

**CHANGING CULTURAL  
MOSAIC OF A VILLAGE  
IN ASSAM**

**D.B. SHARMA**

## **The Book**

This book is an attempt to make a micro-level study of the nature and extent of changes in a village in Assam. The village, Niz Hajo in Kamrup district lying on the borderline of urbanism and ruralism, has been taken for investigation in view of its uniqueness in respect of its socio-religious life. In the process of changes in the village old patterns are slowly disappearing but new patterns have not emerged to replace the old totally. The overall pattern that is emerging is a mixture of traditionalism and modernity.

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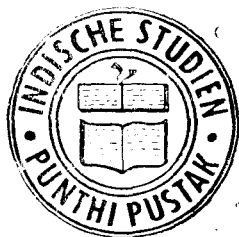
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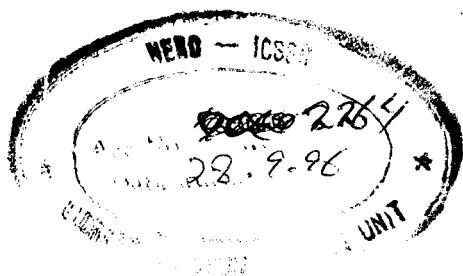
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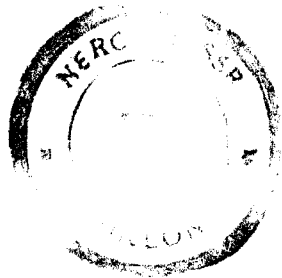
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## CONTENTS

Preface	...	ix
Acknowledgements	...	xiii
Abbreviations	...	xv
Chapter I : HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	...	1—25
Chapter II : SOCIAL STRUCTURE	...	27—86
Chapter III : RELIGION	...	87—183
Chapter IV : ECONOMY	...	185—243
Chapter V : POWER STRUCTURE	...	245—304
Chapter VI : CONCLUSION	...	305—320
Appendix A :	...	321—327
Appendix B :	...	329—332
Appendix C :	...	333—343
Bibliography	...	345—359
Index	...	361—374
Map of Niz Hajo	...	



## CHAPTER

# 1

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Niz Hajo, a village in the district of Kamrup, lies at a distance of 29 km. north-west from the city of Gauhati, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river. It is situated at  $20^{\circ} 15' 4''$  north latitude and  $91^{\circ} 31' 39''$  east longitude. The area of the village is 4.01 sq. km. Niz Hajo receives an annual rainfall of 1637.2 mm. and its temperature varies from  $7.8^{\circ}$  to  $37.0^{\circ}\text{C}.$ <sup>1</sup> The village is connected to Gauhati and to different towns of the northern part of Kamrup district by motorable roads. Niz Hajo is an important bus stoppage for almost all the passenger-carrying buses that ply between Gauhati and the towns of the north bank of the district. The nearest Railway station is Nalbari in the north-west of the village at a distance of 20 km. Borjhar, lying at a distance of 25 km. from the village, by road, is the airport that links the village, through air, to the outside world.

Niz Hajo is situated in a picturesque surrounding. On the south and the south-east of the village rise a few small hillocks and each hillock has a name of its own. Vast paddy fields lie on the other sides of the village. Beyond the northern boundary a river flows from the east to west. On the extreme south, beyond the hillock on which the Kedar Mandir is situated lies a large stretch of paddy fields and swamps. These swamps are believed to be the abandoned course of the Brahmaputra. Many legends are associated with the abandonment of the course by the Brahmaputra.

The village of Niz Hajo was possibly known, in the past, as 'Manikuta' as referred to in the *Kālikāpurāna* and the *Yogini Tantra*. Both of them refer to Manikuta as the place where Lord Vishnu in *Hayagriva* form is worshipped. The Darrang *Rājvamsāwali* also refers to 'Manikutagrām' as the place where Hayagriva is worshipped.<sup>2</sup> The Vamsāwali calls the place a 'grām', definitely denoting it, as a village.

The *Yogini Tantra* gives a description of a place named 'Apunarbhava' where the God Hayagriva resides. The Tantra gives detailed description of the houses, the people and the temples of this place.<sup>3</sup> But there is now a 'kunda' (a pond of sacred waters) in the village known by this name. Considering this it is possible that the village was known as 'Manikuta' rather than as Apunarbhava because the latter is found only as a kunda. The hillock at the centre of the village on which the Hayagriva Madhava temple is situated, in fact, is still called the Manikut.

