

TRANSFER AND ALIENATION OF TRIBAL LAND IN ASSAM

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE KARBIS
OF THE KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT



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DR. B.N. BORDOLOI

In recent years alienation of tribal land has been identified as one of the causes of tribal unrest in India. The problems connected with transfer and alienation of tribal land are not uniform throughout the country. The problems have various dimensions and they differ from State to State.

The present volume deals extensively with the problems of transfer and alienation of tribal land in Assam. A special reference has been made to the Karbis of the Karbi Anglong District, an autonomous hills district under the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India, because of the peculiar nature of the problems.

The study embraces in its ambit the incidence and the problems of transfer and alienation of tribal land within the protected Belts and Blocks, popularly known as Tribal Belts and Blocks, outside these Belts and Blocks, among the Karbis of the Karbi Anglong District and tribal families affected and displaced due to the installation of the Dhansiri Irrigation project, a major project in Assam located in the Darrang District and the Jagiroad Paper Mills in the Marigaon District under the management of the Hindustan Paper Corporation.

The author besides incorporating a profile of the major tribal communities in this book, traces the history of the large-scale migration of the people from then East Bengal (Now Bangladesh) during the pre-independence days to the Plains of Assam and also describes how such large-scale migration had affected adversely the land matters specially those of the tribal classes. The author then gives an account of the introduction of safeguards and other protective measures for tribal classes in land matters by the then provincial Congress Government headed by late Gopinath Bordoloi through legislation in 1947 and also subsequent amendments and other Executive Orders of the Government of Assam upto March 1990. The author also deals with the legislative and other protective measures adopted in the two Autonomous Hills District of Assam to protect and safeguard hill tribes' interest in land.

Displacement of tribals due to installation of major industrial, mining, irrigational and power projects has become another burning problem in the country. The author has done a pioneering work so far Assam is concerned by incorporation of the results of his study of the Dhansiri Irrigation project in the Darrang District and Jagiroad paper Mills in the Marigaon District in this volume showing how these two projects have adversely affected or suitably benefitted the tribal families whose lands were acquired for the purpose of installation of these two projects.

Towards the end of this volume, policies that might be considered and adopted by the State and the Central Governments, District Councils and other concerned authorities are prescribed elaborately to bring the incidence of transfer and alienation of tribal land to the minimum extent possible.

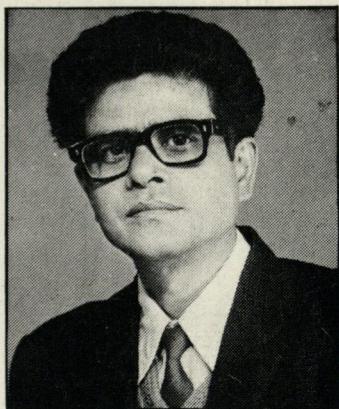
Based on empirical research this book is the first ever of its kind in Assam dealing with one of the basic and vital problems concerning the tribals of the State, both plains and hills, and making a significant contribution towards understanding the problems of transfer and alienation of tribal land in Assam in their proper perspective.

Dr. Budhindra Nath Bordoloi has been associated with tribal research, planning, development and training for the last 28 years having a wide practical experience about the problems and predicaments of the tribal communities in India in general and the tribal communities of Assam in particular. He has also four years teaching experience in college. Dr. Bordoloi has a uniformly good academic career. He is an M.A. in Economics and Doctorate in Anthropological Economics. He is a product of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay, in Tribal Welfare and Administration. He had the opportunity of working in the tribal areas of several states specially in Gujrat and Madhya Pradesh.

Dr. Bordoloi is the author of 5 books, co-author of 2 books and has edited 3 books. He has more than 30 research papers to his credit and many of them have been published in books and reputed journals. He has participated and presented papers in state, regional and national level seminars, conferences and workshops. In July 1988, he participated in the 12th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held in Zagreb, Yugoslavia and presented a paper. Dr. Bordoloi has also been serving as a guest faculty in many state, regional and national level training institutions.

Dr. Bordoloi was the President of the Anthropological Society of North-East India during the year 1985-86. He was a Member of the Working Group on the Development of the Scheduled Castes during Eighth five year plan, Planning Commission, Government of India. He was a Member of the Task Force on Tribal Development, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.

He is a Member of the Central Research Advisory Council, Ministry of Welfare, Government of India. He is a Member of the Working Group on 'Tribals Command Over Resources' constituted by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi. Dr. Bordoloi has been elected as a Member to the Executive Committee of the Indian Association of Social Science Institutions, New Delhi, for the term 1991-93. Presently he is the Director of the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati.



Dr. Budhindra Nath Bordoloi

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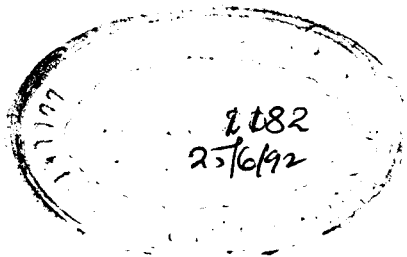
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JAGIROAD PAPER MILLS

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CHAPTER- I

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ASSAM, PAST AND PRESENT

A. GEOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

Assam is one of the States of India and is located in the North Eastern corner. It is situated within 24° to 28° latitude and 92° to 96° longitude. It is bounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the North, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram on the South, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on the East and Meghalaya and West Bengal and Bangladesh on the West. Thus two foreign countries, namely, Bhutan and Bangladesh are bordering Assam on the North and on the West.

