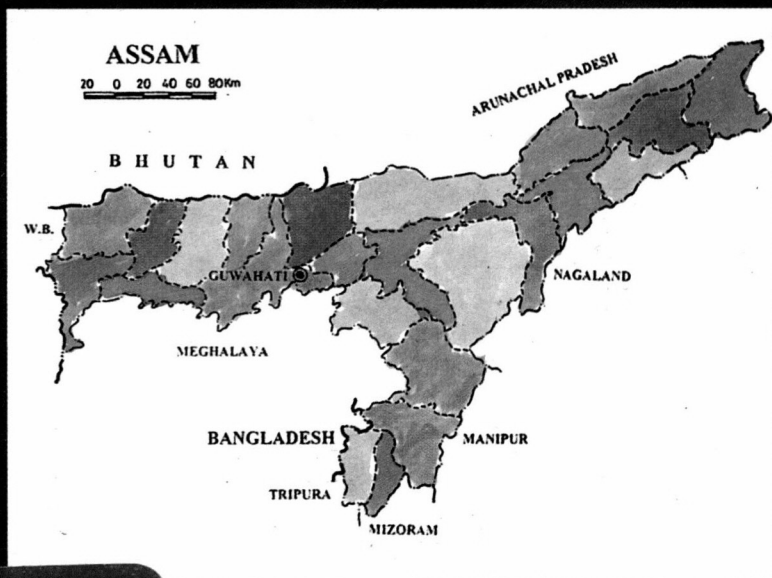


Research Priorities in North-East India

With Special Reference to Assam



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R. Gopalakrishnan

This book, *Research Priorities in North-East India (with special reference to Assam)*, attempts to identify the research priorities in a state that has indicated sizeable conflict situations. It is also apparent that if such an effort is indeed made, it will pave way for a better understanding of the problems facing the state and perhaps add to the competence in resolving as much of the conflicts as possible. Above all, the present attempt is an effort to place these research priorities in a contemporary perspective and as an alternative to the all too common approach to the problems of the state.

R. Gopalakrishnan is currently Professor of Geography, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. He has written books on the North-East India, Afghanistan, War and Peace Studies, etc.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES
IN
NORTH-EAST INDIA

(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM)

Editor
R. GOPALAKRISHNAN



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Foreword

In the year 1992-93, the ICSSR-North-Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong, planned to sponsor one day panel discussions on Research Priorities in the Seven States of North-East India, sometimes also referred to as the seven sisters, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Of these seven states Assam is the largest in terms of both area and population. It was, therefore, rightly thought that a single one day panel discussion may not do justice to the research priorities in Social Sciences for a large state like Assam. Hence, it was decided to hold three panel discussions in three different and widely apart cities and towns of Assam.

The choice of Dibrugarh and Gauhati in the Brahmaputra Valley, and Karimganj in the Barak Valley was considered most appropriate in view of the socio-cultural divergence of the regions represented by the respective towns. Prof. Atul Goswami of the Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh and Prof. A.C. Bhagabati of the Institute of Social Change and Development (now known as OKD as Institute of Social Change and Development) Gauhati, and Dr. Apurbananda Mazumdar of the Department of History, R.S. Girls College, Karimganj, were requested to organise the panel discussions and coordinate them.

All the aforesaid scholars accepted our request and invited a number of locally available scholars in different fields of Social Science to prepare an article on Research Priorities in their subject and to participate in the panel discussions. Consequently, Prof. Atul Goswami held the panel discussion on May 25, 1992, at Dibrugarh, and Dr. Apurbananda Mazumdar held it on May 28, 1992 at Karimganj. These two panel discussions

were followed a little later by another at Gauhati. Prof. A.C. Bhagabati held it on March 13, 1993.

Needless to say that all the three panel discussions were well attended and successful on all counts. Participants discussed the papers and identified the priority areas of research in different Social Science disciplines. We take this opportunity to thank Professors Atul Goswami, A.C. Bhagabati and Dr. Apurbananda Mazumdar and their friends and colleagues who contributed to make these discussions academically fruitful.

Prof. R. Gopalakrishnan is a senior scholar and Social Scientist of the region known for his scholarly contributions both within the region and beyond the region. I am thankful to him for having accepted our offer to edit this volume of the Research Priorities, and completing the work right on time. I must also thank our Deputy Director, Dr. C.J. Thomas, for his interest in the research priorities without whose help and cooperation it would not have been possible to bring out these volumes.

I hope that this series on Research Priorities on North-East India in general, and Assam in particular, will be useful to all those interested in the researches on the North-Eastern parts of the country.

Shillong
July, 2001

Jai Prakash Singh
Ex. Hon. Director
ICSSR-NERC

Preface

This is a collection of papers presented by Research on Assam. This was essentially a local level panel discussion, which after a serious deliberation came out with definite recommendations. This effort is, therefore, to present the findings. These findings are preceded by a background of the current status of the State of Assam and is followed by identification and priorities of research for the state in the twenty-first century.

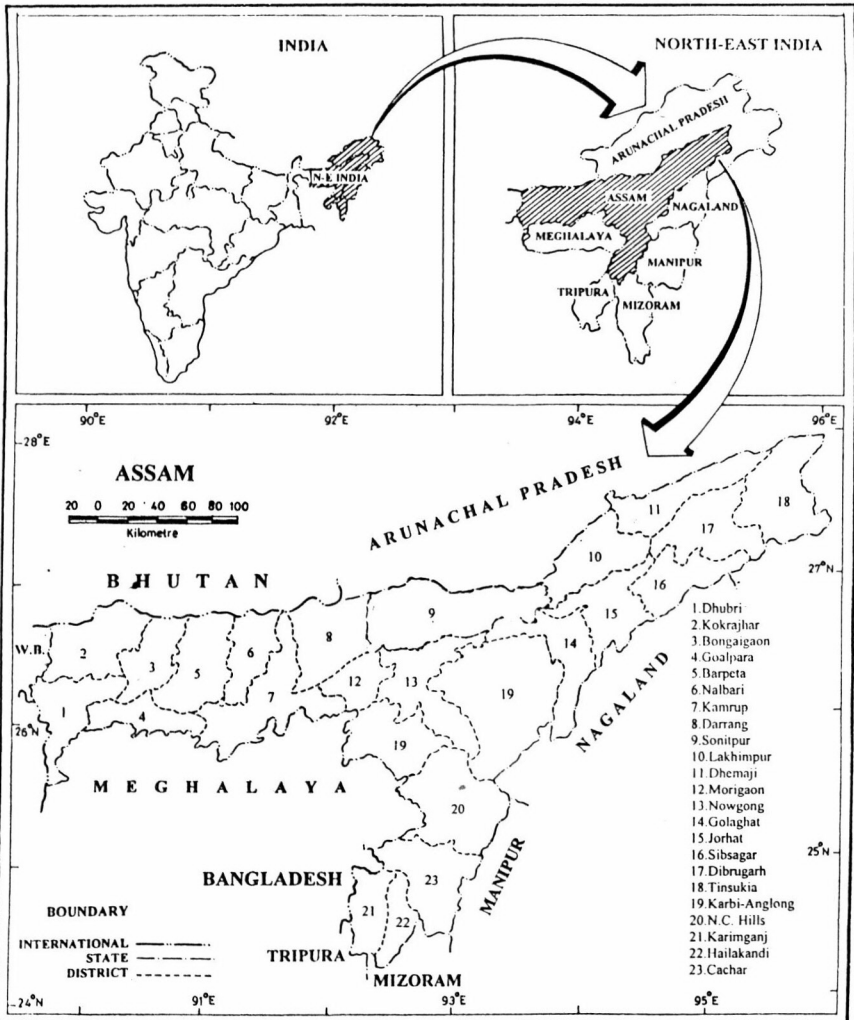
This work has been initiated at the behest of the North-Eastern regional Centre—ICSSR, Shillong, which is actively pursuing its effort to promote, sponsor and publish research priorities in the North-Eastern Region of India. The present section highlights research priorities for the state of Assam.

I extend my sense of appreciation to the Honorary Director Prof. J.P. Singh, and Deputy Director Dr C.J. Thomas, for providing the opportunity to associate myself with this volume. I also express my sense of appreciation to Ms. C. Khonglah and other staff of the office of the NERC-ICSSR, for their assistance and co-operation in completing this assignment. Last but not the least, I acknowledge my appreciation to Dr. N.P. Goel for bringing this manuscript in the final form.

Prof. R. Gopalakrishnan
Editor

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Introduction

This book, *Research Priorities in North-East India* (with special reference to Assam), has attempted to identify the research priorities in a state that has indicated sizeable conflict situations. It is also apparent that if such an effort is indeed made, it will pave way for a better understanding of the problems facing the state and perhaps add to the competence in resolving as much of the conflicts as possible. Above all, the present attempt is an effort to place these research priorities in a contemporary perspective and as an alternative to the all too common approach to the problems of the state.

Even after five decades of Independence, the North-East India in general and the state of Assam in particular, continues to attract scant attention from scholars, administrators and policy-makers. It is only in the recent past that the concern for the region's status has been expressed. In more than one way, this apathy has been encouraged by social and economic stagnation. This has led to instability to dominate the regional transactions and relations. It has also encouraged mushrooming of political fora and militant organisations that reflected the revolutionary changes in the perception of the protagonists in the region. The experiences of stagnating economy, inadequate communication infrastructure and frequently ineffective relief, remedial and growth mechanisms have abetted this. These have undermined socio-cultural and economic fabric of the society. So that, today the region and the state in particular is at the crossroads of consolidation and growth on the one hand, and stagnation and political instability on the other.

In fact, the phenomena of social and political relations has encouraged examination of some of the socio-economic instances. But despite the interest, which has been created by

this problem, there is a limited literature. Those who have written the bulk of material on the state and the region, have prepared it with a professional interest on the subject of socio-political instability. These were meant for professional audience. At the wider levels of regional development, the deliberations on the present theme have been conducted at levels totally inadequate to assess and formulate policies for development of the state (and the region).

Assam is a miniature replica of the Indian Sub-continent. Its geography has the characteristics that enabled many of the trans-regional elements to adopt themselves to the meso-level ecological conditions of the Brahmaputra-Barak system or the Assam. So that, it's history, is one of continuous reflections of large-scale population movements, where each cultural strain while maintaining its exclusiveness, coexisted with others. These migratory population streams used the plain and valley section of the North-East as a transit point—a staging point for empire formation or only to settle in the adjoining hill and mountain territories. Be that as it may, the state gradually witnessed transition from a primitive economy to a subsistence economy, with every population wave adding to the technology and change.

