

**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**



**TWENTYFOURTH SESSION
GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
GUWAHATI
2003**

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Preface

The Twenty-fourth Annual Conference of the NEIHA was hosted by the Gauhati University, and was held at Guwahati, Assam from 16-18th October 2003. The Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University welcomed the delegates and the session was inaugurated by Honourable Judge of the Gauhati High Court, Justice P.G. Agarwal. The three days of the Conference was very well attended by historians and other social scientists from different parts of the region and also from other parts of the country and the academic sessions, the most important part of the Annual conferences of NEIHA, saw the active participation of all NEIHA members present. We would like to record our thanks to the Vice-Chancellor, Gauhati University for having hosted the XXIVth Session of NEIHA and also our sincere thanks to Prof. Ranju Bezbaruah the Local Secretary, and his Colleagues and students in the Department of History Gauhati University who worked untiringly to make the session a success.

This volume is a collection of the papers presented in the various academic panels of the XXIVth Session and also the proceedings of the business meetings of the session. The Association is grateful to the Indian Council of Historical Research for the financial support advanced towards the publication of the Proceedings volume. Here we would again like to remind the esteemed members of NEIHA that they should take care to see that their papers follow the NEIHA style sheet of referencing and also to ensure that the revised papers reach us within the last day announced in the business session. Without this co-operation from the members the work of the Editorial Board gets held up and it also becomes difficult to meet the deadlines of the press. It was mainly for these reasons and also of course for the considered opinion of the Panel Chairpersons, whose comments on every paper were clearly recorded and the deliberations of the Editorial Board, that a number of papers had to be abstracted or listed. The task of editing, proof reading etc. of such a large number of papers within a very limited period is very time consuming and we can do the work to the

satisfaction of all NEIHA members only with the co-operation of all the paper presenters.

Finally we would like to say a very special word of thanks to the members of the Editorial Board, Prof. J. B. Bhattacharjee, Prof. Mignonette Momin and Prof. F. A. Qadri who made our work much lighter by giving a lot of their time to sit through the Editorial Board meetings to decide on the status of the papers and not only editing the papers but also helping out with a lot of the proof reading as well. We would also like to thank Mr. Pradeep Shaha and his staff of *Modern Offset* for their interest in the work and getting the volume ready in time for release in the 25th session.

Shillong
15th June, 2004



(Manorama Sharma)



(D.R. Syiemlich)

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Presidential Address

R.D. Choudhury

I am extremely grateful to the NEIHA, the foremost and premier academic organization in the field of history in North-East India for the kind invitation given to me to be the General President of this session. In fact, I told Dr. J.B. Bhattacharjee, the torch bearer of this organization and the General Secretary, Dr. Sristi Dhar Datta, that I was not a historian, nor an archaeologist. Though my basic qualification was in History and Archeology, the entire service life I have spent as a humble worker of museum. As such, neither I got any chance to teach students and sharpen my knowledge, not had I got the opportunity to be an explorer or excavator in the field to get first hand knowledge in this line. To write a presidential address of such an august body with which personality like late Dr. H.K. Barpujari was associated and scholar like Dr. Hiralal Gupta is connected, is really an honour for me. So, I am deeply moved for giving such a great responsibility to me which I do not deserve at all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we in North-East India are surrounded by four countries i.e., China and Bhutan on the North, Myanmar in the East and Bangladesh in the West. The main land of India is linked with this part of India through a narrow passage. At the time of the partition of the country, the Congress leaders decided to place the undivided Assam, i.e., North-East India in Group 'C' i.e., East Pakistan. The country was divided into Pakistan (comprising East and West) and Hindustan. This decision was made on the basis of Hindu and Muslim population, it was again divided into two parts i.e., East and West Bengal, the East Bengal was given to Muslim majority, while the West Bengal remained with the Hindu majority. East Bengal joined the Pakistan and came to be known as East Pakistan, while the West Bengal remained as a State of Hindustan i.e., India. Hindustan, i.e., India placed in 'A' Group, while Pakistan i.e., West Pakistan was placed in the 'B' Group. The East Pakistan was placed in the 'C' Group. The Congress leaders of the country did not have any fair idea about the North-East or the culture of the undivided Assam. So, they did not bother to think about the fate

of the people of the North-East. Leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel etc. endorsed the view that the region to the farther-East would automatically fall in 'C' category i.e., East Pakistan.¹

But the then Prime Minister of Assam, the great freedom fighter Gopinath Bordoloi could not accept this decision. He fought tooth and nail against it and refused to be with 'C' Group predominated by the Muslim population. Bordoloi, a man of vision could realize that, if Assam joins the 'C' Group, predominated by the Muslims, the Hindu population would be ruled by the Muslims. He ran from pillar to post, met all the influential Congress leaders including Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel. But his cry was not heard by them. Ultimately, Mahatma Gandhi came to his rescue. Mahatma Gandhi realized the danger of clubbing Assam with 'C' Group i.e., East Pakistan. He had visited Assam twice in connection with freedom movement. Once he was in Tezpur and in the second visit he stayed in Gauhati. During his two visits he could come to know about the Hindu population of the Brahmaputra Valley and the tribal population in the hills. His question was, if Assam was placed in the 'C' Group, then what would be the fate of the Hindu population and also tribals? So, he could realize the fear of Gopinath Bordoloi and declared that Assam could not be with the 'C' Group, it would be with 'A' Group, i.e., Hindustan. Thus, it was Mahatma Gandhi, whose decision saved Assam from the evil design of placing it under Muslim rule.² The hill tribes' response to partition and independence had variations. They followed Assam gradually. The Naga, Khasi, Garo, Mizo and Manipuri also decided to be with India i.e., 'A' Group, one after the other. The Nagas exploited the creation of East Pakistan to negotiate with India. The Khasis realized that they had much to lose in joining India, but found that to be the only option open for them. The tribals of Manipur and Tripura were beginning to speak for themselves and expected better deal in India. Tripura, Manipur and Khasi States signed the instruments of Accession and merger agreements with the new Indian government and completed the work of integration of the region into the Indian Union.³ So, today, also Mahatma Gandhi and Gopinath Bordoloi are regarded as the saviours of Assam and North-East India. Not only this, Kusal Konwar, Kanak Lata and so many freedom fighters laid down their lives to liberate the country from the British Rule. We cannot ignore the contributions of the States like Manipur, Nagaland, and Meghalaya etc. Beer Tikendrajit of Manipur, Rani Gadiliu of Nagaland and Reverend Nicholas Roy of Meghalaya are well known for

their contribution to the nation. Tikendrajit, was of course, hung by the Britishers before Mahatma Gandhi launched his freedom movement. Rani Gadiliu fought against British administration and went underground with his followers. Ultimately she was recognized by the Govt. of India as freedom fighter.

Assam, in her earliest period of civilization, witnessed the movements of the people of various strains⁴ Linguistic evidence, popular customs and some of the place names of the province indicate that speakers of the language of Mon-Khmer family which has been characterized by Schimdt as the Austric family of languages came to Assam in a fairly early period. Though it is not possible to say exactly in which period they filtered into Assam, yet appears that they penetrated into this province long before the advent of the Aryan or the people belonging to the Aryan stock from the West.

The next wave of Indo-Chinese advent is represented by the various people speaking Tibeto-Burman languages. After reaching the Brahmaputra Valley they were divided into several groups and occupied the different hills of the State. It seems, they failed to occupy the Khasi and Jaintia hills and it remained under the occupation of the Austric-speaking people. The most important group of the tribes of the Tibeto-Burman people was represented by the Bodos. They mainly occupied the plains of Assam. The Bodos, who are also known as the Kacharis or the plain tribals of Assam, built strong kingdoms with varying successes and held sway over one or the other part of the province during historical times. But although the Bodos are called sometimes as the Kacharis in Assam, there is a distinction between them. The Bodos did not have any kingdom. But the Kacharis had kingdom and rulers. There are some places and rivers in Assam whose names possibly originated from the Bodo language.