A. 1 Topography :

Assam is blended with hills and plains. Topographically it can be divided into three distinct Zones, namely, the Brahmaputra Valley or the Brahmaputra Plains in the North, the Karbi Anglong (Mikir Hills) and the North Cachar Hills in the middle and the Barak Valley or the Barak Plains in the South.

The Brahmaputra Valley is about 500 Km in length and about 60 Km in breadth. This Valley lies at the foot of the Himalayas and towards the South it is extended upto the Naga Hills and the Karbi-Meghalaya plateau. The Brahmaputra has many important tributaries on the southern as well as on the northern sides. The important south bank tributaries are the Buri-Dihing, Dikhou, Dhansiri, Kapili, Digaru, Krisnai and Jinjiram. Among the important north bank tributaries, mention may be made of the Subansiri, Ranganadi, Jia Bharali, Jia Dhansiri, Puthimari, Pagladia, Manas, Ai and Sonkosh. The Brahmaputra Plains have been created by the erosional and depositional activities of the Brahmaputra and its numerous tributaries. The great river island 'Majuli' is also the creation of the above mentioned activities.

Almost the entire Brahmaputra Valley from Sadiya to Dhubri is flood-prone. Heavy rainfall during the monsoon, existence of numerous

tributaries and the flatness of the valley, cause recurring floods during the monsoon. The soil in the Brahmaputra Plains is very fertile and is suitable for a variety of crops.

The Barak Valley or the Cachar Plains lies south beyond the Barail Ranges. Like the Brahmaputra Valley, the Barak Plains have also been created by erosion and deposition by the river Barak and its tributaries like the Longai, Dholeswary, Sonai etc. This valley is about 80 km in length and 60 km in breadth. This valley is, however, surrounded by hills on three sides.

In between these two valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak lies the Karbi plateau and the North Cachar Hills.

The Karbi Anglong (Mikir Hills) geologically constitutes a part of the Shillong Plateau. The average height of this plateau is 300 to 400 metres. The highest peak known as Singhason is about 1360 metres. The North Cachar Hills start from where the Karbi Plateau ends. Hills in this region are not only very steep but full of deep gorges. The hills in the North Cachar Hills form a part of the Barail Range and they are the highest in Assam. Some of peaks of this range are above 1600 metres.

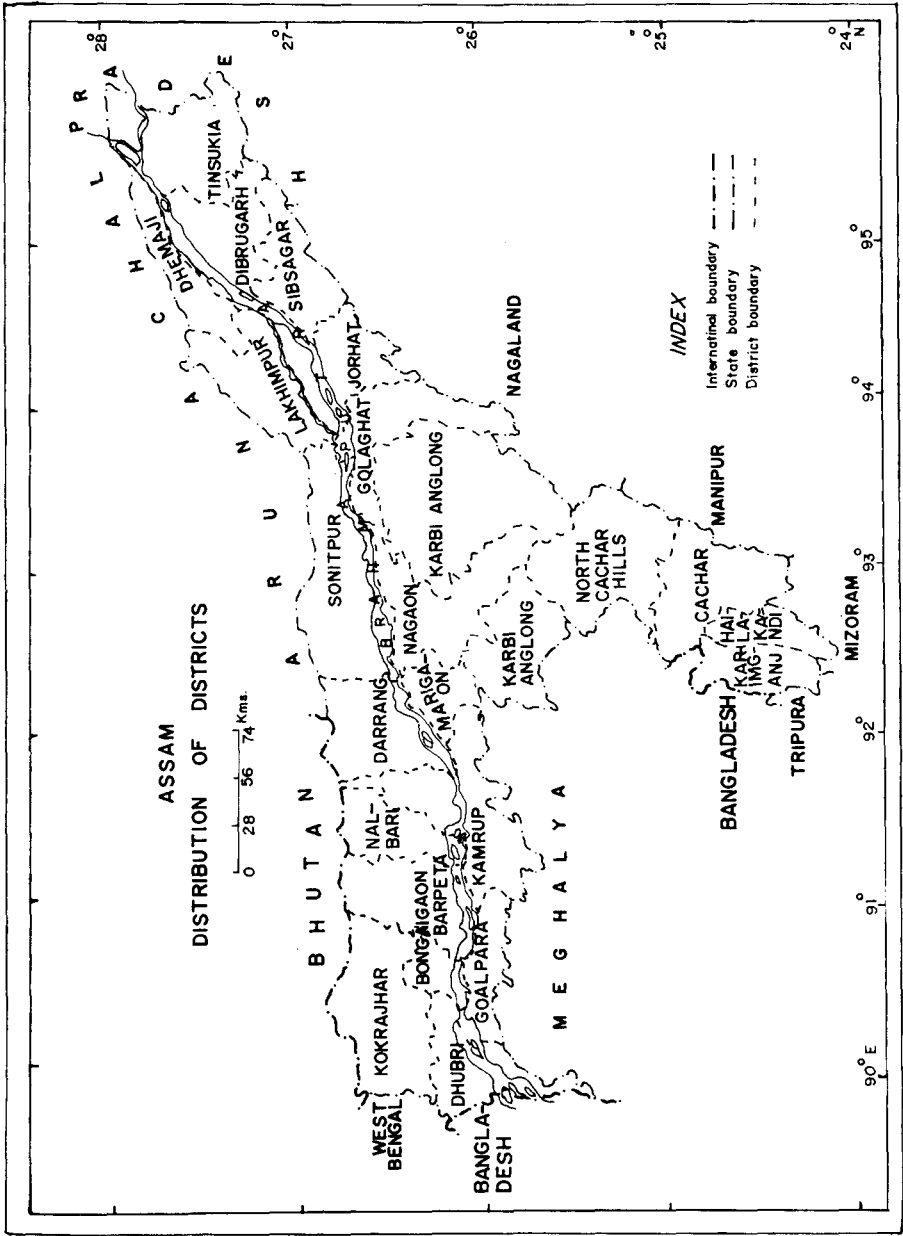
A. 2 Climate and Rainfall :