The Manikut hill of Hajo as a place of Hayagriva worship as mentioned in the *Kālikāpurāna*, a 10th century composition, might have had its importance since a long time much before 9th century A. D. But even before this, whether Hajo was a centre of Buddhism in the period before the Christian millennium, is shrouded in mystery. Dr. Waddell, in his book *Lamaism*, deals with the tradition prevailing in Tibet that Buddha's Mahaparinirvana took place somewhere in Hajo.<sup>4</sup> A conjecture is being drawn here by Waddell, between Buddha's Mahaparinirvāna and the tradition of Buddhist pilgrims visiting the shrine at Hajo as the most holy place. Although, it is believed not to be true, yet one has to take it into account that Hajo has been an important holy place for the Buddhists since times immemorial.

The *Kālikāpurāna*, mentioning the boundaries of 'Manikuta', says that between the *Manikuta* and the *Gandhamādan* (present

day Gondhmou hill near Sualkuchi a village about 7 km. south of Niz Hajo) hills flows the *Lauhitya* (the Brahmaputra). The Purana says that to the south of the *Barnāshā* river (the Ballavā or Borolia river) is the *Lohita* sea and to the east of this sea is the Manikuta hill where Hayagriva resides.<sup>5</sup> This description of the boundary suggests that the river Brahmaputra on the south, the Lohita sea or the vast mass of water on the west and the river Borolia on the north were the three boundaries of Manikuta. These demarcating boundaries of Manikuta have changed since then but, at the same time, these largely conform to the present situation. The river Brahmaputra was flowing past on the south of Hajo, through a branch, but it abandoned its course by 1636 A. D.<sup>6</sup> However, a small stream known as Hajorsota still flows along the southern boundary of the village. Even in 1823, Hajorsota was an important river route that connected Gauhati.<sup>7</sup> The traditionally known boundary of Niz Hajo are the Lokhaitora river on the north, the Hajorsota on the south, the Garudacal hill on the east and Ramdiā village on the west. Mills observes that the river 'Barna' or *Barnāshā* "has left its former bed, and now flows down the Lakhayturrah" river.<sup>8</sup>

The origin of the word 'Hajo' is traced to the Bodos. The present day district of Kamrup was predominantly inhabited by the Bodo ethnic group in the past. In their language the word 'Haju' means a hill.<sup>9</sup> In Bodo language 'Hā' means 'land' and 'Gaejau' means 'high' or in other words Hā+Gaejau=Hāgaejau which later came to be called as 'Hajou' or Hajo. The people of the surrounding area of the village still call it 'Hajou' in their colloquial use. There is no major Bodo tribal habitation in the vicinity of the village now. But, that at one time this region was definitely inhabited by the Bodos and the Kacharis is a known fact.<sup>10</sup> Thus a Bodo origin of the name of Hajo has greater acceptance than the other views. Waddell says that the aboriginal Koch and the Mech

worshipped the hill as a deity which in their language was called 'Hājo'<sup>11</sup> and the place therefore came to be known as such.

There are also few other local legends about the origin of the name Hajo. One of the legends, most prevalent amongst the older section of the village, says that once when the sage Urbo was in deep meditation on the Manikuta hill, an Asura, called Hayāsura, plundered his place of meditation compelling the sage to break his 'Yoga' and run away wailing 'Ha Yoga', 'Ha Yoga' and since then the place came to be known as Hajo. However, there is no literary evidence in support of this story. Another view says that 'Hajo' was derived from the Arabic word 'Haj' meaning pilgrimage. In Hajo, there is a mosque with a shrine founded by a Muslim saint in about 13th century A. D. The people regard the mosque as equivalent to one-fourth of the holy place of Mecca and they come for 'Haj' or pilgrimage here. It is, therefore, said that the place came to be known as Hajo from the word 'Haj'. But amongst the Muslim population of the area around Hajo this view does not have any currency. Again, some others say that Hajo is named after the name of Haju the grandfather of the great Koch King, Biswasingha. According to this view the Koches had established a capital in this village and named it after Haju, the founder of this dynasty. But, there are no historical evidences to support this view that at any time the Koch capital was established at Hajo. In 1581, Koch King Naranarayana divided his kingdom into two parts along the river Sankosh. The western part of the Kingdom came to be called Koch Bihar and the eastern part was known as Koch Hajo. The village was within Koch Hajo but no record shows that it was capital of that kingdom. Referring to Koch Bihar and Koch Hajo, Gait writes "the former name of course still survives, but the only trace of the latter is in the town called Hajo, a few miles north of Gauhati".<sup>12</sup>