When and how the Aryans entered Assam from the West is not quite clear. But it seems that they came comparatively at a late period. The Vedic literature speaks of Eastern India as a Melchha country. The *Mahabharata* refers to it as a Mleccha kingdom, which was ruled over by king Bhagadatta. In the same work it is referred to also as an Asura kingdom ruled over by the Asuras, i.e. Narakasura and others. This shows that the Aryans did not come to Assam at an early period, and that during the Vedic and Epic periods this region was ruled by the Asuras, who were non-Aryan and the predecessors of the Aryans. The river Sadanira

(in Bihar) was, for a time, the limit of the Aryan world in that direction and beyond it was a marshy region, not frequented by the Brahmanas. Gradually, an increasing number of high-class Aryans poured into Bengal from the middle of India in the early centuries of the Christian era, either in the wake of military campaigns or for more peaceful pursuits.

According to Vedic and Brahmanical literature Asuras migrated from Assyria to India earlier than the Aryans. They first established themselves in the Indus Valley. Subsequently, the Aryans came and fought with them. The Asuras were defeated and pushed downwards. As a result, they came down to Madhyadesa and made a stronghold there. But, afterwards, they were again beaten up by the Aryans. Ultimately, some of them had to go further to the East, i.e., Bengal and Assam, while the others entered South India (?). Jarasandha at Rajgir and Bhagadatta in Pragjyotisa attest Asura individuality through Epic days and later and that the closing point in the history of individual Asura chief centers round Bhagadatta of Assam and North Bengal (Pragjyotisha) and Jarasandha of Magadha. Bhagadatta was an Asura king who was called Mleccha. Mleccha is allied to Mlech, Malka, and an Assyrian form, which is still used as Mlek or Malek in Baluchistan and as Malik in the Indus Valley.⁵

With a view to finding out the real nature and content of the cultures represented by the Asura sites and determining their chronological position in relation to other cultures of the northern Indian plains excavation was conducted at Saradkel and Kunjla in Bihar. It is proved from both the sites that the culture represented by these so-called Asura sites was an iron using one and did not represent in any of its phases a completely stone or copper assemblage. It is reasonable to infer that the culture may belong to A.D. 100 or 200.⁶

Therefore, our conjecture is that on this basis, Naraka and Bhagadatta may be placed in c. A.D.100 and that they and some of their predecessors, such as, Mahiranga, Ghatakasura, etc. represented the early Asuras in Assam. Naraka and Bhagadatta might have flourished about A.D. 100. These *Asuras* were none but the non-Aryan people.

After the end of the Asura rule in Assam, the Aryans might have started penetrating into Assam slowly. Bhagadatta might have come under the Aryan influence. For, Bhagadatta is an Aryanised name. Moreover, Bhagadatta and his successor Vajradatta were the kings of the last phase of the Asura rule in Assam.

Apart from the literary evidence, we have inscriptional evidence to show that in the early centuries of Christian era, the Aryan people, who came from the west of Assam, settled in the Brahmaputra Valley.

The palaeolithic people, from archaeological point of view, were the earliest settlers and they had their migration possibly from South India to South-East Asia through North-East India and *vice-versa*. Number of sites of palaeolithic culture have been discovered in Garo Hills of Meghalaya. Evidence of Neolithic culture has been found in many places throughout North-East India. The sites in the Garo Hills, Meghalaya, have yielded a large number of tools of the Neolithic period. Huge number of tools of the period are in the Department of Anthropology of the Gauhati University. On the basis of the present evidence, it can be postulated that there is no positive proof for an independent origin of the Neolithic culture in Assam. On the other hand, there is ample evidence to show that Neolithic culture of Assam bears a close affinity with that of South-East Asia. It differs significantly from the Neolithic culture of South India. But it has some common traits, only in respect of stone tools, with Santal Parganas and South Bihar. This culture of Assam and her neighbouring states, especially Meghalaya, most probably owes its origin to some source in the eastern Asia which may lie in the high lands of South-East China and North Vietnam. It is quite possible that the Mongolians who came to the Brahmaputra Valley in successive waves brought the culture. Assam seemed to have served as corridor between the Indian mainland and South-East Asia through which Neolithic traditions came to the eastern half of India⁷.

But after Neolithic period there is a big gap. We do not get any evidence of mesolithic and chaeolithic period. Further investigation may throw new light in this regard. We get archaeological evidence i.e., rock-cut votive *stupas* from Sri Surya Pahar, from 100 A.D. or 100 B.C. onwards. Few years back I came to know about some punch-marked coins belonging to Maurya period, which are being preserved in the Manipur State Museum. These are also published without the names of the provenance. But after enquiry it was found that these coins were collected from some places outside North-East India.

Bengal was Aryanised a little earlier as the archaeological objects prove. In this respect from the Mahasthan inscription of the Maurya period we get corroborative evidence supported by the punch marked coins. Assam received the Aryan culture quite late, and not in a fairly

early period, as is claimed by some scholars, who further contends that Assam had contacts with India since the Mauryan period.

This view requires an explanation⁸. The Mahasthan inscription found in Bogra district, Bangladesh, seems to suggest the inclusion of North-Bengal in the Maurya Empire. There is little information about the socio-economic life of Kamarupa in the pre-Christian period and about its relations with the Mauryas. B.K. Barua has made such comments possibly on the basis of the suggestion of this inscription. But, so far, not a single specimen of punch-marked coin, or any inscription of that age has come to light in Assam. Punch-marked coins which were in circulation in Maurya period in a good number have been discovered in the Bengal region. However, if the miniature votive *stupas* and the caverns at Sri Surya Pahar, can be dated to c. A.D. 100 or 100 B.C., it will not be difficult with more pieces of evidence to push back the beginning of Assam's link with historic cultures of India from the very beginning of the Christian era to the Maurya age. Barua might have also taken into consideration the identification of the place name. Suvarnakudya, mentioned in *Arthashastra*, as producing the best quality of *dukula* along with Sonkuhiya, a well-known village in the Kamarupa (now Nalbari) district of Assam. This identification was made by some scholar, according to whom Suvarnakudya produced the five fabrics of gold colour, known as *dukula*. It is supported by others. This identification may be right from the etymological point of view, but there is no corroborative evidence, nor there is any strong tradition of exporting *dukula* from the kingdom of Kamarupa or Pragjyotisha to upper India in the days of Kautilay, the author of *Arthashastra*. But to be sure, from Gupta period onwards, Kamarupa had constant relation with other parts of the country. Archaeological excavation may throw new light in this connection.

As soon as the Indo-Aryan speaking people entered into and settled in the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam embarked upon a new phase of civilization. With the spread of Aryan Culture or *Arya-Dharma* in the Valley, Hindu religion in its various forms became very popular. Within a short span of time this faith could attract the mind of the people of the region in such a way that even some section of tribes also started accepting Brahmanical religion and culture. The rulers of three dynasties that flourished in the period between 4th to 12th centuries, i.e. Burman, Salastambha and Pala, in Assam, all were Hindus.

Amongst the important cults that existed in the Assam Valley were Saiva, Vaishnava, Sakta, and Saura⁹. The worship of Siva prevailed in the region even before Naraka. But there is no archaeological evidence to support this theory. However, traditional demon king, Bana, who is said to have been a contemporary of Naraka is believed to have been devout Saiva. But looking at the archaeological evidence, we can postulate that the cult became well developed in the early Christian centuries. All the kings of Kamarupa upto Dharmapala, patronized Saivism. There is definite archaeological evidence to show that during the Gupta period Saivism became a well developed cult in North India. Bengal was surely under the influence of this growing faith and it is evident from inscriptions that before the end of the A.D. 5th century, Siva was worshipped in the *linga* form in parts of North Bengal. All this shows that the stream of this faith flew as far east as Assam and like some of the rulers of Bengal all the royal authorities of Kamarupa upto Dharmapala (12th century A.D.) regarded Siva as their tutelary deity.

