

CHAPTER – IV

ETHNOGRAPHY HISTORY CULTURE AND ECONOMY OF THE REGION

4.1 Ethnography of Assam

Assam is situated in the North-East corner of India and is aptly described as the land of the “Red River and Blue Hills”. The mighty river Brahmaputra dominates the whole of the Assam valley and the blue hills intersect most part of the state with their evergreen forest and blue haze. This land is the home to a variety of exotic flora and fauna including the famous one-horned rhinoceros.

Assam is the meeting place of various races and tribes. Long before the coming of the Aryans to India, millennium before Christ, this ancient land of Assam was inhabited by a people whom the scholars call “Austriacs” or Asutric-Asiatics” as they migrated from the Austronesian and other islands of the Pacific Ocean to the Asiatic mainland. The tribes of the Mongoloid stock probably entered Assam long after the coming of the Austriacs. It is said that the Tibeto-Burman tribes of the Mongoloid race were followed by the great Bodo tribe. The earliest literature of ancient India, the Mahabharata mentions Assam as the land of *Mlechechas* and the *Asuras*, that is a non-Aryan country. In the age of Mahabharata, this part of the country was called ‘pragjyotisa’. It was however, known as ‘Kamrupa’ to the ‘Puranas’ and the *yogini* ‘*Tantras*’. Ancient Pragjyotisa or Kamrupa came into contact with Aryan civilization and culture at a very early age as historically this border land had been the most easterly acquisition of the early invaders. In the later part of the twelfth century A.D., the Muhammadans embarked on the conquest of the northern India. However, this eastern land was hardly affected by the Muslim invaders. In the thirteenth century, the Muhammadans invaded Kamrup three times but each time they were beaten back by the Ahoms who entered Assam through the eastern gate across the Patkai range and ruled this state for about six hundred years. The admixture of distinctive

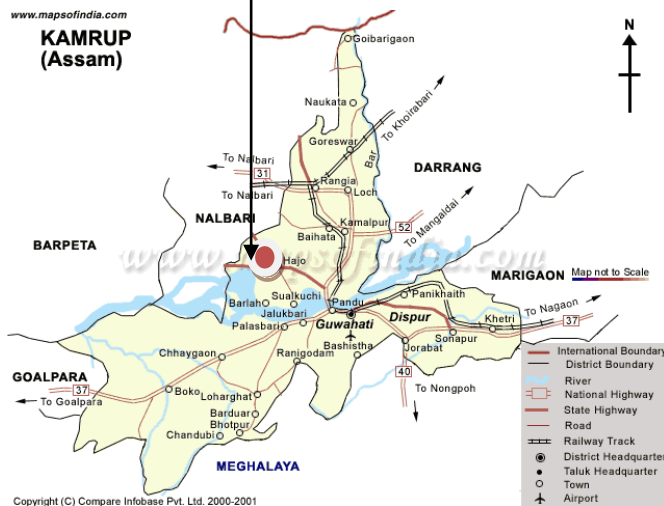
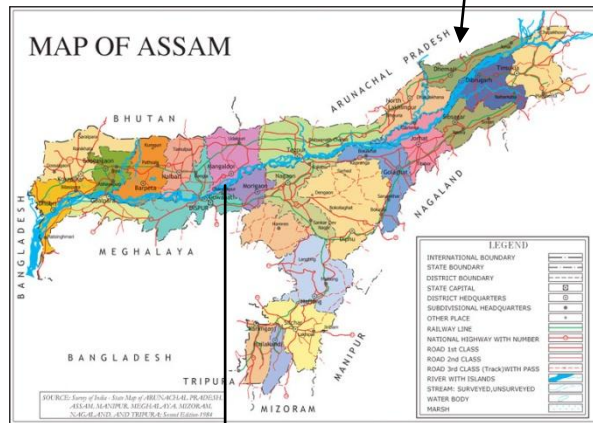
and diversified cultures of different races and tribes who settled in this part of the country built the great Assamese race.

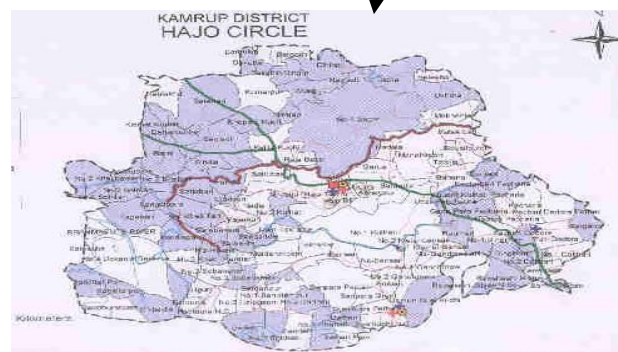
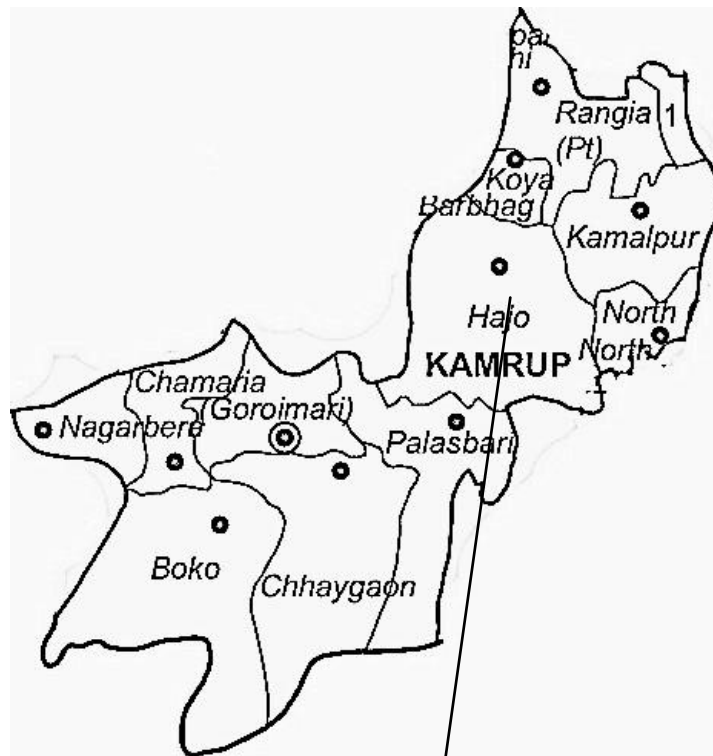
The beginning of Assamese language is traced to the '*charyapadas*' dating back to 10th century. It was during 13th to 14th century that Assamese written literature flourished. In the 16th century, prose literature reached glorious heights. Modern Assamese literature as is prevalent today has its origin in the 19th century.