Over a period of time, these development enabled development of agrarian economy that was self-sustaining. These were the forerunners of elements that were conducive for formation of states and military-feudal structures in the valley landscape. In each historical period, there was constant struggle for space and confrontation over the control of subsistence between the original inhabitants, the colonisers, the immigrants and the conquerors—rulers. These became the basis on which all-subsequent historical geographical transactions of exclusiveness of space by the concerned population groups and subgroups were based.

In fact, the historical patterns were responsible for marginalisation of many peoples in the region. However, these processes induced plural structures and relationships to emerge and dominate the regional landscape. Regional variations, differences, disparities and inequalities, remained latent but had the potential to translate a peaceful landscape to an unstable political entity. Interacting with the regional geopolitical

compulsions, participation and representation became the most common theme on which competition over space, confrontation over the control of means and conflicts over management were based. These became all the more imperative, when change and modernisation had horizontally and vertically divided the society. It is, in keeping with this perspective, that the present study has been undertaken.

Location

The state of Assam is situated in the extreme North-Eastern part of the country. It lies, between 24°8'N latitude and 87°42'E and 96°E longitude. Assam forms the core of the North-Eastern region, (comprising the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, besides Assam). It is bound by the states of Arunachal Pradesh in the north and North-East; by Nagaland and Manipur in the east; by the states of Mizoram and Tripura in the south-east; by Meghalaya in the south; and by West Bengal in the west. It has international boundaries with Bangladesh in the south-east and south-west and with Bhutan in the north and North-East. The state has Goalpara in the lower Brahmaputra valley and Cachar in the Barak valley as the gateways to the state and the North-East region itself. The significance of these gateways lay in their historical role in transforming relationships and transactions of the region. The entire region is connected with the rest of India by a slender corridor leading from Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts of Assam—the Siliguri Neck.

Assam has a geographical area of 78,438 sq. km. or 78,438,000 ha. This is 2.4 percent of the total geographical area of the country. The state comprises of two major river regimes of the Brahmaputra and the Barak of the Meghna systems. In other words, there are two distinct natural regions, viz., the plain area of the Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys comprising of twenty-one districts. The districts in the plains are Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nagaon, Morigaon, Karimganj Hailakandi and Cachar; and the hill areas consisting of the two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar

Hills (have their own autonomous district Councils), cover an area of 15,200 sq. km and accounts for about a fifth of the land area of the state. The state has a population of 22,294,562 persons (1991 Census). Of this population, 6.24 percent is in the category of Scheduled Caste and 10.99 percent in the category of Scheduled Tribe population. With an average density of 284 persons per Square Kilometre, highest density is found in the district of Dhubri (467) and lowest in the district of North Cachar Hills (30). The State in the 1971–91 period averaged a growth rate of 52.44 percent. This growth is higher than the national average and has out stripped the rate of economic development.

Historical Outline

Major river basins of the state experienced separate historical development. From the available literature, one can easily discern that the Brahmaputra valley with its insular characteristics displayed prominent South-East Asian influences while the Barak Valley, located in the south-eastern extremity of the Indo-Ganga plains in the east, indicated profound deltaic influences. Accessibility, through the mountain passes located in the eastern adjoining territories and the continuous stretch of flat lands, permitted settlement and movement across the valley. Regional ecological conditions modified the requirements for adaptation. These were conducive for the development of individual elements. These established broad regional trends and alignments that laid the foundation of the valley societies. All these societies were characterised by several layers of identity with varying cultural backgrounds. The coming together of this amalgam brought about significant fusion of socio-cultural elements to provide a basis for a plural society. These affected the regional synthesis—with individual elements remaining exclusive but mutually dependent on the valley environments. It was on these geopolitical and ecological niche that the major spatial pattern in the state emerged. In conventional terms, location of the state has been of crucial importance.

The Brahmaputra valley remained susceptible to frequent waves of migration and invasions. Goalpara and Cachar

offered easy access through which the deltaic influences permeated into the region. The mountain passes in the east along the North-Eastern Hills permitted trans-frontier elements to penetrate into the regional space. This called for frequent territorial adjustments between the various groups who were already in occupation of the valley space but also with the new waves of migrants who forced the earlier settlers to either disperse and fragment or move into the interior hills or both. Continuation of these processes brought about distinctly marked areas of attraction and areas of isolation. So that there developed symptoms of differences and disparities within the existing state's territories. Natural endowments and geographical attributes reinforced this. Latter provided each territory and its populace with specific geo-economic considerations. In a way, these encouraged early balkanisation and reflected heterogeneity under more or less similar conditions in the state's landscape. Consequently, with the extension of administration, there emerged contradictions in space arrangements. This was not related to either historical or geographical distinctions. However, such distinctions, proved to be meaningful only in the socio-cultural and politico-economic contexts, if one refuses to accept the existing arrangements.

Geo-political factors have played a crucial role in the evolution and development of the state's political and socio-economic milieu. The balkanisation that had taken place since Independence were largely due to greater impact of social welfare measures and consequent slow rate of economic development. It, then, becomes necessary to understand the basis of these attributes. These constituted the basic features of the pre-colonial, colonial, as well as post-colonial state.

The extent of ancient Assam can be obtained from the Hindu epics and in the Pauranik and Tantric literature; Assam or Pragjyotisha as it was then known, stretched southwards as far as the Bay of Bengal. Its western boundary was the Karatoya. On the other hand, the Puranic literature suggested that Kamrup or Assam embraced almost the entire eastern Bengal, Assam and Bhutan. In the Jogini Tantra, Kamrupa is said to have extended from the Karatoya river on the west to Dikhu on the east and from the mountains of Kanjagiri on the north, to the confluence of the Brahmaputra

and the Lakhya river on the south. In other words, it included roughly the present day Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan, Rangpur, Cooch Bihar, the north-east of Mymensingh and, possibly the Garo Hills. Further, this country was divided into four portions, viz., Kampith from the Karatoya to the Sankosh, Ratnapith from the Sankosh to the Rupohi, Suvarnapith from the Rupohi to the Barail and Saumarpath from the Bharali to the Dikrang.

According to Huen Tsang who visited India in the first half of the seventh century A.D., that Kamrupa had a circumference of almost 1,700 miles. Probably, it would have included the whole of Assam, and Bhutan. North Bengal is as far as Karatoya river and the part of Mymensingh, which lies to the east of the old course of the Brahmaputra. Its eastern boundary was line of hills adjacent to the tribes of the Chinese frontier, *i.e.*, it extended as far to the east as did the composite Assam. Buranjis of the Ahoms, provide adequate references to the size and extent of the state between 12th and 18th centuries. Reference about the extent of the boundary of Assam during the Ahom rule is contained in Mir Jumlah's account, who accompanied ShihabbUddin, on his invasion of Assam in 1662. During the Ahom rule, the extent of Assam varied with the change in the leadership.

The Assam valley has been repository of Dravidian, Mongoloid, Austeric and Aryan groups of people. These groups entered the valley at different periods. Initial settlements were temporary. Frequent movements within the valley space coincided with the search for sustainable lands for cultivation with the then available technology and man power. It formed part of the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa. It consisted of numerous tribal kingdoms who were in constant state of dynamic equilibrium with each other. By the Thirteenth Century A.D., the valley was dominated by the Kamata Kingdom, covering the area occupied by the present day districts of Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, and parts of Morigaon. It lasted upto 1385 A.D. The Bara-Bhuyan Kingdom, covering the area occupied by the present day districts of Darrang, Sonitpur, parts of Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Jorhat and Sibsagar. It lasted upto 1504 A.D. The Kachari Kingdom, covering the area occupied by the present day districts of Nagaon, Jorhat, and Sibsagar. It lasted upto 1536 A.D. The

Chutiya Kingdom of the Bodo-Shan group, covering the area occupied by the present day districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar—east of Subansiri and Dihing Rivers. During this period, elements from the Ganga delta and the Tai elements from further east of the region began their periodic forays into the region.

Thus, Assam lay North-East of the province of Bengal. The river Brahmaputra divided the valley into two unequal halves by flowing west to east. Guwahati to Sadiya is about 200 km; its breadth, north to south, from the hills of the Garos, Miris, Mishmis, Daflas and Landahs to those Naga tribes is given eight days journey. Its southern mountains touch length-wise the hilly region of Khasia, Kachar and Gonasher and breadth-wise the hills inhabited by the Naga tribes. The land on the north bank of the Brahmaputra is called Uttarkol, and on the southern bank Dakhinkol; Uttarkol stretches from Guwahati to the home of the Miri and Mishmi tribes, and Dakhinkol from the kingdom of the Nak-Kati Rani to the village of Sadiya. Hamilton (1820) stated that Assam adjoined the province of Bengal at the North-Eastern corner, about 91° E longitude, from where it stretches in an easterly direction to an undefined extent; but it is probable that about the 96° east longitude, it meets the northern territory of Ava, and is separated by an intervening space of about 180 miles from the province of Yunan in China.

The Ahoms, comprising essentially of the Tai elements, began their incursions into the valley towards the latter half of the thirteenth century. They were able to bring the upper Brahmaputra valley under their sway. In this initial phase (13th to 16th Century A.D.), they shared the valley with other prominent powers. However, towards the latter half of the sixteenth century, power relationship within the valley were transformed. It coincided with the emergence of the Koch Kingdom covering parts of the present day districts of Goalpara, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur, and Morigaon. It lasted upto 1587 when it was absorbed by the expanding Ahom kingdom. The Ahom Kingdom enclosed the present day districts of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, and Sibsagar by early fourteenth century. It's westward expansion coincided with the decline and fragmentation of the Kacheri

Koch kingdoms. This empire survived for a long period, *i.e.*, from 1226 to 1826 A.D. By 1587, the Ahoms confronted the Mughals in the west round the Lower Brahmaputra valley, the Burmese along the Patkai ranges in the east and Manipur in the south and south east; while Manipur was also under permanent threat from the east. Initially the Ahoms were successful in subjugating the territories occupied by the Morans, the Borahis, the Naga groups and other inhabitants of the valley. With the decline of the Ahoms, the Singhpos along Patkai range wrested control of the area east of the river Burhi-Dihang in 1794. Following them, the Khamptis established themselves along the river Tengapani and extended their territorial control upto Sadiya.