Vaishnavism was popular in Assam from early time, for, the Kamarupa rulers traced their lineage to Vishnu through Naraka, according to a legendary belief. But there is hardly any doubt that Vaisnavism became popular in the land at least by the 5th-6th century A.D. We have archaeological evidence to show that the cult became popular in Bengal by A.D. 5th century. In Kamarupa too the faith existed in A.D. 5th century, as known from the Umacal rock inscription. Vaishnavism, popularly known as Bhagavatism, patronized by the Guptas, found its way to Bengal in the Gupta period and was firmly established in the Pala period. As in Bengal, in Assam also from the 8th century onwards the rapid development of the faith is proved by the iconographic evidence. The sculptural representation in the Suakuchi grant of Indrapala (A.D. 100) shows that though the king was a Saiva officially, yet he regarded Vaisnavism too. The cult became very popular from about the beginning of the 11th century to the end of 12th century and onwards. The extreme popularity of the cult in the 12th century, in all probability, was caused by Jayadeva (A.D. 12th century), the illustrious Vaishnava propagator of Bengal, and probably due to this effect Dharmapala (A.D. 12th century), a ruler of Kamarupa, who was previously a Saiva, at his old age, gave up Saivism and accepted Vaishnavism¹⁰.

The birth-place of Saktism as a definite sect seems to have been eastern India. Assam or at least North-East Bengal seems to have been in a great degree the source from which Tantrism and Saktism proceeded.

The origin and later growth of some of the important elements of Saktism and Tantrism are to be attributed to the non-Aryans in ancient Assam and the foundation of both the faiths was largely laid by the megalithic culture of this region. It seems true that elements, such as, human sacrifice and animal sacrifice etc., performed in connection with the Sakti worship in this region were derived from the beliefs and the customs of the tribal culture affiliated to the non-Aryans. That Kamakhya and Tamresvari (at Sadia) temples were great centers of Tantrism and Saktism are proved archaeologically.

Since Hinduism and Buddhism were two flourishing religions, some sections of tribal people in India also were influenced by these two faiths. Jainism was another India born faith like Hinduism and Buddhism. But it could not be popular in some areas of the country. That Hinduism had some influence on the tribals in North-East region is archaeologically proved. Deopani-Golaghat region bordering Nagaland having tribal population was certainly influenced by the Hinduism or Brahmanical faith. In the Assam State Museum there are two Vishnu images of the late Gupta style, which was continued even to the 8th-9th centuries. One of the images is inscribed. The inscription which has already been deciphered belongs to 9th century. The physiognomy of this stone image bears tribal trait¹¹.

The second image carved in a solid stone in the same standing posture holding the weapons in the same way, however, has lost its head. We have reasons to believe that this image of Visnu also must have had a tribal physiognomy. There is another smaller image of Hari-Hara carved on a block of stone. It is an inscribed image of the same age. The face to the image bear tribal style i.e. the 8th-9th century A.D.¹² Another stone image representing Hari-Hara preserved in the Assam State Museum bears the same facial style¹³.

A few stone icons representing Brahmanical gods and goddesses were brought from Golaghat region by the humbself, which have adorned the Assam State Museum. These also reflect tribal style, particularly the unidentified stone image representing a female seated deity holding a fish in her hand showing tribal character in her face. This group of sculptures, stylistically, may belong to the 6th-7th century¹⁴.

Two stone images of Parvati and Daksha were collected by me from Ranga Gora Tea Estate near Tinsukia in upper Assam. The image of Parvati clearly shows tribal style. Some say that these sculptures

bearing similarity with the Golaghat sculptures were brought from that region and placed in the bungalow of the manager of the Ranga Gora Tea Estate. But the local labourers say that these were discovered in the Tea Estate. Whatever may be the find place, these bear tribal traits. Stylistically, they date in the same period¹⁵.

A group of stone sculptures were brought by me from Bargang Tea Estate which is being preserved now in the Assam State Museum. All these stone sculptures belong to about 14th century or so. These stone sculptures most probably were originally fixed in some structure, as the size and the other details show. Scene of worshipping tree by female and male figures and fighting scene between two males and priest with thick sacred thread on his body are seen in the group. The tree may represent a *siju* tree which is held in high respect by the Bodos. The priest may represent a tribal priest. The faces of each of the sculpture bear tribal affiliation. Evidently, these sculptures show the tribal way of life. As the sculptures were brought from the Naza-parvat, these can be attributed to the Bodos, who inhabited the foot hills to the North of the Brahmaputra and still the bulk of population inhabiting the foot hills to the north from the West Assam to the East is dominated by the Bodo population. But certainly these sculptures do not have Hindu affiliation. It represents tribal culture¹⁶.

The Ahoms who belonged to the great Tai race entered the Brahmaputra valley from upper Myanmar through the Patkai range by the beginning of the 13th century, were first unknown to the culture of the Sanskrit speaking people already settled in the valley. They practiced their own religion, language and script. But when they decided to establish their rule, the rulers realized that they must accept the religion, language and script of Hindu population in the valley. So they did. The rulers assumed Assamese names having roots in Sanskrit, started erecting temples enshrining Hindu deities, encising stone and copper-plate inscriptions in Assamese script and Assamese language and also Sanskrit language. Even they fought against the Mughals who came from Bengal to Assam and crushingly defeated the latter and saved Assam. Lachit Barphukan's victory over the Mughals in the battle of Saraighat is treated by the Assamese as a legendary battle for driving away the Mughal army, who never ventured to conquer Assam again. However, the Ahom rulers appreciated the art activities of the Mughals. Ahom king Rudra Singha, who was a great patron of art and literature, even gave the settlement to some Muslim artists near the Ahom capital. Some manuscript paintings

from the time of Siva Singha have illustrations which bear Mughal-Rajput style. That the paintings in them bear Mughal stamp in style is clear. The Hindu temples of the period had undergone Islamic influence from the nearby Bengal region, where *do-chala* and *char-chala* style became popular^{16a}.

The Moamaria rebellion¹⁷ started during the reign of King Siva Singha due to the humiliation done to Moamaria Vaisnavas by forcibly converting them to Sakta at the direction of Queen Phulsvari and subsequently Kirti Chandra Bar Barua's insult to Moamaria Gosai and Nahar, Chief of the Maran tribe during the rule of Lakshmi Singha. It became the cause of the decay of the powerful Ahom dynasty. Moamarias, to throw the yoke of the Ahoms, declared independence and defeated the Ahoms in several fights and even captured their capital Gargaon during the period of Lakshminath Singha. Gaurinath Singha, the most weak and cruel Ahom King, ultimately had to take the help of British Army from Calcutta to quell the revolt of the Moamarias in 1792. The British troop could control the Moamaria rebels for some time. But they had to leave for Calcutta at the direction of the high command. During the rule of Chandra Kanta Singha, after the development of serious differences between Badan Chandra Barphukan and Burha Gohain, the former left for Calcutta to obtain the help of the British government to fight against Burha Gohain. But Badan Chandra failed to get British help. He, however, got the help from the Burmese King. As a result, Badanchandra brought Burmese army (Man), who caused indescribable misery to the people of Assam. They plundered villages, burnt village after village, killed innocent people, insulted the womenfolk and so forth. To put an end to their presence in the region, the Ahom King Chandra Kanta had to take British help. The Burmese army also wanted to rule Manipur. But King Gambhir Singh drove them to Burma. Ultimately, British administration compelled the Burmese to come to term of peace and non-interference in the affairs of Manipur and province of Assam and signed the historic Yandabo Treaty on 24th February, 1826. As a result, British rule prevailed in Assam formally and Gambhir Singh was been recognized as the King of Manipur¹⁸.

Koch,¹⁹ Kacharis, Chutias and Jaintias were contemporary in greater Assam, whereas Manipuri and Tripuri kings were contemporaneous in Manipur and Tripura respectively. Ahom flourished in the same time. So, all these dynasties belonged to the late mediaeval period and were contemporaneous and all were Hindus. The powerful Koch kings had

their rule over lower Assam. They had their capital at Koch Behar in North Bengal. Their first capital was at Chiknajhar, near Kokrajhar, which was founded by founder of the dynasty Haria Mandal, father of Visva Singha, who was known as "Bisu" and later on who assumed the name of Visva Singha and ascended the throne and shifted the capital from Chiknajhar to Koch Behar. He raised his head and subjugated the petty Bhuyan Chiefs^{19a}. This Hindu kingdom reached its zenith during the rule of King Naranaryana, who had his brother Chila Rai as General. It is during this period the great Vaisnava saint Sankardeva, with the patronage of King Naranarayana and his brother Chilarai, contributed extensively towards the Assamese literature. As the Ahom rulers did not know about his scholarship and they constantly harassed him, he had to come to lower Assam, and finally, to Cooch Behar, where he breathed his last. His followers – Vaisnava sanit, Madhavdev, Damodardev etc., contributed greatly to the movement launched by their Guru, Sankardev. Haridev and Bhattadev also flourished in the same time. King Naranarayana and his brother Chila Rai, were great patrons of art and culture. It is during his rule Kamakhya temple in Guwahati was constructed under the supervision of Chila Rai. Raghudev got the Hajo temple constructed. Both king Naranarayan and Chila Rai were very good Sanskrit scholars, who got their education in Sanskrit at Varanasi.

