

POPULATION GEOGRAPHY OF ASSAM



32

G. L. BOROOAH

Population Geography, as an organised branch of Geography, is comparatively new. The study of this branch of knowledge was first initiated in the first half of this century in France by Beaujeu-Garnier. It acquired importance in a formal form in 1953 when Trewartha introduced this subject for discussion before the Association of American Geographers. Since then both from the point of view of quality and quantity the importance of Population Geography has registered a significant increase.

The subject has now become the central theme of a number of scholarly works. The present volume is a most welcome addition to the subject of Population Geography in this country where 'this branch of Geography is almost negligible and many of its aspects like population pressure, regional analysis of fertility and mortality, migration, population characteristics and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, regional changes in occupational structure, population regionalisation etc. are yet to be studied'.

So far as Assam is concerned, the study of Population Geography is still in its infancy. The present volume therefore plays a useful role in making up this deficiency. As its tell-tale title indicates, the author has enumerated her objectives in conducting this study as under :

- (i) A study of the historical background of the population of the District of Dibrugarh as far back as its historical background permits,
- (ii) A study of the spatial distribution, numerical, racial, religious, occupational and social composition of its population in the 19th century since the time of the annexation of Dibrugarh District (1826) by the British rulers to the time of the earliest available census period,
- (iii) Growth and distribution of the population since 1872 with special reference to all the attributes of its composition,
- (iv) An analysis of group-wise variations in distribution, density and also racial, linguistic, occupational and social and areal composition,
- (v) Present characteristics of the population and finally
- (vi) The synthetic appraisal.

Apart from other preliminary components of the work like Preface etc., its main text consists of 9 chapters. Chapter I introduces the reader to the heart of the problem taken up by the author for research like its significance, its objective, scope and methodology. The other Chapters deal with the geographical set-up of district like physiography, climate, vegetation

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geology, mineral and soil, the original socio-cultural basis of the people who constitute the present population and the geo-political evolution of the district ; the economic resources of the district leading to its industrial development ; demographic aspects ; the spatial characteristics in the growth of population through the passage of time ; the occupational composition of the population and the socio-cultural pattern of the present population. The last chapter—Chapter IX—embodies a synthesis of the facts and findings in the form of summary and conclusions.

It has been found that the growth of population in Dibrugarh district has enormously risen during the last one hundred years during which it registered a rise of 1618.59% in 1971 over that of 1872. With the discovery of new oil fields in the South where natural resources are in abundance both the population and the industrial tempo are likely to register a phenomenal growth rate.

The book blazes a new trail and marks a significant contribution to the new field of Population Geography and will give an impetus to the further development of prolific literature in this branch of knowledge in the years to come.

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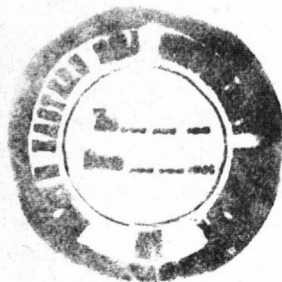
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**POPULATION GEOGRAPHY OF ASSAM :
A STUDY OF DIBRUGARH DISTRICT (1872-1971)**

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Population Geography of Assam

A Study of Dibrugarh District (1872-1971)



G.L. BOROAH



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GUNA LATA BOROAH

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B. INTRODUCTORY PART

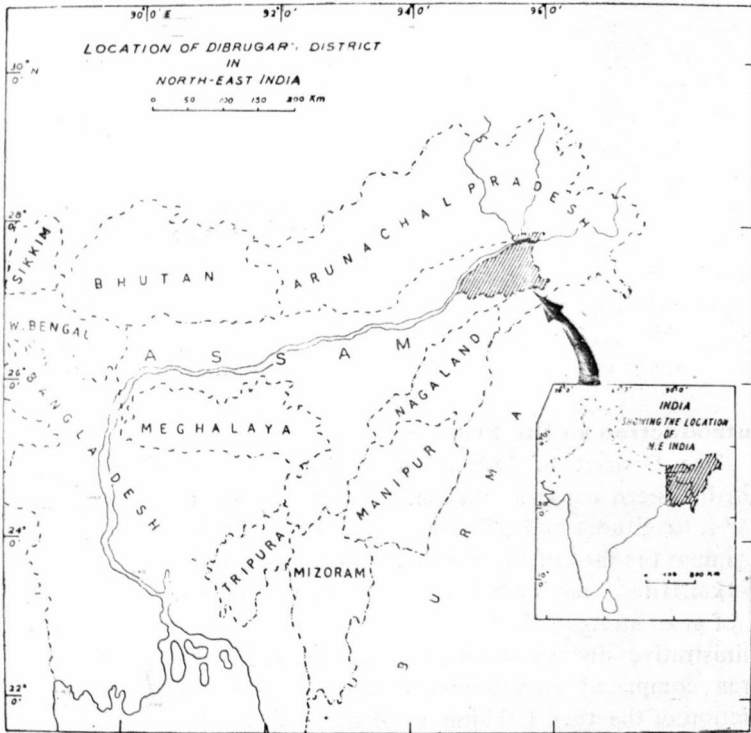
Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

