STUDY ON BRAHMAPUTRA: THE LIFELINE OF THE PEOPLE OF ASSAM

REPORT
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The study on Brahmaputra: The Lifeline of the People of Assam is a result of the help and contribution of a number of people to whom I would like to acknowledge my sincere gratitude. In the course of my discovery of the river and the people of the Brahmaputra valley, I came into contact with several individuals from different parts of the state. Some of these individuals have shared their personal insight and experiences, while others, academicians and intellectuals have generously allowed me to peep into their vast reservoir of knowledge. I would first like to offer my gratefulness to Professor Ismail Hussain with whom I interacted during the course of my study. His vast knowledge on the culture of Assam has helped in tremendously in this study. I was also able to make use of the books which I received from him. A study of the Brahmaputra would remain incomplete if I did not refer to the popular book on the river ‘The Brahmaputra’ by Arup Kumar Dutta. He was generous enough to lend me his personal copy as the book was not available in the market. I am deeply thankful to him. I am also thankful to Mr. Rajib Ningkhe who gave me insight into the culture of the Singphos and the other Tai Buddhist communities of Assam. His books on these communities are valuable resources in understanding the Tai Buddhist tribes inhabiting Assam. During the visit to Majuli, I came into contact with several individuals who broadened my perspective about the people and culture of the island. In this regard, I would like to mention the name of Professor Narendra Ch. Thakuria, Retd. Principal, Majuli College. I would like to offer my sincere gratefulness to him for sharing his knowledge and experiences of the island with me and also giving me his two books written on Majuli. Naren Kotoki, Bar Bharali of Dakshinpat Satra, Ajit Sarma, Pujari of Auniati Satra, Kushakanta Goswami of Samuguri Satra, Uma Tako, Manik Das, Bhani Kalita, Deheswari Hazarika and Tipeswar Bora have also shared their views and knowledge about different facets of Majuli. At Sadiya, I was enriched by the talks I had with Jyoti Prabha Deori, Member of Deori Autonomous Council and Andeswar Pao, a retired teacher of Chapakhowa Town ME. School. I am also thankful to Mr. Rimal Amsih of Jagiroad for sharing his knowledge about Tiwa culture with me. Mr. Bhugen Gohain of Rongagorah Natun Gaon and Mohisang Pao have shared their knowledge and experiences of living on the banks of the Brahmaputra. I am grateful to Shakti
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This study as already mentioned is mostly based on secondary data and I have tried my best to do justice to the materials used. In this regard, it would not be impertinent on my part to mention that to write on people and culture is an extremely precarious exercise. There is always divergence of opinions on such subjects which I feel is healthy, but I hope any such disagreement if it arises will be constructive and positive. If by any chance, some inconsistencies have crept in the study, I sincerely hope the readers will excuse the lapses. The Brahmaputra looms large over the social, economic, political scenario of Assam. Such is the dominance of this mighty river that any mention about Assam, invariably has to refer to the Brahmaputra. The study of this river is a mammoth exercise which can never be completed and research will continue to unveil many hidden secrets about the culture and people of the region through which the river flows. Considering the vastness of the topic, this study can never be regarded as complete. I consider my effort as a drop in the Mighty Brahmaputra.
Executive Summary

The River Brahmaputra is a symbol of Assam and the culture of the people living in this region. The life and culture of the inhabitants living on the banks of the river is a reflection of the river’s benediction and woes. The river banks of Brahmaputra are dotted with settlements since time immemorial by people belonging to different religions, caste, tribes, languages, etc. Flowing through the breadth and length of Assam from Sadiya to Dhubri, it finds mention in the history, mythology, poetry, folklores and songs of Assam.

The aim of the study was to document the cultural diversity of the people of the Brahmaputra Valley from Sadiya to Dhubri and to find out the influence of the river on the social and culture of the society. The recurrent floods caused by the Brahmaputra have always presented a gloomy image of a river hell-bent on destroying everything that comes in its way. But Brahmaputra has given to Assam much more then what it has taken away. Turn any pages of history or literature of Assam, and one is bound to invariably find mention of the river in different context. So intricately is the lives and culture of the people of Assam woven with the river that one cannot be thought of without the other.

An understanding of the lives and culture of the people and the influence of the Brahmaputra involved extensive readings of literatures from different disciplines- Anthropology, Folk Lore, History, Historical geography and Archaeology. Secondary data have been extensively used for the study. Although, the population of the Brahmaputra valley, the Barak Valley and the Hill districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao constitute the people of Assam, but the focus of this study is the culture and society of the people of the Brahmaputra valley.

A study of such dimension requires visits to places of cultural and historical significance, and settlements of different communities to gather firsthand knowledge. The Brahmaputra Valley through which the river flows is the most densely populated region in the entire state. The diversity in population, culture and society is mindboggling and this is an area of study which requires ample time and resources. Considering the paucity of both, only a few areas were visited for collection of primary data. The views and knowledge of Experts were also taken into consideration for the study.

The History of Assam is the history of the Brahmaputra. The river and the region, both belonging since antiquity were mentioned in the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. On the banks were
established beautiful settlements. Powerful kings fought with one another to establish their dominions. Assam history is replete with stories of war, conquest, reconciliation on the banks of the Brahmaputra. The Brahmaputra’s fertile valley invited scores of invaders to this region. Its bank witnessed numerous battles over the ages.

It was on the bank of the Brahmaputra that the ancient urban centers and capital cities like Pragjyotishpura, Hadappesvara or Durjayanagara, Kamarup, Sadiya and Sonitpur were established. Legends and myths of sages, kings, princes and princesses developed on its banks. The powerful kingdoms of Bhaskarvarman, Pal, Kamata, Koch, Ahom, Chutiyas, and Kachari dynasties flourished here. The Brahmaputra and the tributaries acted as natural demarcation of territories ruled by chieftains.

Legends and history have merged with one another in the stories of kings like Narakasura, Banasura, and Bhismaka. The events related to Gods and Goddesses like Shiva, Parbati, Kamakhya, Kama, Krishna, and Sages like Santanu, Parashuram and Basistha Muni have given rise to several myths and legends associated with the river and this place. Rukmini and Usha were Princesses of ancient Assam.

Brahmaputra River is regarded as the ‘Son of Brahma’ and is one of the few male rivers. It is considered as a Nad. There are myths associated with its name and origin. In Vedic literature, the river is given the status of a living God. In ancient times it was called as Lauhitya and found mention in various forms in the early inscriptions and literary texts. It was also called by various other names. To people of Assam it is known by the names of Burhaluit, Luit, Siriluit, Borluit, Bor nai. The different Tribal communities refer to the river with their own indigenous names.

Since ancient times, the origin of the river has been an enigma. Countless monks, explorers and travelers from India, China and Europe made attempts to unravel the mystic associated with the Brahmaputra and its origin. Even as early as the beginning of the 18th century, the origin of the river was a subject of speculation, and there have been references about the river in the writings of several explorers and missionaries. What we now know about the river is through the hard work and sacrifice that explorers and cartographers have made since the last two centuries. Their persistence amid adversities finally unveiled the mysteries surrounding the origin and course of the Brahmaputra. Several people had to sacrifice their lives. After relentless search over the centuries the mystery of its origin was finally settled by the middle of the twentieth century.
The massive Brahmaputra enters Assam from Arunachal Pradesh in the east through Sadiya and flows through the entire length of Assam and finally near Dhubri it turns south and enters Bangladesh and assumes a new name Jamuna. Here it once more changes its name to Padma and then flows into the Bay of Bengal. The Brahmaputra while carrying the waters of its tributaries flows throughout the length and breadth of Assam.

There are a number of places in the Brahmaputra Valley which in earlier times were centres of culture and civilization. It would not be wrong to say that the entire region of the Brahmaputra Valley stretching from Sadiya to Dhubri has seen the growth and development of both rural and urban settlements. Some have lost their sheen over time while others have been able to retain their importance. Architectural remains of ancient and medieval period abounds the region, a testimony to the rich cultural heritage of Assam since time immemorial. Many of these buildings, especially temples were built on the bank of the mighty Brahmaputra and its numerous tributaries. Thus, the banks of the river along with its tributaries are dotted with temples, fortifications, bridges and cultural complexes. All these have undergone the ravages of time, but their presence can be ascertained by the remains which have been excavated.

The story of the Brahmaputra is a story of the people living in the region through which it flows. Just like its tributaries which have permeated the entire region, its influence has also touched the life and culture of people of Assam. Its fertile soil has attracted migration of people from prehistoric times. The earliest people inhabiting this region mentioned in literature are the Australoids and the Mongoloids. They were followed by the Caucasoid who came in several waves of migration. The migration of people to Assam which started thousands of years ago has continued till today.

Different groups of people over the centuries have come and settled here. Over times, admixture has taken place between different members of two groups. Centuries of living side by side with each other has resulted in the fusion of both cultural and physical traits resulting in the growth and development of a composite culture which is unique to Assam. Contemporary Assam is now home to group of communities belonging to different tribes, castes, language and religion. The different religious groups like the Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, etc., form the population of Assam. The different castes are found within the Hindu religion. Assam is home to diverse groups of tribes who have given colour and vibrancy to the state’s culture. There are altogether fifteen numbers of Scheduled Tribes (Hill) and fourteen Scheduled Tribes (Plain)
having distinctive culture, language, folkways, legal system, religious belief and practices, and are at various stages of development socially, educationally and economically. Besides these Scheduled Tribes there are a number of other communities living in Assam which also includes the Tai Buddhists groups.

The different communities working in the Tea gardens who are given a common nomenclature as ‘Tea Tribes’ form an integral part of Assam. They form a significant population group of the state having distinct social and cultural features.

The bed of the Brahmaputra has formed innumerable river islands locally called as *chars* or *chaporis*. The people living in the *char* and *chaporis* lead a river centric life. The island of Majuli is the biggest River Island. Majuli, the jewel in the midst of the Brahmaputra is a land of diverse beauties. Brahmaputra’s impact on the overall socio-economic condition of Majuli is immense. The people belonging to different caste and creed inhabit the island. Their livelihood, society and culture are profoundly influenced by the river. Majuli can be equated with a mini Assam, where we find people from different communities and castes living in peace and harmony.

The history and culture of Assam is enriched with the contribution of the Neo-Vaishnavite teachings of the great Gurus - Sankardeva and Madhavdeva. The Birth of Sri Sankardev in 1449 is an epoch making event in the history of Assam. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam propagated by Sri Sankardev and his disciples has left lasting impression on the life and culture of the people of Assam. Ever since its adoption, Assamese society and culture has undergone a state of Renaissance. Sri Sankardev taught a simple creed, which was also called as *ekāsarana nāma-dharma*. The movement initiated during the sixteenth century by Sankardev was carried by his disciples to almost all parts of Assam in the next two centuries and governs the socio-religious lives of the people of Assam. The benign influence of Neo – Vaisnavism has built a society of tolerance and inclusiveness where the rigidity of caste and creed has become diminished to a great extent.

The grandeur of the Brahmaputra River and the natural beauty of the surroundings through which it passes never fail to fill the viewers with awe and reverence. Since ancient times, this has been reflected in the writings of travelers, administrators, invaders who have come here. In the course of British annexation of Assam, various people – Administrators, anthropologists, travelers, medical officers, explorers, missionaries, etc, began to collect information and left
Memoirs, Journals, documents and Reports on the geography, history, administration and people of this region. Their contributions have added to the understanding of the region and its people.

Travelers have sung paeans of the river. When Mahatma Gandhi first visited Assam in 1921, he was moved by the beauty of the river. He wrote about Assam while sitting on the bank of the river Brahmaputra in Tezpur town. Gandhijis note on that fateful day is a testimony to the grandness of the Brahmaputra and the rich history of Assam.

The various moods of the Brahmaputra has inspired the writers, composers and singers of Assam to pen their thoughts on the river. In this context, the names of Laksminath Bezbaruah, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Bhupen Hazarika are noteworthy. In the stories and novels of various writers in Assam, the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries have found mention.

History, tradition, spiritualism, nature, love, pain, separation are reflected in the songs and prose of Assam. The Brahmaputra and the other rivers of Assam find a place in both folk literature and contemporary prose and songs. The stories, narratives, myths, legends are abundant and deals with a variety of issues. In many of the folk literature the Brahmaputra and the other rivers are frequently mentioned.

Written historical account in the region is relatively recent and started since the medieval period. We get references from Ahom chronicles about different tribes. The communities again find mention in several accounts of Europeans who came to this part of the country. Through written records, the origin of the communities in this region can be traced since the last 800 years. But the communities’ origin and presence in this region precede historical records. Each group has stories about their origin and migration to this place and these stories have been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Many of the tales speak about the tribes migrating through the river and their consequent settlements in the valley and hills of Assam.

The story of the Brahmaputra, the people of Assam, the history, society and culture which evolved thousands of years ago is still continuing. Like the Brahmaputra which has seen both continuity and changes over the ages, the culture and society of Assam too, have experienced the same. The destinies of both are linked with one another.
The river, the cultural remains on its bank and the people with their diverse culture have scope for development to attract tourists and other travelers.

Moreover an interdisciplinary approach needs to be applied for carrying out a study of the Brahmaputra and its influence in the life and culture of the people of Assam. Considering the vastness of the subject, the efforts of anthropologists, archaeologists, sociologists, historians, geographers, linguists, to name a few are required for a holistic understanding of the subject under study.
List of Tables

| Table- I | List of food of different communities/ tribes | 27 |
| Table-II | Traditional attire of the different Communities/Tribes | 30 |
| Table-III | Traditional ornaments of the different Communities/Tribes | 34 |
| Table- IV | Musical Instruments used by the different communities/ tribes | 36 |
| Table- V | Religion and Festival of Different Communities/Tribes | 39 |
| Table-VI | Traditional Institutions among different Communities and Tribes | 47 |
| Table-VII | Places of worship situated along the bank of the Brahmaputra | 80 |
| Table-VIII | Names of the Brahmaputra in different Languages and Dialects of Assam | 113 |

Maps

1. River Map of Assam | 54 |
2. Old Map of Survey of Guwahati | 64 |
3. |

1. Introduction | 01 |
1. Introduction |
1.2 Objectives |
1.3 Methodology |
1.4 limitations of the Study |

2. A Brief History of Assam | 01 |
2.1. Introduction |
2.1.1. Prehistoric Period |
2.1.2. Ancient Period |
2.1.3. Medieval Period |
2.1.4. Modern Period |
2.2. Origin of the Name of Assam |

3. People of Assam | 08 |
3.1. Introduction |
3.2. Early Migrations |
3.3. Later Migrations |
3.4. The present population of Assam
   3.4.1 Introduction
   3.4.2 Different Religious Communities
   3.4.3 The Tea Community
   3.4.4 The Char Dwellers
   3.4.5 The Tribes in the Plain districts
   3.4.6 The Vaishnavite Gurus of Assam and Satras

4. The Brahmaputra River
   4.1 Introduction
   4.2 Myths
   4.3 Tracing its origin

5. Brahmaputra valley - The Cultural Landscape
   5.1 Introduction
      5.1.1 Places of cultural significance
      5.1.2 Sadiya
      5.1.3 Dimapur
      5.1.4 Sibsagar
      5.1.5 Majuli
      5.1.6 Tezpur
      5.1.7 Kamrup
      5.1.8 Goalpara
      5.2 Monuments
      5.3 An account on the tourism potential of various places of historical and Cultural Significance in Assam.

6. History and Culture of Assam and the Brahmaputra
   6.1 Introduction
   6.2 Brahmaputra as witness to historical events
   6.3 Inspiring the Creative minds
   6.4 Folk Literature
      6.4.1 Introduction
      6.4.2 Songs
      6.4.3 Folk tales
6.4.4. The Sacred River
6.4.5. Indigenous names of the river
6.4.6. Tribes- Rewriting the origin of their migration.

7. Conclusion
1. Introduction

3.1. Introduction
The River Brahmaputra is a symbol of Assam and the culture of the people living in this region. The life and culture of the inhabitants living on the banks of the river is a reflection of the river’s benediction and woes. The river banks of Brahmaputra are dotted with settlements since time immemorial by people belonging to different religions, castes, tribes, languages, etc. Flowing through the breadth and length of Assam from Sadiya to Dhubri, it finds mention in the history, poetry, folklores, mythology and songs of Assam.

The impact of the river in shaping the socio-cultural life of its people is an area of study having immense importance for everyone.

1.2 Objectives

□ Documentation and study on the cultural diversity of the people of the Brahmaputra Valley from Sadiya to Dhubri

□ To find out the influence of the river on the society and culture of the people.

1.3 Methodology
The study is mostly based on secondary data. Books on history of Assam, Historical Geography, Environment, Society and Culture, Archaeology, literature, Folk culture have been consulted for the study. Different libraries were visited for collection of data. Secondary data were also collected from the internet, where there is a surfeit of information on the subject.

As a part of the study, field work was carried out. A study of such dimension requires visits to places of cultural and historical significance, and settlements of different communities to gather firsthand knowledge. The Brahmaputra Valley through which the river flows is the most densely populated region in the entire state. The diversity in population, culture and society is mindboggling and this is an area of study which
requires ample time and resources. Considering the paucity of both, only a few areas were visited for collection of primary data.

The views and knowledge of Experts were also taken into consideration for the study. Although, the population of the Brahmaputra valley, the Barak Valley and the Hill districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao constitute the people of Assam, but the focus of this study is the culture and society of the people of the Brahmaputra valley.

1.4. **Limitations of the Study:** The study does not claim to be a complete documentation of cultural diversity found on the bank of the river, since the subject is vast and study of culture and settlement involves a suite of discipline (anthropology, archaeology, landscape architects, history, historical architecture and museum curator). There was limitation of time of the study (3 months including 15 days of field work). There are hundreds of settlements and diverse population settled on the river banks, but for the purpose of collection of data for this study, only a few places were visited.

2. **A Brief History of Assam**

2.1. **Introduction**

The history of Assam has passed several stages of development to reach to its present state. Prior to the 12th century AD., there was lack of historical documents and other records on Assam; hence historians had to rely on different sources to construct the history of Assam. References about this region were found in the Puranas, Sanskrit literature, Buddhist literature and accounts of foreign travellers. Archaeological sources like monuments, numismatics, epigraphy and pottery have also contributed to our understanding of the history and culture of Assam till the 13\textsuperscript{th} century AD.
2.1.1. Prehistoric Period

There is lack of evidence of prehistoric archaeological evidence of human settlement in Assam. No human bones or skulls of prehistoric period have been discovered yet. This has been explained as a result of the climatic and ecology of the region. The climate and soil of Northeast India have not supported the preservation of human bones here unlike in other places of India. But never the less, studies on prehistory of this region yields a few result which indicate that some form of human settlements during Neolithic period were present in the region covering different areas of Assam. Hasan (1981) writes that the Neolithic Cultures of Assam falls into six distinct zones: namely Cachar Hills Zone, Sadiya Frontiers, Naga Hills Zone, Khasi Hills Zone, Garo Hills Zone, and Brahmaputra Valley Zone. Regarding the discovery of Neolithic tools and implements in the Brahmaputra valley, it has been written that the materials available for study are few and far between. Save for two “celts” from Dibrugarh and Sibsagar, all other tools come from the chance discovery of Mr. W. Penny in Tezpur district. (Dani. A.H, 1981, pp. 45-46). Similarly, M., Hazarika. (2006) surmises that although no evidence of rice agriculture has been found in the low land valley cultivation, but on the basis of circumstantial evidences like migration, linguistic features, and archaeological evidences of stone tools and pottery, early agriculture in the low land areas were also present in northeast India. So from studies on the prehistory of Assam it can be ascertained that the culture of Assam precedes historical period.

2.1.2. Ancient Period

The earliest mention of a ruler of Kamarupa was named as Mahirang Danav. He was succeeded by his descendents who were known as Hatakasura Danav, Sambar Asur and Ratna Asur. They were followed by a chief, named as Ghatak who was the ruler of the Kiratas. He was slain by Narak Asur who was a powerful ruler of Kamarupa. According to legends, he was born of Vishnu and Prthivi, the Earth Goddess. There are a number of legends associated with Narkasur. He was brought up by King Janak of Videha or North Bihar. He made Pragjyotishpur his capital city. He was a
worshipper of Vishnu and was much favoured by this God. It was Vishnu who taught him to worship the Goddess Kamakhya. Earlier, he was very pious and god fearing, but later, after coming under the influence of BanAsur, the king of Sonitpur, he became arrogant and irreligious. He even asked Goddess Kamakhya to be his wife. The Goddess accepted his proposal on the condition that he constructs a temple on the Nilachal hill along with a tank and a road to the temple within a night. Naraksur was almost able to accomplish this task, but the Goddess caused a cock to crow, claiming that morning had arrived, and as such she refused to marry him. Narakasur was enraged and killed the cock. With this act, Narakasur lost the goodwill of the Goddess. He also did not allow Basistha Muni to go to worship Kamakhya, as a result of which he was cursed by the sage. Narakasur’s end came when Vishnu in the incarnation of Krishna slain him. His son Bhagadatta ascended the throne after his death. The name of Bhagadatta is frequently mentioned in the Mahabharata. He was also a powerful ruler like his father. He is credited to have fought along with the Kauravas in the battle of Kurukshetra against the Pandavas. The kingdom of Pragjyotishpur under him was attacked by Arjun, the Pandava prince. He was finally defeated by the intervention of Krishna. Narak Asur descendent continued to rule for nineteen generations. The last kings of this dynasty were Subahu and Suparna. Some other traditional rulers included Debesvar who was ruling Kamrup in the commencement of the Saka era. There is also a mention of a Kshatriya ruler by the name of Dharma Pal. He made his capital west of Gauhati. He was followed by several rulers ending with Ram Chandra. This period of early Assam history prior to 7th century A.D. was obscure. Some semblance of authenticity could be deciphered after Hieun Tsang; the Chinese traveler who visited Kamarupa left an account of his visit to this kingdom. During his visit, Assam was under the rule of the Varman dynasty and the king during that time was Bhaskar Varman. Bhaskar Varman was the eleventh in descent in the genealogy of the Varman dynasty. The reign of Bhaskarvarman is an epoch making period in the history of Assam and has placed the name of Kamarupa as a frontier state in the map of India. With his death, the Varman dynasty came to an end.
There is reference about the Dynasty of Sala Stambha whose last ruler was by the name of Sri Harsha. The dynasty of Pralamba assumed power at around 800 A.D. There were around twenty rulers from this dynasty. By 1000 A.D, the Pal dynasty came into focus with the rule of Brahma Pal. Several rulers from this dynasty ruled till the 11th century. By 1100 A.D., there again developed a reign of confusion in the kingdom of Kamrupa with no definite ruler. The kingdom of Kamarupa disintegrated, resulting in the emergence of many petty chiefs at different places.

2.1.3. Medieval Period

During the early part of the thirteenth century, Kamrupa came into close contact with Muslims when Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji after conquering Bengal in 1204, proceeded eastwards into Assam while on his way to Tibet. Over the next five centuries several Muslim invasions took place in Assam. In 1220 Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah is said to have advanced as far as Sadiya. After thirty six years, Ikhtiyar uddin Yuzbak Tughril Khan invaded Kamrup. In 1337 Muhammad Shah invaded the country. In the meantime, in 1228, there emerged in eastern Assam a powerful dynasty called the Ahom dynasty which ruled Assam till the advent of the British in Assam in 1826. The Ahoms belonged to the Tai or Shan section of the Siamese – Chinese branch of the Sino-Tibetans. They arrived in Assam through North Burma, along the Noa Dihing River. During their six hundred years rule, they were able to consolidate their power by bringing the different rulers or chiefs under their dominion. They came into contact with different communities like the Moran, Matak, Borahis, the Nagas, Manipuris, Jaintias, Miris, Kacharis, Chutiyas and Koch. When the Ahoms were consolidating their position in Assam, they came into conflict with the ruling Kachari, Chutiya and Jaintia kingdoms. The Chutiyas were in power in northeastern Assam and parts of Arunachal Pradesh. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries they ruled the districts of Lakhimpur, parts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. The Kacharis ruled from the Dikhow river to central and southern Assam. The Kachari kingdom at one time included a wide stretch of territories represented by the present districts of Nagaon, Sibsagar, parts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar. In the western part of Assam the Khan or Khen Dynasty established the Kamata
kingdom during the fifteenth century. Another powerful dynasty was the Koch dynasty which has left large impact on the society and culture of Assam. This dynasty established sovereignty in 1510 AD when Biswa Singha laid the foundation of this dynasty. The Koch kingdom in Western Assam and present North Bengal was at its zenith in the early reign of King Naranarayana. By seventeenth century the kingdom lost its power and had to cede political hegemony in favour of the Ahoms. By using diplomacy as well as force the Ahom rulers were able to become masters of the entire Brahmaputra valley.

The Ahoms came into conflict with the Mughals several times. In 1682, during the reign of Gadadhar Singha, the Ahoms recovered Western Assam from the Mughals which was earlier ceded to them. The river Manaha was recognized as the boundary between the Mughal and Ahom dominions. The boundary of the Ahom during that period consisted of Brahmaputra valley, excluding Goalpara. It was bounded on the north by the Bhutan hills, on the west by the Manaha River, and the Habraghat Pargana, on the south by the Naga, Khasi, Mikir and Garo hills and on the east by the Mismi, Singphou and Khamti ranges. The boundaries of Assam of this period remained fixed and unaltered till the occupation of the British in 1826.

2.1.4. Modern Period

With the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, the fate of Assam passed into the hands of the British. Now began a history in Assam which was a series of annexation and secessions. The British annexed Cachar in 1832 and Jaintia Hills in 1835. In 1874, Assam became a separate province with Shillong as its capital. Sylhet was merged with East Bengal on partition of India. It saw further reduction of its area when Dewangiri in North Kamrupa was ceded to Bhutan in 1951. States of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram got their own separate states. Today Assam has an area of 78,438 sq. kms. It consists of thirty two districts and is credited to be the most populous state in the entire Northeast India.