Niz Hajo is the name of the village, which to the outside world is, generally, known as Hajo. But, Hajo, as such, is also a Mauza or the revenue area, a police station, a Community Development Block, an administrative area for the Gaon Panchayat, a P. W. D. Sub-division or also the village to which the people refer to in connection with their socio-political-economic life. In fact, Niz Hajo is the centre of most of the activities of the people of this Mauza, of this police station, of this Gaon Panchayat or of this P. W. D. sub-division. The prefix 'Niz' (literally meaning "one's own") is put before 'Hajo' to name the village as Niz Hajo. It could not be ascertained as to why, when and how this change of name took place. However, it is possible that as there are different administrative areas of the P. W. D., Police, Revenue and other departments, the prefix 'Niz' was put before 'Hajo' to specify the main village constituting the centre of these areas. Again, it may be possible that for revenue administration purposes when a larger area was divided into smaller units, the area of greater socio-economic importance might retain the name of the larger area by using a prefix like 'Niz'. In the district of Kamrup there are 45 villages with different names with the prefix 'Niz'.<sup>18</sup>

In 1971 Census, Niz Hajo was declared as a town. The definition of a 'town' as adopted in 1971 Census provides that places satisfying the following conditions should be treated as towns, viz., (a) a minimum population of 5,000 (b) at least three-fourth of the male working population is non-agricultural and (c) the density of the population is 400 persons per sq. km. Within the declared town area of Niz Hajo there was a density of 2561 persons per sq. km. in 1971. It was classified as belonging to the functional category of Primary activities-cum-Trade and Commerce. According to the Census classification the Primary activities consist of Cultivation, Agricultural Labour, Mining, Fishing, Quarrying, Livestock, Forestry and allied activities. The total population of Niz Hajo was 10,269

according to 1971 Census. The 1961 Census classified Niz Hajo as a village. 8·54% and 6·97% of the total population of the village were shown as belonging to the categories of cultivators and agricultural labours in the census reports of 1961 and 1971 respectively. For the purpose of constituting the village into a town it was divided into 18 blocks.<sup>14</sup> In spite of the declaration by the Census of 1971, Niz Hajo continues to be a village and no Municipal Board or Town Committee was constituted till 1981, nor any public initiative was taken in that regard. It has been gathered that, in 1962, a socio-cultural organization known as the Milan Sangha, formed in the village under the leadership of some villagers who held white collar jobs in Gauhati and in nearby towns, took the initiative in getting the village declared as a town. But this move could not materialize for want of popular support.

The decennial figures of the village population according to the census reports and the records of the Gaon Panchayat have been as follows :

1951	...	6,308
1961	...	8,446
1971	...	10,269
1981	...	13,326*

The rate of the growth of population has been 33·89% between 1951 and 1961, 21·58% between 1961 and 1971,<sup>15</sup> and 30·09% between 1971 and 1981.<sup>16</sup>

The civic amenities available in the village as in 1971 were the supply of protected well-water to the different neighbourhoods of the village and the streetlighting with 120 light points.<sup>17</sup> But due to non-payment of the light charges by the Gaon Panchayat the street lights have since been withdrawn. As against 120 domestic light connections in 1971,<sup>18</sup> there are 225 as in 1981 March.<sup>19</sup>

There are 2 High Schools, 1 Higher Secondary School, 13 Primary Schools, 1 Weaving School and a College (started in the year 1979) in the village. In addition to these, some important Government departments and offices like, the P. W. D., Agriculture, Veterenary, E. & D., Public Health Engineering, Post Office, Community Development Block and the Hajo Police Station are located in the eastern part of the village. The office of the Sub-Deputy Collector of Hajo, situated in this part of the village, is another important and busy office. A branch of the Allahabad Bank has been opened on the main road that passes through the village. The offices of the No. 1 Hajo Gaon Panchayat and the Assam State Electricity Board are situated at the centre of the village near the Hayagriva Madhava temple.

The village is divided traditionally into twentysix neighbourhoods or '*tolas*', viz. Malitola, Kaibartta-tola, Bhoralitola, Sakamtali. Santipur, Udhanpata, Muslimpatty, Ozatola, Gayantola, Mahadevtola, Jogaitola, Athporiatola, Bamuntola, Borahtola, Beztola, Kumarpara, Sonaritola, Ganeshtola, Fakirtola, Panipara, Majorsupa, Bahkatola, Dhoporguri, Nadirpar, Pakhamela and Kochtola. Some of the '*tolas*' have been renamed in the recent past. Most of them were named after a caste or a servicing group of the temples or the Durgah of the village. Niz Hajo is a multi-caste village with 16 caste groups belonging to both Hindu and Islamic faiths.

## II

A glimpse at the history of the district of Kamrup till the close of the 17th century is considered essential here to understand Niz Hajo's socio-political position through the ages.

