UG HT S6-01 (DSC)

FOUR YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER VI

CULTURAL HISTORY OF ASSAM

HISTORY

Surya Kumar Bhuyan School of Social Sciences

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University

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Course Introduction:

This Course is meant for the Sixth semester learners of History of BA programme under the revised semester system (NEP 2020) of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. The course is titled Cultural History of Assam. This course discusses the cultural history of Assam from ancient time to the modern period.

The first unit is Assamese Culture and Its Implication. This unit discusses Definition of Culture; Legacy of Assamese Culture; Interpretations and Problems.

The second Unit Assamese Culture and Its Features. This unit discusses the Assamese Culture and its features: Assimilation and Syncretism.

The third Unit Folk Culture of Assam and Its Features. This unit discusses Meaning and Definition of Folk Culture; Relation to the Society; Tribal Culture vs. Elite Culture, Ethnographic description of the People of Assam.

The fourth unit Folk Literatures of Assam: Narrative and Non Narrative Genre. This unit discusses Assamese Folk Literature, Bodo and Rabha Folk Literature, Karbi, Dimasa and Mising Folk Literature, Folk Songs of the Tea Tribes of Assam, Folk Songs of Barak Valley.

The fifth unit is Material Culture of Assam. This unit discusses the Concept of Material Culture; House Building Types and Decorations in Assam; Costumes and Ornaments in Assam; Bell Metal Industry, Musical Instruments of Assam: Khol, Mridanga, Dhol, Daba, Madal, Dambaru, Pepa and others.

The sixth unit titled Religious Traditions of Assam This unit discusses religious traditions such as Saivism, Saktism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism; Indigenous Religious Practices of the people of Assam.

The Seventh unit is The Neo Vaishnavite Movement of Assam. This unit discusses the Origin and Development of the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement in Assam; Sri Sankardev and his contribution in the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement; Neo-Vaishnavite Movement after Sankardev.

The Eighth unit is Neo Vaishnavite Institutions: Stucture and Culture. This unit discusses the Growth of Institutions under the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement; Satras; Namghars; Socio-Cultural Influence of the Satras and the Namghars, Relevance in contemporary period.

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The Tenth unit is Art and Architecture of Assam. This unit discusses Early Assamese Sculpture; Secular Architecture; Religious Architectures, Paintings of Assam: Satriya Painting, Manuscript Painting; Traditional Folk Paintings of Assam.

The Eleventh unit is Contributions of Islamic Culture. This unit discusses the Making of Assamese Culture and the role of Islam, Islamic Art and Architecture, Music and Dance.

The Twelveth unit is Assamese Society and Sports, in this unit different types of Sports in Assamese Society are discussed in detail.

The Thirteenth unit titled Assamese Cinema and Theatre. This unit discusses the trends of Assamese Cinema: J. P. Agarwalla to Bhaben Saikia, Mobile Theatre- Origin, Development, Yatra, Theatre as an Industry.

While going through this paper, you will notice that some boxes are put in the left hand or right hand side of the text. These boxes are meant to serve the purpose of in-text glossary for you. Again, you may find some boxes marked with: “LET US KNOW”. These boxes will provide you with some additional interesting and relevant information. The boxes marked with “ACTIVITY” will help you in making your learning more active and efficient. And, at the end of each section, you will get “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. It will be better if you solve the problems put in these boxes immediately after you go through the sections of the units and then match your answers with “ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” given at the end of each unit.

UNIT 1: ASSAMESE CULTURE AND ITS IMPLICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1. Learning Objectives
1.2. Introduction
1.3. Definition of Culture
1.4. Nature and Characteristics of Culture
1.5. Racial Elements
- Negrito
- Australoid
- Mongoloid elements

1.7. Let Us Sum Up
1.8. Answers to Check your Progress
1.9. Further Reading
1.10. Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- define culture and its relation with society and the human species,
- explain the elements of culture and its various components,

1.2 INTRODUCTION

You must have noticed that the greeting style of people over different nations, communities differ in many ways. For example, Indians fold their hands together and say 'namaste' while greeting others; in western countries they shake their hands, in other nations, they display politeness and bow their heads. Each of these people, groups are following their own culture and none of them can be said to be superior to the other.

This unit dwells on this very important aspect of human life- "culture". in general and we will be discussing the relation of culture with the society and its influence in our day to day life. At the same time, we will be focussing on the Assamese culture in particular and its formation over the years. The unit will look into the process of assimilation and syncretism in the development of the Assamese socio-cultural heritage.

1.3. DEFINITION OF CULTURE

What is "Culture"? Does the finer aspect of life like classical music, classical arts, gourmet cuisine etc. define culture? Let us know about it-

The word “culture” derived from the French term "colere" means to tend to the earth and grow or cultivate and nurture. The German word "kultura" equates culture with civilization and with individual or collective moral progress. Culture is found everywhere and not just in the high arts or in western civilization.

Descriptive definition tends to see culture as a comprehensive totality making up the sum of social life and also to list the various fields making up culture. Historically culture is seen as a heritage that is passed on over time through the generations.

Anthropologists have formulated many definitions of culture. 19th century British Anthropologist Edward Tylor defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law and custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1871).

In Malinowski's opinion (1931) - culture is a total system of life that runs its course. In his views, both social culture and physical culture are referred to as important factors of culture. According to Ruth Benedict (1934), culture is not the content of social life but it is an order and organisation of social life.

For a layman like us, culture can be understood as everything that people have, think and do collectively as members of society. What differentiates men from animal is culture. Culture includes everything inside and outside of man which does not exist independently in nature but appears due to human labour or his activities in the broadest sense.

Culture signifies the customs, traditions, attitudes, values, norms, ideas and symbols of human behaviours. The members of the society not only validate them but also substantiate their behaviour accordingly. They are members of the society because of the common traditions and customs which are passed down from generation to generation through the process of socialization. These common patterns are termed as culture. The term enables us to conceive the explicit behaviour pattern of human beings in regards to their social relations.

Hence, culture is the characteristic and knowledge of a particular group of people defined by language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. The cultural ideas evolved from shared social life.

Culture can be divided into two parts- human or non-material and material culture. The material culture consists of physical or man-made objects, resources and spaces that people use to define their culture. These include homes, neighbourhoods, cities, schools, churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, plant, and tools of production and so on. All these physical aspects of culture enable us to define its members’ behaviours and perceptions.

Non-material culture consists of non-physical ideas, beliefs, values, norms, morals, language, organization and institutions which are abstract and traditional. The non-material culture shapes the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of its members. The most prominent aspects of this non-material culture are symbols, language, values and norms.

Culture can again be divided into two groups- classical and folk. While the classical culture follows certain rules and regulations, the folk cultures are learnt through observation and practice over generation, it is a part of life and a contribution of ethnic groups.

The cultural values are based on ideas both, fair and just, good and bad. It has some norms based on expectations and rules by which a culture can govern the behaviour of the members of the society in any situation. For a culture to exist, members of a culture must adhere to its norms. Hence, members must conform to and obey rules. Failure to produce any form of conformity can result in social control in the form of ostracism, fines, punishments and even imprisonment.

Culture is an evolutionary process that enables to sustain human civilization. The culture of a man can hardly remain isolated from that of a group.

Primitive culture is simple culture marked by the absence of technology, industry, literature and commerce. Modern culture is more complex in nature and dominated by science and technology and work specialisation. 21st century is marked by cultural diversity and there is a need to protect it. Cultural diversity implies the existence or the inclusion of diverse populations of various cultural differences in a society, or institution.

1.4. NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURE

A cultural phenomenon is not isolated but interconnected. Culture is a collective phenomenon. Human beings promote their cultural values and interest through reciprocal activities. Each culture influences and is influenced by another culture related to it. The individuals and the group in a society are structurally and functionally so related with one another, that the influence of one on the other is quite natural. We can consider a thought or an action as a culture if it is shared and believed or practised by a group of people. However, there are complexities. Some people who share the same culture may be numerous and geographically scattered. Most modern nations today have multi cultural population resulting in the rise of sub-culture or regional culture. It refers to the variations in culture that exists within a single country.

The characteristics of culture are as follows-

Culture is learnt or acquired by the members of the society which the individual members or the group or the society possess through their activities or functions. They learn the behaviour pattern, language, customs and tradition as they grow up in a particular culture and environment. Any person who can familiarize with the culture of others can get influenced by their personality and lifestyle. Culture is learned through social interaction with other people in the society. Through the process of enculturation, human cultural traditions are passed. Language helps in this process of transmission. Culture is learned and acquired by infants through a process referred to by the anthropologists as enculturation. Mental structures are created through common experience.

Culture can be transferred from one generation to the other. Language plays a prominent role in perpetuating the cultural pattern. Transmission of a culture may be due to imitation or instruction. Culture is trans-generational continuing beyond the individual's life span. There is stability and consistency of cultural patterning through time despite the fact that culture is continuously being reworked and recreated.

Culture is dynamic. Culture does not accumulate, it changes. The invention within a society as well as diffusion leads to changes of culture and the change differ from society

to society. It is also responsive to the changing conditions of the physical world. It is flexible and allows adjustments in the wake of changing circumstances. This characteristic of culture enables the society members to deal with crisis, solve conflict and restore order are Ideas, behaviour, etc. change, shift are reinvented and become popular. People challenge the culture they live in and thus create new ones.

Culture is diverse. It is formed by many separate cultures. Every society has its own culture which is unique and follows certain norms, traditions and moral values.

Culture is shared as all aspects of culture are transmitted symbolically to the members of the society. An action to be considered cultural must be commonly shared by the group of individuals. A shared set of ideas, values, perceptions and standards of behaviour have a shared meaning that makes the action of human being intelligible to the others. Hence, the members are able to predict the behaviour of their fellowmen and react accordingly. However, culture is not uniform for all the societies. The members of the same culture share enough knowledge and behave in ways that are meaningful and acceptable to others.

Culture is based on symbols– sound, gesture marks which are represented in meaningful ways. Language is another symbolic aspect of culture. Symbols tie together the people who otherwise might not be the part of a unified group.

Every society has ideas about how people ought to behave. This is called cultural patterns.

Culture is integrated and all the traits that make up a culture are mostly consistent with one another.

Culture is adaptive as it helps in developing ideas, technologies and activities that enable them to thrive in their environment.

Culture is composed of many elements some of which are mentioned below. The elements of culture are- beliefs, ideas, knowledge, values, and attitudes

- Culture is primarily based on patterns of behaviour as a unified whole. Socially accepted models turn into customs and are transmitted from generation to generation and individual to individual. Customs are generally accepted and consolidated by the power of the mass habits. The socio-cultural customs remain unexplained nor are the members of a society aware of it. Customs includes the traditional form of labour, behaviour pattern, life style and system of upbringing.
- Belief- The system of belief grows over time and man evolved the system and it constitutes the basis of life in human culture. The fear for the unknown, feelings generated towards supernatural things etc are part of the belief system.
- Norms- social norms are a standard developed for the behavioural pattern expected from the members of the society attached to their specific roles and status. The norms are more or less agreed upon. Norms are regulatory principles and do not reflect concrete phenomena. Most norms arise spontaneously through trial and order. Norms are basic parameters which allow for a certain degree of variation in behaviour as long as it does not violate the established boundaries. The function of norms consist in excluding the influence of subjective circumstantial motive and ensuring reliable predictable and standardised behaviour. Norms promote the establishment of ideas values and methods proven effective by science into real life. Norms are shared ideals about how people ought

to act in certain situation. Norms make social interaction predictable and enable us to behave towards others while expecting others to behave in diverse situation.

- Values are beliefs about the way of life that is desirable for themselves and their society. Values affect our motivations and this influences the reason we do what we do. Values are also critical to the maintenance of culture as a whole because they represent the qualities people believe are essential to continuing their way of life. It means all individual personal relationships must have a sense of bearing on the members of the society. Social norms are based on social values.
- Signs- The signals and symbols developed by the society help in communication and thus enable social interactions among the members of the society. The fundamental aspect of culture is symbol and the capacity to create and give meaning to symbol helps people identify, sort and classify things, ideas and behaviour. The power of the shared symbols becomes clear when we meet others from our own culture in a far off country. It is the shared meaning of our symbols that enables us to interact with one another with the least amount of ambiguity and understanding.

There are confusions relating to the term culture with race and civilization. Race is a population where members share common physical traits and refers to biological non-genetic characteristics. Concepts vary even when groups share some cultural traits and racial or physical traits.

The terms are not interchangeable. Civilization as a term does not imply a more superior culture. All civilizations are cultures but all cultures may not be termed as civilizations.

LET US KNOW

Anthropologists refers to civilization as specific type of culture that first appeared around 5500 years ago in the Fertile Crescent (present day Iraq).

Culture develops continuously and the changes bring alteration in ideas and beliefs etc. The process involved in the growth of culture consists of the following–

- Accumulation- The process of accumulating more ideas and skills as it (culture) grows. In this process new cultural traits are adopted while the old ones are dropped out.
- Diffusion- Culture spreads from one society to another through the process of diffusion. It applies to all items of material and non-material culture.
- Accommodation- Cultural accommodation enables the various cultural traits adopted to be adjusted and accommodated in the society.
  Cross-fertilization- the process of mutual give and take through the conjunction of two cultures is termed fertilization.
- Acculturation- The process of acquiring cultural trait of another society is called acculturation.

- Assimilation- the process of assimilation takes place when the culture of a society gets intimate with another and in the process loses its own individuality.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is the French derivative for the term "culture"?
Q 2: What does cultural diversity imply?
Q 3: Do you agree that culture is trans-generational?

1.5. RACIAL ELEMENTS

From the pre-historic and other remains we came to know that Assam was inhabited by various racial elements and it confirmed that the land may be considered as the great anthropological museum, containing even now some primitive people. The various elements passing through Assam from India on the one side, and South-East-Asia on the other have left their substratum in both the hills and the plains. Though the northern route did not play a prominent role in migration but the prime route that prevailed through the mountain passes between Assam and Tibet and the waterways through the Brahmaputra and the Ganges played an important role.

The classical sources mentioned the existence of these routes. Other sources have also mentioned routes passing through the mountain passes of Bhutan and Tibet. It is proved that some racial elements made their way in small numbers into Assam through the passes. Assam is a mixture of many cultures because of the migration of the prime human races since very ancient times in different periods of history. The prime human races like the Negrito, the Dravidians, the Mongoloids and the Aryans all immigrated to this land in different times. Let us know about these racial elements-

- **NEGRITOS**

B.S. Guha mentions the Negrito race in the Census of India (1931) and he considers them to have made the earliest presence in India. According to anthropologist, the Negrito race first entered India followed by the Austrics and the Mongoloids. The original home of Negroids was Africa from where they entered India via Arabia and the coastland of Iran and Baluchistan and subsequently spread to different parts of India including Assam. Their progress into the Northern and Eastern zones of India was stemmed by the Austrics who fought them successfully and thus hampered the northern move of the Negroids who had confined themselves to the Southern part of India from where they move towards east and reached Indonesian Islands where they mixed freely with the Austrics of that area. The people of mixed blood then moved westwards and entered Assam where they were confined to the hills on the eastern border of the country.

However, there are several controversies as to the presence of this race. Since they entered at an early stage, there are very little traces of them. The existence of the Negritos race is agreed upon by scholars such as S. S. Sarkar, D. N. Majumdar, L. A. K. Iyer. Mills thinks that the hill inhabitants of Assam were Negritos who were little dark men

with curly hair. S. K. Chatterjee subscribes to this view and writes of the traces of the Negrito race found as far-east of Assam among the Nagas. P.C. Choudhury agrees to it- "both ethnography and the material culture of the tribe also point to the existence of such a strain." Besides some crude specimens of art are taken to be the survival of Negroid cult among the tribes of Assam. Others like G. Oliver have denied the Negritos characteristics among the Nagas.

The Negrito race is found among the Angami Nagas who reside in the hills. Dr. Hutton pointed out the sign of Negritos among the Angami Nagas. Many scholars have supported his view that they are the descendants of the Negrito race but later got mixed with the Mongolian tribes. The assimilation of the Negrito with the Mongolian race makes it difficult to find out the old manner, customs, beliefs and social status of the Negrito race at present. Little of the manners and customs of the Negrito race is found among the Angami Nagas.

They are assumed to have belonged to the Palaeolithic age in Assam. Two stone implements discovered in the Darrang and Kachar districts have been recognized as remnants of Stone Age in Assam. However, it is believed that the two implements belonged to the Negrito race and the use of one of the implements is found among the sayings of the Angami Nagas. Their contribution to Assamese culture is insignificant due to their assimilation with the Mongolian race. However, the society of the Negrito race was patriarchal as seen among the Angami Nagas.

- **AUSTRALOIDs**

The Australoids are known by different names like- Pre-Dravidian, Proto-Australoids, Veddid, Nishada. Characterised by dolichocephalic head, marked broad nose, dark brown skin colour, short stature and wavy or curly hair. They resemble the Caucasoid and thus are considered a sub division of the race giving it a name Archaic Caucasoid. This ethnic element was concentrated in South India but spread to the north and north east India as well. This revealed from the study of the skeletal remains unearthed from pre-historic times and also from the physical features of the existing population.

Living in the hill slopes and forest the Australoids were hunters and gatherers who practiced primitive agriculture. They made pottery and the stick was their main tool. Boomerangs were also used to kill birds and other small games. As for the language spoken they were associated with the Austric speech family which included two groups- Austro-Asiatic and Austronesian. The speeches belonging to the Austro-Asiatic group are current among those living in India, Burma and Indo-China. In Assam, the Khasis of Meghalaya speak the language of this group.

Sarkar believes that the concentration of the Australoid racial make-up is found among the lower caste. Minute observations reveal the existence of this racial element among the lower caste which later spread to the upper caste. The Khasis have maintained their Austric language but the physique differs. There can be two possibilities for the above- (i) One that they were Australoids and spoke the Austric language. Their assimilation with the Mongolian strain may have led to the remarkable changes in their physique, (ii) they were Mongoloid but accepted the Austric language. Dixon was of the opinion that the Khasis shared racial affinity with the Tibeto-Burman tribes. While Chatterjee explains that they appear Mongoloid and must have adopted the language of

the earlier race, the Austrics after descending from the Tibeto-Burman area. He opines that they may have changed their speech while in Burma.

The Wanchoos of Arunachal Pradesh also seem to use the Austric words in their dialect. The Proto-Australoid features are found in their physical features too. There are assumptions that certain cultural and ethnic traits were spread while the Austric speakers passed from the homeland of the present Wanchoos.

The ethnic traits of the Australoids are also found among the Bodo tribes. The Rabhas, Garos and Mikirs have dolichocephalic head implying that the Australoids contributed the dolichocephalic strain to the Mongoloid population of North East India. Flatz and others made an observation that the entire area of Assam, Northern Bengal and possibly parts of Nepal were inhabited in pre-historic times by a contingent of population of matrilineal Australoid tribes.

Thus, it appears that the Australoids came first to Assam, before the Mongoloids leaving behind certain genetic endowments. It was the Austro-Asiatics who brought the culture of terrace cultivation, erection of megaliths etc. The origin and migration of the Australoids is still a matter of controversy. Sarkar holds the view that from South India the Australoids moved to the east and west and became widespread until they were pushed to form isolated groups.

- **MONGOLOIDS**

The tribes of North East are predominately Mongoloid. The Mongoloid populations entered into the regions through the various routes at different times. Though the population differ, in culture, language and physical features, yet they speak the Tibeto-Burman language. The features among the Mongoloids are yellow brown skin, black stretched or flat wavy head hair, scanty facial and body hair. In Assam, the Mongoloids in the early time intermixed with the Australoids and Caucasoids from whom they accept some genre and as a result acquired physical features.

The Tibeto-Burmans migrated from North West China. They settled in the hills and plains of Assam driving the speakers of Austric speech in different directions and were known as Rabha, Kachari, Bodo, Tiwa, Karbi Dimasa and other. Linguistically the Tibeto-Burman group is divided into two main branches - North Assam and Assam Burmese. The North Assam branch is formed by the various Arunachal tribes- Abors, Akas, Daflas, Miris and Mishimis. The Assam Burmese group include three groups- Bodo, Naga and Kuki Chins. People who speak Bodo language were- Garo, Rabha, Kachari, Koch, Mech, Hajong, Lalung. The Naga is a generic name for the tribes who inhabit Nagaland. The Nagas have heterogeneous elements in their physique. The Kuki Chin tribes are distributed in the southern region of Assam. The only data available are on the Thado Kuki and the Purum Kuki.

The Ahom of the Tai or Shan group of the Mongoloid entered Assam and settled in Upper Assam followed by other Shan tribes- Khamtis, Khamyangs, Aitongs, Phakials and Turungs preserving their traditional socio-cultural ways of life.

The Kiratas are a group of people who finds mention in the Yajurveda where it is mentioned that it was necessary to have a kirata in the purusha medha sacrifice. From the Arthaveda it is assumed that the kiratas were cave dwellers and lived in the hills and forests. In the Mahabharata, the army of Bhagadatta's, king of Pragjyotisha, composed of

the kiratas and the cinas. They are described as shining in gold in the Ramayan referring to their skin colour. The Kalika Purana refers to the kiratas as strong, ferocious, and addicted to meat and drink and yellow skinned. As for the geographical distribution, the Visnu Purana states that the kiratas lived in the eastern parts of India. The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea mentions kirrhadae as iving in the hills of Assam and Burma.

It was the Kiratas who introduced the cultivation of silk of different varieties in Assam. Therefore, the hill tribes of Assam are expert weavers of silk. After establishing their settlement in Assam they took to cultivation and also carried trade with their original homeland and other parts of India. They were not only great warriors but also expert as boatmen. After the Austrics, they became the rulers of Assam.

- **MIXTURES OF VARIOUS STRAINS**

From the ethnographic point of view it can be assumed that the early inhabitants of Assam had an admixture of different racial strains. We cannot say when and where it took place but it could be assumed that this had happened both before and after their migration and settlement in this land.

An admixture of the Negrito, Austric, Alpine and Tibeto-Burman elements in varying proportions have been found among the Khasi-Syntengs. According to Dixon, the Khasis are racially closely related to the majority of Tibeto-Burman tribes. On the other hand, according to Hutton, most of the Naga traces are an admixture of the Negroids, Austro-Asiatics, Alpines and Tibeto-Burmans and a race of Southern origin allied to the people of Philippines, Borneo and parts of Indonesia. All these elements are found among the Ao Nagas and the Thados. The Thados has some similarities with the Mon culture and many of their customs are indicative of Khasi ho cultures of Indonesian affinity and of the Pagan Malayans and Philippines.Their customs of burial compares well with that of the people of Sumatra and Philippines.

Both the Sema and Angami Nagas have an admixture of Mongolian, Bodo elements. From the archaeological and ethnographical records, it is confirmed that the Nagas had some Dravidian strain that was also prevalent among the Aos. Some scholars also believed that the Dravidian elements are also prevalent among the Koch-Kacharis. According to Raisley, the Koches are large Dravidian tribes with an admixture of Mongolian blood. But on the whole, Dravidian characteristics predominate among them. The fusion of Naga-Bodo blood took place at an early period. Though especially Nagas had absorbed many Oceanic elements but their physical features have similarity with Tibeto-Burman tribes. For instances we can mention that Sema Nagas have an admixture of Bodo and Mongolian blood. This led to the creation of intermediate groups of tribes like Naga-Bodo. The lone affinities of the Nagas with the Annam tribes represent an approximate identical mixture of races and culture. In fact, the tribes of Assam have close ethnic affinities with the people of Burma whether Mons or Tibeto-Burman.

Thus, the Alpine elements are found in most of the tribes of Assam who basically belonged to the Caucasic blood. These people were restricted to the confines in South-East Asia in pre-historic age and gradually came down the river valleys of Assam and Burma. Here they confined themselves into the hills and became the ancestors of the Nagas and other allied tribes. Before or in the course of their settlement in this land, some

of the Tibeto-Burman tribes like the Angamis, Manipuri and Mishimis absorbed Caucasia blood.

- **DRAVIDIANS:**

After the Austrics a wave of Dravidian force penetrated in Assam from the West. The Baniya's and Kaivarata's belonged to these Dravidian groups. At the initial stages, this Dravidian group was mixed up with the early Indo-Chinese people that inevitably led to a fusion between both the races. This inter-fusion led to the creation of a new group called the Mongol-Dravidian group. It was said that some rituals and customs prevalent among the Assamese society i.e., the use of turmeric in wedding culture originated from the Dravidian culture.

- **ARYANAS**

The Aryans were the last racial group who migrated to Assam towards the Brahmaputra valley in the later Vedic period. As a result of the impact of Hindu culture, the Mongol-Dravidian of the Brahmaputra valley were largely Aryanised and entered into the Hindu fold. From the beginning of the 6th century A.D., there was a large scale agraharas settlement for the Brahmana and other high class Aryans due to the emergence of an organised socio-political order. Patronage of Aryan Culture by ancient rulers of Assam encouraged the scholars to preach the Aryan culture in distant places like Burma and South-East Asia. According to Chinese pilgrimage Hieun-Chang, as a result of the spread of Aryan culture, Kamarupa became the centre of Brahmanical learning. At the influence of Alpine culture many rulers contributed to the Aryanisation of the valley and became responsible for some tribes. At the impact of Aryan culture some of the Tibeto-Burman rulers adopted the Hindu Culture and became Kshatriyas .The impact of the Brahmanical culture of Assam is not only felt in the neighbouring places of India, it was also felt in the distant places like Burma and South-East-Asia under the patronage of the rulers.

Assam has a rich cultural heritage that dates back to the days of the Epics. Though she received a large variety of racial elements, basically it contained the Tibeto-Burman of Indo-Chinese stock in majority. Both the Austrics and Tibeto-Burman elements have made enormous contribution to the growth and development of Assamese language and culture. Entire racial groups i.e. the Aryans, the non-Aryans and Hindus and non -Hindus have mingled peacefully and contributed to the building up of the complex culture of Assam.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 4: Name the earliest race that made its first appearance in India?

Q 5: Who first pointed out the signs of Negritos among the Angami Nagas?

Q 6: Who brought the culture of terrace cultivation, erection of megaliths to Assam?

Q 7: In the Mahabharata, the kiratas formed the army of which king?.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that-

- culture, as an integral part of human life, includes everything inside and outside a man,
- Culture is progressive, shared, diverse, adaptive and at the same time it consists of elements like values, norms, belief, etc..
- The Assamese culture is formed by the assimilation and syncretism of various racial elements and tribal and non-tribal cultural traits.