Chutias²⁰ ruled in the North-East corner of Assam establishing their capital at Sadiya, which has been recently eroded by the Brahmaputra. The Sakta temple, Tamresvari, was the example of the Chutia architecture. There is not even the trace of the temple, which is completely eroded by the mighty Brahmaputra more than sixty years ago or so. However, T. Bloch, who visited the site as far back as 1906, published a report on the ruins along with a photograph. From the photograph of the ruined small temple, one can know that it was a small Hindu shrine and the style of the human figures bear some tribal affinity.

The Kacharis²¹ were powerful rulers of the Brahmaputra valley. They had their first capital at Dimapur. Then they had to move to Maibong and finally to Khaspur in Cachar, as they were defeated by the Ahoms. These rulers were also Hindus. They erected temples at Maibong and Khaspur. They assumed Assamese names, issued inscriptions and coins in the same way as the Ahoms and Koch did.

Jaintias²² ruled in an area, near Jowai, of the present Jaintia hills of Meghalaya. These tribals also accepted Hinduism and issued coins,

assumed Hindu names like other contemporary rulers of this region. Even they erected temples dedicated to Hindu divinities. Temples constructed during their rule and sculptures chiseled on stone, can even now be seen at a place near Jowai. At Barhat beyond Dawki a temple was constructed by the Jaintia rulers, which was visited by me recently. Both the temples belong to 18th century or so. These are brick temples. The styles of these small temples are very common in Bengal and also in Assam. In fact, the late mediaeval Bengal style influenced the Ahom, Kachari and also the Jaintia monuments in Meghalaya. At Barhat the Hindu temple was constructed by the Jaintia king for the benefit of the local Jaintia Hindu people. But now, after they became Christian, regular worship in the temple has been stopped. But they know that it is their monument and so they respect it.

The State of Tripura²³ has its own history. Tripura was ruled by the Tripuri Kings, who were tribals. They were contemporaneous of the Ahom kings of Assam. Like the Ahom, Koch, etc. they also accepted Hinduism. They constructed Hindu temples, excavated vast tanks near the temples, issued coins and inscriptions in the same language and script. The famous Tripuresvari temple was constructed during the reign of Manikya is even older than the Kamakhya temple. Still the ruins of the royal palace of the Tripura kings on the bank of Gomati near Udaypur give the evidence of the past glory of these tribal kings, whose details can be had from the *Rajmala*, as the details of the Ahom kings can be had from the *Buranji*, i.e., chronicle. The Hindu temples erected by the Kings of Tripura are singular in style. It bears the elements of three religions i.e., Hindu, Buddhist and also Islam. Temple architecture bearing these three religious elements are not found anywhere in the country.

We also get the evidence of the pre-Manikya culture in the State. The ruins of Unakoti show the existence of two phases of Hindu culture at the place, which is the most important archaeological site of Tripura. The first phase of sculpture clearly bear tribal trait, which represent Siva, Ganesh, Parvati, Ganga, Sivalinga etc. These are rock-cut. This peculiar type of sculptures shows that author of the culture were Saivas and they were tribals and it tallies with the local legend prevalent in that area. The second phase of culture that flourished at the site belonged to non-tribal Pala-Sena period. It shows group of stone sculpture carved in stone representing various Brahmanical gods and goddesses including traces of a brick temple. This group of stone sculptures bear highly sophisticated

style of Pala-Sena period and portable in nature, belong to 10th -12th century, while the Saiva rock-cut sculptures bearing clear tribal trait, may belong to c. 8th century A.D. This is the earliest archaeological evidence proving the tribal people accepting Hinduism in Tripura. After carefully examining these sculptures during my last visit, I am of this opinion. Another site i.e., Devatamuda, shows rows of rock-cut sculptures representing Hindu culture executed in tribal style, but not certainly like the ones at Unakoti. These are also of pre-Manikya period²⁴.

Apart from this, the Archaeological Survey of India²⁵ have recently excavated a Buddhist *stupa* with a good number of stone and terracotta sculptures representing Buddhist divinities and other human, animal and mythical figures, which are in style of Paharpur Buddhist *stupa*, now in Bangladesh. Near this *stupa*, a ruin of another ancient Hindu temple, dedicated to Surya exists. The third structure discovered and exposed by the ASI represents a Buddhist *stupa* of the same style near Pilak. The place is called Baxa Nagar which is just on the Bangladesh border. All these three groups of sculptures belong to c. 8th century A.D. It is the continuation of Bengal culture that flourished in c. 8th century, across the border.

Manipurians are people belonging to the Kiki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman²⁷ speaking language group. It is reasonably true that the modern Manipuri race is a composite one formed out of several tribes. There is a controversy amongst the scholars with regard to their original home. Some say they came from South-East Asia,²⁷ while some scholars think, they came from North-West border of China²⁸. They are predominantly Mongoloid with strains of non-Mongoloid strains²⁹. It is also believed that some Aryans and Dravidians might have merged into this community³⁰. The Manipurians consist of a number of small tribes. These tribes can be broadly divided into (a) valley people and (b) hill people. The valley people are Meiteis and Manipuri Muslims. The hill people are from Naga and non-Naga (Kuki)³¹ communities. The Aryan strain in the Manipurians is due to the presence of the Brahmins of Indian origin³². The Manipurians practiced ancestor worship and animism with central focus on worship on *Umang Lai* representing the root of the Manipurians' ancient way of living and culture³³. The Meiteis are Vaisnavas³⁴ (Hindus) and also they practice traditional religion. Hill tribes have accepted Christianity. The kings of Manipur assumed Hindu names like the Ahom, Koch, Tripurians etc. The kings issued coins. The coins bear 'one letter' legend giving the identity of the issuing kings. King Garib Nawaz³⁵ (patron of

the poor) accepted Hinduism in 18th century, who was followed by his men in Manipur. He was the first to embrace Hinduism, who was followed by the subsequent kings of Manipur. Prior to the Hindu Kings of Manipur, Pakhangba, who belonged to tribal community having its origin in greater Myanmar, flourished in 100 A.D. (33 A.D.) according to Manipur tradition. However, this date available from local records and the genealogy of the kings are not accepted by some scholars³⁶ due to lack of archaeological evidence. Gait says that the account of this period is merely, legendary, which must have been compiled comparatively at later time by the State Chroniclers on the basis of their own imagination³⁷. The letter of the coins bearing one letter legend issued by the Hindu kings are Assamese/Bengali character. There are about 20 monuments, which belong to Hindu religion and also their original tribal faith with central focus on worship of "Umang Lai". The famous Govindaji temple near Imphal, is a great centre of the Vaisnavas. The buildings of this institution, belonging to the 18th century, are similar to the Vaisnava *satras* of Assam. The environment is also same. L. Kunjeswari Devi has given illustrations of the monuments and inscriptions, which are dated in the late mediaeval period^{37a}. Excavations have yielded good deal of information relating to the existence of the pre-neolithic and megalithic culture in the State³⁸.