The District of Dibrugarh is situated in the extreme north-eastern corner of Assam. It extends between $94^{\circ} 44'$ E and 95° E longitudes and $27^{\circ} 3'45''$ N and 28° N latitudes (Map 1). Lying at the foot of the Eastern Himalayan mountains and the Patkai Hills, near the border of China and Burma, this district is of great strategical importance. It was created a separate administrative district on October 2, 1971. Prior to this date, the area comprised an administrative sub-division within the jurisdiction of the then Lakhimpur District.

In terms of population (14,11,119 in 1971), this district occupies the seventh place among the districts of Assam and accounts for 9.6 per cent of the total population 1,46,25,152 of the state. The district has an average density of 201 persons per sq. km. distributed over 7,023.9 sq. km. of its area.

The population composition of the District of Dibrugarh is unique in the sense that it is composed of the peoples of various racial, linguistic, social and religious groups. In the racial composition of the population, one finds spectacular prominence of Mongoloid and Aryan elements and an admixture of these two, apart from the Proto-Mediterranean and Australoid elements brought in by the labourers of the tea plantations. "The socio-religious customs of the Aryans have been influenced by the habits and manners of their non-Aryan neighbours, the latter too have not been able to escape the influence of the Aryans with whom they have commercial relation since time immemorial.



The two elements have flourished side by side leading to the evolution of a unique civilization which imbibed and incorporated the assimilable features of both".¹

Linguistically again there are many groups in the district, whose origin belongs to the four main families of languages, namely, 'Astro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Chinese, Dravidian and Indo-European.'² Of these the Tibeto-Chinese, linguistic group has been divided into two sub-families-Tibeto-Burman and Siamese-Chinese. The majority of the indigenous people of this district originally belonged to these two linguistic groups—the former being the language of the Chutiyas, Kacharis, Morans and Borahis, and the latter that of the Ahoms, Khamtis, Phakials, Turungs, Aitonias, Duonias and Noras. With the coming in of the Aryans into the Brahmaputra valley, there developed, perhaps in the first millennium A.D., the Sanskrit based Assamese

language, which slowly started assimilating the local languages. It is interesting to note that a good majority of the tribal population in this district speak Assamese in addition to their own dialects. At present Assamese is the spoken language of 63.79 per cent of the total population of the district. The other languages spoken, in order of importance are Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Munda and Mishing.

The religious groups are many. Amongst them, Hinduism Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are noteworthy. The majority of the people are Hindus and as per census of 1971, their percentage stood at 92.4. The rest comprises of Christians (3.5 per cent), Muslims (3.1 per cent), Buddhists (0.7 per cent), Sikhs (0.2 per cent) and Jains (0.1 percent). Hindus in this district, as elsewhere, are divided into three sects : Saktism, Saivism and Vaishnavism.

The district has always been the melting pot of races and tribes. 'Waves of people belonging to various ethnic groups pouring into this region from time immemorial have affected the isolation of racial groups.'³

The people of the district can be divided into four main socio-religious group : (a) Non-tribal Hindus, (b) Tribals, (c) Muslims and (d) Christians. Amongst the first group there are sub-groups such as Brahmin, Ganak, Kayastha, Kalita, Keot, Koch, Chutiya, Ahom, Kaivartta, Hari and Baria apart from various castes of the Bengalis, Nepalis and Hindusthanis. Amongst the tribes Kachari, Moran, Matak, Miri, Deuri, Khamti and Phakial are the main. Among the Muslims there are Assamese speaking indigenous people and those who settled from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Bangladesh. Most of the Christians are converts from tea garden labour stock. Some of the tea garden labourers who have not embraced Christianity, still profess Central Indian tribal religions.