In the 15th century A.D., noted religious reformers Sri Sankardeva and his close disciple Sri Madhabdeva brought about a renaissance in the field of religion through their preaching and they were the pioneers in the field of socio-cultural reforms in Assam. They preached '*Ek Sarana Dharma*', which embraced all its devotees irrespective of caste and creed. The Satra system which is the innovation of Sri Sankardeva, had been occupying the position of nerve centre in Assamese society. The *Bhawana*, *Ankianat*, *Bargeet*, *Ojapali* etc, written by these two religious reformers also contributed immensely to the Assamese literature and culture occupying a distinctive class of pride in India.

Assam is a land of rich potentialities and is full of mineral resources and other raw materials but these resources and other raw materials have to a great extent remained unexploited. One of the major industries in Assam is that of the "one bud and two leaves", viz, tea industry. It is for this reason that Assam is known as 'the land of tea'. Assam contributed more than 33% percent of the world output of tea. It is also rich in oil and coal. Cottage industry is carried in a traditional manner in almost every household. The skill in the art of weaving and spinning is always held to be one of the highest attainments of an Assamese woman. Assam promises a bright future provided proper and due impetus is given in harnessing the rich resources of the state. (Assam State Gazetteer Vol.1. pp.1-2)

Map of Study Area (Hajo Circle)





4.2 Origin of the Name Assam

Opinions differ as to the origin of the name Assam. Some think it is an anglicized form of the Assamese word Asam meaning 'unequal', 'peerless' a term by which the Ahoms' or the Shan invaders were called by the local people. Its several variants such as Asaam, Aasam, Asam and Acam are noticed in Assamese literature. Some are of the opinion that the word is derived from Asama in the sense of "uneven" as distinguished from Samatata or "even". It is certain that the name nowhere occurs prior to the Ahom occupation of the country, and the name was applied to the Ahoms rather than to their country. E.A. Gait however, opines that the Ahoms called themselves Tai, as it is not clear how they came to be known by their present name. It is also suggested that the word shan, or its variants syam or siam are all derived from a common word. The Assamese historical tradition says that the name Asam in the sense of 'unequal' has been applied to the Tai conquerors by the local tribes when the former entered the Brahmaputra valley in the thirteenth century. Later Asam was given a Sanskrit derivation with the meaning "unequal" or "unrivalled". Suniti Kumar Chatterjee suggests that Ahom comes from Rhwam, a term by which the Burmese called the shan or the Tai people. B.K. Kakati thinks that Asam as applied to the shans is a hybrid formation of Assamese privative prefix A with the Tai word sham meaning "to be defeated" and hence Acham means "undefeated". (Assam State Gazetteer Vol.1, pp: 2-3)

4.3 Area and Population

Assam is a state of heterogeneous population with socio-cultural and ethnic diversity. According to the census of India 2011, the population of Assam stands at 31205576 lakh of which 159.39 lakh are males and 152.66 lakh are females. The decadal growth of the states population works out at 17.07 percent during the decade 2001-2011 as against 17.68 percent for the country as a whole. Out of the 312.06 lakh population, 86 percent population live in rural areas and 14 percent population live in urban areas of the state. While the percentage of the rural population in the state stands much higher compared to All-India average (69

percent) the proportion of urban population in the state has increased from 12.9 percent in 2001 to 14 percent in 2011. (Census Report India 2011)

The density of the population of Assam has increased to 398 persons in 2011 from 340 persons in 2001 census or on an average, 58 more people inhabit every square kilometer in the state as compared to a decade ago. The sex ratio of Assam has increased to 958 female per 1000 male in 2011 from 935 in 2001. (Census Report of India 2011)

The present state of Assam is bounded by hills on all sides, except the south-west and west, where its shares are common borders with Bangladesh. In the west, there is a narrow corridor connecting the state with the northern part of the state of West Bengal. The mighty Himalayas bound Assam in the north. Bhutan and the state of Arunachal Pradesh made up the main Himalayan tracts in the north. The patkai ranges, stretching down from the northeast, girdle Assam on the eastern side. Besides a part of Arunachal Pradesh, the states of Nagaland and Manipur make up the eastern borders of Assam. Mizoram lies in the extreme south, beyond the Barak plains of Chachar and Karimganj district of Assam. The hilly state of Meghalaya lies to the south of the western part of Brahmaputra plains of Assam.

Assam occupies a strategically vital position in Northeast India. It is situated between latitudes 24° to 28° N and longitudes $89^{\circ}42'$ to $96^{\circ}30'E$. Of the total area 78,438 sq. kilometers 15,322 sq. kilometers is covered by the two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.

The plains region of Assam is broadly divided into the Brahmaputra valley and the Barak valley. The Brahmaputra valley is further divided into three socio-geographical parts of Upper Assam, Middle Assam and Lower Assam. Upper Assam covers the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat. The districts of Nagaon, Morigaon, Sonitpur, Darrang and Udalguri may be placed in Middle Assam since these lie in the central stretch of Brahmaputra valley. Lower Assam consists of Kamrup (Metro),

Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang, Dhubri and Goalpara district. Upper, Middle and Lower are the terms used to connect the course of the mighty Brahmaputra flowing from the extreme north east to the west. These terms also imply distinctive cultural regions in the context of Assam. The Barak valley comprises the districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj. Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao are the only two hill districts.