The recent excavation in Manipur conducted by A.K. Sharma at Sekta³⁹ has yielded some valuable antiquities including human skeletal remains found in urn burials and bronze relic casket. Urn burials can be compared with the system found in some other sites in India. On this basis, Sharma wants to date these objects in c. 100 B.C. However, it is subject to the confirmation of the result of laboratory test. He dates the Buddhist relic casket to 100 B.C. or 100/200 A.D. He further wants to say that there is absolutely no influence of Myanmar burial system on Sekta burial custom. We have neither confirmed it, nor have we denied the theory of Sharma. However, some scholars in Manipur do not subscribe to his views. A masked human skull made of gold has also been discovered at a place near Imphal along with other objects. The mask is of peculiar nature. It may be dated around 16th century or so. Some punch-marked coins datable to Maurya period are in the Manipur State Museum. But these are from other parts of the country. Two seated Buddha figures preserved in the same museum are from Manipur. They date in the late mediaeval period having Myanmarese influence. The influence of Buddhism must have come from Myanmar, where Theravadi

Buddhism became very popular. The Meiteis, as already said are predominant in the valley, while the hill areas are inhabited by more than 33 ethnic tribes. Muslim populations are in minority. They came to Manipur⁴⁰ in historical period in 1606 A.D., i.e. prior to Hinduisation and Christianisation. Manipur is connected with the *Mahabharata* stories through the episode of Chitrangoda and Babrubahan. Chitrangada, according to a legend, was the daughter of a king of Manipur. Chitrangada was married to Arjuna, the hero of the *Mahabharata*. Babrubahan was the son of Chitrangada and Arjuna. The *Mahabharata* legend must have been the creation of the Brahmins, who called the Manipuri rulers as *Khastriyas* and who gave the present name of the State identifying it with Manipur of the *Mahabharata*⁴¹. This has become a very popular legend in Assam and also in Orissa.

Myanmar was the original home of the Mizos, meaning hill people. "Mi" means people and "Zo" means hill⁴². Mizoram, a tribal state, till recently was a district of Assam. The State is predominately inhabited by the Mizos mainly, Lushai and in the second place Kukis with their sub-groups. In addition to these two major tribes, representative of some other tribes including Dimasa, Chakma, Garo, Hajong, Hmar, and Khasi also live in Mizoram. Mizos did not have script of their own. So, they did not have the practice to write their history like the Ahom and Tripura Kings. However, stories relating to the origin and history of this community have been passed on from father to son. Therefore, the folktales prevalent in their society is important, as this system can be treated as oral history.

Possibly, around 15th century the Mizos lived in hill areas of Myanmar⁴³. The Mizos were also known as Lushai. Even till the other day i.e., before Mizoram became a separate State, it was known as Lushai Hills district of Assam. Lushais were very prosperous tribe. In the beginning of 18th century the Lushais started coming from Myanmar to India in search of suitable area for jhum cultivation. This led to inter-tribe clash amongst different groups and clans under different chiefs for supremacy over the land for a long period. This kept the head hunting practice for long. Each tribe preferred to occupy hill top. Lushais under Chief Lallula Sailo consolidated their position by occupying most of area and moved to Cachar and Syllhet districts of undivided Assam. Even occasionally for power Sailo Chief had to obtain support from the Chakmas, who were Buddhists from Chittagong hills, and Manipur kings to defeat this kinsmen in 1830. Thus, defeating all their clans which

were treated as enemies, gradually, the Mizos became the supreme in the Mizo hills. However, fight continued. This weakened them. Gradually, land for Jhum cultivation also became scarce. Thus, food became rare commodity; therefore, they started forcibly collecting food from the bordering villages of Cachar, Manipur, Chittagong hill tracts and Tripura. In search of food their looting and depredation in the bordering villages continued. As these areas were under British rule, it became the moral obligation of the British government to protect the innocent villages from the attack of the powerful armed Mizos.

British army decided to repulse their attack. The cases of murder, plundering, looting, attacking in the border villages in the plains became so frequent that the British army had to take offensive. Several expeditions had to be taken against them by British army deep in the Mizo hills. Army had to march from all sides i.e., Cachar, Syllhet, Tripura and Chitagong hill tracts, to the Mizoram. Ultimately, the British army became fully successful in controlling them. Army from Myanmar, which was under British rule also led an expedition and joined the other army columns. After full occupation of the entire hills, in 1895, Mizoram was brought under British rule⁴⁴. After that British administration also included some bordering areas including Chakma dominated one and concentrated on peace process which led to all round development of Mizoram in due course. Aizwal became the headquarters of the Lushai district, which was brought under Assam. Subsequently, it became an union territory. Finally, it became a full fledged State. Under British rule, Mizoram became very prosperous in the field of health and literacy. Today Mizoram is proud to occupy the highest position in literacy in India. Except Chakma, all other tribes came from the East. Chakmas are from West.

We do not see any noteworthy archaeological objects in the State. Except the Chakmas who were Buddhist all the population of the State coming from East, i.e. Myanmar, embraced Christianity. There was no penetration of the Hindu culture from the bordering area. However, use of memorial stone was in practice in Mizoram. At many places huge stone slab depicting engravings of human figures in the cremation ground are found erected in the memory of their deceased Chiefs. These stones, called 'lung' are erected to praise the heroic qualities of their leaders. Sometimes carvings of animal like figures are also depicted. This means that the particular Chief was expert in hunting tiger. Some of the places famous for memorials are Mang Khaya Lung, Chibta Lung, Chikapui

Lung, Chakai Iasn, Lung Milem etc. At Chakai Lam, there is a stone bearing the carvings of a tiger. At Lung Milemm there is stone block showing three figures of human being, which appears to have Buddhist affiliation. It needs further study. At langkef there is a stone showing some scripts and carvings of sword like objects, which has influence of Myanmar culture. The scripts are yet to be deciphered. It needs further investigation. These memorial stones were erected prior to their people becoming Christians in Mizoram. There are also a number of caves in the hills related to the folk stories. Since there is no written history of the Mizos, these stones are of immense value. The folk stories and the legend prevalent amongst the Mizo leaders tell regarding their origin.

The Nagas, like the Mizos and other tribes have no recorded history. Like the Mizos, there are several stories relating to their origin⁴⁵. These stories are prevalent in the Naga society. Like Mizos they came from the Myanmar and belonged to the great Mongoloid stock. There are several sub tribes amongst the Nagas, such as, Angami, Ao, Chang, Sema, Rengma etc. Apart from the Nagas there are some non-Naga tribes also who live in the Nagaland. They are in minority.

Although the Nagas do not have written history, they are not unknown to the other parts of the country, particularly, in the Gengetic valley⁴⁶. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, these Indo-Mongoloids are non-else but the *Kiratas*, frequently mentioned in the Sanskrit literature. The earliest references of these *Kiratas* are found in the *Yajurveda*. The *Artharvaveda* also mentions a *Kirata* girl digging medicinal herbs from the mountains. In the *Mahabharata* *Kiratas* are mentioned as hill man in the eastern Himalayas. Bhima the hero of the Pandavas defeated seven *Kirata* rulers in course of his victory march. The same epic also mentions Bhagadatta as the king of Pragjyotisa, the ancient Assam. The *Ramayana* also mentions the *Kiratas*. It is said that Ulupi, the Naga princesses fell in love with Arjuna, the great hero of the *Mahabharata*, when she first saw him in his sojourn to Eastern India. She developed an emotional feeling in her mind for Arjuna. She fell in love with him. Thereupon, Arjuna took her to Nagalok, the land of the Nagas, and both of them lived happily until Arjuna moved to Manipur. According to legend, Nagas, however, participated in the great Kurukshetra war for Kauravas⁴⁷.

It is difficult to get a satisfactory account of the Nagas. Ptolemy's brief mention to the kings of Kamarupa that flourished in between 4th and 12th centuries are quite silent about the Nagas. But *Ahom Buranji*

throws light on the existence of the Naga tribe⁴⁸. The first Ahom King Chukapha entered Assam through Patkai range in 1228. He first came into contact with Wancho, Nocte and Konayak. Later on during the course of their kingdom came into contact with the Ao and Lotha Nagas. There were constant clash between the Ahoms and the Nagas. But on the whole the Ahom could contain them. The Naga had to pay tribute to the Ahom King. Time to time like the Mizos, the Nagas also created problem for the peace loving people of plains in the border. So the Ahom kings had to fight them back and take punitive action against the Nagas. To purchase peace with the Ahom Kings, the Nagas surrendered and offered two Naga girls with their attendants. This led to peaceful co-existence of these two communities in 18th century. In the early 19th century, when the Ahom Kings started weakening, the Moamoria rebellion gave blow to the royal authority and finally the Burmese invasion gave death blow to the royal authority, the Nagas quietly threw the yokes of the Ahom kings and started plundering the bordering Assamese villages and disturbed peace.