Assam has a tropical climate. The summer days are quite hot while the winter days are sufficiently cool, Humidity is, however, present in the summer as well as in the winter. The average temperature varies from place to place depending on the rainfall and elevation and topography. While the average maximum temperature is 30⁰ Celseus, the average minimum temperature is 10⁰ Celseus. The monsoon starts here generally from mid-May and continues generally upto September. The winter season begins from mid-October and it continues upto March with occasional light showers. The average annual rainfall is 300 cm.

A. 3 Soil, Flora and Fauna :

In the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak, the soils are mostly alluvial. In the hill areas the soils are red in colour and they are also acidic. The climatic conditions as well as the soils in the Assam plains are quite suitable for the cultivation of a variety of crops like rice, pulses, mustard, jute, various types of vegetables and commerical crops like tea. The climate conditions and the soils in the hill area are quite suitable for the cultivation of commercial crops like coffee and rubber.

From the point of view of forest wealth, Assam is very rich. On records Assam is supposed to have 39% of geographical area under



forest – Reserved Forests 22% and unclassed state forests 17%. Since the Unclassed State Forests also include government land, grazing land and forests outside the purview of the Reserved Forests where virtually the State Government has very little control, it is not precisely known how much land remains as unclassed state forests as such. Valuable timbers like *Sal*, *Bansom*, *Hallok*, *Gamari*, *Tita Chapa*, *Sisu* etc. are grown in the reserved forests. Wild bamboos suitable for paper pulp grow abundantly in the hill areas. In the Unclassed State Reserved Forests various kinds of medicinal plants are also found abundantly. Among the minor forest produce mention may be made of the bamboo, thatch, cane, reeds, sal seeds etc.

There are 524 Forest villages in the Reserve Forest Areas of Assam, which are recognised by the Forest Department, Assam. 47.11% of the population of the forest villages are tribals.

From the point of view fauna also Assam is very rich. The Kaziranga National Park which is internationally famous for its one horned rhinoceros is also habitat of many wild animals like tigers, bears, deer, buffaloes, monkeys and innumerable species of birds. Migratory birds also visit the park at different parts of the year. The forests of Assam contain different types of animals like elephants, tigers, bears, monkeys, reptiles besides a host of birds.

A. 4 Minerals :

Oil (Petroleum), natural gas, coal and limestone are the important mineral resources of Assam. In Digboi, Naharkatia, Hoogrija and Moran in the Dibrugarh District, Lakowa, Galeki and Rudrasagar in Sibsagar District and Borhola in Jorhat District crude oil is drilled. In the early parts of 1988, Oil and Natural Gas Commission has also discovered oil in the Barak Valley. These fields produce 5.25 million tonnes of crude oil every year and this constitutes 60% of the country's output.

At present natural gas is produced only from the fields of Namrup and Naharkatiya to the tune of 600 million cubic metres annually out of which only 50% have so far been utilised. Coal is found in the Ledo, Margherita, Jaipur and Lekhapani areas in the Dibrugarh District, Patkai Hills in the Tinsukia District and Sheelbhetta region in the Karbi Anglong District. The total annual production of coal from the various fields of Assam comes to about 6 lakhs tonnes.

Limestone is mainly found in the Dillai Parbat in the Karbi Anglong district. The location of the Bokajan Cement Factory under the management of the Cement Corporation of India located in the Karbi

Anglong District, has been made possible because of the existence of this mineral.

A. 5 Economy :

Assam has an agriculture based economy and more than 70% of the population depend on it as their main source of livelihood. However, only 20% of the total geographical area of the state has been used for the purpose of agriculture. Rice is the main crop cultivated by the people. Maize is generally cultivated in the hill areas. Wheat, pulses, oil seeds specially the mustard are also cultivated in the plains areas. In the interior hill areas, of course, the tribal people still practise shifting cultivation which is commonly known as *Jhum* in the North East India. In the *Jhums*, the tribal people raise mixed crops along with the cultivation of paddy. Tea, jute and sugarcane in the plains areas and coffee and rubber in the hill areas are grown as commercial crops in Assam. There are 750 tea gardens in Assam of various sizes. These gardens are mainly concentrated in the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nagaon, Lakhimpur, Darrang, Cachar and Karimganj districts.

Assam is considered to be industrially backward. Prior to independence it did not have any industries worth the name except the oil refinery at Digboi, tea industry and the plywood industry located mainly in Upper Assam. At present there are three oil refineries at Digboi, Guwahati (Nooamanti) and Bongaigaon. There are three Sugar Mills one each at Barua Bamun Gaon in Golaghat District, Badarpur in Cachar District and Kampur in Nagaon District. The only fertilizer plant in Assam is at Namrup in Dibrugarh District. The Bokajan Cement Factory in the Karbi Anglong District is another important landmark in the industrial history of Assam. Jogighopa Paper Mills has been closed down since it has become unprofitable. The Jagiroad Paper Mills in Nagaon District and the Cachar Paper Mills located in Panchgram of Cachar District under the management of the Hindusthan Paper Corporation are so far running well.