It is very difficult to ascertain the actual number of population of the district prior to 1872, for, there was no regular and authentic census of population prior to that year. The earliest known record of population of the district is stated in Pemberton's Report,⁴ where it is mentioned that in 1832 the population of the present District of Dibrugarh was 38,829 (6.4 per cent), out of the estimated total of 6,02,500 persons of

the Brahmaputra valley. In 1872, as per the record stated in Hunter's Statistical Account,⁵ there were 82,109 (3.9 per cent) persons in the district as against 20,84,677⁶ in Assam. Since then the growth of population was surprisingly high in this district, which became 14,11,119 as per the census of 1971. Thus the overall growth of population in the District of Dibrugarh, in the centuries between 1872 to 1971, stood at 1618.59 per cent as against 601.6 percent in Assam and 154.6 per cent in India.

This rapid growth of population was due largely to economic prosperity of the district which initiated the in-migration of a large number of labourers and employees not only from the other states of India but also from outside the country.

As a result of vast in-migration into this district, it is not only the growth, but also the structure of the population of the district, that have undergone change. The racial composition, linguistic and religious make-up, occupational structure and settlement pattern—in short all the aspects of demography—have been found to be radically changed.

Nowhere in Assam, and in a very few districts in India, is the population structure so varied and dynamic, and it is because of these reasons that this topic, namely, 'The Evolution of Population Structure of the District of Dibrugarh in the Last One Hundred Years (1872-1971) : A Geographical Analysis', has been chosen for study.

2. Review of Relevant Literature and Allied Works

Population Geography, as an organised branch of geography, is comparatively new. The population characteristics earlier used to be studied by demographers alone. Though population is the content of study in both Demography and Population Geography, the approach in each case is quite different. According to Trewartha, 'the essence of Population Geography lay in the understanding of regional differences in the earth's covering of people'.⁷ As for Demography, 'it is the study of the size, territorial distribution and composition of population changes therein, or in other words it deals with the static as well as dynamic aspects of population.'⁸ As such, while the demographer is concerned with numbers and absolutely

depends upon statistical methods, the geographer relates numbers to area and relies upon maps.

Population Geography was initiated by Beaujeu-Garnier in the first half of this century in France. But it got its due importance in a formal form in 1953 when Trewartha opened up this subject for discussion before the Association of American Geographers. Since then the quality and quantity of Population Geography has markedly increased. Trewartha emphasized that numbers, densities and qualities of population provided the essential background of Population Geography. 'A rich harvest of Population Geography has not yet been reaped by the population Geographers, because this is still in its formative stage. Although the basic concerns of the field are as old as human society, the indispensable facts and techniques for the study have become available very recently.'⁹

Trewartha's original lecture on Population Geography which was delivered before the Association of American Geographers on the occasion of its 49th annual meeting in the year 1953 strongly advocated the usefulness of the study of Population Geography. She mentioned as to how this branch of geography had been utterly neglected by the geographers. Trewartha emphasizes that, 'Population is the point of reference from which all other elements are observed and from which they all singly and collectively derive significance and meaning.'¹⁰ Trewartha stressed that Population was the basis of all aspects of Geography.

In the book 'Population Problem', the Thompson and Lewis (1953) enumerated population study mainly from three viewpoints—size, composition and distribution. In the part population composition, the authors dealt with age, sex, race, colour, mother-tongue, natural increase, migration, urban growth, economic and educational composition, rural, urban and metropolitan composition from sociological viewpoint, in an elaborate way with the help of statistical data.

In view of the growing need of Population Geography, T. Lynn Smith (1960) brought out a volume entitled 'Fundamentals of Population Study' for the college and university students explaining all major elements of population, such as,

distribution, rural and urban residence, race, colour, ethnic-stock, age, sex, marital status, migration and growth from statistical viewpoint. Since the author of this book is a sociologist, his treatment is more sociological than geographic. However, it does help one to understand the basic elements of population study.