1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Colere means to tend to the earth and grow or cultivate and nurture.
Ans to Q No 2: Cultural diversity implies the existence or the inclusion of diverse population of various cultural differences in a society, or institution.
Ans to Q No 3: Yes, because it continues even after the life span of an individual.
Ans to Q No 4: Negrito
Ans to Q No 5: Dr. Hutton
Ans to Q No 6: The Austro-Asiatics
Ans to Q No 7: Bhagadatta
Ans to Q No 8: Sonowal
Ans to Q No 9: The Caryapadas
Ans to Q No 10: Bathou

1.9. FURTHER READING

1) Barpujari, H.K. (2004). *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. I, Guwahati, Publication Board
2) Datta, Birendranath (2012). *Cultural Contours of North East India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press
3) Deka, Dr. Namita (edited) (2007). *Assam Darpan*, Guwahati, Bani Mandir
4) Mibang, Tamo and Chaudhuri, Sarit K. (2004). *Folk Culture and Oral Literature from North East India*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication
5) Neog, Hariprasad and Gogoi, Lila (2003). *Asomiya Sanskriti* (4th edition), Guwahati, Banlata

1.10. MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)
Q 1: Name the author who composed "Chandravali Kavya?
Q 2: The Mughal style of dressing was followed during whose rule?

Q 3: How many *khels* do the *buranjis* record for the preparation of cloths and under whom?

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)

Write short notes on-

Q 1: The Kiratas

Q 2: Bamboo as a part of Assamese culture

Q 3: Dravidians

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

Q 1: Analyse the process of assimilation in the making of the Assamese culture, with special reference to the contribution of the Aryans.

Q 2: Explain the integration of the various racial elements in Assam.

Q 3: Critically evaluate the concept of culture and relate it with the case of Assam.

UNIT 2: ASSAMESE CULTURE AND ITS FEATURES

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1. Learning Objectives
2.2. Introduction
2.3. Syncretism and Assimilation in Assamese Culture
2.4 Let Us Sum Up
2.5 Answers to Check your Progress
2.6 Further Reading
2.7 Model Questions

2.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- describe the process of syncretism and assimilation in the making of Assamese culture

2.2. INTRODUCTION

Dear learners, you have already learnt about Assamese culture in your last unit. This unit will look into the process of assimilation and syncretism in the development of the Assamese socio-cultural heritage.

2.3 CULTURAL SYNCRETISM AND ASSIMILATION

The basis of Indian culture is unity in diversity. Indian culture is an amalgamation of cultural integration, acceptance, unification, refinement, elevation, synthesization etc of various social and cultural processes that belonged to the Mongoloids, the Negritos, the Australoids and the Nordics. Assamese culture too is an integrated one consisting of four main ethnic cultures- namely the Australoid, Mongoloid, the Dravidian and the Aryan culture. In simple words, Assamese culture and civilization is the mini version of the greater Indian culture and civilization.

The traditional Assamese culture is a product of the ongoing interaction between the tribals and the Indo-Aryans. The Assamese culture marks the cultural assimilation of different ethno-cultural groups over the different period in the history of this region. The migration of the different racial elements along with mixed northern Indians has enriched the aboriginal culture and at the same time, sanskritization and hinduisation have intensified and made the culture more prominent.

A sizeable section of the Koch or Rajbangshi is made up by the descendants of tribes. In fact, tribes like the Rabhas, the Tiwa (Lalung) and the Sonowals are no more different than the Hindus. Today the Assamese social fabric comprises a mixture of both

the jana (tribal group) and jati (Aryan hindu society). The process of assimilation and syncretism is not yet over and is still on the move.

It is believed that the Assamese culture evolved in the pre-Ahom period and took a definite shape with the arrival of the Tai-Shans. The Neo-Vaishnava movement under Srimanta Sankardeva added another dimension to the Assamese culture. It had a huge impact on the lives of the people, affecting the language, literature, fine arts and so on. The cultural pattern was often common and at times different according to places while being infused with local characteristics.

The unity and integration of Assamese culture is seen in the population composition, Assamese language, religious belief, social customs, festivals, songs and dances, musical instruments, food, dress etc.

- **Language**

The Assamese language reveals a mixture of Sanskrit and source is derived from other linguistic communities. Languages differ according to areas and ethnic groups. Most of the ethnic groups have given up their language and speak their own version of Assamese language. Nagamese is an example of the harmonious blend of naga dialect and Assamese. Assamese is being used as a link along with the native tribal dialect for communication.

The Tai script of the deodhais and bailungs were replaced by the newly developed lingua franca, Assamese that borrowed its vocabulary from multiple sources including Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and local dialects.

Originally the Assamese language sprung from Magadha prakrit in the east which resulted in the rise to apabhramsa dialect. The Assamese language has gone through a long process of integration. Later, Sanskrit, prakrit, non-aryan, tribal and the Arabic-Persian vocabularies did become a part of the language. These words have influenced the phonology, morphology, lexicology and semantics of the Assamese language. The reference to Asamiya language is found in the records of Hiuen Tsang who visited Kamarupa during the time of Bhaskara Varman.

According to Golak Chandra Goswami, the Assamese language has developed to such a form with so many influences that now it is not only difficult but it has become impossible to identify the various elements of the language. As a result, though Assamese is originally an Aryan language yet the non-aryan characteristics are more prominent in it, Siro Senehi Mor Bhasa Jononi has acquired an original form with various unique and unusual qualities which cannot be found in Aryan language.

Let us take the example of the word Asom (Axom). Some scholar's hold the view that it is a Tai Ahom word, but others negate it by declaring the word Asom as being derived from the Boro words "Ha-sam". Likewise according to the scholars Kamrup orginates from Austric language and the origins of Pragjyotish is a set of a few Aryan words (Pagar-mountain, Jyo/Ju-Tall, Tik/Tis- Long). Besides the pronounciation of many Assamese words have tribal influence. Some kinship terms such as -Enai, Puyhao, Momai, Aapa, Nicha etc have come from Tai-Ahom language. With the Muslims, many Arabic and Persian words have found a place in the Assamese language. Apart from this, the British Raj has enriched the Assamese vocabulary with many English words.

Dialectical variations are found in the use of Assamese language in different regions which can be broadly divided into Eastern, Central and Western Asamiya.

LET US KNOW

The Assamese language originally belongs to the Indo-European language family. The Charyapadas written in ca 9th to 10th century were the oldest example of Assamese language.

- **Literature**

The Assamese literature too has developed through the process of integration and assimilation. Literature in published form was non-existent in ancient Assam and it was only a small body of folk or oral genres. Assamese translation of the sacred texts like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas along with the buranjis and the devotional texts during the neo-Vaishnavite movement constituted the ancient Assamese literature. Among the Puranas the VishnuPurana, the Bhagawata Purana and the Harivamsa contributed the most.

Some of the Assamese songs, pada (kind of Assamese metre of 2 lines rhyming at the end), verse drama, religious books were either transcription or literal translation of these Puranas. With regard to style and form, the Assamese language is totally western. Western elements were first published in the Jonaki. Later these elements took various forms and entered into the Assamese literature. In between the folk literature of Assam evolved with the help of indigenous thoughts and ideas. It flourished as the local flavour. Aai-naam, Opesora-sobahor naam, Lakhimi sobahar naam, biya-naam, malita, juna, riddles, maxims, proverbs etc are nourished by various familiar thoughts, ideas and customs. But Bihu geet and Husori geet are contributions of the non-aryans for sure. Haidang geet of the Sonowal tribe, Bishahari geet associated with the Mare gaan of the Pati Rabha community and the Bahurongi geet have enriched Assamese folk literature.

Likewise folk tales related to animals is a contribution of the Bodo-Kacharis and the Rabhas.

Jikir and Jari songs are created in the line of deh bisaror geet. Ojha utha geet (Aai tuli), kabeera geet or badshahi geet are excellent examples of the cultural synthesization in Assam.

The Buranjis or chronological records of the Ahoms are the noteworthy example of rare treasures of Assamese written tradition. Buranji literature and Sakta literature are considered as pleasing ancient literature. The types of literature along with drama and other practical books were written under the patronage of the Ahom rulers. Swargadeo Rudra Simha wrote ShivaPurana and kings like Jayadhvaj Simha and Siva Simha were lyricists. Sukumar Barkath composed "Hastirvidyanama" during this time. With Muslim invasion Islamic culture entered Assam. Following the tradition of Sufi, Islamic verses of the time, Pashupati Dvij wrote "Chandravali Kavya" and Ram Dvij wrote "Mrigawati Charit"

The mid-nineteenth century Assamese literary period was marked by the emergence of the Assamese journal "Orunodoi" first edited by Rev. Oliver T Cutter. Other works published in Assamese were a grammar text by Rev. Nathan Brown and the first Assamese dictionary by Rev. Mile Bronson. The Christian influence in the Assamese literature did help in modernizing the language as well as liberalizing the Assamese culture. Towards the later phase in the 20th century, Assamese literature flourished and touched new heights with the works of luminaries like Lakshminath Bezbarua, Chandrakumar Agarwala, Ambikagiri Raichoudhuri, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Nalinibala Devi to name a few.

- **Religion**

The religious history of Assam is also a history of integration. The religious aspect of Assamese culture is intermingled with the tribal cultural elements. Especially the concepts and ideas of Shiva Mahadev Burha Gohain carry the tribal elements and their impact is far reaching.

Shiva is basically a Dravidian god and Rudra is a Vedic god. The fusion and integration of Shiva and Rudra creates the Shiva of the Puranas. The tribal ethnic groups have assimilated Hindu gods and goddesses in their religious system.

Almost all of the tribal communities of Assam such as the Bodos, Kacharis, Rabhas, Dimasas, Lalungs, Sonowals, Deuris, Chutiyas, Karbis worship Shiva. To sum up, the tradition of worshipping Shiva in Assam is a mixture of the pre-Aryan, Aryan, tribal and aesthetical elements.

In the same manner, the genesis and development of goddesses like Durga and Parvati too can be traced in the culture of the pre-Aryan, Aryans and the tribal communities. Likewise, the snake goddess manasa-bishahari is a product of the synthesis of the non-Aryan, Aryan and Dravidian cultures. Similarly, the concepts and ideas of worship of various village deities and evil spirits carry the influence of the tribal culture. Scholars say that Kamakhya too is basically a tribal goddess. Worshipping of goddess Manasa as a saviour is a custom prevalent among the animistic tribal men and plain people of Assam. Kamakhya is the premier temple of Manasa worship and shamanistic dance festival. Shamanistic dance is locally called deodhani or deodha nach.

The foundation of the Sakta Tantric cult of Ancient Assam with emphasis on the yoni worship was laid down by the phallic worshipping primitive tribes. There is a contribution of the tribal element in the religion of the Assamese Hindus. Bohag bihu had an origin in the fertility cult as evident from the song and dances. Magh bihu can be traced to the primitive harvesting festival. Ceremonies and rituals revolving around marriages also have origins in the popular belief in sorcery and witchcraft. Khoba-Khobuni ceremony, for example, is performed by the newly-weds who make an offering to the two demons Khoba and Khobuni. However, the entry of the Brahmanic cult was heralded with the coming of the Aryans as mentioned in Aitareya Brahmana, Satapatha Brahmana, etc.

The syncretism of religion in Assam is clearly evident from the records which refer to Bhaskaravarman as being a worshipper of Siva, while respecting the sramanas. The Pala rulers of Kamarupa were Saivists but they paid homage to Devi. King Indrapala who followed the tantric cult, was devoted to Visnu as borne by the Guakuchi plates. The spirit of toleration as marked in the Kalika Purana recommends worshipping of other deities

despite being a Sakta Purana. The Ahoms too assimilated well with the local culture and in matters of religion they had a secular attitude. Similarly, the neo-Vaishnavite movement contained some democratic elements which attracted a large number of followers from all classes. Similarly, the tribesmen began to come under the Aryan influence and this is evident from the sanskritized names of the tribal names of places and rivers. The influence of Hinduism and neo-Vaishnavism is seen among the tribes. The Bodo-Kacharis identify their chief deity Bathou with Siva and the female deity Mainao with Parvati. The Chutiyas too began worshipping Gira and Girasi as Siva and Parvati. The Hajongs too worship a lot of Hindu deities.

- **Festivals, Rituals and social customs**

National festivals and other customs of Assam are also examples of cultural integration. Bihu, the national festival of Assam, is basically an integrated festival. The word Meji related to Magh Bihu is derived from the Sanskrit word Medhya. Similarly, another word 'Bhelaghor' related to Magh Bihu originated from the Sanskrit word Mesh Griha. The tradition of preparing Chunga pitha and organising buffalo fights are a contribution of the Mongolian and the Dravidian cultures. Bihu is based on the fertile belief of the agrarian society. This festival resembles many other Indian festivals celebrated in other parts of the country. Many traditions and rituals of Bihu are similar to Pongal of Tamil Nadu, Poush Sankranti of Odisha, Bishu of Kerela, Baishakhi of Punjab, Chat Puja of North India etc. Goru Bihu or worshipping domestic animals especially the cow is a tradition originally followed in the Vedic age. But bathing them with pulses, turmeric, egg plant, thekera (a sour plant) bottle gourd is a tradition carried forward by the Aryan communities.

In Assam, there are many festivals worshipping Bamboo which is a contribution of the Mongoloids. Therefore, almost all Bamboo festivals- the Bhatheli, the Deul, the Pauratola, the Sunweeri, the Suree the Dahar Phuroa etc have Mongoloid elements in them. Similarly the Mohoho festival celebrated in Lower Assam resembles the Macha hana (tiger hunting) festival of the Bodo Kacharis.

Marriage ceremonies are also a mixture of many cultures. There are eight types of marriage and the one conducted before the sacred fire (Hom) with the chanting of the mantras is considered the most auspicious. But some other rituals related to marriage such as- Joron, Gathiyon. Suaguri Tola, tekeli diya, Khoba khubi, offering fish to the bride's family during Joron and such others are indigenous Assamese beliefs. The traditional way of treating any ailment (Bejali) or preparing medicine also carry the elements of tribal beliefs and ways of healing.

- **Music, Dance and Song**

Music is an integral part of the culture and a product of human society. Assam, with its beautiful valleys and hills, is the home of many ethnic tribes. The music prevalent in Assam carries the tone of all the tribal and non tribal elements. The process of cultural integration is visible in Assamese dances and songs too. Even the musical instruments used in Assam is a mixed contribution of various cultures. The singing of Bihu song and the Bihu dance resemble the tribal way of singing and dancing. The Baisagu dance of the Bodos is quite similar to the Bihu dance. Likewise, the Oinitam of the Mising tribe also bears similarities with the Bihu song. Assamese Biya goa Ojapali songs are similar to the

Fakir Ali Geet of the Muslim community. Noted writer Syed Abdul Malik opined that the tune of Jikir was much influenced by the Assamese Ojapali, Deh Bisaror geet and Borgeet.

Shamanistic dance is an indigenous phenomenon. Folk traditions of supestitions and belief in occurance of diseases and their treatment are rampant among the tribals and non-tribals of Assam.

- **Food**

Among the most visible form of cultural manifestation is food. The food habit of a community reveals a lot about their values and mode of life. In case of Assamese foods, the chief characteristic features are the use of

spice (limited) and the use of common herbs. The process of preparing the food is simple and involves boiling. It appears to be greatly influenced by the varied cultures. The use of vegetable oil and mustard oil has been the result of the growing contact with people from outside the region.

The non-vegetarian nature of the food of the upper class (Brahmins, religious gurus) is due to the non-Aryan influence on the Assamese culture. Sankardeva was himself known to be fond of food items prepared from fish. The Varna Hindus of Assam learned to catch fish from their tribal brothers and to use fishing nets, Jakoi, Juluki, etc. Various food items prepared from fish (Massor Jhul, Patot dia Maas, Maasor Khar) all have the essence of tribal cooking. Cooking of various wild leafy vegetables and eating of Poita Bhaat (boiled rice soaked in water overnight) are tribal in nature. The use and preparation of various pitha (rice cakes) are a mixture of tribal and non tribal culture. The symbol of unique Assamese culture "Tamul Paan" (Taamul paan) is a contribution of the Austrics. Similarly, potato, tomato, papaya which arrived much later, have become an integral part of the Assamese food culture which was due to the interaction of the local tribes with the neighbouring areas. Even bamboo soot which has become a part of the Assamese cuisine is of tribal origin.

- **Dress**

References to the traditional dress and ornaments of Assam are found in the buranjis and the folk songs of Assam. The buranjis record that four khels were established by the Ahom king under the Bhuyans for the preparation of clothes. These khels were- kopaah katoni, paat katoni, jola katoni and mejang katoni.

Jewelleries were worn by men and women, rich and poor alike. The difference could be noticed in the metals used for preparing the jewellery items. It was a common practice to wear jewelleries on auspicious occasions like marriage, festivals and rituals. The designs and motifs on the jewelleries have changed with time.

The dresses and traditional jewelleries worn by the Assamese people symbolises the integration of the various tribal and Islamic culture. The loom used by the Assamese women is a contribution of the tribal culture. In other parts of India, the Varna Hindu women do not weave in the loom, but it is a tradition kept alive over generations in Assam irrespective of caste and community.

The process of assimilation is evident in the pattern of donning the traditional attire. The Assamese women wear their mekhela slightly above their chest (methoni maara). Besides, the cloths that cover the upper body of the women, and wearing bindis are contribution from the tribal communities. The way men dress in Assam too is influenced by

the tribal culture. During the reign of Rudra Singha, Assamese dress started to borrow styles from the Mughal tradition. It is noteworthy that the Islamic style of dressing style entered into the Satra culture of Assam, Later, it was used during the Sutradhari dance, Ojapali dance and Natua dance forms. Similarly weaving flower patterns on riha mekhela is also influenced by the Islamic tradition.

Dr. Lila Gogoi mentioned the fascination for dresses during the Ahom rule. The Assamese clothing line assimilated the designs from other ethnic tribes and communities. The custom of wearing the six yard long saree was not prevalent by the Assamese women.

For ornaments there was the goldsmith's khel. Ornaments were made from gold, silver and bronze. The ornaments were prepared by the goldsmith khel, the members who came from the west but their designs reflected the regional taste and favour. The jewelleries are worn during the Satriya nritya, the bhaona and such other occasions. The most important ornaments worn during the bhaona performance are- nupur and ghugura for the feet, bangles, armlets, neckpieces, kiriti for the head and paag. The kings and queens wore chandrahara (ornament for the waist). The ornaments worn by traditional Assamese women are- thuriya, keru, korno bala, lokaparo, long keru, jangfai (earring), golpota,dhulbiri, junbiri, dhoriyabiri, parosokuwa, maduli, dugdugi. Gejera, bena, pans sori, sat sori, sipatmoni, silisa moni (neckpieces), gaamkhaaru, konkon, bala, (bangles), siripota, senepota, paro *sokuwa* (finger rings) and others. The teeth and nails of the animals were also used as materials for making ornaments.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 1: The Haidang geet is associated with which tribe?

Q 2: Name the earliest example of Assamese language?

Q 3: Name the chief deity of the Bodo-Kacharis?

2.4. LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit you have learnt.

- Cultural syncretism and assimilation of Assamese culture through different phases

2.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Sonowal

Ans to Q No 2: The Caryapadas

Ans to Q No 3: Bathou

✓ 2.6 FURTHER READING

1) Barpujari, H.K. (2004). *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. I, Guwahati, Publication Board

2) Datta, Birendranath (2012). *Cultural Contours of North East India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press

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5) Neog, Hariprasad and Gogoi, Lila (2003). *Asomiya Sanskriti* (4th edition), Guwahati, Banlata

? 2.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1: The ShivaPurana was authored by which Ahom ruler?

Q 2: The *Baniya's* and *Kaivarata's* belonged to which racial group?

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)

Write short notes on-

Q 1: Nature and elements of culture

Q 2: Food culture of Assam

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

Q 1: Describe the influence of the tribal elements in the religious practices of the people of Assam

UNIT 3 : FOLK CULTURE OF ASSAM: MEANING AND IMPORTANCE

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives
3.2 Introduction
3.3 Defining "Folk Culture" and its various aspects
3.4 Oral Literature
3.5 Material Culture
3.6 Folk Custom
3.7 Folk Performing Arts
3.8 Let us Sum Up
3.9 Further Reading
3.10 Answers to Check Your Progress
3.11 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to-

- define Folk culture,
- describe the different aspects of Folk culture,
- discuss the various forms of Oral Literature of Assam,
- discuss the customs and tradition attached to Folk culture of Assam,
- describe the Folk performing arts of Assam.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

We have already discussed on the topic of Culture, its nature and Assamese culture in particular. We also analysed the cultural assimilation process in the making of Assamese culture. In this unit, we will discuss folk culture and its various kinds, like Oral literature, customs and traditions and performing arts in Assam.

3.3 DEFINING FOLK CULTURE

The term culture has been derived from the Latin word "cultus", meaning to "care. Scholars differ in opinions regarding the proper definition of culture. Etymologically, the word Folk means 'of or pertaining to the inhabitants of land, their culture, tradition or history', or to go to its Assamese synonyms, it would mean people or Lok. Therefore, the connotation of the term folk culture refers to the culture of the people of an area in general

and it includes mental, social and physical means of the people, which makes life run its course'.

Folk culture is as old as human civilization and the collection of folk literature and and folk culture dates back to 5th -6th century B.C. However, scientific discussion on folk culture began only in the 16th century A.D.

The forerunners of the study of folk culture in Assam and rest of India were the Civil Servants of the British Government and the Christian missionaries. However, even before them, in the creations of medieval poets and writers of Assam, there are a large number of sources of folk culture. In the writings of Sankaradev, Madhabdev, Madhab Kandali, Harihar Bipra, Ananta Kandali, we find the sources of folk culture of Assam but these sources or the works lack scientific explanations. Therefore, it can be said that the scientific study of folklore and folk culture began during the colonial rule.

Technically, study of folk culture includes its various dimensions such as Oral literature, Material Culture of the Society, Social Folk Custom, Folk Performing Art etc. Assam is a land of numerous tribes and is often regarded as the melting pot of the multi-cultural ethnic society. It is said that Assam is a miniature replica of the subcontinent. Its geography has the characteristics that enabled many of the trans-regional elements to adapt themselves to the ecological condition of Assam.

Consequently, the history of Assam is one of the continuous reflections of large scale population movements, where each cultural strain while maintaining its exclusiveness, has co-existed with others.

3.4 ORAL LITERATURE

Oral literature forms a major source for our knowledge abut any society. It not only helps us to understand the society but also is an important source in reconstructing the history of any period or of any place. Assam, is a land of multi ethnic culture. The various ethnic groups display a vast array of oral literature that reveals the various aspects of Assamese life such as the socio-economic and political condition of the people of Assam. Oral literature of Assam can be broadly categorized into five categories.

From Cultural point of view, folk culture can be classified into different categories and this classification is known as ethnic genre or ethnic classification. This classification can also be called native classification since both ethnic and native classification refers to the same aspect of folk culture.

The classification made considering the academic side as well as international norms of classification of oral literature is known as analytical classification. Within this category fall the following aspects

- Folk poem or oral song or verbal Songs/poems
- Prose Narratives
- Proverbs, sayings, maxims
- Riddles
- Folk speech etc.

From the point of views of various themes of the folk literature it can be further sub-divided into the following sub-categories :

- I Love songs /love poems
- Spiritual songs
- Philosophical
- Satirical
- Comedy
- Socio-economic
- Encouraging
- Historical-political etc.

Many of the folk songs are sung during some special occasions or festivals. Considering the context of its performance, folk literatures can also be divided in a category. This is called contextual classification.

Many of the aspects of art and of Folk literature pertain to some social functions. For this reason it is also called functional folklore. For example, the lullaby sung for making the children sleep can be classified as lullaby considering its functional aspects.

Depending on the regional and linguistic characteristics, Assamese oral literature can be divided into many categories such as

- Kamrupi (songs of Kamrup)
- Songs of Nalbari
- Darangi (songs of Darrang)
- Sonitpuri (songs of Sonitpur)
- Lakhimpuri (Songs of Lakhimpur)
- Dibrugarh (Songs of Dibrugarh)
- Songs of Sivsagar
- Songs of Jorhat
- Songs of Nagaon
- Songs of Marigaon
- Goalparia (Songs of Goalpara)
- Songs of Dhuburi etc.

Assamese oral literature can also be divided into many other categories depending on its contents.

Among then the religious sons are worth mentioning as they have occupied an important place in the oral or folk literature. Songs sung during or at the time of prayer or worship are called the religious songs. These songs mainly contain the origin of gods and goddesses, spread of their worship in the Earth, rituals of prayer and worships etc. Religious songs can be divided in some sub categories such as :

- Songs related to Various Gods and Goddesses: These songs are related to goddess Durga, Manasa, God Shiva and Jagannath etc
- Aai naam or songs of Goddess Sitala: These songs are sung for the cure of pox. If the goddess is satisfied by the song then the disease is cured, according to popular belief.
- Apeswari or Apechari Naam: These songs are sung, mainly by the women, to satisfy the fairies so that they do not harm the people, mostly the children.

- Sonarai Pujra Geet: These songs are mainly sung in the Goalpara areas of Assam. There songs are sung by the cattle rearer at the time of Sonarai Puja and are known as Sonarai Pujar Geet.
- Kati Pujar Geet: These songs are sung by the women not having a child to satisfy God Kartik so that they can have child. These songs are also sung in the Goalpara area.
- Bas Pujar Geet: There are two kinds of Bas Puja- (i) Mada-kaam and (ii) Bahgawati Baas. Songs sung during this puja is called Baas pujar geet.
- Tukuriya Pujar Geet: These songs are sung by the people of Pati Rabhas at the time of the Tukriya Puja.
- Barmani Pujar Geet: These songs are also sung by the Pati Rabhas.
- Deh Bisarar Geet: These songs are sung by the bhakats or the monks who used to travel from one place to another singing songs related to human life and daily happenings. These songs reflect the pains and joys of human lives.
- Jikir: These songs are mainly sung by the Muslim people of Assam. Like the Deh Bisarrar geet these songs also represent human life, its joy, pain etc.
- Jaree Geet: These songs are also sung mainly by the Muslims giving a description of the tragedy of the Karabala. Besides the lives of Hazarat Mohammad, Bibi Fatema, Hasan-Hussain etc. are also represented in these songs.
- Kamrupi Loka Geet: These songs were mainly sung in the Kamarup areas. The bhakti or the spiritual feelings of these songs attract the people. Lord Krishna, Siv-Parvati etc. are the main deities who are prayed through these songs.

LET US KNOW

Tragedy of the Karabala: This is related to the battle of Karabala which took place in 680 AD. The Battle was between a small group of supporters and relatives of of Muhammad's grandson Hussain Ali and a much larger military detachment from the forces of Yazid I. Hussain and all his supporters were killed including his six month old infant son. Shia Muslims commemorate and acknowledge through this event the great sacrifice made by Hussain Ali and others.

Songs related to festivities

Assam is a land of rich cultural heritage. Many festivals are celebrated throughout the State. Among the festivals the most prominent ones are the Bihu, Bhatheli, Moho -Ho, Ambubachi, Suweri etc. In all these festivals many song are sung and these are a major source of oral literature of Assam. However, these types of songs can broadly be divided in two categories - (i). Songs related to Bohag Bihu and (ii). Reformative songs or songs related to various stages of life.