The total population of Assam, according to the 2011 census is 312,05576. Two dominant racial elements are to be found in the population of Assam: The Caucasoid and the Mongoloid (Das B.M. 1985:1) The Caucasoid type is represented by the caste Hindu people, some professional caste and the Assamese Muslims. Brahmin who traditionally formed a priestly caste, *Kayastha*, *kalita*, *Keot*, *Rajbongshi*, *Jugi*, *Kaibarta*, *Hira*, *Kumar*, *Saloi* etc. are some of the Hindu caste of Assam. The Mongoloid of Assam includes mainly the Ahoms, Bodo-Kacharis, Rabhas, Tiwas, Karbis, Misings Deoris, chutiyas, Morans and the Tai or shan groups like the Tai-phake, Khamti, Aiton, Turung and the Khamyang. (Das B.M. 1985:1) (Daye 8-11)

Moreover, during the British rule when many tea gardens were started in Assam, various tribal groups from Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, etc. migrated to Assam to work in the tea-gardens. In the course of time, many of their descendents accepted the Assamese language and culture to some extent and they now form an integral part of the present Assamese population.

4.4 Kamrup - Brief history of the district

The present district of Kamrup originally formed as a part of the kingdom of Kamrupa. From available evidences, its chronology can be traced from Naraka and Bhagadatta. Naraka established his capital at Pragjyotishpur, the Guwahati of today. He was powerful, prosperous and head strong. There is an interesting legend associated with him. The legend says that he wanted to marry Kamakhya and the goddess gave her consent on the condition that he would construct for her a temple, a road and a tank in a single night. He took up the challenge and was

about to complete his task when Kamakhya made a cock crow before the usual hour. In his rage, Narak killed the cock at a place about 10 kms from Guwahati which since then has been known as Kukurakata. Narak's name is also remembered as one of the protestors of Kamakhya and the builders of the causeway up the Southern face of the Nilachal hill where the present Kamakhya temple stands. Kamrup which formed a part of a powerful kingdom was ruled by a chain of non-Aryan princes a thousand years before Christ. Thereafter, for many centuries nothing certain is known about the history of the district.

Some copper plates of the eleventh century after Christ show that Narak was displayed by Chalastambha, a Mecha or foreign conqueror whose live ended in the person of Sriharsha. Sriharsha was succeeded by a family of foreign princes, the first of whom was Pralambha and the last Tyagsingh. Narak was restored in the person of Brahma pala. Brahma pala was succeeded by his son, Ratna pala who in turn was succeeded by his son, Indra pala. Thereafter the history of the pala kings remained in obscurity.

After the disappearance of the palas, the Koch dynasty founded by a mech named Viswa Singh entered the scene. Viswa, after subdividing the petty princes, founded a magnificent city in Coach Bihar. This king visited Nilachal where he was shown a mound said to contain a deity. He offered prayers and his prayers were granted at once and he accordingly had the mound explored when the ruins of an old temple was discovered. A new temple was then erected there. He was succeeded by his son. Malla Deva in 1534 AD. He assumed the name of Nara Narayan. He subdued the Ahom king, the Kachari Raja and the Raja of Manipur. He slew the kings of Jaintia, Tripura and Sylhet. The Koch kings were later on defeated by the Muslim Subedar of Bengal and Guwahati because the capital of the Muslim Governor. The Ahom, who was earlier defeated by the Muslim and were driven out of Kamrup, under the leadership of Ahom Raja Joydhvaj Singha drove the Muslims in 1658. In 1662, Mir Jumla the new Subedar of Bengal drove away the Ahoms from Kamrup and occupied Guwahati and Mohammedan Fouzdar was posted there. After the departure of the Muslims Guwahati was

captured by Gadadhar Singha in 1681 AD and from this time onward Kamrup became part of Ahom territories administered by a Viceroy stationed at Guwahati.

Gadadhar Singha was the first king to definitely annex Kamrup to the Ahom territories. He was succeeded in 1695 AD by Rudra Singha. It was during his reign that the Ahoms reached the zenith of their power. When he died at Guwahati in 1714 AD, his son erected the Rudreswar Temple in his memory. From the middle of the eighteenth century the Ahom power began to decline. Lakshmi Singha's reign from 1769 to 1780 witnessed the Moamaria insurrection which was cruelly dealt with. He was succeeded by Gauri Nath Singh in 1780 in whose reign the Moamaria insurrection broke out with increased violence. When Gauri Nath Singha died in 1765 he was succeeded by his son, Kamaleswar Singha in whose reign the Daflas made an inroad on the Ahom territories and put them in great disorder. He was succeeded by his brother, Chandra Kanta Singha in 1809. He was deposed in 1816 and Purandar Singha was appointed in his place. He was reinstated by the Burmese whom he has appealed for help. They soon made it clear that they intend to retain their hold in Assam. Under the Burmese's oppression and tyranny, Chandra Kumar Singha fled to Goalpara wherefrom he attempted to recover his lost kingdom. In the meantime, quarrel arose between the British and the Burmese and under the former pressure the later evacuated Guwahati without striking a blow. Under the treaty of Yandaboo, 1826, Assam was finally ceded to the East India company. (Kamrup Village and Town Directory, 1991, pp. 8-10)

