A BRIEF PROFILE OF THE DISTRICT OF NAGAON:

1.0. Historical Background:

The present district of Nagaon is one of the historically famous districts in the state of Assam of north-east India. It became the easy target of the Burmese during their invasions in the state in the late 17th century. In the year 1826, after the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo¹ this part of the province came under the British who made it a separate administrative unit in the year 1832. The British took some years to finally settle it down on the bank of the river Kolong and to declare Nagaon as a district headquarters in 1839. It gradually emerged as a town and later became a municipality in 1893. The district was earlier known as Nowgong which later changed into Nagaon (Na meaning new and Gaon as village in Assamese). Hence the name Nagaon stands for a 'new village'.

1.1. Organization of the District:

Situated on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, the district is divided into three distinctive civil sub divisions, Nagaon, Hojai and Koliabor. There are around 7 towns in the district, Nagaon topping the list with a majority of population constituting both the rural and urban areas. It has around 10 revenue circles, 18 development blocks and 240 grām (village) panchayats. There are a total of 6 urban areas namely, Lumding, Hojai, Lanka, Dhing, Raha including Nagaon. Koliabor, a sub-divisional town of the district is situated at a distance of 48 kms. approximately to the east of Nagaon. This place is historically famous as initially it was the headquarters of the Barphukans during the Ahom rule and in the later period several battles were fought against the Muslim invaders here. Dhing is a small town located at a distance of 25 kms approximately, to the north west of Nagaon town. Under the Assam Panchayat Raj Act, 1959, Nagaon too has a panchayati-raj system at the rural level. It has a Gaon Panchayat, Anchalik Panchayat and Mahakuma Parishad at the village, block and the sub-divisional level respectively. These have

¹ A peace treaty signed between the British and the Burmese which ended the first Anglo-Burmese war. It was signed on February 24.1826.
been instrumental in formulating plans for rural development of the district. There is also an urban statutory body i.e. the Municipality Board in Nagaon catering to the urban needs.

1.2. Geographic Features and Boundaries:

Nagaon, a district centrally located in the state of Assam in North-East India, is estimated to be one of the largest districts in the state. It extends at a latitudinal stretch of 250-45' to 260-45' North and 920-33' 6" East longitude. It has covered a total geographical area of 3,831 sq. km approximately.² Mostly covered by thick forests and fertile lands, the mighty river Brahmaputra flows along the northern border of the district. Its major tributaries flowing through the district are the Kapili and Kolong. Kolong, the major tributary divides the district into Nagaon and Haiborgaon. Nagaon is bounded by the district of Sonitpur and the Brahmaputra in the North, West Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills in the south, East Karbi Anglong and the district of Golaghat in the east and the district of Marigaon to the west. The National Highways 36 and 37 intersect the district.

1.3. Demographic Profile:

Nagaon has a population of a heterogeneous nature. According to 2011 census report, the total population of the district is 2823768 with sex ratio 962/1000. The density per square kilometer is 711. While the majority of the population in the district comprises Hindus (the Vaisnava community being a majority within it), there are several other groups belonging to different religious denominations. There is a sizeable number of illegal settlers migrating from the erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh, strewn mostly in Hojai, Kampur and Dhing circles of the district, who have been a major issue of concern for the original inhabitants. They have gained access to the district at different periods of time. The tribal population comprising communities like Tiwa, Bodo-Kachari, and Karbi has made a considerable presence in the district. Majority among them are Hindus, while some groups adopted Christianity.

1.4. Religion and culture:

Bardowa, the birth-place of the Vaisnava saint and reformer is situated in Nagaon. It has been attracting a quantitatively large number of the population and has become a major tourist spot in recent years. This may be another reason of housing a good number of Satras- the seat of Vaisnava learning and cultural development which are scattered in almost whole of the district except Hojai. In recent years it has become one of the culturally affluent districts of Assam centering round Vaisnava religion and heritage. However religious traditions belonging to other sects of Hinduism as well as Islam and Christianity have also sizeable number of followers in the district. There is a remarkable presence of the Assamese Sikh community in some areas like Chaparmukh and Lanka. Several other institutions born outside the ambit of Sattriya tradition which have grown prominence in the district recently are the Ek-Saran Bhāgavati Samaj, Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva Sangha, Krishnaguru Sewāshrama etc.

1.5. Human resource development:

The district is a semi-urban conglomerate of mainly an agricultural population. After independence development in the sector of education starting from the primary to higher education substantially increased in the district with the establishment of colleges in the urban as well as rural areas. Simultaneously schools for both secondary and primary education are there in all parts of the district to cater to the growing needs of the population. Schools and colleges at private initiatives have also been set up in different areas. While these educational institutions have been serving the purpose of spreading education, they are creating employment opportunities for the people in the district and are creating an environment for education and knowledge dissemination. There is no university so far to have been set up in the district and people mostly go for higher education to the universities in Guwahati, Tezpur and Dibrugarh. Preparations are afoot to start a university inscribed in the name of Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva, the great saint, preacher, poet and philosopher of medieval Assam under the aegis of Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva Sangha, a religious and socio-cultural organization of the state.

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As per the survey, there is no evidence of any Satras in Hojai division. The local inhabitants are mostly the Bengali-Hindus and minority Muslim population, as such I found more Hindu temples and mosques scattered in the area than any Vaisnava Satras.
People inhabiting the rural areas of the district are mostly the farmers and cultivators making the optimum utilization of the human resource. Small scale business enterprises are gradually cropping up in the rural areas. However, influx of illegal immigrants and encroachment of lands have become a major issue in the district in recent years.

1.6. Agriculture and economy:

Economically considered to be rich, the district has fertile alluvial lands suitable for cultivation. According to the statistical record of 2007-08, the permanent pasture and other grazing land is estimated at 5966 area in hectare (equal to 10,000 sq.mts). The Muslim population is concentrating more on agriculture and land based activities rather than the indigenous Hindus. Apart from agriculture, cottage industries such as handloom and weaving, pottery, jute, cane and bamboo are developing at a rapid pace and have been validating a major boost to the market-economy. While a majority of the population is concentrated on agriculture mainly cultivation of rice, there are other sectors which have generated a wholesome economy. These include pisciculture, apiary, sericulture, tea cultivation, poultry farming etc. Moreover, almost every Assamese house-hold, particularly in the rural front of the district traditionally has handloom apparatus and is engaged largely in the art of weaving. Of late wood carving and wood-cut work have taken a place in the modern economy. This has engrossed into the export and import business replenishing the economy of the district.