Songs related to Bohag Bihu

The bihu songs are mainly sung during the time of Bohag or Rongali Bihu. However, there are a few songs related to both Kati and Magh Bihu. The bihu songs are known as Bihu Geet or Husari geet. Perhaps Bihu Songs or the Bihu Naam also referred to as Bihu Geet are the most popular specimen of oral literature in Assam regardless of caste, creed and religion. The time of the origin of the Bihu Songs cannot be said with confirmation. These songs are mainly sung during the time of the Bihu festivals of Assam and are transmitted orally from one generation to another. Many of these songs have been documented by many researchers. But there are still many Bihu songs which are prevalent among the people of Assam in its oral form. These songs are rich with contents that deal with nature and various aspects of the Assamese society. Beside Assam's traditions, festivals, art and architecture, ornaments, cosmetics, foods and wine etc are several numerous topics that are reflected in the Bihu songs. In addition to the Bihu songs there are numerous other songs which are sung in many festivals celebrated by the various communities of Assam.

- **Reformative songs or Songs related to various stages of life**

These songs are mainly related to various stages of human lives like Annaprasan, Sulakaran, Upanayan, Tolani Biya, biya naam etc. Among these biya naam are most common during marriages. These kinds of songs reflect various aspects of the society. Mainly, the economic and social conditions are reflected well in many of the biya naam. In these songs, in many occasions Krishna-Rukmini or Hara-Gauri are represented as the main characters but the descriptions are related to the reality.

LET US KNOW

- *Annaparsan:* It literally means 'Eating of Food.' In this ceremony a child is ritually given food in mouth according to Hindu rites
- *Upanayan:* In Hinduism, Upanayana is the initiation ritual for a Hindu Brahmin boy who is given the sacred thread, to symbolize his initiation into spiritual knowledge.
- *Tolani Biya:* This is the ceremony celebrated when a girl gets her puberty.
- *Biya Naam:* This is a kind of song sung during the time of marriages in Assam.

- **Love songs /love poems**

Generally songs related to love, affections, etc. are categorised as love songs. These folk love songs are sung during various festivals and situations. Many of the Bihu songs or Bihu naam fall in this category. These songs contain numerous elements of love (for bihu songs see 4.2). Besides the Bihu songs, love songs, are further subdivided into some cataegories like Bhabaiya- Chatka, Musali or Mahut Geet, Iewatan, Garakhiya Geet etc.

LET US KNOW

❖ Bhabaiya and Chatka songs are sung in the Goalpara area. Unlike other folk songs these are not sung in religious festivals. Both Hindus and Muslims sing this song which contains the message of love.
❖ Musali or Mahut Geets are songs sung by the caretakers of buffaloes and elephants They address their beloved through these songs.
❖ Lewatan songs are sung by the Hojong Community which too sketches the picture of love.

- **Children Song:**

Songs related to children are found in all parts of the world. In Assamese language these songs include lullabies, nursery poems and children game songs.

❖ Lullabies: These songs are sung by parents, grandfather or grandmother and other senior members to make the children sleep. The language of these songs is very simple and easy to understand by the children.

❖ Nursery rhymes: To mollify the offended children or to feed them parents or other family members sing these songs known as Nisukani Geet in Assamese.

- **Work Songs**

Songs related to various activities or work can be termed as work song. Since most of the folk or people are always somehow related to various activities, there are many songs which they sing during their works as means of relaxation. Songs of the ploughman or haluoi geet, songs sung during the time of producing gur or Kuhiar Pera Geet, Songs sung during the time of riding boat or Nao baote Goa Geet, songs at during the time of fishing, of catching elephant in the jungle etc. are some notable examples of work song.

- **Songs related to Independence:**

The Indian freedom struggle touched the people of every caste community and religion, from the elite to the common people in India. Many songs were composed in Assamese songs to spread the message of freedom struggle. In many of these songs the hanging of Kushal Konwar, Maniram Dewan was a recurrent theme.

- **Ballads:**

Ballads are the songs that describe various stories connected with myths, legends, history, magic etc. Assamese ballads include several topics like myths of the birth of Dheki, Dhol, sugarcane etc., historical figure like Gandhi, peasant struggles of Rangia, Patharughat, Phulaguri etc., and legends like Beula Lakhindar etc.

- **Charms:**

Oral literature also includes the charms or mantras. The charms are considered as a major source of oral literature of Assam. Charms, however, can be divided into such categories as magical charms, prayer charms, threatening charms etc.

- **Prose Narratives**

Like folk songs, prose narratives are also a major source of oral literature. It includes myths, legends and tales. Just as the songs are related to myths, the prose narratives also deal with myths that are related to the origin of animals and birds,

geographical features, miracles, activities of gods and goddesses etc. Tales are also very important source of oral literature. Tales can be divided into animal tales, supernatural tales, Etiological tales, Jokes, Anecdote, etc. Tales on fox, crow, monkey etc., are very common in Assam. Some of the interesting tales of Assam have already been collected by several scholars and they are published in the form of books. Collections of tales by Laxminath Bezbarua, Prafulla Dutta Goswami are some examples.

- **Proverbs and Riddles :**

This is also an important form of oral literature in Assam as in many other parts of the world. Most of the proverbs are related to a story or tale which gives a moral. Assamese Dakar bachan is an important example of such proverb. Riddles or Fakora Jojana are intended to provide wisdom and questions.

Thus, it is seen that Assamese oral literature consists of songs and tales. All the tribes of Assam have their own folk tales and folk songs which give a picture of the society of certain periods. Oral sources provided a valuables key to the study of the ethnic or tribal groups in Assam.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions-

Q 1: Name any two books of Laxminath Bezbarua on folk tales?

Q 2: In which area of Assam, are Sonari Pujar geet mostly popular?

Q 3: Which community of Assam sings the Barmani Pujar geet?

3.5 MATERIAL CULTURE

Material Culture is the visible form of folk culture. Material culture includes all the material items used by men such as house, household commodities, and different kinds of apparatus, instruments, weapons, pots, and means of conveyance. Material culture can be divided into five broad categories

- Folk art
- Folk Crafts
- Folk Architecture
- Folk Costume and
- Folk cookery etc.

In the process of making resources for living and in making foods the tradition of a place finds expression in the folk arts and crafts. Assam exhibits a rich cultural heritage in the form of its arts and crafts.

- **Folk art, craft and architecture**

Assam exhibits a very rich tradition of various folk crafts for centuries. Among the major crafts of Assam, cane and bamboo craft, bell metal and brass craft, silk and cotton weaving, toy and mask making, pottery and terracotta work, wood craft, jewellery making, musical instruments making, etc. are very prominent. Besides these, Assamese craftsmanship has also touched some other fields like making of boats,

traditional guns and canons, traditional building materials, utilities from daily life ranging from weaving accessories, furniture, musical instruments etc.

- **Metal Crafts**

This is one of the oldest cottage industries in Assam. Bell-metal and brass have been the most commonly used metals for the Assamese artisan. Almost every household in Assam posseses some utilities and symbolic articles made from bell metal and brass. The Xorai and bota have been in use for centuries to offer gifts to respected persons. These two are the most respected items of gift in Assam.

Some of the important centres for the production of this metal crafts are Hajo and Sarthebari. The people of these villages have used their innovation skills to design modern day articles to keep pace with the changing times. Besides gold, silver and copper etc. are also an important form of traditional metal craft in Assam. Gold and silver, however, are mostly used as ornaments.

- **Assamese Masks and Toys**

Assamese Masks are also known as mukhas. They are regarded as the base of the Assamese culture and tradition. Masks are worn mostly during theatres and bhaonas. They revolve around the Assamese tribal myths and folktales. These masks have been the centre of each and every cultural event in the state for a long time.

Likewise, toys speak a lot about the culture and tradition of a place. They depict the lifestyle and the way of living of the people residing there. So much can be known about the heritage and customs of a given place through toys that mentioning them becomes inevitable when one speaks about the art and craft of a particular region.

- **Cane and Bamboo Works**

Bamboo and cane contribute a lot to the economy and lifestyle of the north-eastern state of Assam. It is an inseparable part of life in Assam. These are found in abundance in every part of Assam. A large variety of articles made from bamboo and cane are found in every household of Assam. Items in daily life, ranging from household implements to construction of dwelling houses, to furniture, to weaving accessories, to musical instruments etc are made from cane and bamboo.

- **Woodcraft**

A reference to the traditional art and craft of Assam, without mentioning the exquisite woodwork found there, would be as good as incomplete. Assam is a forest covered land. A large variety of wood and timber are easily available in the forest of Assam which have formed a part of the people's culture and economy.

It is said that an Assamese can identify the timber by touching it even in darkness, and can produce a series of items from it. Decorative panels in the royal Ahom palaces of the past and the 600-year old satras or Vaishnative monasteries, birds and animals figuring in mythology made from wood etc. are the best examples of the excellence of craftsmanship of the Assamese artisan the known as *Khanikar*.

- **Assamese Jewellery**

Assam has a rich collection of unique and exclusive traditional jewellery. Ornaments mainly from gold and silver are used by the Assamese women. These jewelleries hold a special place in the heart of the Assamese women and are worn by

them during the cultural and religious events. All the tribes of Assam have their own unique form of jewellery.

- **Folk Costumes**

Costumes or dress is one of the basic necessities of human being. It depends on the geographical location, religion, and social customs of the people. Assamese costumes represent the folk culture of Assam. Assamese craftsmen also excel in handloom production especially in weaving. Assam is the home of several types of silk such as Muga, Eri etc.

Sualkuchi is the main centre of silk production of Assam. However, in almost every part of Assam, especially in rural areas, weaving is a common and daily activity of the female members of the household. Moreover, various tribes of Assam make different types of cotton garments with unique embroidery designs and wonderful colour combinations.

- **Folk Cookery:**

Earlier the people of Assam used to eat various fruits and vegetables which were easily available in nature. Traditional Assamese food is not spicy. Rice (Bhaat) is the staple food of the people of Assam. It is eaten with curry of various items ranging from vegetables and herbs to meat and fish which are easily available in Assam.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions-

Q 4:Name two villages of Assam which produce metal crafts?

Q 5: Why is Sualkuchi famous for?

Q 6: Name the staple food of the people of Assam.

3.6 FOLK CUSTOMS

Folk Customs get reflected in folk literature and material culture. It is the bridge between oral literature and material culture. Tradition and custom related to agriculture, birth, marriage and death etc. can be included in the folk customs. Folk customs mainly include four different aspects such as Folk Festivals, Folk games, Folk medicine, Folk religion etc.

- The principal folk festival of Assam as known to all is Bihu. However, every tribe of Assam celebrate their own tribal festivals most of which are mainly related to agriculture. Besides Bihu, Boishagu and Kehrai puja by the Bodo, Ali-Ai-Ligang by the Missings, Me-Dum-Me-Phi by the Ahoms are celebrated in large scale. Holi, Durga Puja, Laxmi Puja, Idd, Muharram etc are also celebrated by the people of Assam.
- Assamese people also enjoy a wide range of folk games like Koni Juj or egg tapping, Kori Khel, Moh Juj or Buffalo fight, Bulbuli Soraair Juj or Nightingale fight, kukura juj or Cock Fight, Nao kehl or Boat Race etc. Most of these games are played during festival time.

- The custom of folk medicine of Assam like other custom is very rich. People used to believe in folk medicine for their cure from various diseases. Medicinal plants found in Assam's forests are widely used for treating diseases.
- Customs related to folk religion are mainly displayed in the time of practicing or following the religious rituals. Customs related to birth, marriage and death are mainly related to religious beliefs of the people which vary among the different group of people or tribes.

3.7 FOLK PERFORMING ARTS

It is one of the main categories of folk culture. Folk Performing Art can be categorized as folk drama, folk music, and folk dance etc. However, all these components are closely related to each other.

Folk drama is an integral part of folk literature. Like other branches of folk literature, the folk drama has no date of its creation and no author. These are transmitted orally from generation to generation. The author of the folk drama is the folk society and its performers are also from the folk society. Some examples of Folk performing art of Assam are Ojapali, Dhulia Bhaona, Gayan- Bayan ,Putala Naash, Bhawariya etc.

- Ojapali is one of the oldest forms of folk performing arts of Assam. This was more popular in Kamrup and Darrang districts and later it spread throughout Assam. Ojapali can be divided into three categories i.e. (i) Suknarayani Gowa Ojapali, (ii) Byas Gowa Ojapali and (iii) Ramayan Gowa Ojapali. Byas and Ramayan gowa Ojapali are related to Baishnavism whereas Suknarayani gowa Ojapali is related to Manasa Puja.
- Dhulia Bhaona, like Ojapali was mainly popular in Kamrup and Darrang districts and is performed in group. The main motive of the performers is to entertain the audience with jokes and humour in their performances.
- Gayan-Bayan is another important form of folk performing art of Assam. It is the traditional performance of the Vaishnava Sattriya tradition. The singer is called 'gayan' and the instrument players are called 'bayan'. Putala Nas is, like many other parts of India are very common in Assam. Many moral stories and jokes are related through the puppet dance.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions-

Q 7: Mention the name of two traditional games of Assam related to bird?

Q 8: Which form of Ojapali is related to Manasa Puja?

Q 9: Name the two folk festivals of the Bodo

3.8 LET US SUM UP

- After going through the unit, you have learnt about that–

- 'Folk culture' refers to the culture of the people of an area in general and it includes "mental, social and physical means of the people".
- Oral literature helps us to understand the society but it is also an important source in reconstructing the history of any period or of any place.
- Assamese oral literature consists of religious songs, reformative songs; songs related to various stages of life, children etc.
- Folk culture is visible in various forms of artifacts and material items as house, household commodities, and different kinds of apparatus, instruments, weapons, pots, and means of conveyance.
- Folk customs and traditions also form a part of folk culture and it includes four different aspects such as folk festivals, folk games, folk medicine, folk religion etc.

✓ 3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Burhi Aai Sadhu and Junuka
Ans to Q No 2: Goalpara
Ans to Q No 3: Pati Rabha
Ans to Q No 4: Hajo and Sarthebari
Ans to Q No 5: Silk
Ans to Q No 6: Rice
Ans to Q No 7: Moh Juj (Buffalo fight) and Kukura Juj (Cock fight)
Ans to Q No 8: Suknarayani gowa Ojapali
Ans to Q No 9: Boishagu and Kehrai puja

3.10 FURTHER READING

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⑦ 3.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1: Who authored the book 'A Sketch of Assam with Some Accounts of the Hill Tribes'?

Q 2: Who is the author of the book 'Ballades and Tales of Assam'?

Q 3: What is the main purpose of the Apeswari or Apechari Naam?

Q 4: In which area of Assam, Kati Pujar Geet is sung?

Q 5: Who are the Khanikars?

Q 6: Me-Dum-Me-Phi is celebrated by which community of Assam?

Q 7: In which area of Assam, is Ojapali commonly performed?

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q 1: What do you understand by folk culture?

Q 2: What are the ranges of four stages of historiography of the study of folk culture in Assam?

Q 3: What are the main divisions of Folk culture?

Q 4: What are the main divisions of the songs related to various festivals of Assam?

Q 5: Mention the different types of Ojapali?

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the contribution of the British Civil Servants in the study of folk culture of Assam?

Q 2: Make an assessment of the contribution of the Assamese Scholars in the study of folk culture of Assam in the Third and Fourth Stage?

Q 3: What are the main divisions of oral literature based on its contents? Discuss

Q 4: Discuss the various aspects of Material Culture of Assam.?

UNIT :4 FOLK LITERATURE OF ASSAM: NARRATIVE AND NON-NARRATIVE GENRE

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives
4.2 Introduction
4.3 Assamese Folk Literature
4.4 Bodo Folk Literature
4.4.1 Rabha Folk Literature
4.4.2 Karbi Folk Literature
4.4.3 Dimasa Folk Literature
4.4.4 Mishing Folk Literature
4.5 Folk Songs of the Tea Tribes of Assam
4.6 Folk Songs of the Barak Valley
4.7 Let Us Sum Up
4.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
4.9 Further Reading
4.10 Model Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to -

- define folk literature
- describe about the Assamese folk literature
- know about the folk literature of the tribal communities of Assam like the Bodo, Rabha, Karbi,Dimasa and Mishing
- have an idea about the folk songs of the Tea Tribes of Assam
- know about the folk songs of the Barak Valley of Assam

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial people used to voice their experiences in the form of oral traditions like myths, legends, epics, fables, folktales, folksongs etc that through light on the various aspects of human life. These oral traditions are termed as folk literature. The emotions and sentiments of the common people are embedded in the folk literature which is transmitted from one generation to the next through the words of mouth. Usually the authors of the folk literature are unknown or unidentifiable and itdoes not traditionally exist in written form and are handed down orally from one generation to the next. Folk literature is like a mirror of any society that helps in knowing the social, religious, culture, etc aspects of that society.

In the previous unit we have already studied about folk culture. Folk literature is a part of folk culture that not only enriches a particular society or ethical group but also helps

in knowing the beliefs, customs, traditions etc of that society. In this unit we will study about the Assamese folk literature, folk literatures of the different tribes of Assam like the Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Dimasa, Mishing etc. Along with this, the present unit will also deal with the folk songs of the Tea tribe and the Barak Valley of Assam.

4.3 ASSAMSESE FOLK LITERATURE

Assam has a rich and varied folk literature in the form of folksongs, ballads, myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles etc that are a part and parcel of the Assamese society covering its multifaceted dimensions. Assam is a land of multi ethnic groups and their folk literature further enhances the arena of the folk literature of the province.

The Assamese folk literature can be divided into various categories depending upon its linguistic and regional characteristics, themes etc. A considerable amount of Assamese folk literature has been recorded at a much later period. It is one of the important means of studying the basic culture of the Assamese people. Folk literature is associated in many instances with rites and festivals which lie close to day to day life of the people.

LET US KNOW

Depending upon the linguistic and regional characteristics the Assamese folk literature can be divided into various categories such as Kamrupi (folk literature of Kamrup), Darangi (folk literatureof Darang), Sonitpuri (folk literature of Sonitpur), Goalparia (folk literature of Goalpara), etc. Likewise depending on the theme the Assamese folk literature can be classified as satirical, comedy, romantic, historical, mythological, religious, economic, legendary etc.

On the basis of the form and methods of narration the Assamese folk literature can be further divided into two broad genres as verse narrative tradition and prose narrative tradition. Verse narrative traditionis either sung or recited and it includes folk songs, ballad, etc that contains a story. Prose narrative tradition is narrated and it includes myth, legend, folktale, etc. In addition to this the Assamese folk literature also includes some non-narrative genres like the proverbs, riddles, hymns, etc.

- Folksongs occupied an important place in the folk literature of Assam. Depending upon its contents Assamese folk songs can be divided into various categories like religious songs, love songs, work songs, children's song, songs related to various rituals, ceremonies and festivals, etc. These folk songs beautifully portraits the rich cultural heritage of the Assamese society.
    - Songs sung during religious occasions are known as religious songs. The origin of various gods and goddesses, the beginning and spread of

their worship in earth, the rituals connected to their worship are the main subject matter of the religious songs.

LET US KNOW

- There are different types of religious songs in Assam, like the Aai Naam (sung for the cure of pox, known as Goddess Sitala in Assamese language), songs sung during the worship of goddess Durga, Saraswati, Lakhsmi, Kali, Manasha, Jagatdhatri, Lord Shiva, Lord Ganesha etc. Apart from these songs there are some devotional and spiritual songs such as Deh Bicharar Geet, Jikir and Jaree etc. that enrich the folk literature of Assam. Deh Bicharar Geets are spiritual songs and the principal motif of these songs speaks in general terms of the futility of man's life and the presence of higher impulse that guides man's destiny. Jikir and Jarees are devotional songs of the Assamese Muslims. These can be described as an Islamic counterpart of Deh Bicharar Geet. Nagara Naam, Pal Naam, Thio Naam are some other devotional songs of Assam.

➢ Love songs are another genre of folk songs that are related to love, affections, etc. *Bhabaiya-Chatka* (folk songs sung in the Goalpara area that carry the message of love), *Musali* or *Mahut Geet* (sung by the caretakers of buffalo and elephants to address their beloved ones), *Lewatan* songs (love songs sung by the Hojong community) etc can be placed under this category.

➢ Songs sung in connection of various activities or works are known as work songs. These songs are sung while performing various works as means of relaxation. *Haluoi Geet* (songs of ploughman), *Kharikatiya Geet* (songs of woodcutter), *Mashmariya Geet* (songs of fisherman), *Kuhiar Pera Geet* (sung at the time of producing gur), etc are some examples of Assamese work songs.

➢ Children's songs like **lullabies, nursery poems, children game songs** constitute an important part of the Assamese folk literature. Lullabies (*nichukani* geet) are sung to make the children sleep or to make them stop crying. The language of these songs is very simple and easy to understand by the children. Nursery rhymes and children's game songs are sung while the children used to play. These songs related to children are mainly imaginative that can attract their tender minds.

➢ Assam being a land of rich cultural heritage, various festivals like *Bihu, Holi, Suweri, Moho-ho*, etc are celebrated throughout the province. During these festivals songs are sung that are inseparable part of the Assamese society. *Bihu Geet* or *Bihu Naam, Husari Geet* are the most popular festival songs of Assam irrespective of any caste, creed and religion. In addition to this,some songs are sung while performing the various rituals and ceremonies connected with the Assamese society. *Biya naam, Joranaam, Khicha Geet* (all these are sung during marriage ceremony) are some common ceremonial songs of Assam.

LET US KNOW

- The *Bihu Geet* or *Bihu Naam, Husari Geet* are sung during the *Bohag* or *Rongali Bihu* festival of Assam. The *Bihu* festival coincides with the advent of spring and is celebrated from the last day of *Chait* month (mid-April) till the sixth day of *Baisakh* month. But in reality is festival is celebrated for a longer period now a day. Many of the *Bihu* songs deal with nature and the various other aspects of the Assamese society. *Huchari* songs are also associated with the *Bihu* festival and are mainly perform by the male folk. Many of the *Bihu* songs fall in the category of love songs.

- Ballads are another important form of Assamese folk literature. A ballad is primarily a tale in the verse form originally said to have been sung to the accompaniment of dance. In the other words it can be said that ballads are like long songs that describe various stories in connection with myths, legends, history etc. In Assamese language ballads are known as malita
- Assamese ballads can be divided into various categories depending upon its theme like the historical, mythological, imaginative etc. Borphukanar Geet, Maniram Dewanar Geet, Gaurinath Sinhar Geet, Haradatta and Virudattar Geet, Jana-Gabharur Geet, Phulkonwarar Geet, Kamalakunwarir Geet, Manikowarar Geet, Dubala Santir Geet, Padmakumarir Geet, Pagala-Parvatir Geet, etc are some ballads of Assam. In addition to this the Assamese ballads include several topics like myths of the birth of dheki, dhol, bhumikampa, etc.
- Myths and legends are an important part of the Assamese folk literature. Myths are traditional narratives which explain the natural phenomenon through symbolism.A myth is a traditional story, which may describe the origins of the world or of a people. It is an attempt at explaining mysteries, supernatural events, and cultural traditions. Sometimes sacred in nature, a myth can involve gods, goddesses or other creatures. Legends are stories based on both real or supposedly real individuals and their marvelous deeds. Most of the legends are associated with the divine and miraculous activities that are believed to be true and focuses on religious belief, natural and cultural surroundings, such as hills, valleys, forests, wetlands, lakes, rivers, fields, stones, old trees, graveyards, chapels, churches and other objects.
- Folktales are an integral part of the folk literature of Assam. Folktales are traditional fictional stories told by old men and women to children and are often related to heroic incidents, the supernatural, the rogue, the beast, etc. Folktales are lucid, entertaining, engaging, easily intelligible and memorable. In Assamese language folktales are known as sadhu-katha. Assamese folktales can be divided into various categories such as animal tales, supernatural tales, cumulative tales, etc. A large number of Assamese folktales are either about tricksters or about animals.The trickster tales of Assam either represent a Tenton or a fox.Ban

Devata, Champa Wati, Panesoi, Tejimola, Teja aaru Tula,Tatun Tamuli, Tikhar etc. are some widely popular folktales of Assam.

- Proverb is an important genre of the Assamese folk literature. A proverb is a simple, concrete, traditional saying or phase that gives advice and expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. In the Assamese language the proverb is called phakara jojana. Assamese folk literature is rich in proverbs and the Dakkar Bachan is an important example of Assamese proverb.
- A riddle has tended to emphasize questions of origins,diffusion, and form. Riddles are questions that are frame with the purposeof confusing or testing the wits of those who do not know the answer.In the Assamese language the riddle is called sathar.
- Hymns occupy an important place in the Assamese folk literature. Hymn is a kind of religious song or poem of praise to god or a god. A large number of hymns mainly related to specific festivals, rites, rituals, religious ceremonies and worship are used in the Assamese society.

4.4 BODO FOLK LITERATURE

The Bodo tribe is very rich in folk literature which consists of oral traditions like folk songs, ballads, myths, legends, folk tales, proverbs, riddles, hymns, etc.

- **Folk songs** are an important genre of Bodo folk literature. Most of the Bodo folk songs are related to the day-to-day life of the Bodo community. These songs portray the socio-cultural and economic life of the Bodo people. The Bodo folk songs can be classified into some categories depending upon its theme like the *Haba Metai* (marriage songs), *Bwisagu Metai* (sung during the Bwisagu festival), *Goto Burkainai Metai* (lullaby), *Kamani Maonaiyao Konnai Metai* (work songs), *Abad Maonai* (songs related to cultivation), *Hadan Sipainai* (sung during cleaning of forest), *Dongpang Dannai* (sung by woodcutters), *Na Gurnai* (sung by fishermen), etc.

LET US KNOW

- Bwisagu is one of the most popular festivals of the Bodo community celebrated during spring season like the Bihu festival of the Assamese community. The Bwisagu songs are sung during this festival that highlights the various aspects of the Bodo society. Some of the Bwisagu songs can be considered as love songs.

- Ballads are an integral part of the Bodo folk literature.Ballads of Ada Bachiram, DaoharamJauhaulao, Daimalu, Cheobar, Soumdoun, Tularam Sednapati, Jaoliya Dewan,Bachiram, Gambari Sikhla,Birgahri Sikhla etc. provide lots of information about the heroic achievements of the Bodo tribe.
- Bodo folk literature is very rich with numerous myths mainly related to its religion, culture, music, literature, etc. Most of the Bodo myths are centered round the

creation of the universe, gods and goddesses, human beings, ghosts, spirits, natural objects, birds and animals, etc. The myths of the origin of Kherai worship is a popular myth of the Bodo tribe.