4.4.1 Physiography

The Kamrup district has undergone tremendous jurisdictional changes during the last decade. By notification No. GAG. 211/83/4 dated 14.06.1983, she lost her Barpeta subdivision which had been her subdivision since March, 1841. Again, by notification No. GAG(B) 46/84/33 dated 10.08.1985, she was robbed of her Nalbari subdivision which had been her subdivision since 01.04.1967. By another notification No. GAG. 534/83/38 dated 28.02.1984, the Beltola Mouza comprising 7 villages and the Panbari Mouza consisting of 19 villages were taken

away from her to form part of the newly formed district of pragjyotishpur with a temporary headquarter at Chandrapur. But by Notification No. GAG(B) 301/84/116 dated 20.02.28 the Pragjyotishpur district was converted into a subdivision of the Kamrup district with headquarter at Chandrapur. With this conversion, Kamrup regained her two lost Mouza as well as the Mayang Mouza with 12 villages of the district of Morigaon. The district at present comprises of 2 subdivisions, Rangia and Guwahati. Rangia was formed as a subdivision of the district vide Notification No. GAG. 312/22/47 dated 03.08.1983 and 15 Revenue Circles. It also has 17 C.D. Blocks. (Kamrup Village and Town Directory)

As it stands at present, the district is bounded in the east by Morigaon and Darrang district. In the north Bhutan, in the west by Nalbari, Barpeta and Goalpara districts and in the south by Meghalaya.

Topographically, the district is bisected from east to west by the Brahmaputra. The northern portion runs in a strip of land from the north bank of the Brahmaputra right to the Bhutan border. The district is generally a great plain comprising a few elevated tracts lying along the Bhutan hills in the north and the Khasi hills in the south. In the north of the district, the ground undulates considerably so much so that the edge of the plain is not easily defined. In the south of the Brahmaputra the plain is broken up by hills. The land from swampy tracts rises up to a height of 3000 feet above the sea level. All the hills are covered with grass, bamboos and forests among them sal is the most important one.

The northern portion of the district is being watered by 2 important rivers the puthimari and the Baralai. While the puthimari, which originates from Bhutan hills, enters the district near Hajo and is known as Lakhaitara, the Baralia, which also originated from the Bhutan hills, flows down southward along the Nalbari-Kamrup border, near Tamulpur it is known as Suple. The southern portion of the district is being dissected by many rivers, the Kulsi, the Singra, the Boko the Digaru, the Basistha and the Bharalu. All the rivers originates in Meghalaya and empty themselves into the Brahmaputra.

Geographically the hills in the southern boundary of the district and those isolated ones on both banks of the Brahmaputra are all composed of gneissic rocks of Archaean age. This group is represented by a complex of older and younger gneisses being intimately mixed up, banded, folded and later intruded by granites, apolites and quartz vein of comparatively younger ages. The portion is covered by undulating hills and as it runs northward reaches the alluvial plain of the Brahmaputra.

The northern boundary of the district runs along the edge of alluvial plains teaching the Bhutan foothills. The hills are represented by a group of Siwalik Sediments consisting of clays, sand-stone, and grits conglomerated with pieces of fossil wood and lignites. Archaean gneissic rocks lie exposed amidst recent alluvium deposited by the Brahmaputra. In the extreme northern part of the district, exposures of Siwalik and Tertiary rocks occur. On the whole the district is covered with recent alluvium. (Village and Town Directory, 1991, pp. 8-10)

4.4.2 Population

As per the latest census report of 2011, out of the 27th districts of Assam, Kamrup is having the 2nd highest number of population. The total population of the district Kamrup (Rural) is 1517542 of which 1375148 (90.64 percent) are rural and 12394 (9.36 percent) are urban population. In Kamrup (M), the total population is 1253938 of which 216927 (7.10 percent) are rural and 1037011 (82.90 percent) are urban population with a decadal growth rate of (15.69 percent) in Kamrup (R) and (18.34 percent) in Kamrup (M) during 2001-2011. Out of the total population of the district 778461 are male and 739081 are female in Kamrup (R). in Kamrup (M) 647585 are Male and 606353 are female. Again 87.89 percent of the total population is literate of which 92.50 percent are Male and 83.14 percent are Female in the census of 2011. In Kamrup (M) total literacy rate is 90.77 percent of which 93.55 is Male and 87.78 Female in the census report of 2011. The density of population in the districts is 570 per km with sex ratio being 946 and 922 respectively for Kamrup (R) and Kamrup (M). out of total population 107827 are scheduled castes (SC) of which 55237 are Male and 52590 are female

in Kamrup (R) district. And in the Kamrup (M) out of total population 101789 are scheduled castes of which 52106 are male and 49683 are female. 75121 population are belongs to the (ST) groups of which 37902 are male and 37219 are female in Kamrup (M).

Being the capital district of Assam, Kamrup attracts a large number of people from within and outside the state for various administrative purposes, trade and commerce and for many other services. Almost of all administrative commercial and political head-quarters of Assam are situated in their district. Guwahati, the capital city as well as the nerve centre of Assam and the gateway to the north-eastern region, is functioning as administrative head-quarter of the district. (Census Report of India, 2011)

As per the census Report India 2011 the Kamrup (R) district has 1068 villages and 146 Gaon panchayats. It has sixteen communities development Block. And in Kamrup (M) number of villages are 216, 14 gaon panchayats.

4.4.3 Climate

The climate of the Kamrup district can be divided into two main categories, namely, hot and humid summer and cool and dry winter. Further, climatically the year may be divided into four distinct seasons viz, winter, spring, summer and autumn.

The winter is the period between mid-November to February. This period is dry with temperature varying between 9⁰C and 12⁰C. The pleasant winter weather is occasionally visited by mild showers and frequent morning.

The spring season continues from the beginning of March to mid-May. This is the pre-monsoon season when rainfall occurs as a result of North western cyclonic winds.

The summer season starts from mid May to Mid September. Monsoon bursts in the middle of June and thereafter heavy rainfall starts which may continue for three or four days and sometimes for a week. But the sky remains

overcast with clouds for most of the days during summer. When there is no rainfall, then temperature raises very high and drought conditions may prevail in the absence of rainfall for a long period. However, temperature drops in a rainy and cloudy days.

4.4.4 Forestry

The district is rich in forest resources. Its main forest wealth are *Sal*, *Sissoo*, *Simul*, *Khoir* etc. Out of total, 1049.69 Sq. Kms is under reserved forests and 243.43 Kms is under proposed reserved forest. The forest area forms 27.32% of the total geographical area of the district.