Apart from these big industries there are lots of small scale industries like plywood factories, saw mills, rice and oil mills, flour mills and many others. The era of electronic industry has also dawned in Assam along with the establishment of Assam Electronic Development Corporation at Guwahati which is now producing a variety of electronic goods including televisions. Sericulture and handloom are two most important cottage industries of the people of Assam. Although sericulture industry is confined to the rural and tribal areas, handloom industry is found to be prevalent in all regions of the state irrespective of

urban or rural areas. Manufacturing of bell-metal utensils in Sarthebari in Nalbari District and brass utensils in Hajo in Kamrup District are other two important cottage industries of Assam.

Although Assam produces 215 MW of electricity, nevertheless, it is insufficient to meet the growing needs of energy, of urban and rural areas. There are three thermal power stations one each at Namrup in Dibrugarh District, Chandrapur in Kamrup District and Bongaigaon in Kokrajhar District. Assam receives power supply from the Barapani Hydel Project near Shillong, the Kapili Hydel Project located on the boundary of Assam and Meghalaya and the Logtak Project of Manipur. The Karbi Langpi Project in the Karbi Anglong District is yet to be commissioned.

Transport and communication systems are not developed in Assam to the desired extent. In fact, deficiencies in these two render Assam economy vulnerable. The Saraighat road-cum-rail bridge on the Brahmaputra at Guwahati, and the Kalia Bhomora road bridge on the Brahmaputra connecting Silghat and Tezpur have been serving as the life lines of not only of Assam but also the entire North-east India. Steps have already been initiated to construct another road-cum-rail bridge on the Brahmaputra at Jogighopa. Construction of broad-gauge rail line from Guwahati to Pancharatna in Goalpara District on the South bank of the Brahmaputra is in progress. The completion of the two above mentioned projects will surely ease the transport and communication difficulties to a great extent. In the Barak Valley the construction of the metre gauge railway line connecting Silchar with Jiri Bam upto the border of Manipur is also another step for easing the transport and communication bottleneck in the Barak Valley. 20200 km of all weather motorable roads including the 1375 km of National Highway in Assam which serve as the net-work of surface road communication, are heavily damaged by heavy monsoon rains and consequent floods every year. Landslides in the hill areas are also regular features during the monsoon which disrupt road as well as rail communication.

In spite of the fact that Assam has 9600 km of navigable water courses, nevertheless, the inland water transport system which was rather one of the most important systems of surface communication contributing to the growth of trade and commerce in Assam during pre-independence days was greatly affected by the partition of the country and at present it is not well developed except the ferry services. Pandu near Guwahati has now been developed into an inland port to facilitate the movement of tea from Assam by steamers. Assam is linked up with air services also and there are six airports, namely,

Guwahti, Tezpur, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Silchar. Except Lakhimpur the other five airports are linked up with Boeing services. Air Bus services operate only between Calcutta and Guwahati. Vayudoot services also ply in Assam. Whatever might be the pace of development of transport and communication system, it is an admitted fact that the bullock carts in the plains areas and porters in the remote hilly areas still play a vital role as means of transport.

A. 6 Demography :

As per 1971 Census the population of Assam was 1.46 crores, the sex ratio being 896 females per 1000 males. Since no Census was conducted in 1981, the projected population calculated on the basis of the growth of population during the decade 1961-71, was assumed to be 2(two) crores in 1981. The average density of population in 1971 was 186 per s.q. km. The percentage of literacy in 1971 was 28.14.... (male 36.78% and female 18.6%). Racially there are many ethnic groups in Assam including the indigenous tribal communities professing different religious faiths and beliefs and speaking a few languages and many a dialect. As per 1971 Census the percentage of people professing different religions was as follows :- Hindus 72.51, Muslims 24.56, Christians 2.61, Sikhs 0.03 and Buddhists 0.09. The Hindus also, of course, include the tribal people professing their traditional religions. The percentage of scheduled tribes both hills and plains combined, was 10.98 in 1971 (9.18% plains and 1.80% hills.)

B. HISTORY – PAST AND PRESENT PAST HISTORY.

B. 1 Mythological Period :

Since there has not been any recorded history of Assam till the advent of the Ahoms in the thirteenth century, it is rather difficult to trace the history of Assam for the unrecorded period. As such the only sources of the past history of Assam for the unrecorded period are the ancient inscriptions, references made in the Mahabharata, Purans, Trantras and similar other scriptures and also the observations made by Huen-Tsang, the Chinese traveller.¹ Even in regard to the origin of the name 'Asom' opinions differ. In this connection the opinion expressed by Mr. Robinson seems to be quite logical. According to him name 'Asom' might have been derived from 'Ahom', since in Kalika Purana

¹ Gait, E., A History of Assam, Third Edition, Guwahati 1984, p.1.

the lower part of this country was called Kamrupa while the upper part was called Namrupa.²

In ancient times, Assam was known as Pragjyotish which literally means the seat for the eastern astrology. According to Kalika Purana, the Kamakhya temple, located at present Guwahati, was the centre of this country and the country extended 100 Yojanas (about 720 km) in all directions. The ancient Kingdom of Pragjyotish thus not only included the undivided Assam but the Eastern Bengal and Bhutan too. The entire Kingdom was divided into four administrative units called 'Pitha'.