The British relation with the Nagas may be divided into three phases⁴⁹. First, British came in confrontation with the Nagas when they wanted to open communication between Assam and Manipur. In 1832 Captain Jenkins and Pemberton started from Manipur with Manipuri troops and marched through Naga Hills⁵⁰. In the following year Raja Gambir Singh of Manipur and Lt. Gordon with troops marched through the hills (Nagas) of Assam along a route east of the route taken by Jenkins. Manipur exercised some sort of authorities over the Southern portion of the Naga hills. "In fact in 1835 the forest between the Doyang and Dhansiri rivers was declared as the boundary between Assam and Manipur"⁵¹. The movement of the Manipuri soldiers under British officers to Assam greatly irritated the Nagas. British administration could, without difficulties, bring the Manipuri and Kachari kings under their control. But the British officers found it not so easy task to control the Nagas. Both the Manipuri King and the Kachari King exercised control over portions of Naga hills. But neither the Raja of Manipur nor the Raja of Cachar could comply with the suggestion of the British Administration that they should keep the Nagas under their control. Tularam had no resources in his kingdom of Cachar. The Manipuris could harass the Nagas but were not in a position to control them. British Administration did not like to take over the Naga hills, so still they inclined the Manipuris as their *defacto* masters of the Hills⁵². So, slowly the British officers

had to come into the picture and lead some expeditions to contain the Nagas and they became successful.

In the second phase of their relation with the Nagas, the Britishers followed the policy of non-intervention with regard to the Naga tribes. In the final phase, however, which began from 1866, British steadily extended and established their full control and authority over the entire Naga hills⁵³. In 1881 Naga Hill District was formed under Assam⁵⁴.

During the World War I a labour force was raised from the Naga Hills. World War II engulfed the Naga Hills. The Japanese were able to penetrate right up to Kohima, where a fierce battle was fought for 64 days. The battle of Kohima ultimately became the turning point of the war. Japanese were repulsed and their soldiers had to retreat. Throughout the period of the war the Nagas remained loyal to the British army and extended all help to the British administration and defeated Japanese army⁵⁵.

Rani Gadiliu⁵⁶, a Naga lady having faith in traditional ritual which is similar to Hindu tantric faith became popular in some section of the Nagas. She also did not have faith in the British rule. She went underground for sometime. She launched a movement against the British rule. British government captured her and sentenced her for life imprisonment. However, she was released in 1946. Later, again she went underground. Ultimately, the Government of India and the State Government came to a negotiation with her and met her demand. She was declared a freedom fighter.

As soon as Naga hills came under full control of the British, missionary activities started. They started converting the Nagas slowly. In the matter of health, education and communication, the Christian missionaries made a lot of contribution in the Naga hills. But for Christianity, the Nagas have paid a heavy price⁵⁷. Because many traditional systems of their culture fell into disuse. For maintaining trade with Assam, the Nagas speak Nagamese i.e. broken Assamese.

In Nagaland no Hindu or Buddhist monument is noticed. But lots of wood works are noticed in the traditional villages. Mon district is still famous for wood carvings. Naga women are famous for producing handloom textiles with beautiful designs, while the menfolk is expert in the production of craft. Nagaland State Museum, in fact is the true mirror of the Naga history and culture. A good collection of works of craft and handlooms are in the National Museum. A number of books on the

Nagas⁵⁸ have been published. We have not noticed any Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim monument in Nagaland.

Dimapur was the first capital of the Kacharis. Still the area of the ruins is called Rajbari. The remains have been preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India. Still ruins of the period, decorated monolithic pillars, old tanks etc. exist there. These have no connection with history and culture of Naga people. Still Kachari people are there, which are in microscopic minority. At Kasomai pathar also decorative monolithic pillars of the days of the Kacharis can be seen. These are preserved by the Archaeology Department of Assam, as the site falls in Assam.

Arunachal Pradesh which was till recently known as NEFA is the biggest State in North-East India in so far as the geographical boundary is concerned. The region was first called NEFA, under the control of Central Government. Later, it became a Union Territory and finally it became a State. The major tribes⁵⁹ that live in the State are Adi (Abor), Nishi (Dafla), Apatani, Galong, Tagin, Khampti, Singhpho, Misimi, Monpa, Aka, Wanchoo, Nocte etc. They have their own dialects. But Arunachalise, i.e., a broken Assamese language, is spoken by a tribe while talking to other tribes. This language is popular, because it was necessary to learn as they had to maintain trade with bordering Assam.

Like the Mizos, Nagas etc. i.e., the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, also do not have any written history of their origin. It is very difficult to say when they settled in this part of the country, from where they came and when, Khamti, a Buddhist tribe, however, came from Myanmar in 18th century⁶⁰ to settle in Assam and also in Arunachal Pradesh. These tribes of the State had their own customs, rituals and language. These rituals have no direct relation with Buddhism or Hinduism. But there are few Buddhist tribes. These are Monpas and Sherdukpens and Khamtis⁶¹. The first two tribes, before accepting Buddhism as their religion, had their traditional religion, believing in numerous gods and goddesses. The Monpas and Sherdukpens are the inhabitants of the Kameng and Tawang district, which are located in the westernmost part and the northern side of Arunachal Pradesh respectively. The Khamtis are the inhabitants of the Lohit district. The Monpas and Sherdukpen practise Tibetan Buddhism, as the Kameng district on the border of Bhutan, where Tibetan Buddhism is the practicing religion, which is

based on the *Mahayana* principle. But the Khamtis practice *Hinayana* form of Buddhism, which entered this region from the East i.e., Myanmar, where practicing religion is the *Theravadi* Buddhism, based on *Hinayana* form of Buddhism.

Gorcham Chorten (stupa) is the largest *stupa*, located in the Tawang district⁶². It is believed to be the second largest *stupa* after the Bodhnath *stupa* in Kathmandu, Nepal. The Tawang monastery (Gompa), is the fountain head of the spiritual life of the Buddhism of tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. This 400 years old monastery is in the Tawang district. Both these two relics belong to Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist creed. In the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and also in uppter Assam, we see quite a few Buddhist Viharas affiliated to *Theravadi* Buddhism which were set up by the Khamtis. However, I could also see a newly set up Vihara at a place beyond Margherita in Assam. It is affiliated, however, to Tibetan Buddhism.

Apart from these Buddhist relics, we also get forts and temples in this State. The Ita Fort of King Ramachandra of Mayapur datable to the 15th -16th century is well known. The very name Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh was derived from 'Ita'⁶⁴.

Malinithan, at the foot hills of Arunachal Pradesh near Likabali is a very important Hindu monument⁶⁴. It is in ruined state, but it consists of large number of stone sculptures belonging to different Hindu deities. These can be dated around the 14th century A.D. but cisselled in the pre-Ahom art style. These works belong to the decadent phase of the pre-Ahom style of Assam. Similar ruins have also been noticed near Jonai of Assam. Bhisamak Bagar and Rukmini Bagar also have yielded sculptures of older period. At Bhaluk Pung, a fort, datable to c. 10th -12th cent. A.D. has been exposed. It is, however, badly damaged. Apart from this, architectural remains, silver coins etc. have also been found at the site, which is said to be the capital of King Bhaluka, grandson of legendry King Bana, whose daughter Usha was married to Aniruddha, grandson of Sri Krishna.

Meghalaya State consisted of two districts of Assam till the other day. Garo, Khasi and Jaintia are the major tribes of this tribal State. Khasi and Jaintia people are the inhabitants of the eastern portion of the State, while Garos are the leading inhabitants of Western Meghalaya⁶⁵. Shillong was the capital of undivided Assam, and it is in the Khasi hill district. Since British established the capital of the undivided Assam in

Shillong, it was advantageous for the Britishers to preach Christianity amongst the Khasis. The Khasi belong to the Austric group, linguistically⁶⁶. Prior to accepting Christianity, the Khasis had their own tribal religion. They were snake worshippers. There is no important monument in the Khasi dominated area. However, large number of megaliths are noticed in this area. Around Charapunji, a large number of megaliths are seen. This culture is still in vogue in some area. For the peace of the deceased ones huge stone blocks were fixed at the burial sites. In South India also megalithic culture was popular in the ancient past. But now-a-days it is a dead culture. However, in the North-East, particularly, in Khasi hill district, still it is being continued.