- Legendsare another important part of the Bodo folk literature. Most of the Bodo legends consist of the heroic actions of the Bodo heroes and heroines who contributed towards the cause of their tribe such as Ada Basiram and his lieutenant Daoharam, Seubar, Soumdoun, Tularam Senapati,Dwimalu Jwhwlao, Sikhna Jwhwlao, Gambari Sikhla,Birgosri Sikhla, etc.
- Folktaleis another genre of the Bodo folk literature. Thecreation tale of earth,sky, birth of Ha fisa howa bird, Kathiya Patula and Chadramali, Lakhishree, the tale of Jaulia Dabdan, Bigroshree Cheklaare very popular among Bodo tribe. The folktales provide valuable information about the various aspects of the Bodo community.
- In the Bodo language proverb is called bathra-phao. Lots of proverbs are used in the Bodo according to the time, space and situations. On the basis of their use, the Bodo proverbs can be categorized as positive equivalence, negative equivalence, positive causational, negative causational,proverbs relating to women,proverbs relating to agriculture,proverbs having moral lesson, etc.
- Like the other ethnic tribes, the Bodo tribe also used many Riddles that occupy an important part of the Bodo folk literature. Bodo riddles can be categories as descriptive, reverse, wisdom, natural, rhyming, puzzle, catch, mathematical, indigenous, riddles of insects and reptiles, riddles of instrument or agent, etc. that are intended to provide wisdom in the light of questions.
- The Bodo tribe uses various Aroj Metai (hymns) related to specific festivals, rites, rituals, religious ceremonies and worship.Bathou is the root religion of the Bodo society. Through many prayers and hymns Bathou is worshiped by the Bodo people in order to be away from all sorts of miseries and misfortunes.

4.4.1 RABHA FOLK LITERATURE

- Like any other tribal community of Assam, the Rabha tribe also has their distinct literature which is express in the form of folk songs,ballads, myths, folk tales,proverbs, riddles, hymns, etc. It is very rich and is verbally transmitted fromgenerations to generations.
- The Rabha **folk songs** are related to various themes like worship, fair, festivals, rites of passage, love and yearning, merriment, agriculture, work etc. These folk songs provide detail information about the socio-religious, economic and cultural aspects of the Rabha society. The Rabha folk songs like *huimaru, baikhu, sathar, tukuria* etc are related to Rabha religious festivals, *tekamni tsay* are sung during the marriage ceremony, *pharkanti* is sung when someone die, *bogejari* songs are *bahurangi*songs sung in various festivals, *baikho-trokkay*geet are related to love and yearning, *hamdzar Tankai Tsay* is associated with agriculture. In addition to this the Rabha folk songs included some work songs like*na bokai* (fishing song), *maran mathan tsai* (songs related to haunting), etc. which are mainly associated with the various economic aspects of the Rabha society.

- **Ballads** are another essential part of the Rabha folk literature. Ballads of *Dodan, Duimukshi, Kumbaichung, Marukhetri-Kurukhetri, Naluwa-Chaluwa, Jogen Bantho, Tansen Dorai,* etc are very informative in nature and are very useful in reconstructing the history of the Rabha tribe.
- **Legends** occupy an important place in the Rabha folk literature. The legends of *Dodan-Marukhetri, Naluwa-Chaluwa, Rondona-Chondona, Kumbaichung, Hasong Takkai Khircha, Dodan-Duimukshi, Tore-Torse, Naniden-Phanindar, Sisu-Ginal, Pangba bai, Rontuk, Jakuwadeo, Moirabai, Jaglang, Memang, Khisambai*, etc used to provide lots of informantion about the Rabha tribe, their beliefs and customs etc.
- The Rabha tribe has a rich and old tradition of **folktales**. Rabha folk tales are very long. Among the various folktales mention may be made of the tales of *TshatiDuimukshi, Kumbaichung, Dzaglan meman, Naluwa-Chaluwa, Gandhitshiri, Thope Netshe, Mayra-Mayri, Rondona-Chondona,* etc, The subject matter of the Rabha folktales is based on the socio-cultural attributes of the community and have distinctive characteristics.
- In the Rabha language **proverb**is called 'suluk'. Depending upon the subject matter and mode of expression, the Rabha proverbs can be classified as social, agricultural, moral, religious proverbs etc. Through these suluks or proverbs the experienced and older members of the society used to provide knowledge and advice to the inexperienced and younger members of the society.
- **Riddles** are another important part of the Rabha folk literature like other ethnic tribes. Rabha riddles can be categories as descriptive, natural, rhyming, mathematical, indigenous etc that are intended to provide wisdom in the light of questions.
- **Hymns** or mantras are also included in the folk literature. The Rabha tribe use various hymns related to specific festivals, rites, rituals, religious ceremonies and worship.

4.4.2 KARBI FOLK LITERATURE

The Karbi folk literature is very rich and varied and it is available in the forms of is available in the forms of folksongs, ballads, myths, folktales, proverbs, riddles, hymns etc. The Karbi folk literature is deeply rooted in their folk life and it provides detail information about the various aspects of the Karbi society. Various phenomena of nature, its flora and fauna, *jhum* cultivation, rivers, trees, etc. together constitute the basis of the Karbi folk literature.

• Folk songs are the most notable genre of the Karbi folk literature. In the Karbi society there are a large number of folk songs which are sung in their different socio-cultural occasions such as birth, purification, death, marriage, work, play, old age, worship etc. The Karbis used the term 'Alun' to suggest a folk song. The Karbi folk songs on the basis of theme can be categorized such as songs of creation (*Keplang* or *Keplank*),wailing songs (*Kecharhe Alun*), marriage songs (*Thelu a-lun or Adam-asarAlun*), songs of social formation and administration, songs of feasts and festivals, seasons and agriculture, songs

of rites and rituals, songs associated with children (*Acho Kebai Alun,Oso Kebei Alun*), songs of love (*Lumpharo Alun*), songs of nature, songs of the aged (*Sar Alun*), work songs, etc. *Hacha-Alun, Domahi Kikan Alun, Kurmi-Alun, An-Kimi-Kic Alun, Sar Kebat Alun*, *Retkinong Alun*, etc are some Karbi folksongs associated their various festivals, rites, rituals, worship and work culture. Two Karbi folk epics *Sabin Alun* (oral Karbi Ramayana) and *Ha-i-mu* further enriches the Karbi folk literature.

LET US KNOW

- *Hacha Kekan* is the harvest festival of the Karbi community and the folk songs associated with this festival are known as *Hacha-Alun*.
- *Domahi* is the spring festival of the Karbis of the plains and the songs associated with this festivalare known as *Domahi Kikan Alun.*
- *Kurmi* festival is the Karbi festival associated with the worship of rain deity. The songs sung in the festival are called *Kurmi-Alun*.
- *Na-khowa Utsava* is the festival of eating new rice in the month of *Aghon*(November-December) celebrated popularly among the Karbis of the plain. The songs associated with the festival are known as *An-Kimi-Kic Alun*.
- The coronation ceremony of the village head (*Sar Kebat*) in a Karbi village is called *Sar Kebat* ceremony. The songs sung in this ceremony are known as *Sar Kebat Alun*.
- The *jhum* cultivation is one of the main agricultural activities of the Karbi people. The Karbis called the *jhum* cultivation as *Retkinnong* and the songs associated with it are known as *Retkinong Alun.*

- Ballads are an important part of the Karbi folk literature. The various aspects of the Karbi society are beautifully portrayed in the Karbi ballads. On the basis of theme the Karbi ballads can be categorized as mythical, legendary or historical, love ballads etc. Ballad of Hai-l, Romir, Hemphu Keplang, Karbi Keplang, Lunse Keplang, Sok Keplang, Thap Keplang, Bong Keplang, Phelo Keplang, Birik Keplang, Nok Keplang, Lo Keplang, Nihu Keplang, Ingti Keplang, Rong Kekim alun orRukachen alun, Sar Kebat alun, Jambili alun, Jirsong alun, Reng Bangham, Romi alun, Hanri alun, Larta alun, Kaching alun, Changlin alun, Cherdihun alun, Didi alun etc. are popular among the Karbi community.
- Karbi folk literature also includes some myths and legends. There are various Karbi myths regarding the creation of earth, the origin of Karbis and different objects of nature, etc. The Karbi myths of Rangsina Sarpo, Thireng- Wareng, etc. are very popular among the community.The Karbi legends refer to the tales of Thong-Nokbe, Rongpherpi Rongbe, Larta, Didi and Disumai, Sat Recho, Rukasen, Harbamon, etc.
- Folk tale is an important genre of the Karbi folk literature. Various elements of nature, demon, love, animals, birds, etc are the main themes of the Karbi folktales.

There are lots of creation tales (Keplang) amongst the Karbis which narrates regarding the origin of the tribe, the clans, the world, paddy, ginger, chilies and many other things. Some of the creation tales widely popular among the Karbis are Pirthe Keplang (Origin of the earth),Karbi Keplang (Origin of the Karbi Tribe),Hemphu Keplang (Origin of the incarnation of god Hemphu),Kur Keplang (Origin of Karbi clans),Lakhi Keplang (Origin of Paddy),Birik Keplang (Origin of chilies),Hanso Keplang (Origin of ginger), etc. These folktales provide valuable information about the Karbi folk life, their belief, rituals, etc.

- The Karbis use various proverbs in their day-to-day life with different objectives and meaning. Moral judgment and socio religious belief of the community, human nature, women status, interrelation of the Karbi society with nature, etc are beautifully reflected in the Karbi proverbs.
- Riddlesare another important part of the Karbi folk literature. On the basis of nature of question and answer, the Karbi riddles can be classified as true riddle, wisdom riddle, puzzle riddle, etc.
- Various types of hymns or mantras are use by the Karbi tribe to please their deities. In addition to this there are other Karbi hymns related to specific festivals, rites, rituals, religious ceremonies and worship.The long verses of Mosera Kihir are recited during chomangkan.

4.4.3 DIMASA FOLK LITERATURE

The Dimasa folk literature is highly colourful and varied and it reveals the socio-cultural, religious and other aspects of the Dimasa community.

- Folk songs are a significant branch of the Dimasa folk literature. The *Bishu* songs are an integral part of the Dimasa society like the *Bihu* songs for the Assamese people. The *Bishu* is a harvesting festival of the Dimasa community and this is celebrated at the leisure time after the hard works at the agricultural field by all the Dimasa people irrespective of any caste, creed, sex, age, etc. The *Bishu* songs are sung at the *Bishu* festival and they throw light on the socio-cultural and economic life of the community. In addition to the *Bishu* songs, there are different types of folk songs in the Dimasa community such as *Majangdini* (love songs*), Garasimang*(sad song sung when a person is dead), *Badathijaobani* (song of sorrow sung by sister who lost her brother), marriage songs, *Jinija Raji*(songs proving information about the past glories of the Dimasa community), lullabies, etc.
- **Ballads** are a significant element of the Dimasa folk literature. The ballads of *Dishru, Maibangma-Ha-gar-Bani, Jiniba Raji, Snemduri, Amalu Dimalu, Jahaya, Harifa, Perobala* and *ganggela, Khalaching* and *chakradaingdai*, etc. very famous and unique. They are helpful in reflecting the socio-political and cultural phenomenon of the Dimasa community.
- **Folktales** occupy an important place in the Dimasa folk literature. Folktales related to heroic activities, animals, birds, supernatural elements, etc. are very popular among the Dimasa people. Several*puranic* tales are also included in the Dimasa folktales with some local modifications.

- The Dimasa folk literature is rich in **proverbs**. The term use by Dimasa people to indicate proverb is *Graugra*. A large number of proverbs are use by the Dimasa people on various purposes that gives an insight of the community's beliefs, morals, traditions, etc.

In addition to the above genres, the Dimasa folk literature also includes some legends, myths etc. that further enriches it.

4.4.4 MISHING FOLK LITERATURE

Folk songs, folktales, proverbs and riddles are the most significant genres of the Mishing folk literature. The Mishing folk literature beautifully depicts the rich and varied cultural heritage of the Mishing community.

- The **folk songs** are the most frequently performed and widely recognized genre of the Mishing folk literature. The Mishing tribe sung various types of folk songs in different situations. On the basis of theme the Mishing folk songs can be categorized as seasonal songs (*Birdug Nitom*), songs of love and yearning (*Oi-Ni:tom*), lamenting songs (*Kaban Nitom*), wedding songs(*Midang-Ni:tom*), lullaby (*Ko-ni:nam*), nursery rhymes (*Moman Nitom*), etc.

LET US KNOW

Ali-aye-ligang is a Mishing festival of sowing first paddy seed into the soil. It is mainly celebrated in the month of *Phagun* (mid February-March). The songs sung in this festival are known as *Ligang ni:tom*.

- **Folktale** is an important genre of the Mishing folk literature. Folktales are called *Do:ying* in Mishing language.The folktales provide valuable information about the beliefs, customs, rituals, etc. of the Mishing community. Mishing folktales are of different types such as cumulative tales, trickster tales, animal tales, etiological tales, romantic tales, tales of supernatural powers, etc. Some of the popular Mishing folktales are *Porpoise and crocodile, Abu Tunturung, The old couple and the pack of foxes, Lightning and Thunder, Tani and Taro, The legends of Tusik and kobang, Tato Ampolung, Batum and Bali, Clever Jackel, Guala Bird, Mitir Bhanga, Ukoh and owl, Dol Pusok*, etc.
- Proverbs and riddles are other important genres of the Mishing folk literature. In the Mishing language proverb is called *Luse-lukor*and riddle is called *Chalak*. Most of the Mishing proverbs and riddles centered on human character and behaviour. They also used to provide valuable insight about the Mishing society.
- The Mishing devotional songs (*A:bangs*) can be considered as hymns. These are
- performed only by the *Mibus*, the priest of the community. The *A:bangs* are recited toplease the various gods and goddesses of the Mishing tribe.

4.5 FOLK SONGS OF THE TEA TRIBES OF ASSAM

After the establishment of the tea gardens in Assam during the colonial rule in the 19th century AD, the Tea tribes from various parts of India such as Telengana, Jharkhanda, Bihar, Orissa, etc. came to Assam to work in the newly established tea gardens of the province. With the passage of time these Tea tribes have permanently settled down in Assam. From time to time new people were migrated to Assam to work in the tea gardens and some of these tea garden labourers were forcefully migrated into Assam.

The Tea tribes of Assam have a rich and varied tradition of folk literature. Among the various genres of folk literature of the Tea tribes, the folk songs are one of the noteworthy elements. There are various types of folk songs prevail amongst the Tea tribes such as *Karam Pujageet*, *Jahli geet*, *Tuchugeet*,*Jhumur* songs, *Sadi geet*, *Domkoch geet, Manashageet*,*Faguwa geet*, etc. Some of the folk songs of the Tea tribes clearly reflect the grief and pain of the tea garden labourers who were forcefully migrated into Assam.

- The *Karam Puja* is one of the major festivals of the Tea tribes of Assam. This festival is related to agriculture and is usually celebrated on the night of *Bhado Ekadasi* (mid August). It is celebrated to worship the 'Mother of Earth', the goddess of creation. The festival is accompanied by dance and songs. The folk songs sung in the Karam Puja are known as *Karam Puja geet*.
- The *Sahrai Puja* is another festival of the Tea tribes which is generally celebrated in the November month before the harvesting period in the dark moon night (*Amaboishya Rati*). In the*Sahrai Puja* the cow is worship which they called as *Go Puja* or *Gouwa Bonga*. The songs sung in the *Sahrai Puja* are known as *Jahli geet*.
- *Tuchu Puja* is a religious festival of the Tea tribes of Assam, celebrated in the month of *Magh* (January) and is associated with the women folk of the society. The idol of *Tushu Devi* is worship in this festival. The songs sung in this festival are known as *Tuchu Puja geet.*
- *Jhumur* is the prominent folk dance of the Tea tribe and this dance is performed along with *Jhumurgeets*. *Jhumurgeets* are mainly sung in the
- *Karam Puja* festival. These songs provide lots of information about the socio-cultural life of the Tea tribes.
- The songs sung in the marriage ceremony are known as *Sadi geet*. There are different types of *Sadi geet* associated with the various rituals of marriage. These songs are mainly sung by the female members of the Tea community.
- *Domkoch geets* are like *Jhumur geet*, but it is not performed in the *Karam Puja* festival. It is generally sung in marriage ceremony. These songs explain the contemporary social system and situations in a humorous way.
- *Manasha geets* are devotional songs sung in praise of theGoddess of Snake, *Maa Manasha*.
- *Faguwa Parav* is another major festival of the Tea tribes, which is a festival of colour (*aabir*) and celebrated in the month of *Fagun* (mid March-April). In this festival the

tribe members perform a special dance called *Kathi*. During this *Kathi* dance folk songs are sung depicting Radha and Krishna. The songs sung in the *Faguwa Parav* are known as *Faguwa songs.*

In addition to the above mentioned folk songs, the Tea tribes have different types of folk songs associated with the various ceremonies of day to day life like birth, death, etc. The folk songs of the Tea tribes used to provide lots of valuable information about the various aspects of the Tea community.

4.6 FOLK SONGS OF THE BARAK VALLEY

The Barak Valley of Assam mainly consists of three districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. The folk literature of the Barak Valley of Assam is very rich and varied. People belonging to different religion and communities used to stay in the Barak Valley and hence the folk literature of multi-coloured.The folk songs are one of the most significant genres of the folk literature of the Barak Valley amongst the other genres. The folk songs are full of variety. Some of the folksongs of the Barak Valley are as follows:

- *Ai gan*: It is a kind of bard-song sung by the cowboys. *Rakhal Seva* is an agricultural festival performed in the Barak Valley with a view to worship the cow and to pray for the well-being of the farmers. The *Ai gan* or songs are directly and indirectly connected with this festival. Most of the *Ai gan* deal with the themes of *Vrindavan, Lord Krishna, Radha, Lilita, Vishakha*, flute, etc. The *Rakhalia gan* are another type of folk song sung by the cowboys at the time of leisure in the shade of a tree. This song is sung by one singer and the themes of these songs are varied depending upon the mood of the singer.
- *Dol songs*: *Dolyatra* or *Holi* is a festival of colour (*aabir*). The songs sung in this festival are known as *Dol* songs. These songs are one of the popular folk songs of the Barak Valley like the other parts of Assam. *Lord Krishna, Radha*, happiness of life, etc are the main themes of the *Dol songs.*
- *Meyeli geet*: These kinds of songs are absolutely confined among the women folk. *Meyeli geets* are sung on various occasions such as birth, marriage, worship, and many other socio-religious events. Only women are the composers and singers of the *Meyeli geets.* These songs are sung by women all in sitting position and without any musical instruments. Only clapping of hands in rhythmical manner is sufficient and occasionally cymbals are played at the time of singing.
- *Kirtan, Samkirtan, Nagarkirtan, Udayasta Kirtan, Prabhati Kirtan, Hari Kirtan, Sandhya Kirtan,* etc.are some other devotional songs of the Barak Valley mainly sung for the common good of all the people in the society. These songs are sung to the accompaniment of different musical instruments.
- *Dhamail* songs are one of the most popular folk song of the Barak Valley. *Dhamail* songs combined with dances are performed during various cultural functions and marriage ceremonies by both Hindus and Muslims. Normally a group mostly of women participate in the *Dhamail* who sing and dance in a circular way and clap their hands in rhythmical manner.

- *That* song: It is a song sung in a tone which is raised gradually to a very high pitch. It is sung by a number of men who form themselves in to a ring and dance while singing.
- *Baul* or *Baoul* songs: These kinds of songs can be considered as like the Assamese folk song *Deh Bicharar Geet.* These songs are highly spiritual and the lyrics have a deep sense of mysticism and a longing for oneness with the divine.
- *Sarigan*: These types of folk songs are sung by the sailors and boatmen. The *Sarigans* are rhythmical group songs mainly sung by the male members. *Sarigans* are chiefly connected with boat-race. The *Bhaitiali* songs are another type of folk songs sung by boatmen and their helpers. It is basically a kind of recreational song that talks about the joy and sorrow, hopes and aspirations, failures and frustrations, gain and loss, love and separation, etc aspects of the life of the common people.*Ghatu* songs are also connected with river and are sung on the bank of the river where the boats are kept (*ghat*). *Radha, Lord Krishna* and different aspects of the contemporary people are the main themes of the *Ghatu* songs.
- *Patua* songs:Pictures related to different issues related to religion, mythology, devotion, social, political and economic problems, etc. are drawn on the canvas of *pat* (a kind of silk) and are explained through songs. These types of songs are known as*Patua* songs and are popular in the Barak Valley.
- *Arigan*: This type of folk song of the Barak Valley is not sung in the daytime. It is sung after midnight and continues till dawn.
- *Jarigan, Murshidi* song, *Gazi* song are some of the folk songs of the Barak Valley chiefly popular among the Muslim community of the area.The sad story of *Karbala* is the chief theme of *Jarigan.Murshidi* songs are a kind of spiritual song that laid emphasis on the importance of *Guru* and pay full devotion towards the *Murshid*. *Gazi* songs are sung by the Muslim community in praise of *Gazi Peer* (saint).

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions :

Q.1 What do you mean by '*Chomangkan*'?
Q. 2 What is *Bwisagu*?
Q.3 What is called 'suluk'?
Q.4 What is 'Alun'?
Q.5 What is called *Do:ying*?
Q.6 What do you mean by *Murshid*?

4.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, you have learnt that—

- Folk literature is one of the important means of understanding the various aspects of any particular society.
- Assamese folk literature, consists of folk songs, ballads, myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, hymns, etc is very rich.

- The various tribal communities of Assam like the Rabha, Karbi, Dimasa, Mishing, etc have their distinctive folk literature in the form of folk songs, ballads, myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, hymns, etc. These altogether together enriches the folk literature of Assam.
- The folk songs of the Tea Tribe and the Barak Valley of Assam provide valuable information about the respective societiesand their cultural values.

✓ 4.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No. 1: *Chomangkan* is a ritual performed by the Karbis after the death of a person.
Ans to Q No. 2: *Bwisagu* is one of the most popular festivals of the Bodo community celebrated during spring season like the *Bihu* festival of the Assamese community.
Ans to Q No. 3 : In the Rabha language proverbis called 'suluk'.
Ans to Q No. 4 : 'Alun' is the term used by the Karbis to suggest a folk song.
Ans to Q No. 5 : Folktales are called *Do:ying* in Mishing language.
Ans to Q No. 6 :*Murshid* is the person that gives 'Irshad' or direction. In other words *Murshid* is the spiritual *Guru*.

4.9 FURTHER READING

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?1.10. MODEL QUESTIONS

(A) Very short questions (Answer each question within 50 words)

a) What is a ballad?
b) What is a proverb?
c) What do you mean by Sar Kebat?
d) What is Garasimang?
e) What is Kaban Nitom?

(B) Short questions (Answer each question withing 150 words)

a) What do you mean by folk literature?
b) Name any two Bodo legends.
c) Name any two Dimasa ballads.
d) Name the different types of folk songs of the Mishing community.
e) Name any two festival of the Tea Tribe of Assam.

(C) Long questions (Answer each question within 300-500 words)

a) Describe about the Assamese folk literature?
b) Write a note on the Bodo folk literature.
c) Write in brief about the Rabha folk literature.
d) Make an assessment of the different forms of the Karbi folk literature.
e) Discuss in brief about the folk songs of the Barak Valley.

UNIT 5 : MATERRIAL CULTURE OF ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives
5.2 Introduction
5.3 Concept of Material Culture
5.4 House Building Types and Decorations in Assam
5.5 Costumes and Ornaments in Assam
5.5.1 Costumes
5.5.2 Ornaments
5.6 Bell Metal Industry
5.7 Musical Instruments of Assam
5.8 Let Us Sum Up
5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress
5.10 Further Reading
5.11 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- have an idea about the material culture,
- explain about the different types of houses in Assam,
- know about the various costumes and ornaments used by different communities in Assam,
- discuss about the bell metal industry of Assam,
- know about various musical instruments of Assam.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units we have already studied about the meaning of culture and the various features of the Assamese culture. Culture in general defines the customs, beliefs, traditions, values, norms etc of human behaviour.We have also studied about the meaning of folk culture. Folk culture means the culture of a particular area. Culture can be divided into two parts, non-material and material culture. Folk culture is not only the identity of a particular ethnic group but it enriches that particular society and carries on the same from one generation to the other. The Assamese culture is very rich in various aspects and it is the assimilation of the various tribal and non-tribal communities. This racial assimilation added a strong colourful flavor to the Assamese culture.

In this unit we will discuss about the meaning of material culture along with the different house building types in Assam. As well as in this chapter we will study about the different costumes, ornaments, musical instruments of Assam. In addition to this we will also study about the bell metal industry of Assam.

5.3 CONCEPT OF MATERIAL CULTURE

Material culture often refers to the visible part of folk life of any community. Material culture consists of man-made or physical objects, resources etc that define the culture of a particular community. How people belonging to different tradition-oriented societies build houses, make cloths, ornaments, foods, tools, instruments, furniture, art and craft etc are all included in the material culture of that particular community. The material culture of any community is one of its basic identities and thereby maintains its uniqueness. Assam exhibits a very rich material culture in the form of art, craft, architecture, costume, ornaments etc which is a blending of the various tribal and non-tribal communities of Assam.

5.4 HOUSE BUILDING TYPES AND DECORATIONS IN ASSAM

A special kind of earthquake resistance house is constructed in Assam as it is an earthquake prone area. These houses are popularly known as Assam-Type house. Generally these houses are single storied but sometimes two or more storied houses are also constructed. Earlier Assam-Type houses were made with bamboo, wood, thatches, cow dung, reed, cane etc which were locally available. But now a day there is a scarcity of these materials and hence other materials like iron, cement, brick, stone etc are also used to build houses in Assam. But in the village areas the traditional bamboo, mud made houses are still made with some innovations.

A weed called Ikora is used extensively to build the walls as well as roof in the traditional Assam-Type houses. An earth plastering is also made in order to make the walls strong and more protective. Sometimes walls are made of bamboo strips plastered with mud. The doors and windows are made out of bamboo as well as wood. Wooden plank flooring is used in these houses with stilts. In the rural areas mud plastered floors are seen. Local grass and thatches are used along with bamboo and wooden frames to build the roof which is slanting in shape. In an Assam-type house there are different types of rooms such as Pak-Ghor (kitchen), Chora-Ghor (living room), Suwani Kotha (bedroom) etc. Other than these Assam-Type houses, the tribal communities of Assam have different type of houses having its own distinctive identity.

- The main house of the Bodo community is called Nomano which consists of three rooms known as Ishing (kitchen), Okhong (dining room) and Khopra (bed room). Mainly bamboo and timber are used to construct these houses.
- The traditional houses ofthe Deori communityare constructed with a long passage having a considerable number of roomsonone side and the front portion of the house is kept open on three sides. The floor of the house is made of flattened bamboos and it is raised from the ground on wooden posts.
- The traditional houses of the Dimasa community are called Noh-Dima and are built in two facing rows. The superstructure of the house is made with timber, walls are

made of bamboo with mud-plasterer and the roof is made with thatches. The entire house is divided into different rooms for different purposes.