Thus, a sketchy picture of the emergence of Assam history from ancient times becomes precise over the centuries.
2.2. Origin of the Name of Assam

The ancient name of Assam was Pragjyotisha. Its antiquity can be established from the fact that it has been mentioned in the two great epics - The Mahabharata and the Ramayana and also in the Puranas. Regarding the name ‘Prajyotisha’ or ‘Pragjyotishpura’, Gait (1992, reprint) writes that Prag means ‘former’ or ‘eastern’ and Jyotisha ‘a star’, astrology, shining. Pragjyotishpur may, therefore, be taken to mean the ‘City of Eastern Astrology’. Since ancient times the rulers fixed the boundaries of their kingdoms on the basis of natural features like rivers, hills, forest, etc. Rivers acted as natural boundaries between two principalities in a majority of cases. According to the Yogintantra, the boundary of the country during ancient times, comprised the whole of the Brahmaputra (Lauhitya) Valley, Rangpur and Cooch Behar. It also included Manipur, Jaintia, Cachar, West Assam and parts of Mymensingh and Sylhet. (Choudhury.N.D., 1985, pp.xxvii). The country was divided into four portions, viz., Kampith from the river Karotoya to the Sankosh, Ratnapith from the river Sankosh to the Rupahi, Suvarnapith from the river Rupahi to the Bharali and Saumarpith from the river Bharali to the Dikrang.

The other name of ancient Assam was Kamarupa. This name is regarded as younger than the name Pragjyotisha. References of Kamarupa are found in literature as well as in many epigraphs. Kamarupa has been mentioned in the two great epics - The Mahabharata and the Ramayana and also in the Puranas and Tantras. The mythology regarding the origin of the name Kamarupa tells us the story of Sati who died due to the discourtesy shown to her husband by her father Daksha. Overcome by grief, Siva carried her dead body and wandered throughout the world. In order to put a stop to this, Vishnu used his discus to cut the body into pieces, which then fell into different places. One such piece fell down on Nilachal hills near Gauhati and the place was henceforth held sacred as Kamakhya. But Siva’s penance did not stop, so the Gods sent Kamdev, the cupid to break his penance by making him fall in love. Kamdev succeeded in his mission, but Siva enraged at this result, burnt Kamdev to ashes. Kamdev eventually regained his original form here.
and from then onward the country came to be known as Kamarupa (Where Kama regained his Rupa or form).

The name Assam is of recent origin. There are several opinions to the origin of the name Assam. The name ‘Aham’ or ‘Asom’ was probably given by the Ahoms who came to Assam in 1228 A.D. It may also have been derived from ‘Ha-cham’ which in Boro language means the low or level country. Its present name is an anglicized form of the name ‘Asom’.

There are also some other names of Assam. The Ahom called Assam as Moung-dun-shoun-kham meaning the ‘land of golden gardens’. In the olden days Assam was also known as Vaisali to the Burmese and the tribes living beyond the Patkai ranges.

3. People of Assam

3.1. Introduction

Assam falls in one of the great migration routes of mankind and over the ages there have been waves of migration of diverse groups. The possible routes of migrations are: the northern passes of Bhutan, Tibet and Nepal, Assam- Burma routes on the eastern side, the valleys of the western side formed by the Brahmaputra- Gangetic plains and the sea route, by Bay of Bengal via Bengal and Burma (Choudhury, N.D., 1985, pp. 25-26). The migration which started thousands of years ago is continuing till present day.

3.2. Early Migrations

As we trace the background of the people inhabiting Assam, we find literature referring to the earliest settlers. There is the mention of the Kiratas, Cinas, Nishada, and other tribes. When the Vedic Aryan people came to Assam, they encountered these communities. The literatures of ancient times also have some references about the physical features and skin colour of the people. Some anthropologists have used the term
Nishada to denote the Australoids. The Kiratas were also mentioned in the ancient literatures. In The Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Kalika Purana, references have been made to their yellow skin colour. These people were occupying the different regions of the Himalayas and the northeastern part of India. The Kiratas were regarded as Mongoloid people. The term ‘Kirata’ was first mentioned in the Yajurveda. The first ruler of ancient Kamarupa was Mahiranga Danav. He was a Kirata. The other rulers like Hatak Asur, Sambar Asur and Ratna Asur were also Kirata rulers and their subjects were all Kiratas. These ancient rulers were of Mongoloid origin.

Anthropologists from detailed studies of the population of this region have come to the conclusion that tribes of Assam are Mongoloid in origin. There are also some Australoid ethnic traits among them. The Australoids are regarded as the earliest settlers of Assam. They were followed by the Mongoloids. The Austric speech –family was associated with the Australoids and their descendents. The Khasis of Meghalaya belong to this linguistic group.

The Mongoloid tribes of North east India are categorized under the Khasis, Boro, Lushai-Kuki, Naga, Arunachal tribes and “Others” on the basis of one or the other factors like linguistic affinity, cultural similarity, common territory and biological closeness. The Boro form one of the most important tribal groups in Assam and belong from a very early period. (Das. 1987, pp.43).

The Mongoloids of northeast India are mostly speakers of the Tibeto-Burman languages. These languages have their origin in southwest China. These people at different times came from different directions and migrated to the hills and valleys of north east India. S.K. Chatterjee suggests, “It seems quite probable that long before 1000 B.C., some of these early Tibeto –Burmans had penetrated within the frontiers of India, either along the southern slopes of the Himalayas, or by way of Tibet”( cited in Das. B.M., 1987, pp. 43).

After the Mongoloids, came the Caucoids. Their migration occurred in several waves. The Indo – Aryans and Irano -Seythians were preceded by the Mediterranean and Alpino-Armenoids in this region.
3.3. Later Migrations

Another series of migration of people took place in Assam after it came under British rule. After the British annexed Assam in 1826, large number of people started migrating to Assam to meet the growing need of human resource for running the British administration. As tea cultivation began to be started in 1836, a large group of people from different parts of India were brought to work as tea labourers. Started in 1853, migration of tea garden labourers on a large scale took place since 1860. This continued till 1937, the number falling low after 1931, by which time the tea garden labourers numbered 10 lakhs in Assam. (Census of India, 1961, Assam, General Report, as cited in Saikia, etal., 2003, preface). The Tea tribes who form an important part of the culture of the state consist of a number of individual tribes who have been given the nomenclature of ‘Tea Tribe’.

The next stream of migration started with Muslim peasants coming from the then East Bengal districts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, and Rangpur. It was in the beginning of the 1900s that people migrated from erstwhile East Bengal started inhabiting the chars of the Brahmaputra River. They came first to the district of Goalpara from the beginning of the 20th century, and in the subsequent two decades they occupied lands in Nowgong, Kamrup (the then Brahmaputra sub – division) and Darrang. By 1931 most of the wastelands of the Brahmaputra valley was under their occupation. By 1941, they settled down in North Lakhimpur district. They at present form a significant proportion of the state’s population.

The third stream of migration consisted of Bengali Hindus refugees mostly from the then Sylhet district to the adjoining areas of present Assam during the partition of the country. After independence also, this flow of people continued.

In Assam, another stream of migration took place with the advent of the Nepali graziers who from the beginning of the twentieth century started settling in the uncultivated and unowned hill slopes.
3.4. The present population of Assam

3.4.1 Introduction

Assam is a meeting place of different groups of people who over the centuries have come and settled down. Over times, admixture has taken place between different members of two groups. Centuries of living side by side with each other has resulted in the fusion of both cultural and physical traits resulting in the growth and development of a composite culture which is unique to Assam. Contemporary Assam is now home to a group of communities belonging to different tribes, castes, language and religion.

The people of Assam can be viewed from the perspective of religion, tribes, and Castes. According to the Census figures of 2011 A.D., the total population of the state is 31,205,576 of which 15,939,443 are male and 15,266,133 are female. This includes the populations of the hill districts, Barak valley and the Brahmaputra valley. The People of India project has studied 115 of the ethnic groups in Assam. 79 (69 percent identify themselves regionally, 22( 19 percent) locally and 3 transnationally. Forty five languages are spoken by different communities including three major language families: Austro Asiatics(5), Sino-Tibetan(24), and Indo European (12). Three of the spoken languages donot fall in these families. On both side of the Brahmaputra, Assamese language is spoken by about twenty million people.

3.4.2 Different Religious Communities

From the religious point of view, the majority of the people in the state practice Hinduism. They account for 61.5 percent of the total population of the state. In Assam, in general practice, two broad categories of Hindu castes are recognized. These are the ‘Bamun’ (Brahmin) and the ‘Sudir’ (Sudra: non- Brahmin). The Sudir group includes several castes of different hierarchical positions. (Das. B.M. 1987, p.12) . The Sudirs are sub-divided into several castes such as Kalita, Kayastha, Ganak, Kaibarta, Hira, Kumar, Jogi, Keot, etc.( Dutta, 2001, PP. 105). There is another classification by the Government, which has also identified 15 numbers of Scheduled Castes Communities in the State, they are 1. Bansfor, 2. Bhuinmali, Mali, 3. Brittial Bania, Bania, 4. Dhupi, Dhubi, 5.Dugla, Dholi, 6.Hira,7. Jalkeot, 8. Jhalo,Malo, Jhalo-

The Scheduled Castes community in Assam are not concentrated in specific pockets and they are interspersed. Agriculture is the mainstay of the majority of the Scheduled Castes in Assam. The Kaibortha, Namasudra and Jalkeots have to depend on fishing. Pottery and goldsmithy are the important occupation of the Hiras and Banias.

The urban dwellers like the Bansfor, Muchis, Bhangis, Mahtar and Maharas have to switch to other professions because of the changing socio-economic situation.

Muslims is the second largest religion in Assam. There is a significant population of Muslim people in the state. According to 2011 census, 34.22 percent of the population of Assam are Muslims. Assam came into contact with Muslims since the early part of the thirteenth century with the first Muslim invasion of Assam. There were several invasions over the centuries which were thwarted by the different rulers of Assam at different times. The Muslims soldiers did not return to their native land. Instead they stayed back and married local women and became a part of this region. During the Ahom rule, many Muslim artisan families were invited by the Ahom rulers to come to Assam and settle here. A Muslim saint Hazarat Milan, popularly known as Azan Fakir came to Assam in the middle of the seventeenth century. He promoted Muslim religion in Assam. Many local people converted to Islam because of his influence. There has been a slow incorporation of Muslims into Assam over a long period of time. The traditional Assamese Muslim community includes the descendents of the Muslim soldiers, the artisan families, Muslim preachers and the local converts. To add to the Muslim population in Assam are the Char dwellers who inhabit the thousands of Char and Chaporries or the sand bars of the rivers of Assam.

The Christian community of Assam accounts for 3.7 percent of the state’s population. With the coming of the British and American Missionaries, Christianity in the Assam developed after the establishment of the British regime in 1826. The first missionaries
to arrive in this region were sent by the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission, who was followed by the American Baptists. They were the pioneers in the field of education in this region. They established churches, schools and hospitals. In Assam, large number of people especially belonging to the tribal communities converted to Christianity. There are also followers of Christianity from other communities in the state.

Assam’s relationship with Buddhism is an ancient one. K. Burah Gohain (1946) suggests that Buddhism was brought to Assam (earlier known as Kamarupa) from Eastern India. (cited S.Sasanananda, 1986, pp. 23). During the 3rd century B.C., Buddhism was introduced into Kamarupa by Thera Dhitika and it widely spread here by the efforts of the renowned Brahmin, Siddha who had converted to Buddhism (S.Sasanananda, 1986, p. 101.) Buddhism again showed resurgence during the reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varman. Although Bhaskar Varman was a follower of Hinduism, he showed great reverence to Buddhist teachings. It was during his reign that the famous Chinese monk Hiuen Tsang visited Kamarupa. Discovery of relics of Buddhist temples from different parts of Assam indicates that the religion was in prevalence during bygone age. The present group of people belonging to the Tai community brought Buddhism with them when they came to Assam. In different parts of Assam, we find the members of the Tai stock living and adhering to their Buddhist tradition and culture. The Singphos, Tai Khamtis, Tai Phakes, Khamyangs, Aitonias, Turungs, are followers of Buddhism and are concentrated in certain pockets of the state. According to 2011 census the state has a population of 0.2 percent who follow Buddhism.

The Assamese Sikhs form a distinct entity in the state. They are presently concentrated in a village called as Borkhola in Nagaon district, although members of the community are scattered in different parts of the state. They are the descendents of the Sikh soldiers who came to Assam to aid the Ahom rulers to fight against the Burmese invaders. Many of the soldiers settled in the state and married local women and in course of time became an indispensible part of Assam. According to 2011 census, 0.1 percent of the states population are followers of Sikhism. Beside the above religious groups, there is a small community of followers of Jainism in Assam.
3.4.3 The Tea Community

The Tea Tribe consist of people belonging to different communities and accounts for 25 percent of the population of the state. They form an integral part of Assam. The Tea industry depend on a strong labour force, and as such the British brought thousands of workers from the Chhotanagpur region covering the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and also from West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The term ‘tea tribe’ in fact includes different groups of communities. There are as many as 96 castes/tribes in the Central List of Other Backward castes (OBCs) for the State of Assam falling under the description as “Tea Garden Labourers, Tea Garden Tribes, Ex-Tea Garden labourers & Ex-Tea Garden Tribes”. They are distributed in almost all the districts of Assam. Their population is significant in the districts of Sonitpur, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Tinsukia and Lakhimpur. They are also found in the districts of Darrang and the Barak valley regions. The Bodo Territorial Area District (BTAD) also has a significant percentage of the population.

As observed by Bhuiya (1960), these people belong from three different linguistic groups. They are kolarian speaking, e.g., the Munda, Ho, Santal and the Kharia, Dravidian speaking groups, e.g., the Oraon, Kondh, Gond, and Malpharia, and the Groups speaking Oriya, Bengali and Hindi (cited Kar, 1997, pp. 162). After they came to Assam, they started settling in a new socio-economic environment which was very different from their original home. Although they belong from different linguistic groups in the tea plantations, they share a common lingua franca, which is called as Cha Bagichar Ahamiya (Sadani), i.e., ‘Assamese of tea garden’ (cited in Kar. 1997, pp. 165). They are regarded as part and parcel of Assamese society. In this context, Saikia (1982) suggests the term Chah Bagichar Asamiya, i.e., ‘The Assamese of Tea Garden’ for them (cited Kar., 1997, pp. 167).

3.4.4 The Char Dwellers

The bed of the Brahmaputra has formed innumerable river islands locally called as chars or chaporis. These chars or chaporis vary greatly in size, shape and physical
vulnerability. Most of the chars are temporary or semi-temporary and only a few are permanent. Due to this reason, the inhabitants of the chars seldom have a permanent address and have to change residence several times. The people living in the char and chaporis lead a river centric life. Their livelihood, society and culture are profoundly influenced by the river.

Centering the river Brahmaputra there are around two thousand chars in Assam which are habitable. Besides, the Mising, Deoris, Kaibarttas, these islands are inhabited by the Muslim cultivators who immigrated into Assam from East Bengal, the Nepalees immigrating from Nepal, the Hindu refugees and small numbers of people from Bihar and Bengal. The majority of the char dwellers are followers of Muslim religion and their population is estimated to be around thirty lakhs people. These people are given different names like Pamua Musalman (the Farming Muslim), Na- Asamiya (Neo-Assamese) Charua Musalman (the Muslims of the river Islands or banks). They occupy the chars of Dhubri, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Morigaon, Nagaon, Darrang, Sonitpur, etc. On the other hand, the Misings, Deori and Kaibbartas are found in the Char-chaporis of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, etc.

3.4.5 The Tribes in the Plain districts

Assam is home to a diverse groups of tribes who have given colour and vibrancy to the state’s culture. The Government of India has given Scheduled Tribe status to various communities in both the hills and Plains of the state. The total Scheduled Tribe population according to 2011 census stands as 3,884,371 of which 3,665,405 are from rural areas and 218,966 are from urban areas. The Scheduled tribe population accounts for 12.41 percent to total population of the state. There are altogether fifteen numbers of Scheduled Tribes (Hill) and fourteen Scheduled Tribes (Plain) having distinctive culture, language, folkways, legal system, religious belief and practices, and are at various stages of development socially, educationally and economically. The Scheduled Tribes, both plains and hills are distributed in all the 32 districts of the state. The plain tribes are found in the plain districts and the hill tribes are concentrated mainly in the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The following is the list of the Scheduled Tribes in Assam-


Although, the population of the Brahmaputra valley, The Barak Valley and the Hill districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao constitute the people of Assam, yet for the convenience of the study the culture and society of the people of the Brahmaputra valley has been taken as the focus of this study.

The Brahmaputra valley is the meeting ground of diverse linguistic and racial groups. The valley is home to both tribal and non-tribal communities. The Bodo also called as Boro or Boro Kacharis is a branch of the great Bodo Group of the Indo-Mongoloid family. Regarded as one of the earliest settlers of this region, this group of people had their original habitat in Tibet or China. The Bodos are scattered throughout Northeastern India. There are some small Bodo pockets outside India like in Burma, Nepal, and Bhutan. The state of Assam is the main adobe of the Bodos. Their main concentration is now on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra starting from Dhubri to Dhemaji district in the east. District wise they have a sizable population in Bongaigaon, Nalbari, Barpeta, Darrang, Goalpara, Dhubri and Kamrup apart from newly constituted Kokrajharp, Baska, Chirang and Udalgiri districts of Bodoland Territorial Area District. They also inhabit the regions of Nagaon, Karbi Anglong and Golaghat districts. Bodo is regarded as a generic term and different names are used to designate them. In Bengal and in Nepal, they are known as Mech. In Upper Assam they are identified as Sonowal Kachari, while in the western Assam, they are more popularly known as Boro or Boro- Kachari. In the Southern districts of North Cachar and Cachar they are designated as Dimasa and Barmans respectively.
The Boro or Boro Kachari according to 2011 census is the largest tribe of Assam with a population of 1,361,735 persons.

The Mising of Assam previously known as Miris is the second largest group of Scheduled Tribe (Plains) of Assam. The term ‘Miri’ was given to them by the plain people and the tribe prefer to call themselves as Mising. Their population according to 2011 census is 6,80,424 persons. They are mainly concentrated in the riverine areas of Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Dhemaji, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sonitpur and Tinsukia districts of Assam. Originally, they were hill dwellers and lived along with the Abors of Arunachal Pradesh. They migrated to the plains of Assam before the reign of the Ahom kings and began settling in the riverine areas of the Brahmaputra and Subansiri rivers. They migrated to the Brahmaputra valley from an area upstream of the Dihong river(Sharma Thakur. G.C., 1972, pp. 2). They belong to the Tibeto Burman family of the Mongoloid group.

The Rabhas are one of the Scheduled Tribes in the plains districts of Assam. They are widely scattered, but mostly concentrated in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. Besides Assam, their distribution spreads over Meghalaya, Bangladesh, Nepal, West Bengal, Manipur etc. According to 2011 census, their population is 296,189. There are divergent views by different scholars regarding the ethnic individuality of the tribe, its original place of abode, and the relationship with other tribal groups. Rev. S. Endle had shown seven ‘sub-tribes’ of the Rabhas such as ‘Rangdaniya’, ‘Maitoriya’, ‘Pati’, ‘Koch’, ‘Bitliya’, ‘Dahuriya’ and ‘Sangha’. (Bordoloi. B. N, et al., 1987, pp. 129). The Pati section of the tribe shows great Hindu influences and the impact of acculturation is more prominent amongst them. Numerically the Rangdanis are well represented in western Goalpara. The Maitoris are numerically less in Assam than the Rangdanis and is concentrated in western Meghalaya. The Dahuri group is found in north Goalpara and the Totlas in north Kamrup area and in the northern belt of Darrang District particularly around Rowta, Udalguri and Hugrajuli.

The Sonowal Kacharis is one of the important plain tribes of Assam. They are distributed in the districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Jorhat
and Golaghat. The Sonowal Kachari has a population of 2,53,344. They belong to the
great Bodo group. The Sonowal Kachari believes that they are the descendents of
Bhaskarbarman, Narakasur, Ban, Bhagadatta, Hirimba, Ghototkos, Bhim, Prahlad and
Bali. Regarding the origin of the name ‘Sonowal’, it is opined that the Kacharis who
used to collect gold or ‘son’ from the bank of the Subansiri came to be known as
Sonowal Kacharis.

The Tiwas, earlier referred to as Lalungs are one of the major ethnic groups in Assam.
According to Tiwa language, ‘Ti’ means ‘water’ and ‘Wa’ means ‘great’. The origin of
the tribe is shrouded in mystery. It is said that while migrating to Assam, they followed
the course of the Brahmaputra and introduced themselves to others as Tiwa. They were
called as Lalung by the non Tiwas. The Karbis called those people as Lalungs who
were living on the South bank of the Brahmaputra. ‘La’ means water and ‘lung’ means
rescued. The river Brahmaputra gave shelter to this people; hence, they came to be
called as Lalung. They are a branch of the Bodo group and belong ethnically to the
Mongoloid stock. The Tiwas are mostly concentrated in Nagaon, Morigaon and Karbi
Anglong districts of Assam. Besides these, there are a few other Tiwa villages in
Dhemaji, Sonitpur, Jorhat and Kamrup districts. In respect of habitats, the present day
Tiwas can be divided into two viz., Plains and Hill Tiwas, the latter being able to
preserve their traditional life and culture. The topography and ecology of the plains and
hills have influenced the Tiwas considerably. Certain aspects of socio-cultural life of
the Hill Tiwas have become distinct from that of the Plains Tiwas. The Hill Tiwas have
been able to maintain many of their traditional characteristics. The Plain Tiwas are
settled cultivators where as the Hill Tiwas still resort to *Jhum* system or Terrace
cultivation. According to 2011 census, the population of the Tiwas in the plains is
1,82,663.

The Garos have received the status of Scheduled tribes both in the hills and Plains of
Assam. In the plain region they are distributed in Kamrup, Goalpara and Dhubri
districts of the Brahmaputra valley. The Garos call themselves as Achik Mande
meaning ‘HillMan’. They belong to the Mongoloid race, and are from the Tibeto
Burman families of the Bodo linguistic group. According to 2011 census, their
population in the plain is 1,36,077. The Garos follow the matrilineal family structure. They trace their lineage through females.

Another riverine community of Assam is the Deori tribe. They are one of the fourteen Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of Assam. The original adobe of the Deori was on the banks of the river Kundilpani at Kundil, presently known as Sadiya. In the census of 1901, it is mentioned that the banks of the Kundilpani river is the ancient habitation of the Deoris. Brown In the book ‘Deori Chutiya Grammar’ (1837) observes that the Deories had their original habitation on the bank opposite to Sadiya. (cited Deori .S, 2013, pp.11).

They are ethnically affiliated to the Tibeto Burman tribes of northeast India. The term ‘Deori’ means the ‘off springs of God and Goddess’. They were regarded as the Levite or priestly body and functioned as the priests of the Chutiyas of Assam (Deori. 2002, pp.16). The Deories are also known as Jimochanya. They had come from China and Mongolia in the distant past. From there, they migrated to Kundil or Sadiya and then moved to several places like Manas Sarovar, Lhasa, banks of the Swati Sarovar and Tsangpo and finally settled in Sadiya and Jaidam. These people settled on the valleys of the Brahmaputra and other areas. Later they settled on the bank of the rivers Dibang, Tengapani and Patorsal, at present within the jurisdiction of Arunachal Pradesh and Sadiya Chapakhoa Sub Division of Tinsukia District of Assam. Their present habitation is spread in the riverine areas of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Tinsukia and Sonitpur and Golaghat districts of Assam. As per 2011 Census their total population is 43750.

The Dimasa Kachari constitutes one of the major tribal groups of Assam and is an important ethnic group in the autonomous hill districts and also in the plain districts of Assam. In the plains they have a population of 19,702. Linguistically, the Dimasa belong to the Boro group of Tibeto-Burman family. The tribal meaning of the word ‘Dimasa’ is ‘son of a big river’. ‘Di’ means ‘water’, ‘Ma’ means ‘big’ and ‘Sa’ means ‘son’. There are several opinions regarding the origin of the name Dimasa. As the
Brahmaputra is the biggest and longest river in Assam, it is presumed that the Dimasas consider themselves to be the descendents of the Brahmaputra. Another section of scholars opine that the Bodos came to be known as Dimasa after they established their capital at Dimapur on the bank of the river Dhansiri. In Dimasa, the river Dhansiri is called as ‘Dima’. Till recent years, the Dimasa Kacharis were also known as Hill Kacharis as they prefer to live in hilly areas. Before the advent of the Ahoms in the thirteenth century, the Kachari kingdom was extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra from the Dikhou River to Kolong River. It included the Dhansiri valley.

The Singphos in Assam has a population of 2,342. The Singphos belong to the Tibeto Burmese language group of the Mongoloid stock. According to Singpho tradition, the Singphos migrated to this region through the Brahmaputra via the Sampo River between 800-700 B.C. There are several references about the tribe from literature of the medieval times. The four boundaries of the Singpho territory are given in the periodical Arunodoy ( cited in Ninkhe, 2013, pp. 18-19) as follows- towards North lies the Brahmaputra, towards East lies Mishmi hills, towards West lies the Patkai mountains and towards South it extends from the mouth of the Na Dihing river to the Burhi Dihing river. The Singphos inhabit around twenty five villages in Margherita region of Tinsukia district. They are also found in the two villages of Dighali and Ouguri in Sibsagar district. The Singphos have been credited to have first introduced the tea plant to the British. Around 1823, Robert Bruce met the Singpho chief called as ‘Bisa gam’ who showed Bruce the tea plant which was a traditional plant of his family. He also gave Bruce seeds and saplings of the tea plant. This was stated to be the beginning of the tea culture in Assam which the British learnt from the Singphos. Ningroola, from the Singphos was the first person to own tea plantation on the bank of the Burhi Dihing river.

The Khamti tribe of Assam consists of 1,106 persons. The Tai Khamtis migrated to Assam from Bar Khamti (khamti Lung) in Burma during the 18th century. First they settled on the bank of the Tengapani River. From there they went to Sadiya and ultimately to Narayanpur. At present the Tai Khamtis inhabit several villages in the Narayanpur region of North Lakhimpur district. They were earlier settled in Sadiya, from where they migrated to the bank of the Dikrong River at Narayanpur.
The Karbis are an important tribe of Assam. They are mainly found in the hill district of Karbi Anglong. They are given the status of scheduled tribe (H) in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao districts. A large number of Karbi villages are also found in the plain areas of the state. They are mentioned as Mikir in the constitution order, Govt of India. Although their main concentration is in the Karbi Anglong. In the plains, Karbis live in the districts of Kamrup (M), Morigaon, Nagaon, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Cachar. Racially the Karbi belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. They call themselves as ‘Arleng’. The Karbis are divided into four groups, namely, Chinthong, Ronghang, Amri and Dumrali. The Karbis believe that their migration to the plains of Assam took place at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

There are several small tribal communities in Assam who follow the Buddhist religion. They are the Turungs, Aitonias, Tai Phakes and Khamyangs. The Tai Turungs were originally residing on the bank of the river Turung in Burma. From there they migrated to Assam. They are presently found in three villages of Jorhat, two villages in Golaghat and one village in Karbi Anglong district.