However, this period also saw the rise of three significant regional powers of the Ahoms, Burma (Kingdom of Ava) and Manipur. These powers between them, controlled the transactions in the region—from the northern and eastern extremity of the Ganga delta through the eastern Hills and plateaux upto the Upper Burma and lower Burma regions. This period also saw inroads made by the Mughals in the west through the Goalpara gateway and through the south-eastern gateway of Cachar from the eastern Ganga delta. The Ahom empire was geopolitically dominated by powerful neighbours whose interests lay in their attempt to fragment the Ahom empire. The Ahoms built strong military-feudal structures adequately reinforced by fort cities, extensive river navigation, strong agrarian economy and a strong feudal bureaucratic military structures. It was largely successful in assimilating many of the elements; thus strengthening plural characteristics. Despite the innovative measures in the structure of control and economy, the Ahom empire succumbed to internal contradictions.

Thus, (the ahom empire in the valley extended on both sides of the river Brahmaputra.) It was divided into three provinces of Kamrup on the west, Assam proper in the centre, and Sadiya in the eastern extremity. The western province Kamrup, with several subordinate or inter-mixed petty jurisdictions, extended from the British boundary near middle Khamakya ($26^{\circ} 36'N$ and $92^{\circ} 56'E$), about 130 miles in length, from the boundary, opposite to Goalpara to Nodornbera, a distance of 21 miles, Assam extends for 109 miles. Its width, averages

about 30 miles. About 104 miles above Gauhati ($91^{\circ}48'E$), the Brahmaputra separates into two branches and encloses an island, five days journey in length and about one in width.

Assam proper, the middle province of the Kingdom is of greater extent than the western. The portion, north of the Brahmaputra was designated as Charidwar, probably exceeds 200 miles in length and 20 in average breadth; but the length on the south side of that river is less considerable. It commences near the middle Kamakhya about 130 miles east, from Goalpara, and reaches to the upper Kamakhya, which is said to be 10 miles below Tikliya Potor Mukh. Within these limits, it comprises of the upper half of the western island formed by Brahmaputra, and includes the island of Majuli, the Brahmaputra and its tributary, the Dihing. Of the third and most remote province nothing is known, except that it is a small side of the Dibrong river, about $95^{\circ}10'E$. The boundary changes that had taken place were mainly restricted to the peripheral region. Ahoms pursued a policy of benevolent neglect as far as the adjacent hilly periphery was concerned. These adjacent hill territories had a weak economic base, and were characterised by difficult and rugged terrain. These along with dense forest cover, acted as a deterrent to accessibility and movement. Physical barrier prevented the core from having any meaningful interaction with its periphery. This enabled these territories to maintain the physical isolation, and reflect multiplicity of ethnic, cultural and regional identities. The Ahom rulers conferred upon these regions, the status of dependencies. They strengthened the economic base of the Brahmaputra valley, which was essentially a rice-based economy.

(The eighteenth century saw the gradual decay of the Ahom power) particularly the Ahom control over the region received its first blow from the Moamoria Civil War that took place in 1770, and since then under the impact of the repeated Burmese invasion, which culminated in their occupation of the valley (1817-1824), left the plain a reign of total chaos, lawlessness and oppression. Thus the last of the Ahom ruler had no option but to seek the help of the British, whose rule then extended till the adjoining Bengal plain. It is under such conflicting conditions in Assam, that the British made their appearance.

They forced the Burmese by the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 to surrender their claim over the region. Thus, according to the Article 2 to the Treaty the Burmese renounced all claims upon and future interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jaintia. This marked the beginning of the new era in the history of Assam and put an end to a glorious rule of the Ahoms and the uninterrupted freedom that the people of Assam enjoyed under them; at the same time the British incorporated the province for the first time within their Indian dominion.

In short, it can be stated that, there is a definite link between political activities and the geographical space. A change in administration or territorial boundary includes a corresponding change in the policy and priorities of development; consequently landscape changes followed. During the Ahom rule, the core of their power, *i.e.*, the Brahmaputra valley, were surrounded practically on all sides by hills, accessible only through the numerous but difficult passes and river routes. The Ahom ruler's policy towards the hilly periphery was essentially that of non-interference, motivated may be by the fact that: possession of extensive unintegrated or economically neglected areas may result in a drain on state resources from the cost of administration and communication construction. Since, their territorial jurisdiction was confined to the long alluvial valley of the Brahmaputra, homogeneous in terms of physiography, economy which was described as a rice economy, and culture, it enabled the Ahoms to administer the region efficiently and effectively in all spheres. Thus the rice economy of the state made considerable progress under their rule. The British interest, on the other hand, was more of economic exploitation, particularly since the discovery of tea and jute in the region. Due to the sporadic raids by the hill tribes, on the valley, it necessitated to exert some measure of control over them, primarily to safeguard their interest and also for reasons of security due to their location in sensitive areas, bordering China and Burma. They, therefore, gradually amalgamated the various political units of the surrounding hill areas. Despite this, their policy was in essence similar to that of their predecessors, *i.e.*, they adopted the policy of conciliation in

their dealing with the hill tribes. This policy helped to keep the hill people at bay and at the same time brought about an atmosphere, conducive for their pursuit in the commercial sector of the agricultural economy.

(Burmese expansion began in 1750. After consolidation of the immediate environs, Upper Burma proper, they expanded westwards to annex the Arakan coasts. Burma expanded westwards into Manipur and then to the Brahmaputra valley. There were corresponding movements towards the coastal Gangetic delta. These developments found parallels in the Sub-Continent, where the British East India Company was able to seize the political initiative and territorial control to establish an empire. Burmese expansion posed a threat. Though Burma had made frequent armed incursions in Manipur in the past, it was only during the first quarter of the nineteenth century that the decisive phase of Burmese territorial expansion was reached and its implications were abundantly clear. Burma brought Manipur under its sphere of influence and latter was able to effectively dominate the eastern half of the Brahmaputra valley by 1823. Simultaneously, Burma occupied the island of Shahpuri—off the delta coast in the East Bengal, now Bangladesh. Its brief occupation of these areas coincided with decimation of the people of the valley and destruction of the valley economy.)

In the meanwhile, the British in India were able to persuade the Jaintia and the Cachar kings for defensive arrangements to meet the increasing Burmese threat in 1824. Subsequently, in 1825, Burmese converged on Cachar. This resulted in the First Anglo-Burmese War. Burma was forced to withdraw from Raha and Kaliabor in the Nagaon sub-region of the valley. This was the western limit of the Burmese expansion in the valley. They were compelled to withdraw from Cachar and Manipur. They capitulated at Rangpur (now in Bangladesh). By the Treaty of Yandabo, 1826, Burma surrendered all its claim over Assam, Manipur, Jaintia, Cachar and Gangetic delta. The British in India subsequently entered into treaty agreements with these powers, but the entire region now lay open to British East India Company's domination and control. As for Assam, particularly the Brahmaputra valley, areas west of Biswanath were incorporated with the Bengal

Province, while areas east of it remained under the nominal control of the Ahoms. These events were followed by the pacification of the Singhpors and Khamphtis. It remained the company's responsibility to guarantee internal security.

A portion of Upper Assam, (excluding Muttock and Sadiya) was constituted into a separate principality and was conferred upon the last Ahom King. In 1834, the British of the Brahmaputra valley was divided into four districts, Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang including Bishwanath and Nagaon Gong. In 1838, due to the incompetence on the last Ahom King, the province under his jurisdiction was annexed and formed the districts of Silpur or Sibsagar, which included the tract south of the old course of Brahmaputra, and Lakhimpur. Again in 1842, Muttock and Sadiya were incorporated into the British territory, and was incorporated to the Lakhimpur district the headquarters of which was transferred to Dibrugarh in the Muttock district. The Colonial territory extended to the districts of Goalpara, Guwahati, Tezpur, Nagaon, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur.

Once the Colonial administration found their footing in the region, it became inevitable for them to be on constant lookout for newer and newer tracts that could be added to their Empire. By 1858, the territorial extent of Assam was bounded on the north-west and north by Burma and the Naga tribes; on the south by Cachar, Manipur, Jaintia and the Khasi hills: and on the west by the British district (Zillah) of Goalpara. It extended from latitude 25° N and from longitude 90°40' to 97°1' E, with an area of 21,805 sq. Miles, and a population at 710,000. Much of the territories that surrounded Assam, *i.e.*, Jaintia, Cachar along with their dependencies, the independent tribal states of the Khasi Hills as well as the other principalities were gradually annexed, on the face of stiff resistance. These were completed within a decade and a half after the Treaty of Yandabo. The first to be incorporated within the administrative set-up was Cachar in 1832, though North Cachar Hills were organised into a separate administrative unit in 1854, after their complete subjection; the Khasi state in 1833, while Jaintia Hills in 1835, and Garo Hills was made into a separate district in 1869, the process to bring them under full control continued till 1873. The Lushais were brought under control during the period 1871–89, and the Lushai Hills was formed

into a district in the year 1898. The annexations of Bhutan Duars, the Sadiya, Balipara frontier tracts, the Naga hills etc. were a long process. Only a part of Naga Hills was annexed in 1866, but the control over the Lotha Nagas was possible only in 1878–80 and the Ao Naga as late as 1889. Thus, it was a fact that the boundaries of the British power in North-East India were in fact always moving in a flux, right up to its last days in India. However, Muttock uprising in 1839 compelled the Colonial power to incorporate the entire Upper Brahmaputra valley in 1839. Correspondingly, Cachar sub-region was annexed between 1832 and 1835. Sadiya Tracts were brought under control in 1842. So that all the territories of the Ahom empire were effectively brought under the purview of the British colonial power.