4.4.5 Flora and Fauna

The district is rich in forest resources. Her main forest wealth are *sal*, *sissoo*, *simul*, *khoir* etc. The area under reserved forests is 1049.69 kms and that under proposed reserved forests, 243.43 kms. The forests area forms 27.32% of the total geographical area of the district. There are many reserved forests in the district. The reserved fall under two Forest Divisions, Kamrup East and Kamrup West.

The Districts is also rich in fauna. Animal like elephant, tiger, bear and deer are found in the forest areas. From some of the *mahals*, elephants are exported outside Assam. There are also a variety of birds both sedentary and migratory found in the beels and swamps of the region.

4.5 Industry

Going by the number of registered factories, Kamrup can be said to be the most industrialized district of Assam. Guwahati, the gateway of the entire northeastern region, is the biggest industrial centre in the state besides being the biggest commercial centres. There is an Oil Refinery in the district located in Guwahati. An Industrial Estate was also set up in the city.

4.6 Sericulture

Sericulture is an age-old rural industry in Assam. It is as old as the Assamese tradition. It provides large-scale part time occupation to the rural people in their off agricultural season. This industry needs the minimum investment, cost and labour. The popular costly and durable *endi* and *muga* of Assam are the products of this industry.

To promote this industry, three (3) *Muga* Farms were established in the district. They are at Khanapara, Kahibama and Bhakatpaara. *Eri* Seed Grainage were also set up at Barduar, Tapatily and Goreswar. Besides, *Eri* concentration Centre were also started in Rataanpur, Longkhona and Gormow. Gurmow *Eri* concentration centre was set in 1986. Mulberry Gardens were started at Shakhati, Gandhinagar and Ratanpur. *Eri* Spining Centres were opened at Ratanpur, Barduar and Goreswar. Barduar and Goreswar centres were opened in 1985 and 1984 respectively. There are 489 Seri Villages in the district out of which, 270 villages are under *Eri* 114 villages under *Muga* and 105 villages under Mulberry. The number of families engaged in sericulture is 10494 out of which, 7105 families are engaged in *Eri*, 3051 families in *Muga* and 338 families in Mulberry.

4.7 Handloom and Textiles

Weaving is one of the most common industries in Assam. Weaving in Assam has its own intrinsic and distinct characteristics. Those products which are used only on special occasions are delicately weaved with exquisite beauty, dainty designs, delightful colours and unscrupulous durability. The artistic genius of the weaver reflects on the products of the weaver.

To promote this fast dying industries due to strong competition from the mill-made cloth, the government have set up seven (7) Handloom Training Centres, one (1) Handloom Production Centre, one (1) Handloom Development Centre and 1 Powerloom Training centre in the district. The number of looms modernized is 465 and the number of worksheds constructed is 126. During 1999-

2000 there were 192602 handlooms with 188945 weavers in the district. During the same period 9.69 million sq. meters of cloth weaved.

4.8 Transport

The district is well connected by road, railway and air. The biggest and busiest railway station in the entire northern region is located in Guwahati. The International airport in the North-Eastern region is also located in the district. The headquarter of the North-East Frontier Railway is situated in the district. Important long distance trains to Jammu Tawai, New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Cochin, Trivandrum, Kolkata etc originates from Guwahati. Long distance buses to different parts of the North-East region and as far as Siliguri and perhaps Kolkata originates from Guwahati. The district is being transverse from East to West by the National Highway (NH-37). The NH-37 and 52 originates in the district. The mighty Brahmaputra flows through the district from East to West and provides a very important means of water transport. There are ferry services between Guwahati on the one hand and Rajaduar, North Guwahati, Kurna and Madhyamkhanda on the other, between Pandu and Amingaon and between Palasbari and Sualkuchi.

According to the Assam Statistical Handbook, 2010, the district had a total road length of 1861 kilometers out of which 564 kilometers is surfaced, 1247 kilometers is graveled and 50 kilometers is earthened. Out of a total road length of 1861 kilometers, 187 kilometers is National Highway, 89 kilometers is State Highway and 1585 kilometers is other PWD roads.

4.9 Trade and Commerce

By and large Kamrup is one of the most important district in terms of trade and commerce. In fact it is second to none. Guwahati is the chief centre of trade and commerce in the district, besides being the gateway of the centre north-eastern region. The district exports bales of raw jute, tea in chests, Assam *endi* silk and *muga* cloth. The items imported to the district are usually gunny bags, cotton cloth and yarns, woolen cloth and yarn, mustard oil, mustard seeds, groundnut,

linseeds, wheat, pulses, sugar, salt, medicine, fish, milk in tins, baby foods, leather goods, cement and iron material, vehicles and other accessories, electrical goods, vegetables etc. the district abounds in important retail marketing centres. A tea Auction Centre has also been operated in Guwahati during the eighties. (Village and Town Directory, Kamrup, pp.8-20)

4.10 Hajo – History, Culture and Economy

Hajo is a revenue circle having 137 villages with an area of 269449 Bigha 19 Lessa. It has two community development blocks namely Hajo Development Block and the Sualkuchi Development Block. There are 137 villages and 24 Gaon Panchayats under the circle. The total population of Hajo circle is 2,20,666 lakhs of which 1,14,026 lakhs are male and 1,06,638 lakhs are female. Out of the total population 1,49,961 lakhs are literate of which 83,461 are male and 66,500 are females. The total illiterate population is 70,703 of which 30,565 are male and 40,138 are female. (According to the Census Report, 2011)

Hajo is a semi-urban area. It is one of the Revenue circle under Kamrup (R) district having an area of 269449 Bigha and 19 Lessa. A cradle of ancient glories with the temple of Hayagriv Madhab, supposed originally to be a Buddhist one and the Powa Mocca a suffi shrine, the holiest of the holy palces for the Muslims of the eastern region for it being the crematorium of one Giasuddin Aulia, a preacher of Islam in Assam during the 13th century, both overlooking each other from two hills tops as symbols of Hindu-Muslim amity and unity. Hajo is situated at a distance of 35 kms to the west of Gauhati on the north bank of the Kamrup district. It is linked by PWD roads which runs eastward to Gauhati, northward to Nalbari, Westward to Barpeta and southward to Sualkuchi. According to the census of 2011 it had a population of 2,62,104 consisting of 52,413 families. Of the total population 1,40,890 are male and 1,27,332 are female. the total literate population is 1,84,259 of which 1,01,435 are male and 82,824 are female.

