
THE TURBULENT NORTH EAST

Editors

**MEHTABUDDIN AHMED
PROSENJIT CHOWDHURY**



**D H S K COLLEGE
GOLDEN JUBILEE
COMMEMORATIVE VOLUME**

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**DHSK College, Dibrugarh, Assam
Golden Jubilee Commemorative Volume**



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Preface

Way back in 1945 a few educationists of Dibrugarh got together to establish a college which they christened as the 'Dibrugarh College'. The college subsequently came to be known as Dibrugarh Hanumanbox Surajmal Kanoi College and played a pioneering role in the spread of higher education throughout Upper Assam. Many a glorious son of Assam has been the proud alumnus of this prestigious institution. The famous Indologist late Dr. Jogiraj Basu left his mark as one of the erstwhile Principals of the College.

The Golden Jubilee celebration of D.H.S.K. College is being held this year and this commemorative volume is published to mark the important occasion. Delayed decision, of course, has somewhat altered the projections, and this has curtailed the scope and the sweep of the volume intended to cover all the important aspects of North-East India.

Various political and sociological reasons have impelled focus on North-East India both in and outside the country. The urge to know more and more about the region has roused the curiosity of the learned and the cognoscenti to comprehend the past and the present social, literary and cultural heritage of this region. This is a welcome development for the so far neglected North-East. We have included a few thought-provoking articles in this volume chiefly to whet such an appetite. These essays, we believe, would throw some light on certain aspects of the past and contemporary situation of this region.

We are indeed grateful to those who have favourably responded to our request for contributing to this volume and are specially indebted and grateful to ex-Kanoian Dr. P.S. Datta, formerly Professor at Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie and the present Executive Editor, *Meghalaya Guardian*. Without his invaluable help this volume would not have seen the light of the day.

Mahtabuddin Ahmed
Prosenjit Chowdhury
M. N. Sarmah

The Brahmaputra Valley

A Meeting Place of the Two Major Races

*B.M. Das**

The Brahmaputra valley is regarded as a meeting place of the representatives of two major races of mankind - the Caucasoid and the Mongoloid. Generally speaking, the Mongoloids came from the east as well as the north, while the Caucasoids entered the valley from the western direction. Prior to the arrival of these two races, the Australoids (also known as the Proto-Australoid, Pre-Dravidian, Archaic Caucasoid, Veddid and Nishada) came to this region in small numbers. Later on they almost completely got absorbed by the new comers. Today their ethnic and socio-cultural elements are discernible only by careful scientific scrutiny. Even then it must be admitted that the Australoids too contributed their share to the socio-cultural heritage of the people of Assam, and also to the biological make-up of the population of this region.

For long past the Caucasoids and Mongoloids lived in close proximity in the Brahmaputra valley, and resultantly got opportunity not only to exchange biological as well as socio-cultural traits between them, but also took active part in the building up of the Assamese people as a whole. Culture contact takes place easily and rapidly. For its own convenience one population group accepts cultural elements from the other. Consequently, the overall culture undergoes changes. Such changes are not difficult to determine. New cultural elements once accepted by a population pass from one generation to the other by the process of socialization. On the other hand, the process of entry of biological traits from one population to another is entirely different. Genes are the

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carriers of biological traits. Unless and until there is flow of genes from one population to another, biological traits cannot enter into a population. In other words, biological contact is absolutely necessary for transmission of genes. Hence, sexual union or mating pattern is the most important factor involved in this process. Biological contact is a very slow process. The results are obtained after a long span of time. Stray cases of biological union cannot produce very effective results. Only when a large number of individuals are involved over a long period of time does the impact become decipherable. In the Brahmaputra valley this process started in the distant past. Thus sufficient time has elapsed to allow examination of the effect of the process.

First, let us be acquainted with the populations which took part in this process at both biological and socio-cultural planes. It is already stated that the major races are the Caucasoid and the Mongoloid.

The Mongoloids

In general it could be said that the Mongoloids have smooth and flat wavy head hair with coarse texture. In them, the beard and moustache and also body hair are scanty. Their eyes are narrow to medium with oblique slits very often having mongoloid eye-fold. Their malar regions are medium to marked in prominence. The face is flat, broad and rounded. Several tribes of mongoloid origin inhabit the Brahmaputra valley. Some of them are the Rabha, Boro Kachari, Tiwa, Karbi, Mech, Mishing, Deuri, Sonowal, etc. Though they are mongoloid people and in general they are preserving their mongoloid biological traits, yet some individuals amongst them, though small in numbers, possess certain characteristics which are non-mongoloid in nature and are comparable to caucasian features. The reverse is true in case of some members of the caucasian populations. These could be observed with naked eye, even by a casual glance. This has happened because of admixture at biological level between members of the two major races.