The present district of Kamrup formed a part of the kingdom of *Pragjyotisha* as referred to in the *Mahabharata*. Later, in the *Puranas* and in the *Tantras* this kingdom was called

Kamarupa. A legend says that the Indian Cupid, Kamadeva, who was destroyed by the fiery glance of Siva, returned to life in this country and the land came to be known as Kamarupa after the name of Kamadeva.<sup>20</sup>

By about 1000 B. C., the extent of the kingdom of Pragjyotisha, as referred to in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, stretched in the south as far as the 'Sea' which was possibly at one time the low-lying parts of present-day Sylhet and Mymensing submerged under water then. The northern limits of this kingdom was the Bhutan hills. On the west was the Kausika river (Kosi) and the eastern boundaries extended beyond the Dikhoo river of the district of Sibsagar. Pargiter believes that the Kingdom of Pragjyotisha included major portions of Assam together with the districts of Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Rangpur, Mymensing, Bogra, Dacca, Tippera and Pabna. The *Puranas* and the *Tantras* referred to the kingdom both as Kamarupa and Pragjyotisha. In the early part of the Christian era, during Samudra Gupta's time, the kingdom was mentioned as Kamarupa. In Hiuen Tsiang's account the country is referred to as Ka-mo-lu-pa. The 13th century Muslim historians called the kingdom on the east of the Korotoya river as Kamru or Kamrud.

During the Koch rule from 16th century, Kamarupa extended from the Korotoya on the west, to the Barnadi river in the east. The kingdom on the east of the Barnadi was known as Saumāra ruled by the Ahoms. With the downfall of the Koch kingdom of Kamarupa in 17th century, the portion of Kamarupa between the Korotoya river and the Manas was included in Bengal by the Muslims and the territory on the east of Manas became a part of Ahom kingdom to be known as Asam or Assam. This brought to an end the kingdom of Kamarupa and since then the area between the rivers the Manas on the west and the Barnadi on the east came to be known as Kamrup as an administrative unit.<sup>21</sup>

The earliest mentioned line of kings of Pragjyotisha was the legendary non-Aryan 'Asura' or 'Dānava' dynasty beginning with Mahiranga Dānava and succeeded by a line of kings that ended with Ghatakāsura. Ghatakāsura was overthrown by Naraka who founded a new dynasty.<sup>22</sup> The *Asura* dynasty of Mahiranga Dānava is said to have ruled Pragjyotisha from 1700 to 1600 B. C.<sup>23</sup> The legendary hero Narakāsura was mentioned in the *Yogini Tantra* as the king of Kamarupa with his capital in Pragjyotishpur, corresponding to the modern city of Gauhati.<sup>24</sup>

After Naraka, his son Bhagadatta ruled Kamarupa during the time of the *Mahabharata* wars. His name is frequently mentioned in it as he fought in the Kurukshetra war on the side of the Kauravas. This dynasty of Naraka-Bhagadatta was known as Bhauma dynasty. After Bhagadatta, a chain of kings of the same dynasty identified as the Varmana line ruled Kamarupa till the middle of the 7th century A. D. The Varmana line of kings of Kamarupa began with Pushyavarmana in 4th century A. D. Bhaskarvarmana was the last king of this dynasty during whose reign the great Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsiang visited Kamarupa in 643 A. D. The Chinese traveller left an invaluable account on the conditions of the country at that time.

The Bargaon Copper plate, believed to be of 11th century A. D., records that a Mleccha king by the name Salastambha, ruled Kamarupa after the Naraka-Bhagadatta dynasty, from the middle of the 7th century A. D. The Salastambha line ended with its twentyfirst king Tyagasimha by about the end of the 10th century. Records show that after Tyagasimha, Brahmapāla was made the king of Kamarupa by about 1000 A. D. Brahmapāla founded the Pāla line of kings who traced their origin to the Bhauma dynasty of Naraka-Bhagadatta. The last important king of the Pāla line was Jayapala by the middle of 12th century A. D.<sup>25</sup> It is said that from the time

of Brahmapāla, the founder king of this line, the cult of Tantrik Buddhism gained its importance in Kamarupa. One of the Pāla kings, viz. Dharmapāla in the early 12th century A. D. is said to have shifted his capital from Pragjyotishpur to North Gauhati on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra river opposite to modern Gauhati and it remained as Kamarupa's capital till the second half of 13th century A. D.<sup>26</sup>