- The traditional dwelling house of the Karbi community is called Chang-Ghor, which is made up of wood, bamboo and thatches. Naujok (wooden posts) are used to raise a bamboo floor or platform called Klong a few feet above the ground. The house rests on the Klong. A ladder called Dondon made of wood and bamboo is used to have access to the house. A partition called Noksek-Arpong divides the main building into two parts known as Kam (bedroom) and Kut (storeroom from keeping important and sacred household possessions). Some of the other important parts of the house are Pang, Hong-Kup, Pang-Hongkup, Hong-Plang, Hong-Pharla, Voi-Roi etc.
- The Mishing community builds their traditional houses on stilts popularly known as Chang-Ghor. A ladder called Ko-Bang is used to go to the house. The floor of the house is made with the mat of thick bamboo splits. Bamboo, wood, thatches are used to construct the house. Normally the entire house is divided into two rooms and the fire place (Meram) at the middle of the house is an importantcharacteristic of a traditional Mishing house.
- The traditional houses of the Rabha community are lengthierin size. Generally it is a single house approximately fifty feet in length. Bamboo, wood, thatches, cow-dung etc are used in the construction of the traditional Rabha houses. The main rooms of a traditional Rabha house consisted of the Nok Chung Kai (bed room), Nansra (living room), Mazara (guest room), Nok Sara (kitchen) etc.
- The traditional houses of the Sonowal Kacharicommunity are made of light materials like thatches, bamboo, mud, cane, wood etc. Generally the main door of the house is in the east direction. Normally the house consists of three to four rooms along with a fireplace.

5.5 COSTUMES AND ORNAMENTS IN ASSAM

The costumes and ornaments worn by people belonging to different communitiessymbolize the identity of the particular community which is completely distinct from each other. Assam being a land of people belonging to different communities, witness the existence of different folk costumes and ornaments, which indirectly enriches the Assamese culture. In this section we will have some basic ideas about the different costumes and ornaments worn by the different communities of Assam.

5.5.1 COSTUMES

- Weaving is a common household activity in Assam since time unknown. In compared to the textiles produced by the hills and the plain tribal communities, the textiles produced by the Assamese non-tribal plains are less colourful. But these are of fine texture, unique design and harmony in colour. Some of the traditional dresses of the Assamese non-tribal plains are*Mekhela* (item of female dress for

lower part of the body from waist down to the ankles),*Riha* (an important part of female's dress used on the top of the *Mekhela* covering the breasts and the upper portion of the body), *Chadar/ Upreni* (Women's wrapper to wrap over *Mekhela* and *Riha*), *Anakata Kapor*(ceremonial and sacred cloth worn on specific socio-ritual occasions), *Dhoti* (men's dress to cover the lower part of the body),*Chola* (men's cloth covering the upper part of the body), *Cheleng Kapor* (a piece of cloth used as wrapper and shoulder cloth), *Gamocha* (a towel type of cloth which is an indispensable part of Assamese life and culture), etc.

- Weaving is a common practice amongst the Bodo community.Some of the traditional dresses of the Bodo community are *Dakhana* (main traditional dress of the Bodo women), *Jomgra* (used by Bodo women to cover the upper portion of the body), *Gangrachi*, *Gamsa* (main traditional dress of the Bodo men),*Arnai* (small scarf wrap around the neck by men) etc.
- The textiles produced by the Deoris are simple and less colourful in compared to the other plains tribe of Assam. But they are very unique and beautiful. Some of the traditional dresses of the Deori community are *Igu* (female garment for the lower part of the body), *Jakachiba* (women's waist cloth), *Khania* or *Cheleng* (used as wrapper by the elderly women, turban by men, shoulder cloth by elderly men), *Barkapor* and *Khania Barkapor* (wrapper, also as shawl in winter), *Iku* (men's dhoti), *Icha* (shawl), *Boche, Gatigee, Baiga* (a towel type cloth used by women to cover the head, breast etc)
- Dimasa women are expert weavers. Dimasa cloths are known for high artistic designs. Some of the traditional dresses of the Dimasa community are *Rijamphain* (women's white colour cloth worn from chest to knee), *Rijamphain Beren* (women's chest wrapper), *Rigu* (women's wrapper or lower garment), *Rikhaosa* (a muffler worn by both male and female), *Bathormai* (women's garment), *Sgaoha* (men's turban), *Rigdo* (short muffler used by men), *Risha* (men's short dhoti), *Gainthao* (long muffler used by both male and female), *Rithap* (Shawl used by men) etc.
- Spinning and weaving is an age-old tradition in the Karbi society and almost everyKarbi woman is an expert weaver. For weaving they used their indigenous loom known as loin loom. The Karbi costumes are well known for their texture, design and noticeable colours. Some of the traditional dresses of the Karbi community are *Pini* (women's unstitched wrap / round skirt), *Pekok* (women's upper body cover), *Pe-Cheleng* (women's wrapper as well as men's dhoti), *Wamkok* (women's girdle), *Piba* (Baby carrying cloth), *Rikong* (men's loin cloth), *Choy* (men's sleeveless jacket), *Poho* (men's turban cloth), etc.
- The Mishing community has a very rich and colourful textile tradition. Some of the traditional dresses of the Mishing community are *Ege* (female garment for the lower part of the body), *Ribi-Gacheng* (used as a covering cloth by unmarried women), *Gero* (used as a covering by married women), *Riha* (the breast cloth), *Galuk* or *Mibu-Galuk* (sleeveless jacket), *Ugon* (men's dhoti), *Yamboo* (wrapper), *Jinrek* or *Tongali* (girdle) etc.
- Weaving is considered as a traditional craft of all sections of the Rabha community. The Rabha costumes are famous for their unique texture, colour and design. Some

of the traditional dresses of the Rabha community are *Lemphata* or *Riphan* (The major item of Rabha women's dress wrap around at breast level down to the ankles), *Riphan Chakkay* (chief dress of the married Rabha women), *Kambung* (women's dress that is tied around the body at armpit level by the married women), *Khodabang* or *Khochne* (female turban cloth), *Angcha* (men's turban cloth), *Pajal* (men's dhoti), *Alan* or *Anay* and *Pachra* (shawl) etc.

- The Sonowal Kachariwomen are good weavers. They adopted the dresses of the other contemporary Assamese people. Some of the traditional dresses of the Sonowal Kachari community are *Mekhela* (women's lower garment), *Ekathia (*wear above the blouse and twisting on the waist to just below the knee), *Takaya* (traditional towel which they wear on their head), *Dhuti* (men's lower garment), *Kamij* (men's upper garment) etc.

5.5.2 ORNAMENTS

The traditional ornaments of Assam are highly inspired to a great extent by nature containing the designs of the flora and fauna and some musical instruments of the province. The traditional jewellery of Assam is handmade and is crafted by highly skilled artisans. Most of these ornaments are worn by women and are made of gold and silver. Some of the traditional ornaments of Assam are:

*Lokapar*ois an ornament embellished with identical twin birds (Pigeon).

*Jonbiri*is a crescent moon shaped pendant worn by the Assamese women. In Assamese 'Jon' means moon and 'biri' means the surrounding designs of the ornament.

Dholbiri is an ornament which is *dhol* (a traditional musical instrument of Assam) shaped and very popular amongst the people.

Golpota is necklace that stuck round the neck and contains different floral designs.

Japi is an ornament which is shaped like a 'japi' the traditional conical hat of Assam.

Pepa is an ornament designed like a 'pepa' the traditional musical instrument of Assam.

Kerumoni is a round crescent shaped ornament with the two ends join together and make a hollow in the middle.

*Dugdugi*is a heart-shaped pendent worn by the Assamese women in the neck.

*Gam Kharu*is a bulky bracelet or bangle with clasps and floral designs inscribe on it. The bracelet can be opened with a knot attached to it. While performing the Bihu dance it is mandatory for the females to wear *GamKharu*.

Muthi Kharu is a bracelet. This bracelet is look like the shape of the fingers clenched while making a fist. *Thuriya*is an earring worn largely by elderly Assamese women. The front side of this earring looks like a flower and the middle is thin so that it can stay in ears and the bottom part is wider than the middle portion so that the earring does not come out from the ear.

Most of these traditional ornaments of Assam are now-a-days available in a combine set that includes the earrings, necklace, ring etc. In addition to these ornaments,

the various tribes of Assam have their own traditional ornaments which are used by the particular tribes along with the above mentioned ornaments.

- The Bodo women wear different types of necklace such as Chandra Har, Bisa Har, Thanka Siri, Jibou Zinziri etc. They wear special kinds of earrings called Phulkhuli, Japkhring, Dul, Boula and Phuti. In the nose they wear Nakhaphul, Nolot as well as Buluki. In the hand they wear bangles called Ashan Shangkha and Ashan Suri.
- The Deori women wear ornaments like Igawa (necklace), Uchoon (bangles), Gema (ring) etc. Apart from these, they wear traditional ornaments such as Lee, Kotu, Madoli, Jonbiri, Dugdugi etc while performing Bihu.
- The ornaments of the Dimasa community are made of precious and semi-precious stone like coral, metals like silver and coins. The Dimasa women wear different types of traditional necklaces such as Rmailik (made of colourful micro beads), Jongsama, Phowal (made from coral and real silver beads), Rangbersha (made of silver coins and beads), Chandrawal (made of flower shaped silver chain consisting of either one or three or sometimes three rows) etc; bracelet or bangle such as Khadu (made with pure silver), earrings such as Khmaothai (it is a bullet like structure made of pure silver). In addition to this the Dimasa females wear a headgear of colour stripes called Shukhep.
- The Karbi women wear different types of necklace such as Lek Sabai, Ser Alek Punjang, Lekdhon, Lek Pongting, Lek Ruve, Lek Pila, Lek Paikam, Lek Bongnai, Lek Changti, Lek siki etc; earrings such as Nathengpi, Nathengpi Akoron, Nathengpi Chawah, Nalangpong, Nathengpi Plirplar etc; rings such as Arnan Ke et, Arnan Kelol, Ser Banda, Rup Banda etc. In addition to this, they also wear three different types of wrist band called Roi Tahu, Roi Setung, Roi Pengkhara.
- The Mishing women wear bangles such as Kongge, Ain Kongge, Ga: Mkaru, Onsarmora etc; neck ornaments such as Tadog, Dogne, Takti, Ain a: Be, Murkong a: Be, Chandoronghaar, Baltag Doksori(a chain made of silver coins), Lingkar etc; earrings such as Pisiring, Kentu, Turi, Takpor etc. In addition to these the Mishing women wear Lakpun during dancing. Lakpun is worn at the waist.
- The Rabha women wear different types of traditional necklaces such as Chandra-Haar, Siki-Suki, Hancha or Hacha etc; earrings such as Nambri, Bala-Nimbri etc; bangles such as Chan, Har Gulai, Mal-Kharu, Mayar-Ching Chap, Banti, Hat Baju or Kanta Baju etc. In addition to these ornaments the Rabha women used to wear Naka Pati and Bali in the nose, Chasi-tam (ring worn in the ring finger of the left hand), Rubak or Rubuk (a girdle made of ivory with seven strings worn around the waist) and Khuchmakrang (used in the knot of hair tied on the top of head, usually its length is nine to ten feet and made of silver).
- The Sonowal Kachari community used to wear the traditional ornaments of Assam such as Gamkharu, Keru, Thuriya, Dugdugi, Jonbiri etc.

5.6 BELL METAL INDUSTRY

The Bell Metal industry is an indigenous industry of Assam and its products have an esteem position in the Assamese society. The bell metal is locally called *kanh* and the industry is known as *kanh udyog*. The bell metal artisans are known as *kanhars*.By using the traditional method of hammering they produce a large number of products which represents the rich material culture of Assam. Earlier, bell metal industry was there in different places of Assam like Sarthebari, Sapatgram, Bilasipara, Raha, Titabar, Lakhipur and some areas of Cachar. However, in due course of time this industry declined and perished away from its traditional centres other than Sarthebari.Today Sarthebari (situated in the Barpeta district) is the only existing bell metal industrial centre of Assam. Other than that, one can find bell metal industry in some other places of Assam which are mostly off-shoots of the *kanhars* of Sarthebari who have moved to those places to expand their business.

LET US KNOW

Bell Metal is a form of bronze. It is an alloy of copper and tin. The two metals are mixed together at the proportion of 80:20 i.e. 80% copper and 20% tin to prepare the bell metal. Due to the local scarcity of copper and tin and to avoid the labour involved in making the bell metal locally, now a day the kanhars started using the scrap metal (old bell metal products) for making the new products. The bell metal products have a higher resale value.

Bell metal products are manufactured in a co-operative basis in a garshal. The head of a garshal is the ojha kanhar who is the master craftsman. He is assisted by the co-artisans called the palis. The tools used in the process of manufacturing the bell metal products are all locally made. Some of them are Niyeri(an anvil), Haturi(a hammer), Sarah(a plus or pincers), Kati(a pair of scissors used to cut the thin feat outer layer of the utensils to give them proper shape), Aake(one side pointed anvil), Reti(a rasp), Chak Bhor(a gimlet), Mohi (crucible) etc.

Various products are made of bell metal which occupies a prestigious place in the Assamese society and are used in different aspects of life in the Assamese society. Some bell metal products are used in day to day household activities, some are used in different socio-religious as well as cultural activities. The bell metal products used in day to day household activities are Kahi (dish), Bati(bowl), Ban Bati (bowl with a stand), Lota (a kind of water pot), Bota(a kind of tray with a stand) etc.The bell metal products used in differentsocio-religious as well as cultural activities of the Assamese society are Tal (cymbal), Barkah (a gong), Kanh (a bell), Dobakah(a big kettle drum), Ghanta(a bell), Chaki(a lamp), Bigraha(an image of a deity) etc.

5.7 MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF ASSAM

Various musical instruments are used in Assam for music and other cultural activities. These instruments enrich the Assamese cultural heritage. At the same time some musical instruments testifies the unique cultural identify of Assam. Some of these musical instruments are Khol, Mridanga, Dhol, Doba, Madol, Dambaru, Pepa etc.

The Khol is a musical instrument mainly associated with the satriya culture, specifically while performing bhaona (dance drama) and singing borgeet (devotional song). The Khol is a barrel shaped asymmetrical drum made out of mud and played with fingers. Generally the length of the Khol of Assam is about 75 cm. The two faces of the Kholare of different sizes and are covered with two layers of cow leather, one face completely covered and the other on the outer periphery of the faces. The right face of the Khol is normally three to five inches in diameter and has a pitch and produces a metallic sound. While the left face is six to eight inches in diameter, produces a lower bass sound. The two faces of the Khol are connected with thin leather strips equally distributed into thirty two spaces.

The Mridanga is a kind of Khol, but shorter in size. Generally it is made of wood. In Assam, the diameter of the middle portion of the body of Mridanga is slightly bigger than the Khol. The history of the Mridanga in Assam is traced back to the pre-Sankari period and it is considered as one of the ancient drums of India.

The Dholis a kind of wooden cylindrical drum which is played while performing different songs and dances in Assam. It is played with a stick on one side and with a hand on the other side. It is normally almost 3 feet in length and cylindrical in shape. A Dholis made by hollowing the inner portion of a wooden log and covering the both sides with animal skin, either cow or goat.The right hand face of the Dhol is played with a stick of bamboo, while the left hand face is played by hand. The leather rope of the Dholhelps in hanging it round the neck of the player. There are different types of Dhol in Assam on the basis of the occasion it is played, like the Bihu Dhol, Oja Dhol, Jay Dhol, Bar Dhol, Dhepa Dholetc. The dhol is an unavoidable part of the cultural life of Assam.

The Doba is a bowl shaped skin covered drum. It is normally kept in a namghar (prayer hall).Generally the height of the Doba is about one meter and the diameter of the mouth is about 1 meter 20 cm. The gorgeous sound of the Doba is produced by beating it with two sticks on cover hide. It is placed in slight inclining position for the convenience of beating it.This instrument occupies a very prestigious position in the Assamese society as well as culture.

The Madal is a Mridanga type barrel shaped hand drum mostly used in folk music. Earlier it was made with the burnt clay but now a day it is made of wood. The body of the Madal is cylinder shaped leaving hollow at both the ends. One end of the stricter is smaller than the other and is covered with animal skin. Lather ropes are attached connecting both the ends around the body. Madal has a significant place in the folk music of Assam.

The Dambaru is wooden instrument look like an hour glass. The length of the Dambaru varies from 15 to 25 cm. The waist or middle portion of the instrument is narrow and there are two strings with knots (balls of metal or cork) at their ends. The two heads of the Dambaruare covered. The Dambaruis held at the hand and rolled from side to side and

because of this shake the end of the strings having metal balls strikes the centre of both the heads alternatively and as a result produces sound with rhythmical strokes. The Dambaru is represented as an attribute of Lord Siva as Nataraja. It is said that Lord Siva played the Dambaruduring the cosmic dance. The instrument occupied a very holy place in the society.

The Pepais a hornpipe instrument mainly associated with the Bihu culture of Assam. It is made with the horn of a buffalo, with a small bamboo pipe attached to it. There are two types of Pepa, single and double (Juria Pepa). The single horn Pepa has five to six holes and the dual horn Pepa has four holes. A metal ring is attached to the opening of the horn that functions both as a mechanical reinforcement as well as an embellishment. Usually a Pepais less than two ft. in length, but the size may vary. It occupies a very prestigious place in the Assamese culture.

In addition to musical instruments there are various other instruments such as Tal, Khunjuri, Gogona, Sutuli etc that are inseparable part of the Assamese culture and society. Along with these the various tribal communities of the province have their own traditional musical instruments. Thus the co-existence of a multi diversified material culture in Assam enriches the Assamese culture.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions :

Q.1 What is called Nomano?
Q,2 What isIkora?
Q.3 What is called Ko-Bang?
Q.4 What is called Shukhep.
Q.5 What is Igu?
Q.6 What is agarshal?

5.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, you have learnt that—

- Material culture is the visible part of folk life of any community. How people belonging to different tradition-oriented societies build houses, make cloths, ornaments, foods, tools, instruments, furniture, art and craft etc are all included in the material culture of that particular community.
- Assam exhibits a very rich material culture in the form of art, craft, architecture, costume, ornaments etc which is a blending of the various tribal and non-tribal communities of Assam.
- Assam being a land of people belonging to different communities, witness the existence of different folk art, craft, costumes and ornaments, which indirectly enriches the Assamese culture.
- Assam being an earthquake prone area a special kind of earthquake resistance house is constructed in Assam popularly known as Assam-Type house. Light

materials like bamboo, wood, thatches etc are use to construct Assam-type houses. In addition to this, other tribal communities construct their traditional types of houses, mostly made of bamboo and wood.

- The Bell Metal industry is an indigenous industry of Assam and its products have an esteem position in the Assamese society and are used in household as well as different socio-cultural and religious occasions.
- Various musical instruments are used in Assam for music and other cultural activities which enrich the Assamese cultural heritage.

5.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No. 1: The main house of the Bodo community is called *Nomano*.
Ans to Q No. 2: *Ikora* is a weed used extensively to build the walls as well as roof in the traditional Assam-Type houses.
Ans to Q No. 3:*Ko-Bang* is a ladder used in a traditional Mishing house to go to the house.
Ans to Q No. 4:*Shukhep is a headgear of colour strips worn by the Dimasa females.*
Ans to Q No. 5: *Iguis the traditional Deori female garment for the lower part of the body.*
Ans to Q No. 6: *A garshal is a bell metal processing unit.*

5.10 FURTHER READING

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5.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Very short questions (Answer each question withing 50 words)

a) What is called *Klong*?

b) Name any two traditional costume of the Bodo community.

c) Name any two traditional costume of the Mishing community.

d) What do you mean by *Riha*?

e) Name the tools used in the process of manufacturing the bell metal products.

2. Short questions (Answer each question within 150 words)

a) Name any two traditional ornaments of the Karbi community.

b) What are the traditional ornaments of the Rabha community?

c) What is called *Noksek-Arpong*?

d) Name the different types of *Tal* (cymbal) made of bell metal.

e) How bell metal is prepared?

3. Long questions (Answer each question within 300-500 words)

a) What do you mean by material culture? What are the things that are included in the material culture?

b) Write a note on the Assam-type house.

c) Name the different traditional ornaments worn by the Assamese women.

d) Write a note on the bellmetal industry of Assam.

e) Name any two musical instruments of Assam. Write how are they manufactured?

UNIT 6: RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives
6.2 Introduction
6.3 Religious Traditions of Assam
6.4 Saivism in Assam
- Saiva centres in Assam
- Saiva literature of Assam

6.5 Saktism in Assam
- Centres of Sakti worship in Assam
- Sakti literature of Assam

6.6 Buddhism in Assam
- Buddhist centres in Assam
- Buddhist literature of Assam

6.7 Vaisnavism in Assam
- Vaisnava centres in Assam
- Vaisnava literature of Assam

6.8 Let Us Sum Up
6.9 Answer To Check Your Progress
6.10 Further Reading
6.11 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- know about the religious traditions in Assam and its historical past,
- discuss Saivism and its influence in Assam,
- discuss Saktism as a faith practised in Assam,
- describe the spread and impact on Buddhism on the general life of the people,

6.2 INTRODUCTION

Religion has a close relation with human life and man's life-style. From the early period of human history, natural phenomena have always aroused our fear, curiosity, questions and a sense of enquiry among people.

In the previous unit we have deliberated on the rich folk culture of Assam and its various aspects that have enriched the region. We have discussed the oral traditions, oral literature and the customs that have contributed to the Assamese culture and society.

In this unit, we shall now discuss the religious traditions of Assam. In Assam also many religious beliefs emerged at different times depending on some folk beliefs. Some

religious beliefs were, however, brought to the region by the followers of different religious sects.

Five main religious traditions of Assam are being discussed in the present Unit. These are mainly - Saivism, Saktism, Buddhism and Vaisnavism.

6.3 RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF ASSAM

Ancient Assam was a vast region, quite bigger in size than the present Indian state of Assam. It was a land of a few tribes who followed animism. Those tribes believed in fertility cult, head hunting, ancestor worship, magic and worship of heavenly bodies or objects such as the sun, the moon, the rain and the thunder.

LET US KNOW

Animism is the belief that says that the non-human entities (birds, animals and inanimate objects) have a spiritual essence. Animism worships non-human entities such as birds and animals and inanimate things such as stone.

The Aryans entered Assam a few centuries before the beginning of the Common Era (i.e., before the birth of Jesus Christ). The Brahmanical rites and rituals entered Assam with the coming of the Aryans. Then onwards, the antique non-Aryan beliefs and practices began to exist in Assam simultaneously with the Brahmanical rites and rituals. Therefore, a mixture of non-Aryan and Aryan religious beliefs can still be observed in Assam.

A few other religions entered Assam in the later times. Several religious centers, such as temples, satras, naamghars, mosques and churches and others existing in abundance in Assam prove that Assam is a meeting ground of several religious beliefs. The co-existence of the different religious traditions, without resorting to any conflicts, is unique to this region. Every religious belief has its own literature relating to their religion.

We shall now discuss the five major religious traditions of Assam.

6.4 SAIVISM

The religious sect that worships Lord Siva as the Supreme deity is known as Saivism. Scholars have the opinion that Siva was originally a non-Aryan tribal god. He was later incorporated into the religion now known as Hinduism.

Saivism, in its early form, is considered to have existed in the Indus Valley civilization (2500 BC-1500 BC). Proofs of the cult of fertility or the worship of the Phallus or the Linga are there in the remains of that civilization. The Phallus or the Linga was later personified as Lord Siva. The deity had other manifestations in that civilization. This is

evidenced by an image of the Pasupati Siva ("The Lord of the Cattle") found in the remains of the civilization.

The Vedic civilization had a deity named Rudra. The Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda give references to Lord Rudra. This Aryan deity was considered to be the god of destruction. He was the Lord of wild people. In contrast, the non-Aryan deity Siva was believed to be benevolent and accepted as the symbol of creation.

The Vedic deity Rudra and the non-Vedic deity Siva merged into one. However, the difference in the nature of the merged god resulted in the development of two forms of Saivism. One of these forms believes in Siva as the destroyer, while the other form has the belief that Siva is a benevolent god.

The epics Ramayana and Mahabharata consider Siva as a god of the religion now known as Hinduism. The religion called Hinduism has 18 puranas. Among these Puranas, the Siva-purana, occupies the sixth position. Parvati is known to be Siva's wife. Ganesa, the god who can remove all obstacles and Kartika or Kartikeya, the god of wars, are their sons. They are believed to have their abode in Kailasa in the Upper Himalayas.

LET US KNOW

Pasupati Siva is a seated figure on a seal found at Mahenjo-daro. The figure is considered to be a prototype of Siva. It is surrounded by animals. Therefore, it is called Pasupati Siva or "Lord of the Cattle".

- **Saivism in Assam:**

Saivism is one of the earliest religious beliefs practiced in Assam. Siva as a tribal god was widely worshipped in Assam by the non-Aryan Austric aboriginals of Assam known as the Kiratas. Saivism later got connected with Tantricism, which uses magic and mantras to achieve Power. Therefore, worship of Sakti, the Primal Energy identified as female, is closely associated with the worship of Siva. Like Saivism of ancient Assam, Saktism of ancient Assam was also of Austric origin.

Saivism and Saktism are related to the worship of fertility, symbolized by human sex organs. Saivism worships the Linga, i.e., the male sex organ. In Saktism, the female reproductive organ Yoni is worshipped.

A few myths connect the worship of Siva in ancient Assam to King Jalpeswar. The king is believed to have his capital in the present Jalpaiguri town in northern West Bengal.

Some other myths relate Saivism to Naraka, Lord Visnu's son who is believed to have brought the Aryan civilization from Mithila (in present Bihar) to Assam. It is believed that Saivism enjoyed a stronghold in Assam prior to the advent of Naraka. This is suggested by the strong Saiva belief as maintained by the contemporary non-Aryan king of Sonitpur named Bana. Bana was then defeated in battle by Lord Krisna, an incarnation of Lord Visnu. The defeat stands for the subsequent degeneration of Saivism in Assam owing to the spread of the Aryan religion, symbolized by Lord Krisna, in the region. History gives evidence of the existence of Saivism in ancient Assam. Several land-grants of

ancient Assam eulogize Lord Siva. Banamala Varman's Tezpur land-grant, Harjara Varman's Hayungthal copper plate, Bala Varman's Nagaon grant and Indrapala's Gauhati copper plate were dedicated to Lord Siva. This proves the adherence of these kings to Saivism.

- **Saiva Centres of Assam**

From the ancient period, Assam is renowned for Saiva centers. The rulers of ancient Assam built several Saiva temples throughout Assam. In the medieval period also the Ahom rulers built Saiva temples.

The Mahabhairab temple at Tezpur in the Sonitpur district is one of the oldest Siva temples of Assam. Bana's daughter Usha is believed to have worshipped Siva in this temple.

The sculptural remains of Da-Parvatiya in Tezpur hint about the existence of a Siva temple there. The sculpture of the temple has similarity with the Gupta sculpture. Therefore, the ruins of that temple may be of that period in which the Guptas were ruling in mainland India. This means that the temple may be as old as nearly one and a half thousand years.

King Bhaskar Varman of ancient Assam (the seventh century AD) was a follower of Saivism. Hiuen Tsang, a Chinese traveller who came to Assam during Bhaskar Varman's time, mentioned in his travel-account Si-u-ki that Assam was then famous for the Deva temples. The Deva temples referred probably to temples of Siva.