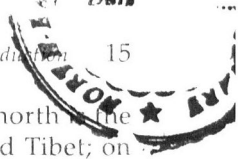
Initially, the Ahom system of administration was adhered to. This was followed by a revenue survey of the valley. This enabled the Colonial administration to assess the resource potentials of the valley and encouraged them to formulate policies that favoured furtherance of their interests in commercial plantations. This was followed by an assessment of land relations. By mid-1830s, the administration promulgated new land policies that were at par with the policies adopted in the rest of the Sub-continent, and ultimately led to the lop sided development of the area (whose impact continued well after Independence). The resultant change had radically transformed the relationships and equations in the valley. It transformed the existing patterns of interactions between various population groups, particularly in their social, cultural, and political transactions. Initially these policies provided little incentives to the inhabitants to participate in the political relations. It is, however, kept them aloof from the economic changes that were gradually introduced in the valley. Spurt in the Colonial economic activities and work of various non-governmental agencies alongwith alphabetisation of the languages and dialects introduced processes that were alien: so that, the state began to exhibit the co-existence of tradition and modernism at the same time. These changes coincided with the large scale movement of population from the Ganga delta and the Chotanagpur sub-regions of the sub-continent who moved into the region as a response to demand for manpower required by

administration and commercial activities. These introduced complexity in a difficult scenario.

Be that as it may, administratively the state was initially included in the Province of Bengal: the Bengal Presidency under a non-regulatory system. In 1874, it was declared as Scheduled District. It was separated from the Bengal Province to form a Chief Commissioner's Province. It consisted of the districts of Goalpara, Garo Hills, Kamrup, Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, Darrang, Nagaon, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar (1875). In 1905, as a result of Curzon's plan for the Partition of Bengal, it was included in the province of East Bengal and Assam. However, with the annulment of the Partition Plan in 1911-12, it was re-designated as the Chief Commissioner's Province. In 1921, it was elevated to a Governors' Province. It, then, consisted of the districts of (a) Goalpara (originally part of the Bengal province), Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Nagaon in the Brahmaputra valley; (b) The Barak-Surma Valley comprising the areas of Sylhet (now in Bangla desh) and Cachar; and (c) the hill areas of Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Naga and Lushai areas along with the areas of Mikir and Barail ranges; administratively, areas of the North-Eastern Frontier Tracts (now Arunachal Pradesh) were brought under the purview of State's Governor.

Independence had brought about a tremendous change in the existing politico-administrative landscape. Partition resulted in the loss of territory whereby the state lost most of its jute producing areas to Pakistan (Bangladesh). Influx of a sizeable number of refugees and dislocation created due to snapping off, of railways, road and water communication with the rest of the country made the situation of the state quite difficult. In addition, the state extended administration to the hill areas. This in a way encouraged the growing feeling of alienation amongst the hill people. Consequently, there began to demand autonomy for their respective territories. This eventually led to administrative re-organisation.

The state of Assam in the post-1947 phase was territorially defined as being located in the North-East border of India and is surrounded on all sides by the other independent states like Bhutan and Tibet (China) in the north-west and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) on the west. It was surrounded by



mountainous ranges at least on three sides, on the north the Himalaya shutting off the tablelands of Bhutan and Tibet; on the North-East is the Patkai range along with a series of other hills which merge with those forming the limits of the independent republic of Burma and part 'C' state of Tripura. It is only on the west where it adjoins West Bengal and Eastern Pakistan that there are no hills. It comprises the whole of the valley of Brahmaputra down to the point where the river emerging on the Bengal delta takes a sudden southwards curve and a portion of the valley of Surma together with the intervening range of hills which forms the watershed between them.

At the time of Partition and Independence in 1947, the Province of Assam minus the district of Sylhet (a referendum was held in Sylhet to decide whether the area was to go to India or Pakistan; it went in favour of Pakistan), an amendment was made to the Assam land revenue regulation in 1947. This amendment re-defined 33 tribal blocks and belts (10 tribal belts and 23 tribal blocks). Subsequently based on this, there were two in the then district of Goalpara, 8 each in Kamrup and Darrang, three in North Lakhimpur and 12 in Nagaon districts. In 1954, Tuensang Frontier Division of the North-Eastern Frontier Tract (re-named as the North-Eastern Frontier Area) was transferred to Assam and became a combined district of the Naga Hills and Tuensang Area.

The post Independence period witnessed a significant change in the relationship between the hills and the Assam valley. Independence led the government to totally abandon the policy of non-interference in the hill regions, due to their strategic location along the borders with China, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and Myanmar. Thus, there were concerted efforts on the part of the state to bring these regions within the mainstream of the country. This resulted in bringing about a growing feeling of alienation among the Hill Units of Assam. In this context, it is fair to state that dissidents normally occurred amongst sections of the population who regarded themselves as being distinctive in language, religion and origin.

Distinct ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity of the hill areas fostered the desire to separate from the composite state

of Assam, to form an autonomous state of their own. Due to their location in a sensitive and strategic region, it was not possible for the state to ignore the aspirations of the people. This ultimately resulted in re-organisation that left Assam, a shadow of her former self. In the process, the first to break away from the threshold of Assam were the inhabitants of the Naga Hills and the Tuensang Frontier Division, which was separated from Assam, to form the state of Nagaland in December, 1963 (it consisted of the entire district of the former Naga Hills of Assam and part of Tuensang, part of NEFA). This served as a catalyst for the other hill tribal areas of Assam to seek their own state. Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh were separated from Assam almost around the same time. Initially, Meghalaya was conferred the status of Autonomous state within the state of Assam on 2nd April, 1970, it became a full-fledged state on January 21st, 1972, comprising of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills with an area of 22,500 sq. km. Since then there had been no changes in the external boundaries of the state.

Mizoram as a Union Territory was separated from Assam on 21st January, 1972, covering the erstwhile Mizo Hills district of Assam, with an area of 21,087 sq. km. The other area was North-East Frontier Agency. In 1972, under the provisions of the North-East Frontier Areas (Re-Organisation) Act (1971) NEFA was declared as a Union Territory and came to be known as Arunachal Pradesh. It became a state in 1987.

The repercussions of all these activities had left a marked impression in the economy of the state of Assam. This may partly account for the slow progress made by the economy particularly agriculture in spite of decades of planned development. From the development administrative point of view, the state has undergone series of changes, from nearly 6 districts in the late 1940s to 10 in the 1970s to 23 in mid-1990s. Today, in 1996, the state of Assam has 23 districts, 45 sub-divisions, 134 Revenue Circles and 131 Community Development Blocks, besides having scores of Panchayats and Anchalik Samities. Table 1 gives the necessary details.

On the basis of the above table, one can infer that:

Table 1: Administrative Divisions—Assam—1995

Districts	Area in sq. km	Sub- Divisions	Revenue Circles	C.D. Blocks
Dhubri	2838.0	3	8	7
Kokrajhar	3498.0	2	5	5
Bongaigaon	2159.0	3	4	5
Goalpara	1910.8	1	5	4
Barpeta	3245.0	2	8	8
Nalbari	2257.0	1	9	7
Kamrup	4345.0	3	14	11
Darrang	4810.0	2	9	6
Sonitpur	5324.0	2	7	7
Lakhimpur	2277.0	2	6	6
Dhemaji	3237.0	2	4	3
Morigaon	1559.2	1	5	4
Nagaon	3973.0	3	9	10
Golaghat	3502.0	2	5	6
Jorhat	2851.0	2	5	6
Sibsagar	2668.0	2	6	6
Dibrugarh	3381.0	1	7	6
Tinsukia	3790.0	3	4	4
Karbi Anglong	10434.0	3	—	10
NC Hills	4888.0	2	—	4
Karimganj	1829.0	1	5	5
Hailakandi	1327.0	1	4	3
Cachar	3786.0	1	5	7

- That 18 plain districts of the state, located largely in the Brahmaputra valley, enclose 71.62 percent or 56,174 sq. km. of the state,
- that the districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, occupying 19.53 percent or 15,322 sq. km., form the Hill and Plateau section of the state; and,
- that the districts of Karimganj, Hailakandi and Cachar occupying 6922 sq. km. or 8.8 percent of the state area, form the Barak valley sub-division of the state.

Within this truncated state itself, the re-organisation of districts—from 5 in 1950s to 10 in 1970s and to 23 in 1990s. Further, because of uneven and lop sided development, inadequate infrastructure facilities and others, several population sub-groups are presently pressing for separate autonomous administrative status. This has brought the spectre of possible re-organisation.

Causes of Rapid Growth of Population

The rapid growth of population in Assam has been due to the following factors *i.e.*, (a) natural increase, (b) immigration from Bangladesh and Nepal and (c) immigration from other states. The difference between the birth rate and the death rate of population in Assam has been consistently high. The birth rate was 46.7 per thousand of population during 1941–51. It increased to 49.3 per thousand during the 1951–61 decade. But the rate came down to 38.5 per thousand during 1961–71. Up to 1925, the death rate in Assam was very high due to epidemics like Kala Azar, cholera, malaria. But it gradually went down. During the 1941–51 decade, the death rate was 31.8 per thousand. During 1971–79, the birth rate came down from 38.5 to 31.0 per thousand population. The death rate, on the hand, went down from 17.8 to 11.3 per thousand population during the same period. Both economic and non-economic factors are responsible for high birth rate. Poverty, illiteracy, religious and social belief, low standard of living high infant mortality, universality of marriage etc., are other factors that have been responsible for this. High illiteracy rate, particularly among women is common, though there has been a marginal improvement in recent years. The death rate has declined due to improvement in medical facilities, control of epidemics, improvements in economic conditions etc.

Density of Population

The density of population of Assam in 1991 was 284 persons per sq. km. as against all India average of 265 persons per sq. km. In fact, Assam had more persons per sq. km. than the national average in 1971 and 1981. Density of population in Assam increased by about 36 percent during 1971–81 compared to 33 percent in the country. Table 2 provides for the variations in the density pattern in Assam and national average between 1901 and 1991. The increase in the density during this period has significantly led to reduction in the man-land ratio among others, in the state. Besides, within the state, there is a marked variation in the density.

Table 2: Decadal Variation of Population 1901–11 to 1981–91
in percentages

	1901–11	1911–21	1921–31	1931–41	1941–51	1951–61	1961–71	1971–81	1981–91
T	16.99	20.48	19.91	20.40	19.93	34.98	34.95	23.36	24.26
R	16.91	20.08	19.70	20.16	18.46	30.87	32.62	21.92	22.56
U	20.55	36.80	27.58	28.30	65.35	26.57	65.01	38.25	39.58

Source: Census of India, 1991.