In ancient times Assam was also known as Kamrupa since Kamdeva, the god of love, was said to have reborn after he was burnt to ashes by Siva, one of the trinity Gods of the Hindus.

The earliest legendary king of Kamrupa was Mahidanaba or Ghataka. The last king of this dynasty was defeated and slain by Narakasura, the son of Vishnu and the mother Earth. Narakasura was one of the most powerful kings of the mythological period who had established his capital at Pragjyotishpur, the present day Guwahati. Narakasura who later on became an oppressor was, however, killed by his own father Krishna. Narakasura's Son Bhagadatta was also a legendary hero. He proved his heroism by fighting against the Pandavas with great valour in the battle of Kurukhetra. He was, however, killed in the battle.

On the north Bank of the Brahmaputra there was another kingdom called Sonitpur and Bana was the most powerful king of this Kingdom. The secret marriage of his beautiful daughter with Anirudha, the grandson of the Lord Krishna of Dwaraka, resulted in a fierce battle between Bana and Lord Krishna. Bana was, however, defeated in the battle. The relics of the Kingdoms of Vidarbha and Sonitpur still remind the people of Assam of their glorious past.

Arimatta, another very powerful king of the past, ruled in lower Assam with his capital at Baidargarh of the present Kamrup. His son Jangal Balahu, however, shifted his capital to Raha in the present Nagaon District. The high embankments called Jongal Balahu Garh around his capital are still there.

Whatever account was available upto the end of the mythological period from the religious scriptures, mythologies and other sources regarding the kings and their kingdoms in Pragjyotish and ancient Kamrup may not be fully accurate. None-the-less, it can be inferred that

² Robinson, W.A., A Descriptive Account of Assam, Reprinted, New Delhi 1975, p. 2.

this part of the country wielded considerable powers and a fair degree of civilization in the ancient past and the Chinese traveller, Huen-Tsang's account of Assam also confirms this.

Huen-Tsang visited Assam during the reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varman, who was one of the most powerful kings of Kamrupa during the middle of 5th century. He was not only a contemporary of king Harsabardhana of Thaneswara but a great friend too.

Two invasions of Kamrup by the Mahmedan Nawabs of Bengal in 1198 A.D. and in 1257 A.D. were successfully repulsed by the then kings.

B. 2 Recorded period (Ahom Period) :

The Ahoms entered into the eastern conner of the Brahmaputra Valley in the early part of the 13th century by crossing the Patkai Ranges. At that time while the Bhuyans were ruling on the north bank of the Brahmaputra the Kacharis were ruling on the south bank. the Chutiyas were ruling in Sadiya and in the western part of Kamrupa the Koches were ruling. The kingdom of the Koches was called Kamatapur. Among the Koch kings Naranarayana was the greatest and his brother Chilaraya was one of the greatest generals renowned for his valour and heroism. Besides his statesmanship Naranarayana was known for his scholarship and he patronised a large number of scholars who had flourished in his royal court. It was, in fact, under his patronage that the greatest Vaisnavite saint of Assam Shri Sankardeva did most his writings.

The period of written history in Assam started from the advent of the Ahoms. Sukapha, belonging to the Tai-speaking Shan community along with a band of faithful soldiers entered into the eastern part of Kamrupa through the Patkai ranges. At first he defeated the Chutiyas and then the Nagas and proceeded upto the Dikhowmukh from which he again turned eastward and proceeded to Charaideo where he established his first capital.

By 1523 the Chutiya kingdom was completely annexed by the Ahoms, having already annexed the kingdoms of the Morans and the Barahis. The Ahoms, however, faced great resistance at the initial stage from the Kacharis whose kingdom was extended from the west bank of the river Dikhou to the river Kallang including the Dhansiri Valley. During the reign of the Kachari King Detchung, the Ahoms not only killed the Kachari king but occupied the entire Dhansiri valley, and destroyed their capital Dimapur also. It happened in mid 16th Century. This had compelled the Kacharis to migrate to the North Cachar Hills where they established their capital at Maibong during the reign of

Suhungmung who was one of the most powerful Ahom kings. He successfully repulsed three invasions of the Mahammedans. Brahminism as well the Vaishnavism preached by Shri Sankardeva flourished with equal vigour during his reign. He also shifted the capital from Saraideo to Gargaon. Naranarayana, the most powerful king of the Koches was his contemporary. Hostilities between the Ahoms and the Koches led to the occupations of the entire north bank of the Brahmaputra upto Narayanpur in the Lakhimpur District in the east by the latter. Ultimately, however, the Ahoms regained the entire territory lost previously after a fierce battle with the Koches.

During the reign of Sukhapha or Khora Raja who succeeded Suklengmung, Chalarai, the Koch general, attacked the Ahom kingdom and even occupied Gargaon. The Ahom king was compelled to enter into a treaty with the Koches.

Susengpha or Pratap Singha who was one of the renowned kings of Assam was on the throne from 1603 to 1641. During his reign there were two attacks by the Mahammedans from Bengal and the king himself with his army not only repulsed both the attacks but also recaptured the territory occupied by them in lower Assam. But the third attack from the armies sent by the Nawab of Dacca was a blow for the Ahoms. The Ahoms were defeated and even Guwahati itself came under the Mahammedans.