There are six villages in Karbi Anglong and three in Golaghat district inhabited by the Aitonias. They came to Assam from Myanmar during the 18th century.

Another small community following the Buddhist faith are the Tai Phakes. At present they inhabit the villages of NamPhake and TipamPhake in Namrup area of Tinsukia. According to historical sources (cited in Ninkhe. R, 2013, pp. 47), the Tai Phakes inhabited the Hukong Valley in the Patkai range of Mountains. From here they had to migrate to other places. Between 1742 to 1850 they had to shift from one place to another in search of proper habitation. In 1777, they came by the river on boat and arrived at Kokilamukh. Here they settled on the bank of the river Disou in Jorhat. In course of time, after several eventful situations they finally settled in Naharkatiya.

The Tai Khamyangs are presently found in Margherita area of Tinsukia district, and in some villages of Jorhat, Golaghat and Sibsagar. During the 16th century they were believed to have inhabited the place called as Khamjang Na, in the Patkai range. In course of time they migrated to the Tengapani and Sadiya regions of Assam.
The Ahom community in Assam inhabit the Upper Assam districts of Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, North Lakhimpur, Golaghat, Dhemaji and in certain areas of Nagaon and Sonitpur districts. They are also distributed in small pockets in other parts of the state. The Ahoms belong to the Tai ethnic group of the Mongoloid race. They came to Assam during the early part of the thirteenth century. The kingdom which Sukapha, the first Ahom king of Assam laid down in 1228 continued till 1826. Within this six hundred years, they have left a rich legacy in the history of this land.

3.4.6 The Vaishnavite Gurus of Assam and Satras

The Birth of Sri Sankardev is an epoch making event in the history of Assam. Sankardev belonged to a leading Bara Bhuyan family. His ancestors were Siromanis or overlords of the Bhuyans. During the reign of king Durlabhanarayana, Candivara, the great great grandfather of Sankardeva was given the epitaph, Devidasa and also land to settle at a place called Bardowa in Kamarupa. Thus, he along with six other Kayasthas and seven Brahmins migrated to Kamarupa from Gauda. Sankardeva was born in 1449 at Alipukhuri in Bordowa, a rich and bountiful land on the bank of the Brahmaputra. His father’s name was Kusumavara and his mother’s name was Satyasandha. Both his parents died when he was seven years of age. He was brought up by his grandmother Khersuti. Till the age of twelve years Sankardeva led a carefree life of a young boy spending his days by playing with his friends, catching small animals and birds, and looking after cows in the fields. He was also said to have often swam from one bank of the Brahmaputra to another and back without any aid. He took his early education in a tol (educational institution) under the Brahman pandit, Mahendra Kandali. After leaving the tol, he had to take the responsibility as an administrator by taking the role of the Siromani Bhuyan. During this time he got married to Suryavati. Sankardeva along with his administrative and household duties continued with his studies. A daughter was born who was named as Manu or Haripriya. His wife died soon after.
When he was around thirty two years of age, Sankardeva went for his first pilgrimage to different religious places of India like Puri and Benaras. He stayed in these places for several years. This pilgrimage had great influence on his career and was responsible for giving shape to his thoughts and ideas about propagation of the Vaishnava religion. After twelve years, he returned home. He married for the second time to Kalindi. He immersed himself in matters related to religion and held religious discourses with others. Sankardeva started preaching his religion and succeeded in getting many people to his fold.

Sankardeva along with his kinsmen migrated to several places within a short period of time and then settled in Dhuwahat (Majuli). It was at Dhuwahat that Sankardeva met Madhavdeva in 1522. At that time, Madhavdeva was thirty two years and a staunch believer of Saktism. Initially, he refused to accept the teachings of Sankardeva but was finally convinced by the great man’s philosophy. He accepted Sankardev as his Guru and remained a devoted disciple and friend till the end.

Sankardeva‘s religion gave access to people from all caste and creed. He rendered the Bhagavata purana into simple Assamese songs and verses which could be followed by everyone. Sankardev’s popular religion invited the hostility of the Brahmans whose teachings were at stake. He along with his followers had to undergo abuse and pain. During the reign of the Ahom king Suhungmung, Madhavdeva along with Haridev, the son in law of Sankardeva were arrested. While Haridev was executed, Madhavdeva had to live in confinement for six months.

Soon after this incident, Sankardeva, Madhavdeva along with their disciples left Kamrupa and migrated to the Koch kingdom in 1546. During that period, Narayana was the Koch king. He and his brother Chilarai were great patrons of learning. In the Koch kingdom Sankardeva was able to preach his religion and many people became his followers, the chief among them was Bhavananda, later called as Narayana Thakur or Thakur Ata. Narayan Thakur was responsible for conversion of a large number of people into the Neo Vaishnavite fold. From here Sankardeva and his followers changed their residence several times and finally settled in Patbausi. Patbausi formerly known as Bausi is an important Sattra in Barpeta. Sankardeva spent around eighteen to
twenty years here. It was here that the Guru made all his major poetical and dramatic works. In Patbaisi, Sankardeva met Damodardeva, a Brahman youth who was also a staunch follower of Vaishnavism.

From Patbaisi, Sankardeva left for his second pilgrimage to Puri. After this short visit to Puri, Sankardeva returned home and spent his time in holding religious congregation and writing books. Sankardeva wrote the Kirtana Ghosa and rendered the Bhagavata, X. Adi into Assamese verse. These are the two great and popular books of Assam Vaishnava.

Chilarai was a patron of Sankardeva and he was instrumental in building the Bhela or Bheladanga Satra in the Koch capital for Sankardeva. Sankardeva at the request of Chilarai had a forty yard long piece of cloth woven by the weavers of Tatikuci in Barpeta. This piece of cloth called as the Vrindavani vastra, depicts Krishna’s life in Vrindaban.

Sankardeva was a versatile genius who excelled himself in a multitude of talents. He was a social reformer, poet and dramatist, painter, musician and actor in dance drama. He is said to have lived a life of excellent and vigorous health, coupled with purely intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. Sankardeva died in 1568 at Koch Behar at the ripe age of around 120 years.

Sankardeva was succeeded by his disciple Madhavadeva to preach the teachings of the Neo Vaishnavite religion. Like Sankardeva, Madhavdeva was also a Kayastha. Madhavdev was born in 1489 A.D. in a village close to Narayanpur. His father was Govindagiri Bhuyan. Madhavdeva secured his education under Rajendra Adhyapaka at Banduka. Soon, he engaged himself as a small trader and worked for sometimes as a Majumdar under the ruling chief of Banduka. Madhavdev went to Dhuwahat where he met Sankardeva. The ancestors of both Sankardeva and Madhavdeva were Saktas. After his conversion to Vaisnavism; he devoted his life to the services of Sankardev and the dissemination of the Neo Vaishnavite philosophy. After the death of Sankardeva, Madhavdeva stayed for sometimes at Patbaisi and then at Sundaridiya where he built a monastery. During the later part of his life, his nephew Ramacarana kept him company.
and served him. Madhavdeva spent his years by preaching the faith of Sankardeva in Kamarupa. He was a scholar, poet and a singer. He composed the verses for his work, the Namaghosa and the Bhakti-Ratnavali. He spread the teachings of Sankardeva and also stayed at Carabari sands of the Brahmaputra River. He stayed at Tatikuci in Barpeta where another monastery was built. He also stayed at Koch Behar when it was ruled by Laksminarayan, the son of Naranarayana. Here he was welcomed and was able to stay and compose his verses. Madhavdeva died in 1596 A.D. He dedicated his whole life to the service of Sankardeva and the cause of the Neo-Vaishnava movement.

Along with the two great gurus, there were several other individuals who contributed to the growth and development of the Neo-Vaishnavite religion of Assam. Damodaradeva was the son of a Brahmin friend of Sankardeva. He brought many people under the fold of Vaishnavism. Damodaradeva established the Vaikunthapur Satra. His disciples established several satras in different parts of Assam. Haridev was another Vaishnava leader who initiated many followers to the fold of Vaishnavism. He established a satra at Maneri. Damodaradeva and Haridev had their own followings and these sects established their own satras. There were also nine Atas or elders who are revered by the followers of Vaishnavism. They are Srirama Ata, Gopaldeva Ata of Bhavanipur, Mathuradasa Budha Ata of Barpeta, Kesavacarana Ata of Bhataukuci, Bar Vishnu Ata of Dhopaguri, Badaluwa Padma Ata, Laksmikanta Ata of Dhopaguri, Govinda or Lecakaniya Ata of Khatara Satra, and Harihara Ata, besides the two Thakurs and grandsons of Sankardeva namely Purusottama and Caturbhuja. Different Satras were established by the twelve apostles, each of Purusottama Thakur and Caturbhuja Thakur, Kanaklata Ai, the wife of Caturbhuja and the sons of Sankardeva’s granddaughters and great granddaughters.

Ever since the adoption of Neo Vaishnavite religion in the sixteenth century, Assamese society and culture has undergone a state of Renaissance. The Neo-Vaisnavite movement in Assam propagated by Sri Sankardev and his disciples has left lasting impression on the life and culture of the people of Assam. Sri Sankardev taught a simple creed, which was also called as ekásarana nāma-dharma. The movement initiated during the sixteenth century by Sankardev was carried by his disciples to
almost all parts of Assam in the next two centuries and governs the socio-religious lives of the people of Assam. This new religious order stressed on the need to worship a monotheistic deity, Visnu, mainly manifesting as Kṛṣṇa. This is ekāsarana. Nāma-dharma is the practice of nāma, that is, īravana and kirtana. (The listening to and the chanting of God’s name). It discouraged rituals and is based on simple prayers for everybody to practice. The Institution of Satras and Namghars were established for meeting the religious, spiritual and socio-ethical needs of followers of this order. The Satras established by the Gurus have spread across the length and breadth of Assam and has also touched the neighbouring region of Koch Behar, now in West Bengal. The Sattras are cultural centres where literature, painting, Mask making, sculpture, drama, songs, music and dances are practiced and propagated. The Bargitas (Great songs) were composed by both Sankardeva and Madhavdeva. The Satras are also storehouses of ancient manuscripts, religious objects, antiques and other valuables. The satras are classed into four sub –sects, each called as samhati. They are the Brahma- Samhati( The Brahmanical group), The Nika- Samhati( the purist group), the Purusa- Samhati, and the Kala- Samhati. The followers of Damodardeva constitute the Brahma – Samhati group. The Auniati, Dakhinpat, Garamur and Kuruwabahi satras are some satras under this group and during the Ahom reign all these satras enjoyed patronage from the Ahom rulers. The followers of Mathuradas, Padma Ata and others constitute the Nika-Samhati group. The Kamalabari Satra, Barpeta Satra and Madhupur Satra of Koch Behar are the three important institutions under this group. The followers of the grandsons of Sankardeva and their successors are the members of the Purusa Samhati. The Bardowa, Bar-bara-janiya, saru- bara- janiya and Kanaka-bara-janiya groups of satras constitute this community. The followers of Gopala Ata constitute the Kala-Samhati group. Since the days of Sankardeva, the adherents of Neo- Vaisnavite religions have come from different caste or social positions and many professional backgrounds. The benign influence of Neo – Vaisnavism has built a society of tolerance and inclusiveness where the rigidity of caste and creed has become diminished to a great extent.

Table- I

List of food of different communities/ tribes of Assam
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Name of the Community</th>
<th>Food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td>Rice is the staple food of the Assamese people. Fish is a favorite food of the people. <em>Khar, Tenga</em> (light and Sour Curry), <em>Poitabhat</em> (cooked rice soaked in water and kept overnight) , <em>Pitika</em> (boiled and mashed vegetables of different kinds), <em>Jolpan</em> (Snacks consisting of different kinds served with curd, jaggery, etc), <em>Pitha</em> (Rice cakes of different varieties) are some other traditional dishes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Bodo</td>
<td>Rice is the staple food of the tribe. They eat a variety of vegetables which they grow at home. They also collect wild vegetables from the forest. The Bodos are very fond of meat and fish. Fish is a delicacy. Pork is a favorite food. They dry the flesh of pork which is called as <em>bedor goran</em>. The dried fish which they use is called as <em>na goran</em>. They also use eat duck, goat, pigeon and hen. They have a traditional rice beer known as <em>madh or jau</em>. Another type of dried fish prepared with arum stems and stored in bamboo tubes called <em>napham</em> is a favorite food and can be preserved for two or three years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Deori</td>
<td>Rice is the staple food of the Deori. They prefer boiled vegetables and eat fowls, pigs, ducks and goats. Fish is an important part of their diet. They drink a kind of rice beer called as <em>Suze</em>. Some of their traditional preparation are <em>Meroku Jubura</em> (curry of roasted rice powder), <em>Merkuji Jubura</em> (broken rice curry), <em>Miduji Jubura, Ujungon Niyom</em> (curry of bamboo shoot).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Dimasa Kachari</td>
<td>The staple food of the Dimasas is rice. Vegetables from the kitchen gardens, and also cultivated in the jhum fields are eaten. They also collect wild vegetables from the jungle. They are very fond of meat and fish. Dried fish is a delicacy. They drink a rice beer used is called as zou.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Garo</td>
<td>The staple food of the Garos is rice which they eat boiled. They also eat pork and other types of meat. Meat is prepared by boiling it with yam, gourd or pumpkin. They also have a hot and spicy soup called as Baring naikam, which is prepared with kind of dry fish called as Nakham. Some popular Garo dishes are Doo Pura, Doo Kalai, DooKapa, Nakam Bitchi, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Karbi</td>
<td>Rice is a staple food of the Karbi people. Their diet also includes Tsophe (black gram lentil)They eat a variety of vegetables, fish and meat. Pork is a favorite food. They use a rice beer called as Horlong. The stronger type of rice beer called Hor arak is also popular. Like the other tribal communities in this region they are also fond of dry fish. Toman (Fermented fish preserved in bamboo pipes) is a delicacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tribe</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Khamti</td>
<td>They eat rice. Their rice cooked in packets of leaves called as <em>Topola Bhat</em> is very popular. They also consume different type of leafy vegetables, edible roots, fish and meat. They have two different types of fish preparation called as <em>Pasom</em> and <em>Pasao</em>. Both these dishes are preserved for future use. They also store dry meat called as <em>Nguhaing</em>. <em>Pokatsang</em> is another special dish prepared with green leaves and kept in bamboo tubes and eaten after one week. Dishes made with potato-yam and fish called as <em>Fak-pasa</em> are specialties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>Like the other tribes of Assam, rice is the staple food of the Misings. Fish is a favourite food. They also consume preserved fish known as <em>Ngo San</em>. They also eat the flesh of pigs. They eat poultry. Their rice beer is called as <em>Apong</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rabha</td>
<td>Rice is the staple food of the people. They like various kinds of vegetables. They eat the meat of duck, pig, goat, fowl, etc. They use an indigenous type of rice beer known by various names like <em>Chako, Makham, Sinchina</em>, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sonowal Kachari</td>
<td>Rice is the staple food of the Sonowal Kachari people. They also include lentil and a variety of vegetables in their diet. They also use a special variety of rice, such as <em>komal chaol</em> and <em>Bora chaul</em> which they take with them when they go to the fields for doing the agricultural work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Singphos are agriculturist and traditionally cultivate tea. Rice is a staple food. They prepare the rice in packets of leaves and these are called as topola bhat. They prepare their food by adding different kinds of green herbs. In their preparation of food, the use of oil is absent or minimal. They eat fish and meat including pork which is a favorite food item. They prepare fish and meat dishes using the bamboo tube (Supung), plant leaves (Kou), bamboo Skewer (ping) and boiling (Gubang). Mushroom is also favoured by them. The rice beer used is called as Sapop.

Rice is the staple food of the Tiwas. They eat a variety of vegetables, meat and fish. Pork and chicken are essential items in their menu. They drink a rice beer called as Zu.

### Table-II

**Traditional attires of the different Communities/Tribes of Assam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Name of the Community</th>
<th>Traditional Attire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td><em>Dhoti, Suriya</em> (Lower garment of the males)<em>Eri Chaddar</em> (shawl), <em>Mekhela Chador,</em> (Lower wrapper and Upper wrapper for Females). Other traditional clothes include, <em>Riha, Gamosa,</em> etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **Bodo**  
The male persons wear a *gamcha*, which hangs down to the knees of the wearer. In winter they use a *Endi* wrapper which they call as *jumgra* or *madamni gamcha*. The Bodo women wear the *Dokhana*, which is a single piece of cloth covering the wearer from the breast to the ankles. If the *Dokhana* is plain it is called as *sala matha* and if it is ornamented it is called as *dokhna thawsi*. Their favourite and traditional colour is yellow.

3. **Deoris**  
The women wear the *Igu* (lower wrapper covering the body from the chest to the toes), *Jokka Chirba* (a piece of cloth encircling the waist), *Gatigi* (tied around the head), *Baiga* (long cloth for the upper part of the body). The Dress of the married women are different than the unmarried girls. The males wear the *Iku* (long clothes for the waist), *Bose* or *Jema* (kind of towel), *Deicha* (big clothes), *Churu Icha* (small clothes). White, red and green are the dominant colours in their dresses.

3. **Dimasa Kachari**  
The traditional dress of the Dimasa male consist of the *richa* (Towel), *chola* (Shirt), *cholahula* (overcoat), *Gainthou* (Piece of cloth wrapped around the loin), *rikausa* (Scarf), *paguri*, *Sagaopa* (Turban), and *rimchauramai*. The women wear the *rigu* (lower wrapper), *ritap* (endi wrapper) *rijamphai*, *rijamfinaberen*, *rikaucha* (upper wrappers), *rikhra*, *jinsudu*, etc.

**Garos**  
The traditional attire of the Garos has been replaced by modern clothing. Neverthe less there are some dresses which were worn since earlier times. The traditional dress of a female consists of a lower wrapper and a blouse to cover the upper part of the body. In the winter, they use a shawl to cover the upper part of the body.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Karbi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4. | The Karbis have their own traditional dresses. The male Karbi wear a turban called as *Poho*, and a *dhoti* or *Rikong* made of cotton. They call the shirt as *choi* and they put on a sleeveless jacket called as *Choi-hongtor* designed with long fringes called as *Abu* or *Apri*. A thick *endi* silk shawl is worn during the winter season. The women wear a petticoat or *Pini* designed with white, red and black strips. An ornamental girdle or belt called as *Vankok* is tied over the petticoat. In the Plains, especially the Dumurali Karbi woman use *Paning* instead of the lower-part garment called *Pini*. The upper part of the body is covered with a wrapper called as *Jalcho*.

As accessories, traditional Karbi woman always carries a small bag called *Chui* and a knife (Noke) with them. |
### 5. Khampti

The Khamtis males wear the *fa-noy* or the *lungi*. While assembling in the council house or the temple they wear the *lungi* as a symbol of their national dress.

The other dresses of the male consists of a Shirt or *shaw*, a Turban or *phaho*, a lower garment or *phanoi*, a lower wrapper called as *Seleng* or *phamoi*. The dress of the female consists of a short shirt to cover the upper part of the body which is locally called as *shoopijing*, a Turban or *phaho*. The garment, which covers the lower part of the body, is known as *shin*. They also use a red belt called as *shasin* tied at the waist. They wear *Riha* or the *longwat*. It is mandatory for a woman to wear the *phaho*. Only the married women wear the *longwat*. The unmarried women wear the *shin* (mekhela), *phamoi* (chador) and *saisin* (belt).

The monks wear the *Sangkan*, a garment which is wrapped around the upper part of the body and the *Sangpen*, a garment which is worn to cover the lower part of the body. They also wear the *Angichet* which is a shirt like the vest and a rope called as *Sainok koupat* which is tied around the waist. The above materials are of saffron colour.

### 6. Mising

The traditional dress worn by a Mising woman consist of a wide strip of cloth worn around the waist, extending down to the knees and is called as *Sumpa*. Around the breast, they wrap a piece of narrow cloth called as *Galuk*. A small piece of cloth called as *Hura* is used as a headdress.

A narrow piece of extra cloth worn round the hips distinguishes the married women from the unmarried ones. The male dress consists of a narrow strip of cloth called as *Kaping*.

On festive occasions the women wear the *Yambo*, *RiwiGaseng* and *Ege* and the men wear the *Miboogaluk*, *Tangali* and *Gonroo*.
7. **Rabha**

The women’s traditional dress consist mainly of *Rifan, Kambung* and *Khodabang* which are invariably needed for attiring a bride at the time of her marriage. At present they wear *Lemphota* (lower garment). The male dresses consist of *Pajal* (dhoti), *Pazar* (Neck cloth), *Buksil* (shirt), *Phali* (handkerchief).

8. **Sonowal Kachari**

The Sonowal Kachari women wear the *Mekhela Chador* and the men wear the *Suriya, Dhoti* and shirt.

9. **Singpho**

The Singphos are expert weavers and almost all members of the community wear hand woven cloth and wear homemade dresses. The Singpho women wear the *khakhokhring*. They wear a lower garment called as *Bukang*. They also wear the *Nunguat* which is tied above the chest. The belt called as *Singket* is used. They also wear a special dress adorned with silver pieces called as *Kumphong Plong*. The male folk use a lower garment called as *Bupa* or *Baka* and a white turban (*Pham bam*).
10. **Tai Phakes**

The dress of the male consists of a woven *Lungi* called as *Fatong* which is worn from the waist extending up to the ankle. Shirts and pullovers are purchased from the markets. Old men use a white shirt with long and loose sleeves while going to the temple or to other villages. A white turban called as *Fahoho* is worn by both the sexes. A white chador called as *Fafekmai* is worn by the elderly persons when they go to the temples.

The dress of the female consists of a lower wrapper called as *Chin*, which extends up to the portion below the knee joint. On the breast, they use a long stripped cloth called as *Fanangwat*. On the waist a belt called as *Chairchin* is worn. The unmarried girl wear a white breast cloth called as *Fafek*. The women wear a white chador when they go out of their villages or to the temple.

11. **Tiwa**

The plain Tiwas use dresses similar to those worn by other rural Assamese women. The typical dresses consist of a lower wrapper, and an upper wrapper. On festive occasions they wear *Singkhap Mekhela, Riha, Sondia Kapor, Thenus, Seleng, Sakathia, Farke, Mankapor*, and *Borkapor*. The women wear a waistband called as *Thongali*. The women also wear a wrapper at the breast, which covers their body, and falls below their knee. The Plain Tiwa men wear the dhoti, *Nimai Sola* and a shirt called as *Thagla*.

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**Table-III**

**Traditional ornaments of the different Communities/Tribes of Assam**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Name of the Community</th>
<th>Traditional Ornaments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td>Ornaments worn on the neck, such as Golpata, Dugdugi, Kerumoni, Jonbiri and Dholbiri, ear pieces like Thuriya, Keru and Loka-paro, Bracelets like Gaam Kharu and Muthi Kharu. In olden times, male also used to wear elaborate ornaments on their neck, wrist and fingers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Bodo</td>
<td>The women wear the Khera or Kheru, japkhring (ear rings), boula (for the upper ear), Nak phul as nose studs, Chandrahari, Bisahar, Thanka-siri, Jibou-zin-siri, as necklaces and Mutha, and Ashan suri for the hands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Dimasa Kachari</td>
<td>The elderly Dimasa males earlier used to wear the silver earrings called as Karih and silver armlets called as Youcher. The Dimasa women wear a variety of ornaments like Poal (necklace made of silver pieces and sea shells), Chandrawal (silver necklace), Rongborsha (necklace made of silver coins), other neckpieces like Liksim, Likjao and Jongsama. Other ornaments are Khamonthai, (earring of gold), Khamonhai (earring made of silver) Khadu (silver bracelet) Eansidam (nose ring), etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Garos</td>
<td>There are different types of traditional ornaments like Nadongbinr Sisha, Nadirong, Natapsi (worn on ears), Jaksan (bangles), Ripok, (necklaces made of long beads, and sometimes with silver or brass), Sengki (Waist band) and Pilne (ornament worn on the head). The men wear rings called as Jaksil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karbi</td>
<td>Rabha</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Karbi females use a number of ornaments like rings, silver</td>
<td>The Rabha women are fond of ornaments which they purchase from the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bangles, necklaces (<em>lek</em>) and a kind of heavy bracelet known as</td>
<td>goldsmith. The traditional ornaments which were in use in earlier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>roipengkhcms</em>. They use different types of necklaces such as</td>
<td>times are the <em>Namri, Dala, Bola</em> (for the ears), <em>Hancha, Sukimata</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lek-peng mui</em> (red and blue bead necklace with designed silver</td>
<td>(necklace) <em>Rubuk, Reckhop</em> (waistband), <em>San</em> (bangle), <em>Khusumakrang</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pieces), <em>Lek-pengkhara</em> (necklaces made of red beads joined with</td>
<td>(hairpin), <em>Chasikam</em> (finger ring). *Thek, Kuria, Nakputi, Bali,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>designed silver pieces), <em>Lek-siki</em> (necklaces made of</td>
<td>Chelahar, Chandrahar, Sangka, Kantabaju, Thengchela are some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multi-coloured beads and silver coins), <em>Lek-pingjiri</em> (necklace</td>
<td>ornaments which are worn by the Rabha women nowadays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made of silver), <em>Lek-pil</em> (necklaces made of big beads of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>orange colour and pieces of <em>eri</em> clothes), <em>Lek-yaikom</em> (a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>necklace made of multicoloured beads inserted through three</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>threads), <em>Bon-mala-</em> (necklace made of big-size silver beads).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the traditional society Karbi men folk wore bead necklaces (<em>Lek</em>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and silver bangles (<em>rni</em>).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table- IV

Musical Instruments used by the different communities/ tribes of Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Name of Tribe/ Community</th>
<th>Musical Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td><em>Dhol, Gogona, Pepa</em>(the horn pipe), <em>Taal, Toka</em> (a piece of bamboo with one part of it split), <em>Xutuli, Khol, Mridanga, Madol, Dotora, Dogor, Baanhi, Nagera, Ektara, bhortala, Doba, bah Jantra, Zuti tala.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Bodo</td>
<td><em>Kham</em> (drum), <em>Jotha</em> (Cymbal), <em>Khawang</em> (Cymbal bigger than the Jotha), <em>Siphung</em> (a long flute), <em>Serja</em> (four stringed instrument)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Deori</td>
<td><em>Durum</em> (drum), <em>Khol, Taka</em> (A bamboo instrument), <em>Pepa</em> (flute), <em>Luguru Kuci, Salmara, Dholong, Tal, Kah, Samkha, Bin, Ghanta, Suti</em> (Clapper of bamboo or wood), <em>Singa, Gagana, Bahi, Bin, Tokari, etc</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4. Dimasa Kachari

Dance and music play an important part in their culture. They have the indigenous musical instruments like the *Khram*(drum), *Muri*, *Muri Wathisa* and *Suphin*(all flute like reed instruments, *Khram- Dubung*(a kind of Veena), *Pen* or *Bin* (stringed instrument).

