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. Assam’s 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 Barkuwari 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 Jengaimuk. 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 Pirs 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 \textit{math} built on the bank of the Brahmaputra. This place has become a holy place with the establishment of Ajan Pir’s \textit{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. F., 1963, pp. 20). Officers called as *Nao Salia 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 Bezbaruah, 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-Axomiyal 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 pritinva tene nām mātra, Nahale preranānidiyākiya( If you are the son of Brahma, then it’s namesake only, For, where is your inspiring zeal ?). He continues, “Sahasro barishar, unnadonar, avigytare, 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 mahāmila nār 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 kare 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 nākiyāhal....... Hiyākhani bhukuwāī 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 dhapoli 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. Gandhiji’s 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 Loko geet, Ainaam, Goalparia Loko geet, 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
tomakē 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 Brahmaputra 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 Sapori,
Bornoir Nirimol Pani
Luitor Suwani Majuli Sapori
Swargor Suwani Tora

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 Bhat Pani Nalao 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 Dhori 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
Ailoi 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 Torai bar* (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 Bhor*
*Luitor 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:

_Ukoni Khoki mori gol boge borot kore_
_Luit 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 naho baba balir juran aise (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 gora_
_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 ghate_
_Dharkar Srikrishna Ahibo kun bate_... (cited, Choudhury, 2005.)

The Assamese folk literature is replete with wise maxims, phrases, proverbs and riddles:

_Luit janu 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 jame_
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:yd Dulidaq Aïna
Atse’ Bidnamdém kali : dage
Nokke’ ke’: ral dulidaq aïna
Asin doyingém Ki:lidade

Bolop Bitné’aside’.
Tolop Bitlad Kumabo
Aipe’me: 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 oiya emtagai
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. 1,2012, pp.64).

Dhansiri dolongkhon dang di bondh korar dore ,
tumar mur bat tu satruwe bondh korile(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 tumaloi 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
Yutmei naula giminedak (Pao. 2015., pers.comm., 30 December)
(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 luitar sihu_
_Mangalbare uruka budhbar 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).
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, Bhattiali 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 Bhatiyali 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
ujiiin 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 g elo 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

Nadir charat xajilu ghar kot asa kori
Seuj bhumir fasal tulim mure bharal bhari
Xai asabur bhahi je gol Brahmaputrar saknoiat
Aji ghar eri moir furu heruai thikona hai heruai thikona (Hussain.I., 2002, pp.103)

The following about lost young love,
Are o nodi Burhamputra ki maya lagayli
Shukher bosti korlire sara sari.
Karo bhanglijomajiimi, karo bhangli bhitare bari
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!)

Baape dukkhot poriya kaandere
maayer chokkher paani porere
haayre Burhamputra kashar bhangiyiire (Hussain.I., 20012, pp.104)
(My father is shattered, my mother is crying relentlessly, O Brahmaputra, you are the destroyer!)

Pautik joto jomajomire bhangiya nil Brahmaputra
Haayre puranokaolia hausher bari- ghar
Takou nil bhasaiyare, bape dukh ot (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 Sahara 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*

*Miriyani Khelile Taat*

*Ene Phagunmahiya Tomar Jaiban 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 Sangranti, 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-kalanādini*, i.e ‘making a gurgling noise’. In Rabha language the Brahmaputra is called as *Tambrang Dhapa* or *Dhapaci*. Similarly, the name *Dhpsi* is also used by the Garos to denote the Brahmaputra. In the interior regions of Goalpara, the river is called as *Dhapa 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 Karbis, 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 (*di;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 Chutia(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>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Misings</td>
<td><em>Abung</em> meaning father</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Rabha</td>
<td><em>Tambrang Dhapa or Dhapaci</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Singphos</td>
<td><em>Talou</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Tiwas</td>
<td><em>Leuti</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 chois, 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.