In addition to these mongoloid tribes, there are several other mongoloid populations in the valley not recognized as tribes. The most important and numerically dominant group is formed by the Ahoms who came to Assam in the early part of the thirteenth century. In course of time the Ahoms assimilated many members of the earlier settlers like the Chutiya, Moran, Borahi, and also they got admixed to some extent with some caucasian people. Not in a distant past, the Ahoms were followed by certain other small mongoloid populations, e.g., the Tai Phake, Khamyang, Aiton, Turung, etc. They are distributed in small pockets in some parts of Upper Assam. They are Buddhist by religion.

The Caucasoids

The Caucasoid race comprises several broad divisions, one being the Mediterranean, which again has several sub-divisions. The Mediterraneans are long-headed people with medium height. They came to the Brahmaputra valley in very early times. They entered Assam from the west through the valley formed by the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. Another division of the Caucasoid, known as the Alpine-Armenoid type came to the Brahmaputra valley from the west by the foothills of the Himalayas. Unlike the Mediterraneans, they are broad-headed people. At a much later date two other caucasian strains penetrated into the valley. They are the Indo-Aryans and the Irano-Scythians. The Indo-Aryans are tall-statured people having long head, fine nose and lighter complexion, while the Irano-Scythians are medium-headed and are of medium stature. All these caucasian strains, namely, the Mediterranean, Alpine-Armenoid, Irano-Scythian and Indo-Aryan, are observed in different degrees among the caucasian people of the Brahmaputra valley. The Assamese Hindu castes and the Assamese Muslims represent the Caucasoid race.

On the basis of observable or somatoscopic traits it has already been stated that admixture between these two major races - Caucasoid and Mongoloid - has taken place to some extent. This is supported by examination of certain properties of blood. There is one variant of haemoglobin, called Haemoglobin E (HbE). This gene occurs very frequently among some mongoloid populations of this region. As a matter of fact, in the context of worldwide occurrence of this gene, the highest frequency of this gene is observed in this part of the country. Some of the mongoloid populations showing high frequency of HbE are the Rabha, Kachari, Garo, Tiwa, Ahom etc. This gene is some sort of a characteristic of these populations. On the other hand, HbE is found in very low frequencies in some of the caucasoid Assamese populations. This has happened because of flow of gene from the mongoloid population to the caucasian people. This phenomenon clearly indicates admixture at biological level between the members of the two races in the Brahmaputra valley. Another property of blood is Rh-factor. According to the Rh-system, two major divisions could be distinguished: Rh-positive and Rh-negative. Rh-negative type of blood is very rare among the mongoloid people. Occurrence of this type of blood in some mongoloid populations of the valley, though not in very high numbers, perhaps is the result of flow of gene from the caucasian to the mongoloid people.

Two type of cerumen (ear wax) are observed in man. One type is dry, while the other type is wet. Dry type is regarded as a mongoloid trait,

because it occurs very frequently among the people of mongoloid origin. On the other hand, the wet type is very common among the caucasid people. Same results emerge when ear wax of the caucasid and mongoloid people of the Brahmaputra valley is examined. A careful scrutiny of the data on ear wax of these populations keeping in mind their ethnic affiliations support that admixture has taken place.

The name of an Assamese Hindu caste is Koch or Rajbanshi or Koch-Rajbanshi. Opinions differ with regard to their origin and antiquity. Howsoever it may be, it can not be denied that in some parts of Lower Assam many Koch people were originally members of certain tribes like the Rabha, Tiwa, Kachari, Garo, Karbi. After conversion to Hinduism they took the caste name, Koch. Once becoming Koch, they discarded their original tribal identity. They become members of the same Koch group. As a population they have assumed a distinct identity in respect of biological traits, distinguishable from their ancestral stock. Many physical features of the Koch have undergone remarkable changes. Being members of an Assamese caste, they establish marital relationship with some other caste populations. Three Koch samples were examined for HbE. Two samples came from those Koch people who became Koch in comparatively recent time, and are occupying the adjacent geographical areas of their ancestral tribe. The other sample included those Koch people who became Koch in an undateable past and live along with other caste people. The Koches of the first two samples showed almost equally high frequency of HbE as in case of the ancestral people, while in the third sample its frequency is much less. What does it suggest?

In fine, it could be said that the Brahmaputra valley is a place where members of two major races, the Caucasoid and Mongoloid, met, exchanged genes between them and contributed their respective shares in the formation of the Assamese people.

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The turbulent North East has been in the national focus for long and has attracted a great deal of attention from the social scientists, historians, litrateurs, political analysts and research scholars. The region has a special fascination for one and all. Its rich history, the special ethnic milieu, unmatched fauna and flora, richness of natural resources, heritage of social, cultural and literary life of its people, all vie for attention and research. Lately, the political turmoil has stolen a march over all other aspects, though thankfully stablisation is now in evidence.

Some of these important aspects form the subject matter of erudite essays by eminent scholars of the North East in this commemorative volume, marking the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the D.H.S.K. College, Dibrugarh.

This small but handy volume contains essentials of the North East which, apart from introducing an initiate into the realms of the North East, is designed as an intelligent supplement for all classes of readers everywhere.

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