### 5. Garo

They have three types of drums . The longer one is called *Dama*, the shorter one is called as *Kram* and the smallest one is called as *Nadid*. They also use a few wind instruments and cymbals of various sizes.

### 6. Karbis

The Karbis use a few musical instruments like the drums called as *Cheng* and *Chengbruk*. The Cheng is a big drum while the *Chengbruk* is small in size. They flutes called as *Muri*, *Pangsi*, *Mri tangpa*.

### 7. Morans

*Sutuli, Dhiting or Dhutong*

### 8. Meches

*Chiphung* (Flute), *Serza*

### 9. Mising

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>10.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rabha</strong></td>
<td><em>Umbanggi</em>, (a kind of mouth pipe), <em>Karanal</em> (a long node less pipe), <em>Natagungglay</em> (earthen mouth organ), <em>Buburenga</em> (mouth organ made of reed), <em>Badungwpa</em> (a string instrument made from bamboo tube), <em>Kham</em> (drum), <em>Brangsi</em> (flute), <em>Daidi</em> (gong), <em>Chengchop</em> (cymbal) <em>Gamena</em> (Jews harp), <em>Singa</em> (flute made of buffalo horn), <em>Jhop</em> or <em>Jhap khara</em> (flute).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sonowal Kachari</strong></td>
<td><em>Dhol</em> (drum), <em>Mrdanga</em>, <em>Taka</em> (A bamboo instrument), <em>Hat-taka</em>, <em>Taka-Mari-Taka</em>, <em>Khutital</em>, <em>Bahi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tai Buddhist</strong></td>
<td><em>Kong pat</em>, <em>Dhol</em>, <em>Jamtong or Yammong</em>, <em>Jammanlung</em>, <em>Chang-an</em>, <em>Kartak</em>, <em>Techi</em>, flutes like <em>Pi Khao Khaï</em>, <em>Tut</em>, <em>Kang-kang</em>, <em>Pirengceo</em>, <em>Pitai</em>, <em>Bin</em> or <em>Ting</em>, <em>Dhetung-tung</em>, <em>Behera</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Tea Tribes</strong></td>
<td><em>Dhak</em>, <em>Nagara</em>, <em>Madal</em>, <em>Timki</em> (a conical type of drum), <em>Nissan</em>, <em>Dhamsa</em>, <em>dhapla</em>, <em>Vamsa</em>, <em>Dhal</em>, <em>Ravka</em>, <em>Makati</em>, <em>Jhaj</em>, <em>Kartal</em>, <em>Kanshi</em>, <em>Ghungaur</em>, <em>Poiri</em>, <em>Jhutia</em>, <em>Kathimor Danda</em>, <em>Banshi</em>, <em>Pepti</em>, <em>Shahrani</em>, <em>Tirio</em>, <em>Madan Bher</em>, <em>Buang</em>, <em>Banam</em>, <em>Kendora</em>, <em>Tuita</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sl.No.</td>
<td>Communities/Tribes involved in celebration</td>
<td>Name of the festivals along with a brief description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td>Bihu is a festival associated with the seasons and agriculture. It is a festival which is celebrated by all people from different religion, caste and creed. There are three types of Bihu which includes <strong>Rongali Bihu</strong> or <strong>Bohag Bihu</strong>, <strong>Bhogali</strong> or <strong>Magh Bihu</strong> and <strong>Kati</strong> or <strong>Kongali Bihu</strong>. <strong>Rongali Bihu</strong> is celebrated on the onset of spring. <strong>Kati bihu</strong> is celebrated during the Month of October when the granaries are empty. <strong>Magh Bihu</strong> is celebrated, after the crops are harvested and the granaries are full with grains. People enjoy this festival by feasting on food and drinks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **Bodos**

**Bathou Borai** is their supreme God who is symbolized by the Siju plant which is planted in the Bodo households for offering prayers. The Bodo also worship many Gods and Goddesses and visit various temples of Shiva and Shakti.

The Brahma section of the tribe devotedly follows the teachings of Kalicharan Brahma. And they perform Hom Yajna in the Vedic style. But they revere the *sizu* plant which they plant in their courtyard as representing *Bathou*.

**Kherai puja**

The religion and festival of the Bodos are intimately connected to agriculture. *The Kherai puja* (form of worship) performed in different times of the year in accordance with particular occasions. Thus, there are *Darshan Kherai, Umrao Kherai*, *Phalo Kherai* and *Nowaoni Kherai*.

**Garja puja** is another important religious festival.

**Baisagu**

It is celebrated to herald the spring season. The supreme deity *Bathau* or *Sibrai* is worshipped on this occasion by making offerings to him. Community singing and merriment with the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments marks the festival and continues for a week. They also observe certain restrictions (taboos) during the period. It is customary to offer community prayer at the close of the festival.

**Katri gasa**

They celebrate *Katri gasa* on the last day of the month of Ahin.

**Domashi**

It is a seasonal festival celebrated to welcome the new harvest.
Different kind of cakes locally called as *pithas* made with rice flour are prepared and served to relatives and friends. The occasion is celebrated with enthusiasm and festive fervor.
| Deori | They are worshipper of Lord Mahadev and Parvati. The Dibongiyas call these supreme deities as *Kundimama*. *Kundi* is identified as Lord Shiva and *Mama* as Parbati. The common place of worship among the Borganya and Tengapaniya is the *Than* while the Dibongiyas call it as *Midiku*.

**Bohagiyo Bisu**

‘Bi’ means ‘extreme’ and ‘su’ means ‘rejoicing’. There is much merriment and joy during this period. The festival generally commences from a Wednesday. The celebration must be preceded by a *Than Puja*. The festival has a close relation with the agricultural activities. The *deodhani* dance forms an important part of this celebration. It is celebrated on the *Sangkranti of Chait*

**Magiyo Bisu**

It is celebrated on the ‘*sangkranti*’ of *Puh*. It is a seasonal festival celebrated for the new harvest. Different kind of cakes locally called as *pithas* made with rice flour are prepared and served to relatives and friends. The occasion is celebrated with enthusiasm and festive fervor. |
| 3. | Dimasa Kachari | **Rajini Gabra and Harini Gabra**

The Dimasa are predominantly followers of Hinduism and they have been maintaining their autonomy and culture to a great extent. The Dimasa Kacharis observe various festivals. The celebration of the socio-religious festivals **Rajini Gabra** and **Harni Gabra** is held once annually before the starting of new cultivation. The former is celebrated during day time only. The **Kunang**, the traditional headman propitiates his family deity by closing the village gate on the day of the performance of **Rajini Gabra**. In the same night the function called **Harni Gabra** is also celebrated. Here the deity **Harni** is worshipped for the protection and welfare of the people during the coming years.

It is very interesting to note that during the performance of **Rajini Gabra** and **Harni Gabra** if any outsider enters into the village in spite of seeing the sign of the closing gate, the entire function is considered to be spoilt. The intruder bears the total expenses of holding the festival anew.

**Busu Dima**

But the celebration **Busudima or Busu** (harvesty festival) is the joyest and most important of all. Prior to celebration of **Busu** a specially decorated and artistically designed gate called **Fangsla** is erected at the main entrance to the village.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.</th>
<th>Garo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Garos are followers of Christianity. They celebrate Christmas, Easter and other festivals with religious fervor. They also have some traditional festival. They celebrate Wangala, which is the harvest festival. This festival is also known as the festival of hundred drums.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5. | Karbi | **Rongker**  
It is a socio-religious festival. The gods and goddesses are propitiated for the welfare of an entire village and to ward off disasters such as disease and natural calamities. It is also performed to welcome a good harvest.  
Another type of *Rongker* called as *Wofong Rongker* is celebrated at an interval of five years and continues for two days. |  
---

**Hacha Kekan**  
It is a merry making festival. Community feast, dance and songs take place. It is a thanksgiving ceremony when the goddess of prosperity is thanked for bestowing her blessings to the people.  

**Chomankan**  
It is an elaborate and important ceremony performed for the deaths in Karbi society. The Karbis believe that the spirits of the dead men and women have to be sanctified by rituals of the death ceremony called *Chomangkan*. It is an elaborate rituals which requires prior planning, large expenditure and elaborate arrangement. There are three types of *chomangkan* namely – *Kanphlaphla* which is performed for the ordinary Karbi people, *Langtuk chomangkan*, performed for the persons who used to occupy high position in the social hierarchy of the Karbis and *Harne chomangkan* which is performed for the persons who occupied highest position in the society. |
<p>|   | Khamti   | The Khamtis are Buddhist. They celebrate the festivals called as Poi Changkan, Mai-Ko_soom-Phai, and others. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.</th>
<th>Mising or Miri</th>
<th><strong>Ali-Aye-Ligang</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ali-Aye-Ligang</em> is the most important festival held on the first Wednesday of the <em>Ginnur Polo</em> (month of Fagun). This spring dance festival is observed to mark the sowing of the seeds. <em>Ali</em> means root, seed, <em>Aye</em> means fruit and <em>Ligang</em> means sow. Thus ceremonial sowing of paddy starts on this day. Dancing and singing is the characteristic feature of this festival. The whole atmosphere is surcharged with music of <em>Dum Dum, Pempa, Siphung</em> and <em>Gunggang</em> played with the rhythmic dances of the girls attired in their best <em>Ribigaseng</em> and <em>Ribiyege</em>. <em>Poro Apong</em> and dried fish is essential for the feast. The festival continues for five days and during these days dancing and feasting is held on the courtyard of the villagers and in return the host entertains the <em>Gurmruk</em> dancers. The festival is concluded with <em>Dapan Tipan</em> i.e. a community feast. The last day of the festival is called <em>Linen</em>. During this festival certain taboos in respect of cutting trees, catching fish, ploughing, burning jungles, eating vegetables cooked with oil etc., are observed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Porag</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Porag is another important festival. For the smooth functioning of this festival the <em>Mimbir Yame</em> i.e youth organization of the Misings make necessary arrangements. They do it in a formal and systematic manner called <em>Daglik</em>. The <em>Murong</em> is renovated. Large quantities of food and drink are arranged much in advance. The host village invites the villagers from neighbouring Mising villages who also participate in singing and dancing. A <em>Miboo</em> is appointed who conducts the prayer to <em>Chedi Melo</em> and <em>Donyi Polo</em> etc. <em>Poro Apong</em> and pork are essential items for this festival. At least 4/5 pigs are sacrificed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and grand feast arranged where all the villagers participate. At night the Miboo leads the dancing and for three days the whole village celebrates with feast and dance. The women folk in their traditional dresses take part in dancing and singing along with the rhythmic beating of drums. The festival comes to an end with a prayer dance known as Ponu Nunam.

**Amrok**

the Misings also observed a festival called *Amrok*. Every household observes the *Amrok* festival where food prepared out of harvested crop is offered to the ancestors. The festival is observed on community basis also. Feast with *Apin Apong*, pork and chicken is arranged. After the feast the youths perform *Pakso Monam* dances along with the tune of *Oi Nitam*. During festival obligations are offered to the malevolent deities (*Uram Kusung*).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rabhas</th>
<th>The Pati Rabhas of Boko and South Goalpara areas are Hinduised and call themselves Vaisnavas. A large section of the tribe has converted to Christianity. The Pati Rabhas observe the <em>Rangali Bihu</em> and <em>Bhogali Bihu</em>. They speak the Assamese language. They observe <em>Langa Puja</em>. The Rangdani and Maitori groups offer <em>Baikho</em> or <em>Khoksi</em> puja, a festival celebrated to propitiate <em>Baikho</em> the goddess of Wealth and Prosperity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Singphos</td>
<td>The Singphos are followers of Buddhism. Every year on 14th February they celebrate the day as <em>Sopong yong manau poi</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 10. | Sonowal Kachari | The Sonowal Kachari observes the Three types of Bihu – *Rongali Bihu*, *Kati Bihu* and *Magh Bihu*. Some other festivals which they perform during the year are *Bhur Utua*, Tithis of Sankardeva, Madhavdeva and Lila Kanta Goswami, *Laksmi Tola Sabha*, *Kheti Utha* or *Chengeli Machor Sabah*, *Bali Sabah*, etc.  

**Rangali Bihu**  
It is celebrated on the *Sangkranti of Chait* and continues for a fortnight. Considered as a traditional community festival, the occasion is marked with great joy and merriment. Young boys and girls dance in separate groups along with the beating of drums and pipes. During the festival the entire village is astir with festive fervour. |
| 11. | Tai Phakes   | The Tai- Phakes are followers of Buddhism. They celebrate *Poi Changkan*. They also celebrate other festivals like *Poi- Khowa*, *Poi- Okwa*, *Poi-Kithing*, *Mike- sumphai*, *Kham Sang* and *Poi- |
The Tiwas living in the plain districts of Nagaon and Morigaon districts of Assam are mostly assimilated to the fellow Assamese way of life. Vaisnavism has taken a deep root among them. The *Naamghar* has also made its appearances in the villages. The traditional culture is however not extinct. This is reflected in the socio-religious beliefs and practices specially among them. Lord Mahadev is the supreme deity and there are *thans* (public worshipping place) where pujas are held with sacrifice of fowls and animals.

*Bichu* is a festival centering around agriculture. They celebrate three types of *Bichus*—which they call as *Boisaak bichu, Maakh Bichu and Kaati Bichu* corresponding to the three Bihu celebrated in Assam. The famous *Jon Beel mela* near Jagiroad is held in January and provides traditional barter facilities. It is an attractive feature of the *Maakh Bichu*.

The *Gossain Uluwa Utsav* is an important part of the *Boisaakh Bichu* festival.

Another festival celebrated by the Plain Tiwas is the *Barat festival*. In order to appease God, Brat or fasting is observed by the womenfolk, at the end of which a festival is arranged to culminate the occasion.

The institutions of *Rajas (Poali raja)* has survived. Every year the Raja (Gobha raja) is honoured publicly.
Table-VI

Traditional Institutions among different Communities and Tribes of Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of Community/Tribe</th>
<th>Traditional Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Bodo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Raijani Bokhri*

It is the common granary which is present in almost all villages. This common village granary is nurtured by the collective contribution of households by means of kind. During lean period the grain is loaned to needy members against a nominal interest rate. It is a cooperative institution of an indigenous form.

*Raijani Metheng*

It is the traditional village panchayat which solves different issues like theft, assault, quarrels, land partition disputes, and problems arising due to breaking of customary law.

*Saori*

This word in Bodo- Kachari language means rendering physical labour on invitation of a co villager during times of need.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Deoris</th>
<th>The Dibangiya and Barganya sections of the tribe have maintained their traditional language same.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sariya Mata</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>An organisation which renders assistance to fellow villagers by way of providing service is present among the Deories. Also present are the <em>Morungghar</em> and <em>Mel</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Dimasa Kacharis</td>
<td>The Dimasa Kacharis have a strong clan organisation. They have both patriclans and matriclans. The Patriclans are called as <em>sengphong</em> and the matriclans are called as <em>jaddi or julu</em>. The patri and matriclans in the Dimasa society regulates the social behaviour of the members of the society. Marriage and inheritance follow clan rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Salis (Village Council)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It is the traditional village level governing institution. It has a traditional headman called as <em>Khunang</em> who along with several elders look after the welfare of the villagers by performing both executive and judicial activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Nodrang (Bachelors Dormitory)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Earlier the youths had to undertake armed fights against enemies of their villages. Its activities over the years have changed. Now it is concerned with economic and social activities in the village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hangsao</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Institution of <em>Hangsao</em> present among the Dimasas assist the villagers during sowing in the <em>Jhum</em> fields and plantation in the paddy fields. They take a nominal charge from the families after the crops are harvested.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4. Karbi

Existence of some traditional institutions is seen among the Karbis although in the present day context many of these institutions have lost its relevance. These institutions concern the social, political and economic life of the people.

**Me and Mepi**

*Me* is the village council which settles the inter-village problems. The council is presided over by the *Sarrthe* (the village headman) *Rongthe* (in the Dimoria Longri) and all the adult males are members (*Chakris*) of the council. In the Dimoria Longri, the headman is called *Bangthe*, a term used as the synonym of *Sarrthe*. The Mei plays an important role in regulating the socio-economic and religious life of the village. *Mepi* is the greater council presided over by the *Habai /Bangthe* (in the Dimoria Longri) who is a high officer than a Sarthe.

**Kerung Amie**

The Karbis also have a traditional economic Institution called *Kerung Amie* which is like a grain bank. This system gives sustenance to poor Karbi households during time of adversity. Karbi households can take loan in the form of paddy from the bank and return the same later to the bank with a nominal rate of interest. There are three types of grain banks which are managed by the community.
In one such type, the grain bank is maintained by the youths of the village. The youths are allotted a plot of land for cultivation by the community. They cultivate the paddy and loan it to needy persons of the community. Similarly, the elderly males of the Karbis also manage a grain bank. They cultivate the paddy in a plot of land which is given to them by the community for this purpose.

**Jirkedang (Youth Dormitory)**

The unmarried male members of the Karbi society are the members of the youth dormitories. It is an institution of social work and performs social work in the village. During the festival of *Rongker*, and *Chomangkan* the members take active part. It is to be noted that in the plains areas outside Karbi Anglong district, Zirkedam is not found. In such areas the *Risomel* or the youth club serves almost the same purpose as Zirkedam.
| 6. | Miris or Mising | The Miris or Misings have undergone tremendous changes in their society but we find that they have been able to preserve most of their traditional cultural trait. Vaisnavism has entered Mising society. Material culture of the Mising tribes has undergone changes due to their close contact with non tribal communities. Some of the villages in Bokaghat district have completely lost the Mising language and now speak the Assamese language. |
|     |              | **Kebang** |
|     |              | The village Panchayat consisting of village elders which plays an important role in the socio-cultural and religious matters within a village. |
|     |              | **Bane Kebang** |
|     |              | This is a bigger Body then the Kebang and decides cases involving two or more villages. A jury helps in deciding the cases. |
|     |              | **Morung** (Bachelor Dormitory) |
|     |              | **Mimbir Yame**: A traditional institution, the literal meaning of the term is ‘young women and men’. Unmarried boys and girls above the age of 12-13 are members of this organisation. Discipline and tribal etiquette are taught by the members. They also offer social work in the village. |
4. The Brahmaputra River

4.1 Introduction

The Brahmaputra Basin which has derived its name from the Brahmaputra River is one of the most densely populated river basins in the world. It is located at a longitude of 82°-97° east and latitude of 21°-31° north. This basin covers an estimated population of seven hundred million people of China, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The Brahmaputra river is considered as an international river and traverses through several countries. It originates from the Kanglung Kang glaciers east of Manas Sarovar which is at an elevation of 5150 m. In Tibet where the upper course of the river is located, it travels 1625 km and then enters Indian territory through Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. It traverses 278 km in Arunachal Pradesh and 640 km in Assam. A total number of fifty nine tributaries are received by this river, twenty two in Tibet, thirty three in India and three in Bangladesh. Dutta (2001) says, “closer to its source it is known as the mutsung tsangpo, then the moghung tsangpo and finally the tsangpo while Chinese maps have it as the yarlu tsangpo-brahmaputra,” (as cited in The Assam Tribune, Nov 4, 2001). In Tibet the river is called by the name of Tsangpo and Yarlung Zangbo in China. In India it is known as the Brahmaputra, and Jamuna in Bangladesh. One of the major rivers of the world, the Brahmaputra is described, ‘A river extraordinaire, the Brahmaputra presents a picture of awesome expanse, enchanting grandeur, overwhelming sobriety and immense vigour’. (Goswami 2008, pp. 2). Through its journey of 2880 km, the river passes through different hydro- ecological and climatic regions. The flora, fauna and ethnic composition of people of this region is one of the most diverse in the world.

The river enters the north-eastern corner of Assam through the Mishmi hills of Arunachal Pradesh where it is called as the Siang, and further down as Dihang, and along with the Lohit and Dibang enters Assam and takes the name of the Brahmaputra. Previously, the river in Arunachal Pradesh was called as Shyama, Sema or Senglai, while near Along it was known as S’Yem. (Dutta, 2001, pp. 2). On entering Assam from the east through Sadiya in Tinsukia district, it flows through the districts of Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Biswanath, Darrang, Nagaon, Morigaon, Kamrup, Barpeta, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, South Salmara- Mancachar and Dhubri. After traversing through
Assam, the river near Dhubri abruptly turns south and enters Bangladesh and assumes a new name Jamuna which once more changes to Padma and then flows into the Bay of Bengal. The Brahmaputra while carrying the waters of its tributaries flows throughout the length and breadth of Assam. Its tributaries have permeated the entire region. The major tributaries from the north bank are the Lohit, Dibang, Subansiri, Jiabharali, Barnadi, Puthimari, Pagladiya, Beki, Manas, Ai, Gabhoru, Chompa\wati, Raidhak, Torsa, Teesta, Jiadhol, Dhansiri(N), Saralbhanga, Aie, and Sankosh. The major tributaries from the South bank are the Noa Dehing, Buridehing, Dibang, Disang, Dikhow, Dhansiri ( S), Kopili, Janji, Bhogdoi, Kakdonga, Kolong, Digaru, Dudhnai, Krishnai, Sonai, Bharalu, Krishnai and Dudhnoi.

The plain areas of Assam consists of two valleys, ie., the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak valley. The names of the valleys have been derived from the rivers which flow through them-the Brahmaputra valley named after the river Brahmaputra and the Barak valley named after the Barak River. The Brahmaputra valley is the dominant physical feature of Assam. It covers 72 percent of the total area of the state and is inhabited by the majority of the population. The massive Brahmaputra touches most of the plain districts of the state. It consists of the Western Brahmaputra valley, the Central Brahmaputra valley and Eastern Brahmaputra valley.

**River Map of Assam**
4.2 Myths

During the mythological period shrouded with myths and legends, there is the mention of the river by different names. The name Brahmaputra literally means ‘Son of Brahma’ and is one of the few male rivers in India. The myth on the origin of the name tells that Brahmaputra was the son of Lord Brahma, the God of the Universe. His mother was Amogha who was the wife of the Sage Santanu. The child who was in the form of water was taken by Sage Santanu and placed in the middle of four great mountains- Kailash, Gandhamadana, Jarudhi and Sambwarttaka. He grew into a great lake which came to be known as the Brahmakund. Another ancient name of the river is the Lauhitya. In Hindu mythology the river is viewed as sacred and mystic.

The Name Lauhitya is found mentioned in various forms in the early inscriptions and literary texts. The Tezpur Copper Plate Inscription and Parbatiya Copper Plate Inscription of Vanamalavarmadeva, Uttarbarbil Copper Plate Inscription and Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription of Balavarman, Bargaon Copper Plate Inscription and Subhankarapataka...
Copper Plate Inscription of Ratnapala, Guwahati Copper Plate Inscription and Guwakuchi Copper Plate Inscription of Indrapala, Gachtal Copper Plate Inscription of Gopalavarman mention the name of river Lauhitya in different contexts. These epigraphs sometimes depict the beauty of the river, and reflect the sacred and high status accorded by rulers of early Assam. The epigraphs also mentions about honouring the river for its vastness and it was called as Varidhi and Sarit-adhipati. The other names of the river according to ancient scriptures are Hiranyo, Mandakini, Hridini, Khatai, Brahmi, Karkaya, Diyame, etc.

There is a legend regarding the origin of the name Lauhitya. Parashuram, the son of Sage Jamadagni killed his mother with an axe which remained glued to his hand. He was advised by the sages to visit the different shrines to wash off his sin. He roamed about the country visiting holy places, but his axe did not fall off from his hand. At last it was at the Brahmakund he was able to drop the axe. He plunged his hand in the water and his axe separated from his hand. He made this Brahmakund a shrine. According to the Kalika Purana, Parashuram caused the Lauhitya to flow out from a hill after he had filled it from the water of the Brahmakund. The Lauhitya rises in this sacred pool and flowed westward from here under the name of Brahmaputra. The reason behind the nomenclature of Lauhitya was its water which was coloured red by the thick blood (Lohita) washed off from the battle axe of Parashuram is also depicted in a copper plate of ancient Assam. (Boruh N., 2010, pp. 127-128)

The legend of Parashuram is also found in the Brahmandaivarta and Kalika Purana. The river due to its vastness is often referred to as a sea in ancient literatures. The Kalika Purana referred the river as a Sagara. The Mahabharata calls the river Lauhitya while in the Matsya and the Varaha Puranas the river is mentioned as ‘Lohita’. Vayu Purana refers to it as a sacred river. Kalidasa in his Raghuvamsa depicting the expedition of Raghu towards Pragjyotisha-Kamrupa mentions that when he crossed the river Lauhitya, the king of Pragjyotisha began to tremble. (Boruh N, 2010, pp. 127-128).

The Mahabharata refers about the Lauhitya Shrine which was established by Parashuram. In the Kalika Purana and the Yogisatantra the river Brahmaputra has been identified with
the Shrine. The hot spring bearing the name of Brahmakunda and Parashuram Kunda presently located in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and situated about fifty miles east of Sadiya is venerated as the same shrine of the Hindu religion.

The term Lauhitya appeared to be the sanskritized form of the Indo-Mongoloid name Luhit, which is still the name of the easternmost branch of the river. S.K. Chaterjee writes that the common name of the river Brahmaputra is a sanskritization of the Indo-Mongoloid name Burum-buthur. It was an intermediate form between Lauhitya and Brahmaputra. (Chatterjee, S. K., 1974, pp. 88). The rational explanation of the red colour of the water of the river is said to be due to the soil it brings along its course. It is so called because of the fact that the river takes this colour during the rainy seasons when it cuts through the red soils in the adjoining embankments. (The Assam Gazetteer, 1967).

