswa Singha, an inhabitant of Chikangram village declared himself a king and during the time of the son of Naranarayan their fame and fortune reached the zenith. The new converts from the tribes are generally admitted to the rank of the Koehes. The main occupation of these people is agriculture, service, trade and commerce and other pursuits have also attracted a number of talented and educated people of these castes.

Other strongly represented caste in the district is the Jogis. Their traditional occupation is rearing of silk warms, spinning and weaving. But this occupation, having lost its former importance, they now have taken to agriculture, service and trade as their means of livelihood.

The Namsudra, Jhalo-molo, Hira, Patni and Kaibarto known as fishermen community have sufficient number in this district. They are also engaged in various occupation including manual job, services, agriculture, potteries, trade and commerce.

Above all, other professional castes, such as, soneries or Bania (Goldsmith), Tatis (weavers), Dhobas (washermen), Napits (Barbers) Kamars (blocksmith) Kumars (potters) Sutradhars and Goals are residing in this district.

Among the Muslims community, most of them are chorua (inhabitant of river banks and island) Muslims and the rest are called Jharua (highlanders or living in the
edge of forest locally known as Jhar) Muslims. Charua Muslims are also locally known as Bhatia on the ground that they came form Bhati that is form East Bengal. In Assam these Muslim people are known as immigrant Muslim or sometimes they are also called as Mia.

Like the Hindus, the Muslim community may also consists of some sub-castes, such as, Datia (fishermen), Talli (who finds oil), Jola (who making yarn), Maisal (who keep Buffalo), Chhander (who sales cosmetic goods in market and rural villages). A peculiar characteristic of the immigrant Muslims of Assam is that although they speak the Bengali language, introduce themselves as Assamese and most of them get their wards admitted into Assamese medium educational institutions. The Jharua Muslims are also known as ohjani Muslims. Perhaps they came from upper Assam.. Moreover, most of the Jharua Muslims are possessing the similar culture of Hindu folk. It indicates that most of the Jharua Muslim are converted from Hindu.

In urban areas, there live some other communities with the indigenous people, they are actually a conglomerate of castes, who are collectively known by the local people as Bengali, Marrowari, Behari and Nepali.

Moreover, there is a section of people that is Tea Garden Labourers like Munda, Orao, Boraik and Tati belonging to tribal castes hailing from middle India in long past. They are working in Chapar, Krishnakali and Chaibari Tea Estates under this district.

LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

Generally, the literary language of any region differs to a greater or lesser degree from the language of ordinary conversation. In Dhubri district, Assamese is the
standard literary language and the dialect which is spoken by the native people differs from the dialects of standard Assamese and standard Bengali.

The day to day conversational language of the people of Dhubri district belong to Goalparia dialects. There are two types of native dialects, namely, (a) Deshi or Jharua (b) Charua or Bhaital. Deshi means the tongue of the original inhabitants of Kamatapur and Charua means the tongue of Charua people. On the other hand, most of the Jharua or deshi speaking people reside in the edge of Jhar that is near forest area or Kaim area (high land). The name Jharua originated from the name Jhar and Bhaitali language is derived from the inhabitant of Bhati.

Besides them, many other indigenous people due to their long association with Assamese speaking people in different walks of life have been adopting Assamese language and culture were returned as Assamese speakers. The Census Report after 1961 reveals that some Muslims who returned their mother tongue as Bengali in 1951 might have returned their mother tongue as Assamese in 1961.

The scope of this analysis being limited, a discussion on many language and dialects, particularly those spoken by the immigrants, can not included here. Many of these language, display wide variations of pronouciations and terminology.

There are many other tribal people who speak in Bodo, Rabha, Hazong, Saotali and Nepali language.

RELIGION

The religious life of the people of Dhubri district is predominated by Hindus and Muslims who constitute 28.73 and 70.45 per cent as per 1991 Census. Other religious communities, such as, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains etc. together formed a very low percentage of the total district population.
(i) The Hindus

Numerically, once the Hindus constituted the major religious community in the district. But, in the course of time, the Muslim population have increased faster than the Hindus. This is mainly attributed to the large exodus of Muslims from the neighbouring districts of Bengal and state of Bangladesh. Yet the Hindus of this district have been playing an active role in every sphere of activity. The Hindus are divided mainly into three principce sects, namely, Saktism, Saivism and Vaishnavism.