Rural-Urban Differences

Population in the state is predominantly rural in character. In 1951, 95.35 percent of the total population of the state was rural: of which rural settlements with a population of 2000 accounted for 50 percent of total rural population: followed by 42 percent of the rural population in villages less than 2000 population and remaining in villages more than 2000 population. In 1961 rural population accounted for 92.5 percent of the total population. In 1991, Dhemaji and Nalbari districts of the state had the highest percentage share of rural population. These districts were followed by Darrang, Marigaon, Golaghat, Sibsagar, Karimganj, Barpeta, Goalpara, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Bongaigaon, and Cachar. Rest of the districts had percentage rural population below 90 percent but above 65 percent of the total population.

The percentage of people living in the rural areas in Assam was 91 percent in 1971 as compared to 80.09 percent in the country. In other words, urbanisation has been slow if not stagnant in Assam. The proportion of rural population in the country declined to 76.37 percent in 1981 (as no Census was possible in the state in 1981). The urban population accounted for 10.29 percent of the total population of the state. According to the 1991 Census, the rural population of the state was 88.92 percent as against 74.28 percent in the country.

One can clearly infer from the available Census records and the works of Mills and Hamilton that the population of the state after the Treaty of Yandabo, 1826. The due impetus was given through the establishment of tea and associated ancillary industries with the British capital. From Table 3 it may be observed that the growth of population in Assam has been very rapid. During the period 1901–1981 the population

Table 3: Decadal Variations in Population—Assam, 1901–1991
(in percentage)

Districts	1901–11	1911–21	1921–31	1931–41	1941–51	1951–61	1961–71	1971–91
Dhubri	33.76	11.42	6.05	10.57	15.21	27.62	40.51	56.57
Kokrajhar	16.70	90.75	39.68	26.59	0.50	-46.34	54.30	76.73
Bongai- gaon	29.94	26.94	15.94	20.85	4.00	-60.51	40.19	64.64
Goalpara	27.41	37.07	20.50	7.73	11.33	37.22	45.88	54.12
Barpeta	00.02	34.04	69.02	44.06	18.77	32.62	35.48	43.02
Nalbari	13.33	14.20	27.92	29.28	9.48	49.62	42.02	49.27
Kamrup	11.16	7.06	9.32	14.60	21.87	37.73	38.80	65.72
Darrang	-0.25	11.78	26.00	35.30	24.13	44.75	43.24	55.63
Sonitpur	24.33	40.69	20.50	19.73	24.26	35.82	27.62	57.14
Lakhim- pur	17.30	22.82	25.99	36.98	21.62	50.46	43.39	56.29
Dhemaji	45.30	63.30	16.90	8.41	-3.35	68.56	103.42	107.50
Morigaon	15.50	31.99	41.66	30.87	23.32	37.89	37.51	50.90
Nagaon	15.80	31.94	41.35	10.34	11.41	35.91	38.99	51.26
Golaghat	16.25	20.14	18.29	1.40	19.52	26.04	30.85	58.12
Jorhat	16.32	17.34	8.88	15.12	15.03	15.03	15.03	24.17
Sibsagar	13.41	20.46	14.44	15.64	15.98	23.36	19.47	38.76
Dibru- garh	27.10	38.40	22.34	10.87	26.23	31.35	22.93	37.78
Tinsukia	21.10	28.32	27.00	34.77	11.09	35.92	31.02	33.12
Karbi Anglong	NA	NA	NA	NA	30.96	79.21	68.28	74.72
NC Hills	47.03	5.92	13.60	13.75	6.16	36.95	40.00	98.30
Karim ganj	12.94	3.19	5.91	9.52	29.87	27.96	25.13	142.03
Haila- kandi	16.09	7.59	7.09	10.20	17.48	27.23	23.61	45.94
Cachar	12.33	5.93	7.60	13.00	19.93	34.99	23.92	22.60
ASSAM	16.99	20.48	19.91	20.40	23.96	47.59	34.95	53.26

Source: Census of India, 1991.

in Assam increased by 504.83 percent as against 187.05 percent in the country. The decadal variation in Assam during the period 1911–1951 was on an average 19.4 percent. In the subsequent decades from 1951–1971, the percentage increase in population was 34.97. As the state did not have Census in 1981, the projected growth rate of population in Assam during 1971–1981 was 36.05 percent as against the country's population growth at 25.0 percent. Among all the states, the highest increase in population between 1901–1981 was in Assam. The subsequent Census 1981–91 saw the growth rate

at 26.63 percent which was much higher than the national average. Significantly, this growth rate of 53.26 percent for the period 1971–91 for Assam after the re-organisation of the states in the North-East India. It is estimated that Assam will have 305 lakh population by March 2001, registering cumulative annual growth rate of 2.2 percent between 1981 and 2001 against 1.8 percent for the country in the same period.

Growth trend of population in the state, is not uniform. In the Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills districts (First Census started in 1951), the growth rate was high. During 1951–1971, the growth of population in these two districts was 62.79 percent and 74.72 percent, as against the state's growth rate of 34.95 percent and 26.63 percent in the same period. In Goalpara district, it was 44.22 percent and 54.12 percent, which was higher than that in any other plain districts of Assam. However, the highest growth rate was in the district of Kokrajhar with 76.78 percent for the 1971–91 period with Sibsagar district having the lowest growth rate of 16.55 percent in 1971–91 period.

In other words, in 1901, Assam had 3.29 million persons, as against 238.4 million persons in the country. In 1991, the total population of Assam went up to 22.30 million as against 844.32 million in the country. The percentage variation of population between 1901 and 1991 in Assam was 577.7 percent as against 254.2 percent in the country. The percentage variation of population in Assam and India between 1901 and 1981 was 504.83 percent and 187.05 percent respectively. The growth of population in Assam during the 1981–91 decade was 23.63 percent as against all India average of 23.50 percent.

Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe Population

There are 16 scheduled castes and 23 scheduled tribes consisting 6.24 percent and 10.99 percent respectively of the total population of the state. The Namasudras and Kaibartas are the major scheduled casts. The major tribes are the Bodos (6.1 million), Kacharis including Sonowals (0.2 million) and Dimasas (0.04 million). According to the 1991 Census, total Scheduled Caste population in the state was 1,659,412 persons (of which 1,430,131 were males); the total Scheduled

Tribes population was 2,574,441 persons (of which 1,777,308 were males).

In other words, 1991 Census identified 7.26 percent and 13.32 percent of the total population of the state as to belong to the Schedule Caste and schedule Tribes categories. Nagaon with 11.43 percent and N.C. Hills with 0.24 percent had the highest and lowest population of Schedule Caste population in the state. While Kokrajhar with 11.46 percent and Cachar with 0.02 percent had the highest and lowest schedule Tribe populations in the state.

Age Structure and Sex Ratio

The age structure determines the proportion of the labour force in the total population. The age structure is often studied by classifying the population into dependent children (below 15 years), economically active population (between 15–59 years) and aged dependants (60 years and above). The population in the age group of 15–59 can contribute to productive efforts of the community. According to the 1971 census, the proportion of dependent children was 46.95 percent and economically active population was 48.34 percent. The proportion of child population was higher than the all India average of 42 percent. In other words, Assam's population is characterised by the predominance of young people.

Occupational Structure

Like any developing economy, the occupational structure in Assam is more tilted towards agricultural and agro-allied activities. In the 1991 Census, divided into the population into two categories, viz., workers and non-workers, and placed them as belonging to workers of economic activity, viz., Primary sector, Secondary sector and Tertiary sector. The primary sector comprises of the industrial categories from 1 to 3, the secondary sector of 4 and 5 and the tertiary sector of 6 to 9. The percentage of population in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors was 76.69, 4.50 and 18.81 respectively. In Assam 76.69 percentage of population was dependent on agriculture and allied activities against 72.05 percent in the country. Even

within the region, Manipur has only 71.28 percent population dependent on the primary sector. In the 1991 census, population was classified into total population, Main workers and marginal workers. The main workers were again divided into (a) cultivator, (b) agricultural labourers, (c) household industry, manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs; and (d) other workers. As per this economic classification, the percentage of main workers to the total population in Table 4.

47.55 percent of the total population of the state is main workers and 2.77 percent is the marginal workers. Out of the main workers, 51.20 percent is the cultivators, 12.72 percent is agricultural labourers, 1.91 percent workers are engaged in household industry, manufacturing, processing, servicing and repair, and 34.18 percent is the other workers. The percentage of cultivators and agricultural labourer together is 63.92.

Literacy

The literacy rate in Assam was 27.9 percent in 1961. It increased to 28.1 percent in 1971. This rate in literacy in Assam is not significant when compared to rise in all India literacy

Table 4: Composition of Workers—Assam, 1991

Kamrup	613340	398674	581362	361768	32038	25906
Darrang	59748	539579	420891	396692	138857	138087
Sonitpur	614362	582223	490532	458567	124030	123656
Lakhimpur	353090	337733	265394	250472	87696	87261
Dhemaji	214816	270037	177629	174115	37187	35922
Morigaon	210022	198493	187673	176521	22349	21972
Nagaon	641133	582640	564911	508140	76222	74500
Golaghat	327254	310646	287415	271445	39839	39201
Jorhat	306852	263795	279732	237679	27120	25616
Sibsagar	371061	319617	331402	310421	39659	38196
Dibrugarh	413315	357467	370877	316727	42438	40740
Tinsukia	396073	343317	355062	304615	41011	38702
Karbi Anglong	280786	257878	250521	236600	22210	21278
N.C. Hills	56791	46197	55754	45484	1097	713
Karimganj	247086	230158	222708	206234	24378	23924
Hailakandi	180876	150844	128499	119346	32427	31698
Cachar	437283	402324	350989	317224	86294	85090
ASSAM	8108785	7334414	7068363	6316357	1040422	1018057

Source: Census of India, 1991.

rate from 24.0 percent in 1961 to 29.5 percent in 1971 and 53.42 percent in 1971–81 period. The important feature of the literacy rate is the considerable improvement in female literacy. The female literacy increased from 15.1 percent in 1961 to 18.6 percent in 1971 to 339.42 percent in 1971–91 period. The corresponding figure for male literacy was 37.3 percent in 1961, which went down to 36.7 percent in 1971 to 63.86 percent in 1971–91 period. Sibsagar had the highest percentage of literacy (36.6%) and Karbi Anglong the lowest percent (19.2) in the state. In terms of literacy Assam ranks twelfth in the country.