The river Dyardanes mentioned in Greek mythology is also said to be the same river as the Brahmaputra. The origin of the name of the Brahmaputra has been a subject of research for scholars throughout history. During medieval period the river has been mentioned in various contexts. Earlier travelers and chroniclers to Assam have left accounts of their travel to Assam and about the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. In the ‘Description of Asam’ by Mohammed Cazim who accompanied the army sent by Mughal king Aurangzeb to Assam in the 17th Century, the river Brahmaputra divided the country of Asam into two parts, the north bank was called as Uttarcul, and the south bank was called as Dakshincul. (cited Goswami, 2010, pp. 4)

4.3 Tracing its origin

The Brahmaputra has been a subject of interest since ages. Since ancient times, the river has been an enigma. Countless monks, explorers and travellers from India, China and Europe made attempts to unravel the mystic associated with the Brahmaputra and its origin.

Even as early as the beginning of the 18th century, the origin of the river was a subject of speculation, and there have been references about the river in the writings of several explorers and missionaries. European explorers wanted to collect information about countries like Tibet which was hitherto unknown to them and regarded as Terra
Incognito. Their fascination about this region made them organize several expeditions. They had other motives also. They wanted to open a trade route to China through Tibet. In the course of their explorations they began to search about the origin of the Brahmaputra.

Herman Moll, writing in the early eighteenth century, mentions that the lake of ‘Chiamay’ lies in ‘Acham’ from where the River Brahmaputra ensued, and ran into the Bay of Bengal after passing through several kingdoms.

Gerhard Kremer, published an atlas in the year 1612 from Amsterdam, named Mercator’s Atlas, where he depicts four rivers beyond the Ganges originating from this mysterious lake, which was later identified to be the Brahmakund of Eastern Assam.

During that period, maps were made by Jesuits cartographers who visited Tibet. In 1715, Father Desideri also drew a map of the rivers. But these maps along with the geographical records and description were not regarded scientific in nature.

In 1733 D’ Anville published a map based on surveys made by the Lamas of Tibet. He supposed the river Tsangpo to be the same with the ‘River of Ava’ or the Irrawady.

John Stewart, who later became the Secretary to the British Colonial Government at Fort William, wrote about the true course of the Brahmaputra in 1763.

Father Joseph Tieffenthaler, a Jesuit priest, had written in the second half of the eighteenth century that the Brahmaputra had its origin in the Manasarovar lake. Most of these claims were not accepted as reliable.

It was only after a century later, that evidence regarding the origin and true course of the river could be collected.

It was Major James Rennel who recognized the identity of the Brahmaputra with the Tsangpo river of Tibet. Rennel considered to be the ‘Father of Indian Geography’ made his observations and recordings based on his surveys of the river in its course in Bengal. In the course of his survey he also took information from people of Assam, who informed him that the Brahmaputra had travelled a long course before entering Assam. In addition,
he based his views on the Lama’s map of the Tsangpo in Tibet as shown in the book by Du Halde.

While entering Assam through Goalpara, he observed the size and speed of the flow of the river which he inscribed in his *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan* and was convinced that the Brahmaputra was identical with the Tsangpo. His river survey in the 1760s was one of the oldest studies of the Brahmaputra in a scientific manner. Rennel, from December 2-6, 1765 traced the course of the river Brahmaputra from Goalpara to Nagerbera, but he had to keep near the south bank of the river, as the population residing there, did not welcome Rennel to explore further. Never the less, Rennel was able to go further ten miles and was able to collect information that he required. The results of his survey are published in the Bengal Atlas, *Memoirs of a Map of Hindoostan* and in his Journals, 1764-1767.

His work was criticized by JP Wade (1805) who dismissed Rennels assumption that the Tsangpo was the origin of the Brahmaputra. Although Wade’s was proved wrong in the long run, never the less, his book ‘A Geographical Sketch of Assam’ (1805) lists sixty one rivers in Assam which is one of the greatest contribution about the rivers of this region.

William Robinson in his ‘Descriptive Account of Assam (1841), also viewed skeptically the idea of the narrow Dihang being the actual wide Tsangpo of Tibet.

After becoming embroiled in the affairs of Assam, with the intervention of the East India Company in quelling the Moamoria rebellion in the Ahom kingdom, the British realised the need to gain knowledge about this land which they knew very little. They sent an expedition to Assam to suppress the rebellion. Thomas Wood of the Bengal Engineers was employed to survey the Brahmaputra and its surrounding. He accompanied Captain Welsh in his expedition to Assam in 1792. He started his survey of the river from Goalpara where Rennel had left off his survey in 1765. By 1794, he finished his survey of the Brahmaputra and its surroundings as far as the mouth of the river Dikhow.

After the Burmese were expelled from Assam by the British in 1826, there grew a renewed interest in this region. The British were keen to learn about the terrain, history,
people and culture of this unexplored part of India. Anthropologists, medical officers, surveyors, administrators started coming here for collection of information. This included gaining information about the origin of the Brahmaputra.

Between 1824 and 1828 Captain Wilcox and Bedford carried out surveys of the rivers in the Brahmaputra valley. Shortly after that, Lieutenant Burlton completed the survey of the Brahmaputra up to Sadiya.

Francis Hamilton (1840) also surveyed some portion of the Brahmaputra in Assam. He did identify the Dihang as a stream of the Brahmaputra, but did not consider it to be the principal one. Several attempts were made by different individuals to trace the Lohit. In this context, the names of Wilcox, Griffith, Rowlatt and Cooper are noteworthy.

Captain R. Wilcox after gathering information from an elder of the Mishmi tribe that the Dihang had its course in Tibet went to explore the upper course of the river. He had to narrowly escape death from the tribesmen who did not welcome strangers to their territory and viewed their activities with suspicion. In 1854, two French missionaries were also killed when they penetrated this territory. By 1885, two more individuals – Needham and Molesworth travelled in the region to follow the course of the river, but were not able to leave a reliable map.

Thus by early 1900, it was found, that the origin of the Brahmaputra still remained unsolved. The British needed to enter Tibet not only to gather information about the terrain, flora, fauna and the connection between the Tsangpo and the Brahmaputra, but also to discover a route which might be important for promoting trade with Tibet. Tibet did not welcome foreigners, especially white people to their country and it was difficult to go look for the course of the Brahmaputra through Assam due to the presence of tribesmen hostile to European intrusion. The British then tried to use other means to achieve their objectives. They resorted to espionage by sending spies and informants within Tibet. As early as 1847, a mendicant, Paramanad Acharya was sent to Tibet with this purpose. In the early 1860s, Colonel T.G. Montgomerie and General Walker of the Survey of India devised a scheme which would enable some individuals to enter Tibet in the guise of pilgrims and gather information about the country and the Tsangpo. They
trained the Indians in the basics of survey works. They were trained on using simple instruments and techniques and record them concisely. They were referred to as Pundits. Some of the Pundits were Nain Singh, Kishen Singh and Manee Singh. They were sent several times to Tibet to collect geographical and political information of the country.

On one such expedition, Nain Singh and Manee Singh were sent to Tibet in find out the source of the Brahmaputra. Both these persons spoke fluent Tibetan language and had earlier visited Tibet. They had to disguise themselves as tradesmen and pilgrim. This expedition has been recorded in the ‘Report on the Trans Himalayan Explorations’. They started their journey in March 1865 and reached Lhasa in January 1866. This expedition was able to locate the source of the Brahmaputra and through information gathered from the inhabitants, also determine the main branch of the river. Nain Singh carried two other expeditions to trace the upper course of the river, the second in 1867 and the third in 1873. After five years, another party was sent for further search of some unexplored portions of the route of the river. In the reports of the journey on the expedition by Nain Singh in 1873, it was written that the Tsangpo could be identified with “the large river which under the name of Dihong enters Assam near Sudiya, where it is joined by the Brahmakund” (cited from Goswami, 2014, pp.43 ). These expeditions could unravel the upper course of the Brahmaputra to a large extent. Though this river in Tibet was considered to be the source of the Brahmaputra, yet there was lack of evidence to prove this assumption.

There was still speculation about the lower course of the Tsangpo which was thought to be either the Irrawady or the Brahmaputra. From 1860-70 till 1910, several Indian surveyors were recruited by the British to collect geographical information of this region. It was during this time that the name of the Sikkimese adventurer and explorer Kinthup comes into the picture. He was sent by the Survey of India to Tibet with a plan to ascertain that the Brahmaputra was the same river as the Tsangpo. He was advised to send specially marked logs at regular interval down the course of the Tsangpo River. He would inform the British officers of the Survey of India about it, and they would keep watch at the lower part of the Dihang river to catch the logs. This would establish the fact that the Dihang is the lower course of the Tsangpo. Kinthup reached Tibet according to
plan, but unfortunately he had to undergo a lot of hardship. He was sold as a slave and lost his freedom, regained it back, lived in a Buddhist monastery for months, tried to prepare the logs for floating it, gained the trust of his master who was a Lama, somehow managed to go to Lhasa and send a letter to the British Officer through a messenger informing him about his proposed plan to send the logs on a particular date (the letter did not reach the destination). He sent the logs finally after two years, which reached the Dihang River and floated in the river undetected. By that time, the British officers had already lost their hope of receiving the logs and they had also stopped their vigil by the river. H. J Harman who was entrusted with the task of keeping watch kept waiting for two years for the logs to arrive. After two years, he lost hope. He became ill and left for England. Finally when Kinthup arrived in India and recounted his trials and tribulations, the British Officers were not ready to accept his stories. But later in 1913, when his account was checked, the British realised that it was remarkably accurate. The latter explorers based their expeditions on the accounts left by Kinthup. Thus it was the exploration of the Indian surveyor Kinthup, as reported in 1884 and later by J.F Needham in 1886 which were able to establish the Tsangpo River as the upper course of the Brahmaputra.

Several expeditions in the early part of the twentieth century were attempted to map the lower course of the Tsangpo. A few expeditions were sent to explore the Lohit, Dibang and the Dihang. J.F. Needham travelled up to the Lohit and proved that neither the Lohit nor any other rivers in Myanmar could be the Tsangpo. It was Needham again who surveyed the Dihang and establish the fact that it was the only possible southward stream. Thus the Brahmaputra's upper course which was long unknown, and its identity with the Yarlung Tsangpo was only established by exploration in 1884–86. This river is often called Tsangpo-Brahmaputra River.

By the end of the nineteenth century, it was widely accepted that the Tsangpo in Tibet was the Brahmaputra of Assam. But there was still another riddle left to be solved. The Tibetan plateau was at an elevation of 3657 meters whereas the lowest level in the Brahmaputra valley was no more than 300 meters. This drastic fall in the level of the river within a distance of around just 200 kilometers stimulated the imagination of
explorers who now began to speculate about the existence of a magnificent hidden waterfall on the Tsangpo.

In the meanwhile, in 1882, while one survey was underway in Tibet by Kinthup, from Assam side, Captain John Michell was conducting a reconnaissance survey of the Mountain region. This region remained impenetrable as the Abor tribes inhabiting this territory did not allow Europeans to enter. In 1909, Colonel D.M Lumsden, Noel Williamson and Rev. W. L. B. Jackman visited the area. Their purposes were varied. All three failed in their mission as the Abors resisted their visit. The British during the expedition in 1911-12 against the Abors sent two surveyors Captain F. M. Bailey and Morsehead attached to the expedition. They took an expedition from Mipi above Sadiya. They made a map of the course of the river. In 1924, two botanists Kingdon Ward and Earl Cawdor completed the mapping of the final eight kilometer stretch of the river. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the river Brahmaputra was almost completely mapped.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Brahmaputra again came to the forefront. During the beginning of the First World War, the importance of the river as a strategic route for British India was realised and in 1914 the *Military Report on the Brahmaputra River System* was prepared and printed by the British Indian Army. It was the main conduit for sending military troops to this region. The river was also used as a major commercial route as the road communication during that period was abysmal. During that same period the British government also had to start looking into another aspect of the river- the recurrent flood it caused. The earthquakes of 1897 had made changes in the terrain of the valley, and the river system had also undergone similar changes.

After India attained independence, a series of scientific studies were taking place to have a complete understanding of the Brahmaputra River. The study of the river has diversified into specialized fields such as geography, geology, geomorphology, hydrology, etc.
What we now know about the river is through the hard work and sacrifice that explorers and cartographers have made since the last two centuries. Their persistence amid adversities finally unveiled the mysteries surrounding the origin and course of the Brahmaputra. Several people had to sacrifice their lives. After relentless search over the centuries the mystery of its origin was finally settled by the middle of the twentieth century. However, the last major discovery with regard to the Tsangpo was made in 1998 when an expedition sponsored by the National Geographic Society, led by two Americans, Tibet-Scholar Ian Baker and Tsangpo- expert Kenneth Storm Jr. ultimately unveiled the riddle of the Tsangpo gorge by surveying and measuring the magnificent thirty meter high Hidden falls.

![Map of Gwahatty in Assam](source- Ethno profile of Karbi In Plain Districts of Assam, pdf file)

5. Brahmaputra valley - The Cultural Landscape

5.1 Introduction
From Sadiya to Dhubri, the state of Assam has over the ages seen the emergences of powerful dynasties that had made their capitals and patronized settlements during their reign. Some of these places have over the centuries continued to play a prominent role in the political and cultural life of the people of Assam. Many other places have lost their significance, but their importance during earlier ages can be ascertained from sources which we get from archaeological and literature.

**5.1.1 Places of cultural significance**

The Brahmaputra and its tributaries have been playing a vital role in the process of social and polity formation of this region since ancient times. The discovery of altogether twenty two copper plates and one stone inscription recording land grants to the Brahmans belonging to the period of the 5th to the 13th century AD reveal the fact that that most of the inhabited rural, urban and cultivated areas lay near or on the banks of the rivers Brahmaputra and their tributaries. The Course of Aryan culture in its progress towards Assam, followed the valley of the Brahmaputra. It was on the bank of the Brahmaputra that the ancient urban centres and capital cities of Aryan culture like Pragjyotishpura, Hatappesvara or Hadappesvara, Durjjayanagara and Kamarupanagara were established. The Bargaoon copper – plate inscription of King Ratnapala of the Pala dynasty gives a graphic but highly poetic description of the city of Durjaya situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra. A similar description of Hatappesvara, which was the capital city of the Salasthamba dynasty, is inscribed in the Tezpur grant and Parbatiya grant of King Vanamaladeva. Both these cities were supposed to be beautified by the presence of the Brahmaputra flowing beside them. Hatappesvara was situated near the modern town of Tezpur. An initial line of the city of Hatappesvara gives a picture of the city “…..This prosperous city of Hatappesvara is blessed with the presence of the Lord Lauhitya”. As part of the long description of the city of Durjaya, which was situated near the city of Pragjyotishpur, the inscriptions runs thus “…..The outskirts of the city were covered by ramparts….it was beautified by the sea like Lauhitya”. (cited in Sarma. S.N.,1989, pp. 73-74).
5.1.2 Sadiya

Sadiya, the easternmost point of Assam is on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra and lies at the foot of the Himalayas. It is situated in the district of Tinsukia. It is bordered by parts of Dibang valley and Siang of Arunachal Pradesh. To the west of Sadiya lies the Lohit district. The river Lohit created the southern boundary of Sadiya. The rivers Siang, Dibang and Lohit meet up at the south-western corner of Sadiya forming the mighty Brahmaputra to the downstream. It is a historically rich land and has been mentioned in the ancient literature as well. Sadiya was a part of Saumarpith of ancient Kamrup and was known as Vidarva kingdom. In the Bhagvat it is narrated that there was a king named Bhismak, who ruled Vidarbha, which according to popular tradition in Assam, is the designation of the country around Sadiya(cited, Gait, 1992, reprint, pp. 14). It was here that the ancient city of Bhismaknagar flourished. It was also called as Kundilnagar as it was on the bank of the river Kundil. Bhismaka had five sons and a daughter Rukmini. Krishna having heard of Rukmini’s beauty wanted to marry her but Rukmini was betrothed to a prince named Sisupal. Rukmini secretly sent a message to Krishna and on the day of her marriage, Krishna appeared and carried her off in his chariot. He had to fight against Sisupal and his army but was able to defeat him and take away Rukmini to Dwarka. During Ancient and medieval times Sadiya was a centre of Saktism. According to the Puranas, when the dead body of Sati was cut into pieces by Vishnu, her head fell at Sadiya. The ruins discovered indicate the existence of Aryan settlements in Sadiya and the ruins of an extensive fort between the rivers Dikrang and Dibong are said to be remains of the capital founded by King Bhismaka. During medieval time, it was the capital of the Chutiya kingdom. Sadiya was the abode of the Deori tribe. The four temples of Sadiya were the Tamreswari or Keshai-khaiti or Pisachi shaal, Baliababa or Pisadema shaal, Kundimama or Gira-Girachi shaal and Pator shaal. The Deories served as priests of these temples.
Sadiya was also a frontier region during the rule of the Ahoms and was the seat of the Sadiya-Khowa Gohain, a frontier governor of the Ahom kingdom. During the British reign, it continued to be an important station of Assam.

The earthquake of 1950 and the subsequent flood and erosion completely destroyed Sadiya, and it lost its former glory. Bhupen Hazarika, who was born in Sadiya, in his numerous interviews, speaks with anguish about the destruction of Sadiya as a result of floods by the Brahmaputra. He says “The river had taken away Sadiya, the place where I was born, and I can never forgive the Brahmaputra for that” (cited Archive. indianexpress. Com, Nov 07, 2011)

5.1.3. Dimapur

Dimapur, the seat of the Kachari dynasty was an important cultural hub. The name of Dimapur, meaning “the city on the Dima”, seems to have been derived from the river, now called Dhunsiri, close to it(Gait., 1906, pp. 89). The place has a number of ruins of palaces and temples.

5.1.4. Sibsagar

Sibsagar has an important place in the history of Assam. It earned a prominent place in the history of Assam during the medieval period. During the six hundred years of Ahom rule in Assam, several palaces, temples, fortifications and tanks were constructed in different parts of the Sibsagar. When the Ahoms chose their capital cities, they established these on the banks of the rivers. Gargaon was the capital city of the Ahoms from the reign of Chuklengmung(1539-1552) till the beginning of the eighteenth century when the new capital of Rangpur was established by Rudra Singha(1696-1714). Both these capitals were within Sibsagar district. Gargaon and Rangpur were constructed on the banks of the river Dikhau. The former was situated at a distance of ten miles up stream from the latter. Sahabuddin Talish who accompanied Mirjumlah in his Assam expedition gives a vivid picture of the city of Garhgaon and its denizens in his writings.
Similarly, Cazim also writes that the Ahom City of Garhgaon, was at that time located across the river ‘Dhonec’, a principal tributary of the Brahmaputra. The kings palaces stood on the bank of the river ‘Digoo’ (Dikhow).(cited in Goswami, R., 2010, pp. 135)

Rudra Singha (16-96-1714) built the second capital and continued for eighty years. Various Dolss like the Shiva Dol, Vishnu Dol, Joy Dol, Devi Dol, Ranganath Dol, and palaces like Rang Ghar amnd Talatal Ghar were constructed. Tanks like the Joysagar and Gaurisagar were dug in Sibsagar district. There are also other architectural structures belonging to the Ahom period in different parts of Sibsagar.

5.1.5 Majuli
Majuli, the jewel in the midst of the Brahmaputra is a land of diverse beauties. The word ‘Majuli’ means, a cultivated land in the middle of a fresh water course. Considered to be the most populated river island in the world, this island is encircled by the mighty Brahmaputra in the South and its tributaries the Lohit, the Kherkatia and the Subansiri in the north. The river and its tributaries have blessed Majuli with its bounty. Originally, Majuli was attached with former undivided Sibsagar district. In the history of Auniati Satra, T.N. Sarmah wrote that island had come up during 1649 A.D.. According to prominent writer Benudhar Sarmah the island was created during 1698 only when two consecutive great floods had occurred (cited Thakuria. N.C, 2015, pp. 7). Majuli has a unique geographical, historical and cultural position in Assam. Ancient legends tell about lord Krishna’s sojourn at Majuli while he was eloping with Rukmini from Kundil Nagar in Sadiya to Dwarka. Rukmini enchanted by the beauty of the place declared that it was the Dwarka of her imagination. Lord Krishna then predicted that in the future Majuli would be the second Dwarka, and indeed today, Majuli is regarded as the ‘Dviitiya Dwarka’. It was here that Sri Sankardev stayed for fourteen years during his propagation of the Neo-Vaishnavite religion. He established the first Satra, the Beloguri Satra at Dhuwahat in Majuli. Both Sankardeva and Madhavdeva met here in Majuli. This event is referred to as
Manikānchan Sanyog and is regarded as an epoch-making event in the history of the Neo-Vaisnavite Movement. Both of them along with their disciples established sixty five Satras in Majuli. It is known as the land of Satras. The well known Satras of Majuli are Auniati Satra, Garamur Satra, Dakhinpat Satra, Kamalabari Satra, Samuguri Satra, Bengena-ati Satra, etc. Many of these Satras were established under Ahom patronage. Majuli is a centre of pilgrimage for the followers of Neo-Vaishnavite religion.

Brahmaputra’s impact on the overall socio- economic condition of Majuli is immense. The people belonging to different caste and creed inhabit the island. Majuli can be equated with a mini Assam, where we find people from different communities. There resides the Misings, Deoris, Ahoms, Sonowal Kacharis, Kumars, Kaibartas, Nepalis, Keots, Sut, Kalita, Brahmin, and many more. The majority of the population practice agriculture in the fertile land. Paddy, mustard, pulses , vegetables and sugarcane are cultivated. The villagers prepare molasses from the sugarcane. There are fishermen who get their catch in the many rivers and water bodies present in Majuli. The Kumars make pots from the clay found in the Brahmaputra. They also construct boats. There are communities who rear buffaloes in the ‘chapories’. The Satras like Samuguri Satra make masks for Bhaonas. In Auniati Satra, the bhakats make beautiful articles of cane ,bamboo and wood.

The Auniati Satra is one of the oldest Satra of Assam. It was established in 1654 under the patronage of the Ahom king Jayadhvaj Singha. The Satra is located at a little distance from the Brahmaputra river. But over the years, the Brahmaputra has been inching near the Satra land and at present the river is around one kilometer away from the Satra. The Ainuati Satra performed the Bishnu Puja in 2014. The priests from the Satra offered the prayers to appease the Brahmaputra and request the Gods to keep flood and erosion away from the Satra. Another important Satra is the Dakhinpat Satra which was established in 1653 AD during the reign of Jayadhvaj Singha. In Dakshinpat Satra a similarly kind of puja is performed. Eight years ago this Puja was performed in a place which was on the
verge of erosion. The area is inhabited by the Sonowal Kacharis. The Pujaris from Dakhinpat Satra performed the puja by following rituals in practice since the last 150-200 years. They have a particular idol associated with this puja. The idol is called as Bhuban Mohan Idol and this idol is taken to the place where the puja is performed.

The Samuguri Satra is renowned for mask making. Their craft has a close association with the Brahmaputra River. The clay used for making the mask is sourced from the river. The clay is brought from Salmora and is supplied by the Kumar community. The Kumar community in Salmora earns their livelihood by making pots. During the winter season the clay is sourced from the bank of the river and stored for making the pots. The women make the pots and the men sell the pots in the market. Their occupation is dependent on straws, clay, drift woods, and the river provides them with all the above materials. The male folk of the community also construct boats which are used for taking the pots to different places of the state for sale or barter.

Over the years, the number of Satras have decreased from the original sixty five to twenty two due to flood and erosion of the Brahmaputra. Villagers have been displaced several times from one place to another and many villages have been obliterated from the map of Majuli. But the Satras as well as the inhabitants who face constant threat from flood and erosion by the Brahmaputra cannot imagine leaving Majuli for other areas. Regarded as a place of the saints, they also value the peace and tranquility in the island. This place welcomes all communities to its fold. The Mising, Deori, Sonowal Kachari, Kaibartta and others have taken ‘Saran’ or shelter at the Satras. The destiny of Majuli and its people is linked with the Brahmaputra.

5.1.6 Tezpur

Tezpur earlier known as Sonitpur, “the city of blood” has references in the literature about its importance. It was an important centre of Aryan civilization.
The temples and ruins in the town indicated that during ancient times this place was much favoured by the rulers. There are stories associated with Sonitpur. One such story is about King Bana who was the ruler of Sonitpur. He was a contemporary of NarakAsur, the King of Pragjyotishpur. He had many sons and one daughter named as Usha. Usha attracted the attention of Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna. He, one day entered her castle where she was kept under guard and married her according to Gandharva ceremony by exchanging garlands. He was captured by Bana and his army. Ultimately Krishna arrived and was able to defeat Bana in a great battle and take Aniruddha and Usha to his kingdom.

5.1.7. Kamrup

The district of Kamrup originally formed part of the Kingdom of Kamrupa, as mentioned in the ancient and medieval period. The ancient cities Pragjyotishpura, Durjaya, Kamrupnagara were within Kamrup. The greater part of Kamrup consists of a wide plain through the lower portion of which the Brahmaputra flows from east to west. Kamrup has a history of thousands of years and its importance has not diminished over the years. It was here that several encounters took place between the Ahoms and the Mughals and Gauhati was a place of contention for both these powers. Within a span of fifty years from 1637, when the Mughals attacked the Ahom kingdom, till 1681 when Gadadhar Singha occupied Gauhati from the Mughals, Gauhati was occupied by the invading forces no less than eight times. After 1681, Kamrup became the part of the Ahom kingdom. Gauhati became the headquarters of the Ahom Viceroy(Barphukan) until the end of the Ahom rule in Assam. The Ahoms constructed five gates or passes (chaki) on either side of the Brahmaputra in Gauhati to protect the area from enemies. It served as a headquarter of naval and military defence. This region is considered a prominent center of culture and trade. Sualkuchi which houses the silk and handloom industry of Assam, is located on the bank of the
Brahmaputra in Kamrup. The traditional Bell metal industry of Sarthebari is also situated in Kamrup.

Today, it is the most populated district in Assam. Guwahati, which is the capital city of Assam is a centre of commerce, trade, education and is favoured by the people of entire NorthEast India.