After the extinction of the Pāla line of kings, a new dynasty was established in Kamarupa by Vaidyadeva. Historical materials about the reign of these kings are not sufficiently available. The Ahom Buranjis and the Muslim chronicles were, of course, the important source of information. Vaidyadeva, once a minister-cum-general of Kumarapala, ruled Kamarupa till the middle of the 12th century A. D. As to who succeeded Vaidyadeva is not known. Probably two other kings of that line ruled Kamarupa after whom came Prithu. From the *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* it is evident that a virile king referred to as the "Rae of Kamrup" ruled this kingdom at the time of the invasion by Mahammad-i-Bukhtiyar. This king was possibly Prithu (1200-1228 A. D.) who caused the destruction of the Muhammadan army in 1206. Prithu was killed in 1228 A. D. in a war with the Muslims. After him two other kings ruled in Kamarupa,<sup>27</sup> with their capital at North Gauhati. The last king of this line was Sāndhya and during his time the capital of Kamarupa was again shifted from North Gauhati to Kamatāpur. Since then the kingdom covered only the district of Goalpara and a part of Kamarupa and it came to be known as Kamatā or Kamrup-Kamatā.<sup>28</sup>

During the period from early 13th century to 14th century the Kamarupa rulers had to encounter more than four Muhammadan invasions. The first invasion was hosted by Muhammad, son of Bukhtiyar, towards the end of the year 1206 A. D. but in the face of various reverses Muhammad's huge army had

to make a disastrous retreat. On his retreat, according to Muslim historian Minhaj Muhammad took shelter in a Hindu temple on top of a hill.<sup>30</sup> Captain Dalton believes that this Hindu temple was that of Hajo.<sup>30</sup> The next major Muslim invasions that took place were in the years 1227 A. D. and 1254-55 A. D.

The king who destroyed Muhammad's army in 1206 was probably Prithu and it was he again who repulsed the second Muhammadan attack launched by Ghiasuddin Iwaz in 1227 A. D. But in the following year he was killed in a war with Nasiruddin, son of Iltutmish. It appears that after Prithu's death, a successor from the same line of kings was placed on the throne by Nasiruddin on promise of an annual tribute.

The third Muslim invasion took place in the year 1254-55 A. D. Evidently it was because of the stoppage of the payment of the annual tribute by the Kamarupa kings, Malik Yuz-Bak invaded Kamarupa in that year. It appears from the account given by Minhaj that Yuz-Bak held control over Kamarupa for sometime till he was repulsed by the army of the King by taking advantage of the rains and floods. Malik Yuz-Bak was killed in this attack and only a few of his army succeeded in returning to Bengal. After this invasion, Kamarupa remained comparatively free from major foreign aggressions till the closing years of the 15th century excepting occasional raids, one of which was that of Sultan Ghiyas-uddin about 1321-22 A. D.<sup>31</sup>

After the shifting of the capital from North Gauhati to Kamatāpur, a new line, known as the Kamatā kings, began with Sāndhya in the middle of the 13th century.<sup>32</sup> As a result of this shifting of the seat of power, the control of the Kamatā kings over their eastern territories became weak. A few Bhuyan families rose in power in this part of the kingdom and ruled as chiefs.<sup>33</sup> The line of the Kamatā kings was supplanted

by the Khen or Khan dynasty in 1440 A. D. The founder king of this dynasty was Niladhawaja (1440-1460). During the reign of the next powerful king Chakradhwaja, Sultan Barbak of Bengal invaded Kamatā but he was defeated by the former near the river Sankosh. The last and the most powerful king of the Khan dynasty was Nilambar (1480-1498). His kingdom extended from the Korotoya river to the Barnadi river. In 1498, Hussain Shah, the Sultan of Gaur, attacked Nilambar and defeated him. Nilambar fled towards the hills and was heard of no more. This brought about the end of the Kamata kings. Hussain Shah held control over Kamatā for some time and returned to Gaur leaving his son Daniel to govern the conquered kingdom. Daniel had his fort at Hajo. After Nilambar was overthrown, four local chiefs, probably the Bhuyans of Kamarupa, combined together and defeated Daniel, by about 1503 A. D.<sup>84</sup> After the Khen kings, the kingdom of Kamrup-Kamatā was virtually disintegrated and a number of Bhuyan chiefs were holding control over it.