The Khasis did not have any written history like most of the tribes of North East India. Nor, they had dynastic rulers. Village chiefs were the controlling authority in the society.

Garos belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. The ancestors of the Garos inhabited in Taura⁶⁷, a province in Tibet from where, under the leadership of two chiefs, they moved to the Goalpara district of Assam and from there they finally reached the present Garo hills by crossing the river Brahmaputra. Garo Hills has yielded a good number of palaeolithic as well as Neolithic sites⁶⁸. Therefore, it is presumed that, archaeologically speaking, Garo hill witnessed the earliest settlement of population in North East India. But the prehistoric culture cannot be attributed to the Garos, who migrated from the Tibet, as it appears. Like Khasis, the Garos also have been following the system of matrilineal society. Like Khasis, Garo and some section of the Jaintias, also of late have accepted Christianity. Some of the Garos can speak Assamese, as they maintained contact with the people of plains through trade like the Mismis of the Arunachal Pradesh and the Nagas who speak Nagamese, a broken Assamese. The Garos had their own tribal faith and still they are continuing this. We do not notice any monument inside the Garo hills.

But in the plains, well inside Meghalaya (Garo Hills district) an extensive site has, of late come to light. The site covering a vast area is called Bhait Bari ruins⁶⁹. There a good number of old tanks, ruined shrines under vegetation and fortifications are noticed. The recent excavation by the Archaeological Survey of India has yielded a good result. A ruined temple with large number of Brahmanical gods and goddesses have been found. These can be dated in 10th -12th century.

A Buddhist ruined *stupa* has also been exposed. There must have been a city or capital in the past. But most of the mounds, fortifications, tanks have been destroyed by the land hungry immigrants. Still there is a chance of getting more archaeological objects, if systematic excavation is conducted at this site. At Phulbari, near this site in Garo hills itself a Sivalinga has been noticed. A good number of Sivalinga, Yonipitha carved or half carved have been lying in that place. Terracotta sculptures, including Hindu divinities have also been discovered in parts of Garo hills bordering plains of Assam.

Sikkim is bordered by Tibet (China) to the north, Nepal to the west, Bhutan to the east and West Bengal State of India to the south. As such, it has no direct link with the other states of the North East. However, the Government of India has clubbed it with North-Eastern States for its development. The word Sikkim is believed to have originated from the Limboo word "Sukhim" or Guru Rimpache, the great Buddhist monk who visited this land from Tibet side in 8th century A.D. named as "beyut demojong", which means hidden valley of rice and fruits⁷⁰.

The Lepchas hailing from Mayel and belonging to Rong Migyit race were the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim. In 1500 A.D., they came in contact with the Bhutias, the tribe hailing from Kham area of Tibet. Both the communities entered into a "Blood Brotherhood" Treaty in 1641 A.D. Soon after Phuntsong Namgyal, a descendent of a Bhutia leader Khyebumse, became the first ruler of Sikkim. Thus, the rule of Namgyal dynasty began⁷¹.

Prior to joining the mainstream of the nation on May 16, 1975, subsequent to a referendum, Sikkim was a monarchy. From 1861, it had become a de-facto Protectorate of the British India, though the process for this arrangement was initiated on February 10, 1817 when the Maharaja of Sikkim signed a treaty with the East India Company.

Lepchas, the earliest inhabitants, who were aboriginal form the largest number of population followed by Bhutias and Nepales. Their population is 12% and 70% respectively. Hindu population is 68%, while Buddhist population is 27% in the State. Nepales is the lingua-franca.

There are quite few Buddhist monasteries and also Hindu temples in the State. The Rumtek monastery is the biggest monastery. It was founded in 1740. It is a huge building with decoration showing different aspects of Buddhism, located in Gangtok. The oldest monastery is the

Pemayangtse monastery, established in 1642 A.D. in West Sikkim. Hindu temples are Kirateswar temple at Legship, Gauch Tok temple, Hanuman Tok Temple and Thakurbari⁷².

Conclusion

From the above survey it is found that the tribal people spreading all over the North-Eastern States came in the remote past in different waves from the East and also from the North. Originally, they belonged to Sino-Tibetan linguistic group which can be divided into two broad sub-divisions i.e., Tibeto-Burman and Siamese-Chinese.

Except the Khasi, the majority of the tribes belong to Tibeto-Burman language family. The Khasis are the Austric speakers who must have migrated from the further South of Myanmar. But this conclusion has been made by scholars on the basis of language only. To some extent anthropological study has also helped to arrive at this conclusion. But this is difficult to prove archaeologically. We can only assume that the bearer of the palaeolithic culture was the people belonging to Tibeto-Burman stock. The Sanskrit speaking people or Indo-Aryan speaking people penetrated to the valley at a late period. The earliest archaeological evidence belonging to the historical period may be placed in 100 A.D. or 100 B.C., as is evident from the monolithic votive *stupas* and also the caverns at Sri Surya Pahar, on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra in the Goalpara district of Assam. In that case, the objects may be placed in Sunga-Kushan period. The Mahasthan inscription, Bogra district, Bangladesh speaks of some information of Kamarupa. The inscription is dated in the Maurya period, and Mahasthan at that time was in the Pragiyotisa country i.e., prior to the region came to be known as Kamarupa. It is also mentioned that Aryans did not frequent to the region east of the river Sadanira, which was located in the Bihar region. Further, the trace of a Buddhist *stupa* as found in the excavation at Bhaitbari, in Garo hill district of Meghalaya which may, with further proof, be placed in 100/200 B.C. The recent excavation at Sekta in Manipur has yielded two cultures i.e., urn burial and Buddhist relic Casket to pre-Christian centuries. The excavator, Mr. A.K. Sharma further says that these have similarities with ones found in other parts of India in excavation. In that case what would have been the route of migration of this culture bearer from mid India to Manipur. If it was through Assam, Assam should have more such objects. Myanmar does have such old sites. Of course, Sharma has said it is subject to the laboratory test result. But it is sure, further archaeological excavation will bring more new light.

The Asura rule in Pragjyotisa may be dated back to 100 A.D. or slightly earlier. Bhagadatta, it appears, is an Arynised name, who fought for the Kauravas. It appears from Bhagadatta onwards, *Arya dharma* became popular in the plains of this region. From 4th century onwards we get the genealogy of the Kamarupa kings, and with little gap here and there we get the names of the ruling authorities down to the advent of the British and subsequently in 1826 after the treaty of the Yandaboo, British rule was imposed officially in Assam and Gambhir Singh was confirmed as the Raja of Manipur. In some hill areas during British rule, tribal people were converted to Christianity, through which they got a new life, connected with western system but they continued their own tribal rituals and customs side by side for some time. Even now the tribal ritual, customs etc. are there in their societies. But some tribal in the hills and plains continued to follow Hindu and Buddhist religion, though of late for various factors, some sections have shown their inclination towards Christianity. It is primarily because of the fault of the Hindus, who do not have much missionary zeal. Satras of Assam could have played a very significant role in this regard. But they did not do it. However, Hinduisation has also been going in some pockets.

The major problem of this region is the influx of the Bangladesis. Ahom General, Lachit Barphukan, defeated the Mughals in the battle of Saraighat, which is a legendary battle for the people of Assam, after which Mughal did not venture to invade Assam. The victory is recorded in an inscription, which is being preserved in the Assam State Museum. Whatever Muslim people in those days came to Assam (in the historical period) have already been mingled with the Assamese society, hence, they are with the indigenous people and are part and parcel of the Assamese society. Like Assam, Tripura also was never under Mughal rule. Though they invaded Tripura, but they could not rule there. But both the States have been facing the same problems now.