Language

Retracing earlier arguments in this section, it can be said that the language diversity both at broader state level and specifically at micro-level had resulted in ethnic consciousness. Consequent efforts have been directed towards sustained linguistic and/or ethnic identification. The resultant ethnic fragmentation at all levels carried with it the potential for conflict that has been, in cases, turned into an actuality. The population in the state can be classified on the basis of their degree of ethnic heterogeneity. There are two major groups of languages in the state, Assamese and Bengali. In addition, there are eight more languages that are spoken by more than one percent each of the population of the state.

Agriculture

The state of agriculture, at the time of British annexation of the region, has been aptly described by Mills (1853). It was part of the overall assessment of resources and possibilities of their exploitation. These assessments considered the valley to be singularly preoccupied with agriculture; improvements in agriculture was the only means through which resources could be effectively channelled, ameliorate the conditions of the people, advance manufactures and commerce etc. The soils of Assam is favourable for the productions both of the tropical and temperate regions. Silk, cotton, tea and variety of other valuable, products grew luxuriantly and it required only the

introduction of an improved method of agriculture to render the produce ten-fold more. The implements used for agricultural purpose were primitive and of simplest kind. The people were ignorant of the growth of a variety of produce of commerce which, would even without the aid of human labour grow spontaneously in the forest of Assam. The means of irrigation and drainage were seldom resorted to. Generally no attempts were made to create embankments, or devise means for the protection of the lands from the encroachments of floods and other accidents.

The consequence is drought or inundation often entirely destroyed the crops. It also reduced the population to wretchedness and misery. The crude state of agriculture prevented the farmers raising more than one crop throughout the year. It was evident that there was ample scope, where intervention on the part of the Colonial Government might have encouraged development of traditional agriculture on modern lines. However, the overriding concern of the British was to establish a commercial agricultural economy, from where they would derive maximum economic benefits. With the discovery of suitable adaptation of tea cultivation in areas that were partially suitable for rice cultivation in the state, an altogether a different approach was adopted towards the then existing agriculture. The Colonial objective of maximisation of economic gain and to feed the manufacturing industries in England. The British policies towards agricultural development were entirely limited to tea and such crops where the expected dividends were the highest; therefore, the growth of the tea plantations, commercialisation of such crops as jute, tobacco, opium, diversification of agriculture, received special impetus. Consequent upon such policies, the acreage and production of cash crops increased several folds. The spectacular growth of Tea Plantation and increase in jute cultivation, became the landmark. Owing to shortages of local labour these activities were largely carried out through immigrant labour.

It could be ascertained from the available literature that out of the total cropped area in 1901, rice cultivation which occupied 71 percent, this subsequently increased marginally to 72 percent, an absolute increase of 2.3 times. The area under rape and mustard seeds registered a significant increase, from

0.16 million acres in 1901 to 0.29 million acres in 1946. The area under tea cultivation showed a gradual increase till 1936–37 and remained stagnant till 1947. This was largely attributed to the fact that tea cultivation was dependent on international markets and was a highly organised industry requiring specialised skill that did not allow the internal economic forces to affect its growth. On the other hand, during the first half of the twentieth century, there was a remarkable increase in the acreage under jute from 5000 acres in 1901 to 0.29 million acres in 1939–40. Jute came to be treated as a commercial cash crop. This enabled the Colonial power to dominate the global trade. However, area under jute declined to 0.18 million acres in 1946–47.

Assam is predominantly an agricultural state with major emphasis on Kharif food grains production. Around 65 per cent of the labour force is engaged in this sector. The average per capita food grains production in Assam during the triennial ended 1990–91 was 135 kg, as against all India average of 205 kg. Assam is deficient in food grains. Among food grains, rice is the only major crop grown in the state. Of the total food grains production in the state, rice alone accounted for 94 per cent. But the average per hectare production of rice in Assam is much below the all India average. The area under rice cultivation in 1980–81 was 2275 hectares. In 1990–91, it has gone up to 2491 ha, showing an increase of 9.5 per cent area under rice cultivation. The compound annual rate of increase between the triennial ended 1980–81 and 1990–91 was 0.8 per cent. Though the total area under food grains has increased from 2558.1 ha in 1986–87 to 2719 ha in 1990–91, there has been fall in the area under wheat, grain tur and other pulses, and mustard, jute and mesta and sugar cane during 1986–87 to 1990–91. There has been some increase in the area under potatoes and bananas.

These developments exerted their cost in the form of neglect of the traditional sector. The mode of production in the traditional sector continued to be dominated by traditional crops and seeds, outmoded techniques, while the use of fertiliser or irrigation remained practically non-existent. Thus agricultural development was uneven, while the Colonial power

devoted their efforts towards the expansion and development of the plantation sector.

Agriculture contributes more than 50 percent of the State Domestic Product (SDP). The share of agriculture was 57.6 percent in the total SDP in Assam in 1970–71 at current prices. This has declined to 42.6 percent in 1984–85 at current prices and 48 percent at 1970–71 prices. In 1985–86, its share was 50.7 percent and 50.4 percent in 1990–91 at 1970–71 prices. This suggested an essentially agrarian character of the economy and as a consequence the underdeveloped character of Assam's economy. There has not been any significant increase in the gross sown area in the state since 1947. Neither was it proportionate to the growth of the population nor was it adequate to meet the requirements of industrial development of the state. As a result, the state became a net importer of the food grains. Besides, (i) rapid increase in and growth of the size of labour force; (ii) increasing pressure on land; and, (iii) increasing demand for raw materials to sustain developmental activities, relentlessly put pressure on agriculture. Yet, Assam contributed about 50 percent of the total tea production in the country. Its share in the foreign exchange earnings from this head is about 60 percent. Jute is another important commercial crop that contributed substantially to the revenue of the state. In spite of this, agriculture continues to stagnate.

Cropping Pattern

Growth in agriculture is largely determined by the area available for cultivation. This is limited by the availability of land extended through reclamation (and to an extent from deforestation. It is to be noted that the state is covered by hills, rivers, beels, and other low lying water logged area and sandy riverine islands making the extension of cultivation difficult). However, the land use changes have played moderating role. Temporal changes in the cropping patterns are reflected by changing land use pattern.

By turn of the present century, 90 percent of the total cultivated land of the then Assam province, was under food grains with the remaining area under non-food grain crops. This situation drastically changed with the Partition and

Independence; so that by 1958–59, area under food grain crops declined to 84 percent. Of the area under food grains, rice occupied 64.8 percent, and was followed by tea with 6.2 percent, rape and mustard with 5 percent, jute with 3.7 percent, sugar cane with 1 percent and other crops with 19 percent. By 1980–81, area under food grains declined to approximately 82 percent with rice occupying an area of 75.9 percent, wheat with 3.4 percent, pulses with 3.8 percent and total non-food grain crops with 15.8 percent of the area under cultivation. This situation in 1990–91 was approximately placed at 80 percent, with rice occupying an area of 76 percent, wheat with 2.5 percent, pulses with 3.4 percent and total non-food grain crops with 16.5 percent. However, by 1994–95, area under food grains was about 83 percent with rice at 76.1 percent, wheat with 2.5 percent, pulses with 3.2 percent and non-foodgrains with 16.5 percent of the area available for cultivation. Correspondingly, during this period, total food grain production rose from 1.7 MT in 1960–61 to 2.3 MT in 1970–71, to 2.7 MT in 1980–81, to 3.44 MT in 1990–91, to 3.53 MT in 1993–94 and to 3.49 MT in 1994–95. This increase has been partially due to the introduction of HYV of seeds in the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. In particular, area under HYV of paddy increased from 0.29 Mha in 1975–76 to 1.15 Mha in 1993–94. Following tables indicate the trend in the cropping pattern from 1980–81 to 1992–93 in the state. They suggest that during this period, the rate of growth has been slow in area, production and productivity of five major food grain crops in the State.

The total cropped area of the state was 2.8 Mha in 1970–71. This has increased to 3.8 Mha in 1985–86 (constituting 42% of the total geographical area of the state). This is against the all India figure of 50 percent cropped area. Of the total cropped area, 75 percent area is under food crops and 25 percent under non-food crops. Rice, maize, wheat, small millets and other cereals are important cereal crops. Gram, tur, and other pulses are under pulses, rape and mustard, linseed and castor are in oil seed category. Besides, there are sugar cane and potato. Other important crops are tobacco, sweet potato, and chillies.

Causes of Low Productivity

There are a number of factors, which are responsible for the low productivity of agriculture in Assam. They can be grouped under general, institutional, and natural factors. General factors are mainly the social environment and the pressure of population. These can be identified as

- a) Social Environment
- b) Population Pressure
- c) Institutional Factors
 - i) Land Tenure System
 - ii) Size of Land Holding
 - iii) Share Cropping
 - iv) Credit Facilities
 - v) Technological Factors
 - vi) Livestock and Animal Husbandry

Assam has a large livestock population but the quality is very poor. The cattle in the State are small in size. The number of cattle per acre of cultivated area is highest in Assam of all states in India. The contribution of State income from the animal husbandry sector is only 4 percent as against 7 percent for all India. The number of livestock and poultry and their products in the State are shown below State and Agriculture.

During the last more than four decades, there has been an expansion in the Department and also in its activities. These include agricultural education, research and extension. The Assam Agricultural College was set up in 1948. In 1969, the Assam Agricultural University was set up. Besides, a number of Gram Sevak Training Centres at Kahikuchi (Guwahati), Arunachal (Silchar) and Jorhat, a Krishi Vikas at Tezpur, the Gossaigoan Kishan Vidyapith, the second Agricultural College was set up at Biswanath Chariali in 1986-87. In the field of agricultural extension a number of agricultural extension programs beginning under the National Extension Service and Community Development Program have been taken up. Since April, 1985, the National Agricultural Extension Project III has been introduced. Besides, a number of ancillary institutions have been developed, viz., Assam Seed Corporation, (1969), Assam Agro-Industries Development Corporation (1967),

Assam State Seed Agency (1985), Assam State Agricultural Produce Marketing Board (1977–78), Assam State Minor Irrigation Development Corporation, Assam Plantation Crop Development Corporation and the Agricultural Farming Corporation (1970). Distribution of agricultural inputs is being done by the Department of Agriculture, Assam Seed Corporation and the Assam Agro-Industries Development Corporation Besides, the STAFED has also been introduced in distribution of seeds, fertilisers etc. The Department of Agriculture introduced the high yielding variety of paddy in the state in 1965–66. A special rice production program was introduced in 1985–86. Project Assistance of Small and Marginal Farmers for agricultural production and the National Oil Seed Development Project etc., are being implemented by the Department. The Department has also set up 58 Agro Service Centres in the state.