LET US KNOW

Xuanzang, commonly spelled as Hiuen Tsang (c. 602 - 664), travelled India in the first half of the seventh century AD. His overland journey to India spanned long seventeen years. He came to ancient Assam and his travel-account Si-u-ki contains valuable records on the political, social and religious life in ancient Assam.

Medieval rulers of Assam also followed and patronized the Saiva cult. Viswa Singha, the founder of the Koch kingdom, claimed himself to be a descendant of Siva. He made Saivism the official religion of his kingdom and issued coins bearing the name Siva. A few of the Ahom kings also followed and spread Saivism by constructing temples of Siva. The Umananda temple in Guwahati in the Kamrup district was constructed by the Ahom king Gadadhar Singha in the seventeenth century. Pramatta Singha constructed the Sukreswar temple in Guwahati in 1744. The Siva temple at Basisthasram in Guwahati was constructed by Rajeswar Singha in the eighteenth century.

The Siva temples at Kamakhya and Madan-Kamdev in the Kamrup district, the Siva temple of Negheriting in the Golaghat district, the Sambheswar temple in the Sri Surya Pahar area in the Goalpara district, the Nagsankar temple at Nagsankar and the Viswanath temple at Biswanathghat in the Sonitpur district, the Sivadoul at Sivasagar in the Sivasagar district and the Bilveswar temple at Belsar and the Jaipal temple at

Dingdingi in the Nalbari district are a few other important Saiva temples of Assam. A few of these temples, such as the temples at Kamakhya, Madan-Kamdev and Negheriting were constructed in the pre-Ahom, i.e., in the ancient period. Others, such as the Sivadoul at Sivasagar, the Bilveswar temple and the Jaipal temple were constructed by different Ahom kings in the medieval period.

Siva is worshipped in Assam both in full form and in the Linga or the phallic form. There is a huge linga in the Kamakhya temple. The linga is known as 'jyotirlinga' ("linga of light"). Such worships of the Linga in Assam indicate the close connection of Saivism with Saktism.

Worship of Siva in antique tribal forms also exists among the ethnic inhabitants of Assam. Bathou, worshipped by the Bodos, is a tribal god who has similarities with Siva.

The worship of Siva in Assam involves the use of flowers, tulsi, bel leaves, and milk and so on. Sivaratri is the name of the festival of the worship of Siva. The festival is observed throughout Assam, especially at Kamakhya.

- **Saiva Literature of Assam**

The Saiva Literature of Assam is of two types: oral and written.

Oral Saiva literature of Assam is available in the forms of folk poetry, folk song, naam, and so on. Some other oral literatures related to these forms are ojapali, tokari geet, biyanaam, Sadasivar naam and others. These oral literatures represent the folk form of Siva instead of representing the Vedic form of the deity. Assamese folk poems, songs and naams imagine Siva as a Jatia Gosain ("a god with curly hair"), burha dora ("aged groom"), bhangua ("intoxicated by bhang") and so on. The dominating agricultural lifestyle of the Assamese folk people has contributed to the imagination of Siva even as a peasant or beggar. The folk depiction of Siva highlights the benevolent nature and the amusing lifestyle of the deity.

Among the written Saiva literature of Assam are the Kalika Purana and the Yogini Tantra. The Kalika Purana, a text written in Sanskrit in about the tenth century AD, mentions two sub-sects of Saivism- the Kapalikas and the Pasupatas. According to the text, the Kapalikas are more terrible than the Pasupatas. The Kalika Purana has references to Saktism also.

LET US KNOW

Traditionally attributed to Vyasa, the Puranas are actually Sanskrit compositions of various poets over a long period of time. They eulogize various Hindu deities, but are storehouses of ancient philosophy. They date between 1500 BC to 1000 CE.

The Yogini Tantra, written in Sanskrit in about the sixteenth century AD, also has references to Saktism. The text mentions two other sub-sects of Saivism- the Kaulas and the Avadhutas. These two sub-sects are said to have worshiped both Siva and Sakti. The Yogini Tantra prescribes the ways of worshipping Siva secretly. Among such ways are the rituals like the Panchamakara, which is the extreme form of left hand rituals. The Hara-

Gauri Sambada, a Sanskrit text of the thirteenth century AD has discussed the relationship between Siva and Sakti in detail.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions by filling in the blanks:
1. Who were the original worshippers of Siva in ancient Assam?
2. Which land-grant refers to Saivism?
3. Who made Saivism the official religion?
4. Which text discusses the relationship between Siva and Sakti in detail?

6.5 SAKTISM

Sakti is the Primal Energy identified as female. The worship of Sakti is one of the oldest religious faiths in India. Folk beliefs about the power of the female and uses the of magic and mantras were at the root of the growth of Saktism.

The worship of power in the form of female existed in the Indus Valley civilization. This is proved by the discovery of some images from that civilization. The Vedic literature also gives evidence of the practice of female worship. Durga, Kali and Uma are a few goddesses mentioned in the Vedic literature. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas, especially the Markandeya-purana also mention about the worship of Sakti.

Sakti is often worshipped as Mother Goddess. The Mother Goddess has various forms like Parvati, Durga, Kali, Chamundi, Padma, and so on. She is motherly but ferocious at times. The Mother Goddess is often worshiped as the consort of Siva. The consort of Siva has the names Sati, Parvati, Durga, Kali and so on. Sometimes she is described as Siva's daughter. Padma is believed to be Siva's daughter. The cult of Sapta-Matrika ("Seven Divine Mothers") is an important part of Saktism.

Animal sacrifice is an important aspect of this religious sect.

I Saktism in Assam

The Kalika Purana, the Devi Purana and the Yogini Tantra testify that ancient Assam was a stronghold of Saktism. There were and and still are many Sakti centres in Assam. Saktism in Assam is, however, centred round the Kamakhya temple in Guwahati. The Kamakhya shrine is one of the most important Sakti shrines of India.

Several iconographical and archaeological remains discovered in different sites of Assam also prove the existence of Saktism in ancient Assam. The Kamakhya shrine and various other Sakti shrines provide some evidence of such existence.

The land-grants of Banamala Varmana and Indrapala also inform about Sakti worship in ancient Assam.

Medieval Assam had many rulers who believed in Sakti and helped Saktism spread in the region. Naranarayan of the Koch dynasty and Rudra Singha, Siva Singha, Queen Phuleswari, Pramatta Singha and Rajeswar Singha of the Ahom dynasty were a few such rulers.

In Assam, Saktism is closely associated with Tantricism. Goddess Kamakhya and many other goddesses manifesting Sakti are worshiped by following the Tantric mode, i.e., by practicing magic and witchcraft and sacrifice of animals, such as goats and buffaloes. The Yogini Tantra bears the evidence that the Tantric way of worshipping Sakti has an early origin.

Sakti is also worshipped in Assam in her folk forms, such as Manasa, Sitala, Subachani, and others.

- **Sakti Centres of Assam:**

The Kamakhya shrine in Guwahati, famous in India, has a Kamakhya temple and around that temple are some other Sakti temples like those of the Dasamahavidyas (who are Tantric forms of the Mother Goddess, ten in number) with names like Bhubaneswari, Kali, Tara, Bagala, Dhumavati, Chinnamasta and Bhairabi.

The Kamakhya shrine is believed to have come into existence when the reproductive organ of Sati's corpse fell on the Nilachala hill. Naraka started worshipping Kamakhya at the advice of his father Lord Visnu and thus the shrine got importance among the followers of Saktism.

Dr. Banikanta Kakati, however, thinks that the shrine was built up by the Aryans on and around the shrine of an ancient Austric deity named Ka-mei-kha. Naraka perhaps brought this indigenous goddess into the Aryan pantheon. Dr. Nirmal prabha Bordoloi also believes that the shrine of Kamakhya might have its origin among the Austric and Mongoloid tribes of Assam.

A few other important Sakti centres of Assam are the Ugratara temple in Guwahati, the Dirgheswari temple in North Guwahati, the Tamreswari Temple in the Sadiya region, the Bhairabi temple at Tezpur and the Balilesa temple in the Nalbari district. Besides these, numerous small Sakti centres are scattered all over Assam.

- **Sakti Literature of Assam:**

Oral and written literatures on Saktism are found in Assam. We found both written and oral literature relating to Saktism.

Ojapali compositions, various songs, naams, and poems like Sitalapada are among the Assamese folk literatures relating to Saktism. The folk imagination recorded in these folk literatures depicts Sakti mostly as women who occasionally resorts to ferocious mood.

The Kalika Purana, the Yogini Tantra and the Hara-Gauri Sambada and the Padma Purana give the evidence that Saktism was practiced in ancient Assam. They connect Saktism with Saivism. The Pachalis (descriptive poetry on Manasa, written in the medieval period) like the Manasa-Kavya of Narayanadeva are the most important among the Sakti literatures of Assam written in the medieval period.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 5. Name the most important shrine for Sakti worship in Assam?

Q 6. Who is Manasa?

Q 7. Write the name of Ahom queen who patronized Saktism.

Q 8. What do you understand by Dasamahavidya?

6.6 BUDDHISM

Buddhism was founded by Gautama Buddha in the sixth century BC. The religion came away from the Brahmanical religion in order to avoid the ritualistic practices of the latter. It sought alternative ways of mitigating the miseries of life.

The Hinayana, the earliest form of Buddhism, existed firmly almost till the beginning of the Common Era. It mostly avoided image-worship. The Mahayana, the second form of Buddhism, dominated the next five hundred years, i.e., from the first to the fifth centuries AD. Mahayana believed in image-worship. The period between the sixth and the tenth centuries AD was dominated by Tantric Buddhism, the third and the last form of Buddhism. Tantric Buddhism used magic, witchcraft and mantras as it came to be associated with Tantricism. Buddhism faced decadence after the tenth century AD. The three Pitakas, namely, the Sutta Pitaka, the Vinaya Pitaka and the Abhidhamma Pitaka are the most important texts on Buddhist thought and philosophy.

- **Buddhism in Assam**

Buddhism entered Assam in the ancient period itself. The religion had a strong hold in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa of that time. Assam being a contiguous land of Bengal got affected by the Buddhist faith.

Many scholars give the opinion that Buddhism did not exist in Assam prior to the time of King Bhaskara Varmana. However, several literary works and archaeological and architectural remains indicate that Buddhism existed in Assam centuries before Bhaskara Varmana's times.

There are evidence of the existence of Hinayana, Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism in ancient Assam. Archaeological remains found in the Sri Surya Pahar area in the Goalpara district bear evidence of this. Archaeological remains found at the Nilachala hill in Guwahati and at Hayagriva Madhava at Hajo in the Kamrup district, Indrapala's copper plate grant and Gauhati Grant and the iconographical remains found at Narakasura in the Kamrup district indicate the existence of Buddhism in ancient Assam.

It is believed that Tantric Buddhism, especially its popular form known as Vajrayana, developed in ancient Assam. The cult of Saktism and Tantricism had a profound impact on Buddhism leading to the emergence of Vajrayana form of Buddhism in Assam. Therefore, many Brahmanical and Buddhist deities and practices do not have sharp distinctions.

The Tai-Ahoms, who came to Assam in the thirteenth century, were probably influenced by the Sahajayana, a form of Tantric Buddhism. References to Buddhism are found in Sankaradeva (1449-1568), a medieval Vaisnavite saint of Assam.

A few Tai tribes, such as the Tai-Khamtis, Tai-Turungs, Tai-Khamyangs, Tai-Phake and Tai-Aitons entered Assam in the eighteenth century. They brought beliefs and practices of the Buddhism of Burma with them. This was the second wave of Buddhism in Assam after the first in the ancient period.

Buddhist beliefs and practices have influenced many social and cultural aspects of the Assamese people. The "rati-khowa" tradition followed differently by many groups of people in Assam bears the influence of Buddhism.

- **Buddhist Centres of Assam**

The most important centre of Buddhism in Assam is the Sri Surya Pahar area in the Goalpara district. A good number of Stupa and terracotta plaque of the ancient period have been found there. Pancharatna, Jogighopa, Paglatek and Barbhita in the Goalpara district, the Kamakhya shrine and the Narakasura Hills in Guwahati, the Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo and Bhaitbari in present Meghalaya are other important Buddhist centres of ancient Assam.

The Tai Buddhist people of Assam live in places like Jorhat, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Narayanpur, Ledu, Naharkatiya and Margherita. These are important centres of Buddhism being practiced even now.

- **Buddhist Literature of Assam:**

Buddhism has a great influence on Assamese literature. The compositions of the Buddhist Siddhas like Saraha, Nagarjuna, and Luipa and others are considered the oldest examples of Assamese literature. The language of these Charyapadas or Buddhist dohas may be considered the proto-type of the Assamese language.

The Charyapadas influenced the pre-Sankaradeva and neo-Vaisnavite writers of Assam. Madhava Kandali, a pre-Sankaradeva poet, and Ananta Kandali, a neo-Vaisnavite poet of Sankaradeva's time, have references to Buddhism.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 9. Which form of Buddhism avoided image worship?

Q 10. What are the main compositions of the Buddhists Siddhas?

Q 11. What is Sahajayana?

Q 12. Name an important centre of Buddhism in Meghalaya.

6.7. VAISNAVISM

Vaisnavism is that sect of Hinduism in which veneration is offered to Lord Vishnu or Krishna or the Dasavataras ("the ten incarnations") of Lord Visnu, namely, Matchya, Kurma, Baraha, Narasingha, Bamana, Parasurama, Halirama, Rama, Buddha and Kalki. Vaisnavism is also known as the Sanatana dharma ("the eternal religion").

The Vedas have references to Visnu but do not consider him to be a major deity. The development of Visnu as the Supreme Hindu god was a phenomenon that took place after the Vedic period. The epic period had Visnu as the Supreme deity. Lord Visnu is generally imagined as having four hands with Sankha, Chakra, Gada and Padma in them.

The devotee of Visnu is known as Vaisnava. The Vaisnava followers worship Lord Rama and Lord Krishna for the most part.

Vaisnavism has the concept of Bhakti Yoga or Bhakti Marga. The concept developed with the Upanisadas. The Bhagavat-Gita, the Padma-Purana, the Visnu-Purana and the Bhagavata-Purana are other important Vaisnava texts.

- **Vaisnavism in Assam**

Mythology has it that Assam has been in touch with Vaisnavism right from the ancient times. The legend of Visnu's son Naraka and Bana, who was defeated in battle by Lord Krisna, bears testimony to this.

The first epigraphical reference to worship of Vishnu is found in the Badganga inscription of Bhutivarman. This inscription described Bhutivarman in Vaisnava terms as early as the fifth century AD.

The Umachal rock inscription of Surendra Varman, the Bargaon inscription of Ratnapala and the Doobi and the Nidhanpur plates of Bhaskar Varman and the Hayungthal plates of Harjara- all of the ancient period- have references either to Visnu, or to Balarama, or to Visnu's consort Laksmi.

Janmastami, the festival on the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna and the Doul-jatra (Holi), the festival of colours, are two Vaisnava festivals celebrated enthusiastically.

In the Assamese society, Vishnu is worshiped also as Satya-Narayana, a benevolent God. Visnu is also worshipped in the form of the Salagrama, which is a special kind of stone.

- **Vaisnava Centres of Assam**

Temples of Vishnu in Assam are not found in plenty. The Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo and the Aswakranta temple at North Guwahati are two important Visnu temples of Assam. In the Kamakhya Temple complex also there is Visnu temple. The deity in the temple is known as Kambalakhya. Visnu and Siva are worshiped jointly in the temple. There are a few modern Visnu temples in Assam. The Harimandir at Nalbari is such a temple. This temple was constructed in the early part of the twentieth century.

- **Vaisnava Literature of Assam**

The Vaisnava literatures of Assam do not constitute a voluminous body. The oral songs such as those sung in the worship of Satyanarayan are the major oral literature of the Vaisnava faith in Assam.

Many pre-Sankaradeva poets of Assam composed descriptive poetry using episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Madhava Kandali of the fourteenth century translated the Ramayana into Assamese. It is not known whether these poets were inspired by Vaisnavism. However, their works may be accepted as Vaisnava literature as Visnu or forms of Visnu like Rama and Krishna are their major characters.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions by filling up the blanks:

Q 13. What is the other term used for Vaishnavism?

Q 14. Which inscription provides the earliest reference to the worship of Vishnu?

Q 15. Name an important Vishnu temple at Hajo?

Q 16. Name the texts that do not consider Vishnu as a major deity?

6.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt about–

- The different religious faiths that have been practised in Assam.
- The archaeological remains belonging to different faiths.
- The religious texts and literary works of Saivism, Saktism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism
- The invaluable contribution of the religious faith in the culture, society and literature of Assam.

6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Kiratas.
Ans to Q No 2: Banamala Varman's Tezpur land-grant
Ans to Q No 3: Biswa Singha
Ans to Q No 4: Hara-Gauri Sambada
Ans to Q No 5: Kamakhya
Ans to Q No 6: A folk form of Sakti.
Ans to Q No 7: Queen Phuleswari
Ans to Q No 8: It is the tantric forms of the Mother Goddess, which is ten in number
Ans to Q No 9: Hinayana
Ans to Q No 10: Saraha, Nagarjuna, and Luipa
Ans to Q No 11: Another form of Tantric Buddhism
Ans to Q No 12: Bhaitbari
Ans to Q No 13: Sanatana dharma
Ans to Q No 14: The Badganga inscription
Ans to Q No 15: Hayagriva-Madhava
Ans to Q No 16: Vedas

6.10 FURTHER READING

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6.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1: Name the most important centre of Buddhism in ancient Assam?

Q 2: The "Rati-Khowa" tradition is associated with which religion?
Q 3: Mention the two sub-sects of Saivism that worships both Siva and Sakti.
Q 4: Name the Ahom ruler who constructed the Sukreswar temple in Guwahati.
Q 5: Name the oldest Siva temple of Assam.

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words) Write Short notes on-

a. Naamghar
b. Kapalikas
c. Panchamakara
d. Siva as a folk deity

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

1. Trace the development of Saivism in Assam.
2. Write a note on Saktism in Assam.
3. Explain the spread of Tantric cult in Assam.
4. Discuss the origin and development of Buddhism in ancient Assam.

UNIT 7: THE NEO-VAISHNAVITE MOVEMENT OF ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives
7.2 Introduction
7.3 Origin and Development of Neo-Vaishnavite Movement in Assam
7.4 Sankaradeva and the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement
7.5 Neo-Vaishnavite Movement after Sankaradeva in Assam
7.6 Let Us Sum Up
7.7 Answers To Check Your Progress
7.8 Further Reading
7.9 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to learn

- Discuss the origin and development of Neo-Vaishnavite Movement,
- Discuss the contributions of Sankaradeva towards Neo-Vaishnavite Movement,
- Describe the development of Neo-Vaishnavite Movement after Sankaradeva.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

The Bhakti Movement (800-1700) started in South India in the sixth and the seventh centuries AD. The movement then gradually spread into the whole of India in the following centuries.

The Bhakti Movement took different shape in different places. Still the basic character and motive of the movement remained the same. The movement opposed Brahmanical dominance, religious fanaticism, ritualism and casteism. It advocated for reaching God through love and devotion.

The saints of the Bhakti Movement communicated to people through their devotional songs and dances. Tukaram in Maharastra, Mirabai in Rajasthan, the Sufi's in Punjab, Kabira in Uttar Pradesh and Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva in Assam were a few of the major saints of the Bhakti Movement. According to their belief, God is one and he may be reached through love and devotion to Him.

7.3 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEO-VAISHNAVA MOVEMENT IN ASSAM

It was SrimantaSankaradeva (1449-1568) who founded the Bhakti Movement in Assam towards the end of the fifteenth century AD. He was assisted by his disciples, chief among whom was Sri SriMadavadeva (1489-1596).

The religion taught by Sankardeva is Neo-Vaisnavism. It is based on the BhagavataPurana, shortly known as the Bhagavata. Therefore, his religion is known both as Neo-Vaisnavism and as Bhagavati Dharma. The religion teaches to take shelter in one God. This God is none other than Lord Krishna, a form of Lord Visnu. As it believes in one God, it is known as Ekasarana Dharma. It emphasizes on Naama ("citing of God's name") as a way of expressing devotion to God, for which it is also known as the Naama Dharma. The religion is also known as the EkasaranaNaama Dharma. Another name of the religion is Mahapurusiya Dharma, because Sankaradeva is considered to be a "Mahapurusa" ("Great Person").

Besides spreading religious and spiritual messages, Sankaradeva's religion reformed and united the contemporary Assamese society by opposing social distinctions like caste and religion. He also shaped Assamese culture by founding Satra (a religious institution) and Naamghar (a type of prayer-house) and by inventing forms like Bhaona ("drama"), Satriya Dance (a dance form) and Bargeet ("holy songs of high standard"). Sankaradeva's plays are known as AnkiyaNaat.

The epoch of the Bhakti Movement continued in Assam for almost two centuries after Sankaradeva's demise in 1568. It was guided during this period by various Vaisnavite leaders such as Damodaradeva and Harideva. Neo-Vaisnavism however did not stop to continue after the end of the Bhakti Movement.

7.4 SANKARADEVA AND NEO-VAISHNAVITE MOVEMENT

Vishnu worship was prevalent in the Brahmaputra Valley from very long past. The third important sect that prevailed in Assam on the eve of Sankardeva's neo-vaishnavism was the Vaishnavism. This form of Vaishnavism was different from the one introduced by Sankardeva. Main difference between these two phases of Vaishnavism was that, in the earlier phase Vishnu was worshiped in the form of idol but Sankardeva's Neo-Vaishnavism differs from that, in that it was popularized the cult of Krishna form of Vishnu worship with the most simple way of devotion called bhakti. Within two hundred years of inception the movement firmly established the Vaishnava faith as the supreme religious order of the Brahmaputra Valley.

The socio-political situation of the Brahmaputra Valley, at this point of time produced the best fertile field for harvesting new socio-religious seeds. The state was scattered among various tribes with their own political as well as religious believes. There was absence of unity in every spheres of society. The common people at this situation had to face difficulties everywhere. Socially with the entrance of the brahmonical elements into their society, they were not treated equally, politically they had experienced the feudal hardship, and in the religious field also they did not have their own choice, as brahmonical elements were main force behind religion. In such a situation great socio-religious reformer of medieval Assam Sankardeva took birth at Barduwa in present Nawgong district of Assam in 1449 A.D. His father KusumbarBhuya with considerable power and affluence. He took his education in Sanskrit which helped him much in acquiring knowledge from our *sastras*. After the death of his first wife he went out on a long pilgrimage of twelve years duration and visited almost all the sacred places of northern India. He closely observed

every place of religious importance, came into contact with many saints and scholars of neo-vaishnavite movement, which had a deep impact on his spiritual life. So after his return from pilgrimage he carried with him a reformist mind and started a new religious sect stressing more on bhakti i.e. neo-vaishnavite movement. Of the nine modes of bhakti, Sankaradeva considered *sravana* and *kirtana* to be sufficient as religious endeavour of man towards the highest consumption possible. They are accessible to the highest and the lowest alike, and no rigid theocratic laws are to be followed.Aim of Sankardeva's neo-Vaishnavite movement was to teach the people simple ways of living, equality of all irrespective of caste and creed in the field of religion, practicing non-violence and discarding sacrifice of living being in the name of religion. The society was also marked by the complicated and elaborate systems of rituals and practices associated with propitiation of various gods and goddess, and exploitation of the commoners in all possible ways by practices of elaborate ritualism and the caste system. Snakardeva, through the prayer of congregational prayer, *nam-kritan* and devotion to one supreme God in the form of Vishnu or Krishna, attempted to simplify existing ritualism. The cultural contributions of Sankardeva towards the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement will be discussed in the unit 8.

LET US KNOW

Nine modes of Bhakti

There are nine modes of bhakti. They are sravana, kirtana, smarana, padasevana, archana, vardana, dasya, sakhya and atmanivendan

7.5 NEO-VAISHNAVITE MOVEMENT AFTER SANKARADEVA

The immediate effect of the death of Sankardeva was visible on the neo-vaishnavite movement that the movement got split due to ideological differences of Madhavadeva and Damodardeva. Both Madhabdeva and Damodardeva were well known disciples of Sankardeva. Division became visible when the headship of the movement was entrusted by Sankardeva upon Madhabdeva. Damodardeva, who was a Brahmin disciple of Sankardeva could not accept Madhabdeva as the head of the order and seceded from it and established his own order by modifying the religious teachings and practices of the parent-cult by making a compromise between the path of devotion and the Brahmonical practices, which was against the teachings of the founder of the sect. Thus with Damodardeva, a new order of the neo-vaishnavite movement ***Brahma Samhati*** developed with more popularity among the Brahmin disciples of the movement. This division was soon followed by another division developed by Purushottam Thakur grandson of the saint himself, known as the ***PurushaSanghati***, this division too rejected Madhavadeva's headship, and claimed Sankaradeva as the Guru, and did not give much stress on ritualism. The third division came when Gopaldeva alias Gopal Ata, a disciple of Madhavadeva, founded his sect with all forms of liberality in the practice of religion as allowed originally by Sankaradeva known as the ***Kala Sanghati.*** MathuradasBurha Ata, another disciple of Madhabdeva founded another order ***NikaSanghati*** to retain the original

teachings of the neo-vaishnavite movement. The process of the historic sectarian divisions of Sankardeva's Vaishnavism took place in Lower Assam, and was complete by the close of the 16th century. Despite differences in certain aspects due to differences of personalities and contexts of developments, they share in common most of the basic elements of Vaishnavism, initiated by Sankardeva.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the Following questions:

Q.1: Name the chief disciple of Sankaradeva.

Q.2:……..founded NikaSanghati. (fill in the blank)

Q.3:Damodardeva developed……Sanghati.(fill in the blank)

Q.4: Who was the father of Sankaradeva?

7.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt

- the origin and development of the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement in Assam in the fifteenth century.
- contributions of Sankaradeva towards the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement,
- the development of Neo-Vaishnavite Movement after Sankaradeva.

7.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q No 1: Madhabadeva
Answer to Q No 2: Mathuradas
Answer to Q No 3: Brahma
Answer to Q No 4: KushumbaraBhuyan

7.8 FURTHER READING

1. Neog, M., (1965), Sankardeva and His Times: Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam, Gauhati University, Guwahati
2. Sarma, S.N., (1966), The Neo Vaisnavite Movement and The Satra Institution of Assam, Gauhati University, Guwahati
3. Mahanta, P.J., (2007), The Sankardeva Movement : Its Cultural Horizons, Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati

7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q.1: Who was Sankaradeva?

Q.2: Mention four divisions of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement.

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q.1: Briefly discuss the teachings of Neo-Vaishnavite Movement.

Q.2: Write a short note on Sankaradeva.

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each questions within 300-500 words)

Q.1: Discuss the origin and development of the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement in Assam.

Q.2: Discuss the contributions of Sankaradeva towards the Neo-Vaishnavite Movement.