Another significant contribution towards Population Geography is the 'Readings in Cultural Geograhpy' (1962), a compilation of selected works. The editors, through these works, try to reveal the nature and scope of Population Geography. The book as the name implies, highlights the cultural aspects of population.

'Population Geography' by John I. Clarke published in 1965 is the first comprehensive book of this kind, published in English. In this book Clarke deals adequately with the meaning, evolution and scope of Population Geography. He mentions that 'Population Geography is concerned with demonstrating how spatial variations in the distribution, migration and growth of population are related to spatial variations in the nature of places. Population Geographers endeavour to unravel the complex inter-relationship between physical and human environments on the one hand and population on the other'.¹¹ The explanation and analysis of these inter-relationships form the basic idea of Population Geography.

Peter Hagget (1965) introduced quantitative analysis in his book 'Locational Analysis in Human Geography'.¹² In this book emphasis is placed on the locational order shown by the phenomena studied traditionally as Human Geography. Here the author deals with settlement as one of the models of locational structure.

The most authentic work in the formative period of the subject is 'A Prologue to Population Geography', by Wilber Zelinsky (1965), where the author explains the nature, use and meaning of Population Geography, its issues, boundaries and identity of the major ideas. Zelinsky defines Population Geography 'as the science that deals with the ways in which the Geographic character is formed by, and in turn reacts upon, a set of population phenomena that vary within it through both space and time as they follow their own behavioural laws,

interacting one with another and with numerous non-demographic phenomena.¹³ In a systematic treatment the author explains in this book the structure of Population Geography, viz., impact of physical factors on cultural man, cultural determinants of population numbers and distribution, migration, class, occupation, race, language, regionalization of population, socio-economic evolution of mankind, balance of people and resources.

The volume 'Geography of Mankind' (1968), by Brock and Webb is mainly based on cultural factors which have marked influence upon forming various traits and behaviours of population. In this book the authors enumerate the influence of language, religion, settlement pattern, density, occupation, growth and migration from cultural viewpoint and as such it becomes helpful for the study of population structure.

'Population Geography, A Reader' (1970) is a compilation of work of different writers where a few aspects of population, viz., growth, distribution and density are treated elaborately. In addition, it also discusses the importance of the study of Population Geography and population data analysis and transformation.

Thus in the course of the last one quarter of the century the Population Geography has been enriched with the writings and treatments of many scholarly geographers, sociologists and demographers. It is also becoming rich with quantitative and qualitative analyses of reasonably high standard.

The pressure of population in the Indian sub-continent attracted attention of the economists, sociologists and anthropologists even in the past. It is found that since the thirties of this century, certain aspects of the vast population of the country, such as distribution and density, growth, occupational structure, religious composition, urbanisation, areal studies, etc. have received individual treatment in the hands of the economists, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers and researchers.

So far the study in the line of Population Geography in India is concerned, the earliest known worker was Krishna-swamy who wrote an article on 'Distribution of Population in Coimbatore District' in 1930. Since then many articles and

research papers dealing with various population characteristics have been published independently and as such it can be said that Population Geography in India has been receiving at least some attention since a long time past.

“Systematic study of Population Geography dealing with all the aspects was initiated by G.S. Gosal in 1956 in his doctoral thesis ‘A Geographical Analysis of India’s Population.’” Following him Krishnan in 1968 wrote his doctoral thesis on ‘Changes in the demographic Character of the Punjab’s Border Districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur’. In 1963 Chandna and in 1970 Mehta compiled their research work on the population of Haryana’s districts bordering on the Union Territory of Delhi and Bist Doab in Punjab respectively.¹⁴

Recently Punjab University has conducted a thorough population study which seems to be a major landmark in the study and development of Population Geography in India. In subsequent years gradually many other postgraduate departments in colleges and universities in the country started teaching Population Geography and conducting research in problems relating to it. As such now it stands out as one of the major sub-divisions of the discipline of Geography in the country.¹⁵

‘Population Geography of India’ (1978) by A. Bhattacharya is a recent work, where the author deals with the aspects such as distribution, migration, marital status, literacy, religious composition, ethnic composition and linguistic composition of the population of India on the basis of census data of 1961. The author clearly shows how these aspects have an impact upon the social bearings of the people.