Nearly six per cent of the Hindus are the followers of Sakti or Worshippers of the reproductive power. Saktism is widespread in this district. It is evidenced by the existence of many Sakti temples, such as Kamakhya at Manikachar, Mahamaya temple at Bagribari where festivals are observed in a large scale.

Saivism is the counterpart of Saktism and is concerned with the worship of the procreative energy as manifested in the male. A large numbers of Siva temples are found in the district. Festival connected with Siva like Savaratri etc. are observed with enthusiasm not only by Saivaites but also by the people of other sects.

A section of the people of this district are adherents to Vaishnavism which relates to the worship of Vishnu. The worship of Vishnu has prevalent in Assam from early times. Sankardeva was the founder of Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam. He did away with the worship of images, the elaborate rituals, sacrifices and the esoteric rites practised by the Saktas. His creed is known as the Eka-Sarana Namadharma or the religion of the worship of only one God-Vishnu through recitation of his name, in hymns and prayers. In this district a large section of the indigenous people, such as, Kalita, Jogi, Kochari and Rajbonsis are initiated by Ek-Saranan-Bhagabat Dharma.
(ii) The Islam

Islam came to Assam with invading Mughal forces and since then the Dhubri district is one of the area in Assam to experience the onslaught of Muslim invasion. For a considerable period of time the district was under the reign of the Muslims. So the Islam had established itself more securely in the area than elsewhere in Assam. The large percentage of Muslims and the large number of old Mosques and other Muslim holy places found in this district confirm this fact.

However, there is not any historical records of any Islamic movement or of large scale conversion from Hindu to Islam in this district.

'The prevailing opinion is that a good many of the Muslim soldiers belong to the invading Mughal armies did not return home and married local women. The opinion gain strength from this physical features of the local Muslims which differ very little from those of their non-Muslim neighbours. Some also might have voluntarily embraced Islam. The result was that the local Muslim subscribed to various beliefs and practices of their non-Muslim neighbours, many of which they still retain' (Datta, B.: 1995:65).

It is found that local Muslim of this district associated themselves with various beliefs, practices, rites and ceremonies which are clearly drawn from their Hindu neighbours. Muslims holy men and holy places have drawn the reverent attention of the Hindus. A Muslim Pir has been transformed in to a Hindu Godling, namely, Maddar. The influence of Islam is also reflected in oral literature. Nearly all the Muslims in Dhubri district are of the Sunni sect.
(iii) **Other Religious Groups**

It has been observed that Christianity has not assumed any distinct local character in the region and as such it has yet to make any appreciable contribution to its cultural pattern. Many of the Christians are descendants of Santhals who had been settled in this district by Christian Mission in the last 20th century.

A large number of Bodos, Garos and Hajongs have also embraced Christianity.

**RELIGIOUS PLACES**

Hindus and Muslims constitute the bulk of the population in the Dhubri district of Assam. Besides them, there are some other religious groups like Christian and Jains. The icons of God and Goddesses placed in temples are still worshipped which signify the influence of Saktism and Saivaism among the Hindus. On the other hand, Muslim Dargah and Mosques of this district bear the importance of religious sentiments of the people of this district.

Dhubri district being a part of several powerful kingdoms at different times, but it has of archaeological importance.

In this district, there is a temple dedicated to Dudhnath at Chapar Circle, where the image of Siva and Parvati carved on stone. In Mahamaya Pith there is a stone image of Durga; its date of establishment is also not known. A big slab of stone lying in the river bank near the confluence of the Godadhar and the Brahmaputra river is associated with the mythological episode of Beula and Lakhindar and is said to have been used for washing by Netai Dhubuni, the washer women of Lord Siva. Near Hatipota, there is the Chandardinga hill associated with ChandoSadagar, an opulent merchant and the father of Lakhindar. As described in the episode, Chand's seven dingas (vessels of merchandise) were caused to be drowned and destroyed at this place by Manasa, the
Serpent Goddess in the waters of the Brahmaputra, which subsequently the Brahmaputra raised her bed with the spoils to form the Chandardinga hill.

Among the remains of the medieval period, the Rangamatir Masjit (Now known as Panbari), a well known brick built mosque with its historical back ground dating back to fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is the oldest remains in the districts. The Mir Jumla Masjit, another brick built mosque situated on the hill top by the side of the Kola river (near Mankachar) dates back to the seventeenth century and was built by Mir Jumla. Pach Piares Durgah, a tomb is also established in Manikachar belong to same period.