UNIT 8: NEO-VAISHNAVITE INSTITUTIONS: STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives
8.2 Introduction
8.3 Origin and Development of the Satra institution and Namghar
8.3.1. The Satra
8.3.2 The Namghar
8.4 Influence of the Satra institution and Namghar in Assamese Social Life
8.5 Cultural Practices in the Satra institution and Namghar
8.6 Let Us Sum Up
8.7 Answers to Check Your Progress
8.8 Further Reading
8.9 Model Questions

8.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe the origin and development of the Satra institution and Namghar,
- discuss the influence of the Satra institution and Namghar in Assamese social life,
- discuss the cultural practises in the Satra institution and Namghar.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

The culture which developed in Assam surrounding in and around the satra institution is termed in general as the satriya culture. The satra and namghar were established in Assam as a part of the neo-Vaisnavite movement started by Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva during the 15th century. In the earlier unit, we have discussed the neo-Vaisnavite movement in brief along with the other religious traditions of Assam.

In this unit, we are going to study about the origin and development of the satra institution and namghar, its influence in the social life of Assamese people, and the cultural activities which are practised in the satra and namghar.

Sankardeva established satra and namghar which initiated and spread the neo-Vaisnavism in Assam. Surrounding the satras, there developed the satriya culture which comprised various rites and rituals, functions and festivals, customs and traditions, music, dance, drama, etc.

The establishment of satras in different places of Assam led to the spread of satriya culture across the state. The satriya culture made deep inroads in the Assamese society as the satras and namghars did influence the religious, social, and cultural, even at times the political, life of the people.

8.3. ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SATRA INSTITUTION AND NAMGHAR

The satra and namghar can be regarded as the gifts of the neo-Vaisnavite movement in Assam. Sankardeva for preaching his new faith played an influential role in establishing satra and namghar. The satra in the simplest form is a centre for religious discussion. The namghar evolved as an offshoot, an extended wing or a miniature replica of the satra institution. It can be defined as a community prayer hall which is found today in every Assamese locality. In this section, we will study about the satra and namghar in two sub-sections.

8.3.1 THE SATRA

The neo-Vaisnavite movement led to the formation of satras in Assam. But one must not feel that the satras owed its existence to the neo-Vaisnavite movement. We find reference to satras in the Vedic text 'Satapatha Brahmana' where it meant sacrificial sessions.

In the 'Bhagavata Purana' the word satra appears several times, each time connoting different meanings, like satra-sanjakin-karma (performance of sacrifice), satra-samajesu (an assembly), brahma-sattra (a session of discussion of Brahmans), etc. But in the context of neo-Vaisnavism of Sankardeva, satra as stated earlier only means centre for religious discussion having no relation with the sacrificial system.

The satra can be regarded as a Vaisnava monastery. But a satra is more than a Buddhist vihara or a Hindu temple. The satras in Assam are a unique type of institution having a definite structure. It is generally situated in a four-sided enclosed area with four karapat (gateway), kirtanghar or namghar (rectangular prayer-hall), manikuta (where asana or altar is placed), residential abode of satradhikara (head of the satra), hati (straight row of huts where bhakats or monks used to reside), bharalghar (store house) etc.

There are four principal constituents of a satra, namely, the satradhikara (head of the satra), deka-adhikara (deputy head of the satra), bhakats (clerical devotees residing within the walls of the satra), and sisyas (lay devotees or disciples leading household life living inside and even outside the satra premises in the villages). It preached and spread the Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma stressing importance on the four key components, namely, guru, deva, nama, and bhakat.

In general, the satra is divided (in Assamese) as udasin, ardha-udasin, and grihasthi. The satras where the satradhikara, deka-adhikara, and bhakats living within the walls of the satra lead a celibate (unmarried) life are called udasin satras. Then the satras where along with the celibate satradhikara, deka-adhikara, and bhakats, there resides sisyas within the walls of the satra are called ardha-udasin satras. The grihasthi satras are those where the satradhikara, deka-adhikara and bhakats like the sisyas leads a household life and perform the functions of the satra. In Assam, most of the satras belong to the category of the grihasthi satras.

The satras are found today all over the state. On the basis of the founder of the satras, the satras are again classified (in Assamese) as mul satra, agyapor satra, and xolabonti satra. The satra directly established by the neo-Vaisnava preacher or guru himself is the mul satra. The agyapor satra is the one established by the bhakats or sisyas at the order of the guru. Again when the descendants of the guru used to take a sacred item of the mul satra established by the guru and establishes a new satra in the name of the mul satra or with different name, that satra is called the xolabonti satra.

Although, Sankardeva established satra in Assam, yet there exists difference of opinion whether the mahapurusha himself established the satra institution or not. The word satra was not probably used for the religious institution established during the life of Sankardeva. The mahapurusha used the term deva griha or hari griha for referring to the religious institution established by him. The term thaan was also used instead of satra at that time as Purushottam Thakur, grandson of Sankardeva in his writings used the term thaan while referring to the Bardowa satra.

Sankardeva initially at his birth place Tembuani (Bardowa), set up the first deva griha or hari griha with the active assistance of his resourceful cousin Ramaraya. This deva griha or hari griha was the centre for religious discussion, prayer, recitation of religious books, etc. Over the passage of time, it took an institutional shape in the form of satra. No satra in its institutional form was established during the life time of Sankardeva.

It was only after the demise of Sankardeva that his main disciples, namely Madhavadeva, Damodaradeva, and Harideva started the process of establishing satra institution in a formal way. Initially, Damodaradeva established satra at Barpeta and Sundaridiya; and Harideva at Bohori. Later, other neo-Vaisnava preachers or guru like Banshigopaladeva, Narayandas Aata, Aniruddhadeva, etc with their missionary zeal and organising capacity established satras at different places of Assam for spreading the ideals of neo-Vaisnavism.

However, there started ideological differences in neo-Vaisnavism in the post-Sankardeva period resulting in the emergence of four orders or samhatis of satras- (i) Purusha (ii) Nika (iii) Kala and (iv) Brahma. The Purusha samhati derives its origin from Purushottam Thakur, the eldest grandson of Srimanta Sankardeva. The satras of this samhati were founded by the preachers who were direct descendants of Srimanta Sankardeva. This samhati lays emphasis on Nama or prayer.

The Nika samhati was founded by Mathuradas Burha-Ata and Badaluwa Padma-Ata. They organized their satras in strict conformity with the rules and regulations prescribed by Madhavadeva and paid great attention to outward cleanliness (nika). In this samhati, the position of Madhavadeva is more important than that of Srimanta Sankardeva, the latter being revered as the Guru (teacher) of their Guru.

The satras established by Gopaladeva and his successors formed the Kala-samhati. The Kala-samhati gave the guru a supreme position. It was more egalitarian in outlook and more liberal in matters of caste than other samhatis. Besides, the satradhikaras of these satra preached mainly among the tribal and so-called backward or depressed people of the region.

The Brahma samhati consisted of the sub-sects of Damodaradeva and Harideva, the two Brahmana disciples of Srimanta Sankardeva. Most of the satras affiliated to this

samhati are headed by Brahmana preceptors; hence the name Brahma samhati. This samhati permits Vedic rites and devotional practices alongside nama-kirtana and lays highest importance on deva (God).

The satra institution of different orders or samhatis is well maintained with different officials being appointed for it. The nature of the satra led to variance regarding the sets of officials in a satra. Still, there are some common as well as key officials in each and every satra, in addition to the satradhikara and deka-adhikara, like the rajmedhi, bormedhi, pachoni, namghoria, namlogowa, khataniar, pathak, bhagawati, gayan-bayan, etc. These officials used to discharge their assigned duties in complete harmony for smooth functioning of the satra.

8.3.2 THE NAMGHAR

The namghar, as stated earlier, is an extended wing of the satra institution. Namghar also known as kirtanghar is the prayer-hall which is rectangular in shape. It is the centre of all the religious activities and is hence considered the central institute of a satra. It is an indispensable part of the satra institution carrying forward and spreading the ideals of satra institution in each and every place as we do not have a satra everywhere.

In every Assamese locality, the namghar acts as the centre of religious, intellectual, and cultural activities. There the religious texts are recited and expounded; community prayers are held; dramatic performances are enacted; music and dance are performed; festivals are celebrated; greater problems of life, philosophy and religion are discussed and debated. Though, not in practice today, the namghar also acted at an earlier time as a court trying all civil and criminal cases.

As a public institution, the namghar provided a purely democratic platform for the persons of the locality to manage their own affairs. The people of the locality with their combined labour and resources used to build, maintain, and repair the namghar. Sometimes, the satradhikara of the satra to which the namghar is associated used to visit the namghar to initiate new disciples and to disseminate spiritual education among them.

Always, the namghar is constructed facing the eastward direction. At earlier times, the namghar was constructed with bamboo, wood, straw, etc. However, now a days, the namghar is constructed with brick, stone, iron, etc. The area or the space inside namghar is used to be divided for its numerous activities like offering of prayer, recitation of religious text, cultural performances, etc. The seat for the satradhikara, deka-adhikara, bhakats, sisyas, etc are all fixed for the smooth and systematic functioning of the activities in a namghar.

At the way of entry to the namghar, there used to be the batchara or entrance. Inside the namghar, there is the manikuta where in an asana or altar the religious text like Kirtanaghosa, Namaghosa is placed as no image of god is worshipped in neo-vaisnavism. Then the central area inside is the kirtanghar, the other name for namghar where the kirtana or prayer sessions are held. There is also a sowghar where the items required for dramatic performances like masks or mukha, costumes, ornaments, etc are kept.

A set of officials like satola, deori, namlogowa, pathak, pachoni, etc are there in the namghar for smooth running of its activities. They used to have their position in the

namghar in order of their gradation and used to have their seat on gradation basis during public functions in the namghar. On the basis of that gradation, they also used to get an additional share in the prasada (offering in the form of fruits, grams, etc) on public functions held in the namghar.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:
Q 1. What is Satra according to the Satapatha Brahmana'?
Q 2. Define the agyapor satra?
Q 3. In which direction is the namghar constructed?
Q 4. In the Neo-Vaishnava faith, what is placed at the altar, and is at the same time the source of worship?

8.4 INFLUENCE OF THE SATRA INSTITUTION AND NAMGHAR IN ASSAMESE SOCIAL LIFE

A new outlook has been provided to the Assamese society by the satra institution and namghar. These two religious institutions are connected with almost all the aspects of Assamese life. As such the Assamese social life cannot be even imagined without these two neo-Vaisnava institutions. Deep influences are there of the satra institution and namghar in Assamese social life which covers every other aspects of life. The following influences we are now going to discuss in this section.

- **Social Harmony and Oneness**

The satra institution and namghar by providing to the people a simple and common religious faith in the form of neo-Vaisnavism did away with the contemporary faiths and creeds of diverse shades and grades. Without any caste or creed barrier, even religious barriers at times, the satra institution and namghar gave a free and open platform to people for assembling together and thereby created social harmony and promoted oneness. This to a great extent paved the way for the abolition of rigid caste system prevailing then in a strict manner in the society.

- **Up-liftment of Socially Backward Classes**

Each and every class in the society is equally treated in the satra institution and namghar. The socially backward classes and various tribes are included in the neo-Vaisnava religious faith. Their social position is thereby uplifted and better standards of living are provided to them.

- **Creation of Morality and Social Consciousness**

Moral life of the people is greatly uplifted by the satra institution and namghar. The two institutions used to maintain the moral and ethical code to regulate the life of people. Emphasis is laid on making the people socially conscious so that they lead a life by

maintaining discipline, order, and morality. The society should be duty based so that a feeling of sacrifice and co-operation is created reducing enmity and conflict among the people.

- **Development of the Concept of Assamese Nationality**

With the creation of the satra institution and namghar all over Assam, a feeling of unity and togetherness developed among the Assamese people. A common culture provided by these two neo-Vaisnava institutions created one culture in the Assamese society, what we call today as the Satriya culture. This feeling of unity and togetherness brought close the people of different places of Assam closer to one another and thereby gradually created the way for the development of the concept of Assamese nationality.

- **Centre for Providing Justice**

At earlier times, the satra institution, more particularly the namghar used to provide justice to the people in both civil and criminal cases. As a social institution, it acted as a loka adalat (public court) solving individual conflicts and differences of opinion through mutual understanding. For serious offences, punishment was provided in the form of expulsion from namghar, social boycott, deprivation from property rights, etc. Even today, the namghar in many villages is used to settle amicably the disputes of minor nature.

- **Promoting Economic Growth**

The satra institution and namghar even promoted economic growth in the Assamese society. In the field of agriculture, scope was provided for farming of fruits, grams, pulses, etc which are required for religious offerings. Weaving industry got encouragement as various types of dresses are need for the dramatic performances, etc in the neo-Vaisnava institutions. Bell and brass metal industry grew a lot as its products in the form of mainly utensils are used in the satra institution and namghar. Locally available products like bamboo, wood, straw, etc were also brought into proper utilization by using in construction works.

- **Centre for Spreading Education**

Both the satra institution and the namghar were a centre of learning and education. During the earlier times, even today through rarely, the satra institution used to maintain educational institutions like the pathsala, catuspathis, tols, etc which were run by the reputed scholars. In these institutions, instructions were imparted on religious scriptures and lore, grammar, law, music, dance, art, craft, etc. The satradhikara himself used to be an intellectual and a knowledgeable person providing religious education and spiritual guidance to the bhakats and sisyas. In the namghar, through the recitation and discussion of religious texts, prayer sessions, religious debates, performances of religious cultural items etc, education is imparted to the people in an informal way. Library was also maintained earlier by the satra institution and namghar for preserving books on religion, philosophy, literature, music, dance, etc. Even, paintings were preserved there.

- **Centre for Literary Activities**

The satra institutions can be called the birth place of Assamese literature. Infact, the religious literature in Assam is a part of the neo-Vaisnavite movement. Sankardeva and his chief disciple and apostle, Madhavadeva composed a good number of songs

(Bargeet), dramas (nat), verse narratives, and other types of work describing the teachings of neo-Vaisnavism. Most importantly, Sankardeva wrote the Kirtanaghosa and Madhavadeva wrote the Namaghosa, the two most sacred texts of neo-Vaisnavism faith. Sankardeva wrote in a new language called Brajabuli which is a mixture of Assamese and Maithili language.

The system of composing literary works started by Sankardeva and Madhavadeva continued with other neo-Vaisnava preachers who also contributed in a significant way to the literary field. Sankardeva even translated the Sanskrit scriptures into to Assamese and this continued resulting in the translation of the Bhagavata Purana, Mahabharata, Ramayana, various Kavyas, etc into Assamese language. There also started the practice of writing the biographies of the neo-Vaisnava saints in the form of Charitaputhis. The namghar provided the much needed platform for the public accessibility of the different types of literatures composed in the satra institution through recitation, discussion, debate, cultural performances, etc.

- **Centre for Cultural Activities**

For performing the cultural activities like singing, dance, drama, etc, the satra institution, more particularly the namghar, provided a wider platform. Devotional songs in the form of Bargeet are sung with the tune being maintained by musical instruments like khol (drum), taal (cymbal), etc. Dramas are performed in the form of dance drama called bhaona. Mostly the dramas are the ankiya nat (one act plays). The satra institution developed a school of traditional dance known as the satriya nritya. Some other forms of dance are also there like the oja-pali, sutradhar nritya, natuwa nach, rasa nritya, krishna nach, etc.

8.5 CULTURAL PRACTICES IN THE SATRA INSTITUTION AND NAMGHAR

The Assamese culture has been highly enriched by the cultural practices prevalent in the satra institution and namghar. The cultural practices are satriya nritya, Bargeet, ankiya nat, bhaona, etc. These cultural practices constituted the performing arts of Assam about which we will study in detail in the next unit. In this section we will just provide a rough outline to let you know about the cultural practices.

- **Satriya Nritya**

Satriya Nritya is one among the eight principal classical Indian dance traditions. This dance form developed within the satra institution as an accompaniment to the ankiya nat and is hence termed as satriya nritya. Traditionally the theme of the satriya nritya was that of the mythological stories and was performed by the bhakats (only male) in satras as a part of their daily rituals or to mark special festivals. However, today, the satriya nritya is performed even on stage on both mythological and other themes by both men and women who may not be associated with any satra.

- **Bargeets**

Bargeets are a collection of lyrical songs. These were composed by Sankardeva and Madhavadeva for beginning the prayer services in the satras and namghar. The Bargeets are written in the pada form of verse. The Bargeets have specific ragas and tala. It expresses the religious sentiments of the neo-Vaisnava preachers. But similar type of song composed by others is not considered to be Bargeet proper.

- **Ankiya nat**

Ankiya nats are the one act plays performed in Assam. It was Sankardeva who started composing and performing the ankiya nats. The ankiya nats are written in the brajabuli language. The prevailing theme of the composition primarily centered round Lord Krishna. The ankiya nats usually combine live instruments and singers, dance and elaborate costumes in production.

- **Bhaona**

Bhaona is a form of drama created by Sankardeva. It has been a traditional form of entertainment with religious messages. The bhaona is generally staged at satras and namghars . The bhaona has some special characteristics like the plays, dialogues, costumes, ornaments, entry and foot-steps of the characters which differentiated it from other plays.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following Questions:

Q 5. What do you mean by "Bargeet"?

Q 6. What is the theme of Ankiya nat?

Q 7. What differentiates Bhaona from other plays?

8.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt about

- the growth of satras as a vital part of the neo-Vaisnava movement,
- The importance of Namghar as a centre for discussions, religious and intellectual.
- The influence of the satra institution and namghar in creating social harmony and uplifting the socially backward classes, thus rousing the moral and social consciousness.
- The cultural practices prevalent in the satra institution and namghar.

8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q. No. 1 Sacrificial sessions

Answer to Q. No. 2: The satras established by the bhakats or sisyas at the order of the guru.

Answer to Q. No. 3: Eastward

Answer to Q. No. 4: Kirtan Ghosa/ Naamghosa
Answer to Q. No. 5: Composed by Sankardeva and Madhavadeva are a collection of lyrical songs
Answer to Q. No. 6: The theme of the composition of Ankiya nat is primarily centered round lord Krishna.
Answer to Q. No. 7: The bhaona has some special characteristics like the plays, dialogues, costumes, ornaments, entry and foot-steps of the characters which differentiate it from other plays.

8.8 FURTHER READING

1. Neog, M., (1965), Sankardeva and His Times: Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam, Gauhati University, Guwahati
2. Sarma, S.N., (1966), The Neo Vaisnavite Movement and The Satra Institution of Assam, Gauhati University, Guwahati
3. Mahanta, P.J., (2007), The Sankardeva Movement : Its Cultural Horizons, Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati

8.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)
Q 1: What is the "manikuta"?
Q 2: Who is a Satradhikar?
Q 3: Who founded the Purusha Samhita?
Q 4: Who were the founders of the Nika Samhati?

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150-300 words)
Q 1: Write short notes on the role of -
a) Namghar as a public institution

UNIT 9 : PERFORMING ARTS OF ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives
9.2 Introduction:
9.3 History of Performing Arts
9.4 Temple Dances in Early Assam
9.4.1 Devadasi
9.4.2 Ojhapali
9.4.3 Mati-Akhora
9.5 Let Us Sum Up
9.6 Further Reading
9.7 Answer to check your progress
9.8 Model Question

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- To explain about the origins of dance formswith the history of performing art of Early Assam.
- To discuss about the different forms of temple dances in early Assam.
- To elaborate how temple dances are performed especially the Devadasi Dance.
- To trace the growth and development of Xatriya dance and its importance to the Satras.
- To analyze the present status of these dances.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

The performing arts are a vital and necessary part of our culture and society and exist in many formal and informal settings. The Performing Art, while projecting itself, assimilates all other art forms such as acting, singing, dancing, drawing etc. Hence, performing arts is a form of art where artists use their voices, and bodies to convey a message or artistic expression. It is different from visual arts, in which an artist use paint, canvas and various materials to create art objects.

9.3 HISTORY OF PERFORMING ARTS

The classical period of performing art began in Greece in 6th century BCE, ushered in by the tragic poets such as Sophocles. These poets wrote plays which, in some cases, incorporated dance. The Hellenistic period began the widespread use of comedy. However, by the 6th century CE, the western performing arts had been largely ended, as

the Dark Ages began. Between the 9thand 14th century, performing art in the West was limited to religious historical enactments and morality plays, organized by the Church in celebration of holy days and other important events. But in the 15th century performing arts, along with the arts in general, saw revival as the Renaissance began in Italy and spread throughout Europe.

India is a land of rich culture and heritage. Since the beginning of our civilization, music, dance and drama have been an integral aspect of our culture. Initially, these art forms were used as medium of propagation for religionand social reforms in which music and dance were incorporated to gain popularity. From the Vedic era to the medieval period, the performing arts remained an important source of educating the masses. The Vedas laid down precise rules for the chanting of Vedic hymns. Even the pitch and the accent of singing different hymns have been prescribed. There was more of exemplary presentation through them than education or social reforms. Presently, these art forms have become means of entertainment for people all over the world.

The state of Assam is the heart of the India's Northeast and it described as a land of dances. In Assam the history of performing art is very old. We have found some information about dance and music of ancient Assam from the accounts of Hiuen-Tsang, the Chinese Traveller, who visited Assam in 7th century CE at the time of Kumar Bhaskarvarman, the ruler of Kamarupa. For the honor of this travellor, king Bhaskarvarman arranged dance and music in his court to welcome the guest. This party was continued for one month in every day. In a copper plate inscription of king Valavarman (11th century CE) mentioned that, in a temple Hetukasulin, Shiva was worshipped with dance and music.

There are various tribal communities lived in the hills and plains, among them are the Dimasa-Kacharis, the Karbis, the ZemiNagas, the Kukis in the hills, and the Bodo Kacharis, the Mishing, the Deuris, the Rabhas, the Tiwas in the plains are prominent. All those tribes have been their own traditional festivals which they perform according to their calendar.

Mythology refers to music being brought to the people of Assam from a place of celestial beings. Assamese music is as ancient as the Puranas, Mahabharata etc. Historians claims that Musical instruments and Dance was observed in Assam from 2nd century A.D. It started its maiden journey in the days of King Baana of Sonitpur kingdom, when princess Usha and her friend Chitralekha sang and danced together at Agnigarh (Tezpur, Assam). Chitralekha is said to be the first artist of Martyaloka (Earth). So, the music of Assamese people which is so grand and special in its origin, thus dates back to the time which history can hardly reach. During the period of the Early Vedic times and the later Vedic times, Assam was introduced with "Ragas" and "Dhrupad Shailee" of the Indian Classical music. The experts however have divided the classical Assamese music into two parts - Borgeet and Ojha-pali. The composer of Borgeet, SrimantaSankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva gave a new definition to the Assamese music. However, it could be stated that Assam has been musically affluent since the birth of the Brahmaputra River.

9.4 TEMPLE DANCES OF ASSAM

Dance and Music was an integral part of ancient Indian theatre as established by the Natya Shastra, the oldest and exhaustive treatise on theatre and dramaturgy.Dancedramas were performed in temple precincts. Dance movements were crystallised in stone as karanas in temple sculpture. Following the Bhakti movement in the 6th century, dance and music became powerful vehicles of worship. The deity was treated like a much-loved king, praised and royally entertained with music and dance, as part of the daily sacred rituals of worship. Gifted, highly educated temple dancers or devadasis were supported by the temples that were richly endowed by the rulers. Dance evolved as a composite art in temples as dancers,dance gurus, musicians, poets, composers, architects, sculptors and painters shared a holistic approach to all the arts.

In Assam from the earliest time, people observed temple dance and music in the temple premises, among them Devadasi dance is prominent. In the later period (from 15th century), Xatriya dance was performed in Xatras, which are the important centres of learning of Vaishnavism till today. Following dance form are the major dances which are observed in the temples.

9.4.1 DEVADASI

The Devadasi dance form of Assam is 1,300-year-old tradition, prevalent since the 3rd century when the Devadasi system was in place. In a copper plate inscription of Vanamala Varma Deva, we find the mention of 'Devadasi'. This dance form continues up-to the reign of king Ratnapala of 11th century. The Girls were offered to Saiva, Sakta and Vaishnava temples to dance as part of a daily ritual. Ancient texts like the KalikaPuran and Yogitantra carry references to this ritualistic dance practice.

The word Devadasi comes from the two Sanskrit words, 'Deva' meaning 'God' and 'Dasi' meaning servant or slave. Thus, Devadasi meant 'one who had devoted her life in service of god. According to the KalikaPuran and the Yoginitantra, ancient Kamarupa was a seat of tantra and the advent of Devadasis to Assam was due to tantric influences. The origins of the Devadasis in Assam can be traced to the reign of King Bhaskaravarman of the Varman dynasty (7th century A.D.). Doobi Copper Plate also mentions that the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang's praise of the Kamrupi arts and dance. The Negheriting Siva temple at Dergaon, the Kamakhya temple of Guwahati, the Siva doul in Sivasagar, Hayagriva Madhaba and Kedara temple of Hajo and the Porihoreshwarmandir in Dubi, Pathsala were the centers where Devadasi tradition prevailed.

Devadasi dance was performed during morning worship and 'aroti' in the evening in the temple premises. This dance is set to the tune of song and is accompanied by the musical instruments like khol, taal etc. The songs were composed by the singers and were based on songs in praise of Siva, Parvati, Durga, Vishnu etc. This dance form in the earlier times confined to only temples but at the time of Ahom king Shivasingha, it was performed outside the temples also, which were called as 'nati'. Ahom king Shivasingha himself married one such devadasi known as Phulleswari.

The sanctity of the Devadasi dance in Assam was preserved with utmost care in comparison to the other state. But unfortunately, the Devadasi dance's fall from glory happened around the 17th century when there were repeated foreign invasions and the colonial educational system. The colonial education curriculum considered it as against of humanity. Therefore, it was forbidden, with the assistance of Indian Social reformers and finally it was abolished. Although, "the devotees continued to practice the same in the seclusion of their homes"- Vatsyana, Dr. Kapila, "Indian Classical Dance".

9.4.2 OJHAPALI

The term Ojhapali is coined from two separate word "Oja" or "Ojha" and "Pali". The word Ojha has come out of the Sanskrit Word "Upadhaya" and "Pali" has come out of "Palita". It is one of the unique form of arts of Darrang District of Assam, which involves three art forms - Song, Dance and Drama. It is performed by a group of 4 or 5 men of whom the chief performer is called Oja who is supported by 3 to 4 Palis, and hence the name Ojhapali. The only instrument played by Ojhapali is Khutitaal (palm sized Cymbal). The performers wear long sleeved white gowns, silver jewelry etc. and Nupur (bundle of tiny metallic percussions played by body vibrations).

The Oja is the chief singer, i.e. Oja recites themes from the mythological stories with music, mudras and dance. The palis take up the refrain and repeat the song with playing of cymbals and marking of time with their feet. Palis are of two types (1) Dainapali, so called because he acts as the right-hand man of the Oja (2) General or assisting Palis. The oja sings the epic poems, mythological stories in verse keeping in time ragas, talas, mudras and takes part in conversation with the dainapali and the dainapali relates the meaning of the verse in front of the audience. In general, the Dainapali seems to add crude humour to the unsophisticated listeners.