The most up-to-date and recent work in Population Geography of an Indian author is the ‘Introduction to Population Geography’ by R.C. Chandna and Manjit S. Sidhu published in 1980. Here the authors deal widely with some important aspects of population structure and as such it provides useful information of the subject as a whole.

In spite of so many works in Population Geography, it is found that ‘in our country this branch of Geography is almost negligible and many of its aspects like population pressure,

regional analysis of fertility and mortality, migration, population characteristics of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, regional changes in occupational structure, population regionalisation, etc. are yet to be studied.¹⁶

The study of Population Geography is still in its infancy in Assam. Miss D. Das's work on 'Tribal Population in Kamrup District' and M.C. Bhuyan's work on 'Immigrant Population in Assam: An Analytico-Synthetic Study' are the two doctoral theses embodying research findings on the population of Assam. Apart from these there are only a few serious works such as 'Tribal Population in North-East India: A Diagonostic Survey in Spatial Pattern in N.E. India¹⁷ and 'Clustering and Concentration of Tribal Population in Assam.¹⁸ No significant work has, however, been done in this part of the country despite the fact that it has a heterogenous population derived from various racial, linguistic, religious and regional stocks.

Significance of the Study

The population of Dibrugarh District is unique in the sense that it has persons coming from many racial and linguistic groups. Before the district was taken over by the East India Company in 1826, the area was essentially inhabited by plains tribes, viz., Kachari, Mishing, Moran, Borahi, Singpho, Khamti, etc and also some Hinduized and Hindu groups like Ahom, Chutiya and Koch. With the de facto annexation of Dibrugarh District by the east India Company in 1842, a series of very important changes started taking place bringing about a far reaching socio-economic changes to it.

The most important of these is the discovery of tea-bushes by Robert Bruce in 1823 in the forests of the district and in the hills and plains adjoining the Mishimi and Singpho Hills in its north-east. This was the time when the Chinese denied the British merchants the former's tea and so the latter were looking for an alternative source of this much adored merchandise. The East India Company, therefore, took and added interest in the area and after annexation, plantation of tea was started as early as in 1835. In view of the industry's growing prosperity and commercial prospect, its remarkable expansion took place since

this period. With the increase of tea hectarage after 1855 the problem of labour supply became acute as most of the Assamese people were owner cultivators not reluctant to work in tea gardens. 'As local labourers were not available the government encouraged importation of estate labourers from other parts of India'.¹⁹ As a result since 1853²⁰ labourers began to be imported especially from Chotanagpur area.

Side by side with the growth and development of tea plantation and spread of tea gardens all over the district, there took place a series of economic developments. Modern saw milling started in Margherita in 1881, coal began to be mined at Ledo in 1882 while petroleum began to be extracted at Digboi, although in a crude manner, in 1889. Roads began to be developed from 1868 to link the tea gardens with the river ports on the Brahmaputra. A railway line between Dibrugarh and Jaipur Road was opened up on the 1st May, 1882 and a steamerway linking Dibrugarh with Calcutta was started in 1883. All these developmental activities required a large number of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labourers like coal miners, engine-drivers and firemen, carpenters, fitters, machinists, blacksmiths, boiler-makers, station-workers, pile-drivers, marine-engineers and pilots.²¹ All these workers came not only from different states of India but also from China, Nepal and those parts of undivided India which are now included in Bangladesh and Pakistan and also from Europe, especially Great Britain.

Even in recent times with the discovery of more oil and natural gas, hectic developmental activities were started leading to the in-migration of thousands of people from outside. This has added significantly to heterogeneity of the population makeup of the district.

It is in this background that a thorough investigation into the structure of population of the district is deemed necessary, in order to understand not only the problems of population planning but also to increase the depth of understanding of the socio-economic complexities.

Objective

The present work, 'The Evolution of the Population Structure of the District of Dibrugarh in the Last One Hundred

Years (1872-1971) : A Geographical Analysis', has been undertaken with the following objectives in view :

- (i) A study of the historical background of the population of the district as far back as possible.
- (ii) A study of the spatial distribution, number and racial, religious, occupational and social composition of the population in the nineteenth century from about the time of the annexation of the district (1826) by the British to the early census period.
- (iii) Growth and distribution of the population since 1872 with special reference to racial, linguistic, religious, occupational and social composition.
- (iv) An analysis of groupwise variation in distribution, density and racial, linguistic, occupational and social composition of the population and association and combination of the groups with regard to areal distribution.
- (v) Present population characteristics.
- (vi) A synthetic appraisal.