The Gurudwara hillock at Dhubri is said to have been constructed in 1665 A.D. by the Mughal army under the order of the Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur. Every year huge number of Sikh pilgrim, from different places of India visit this place to pay their tributes.

In the Hindu villages of this district there are at least one community shrine of public worship where most of the popular Gods and Godlings are installed and offer pujas every year. On the other hand, in the Muslim villages of this district there are at least one Masjid where the Muslim people perform their Namaj (prayer).

FESTIVITIES

Colourful festivals observed in the district enthuse the lives of the people. The festivals observed by the people of this district may be categorised into four heads, namely, Hindu festivals, Muslim festivals, Kachari festivals and National festivals.
(i) Hindu Festivals

The Hindu observe many festivals, rituals and many other festival of local nature. The biggest festival of the year is the Durga puja. The town, the villages and tea estates become joyful with the puja festival from the Durga Sasti day to Bisharjan day.

Another religious festival widely celebrated in the district is the Sivaratri which is observed in each and every villages with much fanfare. Doljatra is one of the important festival in this district held in honour of Lord Krishna in the month of February or March. The image of lord Krishna is rested in an ashana with in a mounted doul. The doul is elevated on an earthen pedestal. During doljatra the image of Krishna is moved out of the shrine together with the rested ashana. After performing necessary ritual the people, men and women, young and old throw red powder (Phaku) at one another. The Janmastami festival is observed throughout the district in August or September in honour of birth of Lord Krishna. Kalipuja coincides with Dewali. It is a joyous occasion marked by bursting crackers and fireworks. Young people often indulge in wine drinking. Rashjatra a festival is celebrated in November in memory of Lord Krishna in different places of the district. The festival continues for 11 to 21 days a month in Bilashipara town. A large people of different sects are attended here.

Other pujas and festivals observed in the district include Ashokastami, Biswaskarma puja, Lakhmi puja, kartik puja, Jugadhatri puja, Basantipuja and Sareswati Puja.

Bihu festivals are observed three times in a year in the name of Bishua, Pushna and kati Bihu which are known as Ranjali Bihu, Bhogali Bihu and Kangali Bihu, respectively, in modern context. These festivals are traced to the remote past and are found associated with cycles of cultivation. The Rangoli Bihu is now observed as a national festival in all places by all castes of this district.
(ii) Muslim Festivals

Among the Muslim festivals Id-uz-zaha, Maharum, Fateha-Duaz-Daham and id-ul-fitre are the main.

(iii) Bodo Festivals

Although the religious festivals of the Bodos of the district are different from those observed by Hindus. Some of the Hindu Gods and Goddess, such as, Goddess Laxmi and/or Kali, are worshiped by the Bodos also. They believe in Bathau or Siju who is looked upon as the tutelary deity of the house.

(iv) National Festivals

The Republic day and the Independence day are also observed uniformly as national festivals by the people of this district. Rangali Bihu is also observed with equal significance of national festive.

VILLAGE STRUCTURE

There are 1360 villages in Dhubri district and most of the villages of the district are very much similar to the village in lower Assam. The villages are surrounded by field and often by jungles and every homestead has a fairly large number of banana, mango, jack fruit, areca-nuts, guava and bamboo trees. Most of the villages also do not seem to have well defined boundaries, so, often it is cumbersome to find the point at which village ends and the other begins. Village are generally of different sizes.

Some village boast of well maintained all weather roads. The remote villages far from the National High Way (NHW) and Public Works Departmental Roads (PWD) do not have such types of roads. Village roads and lanes remain full of dust in winter, mud and slush in the rainy season.
THE HOMESTEAD

The arrangement of a typical homestead of the district differs very little from that of other parts of Assam. In this district where typical houses of the region are found, people follow an old traditional maxim at the time of constructing a house in a homestead.

'Pube haash Paschime has
Uttare gua dakhine dhua'

This maxim means that ducks to the east, that is ducks must have swimming in a pond where the house members will get fishes and take bath, bamboo to the west for catering to day to day needs for houses, areca nuts to the north which are used in the family for their day to day consumption and open courtyard to the south which is favourable for getting open air (Fig. 6).

The courtyard around which the houses are built is called the aigina or chotul a place which is always kept neat and clean by the women of the house. In the east corner a small house is built which is known as family's Thakurghar (small temple). Besides this, there is usually another courtyard in the entrance to the home stead, which is called bairabari or kholan, where another Thakurghar (temple) is also erected.