At this stage the rise of the Koch power in Kamrup put an end to this state of disorder. The founder king of the Koch dynasty was Biswasingha. This king had a very humble origin. His father, Haria Mandal, a village headman, married Hira and Jira, the two daughters of one Haju. Two sons were borne to Hira and Jira—Bisu the son of the former and Sisu the son of the latter. It appears that Bisu, in his early youth, witnessed the fourth Muhammadan invasion of Hussain Shah and the fall of Nilambar the last Kamatā king. After the fall of Nilambar, Bisu's father Haria came into conflict with the Bhuyan chief of Phulaguri. Haria was subdued and made to pay a tribute to the Chief. Seeing the humiliation of his father, Bisu resolved to take revenge on the Bhuyans. Soon after, he embarked upon a mission of subduing the Bhuyans one after another on the either sides of the Brahmaputra in the kingdom of Kamarupa. By about 1515 A. D., after over

throwing all the Bhuyanchiefs Bisu proclaimed himself as the king of Kamatāpur and assumed the name of Biswasingha.<sup>85</sup> He built a beautiful capital city at Koch Bihar.<sup>86</sup>

On Biswasingha's death in 1540 A. D., his son Malladeva ascended the throne assuming the name Naranarayan. Naranarayan appointed his brother Sukladhwaj alias Chilarai as his Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief. Chilarai led the Koch armies with unvarying success to different kingdoms surrounding Kamatā.<sup>87</sup> Naranarayan's reign represented the zenith of Koch power.<sup>88</sup>

According to the Muslim historians, in about 1564 A. D., the Sultan of Bengal, Suleiman Kararani invaded the Koch kingdom. This Muslim invasion was led by Kala Pahar the general of the Sultan's army who left behind a trail of vandalism by destroying and desecrating many Hindu temples including that of Kamakshya and of Hajo. The Muslims defeated the Koch army. After their withdrawal, Naranarayan rebuilt the temple of Kamakshya in the following year.<sup>89</sup> In the subsequent years the Koch king and his general brother Chilarai established friendly relations with the Mughals and became an important ally of the latter. In 1583, while fighting on the side of the Mughals with Masum Kabuli on the banks of the Ganges, Chilarai contracted small-pox and died. This was a great blow to his brother.

After Chilarai's death, his son, Raghudev, apprehending deprivation from the throne, rebelled against Naranarayan and established his seat at Barnagar. Naranarayan did not want any confrontation with his nephew Raghudev and, having failed to pacify him, divided the kingdom along the river Sankosh and gave the eastern part to the latter. Naranarayan did not live long after the disruption of his large kingdom and he died in 1586 A. D. His son Lakshminarayan ascended the

throne of the western part of the Koch kingdom known as Koch Bihar.<sup>40</sup> Raghudev ascended the throne of Koch Hajo in 1581 A. D.<sup>41</sup> but he had to lose a part of his kingdom, of Goalpara, to the invading East Bengal Muhammadan Ruler Isa Khan.

Raghudev rebuilt the Hayagriva Madhav temple at Hajo which was earlier destroyed by Kala Pahar. His death occurred in 1603 A. D.<sup>42</sup>

After the death of Naranarayan, the two branches of the Koch royal families of Raghudev and Lakshminarayan landed in quarrels which led to total dismemberment of the once powerful Koch kingdom into pieces. Parikshit succeeded to the throne of Koch Hajo after Raghudev in 1603 A. D. and he shifted his capital to North Gauhati. In the subsequent years the cousins were in constant strife on the issue of supremacy. Both the kings sought the help and friendship of the Ahoms. Parikshit was helped by the Ahoms and Lakshminarayan took the help of the Mughals and became a vassal of the latter. In 1612 A. D., an army of the Nawab of Dacca under Mukkaram Khan attacked Koch Hajo and Parikshit was defeated and taken as a prisoner to Delhi. The Mughal Emperor Jehangir released him on an undertaking of payment of four lakhs of rupees. Parikshit returned but he died on his way. A Mughal garrison was left in command in the western part of Koch Hajo under Mukkaram Khan's brother but when the latter died in 1616 A. D. Mukkaram Khan himself assumed the governorship of this country and established his headquarters at Hajo.<sup>43</sup> Since then Hajo remained as an important fort of the Muhammadans for a long period.

Even after the decline of their kingdoms, the Koches of Kamrup and Goalpara could not accept the domination of the Mughals and rose in rebellion and started a guerilla warfare against the Mughals under the leadership of some patriot

leaders. They won success in several campaigns against the Mughals. In the meantime fresh developments took place which led to another invasion of Kamrup and Ahom kingdom by the Muslims.

On the defeat of Parikshit, his brother Balinarayan took shelter with the Ahom king Pratap Singha, which the Bengal Governor Sheikh Qasim did not like. In addition to this, other activities on the part of the Ahoms and the Koches offended the Bengal Governor and the latter sent a force under Syed Aba Bakr to invade the Ahom country.<sup>44</sup> This invasion was disastrous for the Muhammadans. Aba Bakr's army gained initial success while advancing towards the Ahom country but a nightly attack by the Ahom army, both by land and water, took them by surprise and were completely defeated. Many leaders of the army including Aba Bakr were killed in the battle. But Hajo remained as a fortress of the Muhammadan rulers. Balinarayan was then installed as the tributary king of Darrang by the Ahoms.