Scope

The investigation in this work is confined to the newly formed Dibrugarh District consisting of the two administrative sub-divisions, namely, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. The work undertaken is ridden with difficulties, firstly, because there is no comprehensive historical literature regarding this area, and secondly, because no formal census operation was carried out in this area before 1881. Moreover, the boundary of the district underwent change many times in the past during the British rule because of its frontier location. Even after the last census of 1971, the district was reorganised and carved out of the old Dibrugarh Sub-Division of Lakhimpur District on October 2, 1971. As such most of the district level census and other official data relate to Lakhimpur District and not to the present Dibrugarh District. Even the sub-division level data are not applicable because, the present Dibrugarh District has been cut out of the old Dibrugarh Sub-Division which included the

Dhemaji thana area. These reorganisations have made the work all the more difficult, because, the data now have to be collected almost from village level, and in many places speculation and interpolation have to be done.

Although investigation has been made into the past history of the district to understand the origin and growth of various groups of people, the main stress has been laid on the last one century, i.e., between 1872 to 1971, because it is this period which has the greatest impact on the present population structure of the district.

Hypotheses

The investigation has been undertaken as a research in Population Geography and hence the main focus will be the present population structure with necessary reference to the socio-economic aspects of the people.

With the objective and scope stated above, the work has been undertaken for an in-depth study, so that the problems and prospects of such complex population can be thoroughly understood. While going to do it, the following hypotheses have been tentatively accepted. These will be tested by the data collected, analyses made and a synthesis arrived at.

1. The present population structure of Dibrugarh District has a multilingual basis and it is in this respect that this district differs from other districts of Assam in particular and those of India in general.
2. The evolution of the present population structure is facilitated by the utilization of the various natural resources of the district.
3. Barring aside the Assamese tribals, the other Assamese population of the district are largely in-migrants from other areas of Assam.
4. There is a spatial pattern in the distribution of the different communities in the district.
5. Most of the in-migrant population except tea-garden labourers, are located in the urban areas of the district.
6. There is a greater degree of occupational diversification in this district than in any other district in Assam.

It is endeavoured in this work to study the evolution of the population structure and to test the hypotheses in order to find out the real facts.

Methodology

Geographical research, like that in any other discipline, can be carried out through inductive, deductive and empirical approaches. These approaches are often found to be rather complementary than mutually exclusive, especially in geographical research. In an area like Dibrugarh District, where most of the early population data are not found, the researcher has to take up inductive method to proceed backward on the basis of present data and historical evidences. It is the same situation again that compels a researcher to take up deductive method, for, whatever past facts and figures regarding demographic and social conditions at all-Assam level are found, have to be taken as the basis, and deduced for the area under investigation. These methods have to be supplemented by the data collected in the field for empirical analysis. Thus, a combination of these three approaches have been found to be useful by this researcher.

As Population Geography deals with human being, there is little scope for nomothetic analysis. Man's number, distribution, density and other demographics characteristics can be best expressed in ideographic analysis and hence this researcher has resorted to describing various aspects of population on the basis of the findings arrived at, through inductive and empirical analysis with occasional deductive exercises.

The steps undertaken in completing this thesis are as follows :

- (i) As the work has a distinct temporal dimension, it has become necessary to study the history of the area with special emphasis on the population of the past. Moreover, relevant literature concerning population, traditions, customs and other socio-cultural aspects of the district have been studied. It is further proposed to supplement the information by studying monographs, reports and other government and private publications.

- (ii) Apart from library work, both current and historical, data have been collected through questionnaire, schedules, sample survey and interviews.
- (iii) Interpretation and analysis will be made by quantifying relevant data and by drawing maps.

While following the methodology as outlined above, it is borne in mind that the work is geographical and hence a geographical interpretation will be given after analysing the facts and figures. An objective and holistic approach will be taken for synthesising the outcome of the research.