The practices is to have four main houses on the four side of the inner courtyard and the purpose is to have protection and privacy. This type of practice also helps to maintain customary standard of the property and decorum of the households. So it helps to maintain direct contact between persons with in the family and outsiders can not easily observe family affairs.

The front house is called the batghar or naharighar (Reception house), the other three houses are used for bed room, kitchen and dinning and besides they have
RESIDENTIAL COMPOUND

Fig. -6
Diagram to Illustrate the Homestead of the Goalparia Folk of Dhubri District.
gohalighar (cowshed) bhoralghar (granary). They build the houses with bamboo, ekra (reed) and thatch with bamboo or wooden posts. However, now-a-days, many rural people like the urban people of this district have evinced keen interest in improving their housing condition. Those who can afford, they have built their houses on the modern principle of construction.

SOCIAL LIFE

(i) Family System

Among the Hindus, the property is generally held by the head of the family, who manages it as its custodian. After the death of the father, the sons and daughters inherit the property. But in some places and cases sons take the major share and sometimes the whole inherited property. The joint family system was common in the past. But now-a-days, it is found that families tend to break up into smaller units under new socio-economic influences and the joint family system is loosing its hold except in certain cases. Joint family system is not prevalent among some of the tribes and in most of the Muslim families of the district.

(ii) Marital Status

Among the Goalparia folk of Dhubri district, marriage by negotiation is common amongst both Hindu and Muslim communities. But the child marriage among the girls and boys are still prevalent in rural areas specially among the immigrant Muslim. Of course, now-a-days, the average age of marriage for males and females has been rising gradually owing largely to the spread of education and change in the social outlook.

Monogamy is common among all sects of people of the district but the Muslims follow the practice of polygamy. Polyandry is prohibited among all sects of people.
Polygamy is allowed by the Kacharis, although monogamy is the general rule among them.

**THE ECONOMIC PROFILE**

The primary occupation of most of the households is agriculture in rural areas of this district. Dhubri, despite being primarily an agricultural district, imports some kinds of agricultural products, such as, pulses, onion, potato and rice etc. For, these are not sufficiently grown in the district. Besides agricultural products, some other commodities of common use like coconut oil tabaccoo, ghee, spices, gur and poneer are also imported from the neighbouring states. It exports some of local products, such as, cotton, jute, betel nut and tea to the other state. There is evidence to suggest that from the earliest times the people of Dhubri district had trade relation with the people of other parts of India.

'This trade was carried on by a class of people called sadagars and the main trade routes were the river Brahmaputra and the various navigable tributaries feeding it. It appears that the sodagars of Kamarupa carried their merchandises in large boats down the Brahmaputra and they reached the sea after skirting round the Garo hills' (Rai Bahadur Boruah K.L: 1966:122).

Dhubri town is the principal centre of business in the district. All important trade centres of the district as well as those outside the district have been connected by a network of roads, railways and waterways.

The most outstanding features of the economy of the district is its lack of diversification. There is practically no organised industry. Only the Brick fields, Bidi factories and three tea estates are localised in this district. The match factory which was established in the British era is now paralysed.
There are professional workers, both engaged in other occupations, such as, fishing, pot-making, ornament making and tea estates either in groups or individually. But it appears that due to seasonal nature of the workers and absence of labour rules and regulation, these occupations have not make them economically sound.

Next to agriculture it is fishing which has the greatest importance as an occupation in this district. And 'although the professional fishermen are looked down upon and is generally a member of one of the humble castes, such as, the Jhalo, the Dom or Nadial and the Hira, Maji and Mallah among the Hindus and the Datia among the Mahmadian' (B.C. Allen ;1905:17). All section of the people, rich or poor, take delight in catching fish for home consumption. In the midst of abundant fishery resources, the fishing industry of this district have not received due attention of concerning district authorities.

Some of the local folk arts and crafts still survive but most of these are either languishing or gradually dying out owing to inflow of better durable crafts. Women folk take parts in various stage especially in harvesting, pot-making and weaving as their part-time occupation. Some women folk also increase their family income by collecting fire wood from the jungle and /or by working as daily wage earner or engaging in tea estates and bricks making.