Immigrant Muslims had to be taken from the then East Bengal, particularly from Mymensingh district, to Assam for growing more food. Because the Assamese people were not inclined to manual works. Even now the flow has not been stopped. For this the Assamese people are responsible. They cannot do hard labour. Hindus of other parts of India are also responsible for their inaction. Rather, Assamese people, those who participated in the famous foreign national movement popularly known "Assam Movement" led by ASSU in which many youths laid down their lives, have been now directly or indirectly, under compulsion

or otherwise, encouraging the immigrant Muslims to come to Assam and settle. It is very sad. The historic Assam Movement to drive out foreigners became a history now. It is a closed chapter. The birth places of Vaisnava saints like Sankardeva, Damodardeva, Harideva and Bhattadeva, whose literary contribution has formed the very backbone of Assamese culture are in peril as they are at the mercy of the Muslim immigrants. But not only Assam, these people have entered almost all the States of this region, except of course Sikkim. This has become a threat to the hill people too.

The dream of Mahatma Gandhi, Gopinath Bordoloi and hundreds of freedom fighters to retain this region particularly Assam which was (and also is) a Hindu dominated State with 'A' group i.e., India has been shattered. Their sacrifices have become a forgotten chapter now. The dominion of the 'C' group, now Bangaldesh is in the process of engulfing the entire Assam because of the lack of patriotism, lack of work-culture and lack of vision of the local people and also Indian people as a whole.

Already most of the dilapidated historical Vaisnava *satras* located in the countryside are encircled by immigrant Muslims. Many people of the *satras* have been compelled to come to towns seeing no future in their *satras*. The dream of great Saint Sankardeva has also slowly shattered. We are now taking *satria* dance and music to the towns and cities to the stage, to Kalakshetras, to the foreign countries, to earn money, get award and degrees. It is very good. But in some dilapidated *satras*, the local people find it difficult to practice all these because of lack of inspiration and support from our society. In Bangladesh there are four Vaisnava *satras*, who care for them? These are institutions of Assamese culture belonging to historical period.

The Report on Illegal Migration into Assam submitted to the President of India by the then Governor of Assam dated 8th November, 1998 gives a clear picture on this burning problem. The lecture delivered by Prof. H.K. Barpujari on this problem, two years back organized by the Ministry of Home, Government of India at the India International Centre, New Delhi is more informative. The memorial lecture on *Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi, and his contribution to the nation* organized by the National Museum and the National Museum Institute and delivered by the then Governor of Assam, Lt. Gen. S.K. Sinha, on 25th August, 1999 in New Delhi gives the genesis of the problem. Prof. H.K. Barpujari's

Presidential Address delivered in the *Kolkata session of Indian History Congress*, is more vocal. It is in the same line dealing with the same problem. But he has not hesitated to say the naked truth unpalatable to the politicians, particularly, the torch bearers of the Assam Movement and the leaders of the Government formed with the promise to the people of Assam. He severely criticized the government formed in Assam after the agitation through his speech, based on contemporary history. He did not spare any body.

It is the work-culture, which can only save Assam. If during the historical period, the Assamese people could dig vast tanks, build forts, construct temples with indigenous labour, during Pre-Ahom and Ahom period, why the present society cannot do it? Better late than never, the people of North-East India forgetting all their petty differences should wake up from their slumber and for their identity should fight against the common enemy, through their work-culture to safeguard their own identity. This is the only solution to respect the decisions of our great leaders. This will be the best policy to pay a tribute to those visionaries, who saved Assam from the conspiracy to club Assam with the East-Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

Another important task is to record the legends, folk tales and oral tradition prevalent amongst the ethnic groups of North-East India. If this is not done, the Western Culture will wipe them out from respective societies. The first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru did a very good job by arranging the folk dance programme from all the States of India on the Republic Day. It is also a good decision to invite the State Governments to take part in the Republic Day processions through traditional dances and tableaux depicting their past history and culture. Through these traditional dances, which are in practice from hoary antiquity they are informing about their original culture to the new generations. The Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Mr. D.D. Lapang, while delivering the Inagural Speech of the Shillong Session of the All India Museums Conference held from 14th to 16th June, 2003 has rightly said that whatever may be we are today, whatever position we hold does not matter, whatever religion we practice - no matter, we must remember our past, we must preserve our history so that the new generations in future known about their past culture and respect them.

Let the NEIHA take up a long drawn comprehensive project to give the responsibility to the respective History Departments of the

Universities of this region to launch a movement to record the legends and the oral history prevalent amongst the elders of the tribal societies. Similarly, the *Museums Association of India* should take up the massive task to record the history of the tribals through dioramas, models and other modern display techniques and show them in the respective State Museums. If these two tasks can be done, we will certainly get good response from the public and also from the Government. Let the *NEIHA* launch a movement to promote work-culture including doing very small business, where investment is not necessary and dignity of labour amongst the youths through the universities of this region, as the *ASSU (All Assam Students Union)* launched the movement against foreign nationals which is, of course, a total failure and show respect to the historical decisions taken by the great leaders. In the foreign countries our students do even the manual work for the cause of their studies, but why not in our own country? Let us take the example from history and be practical. History is for the past, present and also for the future.

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Generalization in Constructing Histories of Northeast India

Mignonette Momin

From the historian's perspective generalization means the blanket application of certain ideas and assumptions to events and developments in history, without much room for specific or localized considerations. The beginnings of such a method can be traced back to a distinct trend of history writing of the Western tradition. The trendsetter was the Greek historian, Thucydides, whose date has been ascribed to *circa* 460-400 B.C. within the Hellenic Age. It was he who first focused on political events at the core of history writing. This was because he believed that political factors underlay historical events.¹ This trend continued in the Hellenistic Age that was dominated by the rulers of Macedonia and their compatriots/allies, and, thereafter, in the era of the Roman Empire.² The latter in turn bequeathed it on various parts of Europe that were brought under its rule, and on the Byzantine Empire straddling eastern Europe and western Asia. Logically, therefore, the legacy passed on to modern Europe.³ During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Europeans embarked on 'expansive imperialism' in different parts of the world, established colonies therein and set about the task of consolidating their administrative control over them, they applied the observation of Thucydides to the colonies in the context of capitalism and colonialism. They constructed the histories of the colonies drawing on the available sources and interpreting the evidence to suit colonial rule. The most common generalization in their writings pertained to the depiction of the societies of the colonized world as essentially backward and stagnant before the advent of colonial rule and the resultant introduction of modern elements of material life, law and order—among other things—to change those societies for the better.⁴ The writers applied such a generalization even in the context of societies that did not directly fall under colonial economy.

Thus it was with British imperialism in India too. When the British extended their sphere of authority to different parts of the Indian sub-continent, they encountered myriad communities that were at various economic and cultural levels, ranging from the 'most primitive' hunters-

gatherers to highly stratified caste-based societies engaged in primary and secondary production or its organization. They found it necessary to gather as much information as they could on the societies they had to govern, for only a fair understanding of the composite 'Indian' way of life and their history would ensure the success of colonial rule. Where the British chose not to interfere in the governance of the existing kingdoms (as, for instance, in Tripura), they did so out of deliberate deference to the exigencies of maintaining *status quo* in well-defined kingdoms. They collated and organized the data to construct a history of India from the earliest times possible, and to build upon the broad generalization mentioned above, which would be used in the course of writing the histories of specific areas within the sub-continent in the wake of British expansion. They interpreted the data from the viewpoint of political developments removed from the notion of socio-economic change in Indian history until the arrival of the British.

The greater part of northeast India thus fell within this scheme of generalization from the British period onwards. The method has continued up to the present times. However, the degree to which the data was used to construct the histories of the region or to derive certain principles of the social organization in a given area during a particular period in the region varied from one intellectual/political climate to another. The purpose of this paper is to take stock of the generalizations that the writers have drawn with reference to some of the low lying areas in pre-British northeast India, to indicate the effects they have had on history writing and how to handle the problem thereof. The discussion will be restricted to very broad topics of political and socio-cultural import characterized by a Brahmanical prejudice, which constituted the writers' principal concerns.

As is well known, modern history writing in northeast India effectively began with Edward Gait, after preliminary data collection and organization of the relevant information from the extant sources had been undertaken.⁵ This was in the context of British imperialism in the region and the establishment therein of the colonial administrative machinery, of which Gait was an articulate instrument.⁶ Expectedly, Gait's view of the region's history was derived from his understanding of Indian history based on his readings of the standard texts authored by James Mill and, later, Vincent Smith.⁷ Both Mill and Smith had used the model of a pyramidal socio-political structure portrayed as follows :