Hajo an ancient place of immense historical importance is a living example of integration. It is one of the most interesting places in Assam and perhaps the only place in the state where one may find shrines and temples dedicated to Vishnu, Siva, Durga, the Buddha and a Muslim saint. It is the confluence of three major religious orders of the world – Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. People belonging to each of the religious orders consider Hajo as a sacred place. Hajo was under the rule of different royal powers from early period of history to the late medieval period. It was an important seat of rule of three powerful royal camps of medieval Assam, i.e. the Kochs, Mughals and the Ahoms. The Hayayriba Madhab temple is one of the oldest temples of the country. The temple which is situated on a small hillock, Monikut, is a unique architectural marvel. Far from the madding crowd, the temple is a place of peace, serenity and heavenly bliss. Hajo's historical importance is quiet interesting. This peaceful hamlet, as it stands today, was a capital of the Koch Dynasty Raghudev, the son of the legendary Koch hero Chilarai and the nephew of king Naranarayana of Kochbehar, established a separate Koch kingdom with Hao as its capital during the sixteen (16th) century. The kingdom of Koch Hajo covered a vast area covering Goalpara North Kamrup and a portion of the eastwhile Darrang district. Its eastern border Barnali river down to the Sonkosh river on the west. The present day Mangoldoi subdivision was once a part of the then Koch Hajo alternated between the Koches, the Mughals and the Ahoms. However, it was under continuous occupation of the Mughals from 1639 to 1658.

Hajo is known in different names in the different phases of its ever changing history. In the 11th century AD Hajo was described in the Kalika purans as Apurnabhava and Manikuta. In the 14th century AD Hajo is called Bishnupuskar and described in the *yoginitantra*, while in the 18th century it was described as *Manikutgram* as found in the Darrang Rajbongshabali by one Surjyakhari Daivagya. During the Ahom period, Hajo was known in its present name 'Hajo'. The histories written in the period make abundant mention of Hajo, while during the Mughal period it was known as Sujabad or Sujanagar. Ananta Kandali, one of the illustrious Vaishnavite poets of Assam called Hajo in its

present name. Scholars and linguists hold different options regarding the name of Hajo. Some of them associate Hajo with ‘Haj’, the most sought after pilgrimage of the Muslim community to Mocca, being in most cases once-in-a-lifetime affair. Dr. Banikanta Kakati suspects Hajo to be a Bodo place name ‘Ha’ means land in Bodo, ‘Gojou’ means high. “Ha-gojou’ come to be known as Hajo. We can add one popular legends connected with the name of Hajo. People professing Buddhism often lend to believe that Gautam Buddha died in Hajo. His death painted his disciples, who in their painful ecstasy said ‘Ha-ju’ meaning the setting of the sun. a section of scholars believed that there are abundant circumstantial evidences to establish that Hajo is named after the Mech king Haju who probably ruled in the 15th century.

Yogitantra, Markandeya purana Darrang Rajbonsawali and almost every religious writing make mention of Hajo with high tone praises. Ananta Kandali wrote verses in praise of the place –

Hajo hena nam *Pabitra uttam*
Than Kamrup maje
Manikut giri *Sikharate ache*
Hayagriba Devaraje
Kashate louhitya *Bahanta pabitra*
Kundya ache sehi than
Apurnabhava nahi *Punarjanma*
Tahate Korile snana
Gokarnarupa *Deva gangadhara*
Murti dhorit acha tat
Jak sote tal *Rabane kalita*
Adyapi dekhi sakshat

Girir Upar

Lingarup dhor

Acha hara Kameswar

Kedar kamal

Lingarupa dhor

Acha jata Harihar

In this poem the reknowned pre-vaishnavite Assamese Poet, Ananta kandali has presented a graphic description of Hajo as a holy shrine.

As has been stated in the poem, Hajo is a holy place located in Kamrup, Assam. On the crest of the hill, there lies the temple of Hayagriba Madhaba an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. By the side of Hajo flows the sacred river Brahmaputra. As people believe, in the pond of Madhaba named as Apurnabhaha or Bishnupuskar, one single bath in the pond makes one free from all sins and from re-birth. Another image of God exist in Hajo, name Gokarna as the folk called it Deva Gangadhara. It is located on a high-seven storied- building like altar. Ravana, the king of Lanka when happened to see it, tried to demolish it. But the temple as well as the God of the temple was seen there after intact. On the top hill there also lies the Phallus image, the representation of Lord Shiva, the third person of the Hindu trinity, (three Gods). Hajo is thus a holy place and has been famous since ancient time. This place resembles the perfect union of Hara, meaning 'Shiva' and 'Hari' meaning Krishna or Vishnu.