In 1617 A. D., Pratap Singha accompanied by Balinarayan and a few other chiefs launched an attack on the Muhammadans. The combined army of Pratap Singha and the chiefs captured Pandu and forced the Muhammadans to retreat to Hajo. The Muhammadan commander Abdussalam at Hajo immediately reported the developments to the Nawab of Dacca and asked for immediate reinforcements. Soon after, assistance came from Dacca to the Muhammadan camps at Hajo. In spite of the reinforcements in the Muhammadan army, the Ahoms renewed their attack and pursued the Muslims upto Hajo. Hajo was attacked by the combined army from all directions. But, possibly because of lack of planning the attack failed and the Ahoms had to retreat to Gauhati.

The Muhammadan army, again in 1619, attacked the Darrang king Balinarayan. But Pratap Singha came to his

aid and defeated the attacking army and forced them to retreat to Hajo. By 1635, Pratap Singha carried out another war on the Muhammadans. In this operation many Muslim soldiers and generals were either killed or captured and Hajo lay under siege. The Muslim Governor Abdussalam sought immediate help from the Nawab of Dacca. On arrival of the reinforcements, Abdussalam, himself remaining at Hajo, sent the troops under Zainal Abidin towards Pandu.

In the first engagement at a place at some distance from the west of Pandu, the Ahoms were defeated and had to retreat to Gauhati. Soon thereafter the Ahoms received fresh reinforcements and the attack was launched on the Muhammadans who were pushed back to Sualkuchi, near Hajo. To the disadvantage of the Muhammadans, the Brahmaputra river which was flowing past Hajo dried up at this juncture and thereby made the movement of the water fleet impossible. The Muhammadan commander Abidin, who was stationing at Sualkuchi by that time, was ordered by Abdussalam to join him at Hajo. Abidin left for Hajo leaving his fleet in charge of three other commanders. Taking advantage of the absence of Abidin, the Ahoms attacked the Muhammadan river fleet and gained a decisive victory there. Hajo was now closely invested by the Ahom army led by the Barphukan of Gauhati. Abdussalam made several unsuccessful attempts to repulse the Ahoms. The Ahoms being confident of their strength and seeing the low morale of the Muhammadans, the siege of Hajo was continued till the Muslim Governor surrendered. A large quantity of booty and several hundreds of guns and horses were taken at Hajo. During the attack all the brick buildings built by the Muhammadans were destroyed by the Ahom army.<sup>45</sup>

The Ahom army attacked other garrisons of the Muslims stationed at different parts of Kamrup and Goalpara and cleared these areas out of the latter's domination. But in 1637

the Muhammadan army recovered their lost territories and established their headquarters at Gauhati. In the following year, hostilities again began between them. Finally, in the same year, being tired of the prolonged wars and exhaustion of resources, the Ahoms proposed for a peace and accordingly a treaty was concluded. Under the treaty the whole district of Goalpara and larger parts of Kamrup remained under the possession of the Muhammadans with Gauhati as the capital.<sup>46</sup>

In 1658, the Ahom king Jayadhwaj Singha launched a major offensive against the Muslims and drove them out of the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>47</sup> But, in 1661, Mirjumla the new Governor of Bengal led an invasion for the conquest of Assam and marched upto Gargaon the Ahom capital. However, Mirjumla had to seek peace with the Ahoms and make a retreat because of the rains and floods and widespread sickness amongst his soldiers.<sup>48</sup> One of the terms of the treaty was that the country on the west of the Bharali river on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and the Kolong river on the south should be ceded to the Mughals. Gauhati remained as the headquarters of the Muslims and Rashid Khan was installed as its Fauzadar. Mirjumla returned to Dacca in 1663 and died in the same year.<sup>49</sup>

Chakradhwaj Singha ascended the Ahom throne after the death of Jayadhwaj Singha in 1663 A. D. He embarked upon a mission to recover the territories lost to the Mughals<sup>50</sup> and captured Gauhati and Pandu in 1667 and drove the latter upto the Manas river.<sup>51</sup> This enraged the Mughal Emperor Aurangajeb and he sent a huge force under Ram Singha to conquer Assam. In a decisive war fought at Saraighat near Gauhati, the Mughals were defeated.