5.1.8. Goalpara

Goalpara has been another important town of Assam since olden days. Most part of Goalpara consists of a level plain, the lower portion of the district is intersected by the Brahmaputra river. Goalpara was a part of the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa. Subsequently, it formed a part of the Kamata kingdom and then came under the domain of the Koch kings. During the Ahom rule there were tussles between the Ahoms and the Muhamaddans, and the fate of Goalpara oscillated between the two powers. After Mirjumlahs’s invasion, Goalpara formed part of the Muhamadan dominion, and later along with Bengal it became part of the East India Company in 1765 A.D. Goalpara town along with Jogighopa were the frontier outposts from which trade was carried out with rest of the country. There were many Europeans who settled in this town. Dhubri was a part of Goalpara district. It is situated on the right bank of the Brahmaputra and has been a port for the river ferries which plies on the river.

5.2 Monuments

The whole valley of the Brahmaputra has architectural remains of ancient and medieval period. Many of these buildings, especially temples were built on the bank of the mighty Brahmaputra and its numerous tributaries. Thus, stretching at present from Sadiya in the east to Dhubri, the westernmost part of Assam, the banks of the river Brahmaputra along with its tributaries are dotted with temples, fortifications, bridges and cultural complexes. All these have undergone the ravages of time, but their presence can be ascertained by the remains which have been excavated.
The *Tamreswari* temple in Sadiya on the bank of the Dhal River was an important pilgrimage centre. Its existence has been mentioned in several documents of the British Administrators. Now there is no trace of this old temple. Locals claim that the remains of the original Tamreswari temple is somewhere deep inside a forest which now falls in Arunachal Pradesh. Others claim that it has been eroded by the Brahmaputra. The present Tamreswari temple in Sadiya has been built on some old remains.

Another important site is the ‘Burah Burhi Than’ which is situated on the bank of the river Deopani. Remains of old ramparts have also been discovered. From information gathered from local people of the area it has been found that this was probably built during medieval times.

There are some remains of guns which were captured by the Ahoms from the Mughals and were used to fortify Sadiya, which during that time was a frontier post of Ahom kingdom. The guns were recovered on the bank of the Brahmaputra and two guns at present are found in the Sadiya Circuit House.

In Lakhimpur district there exists an old temple on the bank of the river Sarhi in Govindapur village. It is also called as Harhi and Haihi temple. Ruins in the form of images have also been found on the bank of the river Champara. Remains of an old temple locally called as Lonpani Dol has been discovered on the bank of the Garaluwa River.

In Sibsagar there are several Ahom monuments. Beside these, there is the presence of an ancient temple on the south bank of the Rangsal, a stream about 2 km south of the Deoparvat hill. Many stone blocks with architectural carvings, were discovered.

There also exists the Christian Church at Sibsagar. It is one of the oldest churches in Assam and was established in 1843 by Dr. Nathan Brown, a pioneer worker who served for the cause of Assamese language.

The Siva temple at Negriting commonly known as the Negriting Temple is situated at Golaghat. It is situated on the top of a small hillock, surrounded by tea gardens on all
sides. From top of the hill, the Brahmaputra River can be viewed. The present temple was built during the reign of Rajeswar Singha.

As we go towards central Assam region, we come across some ruins of old temples in Nagaon area. One such is located at Chang-chowki, which is about four kilometer from Kampur on the right bank of Kopili River. There are remains of old architectural ruins and sculptures. Kawaimari, which is on the south bank of the Kapali River, near Chang-chowki has remains of an old temple. At Sitajakhala on the bank of the Killing River, there existed a temple on top of the hillock. A flight of steps from the location of the ruined temple to the lowest water level in the river below have been found, which suggests that the steps were made evidently to carry water to the temple which existed in earlier times.

In Badaganga, situated in Karbi Anglong district and adjacent to Nagaon, ruins of a temple have been located on the bank of the stream Badaganga. Again, on the bank of the river Dikharu, to the north of Dokmoka, is the ruins of the temple known as Budagosainthan.

Tezpur has a large number of archaeological ruins of antiquity. Tezpur was formerly known as Sonitpur. At Bamuni Pahar, a low alluvial hillock on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, extensive ruins of pre Ahom temples were found.

At Agnigarh, near the Brahmaputra some ruins existed. Similarly, at Tingeswar, on a hillock to the west of Tezpur, ruins of an old temple have been lying.

At Silbori, on the bank of the Dhansiri River, a stone temple in ruins is noticed. Temple ruins are also seen in places at Baman, on the way to Kurua on the bank of the Brahmaputra.

On the bank of the river, at Viswanath, traces of old temple are seen. Many well worn stone pieces are found in the bed of the river which become well- exposed during the winter seasons.
At Singri, on the south of the bank of the Brahmaputra stands the Gupteswar or Gopeswar temple.

A group of remains at Kasomari Pathar, close to the Doyang River, near Jamuguri has been recovered. At Umavan or Umatumani is a temple which exists by the side of the Brahmaputra. It belonged to the late medieval period.

Ancient Kamrup district consisted of a very large area and was dotted with temples and forts. Ruins of temples are found in many places located on the bank of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. On the north bank of the Brahmaputra, Hajo, Madankamdev, North Guwahati, etc, there are several temple ruins.

To the south west of Hajo, on the bank of the Brahmaputra, across the river at Sualkuchi, is the Siddheswar Devalaya. It was built during the rule of Ahom king Siva Singha. On a small hill at Hajo is situated the Hayagriva Madhav Devalaya which was probably established in the 16th century. It is an important Buddhist pilgrimage centre. Koch King Raghu Deva rebuilt this temple.

At Madan Kamdev parbat, near Baihata Chariali, exist extensive temple ruins. The Ruins indicate the temple as being a Shiva temple. The local people offer regular worship in the site.

At Tamulpur, to the north bank of the Brahmaputra, is the place of the Silsako or the stone bridge. The bridge was over the channel of the river Barnadi, and through this bridge, Muhammad Bukhtiyar and his Turkish cavalry is said to have passed in 1206. The bridge is now completely destroyed.

At Chaigaon, on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, ruins of a temple are found, which according to popular legend are the remains of the Merghar (round sanctuary) erected by one Chand Saudagar, a legendary merchant.

Gauhati which has been a centre of social and political eminence since ancient times have a number of temples. Some of these belong to medieval times and many are built on the sites of old remains. Ruins of temples, images of God and Goddesses are found in
several places. In the islands of Umananda and Urbasi there are remains of temples of pre Ahom period.

The temple of Umananda or the Umananda Devalaya is situated at a tiny hilly Island in the mid stream of the Brahmaputra. It is from the name of the deity of the temple that the island is called Umananda. According to Notes on Assam Temple Ruins (JASB, 1855 and Gait, HA), the ancient name of the island is Bhasmakuta (cited Adhikary, 2008). The place is also known as Bhasmasal (Kamrupa Anusandhana Samiti, p.106). A brick temple of the time of Gadadhar Singha, a Siva linga and a silver image of Siva on a bull are inside the temple. Silver image bears an inscription which refers to the donation of the image by Siva Singha.

Urvasi is a small rocky island in the midst of the Brahmaputra. Rock cut sculptures and images are seen here. The sculptures probably belong to the 9-10th Century.

A small island by the name of Arparbat is amidst the Brahmaputra near Gauhati. The origin of this island has a mythological background. M’Cosh in his book writes about the story associated with this island. “Gohatti was believed to be a favoured abode of the Hindoo deities; and yet it appears they liked to keep the Brahmaputra between themselves and their worshippers, and had their secret retreat on the opposite side of the river. Tradition says that in coming down gods and goddesses, to the river to bathe one warm morning, their amorous passions unluckily exposed them to mortal gaze. To hide their shame, and secure them against ever again exposing themselves in such a foolish predicament, they instantly threw up a small rocky island”. (M’Cosh, 1975, pp. 85). Allen regards the origin of this island to Krishna, who created it to screen Rukmini when bathing from the curious eyes of the people on the further bank (Allen 1905, pp.94).

In Uzanbazar area on the bank of the river, there is existence of a few rocks cut images.

The Asvakranta Temple is situated on a rocky hillock opposite Guwahati city and on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River. It is approachable by a flight of 28 steps from the river. There are three legends associated with the name of Asvakranta. According to the first legend by (K.L.Barua, EHK.) Lord Krishna on his way to Mathura, halted here as
the horses of his chariot became tired in the long journey. The holes now visible on the rocks on the edge of the Brahmaputra are said to have been made by the horses hoofs. Another story,( H.C.Sarma, and S. M. Bhattacharya) connects the holes with the hoofs of the horses of Krisna’s chariot at the time of his war with Naraka, the ruler of Pragjyotishpur. The third legend is about Krishna bringing Arjuna to a place called Saptadola, when Abhimanyu was killed. On the way to Saptadola the horses of Krishna’s chariot became tired and hence the name Asvakranta. ( cited Adhikary, 2008). This is a place where devotees perform the Sraddha ceremony of their dead relatives. According to G. N. Bhuyan and P.C. Sarma, ( 1986), recent researches have proved that the said holes in rocks are nothing but natural formation of water actions( cited in Adhikary,2008). Allen (1905) writes, ‘Krisna , so the story goes, halted here with Rukmini, and the holes now visible in the rocks are said to have been made by his horse’s hoofs’. 

The present temples at Sukreswar were built during the Ahom ruler Pramatta Singh, but remains of old sculptures indicate that there existed some temples in the pre- Ahom period.

Another temple located on the bank of the river in Guwahati is the Janardan temple. It is adjacent to the Sukreswar temple. It was built during Pramatta Singh’s time. It is dedicated to Lord Visnu. Close to this temple lies the Baneswar temple which was built during the rule of Chandra Kanta Singh. All the three temples are located between the Brahmaputra and Mahatma Gandhi road close to the Northbrook Gate in Panbazar area of Guwahati.

The Manikarnesvara temple stands near the meeting point of the Barnadi River with the Brahmaputra at the eastern extremity of North Guwahati. To the north of Manikarnesvara temple, there is the Dirghesvawri temple which was built by the Ahom rulers.

The Pandunath temple is situated close to the Pandu Railway station at the foot of the Varaha hillock which forms a part of the Nilacala (Kamakhya) hill. The temple stands on the bank of the Brahmaputra. Another temple is situated on the north bank of the Brahmaputra at Rangmahal. This is a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is here that the Ahom king Rudrasimha passed away while he was preparing for an invasion of Bengal.
From Pandu there is a way to Kamakhya temple. The Kamakhya Temple, situated on top of the Nilachal hill, overlooking the Brahmaputra river is one of the most important Shakti pith in India. It was built by the Koch King Naranarayana and has been a seat of Saktism and Tantricism since ancient times. Regarding the picturesque nature of the Nilachal hills, Allen (1905, p-93) writes “the summit of the hill there is a magnificent view over the surrounding country. Its feet are washed by the mighty Brahmaputra, whose channel at this point is shut in by rocks on either hand”.

As one goes further towards the western Brahmaputra Valley, we enter Goalpara, Dhubri, Bongaigaon and come across several sites of archaeological importance. There are several places of historical importance in this region.

A few shallow caverns are noticed in the Yogighopa hill on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. Across the river, two similar caves are noticed on the Pancharatna hill. The caves are considered to be very old. Kataki, says on the basis of the information received from the local people that there are traces of pedestals over which some images were originally placed and that the original images were thrown into the Brahmaputra by Kalapahar, an avowed iconoclast. These small caves might have been frequented by Buddhist monks (cited, Choudhury, 1985, pp. 133).

Sri Suryapahar Ruins is situated at Dasabhuja Devasthan in Goalpara. There are a number of Shiva Lingas, rock cut images and stone inscriptions in the site. The Surya Pahar remains are of Hindu God and Goddesses and ruins of temples. These temples probably belonged to the 9th century.

A ruined temple is also noticed just near the Pancharatna ferryghat. At Mornoi, near Goalpara town, ruins of a temple are found. The temple is situated on the top of a hillock which stands on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. From the temple site on the hillock, a flight of steps, made of stone slab goes down to the main stream of the river.

At Dhubri, there exists the Natai Dhubuni Ghat. It is a big slab of stone lying by the river bank. The Brahmaputra and the Gadadhar River meet here. The mythological episode of Beula Lakhir is associated with this site. The Myth of Beula-Lakhir represents the
belief that Beula, the wife has brought her dead husband Lakhindar alive from Heaven through the river-way.

The Gurudwara of Tegh Bahadur also known as Damdama Sahib is situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra at Dhubri. It was here that Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism and Sri Sankardev, the founder of the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement in Assam met each other when Gurunanak visited Dhubri in 1505 A.D., while on his way from Dacca to Assam. The ninth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Tegh Bahadur later established the Gurudwara during the seventeenth century. It is a place of pilgrimage for the followers of Sikhism.

The Rangamati mosque also known as the Panbari mosque is the oldest mosque in Assam. Built during the seventeenth century, this mosque is situated around eight kilometers from the river Brahmaputra.

A mosque named as Mirjumlar Masjid is situated on the hill top by the side of the Kola river in Dhubri. It was built by Mirjumlah.

The Ahom rule in Assam witnessed the construction of a number of palaces and temples. The Ahoms when entering Assam followed their own traditional religion. Gradually they started coming under the influence of Hindu religion in Assam. Hindu influence entered the Ahom courts during the rule of King Sudangpoha Bamuni Konwar. Jayadhwaj Singha was the first Ahom king to accept Hinduism. The Ahom rulers showed due respect to Saktism, supported the Vaisnava monks and Satras and also patronized the Ahom priests and allowed them to perform their traditional ceremonies. In the course of their rule, they constructed a number of religious institutions. Most of the temples in Guwahati mentioned earlier were built by the Ahom monarchs. They also dug a large number of tanks in several places of Assam. There are number of temples which were built near the tanks. There are some instances of temples being built on the bank of rivers. One such is the Napukar Dol, an eighteenth century temple which is situated towards east of Sibsagar, on the bank of the Naphuk river. Ruins of an old temple have been found in Biswanath, in Sonitpur District. Built during the time of the Ahoms, the temple was washed away by the river Brahmaputra.
The Bhomoraguri stone inscription was made by the Ahom General Kalia Bhora Borphukan who planned to construct a bridge over the Brahmaputra. His aspiration was fulfilled two centuries later with the construction of the bridge named Kalia Bhomora Bridge to honour this great General.

The Ahoms constructed Stone bridges (Silsakos) on the canals and rivers. The bridges were made by tunnelling through massive stones. Of about ten such bridges mentioned in the Ahom Buranjis, many are in ruins. The Namdang Bridge over the river Namdang at Sibsagar, Darika and Dijai Sakos are intact. The bridges made from single blocks of stone speak volume about the artisans of that age.

Thus we see that from Sadiya to Dhubri Assam’s cultural landscape has been replete with archaeological marvels of ancient and medieval times. The Brahmaputra Valley has many more architectural marvels then those mentioned above.

Table-VII

List of famous and popular places of worship situated along the bank of the Brahmaputra

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Name of place of worship</th>
<th>A brief description about the place of worship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Tamreswari temple</td>
<td>Locals claim that the remains of the original Tamreswari temple is somewhere deep inside a forest which now falls in Arunachal Pradesh. Others claim that it has been eroded by the Brahmaputra. The present Tamreswari temple in Sadiya has been built on some old remains.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Burah Burhi Than</td>
<td>Remains of an old Shiva temple at Sadiya</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Sarhi devalaya or Harhi and Haihi</td>
<td>The temple on the bank of the river Sarhi in Govindapur village in Lakhimpur.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Lonpani Dol</td>
<td>Remains of this old temple on the bank of the Garaluwa River in Lakhimpur.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Napukar Dol</td>
<td>This eighteenth century temple is situated towards east of Sibsagar, on the bank of the Naphuk river.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Christian Church</td>
<td>It is one of the oldest churches in Assam and was established in 1843 by Dr. Nathan Brown.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Negriting Temple</td>
<td>It is Siva a temple situated at Golaghat on the top of a small hillock, surrounded by tea gardens on all sides. From top of the hill, the Brahmaputra River can be viewed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Auniati Satra, Garamur Satra, Dakhinpat Satra, Kamalabari Satra, Samuguri Satra, Bengena-ati Satra</td>
<td>Majuli is known as the land of Satras. There are many Satras here and it is a pilgrimage centre for the followers of Neo-Vaishnavite religion. There are twenty two numbers of Satras at present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Chang-chowki</td>
<td>Ruins of old temples found at Chang-chowki, which is about four kilometer from Kampur on the right bank of Kopila River. There are remains of old architectural ruins and sculptures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ruins at Kwaimari</td>
<td>Kawaiamari, which is on the south bank of the Kapili River has remains of an old temple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Budagosainthan</td>
<td>The ruins of the temple is found on the bank of the river Dikharu, to the north of Davaka in Nagaon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Bordowa Satra</td>
<td>Sankardeva, the founder of Neo Vaishnavism was born at Bordowa in Nagaon in 1449.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Sitajhakhala</td>
<td>On the bank of the Killing River, there exist ruins of a temple on top of a hillock.</td>
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<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Badaganga</td>
<td>In Badaganga, adjacent to Nagaon, ruins of a temple are located on the bank of the stream Badaganga.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Bamuni Pahar Ruins</td>
<td>At Bamuni Pahar, in Tezpur, a low alluvial hillock on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, extensive ruins of pre Ahom temples have been found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Agnigarh Ruins</td>
<td>At Agnigarh in Tezpur near the Brahmaputra some ruins exist of ancient temple.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Tingeswar Ruins</td>
<td>On a hillock to the west of Tezpur, ruins of an old temple are seen at Tingeswar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Silbori</td>
<td>At Silbori, on the bank of the Dhansiri River, a stone temple in ruins is noticed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Baman Ruins</td>
<td>Temple ruins are seen in places at Baman, on the way to Kurua on the bank of the Brahmaputra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Bishwanath</td>
<td>On the bank of the river at Bishwanath, traces of old temple are seen. Many well worn stone pieces are found in the bed of the river which become well exposed during the winter season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Remains of Kasomari Pathar</td>
<td>Some architectural remains, close to the Doyang River, near Jamuguri have been recovered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Umavan or Umatumani temple</td>
<td>This temple is situated at Umavan on the side of the Brahmaputra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Siddheswar Devalaya.</td>
<td>It is situated to the south west of Hajo, on the bank of the Brahmaputra, across the river at Sualkuchi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Hayagriva Madhav Devalaya</td>
<td>It is situated at Hajo and is a place of pilgrimage for both Hindu and Buddhist people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Place Name</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Poa Mecca</td>
<td>It is situated at Hajo. It is a tomb of a Muslim saint. It is a place of pilgrims for Muslim pilgrims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Madan Kamdev</td>
<td>At Madan Kamdev Parbat, near Baihata Chariali, exist extensive temple ruins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Umananda Devalaya</td>
<td>It is situated at a tiny hilly Island in the mid stream of the Brahmaputra at Kamrup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Urvasi</td>
<td>Urvasi is a small rocky island in the midst of the Brahmaputra at Kamrup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Arparbat</td>
<td>A small island by the name of Arparbat is situated amidst the Brahmaputra near Gauhati.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Asvakranta Temple</td>
<td>The Temple is situated on a rocky hillock opposite Guwahati city and on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Janardan temple</td>
<td>A temple located on the bank of the river Brahmaputra in Guwahati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Sukreswar Temple</td>
<td>The present temples at Sukreswar in Guwahati were built during the Ahom ruler Pramatta Singha, but remains of old sculptures indicate that there existed some temples in the pre-Ahom period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Baneswar temple</td>
<td>The Baneswar temple situated in Kamrup was built during the rule of Chandra Kanta Singha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Manikarnesvara temple</td>
<td>The temple is located at North Guwahati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Dirghesvawri temple</td>
<td>The temple is located at North Guwahati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Pandunath temple</td>
<td>The temple stands at the foot of the Varaha hillock which forms a part of the Nilacala (Kamakhya) hill.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
38. The Kamakhya Temple

The Kamakhya Temple, situated on top of the Nilachal hill, overlooking the Brahmaputra river is one of the most important Shakti pith in India. It was built by the Koch King Naranarayana and has been a seat of Saktism and Tantricism since ancient times.

39. Sri Suryapahar Ruins

The Surya Pahar remains are of Hindu God and Goddesses and ruins of temples. It is situated in Goalpara.

40. Pancharatna

A ruined temple is also noticed just near the Pancharatna ferry ghat.

41. Gurudwara of Tegh Bahadur or Damdama Sahib

This place in Dhubri is a place of pilgrimage for the followers of Sikhism.

42. Rangamati mosque

The Rangamati mosque situated in Dhubri also known as the Panbari mosque is the oldest mosque in Assam.

5.3 An account on the tourism potential of various places of historical and cultural significance in Assam.

The landscape of Assam is a tourist paradise where one is spoilt for choice. There is a multitude of tourist attractions in the state. Wildlife, Eco and Adventure, Places of Pilgrimage, Heritage and Culture, Tea and Golf, Fairs and Festivals, River and Rural tourism are some features of the state which have attracted tourists from far and near. The National Parks, Wildlife and Bird Sanctuaries are not only places where tourists can see the Majestic Rhinos, Wild Elephants, The elusive Wood Duck, Hornbills, River Dolphins and other faunas and diverse floras of this beautiful land, but we also get glimpses of the different communities living within and in the fringe villages of the parks and sanctuaries. The Mising, Karbi, and other communities residing in the fringe villages of Kaziranga National Park, the Bodos near Manas National Park, The Tiwas
near Pobitora Sanctuary, and the Mising village of Laika which is located deep inside the Dibru Saikhowaghat National Park are places worth a visit. Besides, there are villages throughout the breadth and length of Assam where different communities inhabit. These villages with their own distinct social and cultural traditional have potentialities of enticing tourists. Different communities have started realizing about the possibilities of their own culture and have started wooing tourists and other travelers to come and taste the cuisine, experience their songs and dances, stay in their traditional houses and participate in their different socio-economic activities. In this context, the Rabha community living in the fringe villages of the Chandubi lake in Kamrup, several Mising groups in different places of Majuli, Dhemaji, etc, The Singphos in Margherita, The Tai Phakes in Naharkatiya cater to travelers who are interested to experience such vacation. The Jon Beel Mela of the Tiwas at Jagiroad which is an annual event is a unique institution worth visiting by everyone.

The Bell metal Industry of Sarthebari, The silk town of Sualkuchi, the traditional mask making of Samuguri Satra, the Kumar pottery of Salmora in Majuli, are some areas where one can have a firsthand knowledge of the traditional handicraft of Assam.

From Sadiya to Dhubri, the landscape is dotted with temples and monuments, which are beautiful places to visit. The land has Vaishnavite Satras and Naamghars, Sakti piths like the Famous Kamakhya temple, various other temples, Mosques and Churches, Buddhist Monasteries and Guruduwaras to fulfill the religious requirement of every individuals. Architectural monuments of the Ahom period and pre Ahom periods are also spread throughout the state. The State celebrates different festivals throughout the year and one can have a glimpse of the culture of Assam during these festivals. Some of these festivals are the Bohag Bihu which is celebrated by all communities to welcome the spring season. The other festivals worth experiencing are the Raas festival, Doul Utsav, Ambubashi Mela at Kamakhya Temple, Dehing Patkai festival and the Tea festival. The Tea community can be another area of interest for travelers to this region. While on one hand, a tourist can experience the old English charm of staying in the British tea Bungalows amid lush and verdant tea gardens, on the other hand, they can experience the rustic life and culture of the diverse tea communities working and living in these gardens. The
Brahmaputra passes through Assam traversing about 800 kms. The river provides ample scope to the Adventurous Tourists for experiencing river sports. Among the many places of Assam, Majuli stands unique for its beauty and diversity. Its, people, Neo-Vaishnavite Satras, Unique flora and fauna can enthrall visitors to this island situated amidst the Brahmaputra.

6. History and Culture of Assam and the Brahmaputra

6.1 Introduction

Any reference of Assam about its geology, geography, history, culture and society cannot be envisioned without the Brahmaputra. Assam and the Brahmaputra are synonymous. Both complement one another. Assams History speaks about many events which have taken place with the Brahmaputra as a witness to these events. Some snippets of history are given below:

6.2. Brahmaputra as witness to historical events

The Ahoms have left historical accounts of their rule in the form of Buranjis, which are valuable source of information on their reign. Events related to the Brahmaputra and some other rivers from Ahom history gives us a picture of life and culture of the aristocracy and the people of that period. The river Brahmaputra has been a silent witness to the many important events which took place in the Brahmaputra valley. These events had far reaching impact on the life and culture in the Ahom kingdom.

It was during the reign of king Siva Singha, that his wife Phuleswari Bar Kuwari attained immense power. In one incident, she humiliated Vaishnava monks by compelling them to bow before the Durga image. The images of all the temples including Phulbari were thrown into the Brahmaputra River under her order. (Bhuyan.S.K., 1983, pp., 41, para 69). She personally supervised the order into execution. Her persecution of the Moamoria sect and demolition of religious places caused immense displeasure in the kingdom.
But save for such kinds of rare and unsavory events, the Kingdom also witnessed many happy occasions. One such was the marriage of the Ahom king Rajeswar Singha. It was on the bank of the river Sonari that the king Rajeswar Singha married the Manipuri princess Kuranganayani, daughter of Manipuri king Jai Singh by performing the Chaklang ceremony. She assumed the title of Barkuvari or Chief Queen.

In 1707, King Gaurinath Singha arrived at Garamur where camps were set up for amusements and recreation of the king. Here the king crossed the Lohit to hunt buffaloes at Jengraimuk. While on the return journey on a boat, the king encountered a violent storm. Unable to cross the river, the king stayed on a sand bar for several hours. He made a vow to offer the sacrifice of 10,000 buffaloes to the Goddess Kamakhya. He reached his camp at night after the storm elapsed after some hours.