Thus Hajo has been described as one of the most pilgrimage place where the 'panchatirtha' of Hinduism i.e. Hayagriba Madhaba, Kedar, Kameswar, Kamaleswar and the temple of Ganesha, Gokarna, Bikarna, Apurnabhaha, swarayduwar, temple of Durga, Bishnupuskar, temple of the God Pakhamela etc. has been situated at the highest pick of India. The holy place of Muslima the Powa Mecca has also been situated at Hajo. It expresses the immense cultural ethnicity among three important religions the Hinduism, Buddhist and the Islam. (www.google.com)

For various industrial works the Hajo has its immense historical importance from very early period. Brass metal industry of Hajo is one of the famous. It was originally in the hands of a section of the Muslims known as Moria who might have come along with the Mughal invading armies and settled there in a locality known as *Moria* patty, now-a-days called Muslim patty. The industry, however, did not remain a monopoly of the Muslims alone, several Hindu families of Bharali Tota had also undertaken it long ago due, probably, to the demonstration effect. Many utensils such as *Sarai*, Bata (raised tray) *Tou* (cooking pot) *charia* (washing bowl) *Lata* (Water vessel) *Kalah* (water vessel of big size), Heta (a ladle), dishes etc. were made of brass from the days immemorial which are used by the Assamese people and the name of Hajo is famous for this industry in the world. Besides this Hajo is also famous for the pottery, fishing, weaving and fishing etc. In pottery works the name of Hajo is associated from very early days. The raw materials in pottery is clay which is dug cut of alluvial soil, generally from the beds of rivers or Beels. In Assam there are two potter castes viz, Hira and Kumar. The Hira caste does not use the potter's wheel and their utensils are not used in religious rites. The Hiras prepare the utensils by beating the clay pieces with the wooden mallet and therefore it is more time consuming or labour intensive. The Kumar's used the potter's wheel Kumar's make clay lamp alongwith other utensils which has a great demand for the worship in the panchatirtha viz, Madhab, Kedar, Kameswar, Kamleswar and the temple of the Ganesh.

The people of Hajo has a great love for flower. This love is related with their aesthetic needs and also their economic benefit. Hence the industry of flower-culture has played a very important role in this region. It has cultural as well as the economic viability. In the region there is a special caste of people called 'Mali' who carried the culture related with flower. They planted flower and tulsi plant in the paddy field. They made garland of various designs to meet the demands of the tourist for worship in the *tirtha* originated here. They made their business in Gauhati also. But now-a-days it is a matter of competition with the flower imported from Kolkata to a large extent.

As mentioned earlier in weaving it is famous from a very early days. Near Hajo Sualkichi is famous for the silk industry in Assam. Its history may be traced back to the days of Kautilya and certainly to the reign of Dharmapal of fourth century who had established his capital on the Godanda hills west to Gauhati.

Hajo is impregnated with number of rivers, tributaries, ponds, hill-streams, beels and other water bodies. These water bodies harbor a rich fish diversity. A large number of endemic fish species have been found in the region. Nearly all the people of this region consume fish; as fish is the only easily available and most popular animal food for the people of this region. Fish and fishing has consolidated an important place in the traditional culture and beliefs of the people of this region. It plays a vital role in moulding the mind of the people towards a rich tradition of conservation of rich fish diversity. Fisherman of this region has traditionally gathered some arranging knowledge in fish behavior and biological indicators in fishery. This body of knowledge has immense importance in the study of fish and fishery management.

Alongwith this there are a lots of indigenious festival in Hajo such as *Charai puja*, *Bulbuli judge*, *Roja Fakuwa* etc. which makes Hajo a place of immense beauty and provide sources of research for the scholars. (Information gathered during field survey)

4.11 Socio-Cultural Background of the selected weaving villages

The design of the sample survey of the present study is presented in this chapter. The survey is conducted covering the weaving villages where handloom weaving is practiced traditionally. A total of fifth important handloom weaving villages have been selected in the entire Hajo Revenue circle. The selected handloom weaving villages are Sualkuchi and Bongsor under Sualkuchi Development Block and Hajo, Ramdia and Bamundi under Hajo Development Block. Following are the few explanation about the representative villages.

Sualkuchi

Sualkuchi is a multi-caste town under Guwahati sub-division of Kamrup district situated on the North bank of the mighty Brahmaputra at a distance of 30 km west of Guwahati. The town is linked with Guwahati by PWD roads and with Palasbari on the south bank by motor boat and country boat. As per 2011 census, the total population of Sualkuchi is 21521 with 4853 households. The literacy rate is 89%.

Having a long tradition of silk weaving at least since the 17th century Sualkuchi is the prime centre of the silk handloom industry of Assam. Although originally it was a 'craft village' having several cottage industries till the forties of the last century such as handloom weaving industry, oil processing in the traditional *ghani*, goldsmith, pottery etc. The industries other than handloom are now almost extinct and the artisans have already taken up silk weaving as a profession. Although the weaving industry of Sualkuchi remained almost confined within the Tanti community of Tantipara up to the 1930, later people becoming to other communities also started to take up silk weaving gradually. Now even the fisherman of the Koibortapara hamlet of Bamun-Sualkuchi and the Brahmin families have also given up their ascriptive caste occupations to a larger extent and they have taken up silk weaving as the main source of income.

The weaving industry of Sualkuchi received a big boost during the Second World War. The growing demand for fabrics and their increasing prices, encouraging a few *tanti* families to introduce weaving commercially and they started weaving factories engaging hired wage weavers. Today the factory system has already been extended to entire Sualkuchi and 8878 percent of the households of the town are being engaged with commercial weaving of handloom. As per report of the census of Handlooms in Sualkuchi conducted in 2002 reveals that Sualkuchi's has 13752 active commercial handlooms, of which 54.75 percent are performed by the women weavers most of which are tribal who are basically hired from the outside of Sualkuchi. Some of the hired wage weavers were originally the local poor from the Bamun-Sualkuchi area of the east and Bhatipara hamlet of

the west, a flow of migrated wage weavers from different parts of Assam has emerged gradually since eighties of the last century and presently migrant weavers are dominating the wage weavers of the town.

One notifying point is that from last three or four year the silk handloom industry of Sualkuchi is suffering for severe labour problem because of which most of the looms of maximum household are remained idle. Another problem suffered by the handloom industry is the high price of yarn. (Data collected on Field survey)

Bongsor

Bongsor is basically an agrarian village, located at a distance of 26 km to the north-west of Guwahati and adjacent to Sualkuchi. The entire area of Bongsor is an assemblage of five revenue villages, which provides residence to both Hindu and Muslim population. The area covered by Bongsor is 10 sq. km. As per the census record by 2011, the size of population in the locality was 6895 of which 1081 were Scheduled Caste (SC) and 499 were Scheduled Tribes (ST) constituting about 16 percent population in the village 88.93 percent were literate.