King Pratap Singha established marital relationship with the Jaintias and the Koch Kings. For the first time in Assam census was conducted. Many families brought from lower Assam were rehabilitated in the sparsely populated areas of Upper Assam. Many roads and river embankments and the Siva Temples at Dergaon and Viswanath were constructed during his rule.

The reign of the next King Joydhvaj Singha was quite important in the sense that during his reign the Mughals under the captainship of Mirjumla attacked Assam and almost without resistance went upto Gargaon, the capital, and occupied it. The king along with his nobles fled to Namrup. The onset of the monsoon, outbreak of epidemics and constant harassment by the Ahom soldiers at night had compelled Mirjumla to enter into a treaty with the Ahom king in January 1663. As per provisions of the treaty, Mirjumla left for Dacca compelling the Ahom king to pay an annual tribute to the Mughal king.

The King Chakradhawaj, who succeeded Joydhawaj Singha refused to pay the idemnity. He sent an army under the command of Lachit Barphukan who captured Guwahati by defeating the Mughal army. The enraged Mughal emperor Aurangajeb sent a huge army under the

commandership of Raja Ramsing. The battle of Saraighat in February 1669 was a decisive one and the Ahom army under the commandership of Lachit Barphukan completely defeated the huge Mughal army who were driven out from the territorial jurisdiction of Assam.

Due to internal feuds among the Ahom nobles and the members of the royal families six kings during the period from 1673 to 1679 met their deaths. The reign of Lora Raja (boy king) who was in fact a puppet in the hands of a noble was an eventful one in the sense that Joymati, the wife of prince Gadapani was put to death after inhuman torture on her for not disclosing the whereabouts of her husband. However, Gadapani with the help of Barphukan of Guwahati dethroned Lora Raja, ascended the throne of Assam and put an end to the internal feuds for the time being. His son Rudra Singha who succeeded him is considered to be greatest of all the Ahom kings. The Kachari king who rebelled against him was not only defeated but driven away from his capital at Maibang. The king along with his nobles had to flee to Khaspur in the present district of Cachar where the Kacharis established their last capital. In 1708 the Jaintia kingdom was also annexed by the Ahoms. Rudrasingha got a palace built at Rongpur near Sibsagar. The digging of the Joysagar tank and construction of a temple on its bank in the memory of his mother Joymati, construction of several important roads and bridges, bringing all the neighbouring tribes under his submission, survey and settlement operations in Sibsagar and Nagaon were some of his other achievements.

The insult of the Moamoria Mahantas at the hands of Phuleswari, the queen of Siva Singha, the successor of Rudra Singha, had sown the seeds of a rebellion which found its manifestation during the reign of Rajeswar Singha resulting in the capture of the Ahom throne by the Moamarias. Although the Ahoms could recapture the throne after sometime it was, however, short-lived and the next king Gaurinath Singha who had to flee to Guwahati to save his skin, sought the help of the East India Company to regain his kingdom and kingship. Captain Welsh along with sufficient number of soldiers was deputed by the East India Company. He captured Rongpur from the Moamorias and installed Gaurinath Singha as the king. But as soon as Captain Welsh left Rongpur, the Moamorias again captured Rongpur and drove away the Ahom king to Jorhat.

Gaurinath Singha was succeeded by Kamaleswar Singha who had a very capable Bura Gohain. This Bura Gohain brought to an end all the revolts including those of Momarias and some tribal chiefs. But the death of Kamaleswar Singha was another blow for the Ahom kingdom. As soon as Chandra Kanta Singha succeeded the deceased king the

trouble started. His disrespect to the nobles led to a crisis. Feuds broke out between the Governor of Guwahati and the nobles at Rongpur and as a result of this the Burmese army was invited thrice to Assam. The Burmese perpetrated such types of oppression that ultimately the British Government had to intervene since the Burmese had even entered into the British territory and committed heinous oppressions there. The British Government declared a war against the Burmese and drove them away from Assam. The Burmese were compelled to enter into a treaty in 1826 at Yanda-boo as a result of which Assam became a part of the British India.

B. 3 British Period :

So far the revenue administration was concerned the British officers posted in Assam after the Yandaboo treaty had instituted a radical change. At the initial stage a poll tax of Rs. 3/- per *Paik* in lieu of certain periods of physical labour was introduced. But it was found to be a most difficult procedure since the *Paiks* of different *Khels* were scattered due to Burmese atrocities. Hence the whole area of a district was compartmentalised into blocks called *Mauza* and each *Mauza* was entrusted to an officer called *Mauzadar*.

For the regular assessment of land revenue on the basis of measurement three British officers were appointed as Collectors. The lands were divided in *Basti* (homestead), *Rupit* (land suitable for paddy cultivation), *Bao-tali* (land suitable for Bao-rice cultivation) and *Faringati* (land growing dry crops). Land was at that time annually settled.³ This system was introduced by David Scott, the Agent to the Governor General, who died in 1831 at the age of 45 years.