Format

The thesis has four parts—the Preliminaries, Introduction, Analysis and Synthesis. The various components will occur in the following order :

A. Preliminaries

- (i) Title sheet
- (ii) Approval sheet
- (iii) Preface and acknowledgement
- (iv) Table of contents
- (v) List of tables
- (vi) List of figures and illustrations.

The text of the thesis will contain nine chapters as shown below :

B. Introductory Part

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Ecological Base
- 3. Population Sub-Structure and Geo-Political Base
- 4. Economic Base

C. Analytical Part

- 5. Demography
- 6. Spatial Analysis
- 7. Occupational Pattern
- 8. Socio-Cultural Pattern

Introduction

D. Synthesis Part

9. Summary, Conclusion and Prognosis

In the first chapter the problem taken up for research is introduced and its significance, objective, scope and methodology are explained. The second chapter deals with the geographical set-up of the district, where physiography, climate, vegetation, geology, mineral and soil are discussed. The third chapter deals with the original socio-cultural bases of the people from whom the present population has evolved. It also deals with the geo-political evolution of the district. In the fourth chapter, economic resources of the district with their allied activities are discussed.

The analytical part of the thesis begins with the fifth chapter, which deals with demographic aspects, viz., growth, distribution, density, and age and sex composition. In the sixth chapter spatial characteristics of the aspects dealt in the previous chapter, i.e. 'Demography', are analysed. The seventh chapter deals with the occupational composition of the population and the eighth chapter socio-cultural pattern of the present population including caste, creed, mother-tongue, literacy, rural urban composition and such other attributes.

The ninth chapter embodies a synthesis of the facts and findings in the form of summary, conclusion and prognosis.

TERMS AND TERMINOLOGY

The work on Population Geography of the District of Dibrugarh involves a lot of terms and terminology that deserve explanation as given below :

Block : A Block consists of a compact unit of more than one hundred villages, for execution of developmental plans and extension programme.

Bor Senapati : This was a title given to the chief of the Matak Country by the Ahom monarchy in 1805 A.D. Since this time the Ahoms acknowledged his superiority in the Matak Country.

Caste : Caste is a social unit. The Hindu society is divided into endogamous groups known as castes, with varying degrees of responsibility and social position.

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District : For administrative convenience the states are divided into small administrative units called districts. All state level departments establish their branches in the district headquarters. The Deputy Commissioner is the chief administrative officer of a district.

Inner Line : To prevent frequent disputes between the people of Assam's plains and the neighbouring hill tribes the 'Inner Line' was introduced in 1873 by the British administration. The 'Inner Line' was the limit of the British administrative area, beyond which nobody was allowed to pass without a permit. Such a line was laid down on the northern, eastern and south-eastern borders of Assam.

Matak Country : Prior to 1841 the region between the Brahmaputra and the Burhi Dihing in Dibrugarh District, was known as the Matak country and was ruled by a man of the Matak community, called Bor Senapati. This region was then mainly dominated by the people of the Moamaria sect, belonging to Vaishnavite sect. The Moamarias were, at that time, very strong and powerful. They could resist the raids of the tribals like Singphos and hence the latter called them 'Matak', meaning powerful.

Moamaria : Moamaria is the name of a Hindu sect, founded by a person named Aniruddha, who was contemporary to Sankar Deva (1449-1569).²² The sect adheres to a simple Vaishnavite philosophy. The members who originally constituted this sect were drawn from various castes such as, Morans, Kacharis, Harish and Chutiyas. They denied the social supremacy of the Brahmins.

Mouza : A revenue unit used for the purpose of land records and revenue collection.

Scheduled Caste : Those socially and economically backward castes of India, lying at the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy, which have been recognised and listed as such by the Constitution, are called scheduled castes.

Scheduled Tribe : Those tribes in India, which are recognised and listed as such by the Constitution, are called scheduled tribes.

Sub-Division : A district is divided into sub-divisions. Each sub-division is put under the administrative charge of a

Sub-Divisional Officer, who functions under the supervision, guidance and control of the Deputy Commissioner.

Thana : Police station and also the area under its jurisdiction. For maintenance of law and order and control of crimes, each sub-division is divided into smaller units called Thanas with a police station located in it.

Tribe : A tribe is a group of people living in a contiguous territory and having a common culture, language and tradition and claiming to have a common descent with a totem of its own.

Village : The smallest unit of rural settlement generally with compact dwelling houses.

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