Recent Development

Agriculture is the main stay of the state's economy. However, it suffers from a number of inhibiting factors. The method of cultivation is still traditional and in the hill areas, shifting cultivation continues. Productivity of agriculture is one of the lowest in the country. The use of fertilisers and consumption of electricity are very low. Mechanisation have not been carried on due to many and varied factors. The flood problem continues to create havoc to agriculture. Irrigation facilities have not developed to provide regular and assured water supply for agriculture. In order to develop agriculture, these factors have to be tackled properly. The flood problem calls for a long-term solution. Likewise there is a need for curbing fragmentation and sub-division of holdings by taking suitable measures, so that mechanisation can be introduced. The use of improved inputs, manures, fertilisers, seeds, etc., depends upon the farmer's education. There is always a resistance to new things. The resistance can be overcome by persuasion, education and motivation of the farmers. In this respect the agricultural extension agents have a big role to play. All these will help in the development of agriculture in the state.

Assam is rich in raw materials. These can be advantageously used for encouraging industrial development. As of

today, its industrial economy is unintegrated. Resources remain under utilised. In fact, industrial development of the state is handicapped by its isolation from the rest of the country, inadequate infrastructure and a small local market. The traditional cottage industries employ, outdated and cost intensive technology. These are compounded by insufficient capital and lack of skilled labour. There are less than 100 persons per lakh of population, supported by industrial activities in every thousand square kilometer area of the state. The state has, on an average, only 2 percent of India's total registered factories in comparison to 22 percent in West Bengal and 16 percent in Maharashtra in the period 1960 to 1990.

Assam received strong stimuli from the plantation sector for the development of tea, coal, petroleum and ancillary industrial units from 1850s onwards. Since then only oil and tea industries have made significant advances. The present position of the state's industrial economy is conspicuous by notable absence of specialised units operating with the latest processes and technology. These are interspersed with the declining traditional cottage industries employing antiquated methods and techniques of production. No commensurate development of industries with diversified economic-production base has taken place to fill the gap. Though initial efforts in planned development saw emergence of public and private sector, their contribution has been in fits and starts. This effort was seriously handicapped by events of 1962, 1965 and early 1980s (this coupled with natural calamities like annual recurring floods, etc., inhibited the industrial development). Since then, socio-political developments, such as administrative re-organisations, problems of the immigrants have in more than one way contributed in retarding the industrial/economic development of the state. Thus, considering the potential of resources—human, agriculture and natural resources, for industrial development of the state only a fraction of the potential has been exploited so far. Except for tea and oil and associated ancillary and secondary servicing units, industrial activity in the true sense of the term in Assam has not taken off properly. The efforts to develop the down stream industries with Bongaigaon as the core and the establishment

of industrial estates in the various districts, are initiatives in this direction.

Floods

Floods have occurred regularly in this century. According to data available from the Central Water Commission (CWC) from 1953 to 1984, an average of 0.8 Mha were affected by floods annually. The maximum area affected was 3.15 Mha in 1954. The maximum population affected was 5.68 million in 1984. The maximum damage in a year Rs. 561.8 million occurred in 1983 whereas the average annual damage was approximately Rs. 139 million. These are suggestive of the fact that the incidence of floods are increasing. The existing trend also indicates that the area affected by floods during the 1980s was higher than in any of the previous decades for which data is available. The 1988 flood affected 4.22 Mha well over the maximum of 3.15 Mha in 1954. The largest number of people ever affected was also in 1988, 12.68 million. The number of people affected per hectare of flood affected area and the amount of damages per hectare of flood affected area have been rising steadily. This has undermined the efforts that were directed to improve agriculture.

Flood situation in the state from 1987 onwards began to come in several waves. The annual feature was characterised by the first wave sometimes in the month of May that swamped on an about 16 districts affecting 1.5 million people. The second in June affected 2.4 million people spread over 17 districts. A third wave affected four districts in July. The fourth in August, the most severe swamped 17 districts. A total of 3.82 Mha and 8.41 million people were affected by the fourth wave alone. Some districts like Nagaon and parts of Karbi Anglong even experienced a fifth wave. The damage to crops, from 1987 onwards averaged Rs. 3340 million annually. This was besides the damages caused to property, human lives and disruption of transport linkages and networks. Besides, the scale and intensity of floods in normal years, affected about 2,000 villages in the state. But from 1987 onwards this increased to 7,290 and in 1988, it was 8,770. And, when one considers the Census figures of the total number of villages in Assam at

21,995, nearly 40 percent of the total villages were subjected to the impact of the floods from 1987 onwards.

Population of the state, particularly in the Brahmaputra Barak plains has been growing rapidly. This has shown an increase from 3.29 million in 1901 to 22.29 million in 1991. This rapid growth encouraged encroachment of riverine areas. As a result, natural backwaters have been constricted. Along with other factors, these have increased sedimentation. In normal circumstances, abandoned channels and horseshoe lakes absorbed the initial impact of floods. Their reclamation for human occupancy have led to far reaching impact on flood management in the state. This has increased the frequency of floods and that too with greater intensity; thereby, some 253 villages and 8,091 hectares of land in Assam were annually affected by erosion by the Brahmaputra.

Reclamation of the spill over areas, *i.e.*, of bils and other natural backwaters, had disastrous impact on the agricultural profile of the state. Several of these natural spillways existed in Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Kamrup and Goalpara. Their ecological role in maintaining the balance favourable for continuous agricultural activity is only now being appreciated. The fact that the bils and depressions predominate the flood plains is an indication of their role in maintaining the hydrological balance of the river. Besides, pronounced Jhum cultivation in the hill sections devastated vast areas south of the Brahmaputra. Its' consequence (the northern tributaries of the Brahmaputra which bring more silt and floods), is now attributed as one of the encouraging factors for increasing incidence of floods in the plains.

In view of these developments, scholars have initiated studies to identify alternative land use patterns. This included the need to evolve a strategy to modify the cropping system in such a way as to overcome the impact of floods. The initial generalisations indicated the need for restructuring the cropping pattern to cope with floods. Except for chronically affected areas, all areas can be brought under appropriate land use. The high flood season coincides with main crop of Assam the *Sali* paddy from June to November. Usually 75 percent of the flood damage is to crops. The *Sali* crop occupies more than 75 percent of the total cropped area. While early floods in the

first week of June destroy the standing *Ahu* paddy and jute crops, floods occurring in late August or early September leave practically no time for replanting of rice seedlings. Appropriate planning that incorporates mid-flood season corrections in its mechanism can go a long way in remedy in this situation. Farmers usually face a shortage of seeds and seedlings to start fresh planting after the flood water recedes. The efforts could include a better mechanism to supply the appropriate seeds and seedlings immediately after the flood is over. This is over and above the fact that as extensive damages to the *Sali* paddy is by recurrent waves of floods, there is an immediate need to shift the emphasis from *kharif* to *rabi* crops and introduce multiple cropping in as many areas as possible. Restructuring of the cropping pattern is possible through the introduction of wheat, mustard, potato, lentil, summer mung. One commentator on the impact of floods in the state, arguing for the need for restructuring the cropping pattern in the state suggested following scheme.

Industrial Development

The availability of substantial deposits of natural resources like the alluvial plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, petroleum and natural gas, forests, coal, limestone etc., were adequate for providing a base for industrialisation, particularly for developing agro-based industries, petro-chemical complexes, gas-based units, etc., that could have at first served the requirements of the local-regional sections. Yet, the state reflects a scenario of economic backwardness-stagnation in agriculture and in industry today. This situation can be traced back the historical trends that in more than one way re-oriented the state's politico-economic perspective.

The pre-Colonial period was characterised by an agrarian economy, dominated by rice-culture. The state, as the core of the Ahom empire, was more or less self-sufficient and generated adequate surplus with which it was able to maintain its separate political status and trade. However, struggles for succession, regional power rivalry, the consequent expansion—devastation of the economy, and decimation of the population by the expanding Burmese power, completely transformed the

regional scenario. The post-1826 period saw colonial consolidation of the area. It first restored the landscape and then introduced changes in the land use to meet the requirements of the colonial commercial and economic priorities. Two notable trends can be identified that influenced the transformation: These were: (i) the foundation of the economy, based on global economic process and trends, *i.e.*, introduction of plantation agriculture (Tea), economy and development of subsidiary ancillary industries to support the plantation. These were encouraged with a commercial and industrial bias, and, (ii) The initiation of processes that introduced the conversion of region to a primary product(s) producers/exporters, cultivating raw material requirements of the Colonial power.

The Colonial interest in the state was to ensure a sound raw material base on which the modern economy can function without any disruption of the source of supply. Typical to the exploitative character of the Metropolitan power, they were quick to seize the advantages of the ground conditions that afforded possibilities for tremendous commercial and economic gains. The outcome was the promotion of tea industry, jute cultivation on commercial basis, processing of crude oil and forest/wood products. The necessary prerequisite for such activities lay in the strengthening of the transport and communication linkages and network of economically viable regions of the state with the adjacent areas of the Ganga Delta. This introduced a trans-regional orientation and brought about a change. The latter were in terms of network of road and waterways, establishment of railways and introduction of postal and communication services on modern lines, all catering to the Colonial perspective of the economy.

Industrialisation in Assam is closely related with the development of tea plantation. Successful tea cultivation in Assam was realised in early 1830s. It began to flourish by 1859, when the Assam accompany with an area of 4,000 acres, produced about 0.17 million kg of tea annually. Area under tea expanded, so that by 1872, 27,000 acres was brought under tea plantations in the state. These plantation produced 1.33 million kg annually. This industry was promoted by the State, which provided many incentives, such as, easy availability of waste land for tea cultivation, labour, enhancement of land

revenue of other categories of land and grant of revenue free waste land for tea plantation, etc. These measures failed to elicit response from the local farmers. The problem of labour for plantation were overcome by import from other areas of the Sub-Continent. Petroleum is the single most important mineral resource. It has ample scope for encouraging industrialisation of the state. It was the Colonial power who initiated the processes of exploitation and processing and refining oil in Assam. Trial boring started in 1889. The Assam Oil Company was formed in 1899, and the Digboi Refinery was set up in 1901. The third major industry is the plywood industry. Like the Tea and the Petroleum, this was set up in 1918 with the setting up of the Assam Saw Mill and Timber Company and Assam Railway and Trading Company at Margherita in 1924.