After the death of David Scott, Purandar Singha was made the Raja of Upper Assam from Dhansiri to the east in form of a protected prince. By 1833 all the Chiefs of the Khasi states also made their submission to the British. The Kachari king Gobinda Chandra died in 1830 without leaving any heir to throne. In 1832, therefore, Cachar was annexed to the British territory. The hill tracts which now form the present North Cachar Hills district was ruled by Tularam Senapati, a Kachari general. This tract was also annexed to the British territory by granting a life pension of Rs. 50/- per month to Tularam. In October, 1838, the territory assigned to be governed by king Purandar Singha was annexed to the British territory on the plea that the king had miserably failed to pay the stipulated tribute of Rs. 50,000/- per annum.

³ Gait, E., A History of Assam, Third Edition (Reprint), Guwahati, 1984, pp. 294-295.

The small geographical regions occupied by different Naga chiefs were gradually annexed to the British territory in between the years 1866 to 1878. Similarly the Garo Hills areas were also fully annexed to the British territory by the end of 1872-73. By 1892, the hill areas inhabited by the Lushais were also brought under the British administration.⁴

In the year 1857 when the Sepoy Mutiny was sweeping the British territories in India, in Assam also Maniram Dewan with the help of the Saring Raja tried to revolt against the British rule but the plot was foiled by the British and Maniram Dewan had to pay his life for this.

In September 1874, the administration of Assam Province including that of Sylhet was brought under a Chief Commissioner. In 1919 Assam became a Governor's Province. In accordance with the Govt. of India Act. 1935, provincial autonomy was introduced in Assam in 1937 and it continued till India attained independence in 1947.

C. RELATIONS WITH TRIBES

C. 1 During the Ahom Rules :

The Ahoms evolved a distinct policy to deal with the tribes some of which had been living within their territorial jurisdictions and some inhabiting the bordering areas. The distinct policy of the Ahoms had three main aspects, namely, (1) non-interference with the internal affairs of the tribes, (2) supply of essential commodities to meet their day to day economic needs, (3) regulation of the trade between the plains people and the tribal people living in the neighbouring hills.⁵ Of course, those tribes who violated the agreements and committed raids in the plains were punished by sending soldiers with capable captains.

C. 2 During the British Rule :

The British, however, followed rather a mixed policy. In principle they more or less followed the policy of the Ahoms in respect of some tribes. But at the same time they also followed the policy of annexation in respect of majority of the numerically strong tribes like the Garos, Lushais, Nagas, Khasis and Jaintias. The ferocious tribes like the Akas, Daflas (now called Nishis), Miris, Abors, Mishimis, Khamtis and Singphos living in the North Eastern Tracts were also subjugated by annexing their kingdoms, but allowing the tribal kings or chiefs to

⁴ Gait, E., *ibid.*, p. 345.

⁵ Dutta, P.N., *Glimpses into the History of Assam*, Shillong 1988, p. 241.

manage their own internal affairs. While during the Ahom rule, there were cordial relationship and free intercourse between the plains and hill people, the introduction of the Inner Line Regulation Act 1873 by the British Government which had restricted free intercourse between the plains people and the hill tribals, was in fact a policy of isolation which created a feeling of distrust between these two peoples.

The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation 1886 was primarily meant for the plains districts only excluding the hill districts. For the hill districts, therefore, there was no land revenue and the British administrators collected house tax only.⁶ House tax collected had given an idea to the administrators the number of household as well as the approximate number of population that a particular tribal community might have and this enabled them to prepare their own defence as well as administrative strategy.

Under the Government of India Act 1935, some administrative changes were brought into these areas. According to this Act Mizo district, Naga Hills district, North Cachar Hills, Balipara Frontier Tract, Sadiya Frontier Tract (Abor and Mishmi Hills districts), Tirap Frontier Tract and Lakhimpur Frontier Tract were termed as Excluded Areas. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills district (excluding Shillong), Garo Hills District and the Mikir Hills Tract were included as Partially Excluded Areas. The Excluded Areas were directly administered by the Governor in his discretion and so far as the Partially Excluded Areas were concerned, the Governor acted in his individual judgement. When India attained independence in 1947, these two concepts, namely, the Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas were done away with and the Constituent Assembly formed subsequently incorporated concepts like the Fifth Schedule, Sixth Schedule and other provisions for the tribals.

D. ASSAM AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Since the attainment of independence Assam has been undergoing transformation not only in the socio-economic fields but in respect of geo-political scenerio also.

The Naga Hills District was cut off from Assam in 1957 by making it a centrally administered area and it remained as such till it was given the statehood in 1963. In 1972 the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, and the Garo Hills District were cut off from the State of Assam and constituted into a separate state called Meghalaya. Similarly, in the same year the Lushai Hills District was also taken away from the territorial jurisdiction

⁶ Gait, E., A History of Assam, Reprint 1984, op.cit., p. 345.

of Assam and it was given the status of a Union Territory and rechristened as Mizoram. And subsequently it was also given statehood.

E. AN OUTLINE ACCOUNT OF MIGRATION OF DIFFERENT TRIBES

North-East India, specially Assam, was subjected to successive waves of migration from Central Asia belonging to the Indo-Chinese linguistic families of which mention may be made of the Mon-Khmer (Khasis and Jaintias), the Tibeto-Burmans, the Siamese Chinese and the Shans (Ahoms). It is assumed that the speakers of the Mon-Khmer family (Khasis and Jaintias) were the first band of infiltrators into Assam and their date of infiltration is several hundred of years B.C. That they were the first band of infiltrators into Assam is indicated by linguistic evidences, popular customs and place names of the state.⁷ People speaking Tibeto-Burman languages, nemely, the Kacharis, Rabhas, Meches, Mikirs (Karbis), Lalungs, Garos, Nagas, Kukis etc. were the second band of infiltrators into Assam.