There is the legend of the Hazarat Shah Syed Mainuddin popularly known as Ajan Fakir. During the Ahom rule he came from Baghdad and settled at Garhgaon near modern Sibsagar. He preached the tenets of Islam and in course of time his influence spread. He acquired a large number of followers. Stung by jealousy at Ajan Pir’s popularity, one Rupai Dadhara conspired against him and convinced the Ahom king to punish the saint. The king passed the orders for plucking out the Saint’s eyes. The Pir is said to have brought two earthen pots where he let his two eyes drop. The King was alarmed and for atonement made land grants to the Saint and had a math built on the bank of the Brahmaputra. This place has become a holy place with the establishment of Ajan Pir’s dargah where pilgrims congregate annually. (Das. J., 1972, pp. 111-112)

During the days of the Ahoms, the Brahmaputra and its tributaries were navigable and used for travel, trade and warfare. The Brahmaputra’s fertile valley has both been a boon and a bane. While, it brought different races who settled on the banks of the river, the fertile soil providing sustenance to millions of people since ages, it also invited scores of invaders to this region . Assam history is replete with stories of battles, conquest, annexation and reconciliation on the banks of the Brahmaputra. The river has been a witness to numerous battles over the ages. This was the river which acted as a conduit for the Mughal armies who invaded Assam several times during the rule of the Ahom
rulers. It was on the bank of the Brahmaputra that many decisive battles were fought. One such battle was the battle of Saraighat. The Battle of Saraighat was fought during the reign of Ahom king Chakradhvaj Sinha in 1671. The Ahom general Lachit Barphukan inflicted a crushing defeat on the Mughal General Ram Singh. The victory on the bank of the river Brahmaputra at Saraighat earned for Lachit Barphukan immortal fame. It was one of the most outstanding naval victories of the Ahoms against the Mughals.

The Ahoms had a powerful naval fleet and they had special category of officers to look into its function. There were different officials along with their Paiks(force) who were placed at strategic places on the bank of the Brahmaputra to govern the territory as well as to guard against the encroachment by others communities. The royal fleet of boats was in charge of the officer called as Naoyaichhe. He had one thousand men under him to look after this fleet. The royal boats were constructed under the supervision of the officer called as Naosalya Phukan who also had a thousand men for building the boats. (Hamilton . F., 1963,pp.20). Officers called as Nao Sali Phukan and Baruas were appointed to maintain the boat yards and docks.

During the Ahom rule, gold was regularly washed from the rivers of the Assam valley. Rajeswar Singha is said to have taken as much as 2,500 ounces of gold every year form the people of Upper Assam. The Sonowals or gold washers were taxed a nominal sum of gold or money per annum. Thousands of people were engaged in washing it. In the different islands of the Brahmaputra, there lived gold washers from certain communities who frequented the different streams for the purpose of gold washing. The Brahmaputra and other rivers like the Dhansiri, Desoi, Jhanji, Bhoroli, Dikrong, and Subansiri were gold bearing rivers. The mention of gold in the Brahmaputra is also inscribed in the inscriptions discovered in Assam. In the inscription of Vanamaladeva, the water of the river Lauhitya is described as polluted with the mud of gold, which comes from the huge gold-rock of the Mount Kailasha (cited, Gupta. C., 1991, pp. 293).

A number of canals were artificially dug by different Ahom rulers to divert the courses of the rivers. It was during the reign of Kamaleshwar Singha, that the Bhogdoi canal was dug which extended from Dichoi River to the Kalioni. The labourers were fed with rice and cakes. The King and his ministers provided food and refreshment to the workers. The
canal was given the name of ‘Bhogdoi’ which literally mean ‘food offering’. Similarly, rivers like the Rupahi, Sonai, Khanajan, etc were dug by the Ahom kings to make short cuts to the Brahmaputra River and to some other places.

In the course of British annexation of Assam, various people – Administrators, anthropologists, travelers, medical officers, explorers, missionaries, etc, began to collect information and left Memoirs, Journals, documents and Reports on the geography, history, administration and people of this region. In this context, the names of Edward Gait, B. C. Allen, John M’Cosh, W.W.Hunter, Francis Jenkins, Milis A.J. Moffat, R.B.Pemberton, Thomas Welsh, Francis Buchanan Hamilton, J.Butler, Captain Hannay, William Robinson, J.P.Wade, Lieutenant Wilcox, Verrier Elwin, Alexander Mackenzie, William L. Shakespear, L. A Waddel are noteworthy. Their contributions have added to the understanding of the region and its people. Some snippets of the reference of the Brahmaputra can be gleaned from their writings. M’Cosh.(1975, pp.6) writes “The Brahmaputra may be called the great drain of Assam, and not of it only, but of all the mountain countries that surround it; the numerous tributary streams of which swell it to a river of the very first-rate magnitude, so as to make it out-rival the great Ganges itself in its tribute to the ocean.” Further the importance of the river as a conduit of trade and export of goods to different places of the country is also mentioned by him, “The distance of the Tea district from Calcutta though great, can be but little obstacle, when such a noble river as the Brahmaputra is open at all seasons for boats of largest burden even to the foot of the hills where the Tea grows”.(ibid., p.33).

The British used the river as a highway which connected Assam with Bengal. They introduced the Government Steamer in 1884 which plied from Calcutta to Gauhati, and later extended its route. Since ancient times, boats were used in the Brahmaputra to travel from one place to another and for crossing the river. Sadiya, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur, Guwahati, Goalpara and Dhubri are important crossing points in Assam. Prior to the construction of the Saraighat Bridge in 1962, ferries were the only means of crossing the Brahmaputra River in Assam. Consequently several bridges were constructed over the river.
6.3 Inspiring the Creative minds

The various moods of the Brahmaputra has inspired the writers, composers and singers of Assam to pen their thoughts on the river. In this context, the names of Laksminath Bezbarua, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Bhupen Hazarika are noteworthy. The composition by Jyoti Prasad Agarwal and sung by Bhupen Hazarika defines Assam and the Brahmaputra in totality:

Of Assam, of Bharat….. I am the Khasi, I am the Jaintia, the Dophola, Abor, Oka, I am the Singpho, the Miri of the plains, the youth of the Subansiri, Of the victorious Ahom, the Kachari, the Koch, I am the prince of the Mech, the Rajbonghshi, the Rabha……. I am the Lalung, Chutia, Lushai, Mikir, Garo, Mishimi, Khamti,………. I fight for equality and friendship …I am the one who labours in the tea garden, The Na-Axomiya Mymensinghia ,the village Nepali, the skilled dancer of the Manipuri …of so many hills and plains, of the waters of a hundred streams, I flow, taking all in my path, to be one with the Brahmaputra

Jyoti Prasad’s other compositions on the river, “Luitor parore ami deka lora, moriboloi bhoi nai” (we are the youth from the banks of Luit and we don’t have any fear of death) written in 1942, was to inspire the youths of Assam in the Freedom movement of India. Another song ‘Luitare pani jabi o boi, Luitare pani jabi o boi…. penned by him was sung in the film Joymoti in 1948.

Perhaps, there are few you have been able to capture the essence of the Brahmaputra then Bhupen Hazarika, who has sung numerous songs on the river. Known as the ‘Bard of the Brahmaputra’, Bhupen Hazarika’s songs addressed to the river speaks of his deep reverence, love and sometimes angst for the Brahmaputra. In his famous song Bistirno paror he asked the river – Tumiye jadi Brahmare putra, Sei prititva tene nam matri, Nahale preranamidivyakiya( If you are the son of Brahma, then it’s namesake only, For, where is your inspiring zeal ?). He continues, “Sahasro barishar, unmadonar, avigytate, pangu manobok sawal songrami aru agrogami kori nutula kiyo (with your
maddening experience of thousand monsoons, why don’t you arouse the disabled human beings for struggle and progress). In another song, Mahābāhu Brahmaputra mahāmilanar Tirtha, Kata jug dhari āhise prakāshi, samannayar artha (The mighty Brahmaputra, the pilgrimage of great confluence, through the ages it has borne the lesson of coexistence). The song Āji Brahmaputra hal bahnimān, Manar digantat dhowāure, Ākāsat papiyātarāghure, Pade pade kāk apamān (Today the Brahmaputra is in turbulence, the mind’s horizon is clouded with smoke, the meteor roams the sky, each step holds potent indignity) . .... O parahi puwāte tulungānāwate, Rangman māsalai gal,..... gadhulire parate Barhamputrar mājate, Rangman nāikiyāhal...... Hiyākhani bhukwāi ākasale cāi cāi, Rahdai bāuli hal (It was the day before yesterday morning, that Rongmon went fishing in his country boat, In the Brahmaputra midstream by twilight, Rongmon disappeared, Thumping on the chest, eyes heavenward bound, Disconsolate Rahdai goes mad). Akowāpakowāgāmochāekhan, Jen bālit meli thowāache, Seikhān gāmochā Brahmaputra, Sitate rod he puwāiche, Jen japiai bāli bhoj khām, Ājir bihu git gām, Mor mon chak, (The twisting gamocha, Spread out on the sand below, this gamocha is the Brahmaputra, Basking in the winter sun, And sing the Bihu songs, The mind and the eyes are at peace).

The benign blessings of the Brahmaputra are revered by one and all, but the floods and disasters never fail to cause pain to the people of Assam. Jayanta Hazarika wrote, when he formed ‘Xur bahini’ to gather relief for flood victims “Luitor Bolia baan, toloi koloi nu dhpoli meliso, hir hir sowode kal roop dhori loi kaak nu bare bare khediso (Oh the maddening floods of Luit, where are you heading this time. Whom are you chasing again with frightening sound of your waves)”. Ninety five years old Mohisang Pao, has seen the Brahmaputra since the day he was born in the village of Laika in the middle of the Brahmaputra. Recalling his childhood on the bank of the Brahmaputra in the village of Laika within Dibru Saikhow Sanctuary, Pao says that in the 1940’s the Brahmaputra was deep and narrow and he could swim from one bank to the other. After the earthquake in the 1950’s, the river bed became shallow leading to flood and disaster. The floods caused by the river have caused Mohisang and thousands like him to leave their ancestral
villages and move to other places. This is a recurrent event, but the victims of such disasters have taken such experiences on their strides.

The river Brahmaputra and its tributaries have found a mention in the stories and novels of various writers in Assam. In literature, Brahmaputra has names like Lohit, Lauhitya, Luit, Brahmaputra, Borronyo, etc. In the novel Pani Nirod Choudhury has mentioned the Pagladiya River. The river Dhansiri is found in the book Suruj Mukhir Swapnot (Dream of Sunflower) written by Syed Abdul Malik. It tells the story about a village called Dalim situated on the bank of the river. The book Ganga Silonir Pakhi (Wings of the Tern) by Lakhinandan Bora tells us about the Sonai River. The novel Agomonir Ghat by Rebati Mohan Dutta Choudhury, popularly called as Silabhadra has the Gangadhar River in the backdrop. Amulya Barua writes about the fisherman’s of Digsou, Padumani Ghat in his book Ai Padumani. There is also the book by Khiti Bora named Kacharibarir Ghatat. Lila Gogoi’s novel on Noi Boi Jai deals with the intense relation of the river and the pain and joy of human life. There is the mention of the Brahmaputra in the novels namely Luit Paror Sualijani and Luitor Ipare Sipare by Krishna Prasad Barthakur. The novel Brahmaputra Chheu- Chhau fetched the Nepali writer Lil Bahadur Chetri the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1987. Similarly in 1991 Ajit Bhuyan received the Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry for his book Brahmaputra Ityadi Padya. The book by Hem Baruah with the title of The Red River and the Blue Hills aptly sums up what the state of Assam stands for. In the autobiography of Lakshminath Bezbaruah, the author shares his vivid experience of boat rides in the Brahmaputra during his childhood, “Travel upon a boat upstream across the Brahmaputra was great fun in childhood….Whenever the boat was moored on a sandbank I would be the first one to jump down and prance like a peacock upon the sands….One afternoon the boat was taken to a sandbank so that lunch could be cooked. We saw numerous river-terns flying overhead. Someone informed me that the river terns built their nests in these islands and laid their eggs in them. Another day we found two huge eggs of crocodiles….One evening we saw two or three turtles crawling across the sand. The boatmen told us that these turtles come in this season to lay their eggs in the islands. Our servant grabbed one turtle and turned it over on its back. Later, after it was killed and cut up, there were about forty eggs in its belly……. Another day
the boatmen caught a strange turtle which had a blunt spike or horn on its back. They said that the turtle was unpalatable…” (cited, Dutta, 2001, pp.69).

The grandeur of the Brahmaputra River and the natural beauty of the surroundings through which it passes never fail to fill the viewers with awe and reverence. Travellers have sung paeans of the river. Mahatma Gandhi visited Assam four times. About his first visit to Assam in 1921, he gave his first impressions of Assam in the pages of *Young India* under the captions ‘Lovely India’. His generous account of the people and the country during his visit touched the people of Assam. He wrote about Lovely Assam while sitting on the bank of the river Brahmaputra in Tezpur town. Gandhijis note on that fateful day is a testimony to the grandness of the Brahmaputra and the rich history of Assam.

6.4 Folk Literature

6.4.1. Introduction

History, tradition, spiritualism, nature, love, pain, separation are reflected in the songs and prose of Assam. The Brahmaputra and the other rivers of the Assam find a place in both folk and contemporary prose and songs. The stories, narratives, myths, legends are abundant and deals with a variety of issues. In many of the folk literature the Brahmaputra and the other rivers are frequently mentioned. Songs are sung during festivals, marriage and other occasions. Songs are sung during festivals, marriage and other occasions. Songs like Bihugeet,  *Oi-Nitom, Aainaam, Biyanaam, Baramahar geet, Kamrupi Lokogeet, Ainaam, Goalparia Lokogeet, Bhatiali geet, Naukhelar geet, Maishal geet, Beular geet, Mahutargeet*, etc reflects the influence of the river on the culture of the communities.

6.4.2 Songs

There are several songs which mention the names of rivers of Assam like the *Dikhow Noi, Jaji Noi, Ranga Noi, Dhansiri Noi, Buwati Noi:*

*Luitor Esuti Disair Esuti*

*Mor Dhan Esutiye jai*

*Caku Tirbir Hridaye nasahe*
**Cari Bhangi Bhangi Sai**
(The Luit or Disai, my beloved is on one of them. He looks about from his boat, anxious for a sight of me). (Dutta, 2001, pp. 211)

Bihunaams or Bihugeets are the most common type of folksongs. The songs are spontaneous and simple expressions of the emotions of the people and are sung by one and all. Some of the Bihu songs with the Brahmaputra in the background are:

*Luitpar holo dikhou par holo*
*Jiralo kaliyaborot*
*tomakê bicari ero gharbari*
*Nethaku Dibrugharat*
(I crossed the Luit, I crossed the Dikhou, I took rest at Kaliabor, Let me leave home in quest of you, I won’t stay at Dibrugarh). (Borah, 2005, pp. 18).

Another Bihu song:
*Brahmaputra Khoni Khosake Suwani*
*Bhetidi Rakhuta Nai* (The Brahmaputa is truly beautiful, Nobody can stop its course).
(Choudhury, 2005, pp. 11)

On the beauty of the river, there is this song:
*Luitore Bali Bogi Toki Toki*
*Kashoi Koni Pare lekhi*
*Luitor Suwani, Ganga koi Siloni, Ba,*
*Luitor Suwani, Borkoi Saporoi,*
*Bornoir Nirimol Pani*
*Luitor Suwani Majuli Saporoi*
*Swargor Suwani Tora*
*Luitor Sipare Kohuani Phula* Choudhury, 2005, pp. 11)

Another goes like this:
*Sirip Sirip kori kapurdui asilu*
*Siri Luitor loi Sai*
Siri Luitate Suhuri Marile  
Dhane Nao Meli Jai  
( I was washing clothes while looking at the Siri Luit, when I heard a whistle across the river. It was my beloved moving over the waters on a boat). (Dutta, 2001, pp. 211)

Another song on the rivers of this region:  
Dihingar Chatat Dhubuni Namile  
Name Luitote Miri  
Nekhao Bhaté Pani Nalaa Kapor KAni  
Gharar Ai Nahale Tiri  
( The washerwoman on the bank of the Dihing, the Mising woman is on the Luit. Till I can place a woman in my house, I will neither eat or sleep.)(Dutta, 2001, pp. 211-212)

On the flora on the sandbars of the Luit: 
Aidale Katile Ahe Saridali  
Luitor Khagore Khore  
Dhonok Matik Ahe charijani  
Dingit Dhora Dhorí kori(Choudhury, 2005.)

On the river birds:  
Brahmaputra Parore  
Dolpunga Charaijak  
Ghuri Ghuri Panite Porae  
Nebhabu buliu tumare katha  
Ghuri Ghuri Monote Parae (Choudhury, 2005.)  
( On the bank of the Brahmaputra the birds goes round and round and lands in the water, My mind goes on thinking about you, even when I resolve not to think about you. )

On the river dolphins: 
Luitor Sihu Oi Tuipai Bur Marile  
Akou Chon Etibar Ola
(O dolphin of the Luit, you have dived out of sight. Please let me have another glimpse of you) (Dutta, 2001, pp. 212)

Marriage songs popularly known as *Biyagaan* are sung during different rituals associated with a wedding. One such song which has a humourous twist to it goes like this:

*Luitor Sopoa Doratu Jopora*

*Bohi Photo Kotha Khiya*

*Amar aidok Ajoli Dekhiye. Botiya Batibo diye*

*Luitor Kakhori Aidou gol Bagori*

*Rame hatae meli dhore*

*Nohou moi Ajoli Nejau moi Bagori*

*Ailo Monote porae. (Choudhury, 2005.)*

Devotional songs praising the lord are numerous and, *Ozapali* falls in this category.

This is about Parashuram and the Brahmaputra:

*Parashuram Dhari Satiganak bodh kari*

*Hathe Dhanu Bame je Kuthar*

*Parbat Pahar kati Tirtha namai Kouti kouti*

*Brahmaputra lok Toraibar (cited, Choudhury, 2005.)*

Some other songs about the river are:

*Upare jai Motor Gari*

*Tole jai rail*

*Saraighat Dolong Bohil*

*Ferrir din gol*

(Above runs the vehicle, below the train, Saraighat bridge has been constructed, the days of the ferry has gone) (Choudhury, 2005.)

Womenfolk sing a variety of songs in reverence on the occasion of religious ceremonies, connected with Goddess Small-pox or *Ai* (Mother). Deep humility and a sense of submission are the keynote of the prayer song. One such *Ai Naam* goes like this:
Kamakhyar Mukh Tenau Bhora dile  
Luitor Mukhor loi sai  
Ujai Ahile Aire Khate Bhorı  
Luitot marile Sewa( Choudhury, 2005.)

The goddess is supposed in the songs to have come from Kamakhya, proceeded up the Brahmaputra to Pichala in North Lakhimpur and at last arrived at Sadiya. As she travels upstream, everybody and everything on either side of the Brahmaputra bows to her:

Ai’s Seven Sisiters come downstream  
Spreading to the hills;  
Trees and creepers all bow to her  
Hearing of her arrival.  
Ai’s Seven Sisters come upstream  
And across the Luit;  
Do not fear and do not get frightened,  
For Ai is kind hearted.  
Ai’s Seven Sisters come upstream,  
Flower bouquet in her boat;  
Fistfuls of buds she is distributing  
As tokens of her love to men. (Das.J., 1972)

The Tokari geet is sung with the accompaniment of a stringed instrument which looks like a guitar and is called as Tokari :  
Luitkhon Bhetile Jengere Jabore  
Sagarkhon Bhetibo Kune  
Bhoga Kahi bati Kohare Goribo  
Ai deha goribi kune(cited,Choudhury, 2005.)

Zikirs and Jaris are devotional songs of Assamese Muslims. The word is from the Arabic Ziqr, meaning ‘singing or remembering Allah name’. The songs are written in Assamese. We find the mention of the Luit in some of the Zikirs:
Luitor Mukhore Rua Kathi kami
Jerengar Mukhere Kher
Kalimar Namote Sajoai Masjid ghar
Aajan deu Sahebor ghar (Choudhury, 2005.)

The Lullabies or nursery rhyme are called as Umali geet in Assamese. One such song with the mention of the Brahmaputra River goes like this:
Ukon Khoki mori gol boge borot kore
Luitor phena, Moh mena. Gas nipite
Kopou kona (cited, Choudhury, 2005.)

Some of the songs from the Kamrup and Goalpara region popularly known as Kamrupiya lokogeet and Goalparia lokogeet have songs which mention the rivers of their region. In some of the marriage songs, the names of the Barnadi and Gauranga River are mentioned:
Barnadir pare pare
Kisher baijon baje
Babjan tu nahoo baba balir juran aishe (cited, Choudhury, 2005.)

In earlier time the Nawaria geets or boatman’s songs arose as boatman drifted along the current of the river. John Butler wrote in 1885, ‘Asam is intersected by rivers, the Assamese prefer moving about in little canoes to travelling by land; watermen seem greatly to enjoy these boat trips, always singing songs as they paddle along”. (cited, Basu. N.K., 1970, pp. 283). There are ballads that describe life on the rivers and speaks about river borne trade of the past. The Baramahigeet describes the separation of a woman from her husband away from home on river borne journeys.

The Brahmaputra has witnessed the history of the region and the ballads composed speak volume about this fact. There are also some Ballads based on popular subjects:
Luitor Rangoli gara
Bharalumukhote ghar bari khajise
Palehi bakhoror bora (cited, Choudhury, 2005.)

Another ballad on Maniram Dewan who worked in the East India Company. He was put to death on 26th February 1858 for rebellion against the British. The following ballad composed speaks about this incident:

Luitor Marile Bheta Oi Maniram
Dihingot Maribo Bheta
Tini Company Changera Chalale
Dile Maniramak Kheda. (cited, Choudhury, 2005.)

The song Naharar geet is about the slaying of Nahar, the adopted son of Ahom king Sukhangpha.
Ki Mas maribo gol
Luite Bhatiai Nahar Senamua
Bhuiya Mariboloi gol... (cited, Choudhury, 2005.)

The influence of the river on the food of the people of Assam is reflected in this song
Saak tulu, saak tulu
Saat saak ki kin au
Tuli anilu lai Lofa
Dhulu luitaor ghte
Dharkan Srikrishna Ahibo kun bate... (cited, Choudhury, 2005.)

The Assamese folk literature is replete with wise maxims, phrases, proverbs and riddles:
Luit jano ubhoti boi
Aik bupai neribi toi
(Does the Luit flow back, Son, Do not ever leave your mother)
Another on ... Air saman hobo kun
Luitor saman bobo kun
The following saying denotes strength and character:

_Luitehe Bothar kub jane_

This phrases on :

_Dihinge Dipange_ (to wander aimlessly)

**Brahmaputrat Pelabo Khoja**

( wish to fling something in the river implies the desire to destroy it completely) ( Dutta, 2001, pp. 213)

**Luitor Pani Akou Ranga Karo**

( Let us redden the waters of the Luit again , is a call to fight for the country) ( Dutta, 2001, pp. 213)

There are songs with the mention of the Brahmaputra and these songs are laced with humour.

**Brahmaputra Ahile Ingrajar jahaj Ai**

**Prithibi Talebalai**

**Chapai De Chapai De Ingrajar jahaj Ai**

**Batari Achene Nai?**

( The English steamer came up the Brahmaputra, causing the earth to shake. O Englishmen, moor your steamer. Have you brought any news?) ( Dutta, 2001, pp.211)

On the bank of the river Brahmaputra the Bishwanath temple remains above water for six months and remain underwater for six months. It is said thus:

**Bishwanath Gohain Lorok Phorok**

**Somah Panit Somah Stalat** ( Choudhury, 2005)

A Riddle:

_Q. Ranga Tok Tok Luitor Khuti_  
_Ki Korisa Mahadeo_  
_Ki gosor guti ?_
Ans: The Sun (cited, Choudhury, 2005)

In ‘Bihugeet Asomiya Jibanor Chitra’, Asomiya Bhasa aru Sanskriti , B. K Baruah(cited, Choudhury, 2005) mentions about fish and tortoise eggs which is regarded as a sumptuous meal in Assam. Here the writer tells about the joyful activity of trying to find tortoise eggs on the sands of the Luit.

The Misings have a rich repertoire of folk literature consisting of myths, legends, narratives, songs, etc. The folk songs called as Oi-Ni:tom and Kaban are melodious and mostly related to beauty, yearning and pathos of love. The main subject matter of Oi-Ni:tom is the remembrance of love. Oi-Ni:tom is the poetical expression of feelings and emotions of Misings youths and girls. Pain and Sadness are the other theme of Oi-Ni:tom.( Kagyung .R., October 2014)

The Misings were earlier hill dwellers who came to the plains and settled on the banks of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Some of their folksongs nostalgically refer to their earlier abode in the hilly tracks of Subansiri valley:

Adi Lokke Kang Kandak
Baggum Sinloode
Okumso Kang Kandak
Brahmaputra Abude
Einolemsine Diuryadeng
Ngke Mennam Oimebui
(In the hills ‘Bagum’ woods are beautiful spots and in the plains the Brahmaputra, but my darling surpasses all these in her beauty)

Aine’Ru:yid Dulīdag Aîna
Atse’ Bidnamdé:m kali : dage
Nokke’ ke’ : ral dulīdag aîna
Asin doyingém Ki:lîdage
Bolop Bitne’ aside.

Tolop Bitlad Kumabo

Aipe’mé: naim asinse’
leko me’ lad kumabo

( Sitting beside the river/ desire to enjoy the flowing river/ sitting beside you/ desire to share my thoughts / just as the river flowing from east to west/ never flows from west to east/ love filled heart will forever remain) (Mili. 2016, pers. comm., 1 January)

Done kombong po: lo loladdona

Nome kangkin sugeola atir oiyae mentagai

Okal dungka: ne okal dankka:ne

Oinam kerenge retid toneya

( In the moonlight of the month of Vaisakh, On the sand of the river Subansiri, I met you first and said, You are the only one).( Borah.2005, pp. 3)

āci jili jiliko mikbe jilik

āci jili tapido miki jili tapimā

( There is a difference between the stream that flows down from the hills and the stream that flows down from the eyes. However deep the stream flowing from the hills, its depth can be measured: but the depth of the tear- stream flowing with the anguish of the heart can neither be measured nor guessed.) (Goswami, 1965, pp. 45)

Tumar ghar Ipare

Mur ghar Sipare

Majot siang Noikhon thokar babe

O senai, Tumak sau

Buliye xamoiot sabo nuaru

( Your house is on that side, My house is on this side, as the Siang river is in the middle, I cannot see you in time, even if I want to ) (cited in Hussain. I.,2012, pp.64).

Dhansiri dolongkhon dang di bondh korar dore ,
tumar mur bat tu satruwe bondh kortle (Hussain, 2002, pp. 102)
(your and mine road has been closed by enemies, just as the bridge of Dhansiri has been closed ….)