It was during the early 1970s, that efforts were made to develop the down stream (Lower Brahmaputra overlay) industries with Bongaigaon as the focus. Assam has two well developed modern industries, viz. Tea and Oil. Besides, there are plywood units, Jute and sugar mills, the cement factory, the match factory etc. However, the number of medium and large-scale industries is not very large. As on 1990, there are only 88 large and medium scale industries in the State. Out of these 12 industries are in the central sector, 14 are in the estate sector and the rest are in the private sector. Since 1985–86 a number of new industrial units have come up. So that by 1993, there were 2402 registered factories. these can be grouped under following categories:

1. Agro-based industry: Tea industry, Food processing industry, Sugar industry and Textile.
2. Mineral-based industry: Metallic industry, Non-metallic industry, and Chemical industry.
3. Forest-based industry and
4. Miscellaneous

Regional Distribution

The industrial establishments in Assam are heavily concentrated in the district of Lakhimpur. Nearly 40 percent of the total industrial output of Assam comes from this district. More than 60 of every thousand of the population work in factories

in this district compared to only seven out of every 1000 persons in the State as a whole. Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Diboi, Makum, Marghariota, Namrup, Naharkatia,, are the important industrial towns located in a long belt by the side of the railway line. Doom Dooma and Moran are important centres of tea industry. With further development of oil and gas at Naharkatia, Duliajan and Moran, industrial activity in the region has the potential to grow further.

Sibsagar district has a rich tea industry. There were 253 gardens out of Assam's total of 746 gardens in 1962. Most of the gardens are located along the railway line from Barapathar to Namrup. The only sugar mill of Assam is located at Dergaon. Jorhat, Golaghat, Sibsagar, Mariani and Titabar are the important centres of industry. Mariani is developing a large plywood factory. Darrang district has no other industry except tea. It contains 97 gardens and these employ more than 95 percent of the factory labour in the district. A number of grain mills, mostly rice mills, have come up along the railway line from Khairabari to Rangapara. Tezpur with its relatively better facility of transport is the centre of agglomeration of industrial development in the district. Kamrup district is mainly an agricultural region. Tea industry is not very important in this district, only 15 tea gardens are located here.

Kamrup district is very well developed in agricultural processing and small-scale metal-based industries. Hajo and Sarthebari are the traditional centres of the bell-metal industry. Barpeta manufactures attractive ivory products. Nalbari is an important centre for the manufacture of Jhapi, a kind of hat made from bamboo and palm leaves. The district contains a large number of rice and oil mills, all located along the railway line. Other factories are largely concentrated in and around Guwahati, which has a unique location with regard to facilities by way of roads, railways, waterways and airways. With the establishment of the Industrial Estate, a large number of modern-sized industries have come up here. The location of the refinery at Noonmati has also generated a boom of industrial growth in the suburbs of the city, and as a result a large number of industrial units producing different types of utility goods have sprung up recently.

Nagaon district also contains a number of tea gardens and is rich in agriculture. So tea manufacturing and processing of agricultural products are two predominant industries absorbing four fifths of the industrial population. The Spun Silk Mill organised by the State Government is located at Jagiroad in this district. The proposed jute mill will also be located at Silghat on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. Hojai, Lanka and Jamunamukh are noted for their rice-mills. Cachar district in the Barak valley is another region of a big concentration of the tea industry contains 114 gardens.

According to the economic data available on the state for the period 1990–94, one can identify five districts in the category of the developed region; these comprise the districts of the Kamrup, Nagaon, Morigaon, Karimganj and Barpeta (4 in the Brahmaputra valley and one in the Barak valley). In the Brahmaputra valley, the developed districts form a compact area with more or less similar geomorphologically characteristics. Several factors are responsible for these districts to reach this position. In the region, modernisation of industries have played a key role for the area's development. Kamrup and Nagoan and Morigaon districts, in comparison to other districts in the state are industrially developed. The industrial activities are concentrated in major towns and cities. It has simultaneously led to high urbanisation, particularly after 1951.

Besides, city located in this area contributed a lion's share in the processes of development through industrialisation, accessibility, etc. This area has developed in agricultural sector. Barpeta and Nagapon have high cropping intensity and are dominant rice and jute producers in the state. They also have a high density of livestock and poultry population per km and high occupation in agriculture (persons per hectare of area sown). Besides, the area has comparatively better accessibility with other parts of the country. It has favourably developed infrastructural facilities, services, facilities and other socio-cultural amenities. Karimganj district in the Barak Valley has several factors that separate it from the rest in that part of the state. Being categorised as one of the developed areas of the state, it ranks second in the agricultural sector in the state. It has high cropping intensity (3rd in the state), high density of livestock and poultry population (2nd rank) and

high percentage of utilisation of irrigation potential. In infrastructure, the district is well-developed (4th in the state). The areas with moderate level of development, is found in twelve districts that form four compact zones. These are found scattered in both the valleys: as in the southern upper Brahmaputra valley that includes the districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Sonitpur and Darrang. The Nalbari district constitutes another zone in the lower part of the Brahmaputra valley in the north Bank, while Goalpara, Bongaogaon and Dhubri districts in lower most part of the valley forms another micro-region of moderately developed region. Cachar and Hailakandi districts in the Barak valley also show such a level of development.

In Upper Assam, the moderately developed areas are characterised by oil-tea based industrial economy. This development has led to greater urbanisation; consequently have encouraged a comparatively more favourable infrastructural facilities. This zone has a high literacy rate than other districts in the valley (Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh Districts rank first, third, fourth—in literacy rate in the state). However, it has been observed that this development in the middle and lower part of the Brahmaputra valley in the northern bank is attributed mainly to the dominant agricultural activity. These are obvious inferences one can draw from the fact that Darrang and Nalbari districts maintain their primacy (first and second position) in cropping intensity and (second and first) net area sown. Besides, Nalbari district tops in the density of livestock and poultry population per km in the state. These observations are also reinforced by the fact that this zone has a high road lengths per 100 km of area (Nalbari tops the rank in the state). The area is fairly well-developed in the basic infrastructural amenities. Goalpara, Bongaigaon and Dhubri Districts in the lower part of the Brahmaputra valley and the Cachar and Hailakandi districts in the Barak valley fall under this level of development and are characterised by dominant agricultural economy.

The districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji in the northern bank and Golaghat in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra valley come in the category of under-developed region. This zone is much behind other districts in agricultural, industrial

activities and in infrastructural facilities. This can be partially explained by the fact that substantial area in these districts are more susceptible to incidence of floods and are also characterised by numerous turbulent tributaries like Subansiri in the right bank. Since the great earthquake of 1950, this region has been experiencing floods of varying intensities and of several waves. Such instances cause far-reaching consequences on the process of development in the state.

The two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills and Kokrajhar district in the lowermost part of the Brahmaputra valley form the backward area of the state. The hilly topography in addition to others of the region has altered the very process of desired level of development in agriculture, industry, infrastructure and others. On the other hand, the lack of industries, infrastructural and agriculture facilities have been the pivot factors for low development in the Kokrajhar district in the midst of substantially high density of population are indicators of factors that have entirely different implications. Suffice it to say here that this state of the zone's economy has enhanced the levels of alienation.

Assam is industrially backward in spite of its vast potential resource endowment. Even after about five decades of economic planning appreciable change in the industrial scenario have not occurred. Some positive signs have, however, been noticed in recent years. The industrial backwardness of Assam is due to a number of factors, which have been discussed in some details in appropriate places. Similar factors hampered many other states of the country at the time of Independence. But they have already overcome the difficulties and have progressed industrially. In Assam those factors still continue to play a dominant role in discouraging industrial development.

Problems of Further Administrative Re-organisation

The state reflected a complicated human landscape that had superimposition of traditions; backgrounds, priorities and interests. Because of its location and a long history of stability, the state of the Brahmaputra, Cachar Plains, Karbi Plateau complex, dominated the regional activities. It had the favour-

able geographical base to absorb many of the modernisation tendencies that emanated from its immediate boundaries. It enabled the territorially based traditional bureaucracy and elite pressure groups to continuously retain their hold on regional activity. Consolidation, change and commercialisation of activities influenced the power and position vis-à-vis other population groups and sub-groups. These were significantly transformed by monetarisation of the economy and spread of welfare measures including the development of language(s). This was followed by the emergence of distinct vocal sections among the native population, who through various organisation and cultural fora were able to restore the primacy of their culture (agitation to relocate the position of the Assamese in the 1860s and 1970s). This success increased their participation and representation; thereby, apart from the immigrant population, becoming the primary vehicle of socio-political transformation of the region.

On the other-hand, location of other population elements enforced isolation with activities of change dominated by the administrators and missionaries. These weak peripheries were characterised by general economic backwardness largely dominated by widespread shifting cultivation (along with its corresponding impact on structure and organisation), and poor communication facilities. As a result, their participation was confined to specific territories and subgroups with minimal interaction with others but more with the administrators. This enabled a separate perception to emerge among the different population groups and subgroups in the region—between the plains and the hill inhabitants, as also within the plains and hill inhabitants. Pre-1970, an agrarian economy was self-sustaining. These were developments indicating only the merger of interests but did not suggest the assimilation of identities. The latter surfaced with the widening of the cleavages and differences between the components of the population both in terms of participation and representation.

Disparities in resources were followed by inequalities in development of the state as a whole (within and outside). This coupled with the exposure to the process of change and impact of welfare measures activated the dormant divisive tendencies. The major population constituents like the Bodos, Karbis, etc.,

linked cultural identity with economic development and initiated socio-political movements towards attaining autonomy and control in the decision-making processes. So that, in the state, the competition and confrontation of divergent interests were focussed around the majority group, the immigrant group and the minority groups, spread over across the east-west direction in the state. Interestingly, movements were largely represented by the student elements. This phenomena became prominent only in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This closely followed the diverse groups and sub-groups efforts towards individual cultural identification and their respective notions of nationality. It was frequently assumed that the dominant language grew at the cost of the other language dialects.

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