Although agriculture and fishing are the traditional occupation of most of the people of Dhubri district currently some of them have switched over to other profession due to increasing population pressure, education and acute scarcity of agricultural land.
INFRASTRUCTURAL FACILITIES

In order to study a region it is urgently needed to take the picture of civic amenities prevailing in the area. So an attempt is being made to highlight the basic infrastructural facilities available in and around this district.

(i) Transport and Communication:

As a part of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa and Kamatapur, the present Dhubri district had close trade and cultural links with the rest of India and neighbouring countries. Its geographical position also favoured deserving those days. The mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries were used for purpose of internal trade and commerce. The old accounts of Assam show that most of the travelers used horses, ponies, elephants, bullock-drawn carts, palanquins, country boats and rafts. The palanquin (dola) and the chariot (rath) were used by the royal families in early period of history. But these types of vehicles are discarded in modern times.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the North Trunk Road started from Dhubri to Raha. There was another road from Dhubri to Bilashipara and thence through Chapar, North Salmara and Jogighopa to Raha. There is a road from Mankachar to Fakirganj linking the trunk road. For the development and construction of roads as many Boards were constituted in Assam. Finally, after Independence of the country in 1947, a Public Works Department (PWD) was constituted by the Central and State Government. As per 1996-97 records, the length of the National High Way is 111 km., State High Way is 114 km. And the other Public Works Department Road is 878 km. in this district.

In every revenue villages there is a public works department and rural panchayat road which is connected with 31 National Highway Road. The great
Brahmaputra river has divided this district in two parts, namely, North Bank and South Bank. But there is good communication between them, which is facilitated by waterways. The different places of Dhubri district are accessible by train, ferry, boats and buses from other parts of the state.

(ii) Medical Facilities

In the entire Dhubri district, there are Eleven Hospitals, 23 Primary Health Centre, 12 Dispensaries of Rural Family Welfare Planning Centre, 303 Sub-centre and Tuberculosis Hospitals and one Civil Hospital at Dhubri Town which meet the demand of entire district of Dhubri. Besides, one Veterinary Hospital is available in each Community Development Block.

Majority of the rural villages are located at a distance of 0-10 kms from the nearest Primary Health Centre. But existence of Health Centre within a reasonable distance does not meet the demand of the people of this district.

The medicines supplied in the Primary Health Centre (PHC) and Hospitals in most cases can not cure their maladies. Except a few solvent people, a few people have the ability to consult the medical experts in the town. Thus, most of the people depend upon the natural cure, Homeopathic medicine or Ayurvedic medicinal which are available in rural and urban areas of this district. Some of the people of rural area believe in magical relief and folk medicines.

(iii) Educational Facilities

Few decades before the people of Dhubri district were not so much interested in education. In course of time, their interest is increasing in education. The Bholanath College was established in this district at Dhubri in 1946. After that gradually about 14
colleges have been established around the district. Moreover, more than 40 Higher
Secondary schools, over 100 English schools and atleast one Middle English schools
and Lower Primary schools have also been established in every villages. Besides these
one Law college, one B.T. College and large number of girls' schools and two Girl's
colleges have been established in Dhubri district, which indicate a rising trend of
educational status among the people of Dhubri district.

(iv) Marketing Facilities

For meeting the daily needs of the people, some daily and bio-weekly markets
have grown up at suitable places of some villages and in the midst of town area. On an
average each village is situated at a distance of 3 or 4 kms. from the marketing centre.

There are fair price shop in every villages and towns. There is a marketing
Board which is situated in Gauripur Town from which this board control all the markets.
Daily, bi-weekly and weekly market locally known Bazar, plays a significant role in
the economic life of the people of this district. Because most of the district depend upon
these marketing centres for their earnings.

(v) Other Civic Amenities:

Above all, with regard to civic amenities, namely, at least one Post Office, one
Telegraph Office, one branch of Nationalised or Rural Bank and drinking water supply
are available in each circle of this district. In every circle, there is one Circle Office and
Assistant Settlement Office.

On the other hand, there are 14 Block Development Offices in this district,
which deal with all the works sponsored by District Rural Development (DRDA)
Agency and Project given by State and Central Government.
Moreover, for the all round development of the people, Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Fishery Office, Agriculture Office, Welfare Office for Scheduled Castes, Tribes and Backward Classes, Office of the Food and Civil Supplies, Settlement Office, Schools Inspector Office, District Elementary Education Office and Tax Collector Offices have been established in the District Headquarters with branches of each of it in their sub-divisional and circle level.