Subansiri Noi khon Saturibo nuaru,
sarukalor bhalpua pahoribo nuaru (Hussain, 2002, pp. 102)
(cannot swim the Subansiri river, Cannot forget the love of childhood)

Kherkota Noi khon khukan morobhumi hol
Sarukalor bhal pua Kio je atori gol (Hussain, 2002, pp. 102)
(Kherkota river has become a dry desert, why has the love of childhood moved away)

Luitor balibur borosunar abhabot xukai goise
aru anoborote tumalo bhabi aru tumak kasote nepai
moiu xukan balir dore xukai –xinai goisu (Hussain, 2002, pp. 102)
(the sand of the Luit in absence of rain has become dry, thinking about you all the time and without you beside me, even I have become shriveled and thin).

Duronir Sadiyat thakilau ba bharalit thakileu,
tumar botora xodai paie thakim (Hussain, 2002, pp. 102)
(Even if I stay in far off Sadiya or Bharali, will always receive your news)

Aane ruid du:li:dag asi bidnam ka:lidag
Oinok kerad du:li:dag aasin aayang
bili:dag
(I want to sit on bank of the river to see the river flow. Same to same, I want to sit on your side to give my heartiest love.)

Asi binnam Kaimilo
Kamanaula duli dangne
Pinput yunnam kayemilo
(I feel like flowing when I see the water flowing in the river, I too feel like flowing with the water, when I see the river flowing fast with froth ….)

Other songs on yearning of youth expresses these sorrowful sentiments - Just as one does not get water when one is thirsty, so I cannot see my darling though I am yearning to see her.

Just as there is no vibration (roaring) on the other bank of the Brahmaputra because the steamer has not come, my mind is lonely as my darling is not here. (Goswami, 1965, pp.46).

Among the Deories there is the Bihu Puja which is celebrated on the first Wednesday of the bright moon in the month of Bohag (Vaisakh, April-May). It is a very sacred day for them. This puja festival lasts for a week. The puja is performed on the first and last days. They sing this song:

*Bage dhari khale litar sihu*  
*Mangalbare uruka budhbare bihu*  
*Tar pacdina manisar bihu*  
(The crane has caught and eaten the porpoise of the river luit (Brahmaputra, Lauhitya)). Tuesday is the eve of *bihu* and Wednesday is the actual *bihu* followed by the *bihu* of human race next day) (Dutta. 2000, pp.35)

The rivers Brahmaputra (Luit), Tengapani, Disang finds a place in their folk literature of the Deoris:  
*Disang Noi eri jam,*  
*Tengapani eri jam,*  
*Anki nijor ai Bupai,*  
*bhai – kokai Xokoluke eri jam,*  
*jodihe xosa kotha kua* Hussain, 2002, pp. 102)  
(I will leave Disang river, will leave Tengapani, even leave own mother, father, brothers, everybody, if you tell the truth).
Luitor Lotuabur Nadir xutat uit- bhaee jai,
nadir pokoniar pakot hoitu korbat balir charat lagi dhoribogoi,
thik kheidore mur dehtu uti bhaee jaute korbat lotua dorei lagi dhoribogoi
aru birhor sokulu tukimgoi) (Hussain, 2002, pp. 103)

Among the Sonowal Kachari, there is the mention of the river Luit, Dhansiri in their
songs and literature:
Luitor sihu Ye mas dhari khai
Domahi Bihu ai ahe aru jai

There is another form of song among the Sonowal Kacharis known as Thuporir geet:
Husori Ai Dhansiri boi
Bihuti anugoi Toka bojai

A Bihu folk song of the Sonowal Kachari:
Sovansirir balite kone son kamala
Balir balichanda dhui
Tumi coa amalai ami cao tumalai
Duphale dukura jui
(Who collected gold dust, from the sands of the Sovansiri, you cast a glance at me, I at
you, fire burns on both side) (Dutta, 2005, pp. 48).

The char dwellers of Assam have a wealth of folk literature which mentions the name of
the rivers like the Brahmaputra and the Padma. The different forms of oral literature
prevalent among these people comprises of folksongs, proverbs, riddles, myths, legends
and tales. The folk songs conveys a picture of a community whose livelihood and
survival is dependent on the blessings of the river. They lead a simple but struggling life
and their culture and philosophy is reflected in their songs. Their livelihood depends on
agriculture, fishing and herding cows in the chars.
The term ‘river’, finds repeated mention in their songs and stories. The boat, flora, fauna, the terrain, sand, *char*, flood, erosion are words which gives basis to their folk literature. Of the different genre of folk songs, like *Dhuageet, Marfarti* or *Murshidageet, palligeet, Barashe or Baramashi geet, Bhatiali geet, Bhawaiya geet*, *Pala gaan, Neelgaan, Biya geet, Magan geet, Bengbiya geet, Sachipata geet*, *Dharmiya gaan, Rakhal geet or Goroshiya geet, Naokhelar geet* etc., the *Bhaisali gaan* and *Naokhelar gaan* are songs of the river. The songs are mostly sung by the boatmen who while using their oars, sing songs with the flow of the river. These *char* dwellers from Sadiya to Dhubri, had come to Assam decades ago from East Bengal. They were also settled in the *chars* by the British administrators. In the songs, the various rivers find a place. They have come from the *chars* of Padma, Meghna, and Jamuna and have reached the shores of Brahmaputra. Some of the folksongs which mentions the rivers and particularly the Brahmaputra are given below.

Folk artist, Hemanga Biswas in ‘Haradhon- Rangman’s song says,

*Padmar tufane uraiyii nilo*
*amiir sukher ghor*
*ujiin theilya ailam ami*
*luiter chor.* (cited, Hussain.I., 2002,pp.16)

(The whirlwinds of Padma have blown away my happy home; I have come to the *chars* of the Brahmaputra by swimming against the tide).

*Padma hoite ailam ami asiimeri chor*
*Barramputroi bhanglo amar sheina sonar ghor;*
*shei ghor chariya jabo kuthaiy upaiy bolona*
*shara jibon dukhe gelo airto shohena.* (Hussain.I., 2002,pp.28)

(From the banks of Padma I have come to the *chars* of Assam, The Brahmaputra has destroyed my golden home, Where do I go from here, can some body tell me? I cannot bear this lifelong pain any more)
With the same feelings, this song tells about hopes shattered, of lost livelihood, as a result of the Brahmaputra

\[
\text{Nadir charat xajilu ghar kot asa kori}
\]
\[
\text{Seuj bhumiir fasal tulim mure bharal bhari}
\]
\[
\text{Xai asabur bhahi je gol Brahmaputrar saknoiat}
\]
\[
\text{Aji ghar eri moi furu heruai thikona hai heruai thikona}(\text{Hussain.I., 2002,pp.103})
\]

The following about lost young love,

\[
\text{Are o nodi Burhamputra ki maya lagayli}
\]
\[
\text{Shukher bosti korli re sara sari.}
\]
\[
\text{Karo bhanglijomajiimi, karo bhangli bhitare bari}
\]
\[
\text{Amiir bhangli nabin boyosher peeriti.}
\]

(What magic have you done O Brahmaputra! Destroying homes of happiness, You are breaking some people's land, some other's homes, and for me you broke my young love!)

\[
\text{Baape dukkhot poriya kaandere}
\]
\[
\text{maayer chokkher paani porere}
\]
\[
\text{haayre Burhamputra kasher bhangiyiire}(\text{Hussain.I., 20012,pp.104})
\]

(My father is shattered, my mother is crying relentlessly, O Brahmaputra, you are the destroyer!)

\[
\text{Pautik joto jomajomire bhangiya nil Brahmaputra}
\]
\[
\text{Haayre puranokaalia hausher bari- ghar}
\]
\[
\text{Takou nil bhasaiyare, bape dukh ot}(\text{Hussain.I., 20012,pp.104})
\]

(The Brahmaputra has destroyed their ancestral land, the ancestral home, drowned everything, leaving father shattered)

6.4.3 Folk tales

In the folk literature of the tribes, there are various tales about the rivers of the region. There are some mythical ballads which describe the origin of the rivers Dhansiri, Belsiri and Subansiri. These rivers, as the tradition go, were princesses. Endle (1997 reprint)
writes about the special respect and reverence for the element of water and the rivers by the Kachari people. The folktale ‘How the rivers were made’ furnishes some explanation of their reverence for the river. The tale is a long one, the latter part tells about the origin of the different rivers. An old man journeyed to the Himalayas and dug a great tank where he kept many kinds of fish. One day, Sri, the god of good luck, while on his way to hunt animals, saw the tank. He was very thirsty and wanted to drink the water from the tank. The fishes in the tank in return for the water that they gave him to drink, asked the god to take them to the great river, the Brahmaputra (or Lohit). So the God tied them to his staff and drew them after him, making runnels of water. And in this way the rivers were created. The fishes presented Sri with a pumpkin and a gourd. But on his way home, Sri gave the presents to one of his friend. He reached home and found that his little daughter was ill. It was because he gave the presents away. But finally, the fishes took pity on him. They asked him to worship and offer sacrifice on the banks of the river which would heal his daughter. His worship cured his daughter. Since that time the Kacharis worship and revere rivers.

There are local legends regarding Arimatta and Jangal Balahu who were rulers in Assam. In the book by Gait, (1992, pp. 17,) the author writes about Arimatta, the ruler who founded a kingdom in lower Assam. Regarding the birth of Arimatta, it is said that his mother was a queen of Pratappur and he was fathered by the Brahmaputra. He was sent by his mother to live on the bank of the river. He became a powerful king. He unknowingly killed his father. He however killed himself by drowning in the Borolia (Buroi) river. His son was Jangal Balahu. Jangal Balahu had constant feuds with the Kacharis, by whom he was finally defeated and killed. Several places situated on the course of the Kolong River have derived their names from incidents in his flight from the Kacharis. At Raha he stopped to drink. At Jagi he appeared above the water while being carried down by the river current and at Kajalimukh, at the confluence of the Kolong and Brahmaputra, he was killed by the piercing of a kajali bamboo (cited Allen, 1905, pp. 1763). Again according to Tiwa tradition, Jangal Balahu was the illegitimate son of Arimatta, the chieftain of Mayong principality and Gangawati the woman chieftain of Khola principality. Jangal Balahu set up a new principality called Sahari and constructed
a fort which came to be known as the Jongalbalahu Fort in Nagaon district. (cited, Baruah. B., 2013, pp. 27). The Tiwa tribe regards Arimatta and Jangal Balahu as Tiwa Chiefs who ruled in ancient times.

In Rabha literature there is the folktale of the birth of the Otter and crocodile. There were two brothers called Sishu and Ginal. Both brothers wanted to marry the beautiful princess or Goddess of Sangshi hills. The Goddess deliberately created a situation between the two brothers which made them fight against each other. She told them that she will marry the one who wins the fight. Both brothers fought against one another. They fell down in the Dhapsi River from where they could not get up. They lived there forever. Later the otter locally called as Sihu descended from Sishu and the crocodile descended from Ginal (cited. Choudhury, 2005).

Misings pride themselves to be the sons of the river. The economic social and cultural life of the Misings is intimately related to a life on the river banks. They build their habitation along the courses of the Brahmaputra, Subansiri, Ronganadi, Buroi and Bhoroli River in the northern side and the confluences of Dibru, Dihing, Disang, Dikhow and Dhansiri River in the south. After settling on the river banks, they have adapted to a new environment and society. The men, women and children are accustomed to a riverine life. They construct their houses on piles. They are expert swimmers. They can use boats and rafts and years of living on the river banks have enabled them to manage their lives during times of flood. The intimate relation of the Mising tribe with the river is an accepted truth and the saying – Noi Suwani Miri which means that the river is made beautiful because of the Miri (Mising) reflects this sentiment.

Another song about Misings intimate relation with the river is expressed in these words:

*Luitor Sipare kahuwani Phulile*
*Miriyan Khelile Taat*
*Ene Phagunmahiya Tomar Jauban Phulile*
*Mone Mor Kheliche Taat*
( On the other side of the Luit the Kahuwa flowers have blossomed. Mising girls are sporting there. In such a month of Phagun your youth has blossomed and my mind is sporting there. ) ( Dutta, 2001, pp. 210-211)

The Brahmaputra, Siang, Dihing, etc are the rivers which find frequent mentions in their literature. Mising prose and folksongs make constant reference to rivers and their intimate relation with them. The Misings have a sad tale about the origin of the name Siang. ‘Si’ in Mising language means ‘water’ and ‘Yang’ means ‘dead body’. The legendary hero Tusung was drowned in the Dihang river which from that time onwards came to called as Siang river. ( Cited from D. Arpita, 2014 ).

The original name of the Lalung tribe is Tiwa. ‘Ti’ meaning ‘water’ and ‘Wa’ means great, noble, high, elevated. The name as well as their constant references of water and river in their religious deities indicates that the Tiwas had originally resided on the bank of a holy river. Edward gait also writes that after entering Assam in the distant past, the Tiwas were dwelling on the bank of the river Brahmaputra.

6.4.4. The Sacred River

The Brahmaputra is a sacred river for the Hindus. On its banks, the rituals associated with Ashokasthami are performed by the followers of Hinduism. The legend associated with this ritual tells about the washing away of the hermitage of Sage Ashoka by the Brahmaputra. The sage very offended at this incident, cursed the river that its sacredness would end. The Brahmaputra, shaken by this curse, begged pardon of the sage who then relented a little and ordained that for one day in the whole year, the Brahmaputra would become sacred. The day is celebrated every year on the eight day of Chaitra, and the occasion is known as the Ashokasthami. Pilgrims take the ceremonial bath on the banks. In Assam the ghats at Silghat at Tezpur and Sualkuchi near Guwahati, wear a festive look during this celebration. Similarly on the occasion of Makar Sagaranti, very year, pilgrims gather at Parashuram Kunda to offer prayers.
Among the Deoris people, Ji-ma or Jichima is their Mother of Water, ‘Ji’ meaning ‘Water’ and ‘Ma’ meaning ‘Mother’. The Deoris who live on the bank of the rivers perform ‘Jima Puja’ to propitiate the river and pray to the Gods for keeping their villages safe from floods and erosion. In Sadiya, the ‘Jima puja’ is performed by the Dibongiya Deori residing on the bank of the river and villagers of the area belonging to different communities participated in the rituals. According to J.P.Deori. (30 December., pers. Comm., 2015), the villagers believe that after performance of the puja in the preceding year, the river which earlier had eroded their villages have receded. Similarly this puja is also known by the name of Luit puja and is performed on the bank of the Kundil river. It is called as Luit Puja by the Borgoya section of the Deori and also by the Ahoms.

Another ritual associated with water is the Bhur Uthua or Bor Sabha. In this ritual, a raft loaded with offerings is released in the river along with prayers. This ritual is an annual festival among Deoris.

Like the Deoris the Sonowal Kacharis have a ritual which is observed by the community. It is called as the Bhoor Utowa Sabah or Raft- floating ritual. It is an annual ritual which is performed on the bank of the river in the month of April-May. It is also known as Bighini atarawa (to drive away the obstacle) ritual. They believe that Bighini Devota who cause obstacle in their work need to be propitiated. Hence this ritual is performed in the beginning of the Assamese New Year and the Bighinis are given farewell on a floating boat. A raft is made with the sheaths of plaintain leaves and some offerings in the name of the Bighini Devota and his associations are given. After the hymns are sung, the raft is allowed to float in the river.

The presence of water god in water is believed by the Sonowals Kacharis. This water god is known as Jalsai Dangaria. The worship of this God is performed by female devotees on the river bank. A Kaldona prepared by sheath of plaintain tree to place the offering is allowed to float in a river.

6.4.5. Indigenous names of the river
The Brahmaputra River ranges from sacred to the secular for diverse cultures. While in Vedic literature, the river is given the status of a living God, for many cultures of contemporary Assam, the river is addressed by common terms. It is known by various names like Luit, Siriluit, Borluit, Bor nai. In the past the river was known as Tilao in the Tai and Bodo and Taluk in the Singpho-Mishmi languages. (Dutta, 2001, pp.2). The Ahoms called the river Nam-Dao-Phi. It means the ‘river of the Star-god’. The river, Gaits writes ‘… in the early days of Ahom rule was known as the Ti-lao’. (Gait. E., 1992, pp. 17). A Bodo expression Bhulam-buthur has been suggested as the Indo-Mongoloid (Tibeto Burman) basis of the word Brahmaputra by Bishnu Rabha (Chatterjee. S.K., 1974, p. 89). Bishnu Rabha explains Bhullam –buthur as kala-kalā-nādini, i.e ‘making a gurgling noise’. In Rabha language the Brahmaputra is called as Tambrang Dhapa or Dhapaci. Similarly, the name Dhapsi is also used by the Garos to denote the Brahmaputra. In the interior regions of Goalpara, the river is called as Dhapu Nadi. (cited, Choudhury, 2005). It is also known as Songdu river in the Achik or Garo language. The Garos also call it as Ammawari meaning the mothers of rivers. Songdu represents the female aspect of a benign divinity. (Sharma, 2006, pp. 321). In many Garo folktales, the name of Songdu occurs as the name of the river, Brahmaputra. In the story “Durama Imbama” Simera, the daughter of Durama Imbama”, the tutelary Goddess of the Achikland in Garo Pantheon is married to Singra, the son of mother Songdu who is represented by the river Songdu( Brahmaputra), (cited, Sharma, 2006, pp. 322). Among the Karibs, the Brahmaputra is called as Luit Aroi. The Dimasa call the Brahmaputra as Di Lao. (Dutta, 2001, pp.104) In Deori language the Brahmaputra is called as Lui To. (Deori, 2015, pers.comm. The term Lui means Long and To means deep. The Tiwas call it as Leuti. The Singphos called the Brahmaputra by the name of Talou. In the book The Kachari(Bodo) ,Sidney Endle on the contribution of the Kachari tribe writes, “.. were in earlier days the dominant race in Assam; and as such they would seem to have left traces of this domination in the nomenclature of some of the physical features of the country, e.g., the Kachāri word for water (dī; dōi) apparently forms the first syllable of the names of many of the chief rivers of the province, such as Diputa, Dihong, Dihong, Dibong, Dibru, Dihing, Dimu, Desang, Diku….and to these may be added Dikrang, Diphu, Digaru…. All near Sadiya, the earliest known centre of Chutiya(Kachari) power and
civilization’ (Endle. S., 1997 reprint, pp. 4). The Misings identify the Brahmaputra with the term ‘Abung’ meaning ‘father’. They also call the river Subansiri as Abonari.

**Table- VIII**

**Names of the Brahmaputra in different Languages and Dialects of Assam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of Language or Dialect</th>
<th>Name of the river</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td><em>Burha luit, Luit, Burha Luit, Siriluit, Borluit, Bor nai.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ahom</td>
<td><em>Ti-lao, Nam-Dao-Phi</em> meaning ‘river of the Star-god’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Bodo</td>
<td><em>Bhullam –buthur</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Garo</td>
<td><em>Songdu, Ammawari</em> meaning the ‘mothers of rivers.,’ Dhapsi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Dimasa</td>
<td><em>Di-Lao</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Karbis</td>
<td><em>Luit Aroi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Misings</td>
<td><em>Abung</em> meaning father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Rabha</td>
<td><em>Tambrang Dhapa or Dhapaci</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Singphos</td>
<td><em>Talou</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.4.6. Tribes- Rewriting the origin of their migration.

Written historical account in the region is relatively recent and started since the medieval period. Since the thirteenth century, the Ahoms came into contact with several communities when they started their reign in Assam. We get references from Ahom chronicles about different tribes like the Morang, Matak, Chutiyas, Misings, Kacharis, etc. These communities again find mention in several accounts of Europeans who came to this part of the country. Through written records, the origin of the communities in this region can be traced since the last 800 years. But the communities’ origin and presence in this region precede historical records. Each group has stories about their origin and migration to this place and these stories have been transmitted orally from generation to generation through folktales, songs, etc. Many of these stories are associated with the Brahmaputra which was the route through which they came to Assam and settled in the hills and valleys.

The Misings were originally hill dwellers who came down to the plains of Assam in small groups during different period of history. They crossed the river Siang to come down to the valley. There are several folksong associated with their migration from the hills to the plains. One such song runs thus, *Pousini Poutang Amo:Moyang SiyangbhouBerkong Amo: Moyang* which can be translated as just as a wild fowl jumps, the Misings had crossed the Siang from their original homeland. Another tale is about an interclan conflict within the tribe, As a result, the family of Yakko and Ber came down to the plains by boat and settled here (Cited from D. Arpita, 2014, ). The Idu Mishmis also believes that one of their clan reached the Brahmaputra Valley through the Luit.

A myth which has been prevalent among the Deoris tells about their origin. Goddess Mahamaya Tamreswari once transformed herself, for the welfare of mankind, into an idol
of stone that kept floating in the Dibrang River. On hearing about it, King Bhismaka sent people to bring the idol from the river to a place that had been sanctified for it. But they could not move the idol. People from far and near were invited to move the idol but nobody could do it. At last four persons from the Chutiya community after ablution began to propitiate the Mother Goddess who was pleased at their profound devotion. These four persons were able to move the idol and then carry it into the sanctum of Tamreswari temple. These four Chutiyas became the royal priests in the temples of Tamreswari, Baliababa, Burha-Burhi and Patorshaal and they were called as ‘Deoris’. In the course of time, the clans that had roots in the four priests of the Deoris proliferated and came to be known as the Deori community.

Since ancient times, the Deoris have migrated from one place to another due to feuds with other tribes, diseases, earthquake and flood. They have several stories regarding these migrations. During the British regime the four clans of the Deoris took four boats on the river Brahmaputra and sailed downward without knowing anything about their destination. They took shelters in the different Chaporis. Later members of three of the clans assembled together at the southern bank of the Brahmaputra. They made camps on the sands of the river by making Chois (shade) of the boats. Since the people lived and cooked food under the shade the choix, the place came to be known as Saikhowa and today it is called as Saikhowa ghat.

Regarding the origins of the four clans of the Deoris, Dutta writes that the Dibongiya, Tengaponiya, Borgoyan and Patorgoyan originated from a particular river or place’s name. The Dibongiya settled on the bank of the river Dibang. The Tengaponiya settled on the bank of the river Tengapani. Borgoyan inhabited the plains of Borpani river and the Patorgoyan settled on the foothills, i.e., Pat – Sadiya. (cited Deori, 2013). There is also another story behind the disappearance of the Patorgoyan group. Due to constant feuds with the neighbouring tribes in Sadiya, one night the Deoris came down through the course of the Brahmaputra with the help of four small boats. One of the boats carrying the Patorgoyan group got lost in the middle of the Brahmaputa.
Regarding the origin and migration of the Dimasa Kachari, B.C Allen, (1905, pp. 77-78) writes that there is a prayer amongst the Dimasas, which refers to a huge pepul tree growing near the confluence of the Dilao (Brahmaputra) and the Sagi. It was here that they were born and from here they increased in great numbers and by travelling by land and water they reached Nilachal Hills on which the Kamakhya temple stands. From here they moved to Halali and finally settled in Dimapur.

The Bodos and the Dimasa Kachari consider themselves to be from the same stock. During course of time both these tribes were formed into two separate groups. Among the Dimasa there is a legend on the separation of the Bodo and Dimasa.

“Long ago the Dimasa fought against a powerful tribe and were beaten in a pitched battle. They were compelled to give ground, but after a time, further retreat was barred by a wide and deep river. In despair the king resolved to fight again on the following day; but in the night a god appeared to him and told him that the next morning the army could cross the river if they entered it at a spot where they saw a heron standing on the bank. No one, however, was to look back while the movement was in progress. The dream proved true. A heron was seen standing on the bank, and the king and a great portion of his people crossed in safety. A man then turned to see whether his son was following, when the waters suddenly rose and swept away those who were in the river bed and prevented the others from crossing. The Dimasa were those who succeeded in reaching the further bank in safety”. (Allen, 1905, pp. 79)

The name of Kaziranga is regarded as a Karbi name. Folklores indicate that in the past, the Karbis lived on the banks of the Kolong and Kapili, and the entire Kaziranga, the famous National Game Sanctuary was within their territory. G. Medhi, (1974) writes that the name Kajiranga was derived from Kajir-a-Rong, meaning the village of the Karbi lady Kajir. Local people also attests to this story. The story behind this name has several variations as it has been orally transmitted from generation to generation. An elderly Karbi by the name of Longpi Phangso of Sem Ingti village of Kaziranga (3rd January, pers. comm., 2016) recalls the story which he heard from his parents. There was a woman named Kazir who was bathing on the bank of the river. She had left her cloth on
the bank. People who was passing by, saw the cloth lying on the ground and enquires to whom it belonged (The piece of attire was red or ‘ranga’ in colour). People then said that the red cloth belonged to Kazir. Hence it came to be known as Kazir Ranga. A large number of Karbi people lived in this area. Due to flood, they migrated to the nearby hills. Later, some of them returned back to their original places.

7. Conclusion

The ‘Study on the Brahmaputra- The Lifeline of the People of Assam’ is an attempt to present a picture of the people and culture of Assam with special emphasis on the Brahmaputra Valley. It starts with a brief history of Assam, starting from Prehistoric age, followed by the Ancient, then Medieval and finally the Modern period. It then gives a note on the origin of names of the region which has changed over times. The story of the origin of the Brahmaputra - Mythological and factual have been subjects of interest to people since ancient times. The story of the Brahmaputra is a story of the people living in the region through which it flows. Just like its tributaries which have permeated the entire region, its influence has also touched the life and culture of people of the region. Its fertile soil has attracted migration of people from prehistoric times. Contemporary Assam is now home to a group of communities belonging to different tribes, castes, language and religion. All these communities are storehouses of cultural heritage and the Brahmaputra is an integral part of this heritage.

The story of the Brahmaputra, the people of Assam, the history, society and culture which evolved thousands of years ago is still continuing. Like the Brahmaputra which has seen both continuity and changes over the ages, the culture and society too have experienced the same. The destinies of both are linked with one another.

The river has been studied mostly from the perspective of geography, geology, geomorphology, hydrology, etc. Serious attempts need to be given to study the socio-cultural dimensions of the river and its influence in the life and culture of the people of
Assam. As such, an interdisciplinary approach need to be applied which can utilise the combined efforts of anthropologists, archaeologists, sociologists, historians, geographers and linguists, to name a few, for a holistic understanding of the Brahmaputra.

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