According to B.K. Barua the original home of the various peoples speaking Tibeto-Burman Language was in Western China near the Yang-te Kiang and the Howang-ho rivers. From these places they went down the courses of the Brahmaputra, the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy and entered Burma and then to Assam.⁸ P.C. Choudhury has stated that the Tibeto-Burman races entered Assam through the courses of the Brahmaputra, Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong and mountain passes of Assam and Burma through the north-east and south west. The people of these races found the speakers of the Mon-Khmer speech occupying small hilly regions and they drove the latter into different directions. Some of these races occupied the hills of Assam such as the Garo Hills, Lushai Hills, Mikir Hills, Naga Hills etc. and gradually spread over the plains of both upper and lower Assam along the courses of the Brahmaputra.⁹

Sir E. Gait also supports the view that the successive hordes of immigrants from the great hive of Mongolian race in western China had entered India through Assam from the North-east.¹⁰

⁷ Barua. B.K., A Cultural History of Assam (Early Period), Guwahati, 1969, p.6.

⁸ Ibid., p.6.

⁹ Choudhury, P.C., A History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the 12th Century A.D., Guwahati, 1959, p. 5.

¹⁰ Gait. E., A History of Assam, Calcutta, 1963; Introduction to 1st Edition.

A new theory contrary to the agreed opinion was expressed by M.L. Bose regarding the originality and the route of migration of the tribes of Assam as well as of the North-East India. He has rejected the theory that the tribes of North-East India belong to the Mongolian origin and their original home was on the Howang-ho and Yang-te-Kiang rivers in China. His contention is that the Kirats, the earliest inhabitants of Assam as described in the Kalika Purana, were no Mongolian but Mongoloids whose original home was the region where India, China and Burma met.¹¹ Bose has also further stated that the ancient kingdom Pragjyishpur was the original home of the Kiratas, Nishadas and the Meches. When Narakasura founded his empire in this region many of the original people deserted their lands and found way to new homes across the ranges into Burma, China etc. When the kingdom of Kamrupa began to disintegrate some of these tribes beyond the frontiers together with new ones started entering into North-East India.¹²

The precise time of migration of these people from the western China near the rivers Yang-te Kiang and Howang-ho is, however, not known. But the intriguing question is – why did these people migrate to far off places which were quite foreign to them. Although the scholars are found to be silent on this point, it may be assumed that natural calamities like floods, earthquakes etc. coupled with internal feuds amongst the different peoples or an abnormal growth of population or attack on their life and property by the pre-historic giant type dreadful creatures might have compelled some peoples to leave their hearth and home and to migrate in search of better suitable place of habitation. In fact these people in those areas were more or less nomadic in nature. Even in Assam also during the early days of their migration they did not settle in one place for too long a period. At a later stage when migration had to be curbed by the communities themselves because of geo-political reasons they settled more or less permanently in some specified areas of the state of Assam which had embraced almost the entire area of the North-East in those days. The tribes infiltrated into Assam by two routes – one group through the Patkai Ranges on the North-East and the other group through the Manipur-Cachar-Mizo Hills on the south-east.

F. CONCLUSION

Assam, the gateway of the North-East India, is a state blended with hills and plains and it is rich in natural resources specially in respect of

¹¹ Bose, M.L.; The Problems of Identification and Immigration of the North-East Frontier Tribes, The N.E. India Research Bulletin, Vol. V, 1974, pp. 46 to 50

¹² Ibid., pp. 44-45

oil, natural gas, luxuriant forest, coal, limestone, timber, with animals and birds including the world famous one horned rhinoceros etc. It produces more than 50% of the tea produced in India. From the points of view of industry, transport and surface communication the state is still lagging behind.

In ancient times Assam was known as Pragjyotish and also as Kamrup. After the advent of the Ahoms in 13th Century, it came to be known as 'Asom'. From the mythological period till the advent of the Ahoms, this part of the country was ruled by kings belonging to different tribal communities. The original home of the tribal communities belonging to Mongoloid race and speaking Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burman languages was somewhere in Western China near the Yang-te Kiang and Howangho rivers.

The people in course of their migration from the Central China by crossing the countries of the south-east Asia had made an entry into Assam in successive hordes through two major routes, namely, the passes of the Patkai Ranges in North-East and Burma-Manipur in the South-East probably several hundred years B.C. These people occupied almost the entire geographical area of the present North-east India in course of their migration at different points of time.

The Ahoms ruled Assam for 600 years beginning from the 13th century and as per terms of the Treaty of Yandaboo, between the British and the Burmese Assam became a part of the British India. After the attainment of independence a lot of socio-economic transformations have taken place in Assam.

The Ahoms' Policy towards the tribals was one of non-interference with their internal affairs and they preferred not to bring the tribal areas under their administrative control unless it was absolutely required as a matter of strategic importance. The British on the other hand, followed the policy of non-interference to a limited extent and annexed most of the territories occupied by the tribals. Their policy was rather a policy of isolation which means keeping aloof of the tribals from the close contacts with the non-tribals. The policy that has been followed in India since independence so far as the tribals are concerned is a policy of integration to the main stream of national life through an integrated development approach envisaging the development of the tribals in all spheres without disturbing their core cultural values and their own heritage and genius as far as possible.