After the victory of the Ahoms in the Saraighat battle the boundary of their kingdom was extended up to the Manas river and Lachit Barphukan, the general in the above battle, was stationed as the Viceroy at Gauhati.<sup>53</sup>

A crisis overtook the Ahom kingdom after the death of Chakradhwaj Singha in 1670 and it continued till 1681. By 1679, Gauhati again fell into the hands of the Muslims. The dissension and internal corruption of the Ahom princes and ministers came to an end in 1681 and Gadadhar Singha ascended the throne in the same year. Immediately after ascending the throne he sent an army to recover the lost territories. The Ahom army defeated the Muhammadan army and pushed them beyond the Manas river. From this time the Manas was accepted by both the powers as the boundary.<sup>53</sup> By the close of the 17th century Kamrup became definitely annexed to the Ahom territory and remained as an administrative unit of Assam since then.

Gadadhar Singha was succeeded to the throne by his son Rudra Singha (1696-1714). King Rudra Singha was a man of great ability and ambition. He consolidated the Ahom power and planned to attack the Mughals in alliance with other Rajas and chiefs. But before this plan could be executed this able monarch died in 1714 A. D.<sup>54</sup>

The history of the next one hundred years of Ahom kingdom was marked by the success and glory of their kings in the first half while the second part began to cast shadows leading up to the fall of the six hundred year old Ahom rule.

Rudra Singha was succeeded by his four sons, e. g., Siva Singha (1714-1744), Pramatta Singha (1744-1751), Rajeswar

Singha (1751-1769) and Laksmi Singha (1769-1780). From the time of Laksmi Singha the Ahom kingdom was disrupted by civil dissension and rebellion. He died in 1780 and was succeeded by his son Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795) and the latter by Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1810).

Chandrakanta Singha succeeded Kamaleswar Singha in 1811. From the time of Gaurinath Singha, i. e. since 1793, the real authority of the Ahom administration was, in fact, wielded by the domineering Prime Minister Purnananda. He created displeasure amongst the nobles by his high-handedness and as a result the Ahom court was divided into two blocs— one group supporting the prime minister and on the other side were the royalists supporting the king Chandrakanta. The royalists being unable to remove the prime minister from authority through various ways, finally sought the help of the Burmese monarch. The Burmese invaded the country in 1817 at the instance of Badanchandra Barphukan, the Viceroy at Gauhati, but Purnananda died before the invaders entered the Ahom capital.

Chandrakanta ruled till 1818 when he was deposed and Purandar Singha, a descendant of Rajeswar Singha, was placed in the throne. Chandrakanta regained his throne in 1821 through the intervention of the Burmese again. But this time the Burmese were determined to rule over Assam. Chandrakanta then entered into hostilities with them but he was defeated. He fled to Bengal leaving the Burmese to the complete domination of Assam. In 1824, the British entered Assam and expelled the Burmese from Assam. By the Treaty of Yandaboo of 1826, Assam passed into the hands of the British. Later Purandar Singha was installed by the Company

as a tributary ruler of Upper Assam but on his failure to pay the stipulated tribute the whole of Assam passed in to their hands in 1838.

The foregoing paragraphs try to give a very brief history of the district of Kamrup. Beginning from the Dānava dynasty till the advent of the British, Kamrup passed into the hands of rulers belonging to different cultures. From 15th century to 19th century, in a span of four hundred years, the district had been under the rule of the Koches, the Muslims and the Ahoms. Naturally, the life of the people is bound to be variegated as moulded by different cultures at different times.

Written history gives Niz Hajo a place of political importance from the beginning of the 17th century with the establishment of the headquarters in it by the Mughal Commander Mukkaram Khan. Two Portugese Jesuit travellers, namely, Father Stephen Cacella and Father John Cabral visited Hajo in 1626. In a letter written by Stephen Cacella on 4. 10. 1627, he referred to the town of Hajo, situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra river, as the 'principal city' of the Koch Hajo kingdom. He wrote that Koch king Laksminarayan used to reside in this capital of the kingdom. But Hajo was never a capital of Koch Hajo as it appears from the records but it was definitely the headquarters of the Mughal commander where possibly Laksminarayan, the Koch Bihar ruler, was forced to reside under the Mughal restraints. In his letter Cacella also gives description of a beautiful and extensive palace of Laksminarayan at Hajo. But no trace of such structure of a palace is found in and near Hajo at present, nor any remnant of Mughal commander's fort exists. Gait writes that during the attack by Pratap Singha's forces in 1635, the "brick buildings

which the Muhammadans had erected", in Hajo, "were all levelled with the ground." Although the Hajo fort of Muhammadans was destroyed by the Ahoms yet it remained as an important camp till the close of 17th century. But it was very likely that the change of the course of the Brahmaputra might have lessened its importance since it became difficult for the movement of the river fleets from Hajo to different battles.

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