Bongsor has also a tradition of handloom weaving. Originally handloom weaving in the village was un-organised domestic handwork of mainly *eri* looming by the local women folk as their secondary household chores. However, by the passage of time mainly due to the peripheral effect of Sualkuchi, mulberry and *muga* looms are gradually installed on commercial basis on the village. Commercial weaving has also attracted the male to this sector. The commercial looms are being performed both by local as well as migrated wage weavers. Bongsor has about 1757 commercial handlooms in 629 households and about 56 percent of the total households are having handloom in the village. But recently, the industry has been suffering from labour crisis and for what most of the looms are remained idea. (Data collected during Field survey)

Ramdia

Ramdia is a multi-caste Mouza or Mahal (i.e. second layer of a revenue unit) comprising a number of villages under the Hajo revenue circle under Guwahati sub-division on the north bank of Brahmaputra of Kamrup (R) district situated at a distance of 35 km to the west of Guwahati. Ramdia is inhabited by Hindu and Muslim population living in *Tolas* and *paras* covering an areas of 62 sq. km. As per 2011 census, total population of Ramdia is 22292 with 2838 households. The literacy rate in the locality is 87.66 percent.

Ramdia is an aggregation of five adjoining revenue villages, viz, Majorkuri, Uzankuri, saster Bongaltola and Bongalpara. Like Karanga and Kamarbandha in Sivasagar district and Barpeta in old Kamrup district, Ramdia is also a pocket of the Blacksmith industry carried out by expert artisans generation after generation. It was also famous for the Ghani industry i.e. oil processing either by human or cattle labour in a wooden motor. Ramdia is originally famous for traditional handloom weaving. In every household in Ramdia there is a loom. Each and every girl in Ramdia is a born weaver. But as a peripheral effect of Sualkuchi, the handloom weaving activities in Ramdia is growing up towards commercialisation during the recent decade. In place of one loom in each household at present there are a plentiful of looms in most of the household. Although the wage weavers were originally the local poor, a flow of migrated wage weavers from different parts of Assam has been significant since the eighties of the last century. Ramdia has 3359 commercial handloom of pat and muga fabrics in 2838 households. (Data collected from Weaving office, Ramdia) Of the total weavers being engaged in commercial handloom women constitute 70.05 percent. In the village Bongalpara, where all the villagers belongs to Muslim community silk handloom industry has been showing tremendous growth from the last decades. Distinctive characteristic of this area is that there are hardly any women engaged in the industry. All the weavers and helpers are from male and they come from their own localities. No migrated hired person are required by these owners of loom. (Information based on Data collected from Field survey)

Bamundi

Bamundi is also a multicasite village under Guwahati sub-division of Kamrup district situated on the north bank of Brahmaputra at a distance of 37 km to the west of Guwahati. The village is inhabited by indigeneous Hindu population living in Tolas and Paras covering an area of 10 sq. km. As per 2011 census total population of Bamundi was 5134 with 725 households. As per 2011 census the literacy rate in the villages was 74.89 percent.

The village has a long tradition of domestic *eri* handloom weaving. Women folk of the locality besides rendering their primary household services, are engaged in handloom weaving as their part time work. However by the peripheral effect of Sualkuchi people of this locality are being gradually attracted for commercial weaving of pat and *muga*. A number of commercial weaving factories have already grown with the installation of pat and *muga* looms and thereby the handloom weaving industry is being organized here gradually. Department of Handloom and Textile, Govt. of Assam has already set up a Khadi Utpadan Kendra in Bamundi. Bamundi has 1395 commercial handloom in 615 household, of which about 60.44 percent looms are weaved by the women weavers. Although the women weavers were originally local inhabitants of Bamundi, by the growing commercialization of it in the locality the flow of migrant weavers becomes significant in the years. But recently the industry in this location has been suffering from severe labour problem because of which most of the looms in such areas remains idle from the last few years. During the time of investigation of the present study in the survey areas most of the looms are remained idle because of the crisis of hired person. (Data collected from field survey)

Hajo

It is a semi urban area of 4.01 sq. km. A cradle of ancient flories with the temple of Hayagrib Madhab, supposed originally to be a Buddhist one and the Powa Mocca, Sufi shrine, the holiest of the holy places for the Muslims of the

eastern region for it being the crematorium of one Giasuddin Aulia, a preacher of Islam in Assam during the 13th century, both overlooking each other from two hills tops as symbols of Hindu Muslim amity and unity. In pattern of habitation with ethnic homogeneity and its associated culture and tradition it may be called a big village divided into Tolas and Paras (blocks or wards of a village, inhabited generally by an ethnic group) except a small area called *pakhamela* which gives the look of a town with bus stops, tea stalls and shops. It is however, the seat of the circle office of the sub-Deputy Controller, Police station and Development Block. It also locates the sub-divisional offices of the PWD and Electricity Board. A public Health unit with 30 beds provides medical facilities to the neighbouring population while a govt. higher secondary and a Girls high school, a High Madrassa school and a degree college provides facilities for general education. The field survey has been taken only in the area which is called Hajo city. The total population according to the 2011 census report is 15,193 lakhs with 3,218 household of the total population 11,760 lakhs are literate. Hajo has been selected for field investigation because its inhabitants practiced handloom weaving traditionally. Unlike the other villages, the peripheral effect of Sualkuchi has less effect on this region. Still now most of the inhabitants run their looms to meet their household needs. Of the total loom 50 percent runs commercially and the remaining 50 percent runs loom for meeting their household needs. These traditional weavers have their special beliefs, myths etc. with the processing of looms which has been put in the respective chapter.