Dress &Costumes:

A troupe of Ojha-pali consists of one Oja and four to six palis. The dresses and costume bear signifance. The Oja of Biyah-gowa variety puts one capcan (a kind of flowing shirt with the pyjamas). He also put on a girdle around his waist and hangs an ornate pachara (a kind of cloth made form muga cocoon) on his either shoulders. The Oja wears a special type of white turban. He puts on anklets and gamkharu, necklace and rings on his fingers and mark of sandal wood on his forehead. The palis too put on loin cloth made from cotton and a capcan. They also wear stylish turban of white sheet over their heads.

Types of Ojhapali

Based on the performing style and the themes of song, the ojhapali can be classified in two heads. (a) Epic-based Ojhapali(b) Non-epic based Ojhapali.

Epic Based Ojhapali depend solely on the epics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Purana. This type of Oja recites ballads of Sri Bishnu and Krishna. This type of Ojhapali is called BaishnavOjhapali because this art form is presented in the Baishnavite rituals. Epic-besedOjhapali can be divided into seven sub-types (1) BiyaharOjhapali or Biya-gowaojhapali or Vyasa ojhapali or sabha-gowaojhapali (2)

Ramayana OjaPali. (3) Bhaura or Bhauria or BhairaOjhapali (4) DurgavariOjapali. (5) SattriyaOjhapali. (6) Pancaliojhapali.(7) DuluriOjhapali. Among the various types of Ojhapali the Biyahar variety is the most ancient. The tradition of biyaharojhapali goes back to Vyasa Sangita which involves the recitation of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Puranas.

Non-epic based Ojhapali differs from the Epic-based variety in respect of content, structure and context, since this form of ojhapali depends on the theme of the snake goddess Manasa or Bisahari, Padma, Brahmoni or Barmoni. These ritualistic songs sung by the ojhapali to invoke the snake Goddess Mansha are known as ManasaSangita. This variety may be sub-divided into five heads viewing the thematic differences apparent in the context of per formances. (1) Sukanniojhapali or Rang-gowaojhapali (2) BisahariGan (3) Mare PujarGan or Mare Gan (4) Padma PuranarGan (5) Tukuriaojhapali.

The SuknaniOjhapali recites the songs of Goddess Manasa from the Padma Puranas composed by Sukavi Narayan Deva (17th century) . The word Suknanni or Suknani is coined form the initial letters of each word of the sentence "SukaviNarayandevanigadati". The worship of Manasa may be styled as Rang Puja and similarly the art form takes the name Rang-Gowaojapali. The Suknanniojapali, prevalent in Darrang is heavily influenced by the biyahgowa form in its musical aspects and so nearer to classical style of this art form, while the ojhapali in Kamrup is pervaded by folk elements.

Bishaharirgan or mare-pujarrgan bears some differences with the Suknani form of ojapali in the context of theme, structure and style of music. Bishaharirgan or mare-pujargan does not depend on the Padma-purana but on the songs composed by Mankar and Durgabar. Another form of this variety is Padma Puranargan. i.e. the story about the goddess Padma. This tradition is current in North and West Goalpara. The troupe consists of one head singer or gidal, palis and bails (who beats khol and plays on cymbal). Very often boys dress themselves in girls' clothes and present dances along with the main performance.

Tukuriaojhapali recites the themes of Epics and Puranas that handed down to them traditionally. A Tukuriaojhapali consists of four palis sittings in a row and a oja in the middle. The oja relates a story in a simple language with the help of a pali after reciting a song.

9.4.3 MATI AKHORA

In Assamese, generally Mati-Akhora means exercise done on the ground. It helps in the formation of the body and clarity of hands. The Xattriya dance training begins with these Mati-Akhoras. It is considered as the grammar of Xattriya dance. After completion of all the Mati-Akhoras, the dancer can be taught the individual dance numbers of Xattriya. Mati-Akhoras are foundation for the learners to make a healthy physical, mental and spiritual set-up which is very necessary for a classical dancer. Some of these Mati-Akhoras are similar with some yogic postures or asana (based on Yoga Shastra), which help the learners to maintain a physical and mental discipline. These many Mati-Akhoras have yogic quality which help the learners to shape their body from all sides. It is worth

mentioning that MahapurushSankaradeva, the architect of Xattriya dance was a great exponent and expert of yoga, who studied Yoga Shastra thoroughly.

Each Mati-akhora is like a letter in an alphabet and if we join together some postures of the Mati-akhora it gives rise to a beautiful dance sequence. The Mati-Akhoras are broadly categorised into two parts i.e- (a) pure exercises and the other (b) basic dance units. Pure exercises are based on some acrobatic poses. For example– thiyolon, athulon, tamalmusura, moraipanikhowa etc. These exercises are generally not used in dance, though there are some exceptions. For instance, we can refer to the Natuwa dance of AuniatiSattra, where in these exercises or acrobaticposes are extensively used. On the other hand, most of the MatiAkhoras belong to the basic dance units.

It has already been mentioned that the MatiAkhoras are grammatical forms for Xattriya dance, and at the same time they are the exercise as well as the structural basis of this dance form. That is why, almost the entire body processes are covered by the Mati-Akhoras and they are- (a) Utha (rising); (b) boha (squatting), (c) thiyo (standing position), (d) calana (gati or gait), (e) pak (turns and spins), (f) jap (jump), (g) ulaha (undulating or wavy movements), (h) citika (springing), (i) bura or duba (porpoising) etc. On the other hand, the Mati-Akhoras are categorized under eight different broad units, such as- (i) ora, (ii) chota, (iii) jhalak, (iv) jhap, (v) muruka, (vi) khar, (vii) pak and (viii) lon. These are categorised on the basis of different characters and application patterns. Under these broad units, there are many sub-units. For example - there are four types of ora - PurushOra, Prakriti or StriOra, PhulOra,andLahiOra. Like that there are at least six types of chota- orachota, katichota, Udhachota etc.

Mati-Akhoras embrace all the features of Sattriya dance. They are the basic body positions or stances, bhangas or body bending, body movements, foot-stances and foot movements, various utplavanas or jumps, bhramari or paks, gati or gaits, various hastas, sirabheda or head movements, griva - bheda or neck movements, dristi-bheda or eye movements etc.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following question

Q.1: Dasi means _____ (Fill in the blank)

Q.2: Mention the two types of Ojahpali.

Q.3: What does Mati Akhara mean?

9.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you will learn about

- the origins or history of the performing arts. The Dance and Music of Assam is also very old with India. The evident like KalikaPurana, Yoginitantra, accounts of Hiuen-Tsang and different copper plates and inscriptions of Assam tells us about the history of performing arts in Assam.

- From Bhaskarvarman to Valabarman and then Shiva Singha (the Ahom king) preached and gave royal support to these dance forms. From 15th century onwards MahapurushSrimantaShankardeva added a new form of dance in to Assamese culture i.e. the Xatriya dance, which became the lifeline of the Satras.

✓ 9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q. No. 1 **:** Slave
Answer to Q. No. 2 : Epi-based Ojahpali, Non-epic based Ojahpali
Answer to Q. No. 3 : Exercise done on the ground.

9.6 FURTHER READING

1) Baruah, B.K (2011), A Cultural History of Assam,(5th Ed.) Guwahati Bina Library, Guwahati.
2) Goswami, Kali Prasad (2000), Devadasi: Dancing Damsel, APH Publishing Corporation, New Delhi.
3) Choudhury, P.C; The History of Civilisation of the people of Assam to the Twelfth Century AD, Guwahati.

9.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions :
Q.1 : Who is a Oja?
Q.2 : Define Epic Ojhapali.
Q.3 : Mati-Akhoras embrace all the features of _____ dance. (Fill in the blank)

B) Short Questions : (Write short Notes on)
(a) Mati-Akhora
(b) Dress and Costumes of Ojhapali

C) Long Questions :
Q.1 : Discuss Devadasi dance in reference to Assam.
Q.2 : Discuss different forms of Ojhapali in your own words.

UNIT 10: ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF ASSAM

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives
10.2 Introduction
10.3 Sculptures
10.4 Architecture
10.5 Painting
10.6 Let us Sum Up
10.7 Answer to Check Your Progress
10.8 Further Reading
10.9 Model Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- discuss and analyse the growth of art and architecture in Assam,
- explain the sculptures and paintings of Assam,
- analyse the contribution of the various rulers and builders towards the development of a composite culture in Assam.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

You must surely have visited the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati or the Rangghar, Talatal ghar in Sibsagar. They are a mark of our cultural heritage and pride of Assam. You must be wondering about the importance of the study of the temples, tanks, masjids and other structures etc. Well, for a better understanding of our indigenous culture and civilization, we have to look into the past remnants left to us as a cultural legacy by our ancestors. The sculptures, paintings, architectures are memories relived from the past which reveal the character of a particular community or society.

In the previous Unit (Unit-4), we deliberated on the Satriya Culture which is unique and integral to the place and people of Assam. The institutions that evolved under this culture have paved the way for bringing the people closer to each other. The Satriya Culture has also been instrumental in the development of creative art forms that is popular worldwide and attracts a lot of attention.

In this unit, we will look in detail into the art and architecture developed in Assam that has left an imprint into the inherent culture of this state. We will take a deeper insight into the style and pattern of paintings, building activities that were undertaken under various rulers of known or unknown lineage so as to understand our cultural past.

10.3 SCULPTURE

Stone sculptures in Pre-Ahom Assam were found in fairly large numbers. We find the influence of the Gupta classical idiom iin the early Assamese sculpture. The door frame of a temple at Da Parvatiya in Tezpur is a reminder of the Gupta style of art similar to those found in Bhumara, Deogarh and Nachna Kuthara. This work reveal the use of plastic activity in stone.

However, the Gupta classical idiom started losing ground since the 7th century and there are no sculptures assigned to this period. But the classical idiom did continue in Eastern India which is evident from the three images- a metal image of Buddha, a stone image of Chakrapurusha found at Aphsad (Bihar) and a metal image of Sarbani from Chauddagram (Bangladesh). By the second half of the eight century, tendencies for the development of regional religious schools of art, regional language, and literature began to emerge.

One such School of art that developed was the Eastern School of Art or the Pala School of Art due to its emergence during the Pala rule. In Assam, there developed two trends in the field of sculptures- one that developed as a mixture between the Gupta classical idiom and the autochthonous while the other was totally dependent on the autochthonous. By the first half of the ninth century the Eastern School had gained a definite identity. The Dudhnai image of Vishnu may be assigned to this period. This sophisticated idiom of the 9th century can be found in the rock-cut images of Vishnu and Siva at Suryapahar, two rock-cut images of Tirthankaras in a cave at Suryapahar. However, the plastic art of Assam revealed a certain amount of uniqueness owing to the different ethnic affiliations. Assamese plastic art continued till its exhaustion by the end of the 12th century.

- **PALA SCHOOL**

The earliest sculptures available in Assam are marked by the fusion of the indigenous and the Gupta idiom which gave rise to a new idiom, named after Kamarupa. The sculptures found between 9th to the 12th centuries, followed the Pala School of art. Several of the sculptures may have been imported from Bengal and Bihar (the main seat of power of the Palas and the Senas). However, the locally available stones support the view that the sculptures may have been produced in Kamarupa by the local artists trained in Pala styles. Before the beginning of the 13th century, Kamarupa was familiar with the Pala-Sena style and the sculptures were a mixture of the Pala-Sena style with local influences.

By the 17th century, Brahmanical culture flourished in Assam which provided a favourable environment for the production of sculptures with the Brahmanical themes. The sculptures belonging to the medieval period were made in stone, metal, terracotta and wood. Several varieties of stones used for sculpting is found in the region. The sculptures at Ambari are made of granite and gneiss. The discoveries at Ambari point to the fact that sculptured objects were produced even beyond the so claimed "7th to 12th century" period.

The Vishnu icon at Ambari gives a hint at the deviating form of art that flourished in Assam in the post 12th century. The icon stands erect in the samaspadasthanaka pose

holding lotus stalk with his two lower hands while his one upper hand is seen holding a disc (chakra) and a long mace (gada) on the other. The posture of the deity lacks rhythm. The two smaller female figures flanking the male deity are shown as standing in a tribhanga pose. The entire figures stand on a plain pedestal and in the middle of the front portion of the pedestal is carved the figure of Garuda. A stela is seen rising from behind the pedestal. All the figures including that of Garuda are treated in an angular and rigid manner.

The sculpture belonged to the Pala-Sena School but was ruined and deviated from the original Pala style as indicated by the lack of precision in the ornaments and no decoration of the stela. This type of deviated Pala idiom continued from the ancient period to the medieval times. The two female figures from Mariani and Singari and the structured panels from Tezpur and Silbari are a few example of this deviated form of art. The unearthing of the icons of Indra and Karttika at Malinithan (Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh) dating back to 13th - 14th century A.D. suggests that the deviated idiom did spread beyond the realms of the region.

- **KAMARUPA SCHOOL**

The Kamarupa style witnessed the coming together of the Gupta and the "deviated Pala" idiom. The ancient Kamarupa School derived its influence from the Gupta idiom, while the "deviated style" originated in the Pala idiom. The nymph on architectural sections located at Numaligarh incorporates the features of both the styles (Gupta and Pala). For example, the figures have oval face with open eyes and thick lips, the lower portion turned out resulting in a weird smile. The oval face marked the ancient Kamarupa style while the manner of holding the lotus stalk reveals the influence of the "deviated" idiom. The amalgamation of these two Schools of art (Gupta and Pala) marked the emergence of a new phase which was termed as the early Medieval Kamarupa style.

A few Inscriptions, sculptures and sculptured panels found in Numaligarh (near Kamargaon) have a distinct feature that is marked by its rigid appearance. The sculptures in the Kamakhya shrine and those found at Pingalesvara, Khamtighat and Sukresvara too have the same features. The bodies of these figures have broad shoulders and legs that look like stumps. But strangely, more agility is seen in the female figures in the sculptures found at the shrine of Kamakhya.

The Ahoms were great patrons of building and sculptural activities and hence the style of the sculptures underwent changes. Among the first stone sculptures belonging to this period are the rock cut figures found near the river Dihing.

The human figures have broad shoulders and squarish face with eyes sometimes open and at other times half open. It has a flat nose and thick lips and most of the figures are adorned with the regional costumes. However, in the sculptures in Phulabari one can notice the influence of the Mughals in the attire of the figures. The facial details of the figures indicate a visual impact of the local population and sometimes of the outsiders.

There are variations in the sculptures belonging to different areas and themes (secular or religious) and sometimes, sculptures belonging to the same age and place too, have a vast difference.

If we compare two panels of sculpture, one displaying Parvati seated on Shiva's bull (Nandi) and the other of a seated Vishnu, we will be able to discern the differences.

Angularity is missing in the icons of Parvati, who is seen seated under a foiled arch on the back of a walking Nandi as seen in the profile. The figure captures the classical quality of Indian art and is bounded by almost gliding lines.

On the other hand, more emphasis is on angularity of the figure of Vishnu seated in padmasana pose. The representation of Mahisamardini in Sivasagar and Kali from Gaurisagar are treated in an angular fashion.

Difference can also be marked in the artistic standard in the sculptures of different shrines and places. Due to the limited number of skilled artisans, new artists were commissioned which resulted in the production of low quality works. However, quality products were produced and it would be unfair to judge them by comparing them with the works of art made by the artists of a low calibre. Some such quality products were the figures representing Rama, Sita and Laksmana in Jai-daul, the icon of Parasurama from Tezpur, and the figure of a female deity from Gaurisagar and so on.

Animal figures are also represented in different artistic qualities. While the bovine animals are of natural standard, animals like lion appear monstrous, due to the unfamiliarity of the sculptors. The figure of a horse on the other hand is more dynamic and natural. Rudra Singha, the Ahom ruler, is represented as an equestrian at the Jai Daul. At Phulbari, the geese appear to be lively in a sculptured panel. Unnatural appearances are assigned to the mythical figures too. For example, at Rangpur, Makara an icon of Varuna looks like an elephant-headed winged lion or Chinese dragon. Floral works appear stylized and soothing to the eyes just as the geometric patterns drawn skillfully on the pillars and walls of buildings (secular and religious).

Besides the stone sculptures, ancient Kamarupa had a strong tradition of making bronze sculptures, which finds mention in the Tabaqat-i-Nasiri. It refers to a temple in Kamarud (Kamarupa) where idols of gold and silver were deposited. Several metallic icons can be attributed to the time of medieval Kamarupa. One example is a bronze icon of Mahisamardini, unearthed at Hahara in the Kamrup district. The figure is seen standing in the alidha position with one foot on the severed buffalo and another on the back of a lion (or on the pedestal). Unlike the late medieval art, the lion is non-conventional in its appearance. The ten armed and three eyed Goddess is holding the traditional weapons and piercing the demon by her trident. Flanked by Ganesa on a rat (musika) and Karttikeya on a peacock (mayura) on both the sides, she is wearing a long garment, ornaments and a turreted crown topped by a crescent. The deity has angular bends in the body which is well shaped with broad shoulders, slender waist, thick lips and open eyes. The characteristics of this image assign it to the early medieval phase of Kamarupa sculpture. Some stone icons have folk element in it and at sometimes are coarse and angular in treatment. The icon of Gaja- Laksmi and Surya from Hahara is a fine example. The bronze sculpture of Surya is of great interest wherein Surya is seen holding stalks of lotuses in two hands, sitting on the lotus with a long stem which issues out of the back of a horse standing in the centre of a row of seven horses. The seven horses are supposed to be the seven horses of the Sun's chariot driven by Arjuna. At the back of the deity and his two attendants, appears a semi-circular rim topped by a pitcher.

In the late medieval age, many metallic icons were installed. In this regard, the brass icons of Madanamohana (Goalpara and Kamrup district), Vasudeva (Tezpur),

Visvanatha (Tezpur) is noteworthy to mention. A few of these icons were installed at the royal orders. It is interesting to note that Rudra Singha installed a gold statue of his mother at Rangpur and a silver image of Umananda in the Umananda temple (Guwahati).

The two metal sculptures belonging to the late medieval age worth taking note of are the icons of Mahisamardini (Tinsukia) and Vishnu (Dibrugarh). The image of the Gdess Mahisamardini, placed in the 17th-18th century, is made of brass and has ten arms. In the name of ornaments she is seen wearing a turreted crown and diaphanous drapery. She is seen standing in the pratyalidha pose where she is putting one foot on the demon and the other on the lion. All the figures stand on the same pedestal. The pain and fear of the demon is expressed well, and the representation of the lion is very conventional. The cap and dress of the demon seems familiar with costumes famous in certain zones known to have been under the Mughal influence.

The four-handed bronze icon of Vishnu belongs to the same age as that of the Goddess Mahisamardini. On a pedestal, the God is seen standing erect and tall accompanied by Laksmi and Saraswati. The image of Vishnu is adorned with the turreted crown and other ornaments.

The sculptures belonging to the period of Ahom supremacy do not have the same standard. There are some fine specimens of art while others just tend to be of a fairly go standard. The treatment of the images appears to be of a low order which may be due to the recruitment of inferior artisans and their use of defective technique of casting the images.

Yet another medium of expressing art was clay. Clay was used for making potteries, bricks and terracotta plaques. The latter was created to adorn the shrines, monasteries and edifices. A few examples are the Ghanashyam daul at Jaisagar and Na-Math near the temple of Kamakhya at Guwahati. Terracotta placques in medieval Assam were used to serve the purpose of carved wooden panels and pillars. Not just icons but scenes from life and nature were also depicted through the terracotta placques, such as the Baghapara terracotta placques which shows row of geese or groups of dancers. The figures are carved in low relief and have broad chests, bulging eyes and faces lacking beauty. Even the postures and actions lack liveliness. They may contain some folk elements in Assamese art or may be considered the products of an age-old practice. Royal patronage was granted for making items in clay as suggested by the datas. Pratap Singha is referred to have sent a person to Koch Behar to learn the nuances of making earthen images. Human figures in clay were used in rituals, plays and toys made of clay and they catered to the need of the people belonging to all the sections of the society.

Among the sculptures found in Assam, it is noteworthy to mention the terracotta figures. The earliest specimen is found in the Da-Parbatiya site. Goalpara also houses pre-Ahom terracotta sculptures which include the figures of divinities. The terracotta placques also adorn the walls of several medieval temples and structures of Sibsagar and elsewhere. The Ambari Urvasi (female figure) situated at Ambari, Guwahati is a perfect example of terracotta art.

Wood and bamboo are the two popular and easily available mediums of art. It was used for constructing architectural pieces (doors and pillars) and for creating objects of utility (utensils, furniture etc.).

The use of wood for sculptural art is known to have been used in the ancient as well as medieval Assam. Reference in this regard can be made to the numerous presents sent by Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa (first half of the 7th century) to Harshavardhana, among which included "carved boxes with panels". The Tezpur plate instruction of Vanamala refers to boats "embellished with different ornaments" which probably implies the beautiful carvings on the wooden vessels. Images were also prepared in wood as is indicated by the Harihara image from Deopani (9th century).

Patronage from the royal household encouraged the flourishing of wood carving in medieval Assam. Shihabuddin Talish's account furnished details into the interiors of the palace of the Ahom ruler Jayadhvaja Singha which testifies the use of wood. Indeed the huge requirement of wood resulted at one period of time in the creation of a separate department under an officer termed as Kath-Barua. The introduction of bricks in building structures limited the use of wood but it continued to be used for decoration and religious purposes.

Many wooden artifacts of medieval Assam have decayed but there are specimens from the later period of Ahom rule which have survived. These artifacts are seen in the Satras of Assam. The structural style of the satras has kept alive the tradition of wood carving. The sanctum (manikuta) and the prayer hall (kirtanghar) have beautiful wood carvings on the doors, pillars, windows, beams, wall surfaces and so on. Some of the satras worth mentioning are the Barpeta, Sundaria, Jania, Kamalabari and so on. The treatment of human figures has a semblance of force and liveliness, while the treatment of the divine figures is static and frontal like the Ganesa figure at Kamalabari.

Similarly, another specimen of wooden carving in the Satras is found in the throne used for holding the Tenth Book of the Bhagavata Purana in the sanctum. The throne consists of rectangular tiers of uniformly decreasing surface area. At the four corners of each tier are animal motifs and the throne is defined according to the animal motif drawn. If the figures of lion-on-elephant appear at the corner, then it is termed as Singhasana and there can be others like mayurasana, hamsasana, gajasana and others. The thrones in the Satras and even in the palaces were intricately embellished. Items like dolas, meant for carrying royal Ahom families and nobilities, were made out of wood and even metal falls within the orbit of sculptural art. Ivory was also used for making exquisite objects.

Among the divine figures, brahmanical art dominated the entire art scenario in medieval Assam. Though it continued from the ancient times, yet new developments could be marked. For example the Matsya (fish) incarnation of Vishnu is sometimes shown in a way implying that half of his by is devoured by a fish. In many representations Dharitri is replaced by a spherical object (implying earth) in the Varaha (Boar) incarnation of Vishnu. Innovative ideas and skills were applied to create work of merit, like the conventional representation of Surya from the satra at Kamalabari.

Non-brahmanical icons were very few and hence insignificant. Among the icons belonging to the medieval age, we can refer to the image of Buddha (13th century) who is seen seated, along with a few representations of stupa and Buddha in terracotta.

A large collection of metallic images and objects in bronze, brass, bell metal, copper, gold and silver is a sign that metallic sculptures did flourish in Assam. The icons range from human figures of divinities to ceremonial objects like the chariots, asanas and

others. The styles of the objects vary from the sophisticated ones to the more folk based ones. Though the brass metal industry survives yet the artisans mostly pruce household items. However, they do make xarais and batas (tray for making offerings) and dunas (meant for holding lighted earthen lamps) with attractive designs.

Thus, ancient Kamarupa absorbed the stylistic traits from the Gupta idiom and later from the Palas and the early medieval Assam saw the continuity of the "deviated" Pala and ancient Kamarupa School. The late medieval Kamarupa School witnessed the incorporation of new features and styles.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q 1. Which Ahom ruler is represented as an equestrian at Jai daul?

Q 2. Where do you find the reference to the tradition of making bronze sculptures in ancient Kamarupa?

Q 3. What is peculiar about the icon of Gaja-Laksmi and Surya of Harihara?

Q 4. Where is the earliest specimen of terracotta figures found in Assam?

10.4 ARCHITECTURE

Architectural remains belonging to the early medieval days are found in many places of Assam, like Tezpur, Guwahati, Hajo, Goalpara, Nagaon, Golaghat and such others. There are literary and epigraphic records which refer to architectural activities in Pre-Ahom Assam. The references are made to the activities related to the building of secular and religious buildings. The Kalika Purana mentions about some important cities of ancient Assam. The foremost was Pragjyotishapura which is termed as giri-durga by the Kalika Purana. The Bhagavata Purana also describes the city as being inaccessible due to its strong defense, both by nature and man. The Vishnu Purana too points to the strong defensive measures taken up in the city. Other cities mentioned by Kalika Purana are- Alaka, Chandravati, Bhogavati, Varasana and Sonitapura. The Kalika Purana gives a description of six types of forts- jala durga (water fort), bhumi durga (earthen fort), vriksha durga(fort covered by thorny trees), aranya durga (fort surrounded by deep forest), bala durga (fort equipped by skilled soldiers) and sailaja durga or giri durga (hill fort).

The Bargaon Inscription mentions another fortress city named Durjaya or Sri Durjaya which points to its invincible defense power. The Nagaon grant of Balavarman mentions that king Vanamala had erected a palace both aesthetically beautiful and functionally efficient.

Among the religious structure, Hieun Tsang in the 7th century mentioned about some hundred of deva temples in Kamarupa. The Kalika Purana too mentions sacred places of worship associated with deities like Siva, Devi and Vishnu. It also mentions a temple of Kubera on the Darpana Hill and a Vishnu temple on a hill called Agnimala. The

Yogini Tantra mentions the sacred tirtha of Apunarbhava which was adorned by several temples. The Umachal rock inscription is the earliest epigraphic record to mention about a rock cut shrine dedicated to lord Balabhadrasvamin. Similarly the Tezpur grant of Vanamala refers to the rebuilding of the Hatakasulin temple. The Gachtal grant of Gopala refers to king Indrapala as having constructed the white washed temples of Sambhu. Besides the Brahmanical temples, there are references to religious establishment under Buddhism and Jainism.

Initiated by the Varmans of Kamarupa (4th to 7th century) architectural activities continued to develop and prosper. It had similarities with the Imperial Guptas as they both patronized Brahmanical culture. Hence, the architectural activities grew into a standard form in next few centuries which was popularly named as Brahmanical or Indo-Aryan architecture. Despite the similarities in ideologies and beliefs, the buildings belonging to both the groups had individual characters. The architectural activities continued during the times of the Salastambhas and the Palas and by the second half of the 12th century, it had almost passed into obscurity.

The Gupta idiom is visible in most of the architectural works belonging to the period of the Varmans as the kingdom of Kamarupa shared a close proximity with the Gupta mainland, especially the western most part of the kingdom of Kamarupa. Buildings with exquisite Gupta carvings have been found in the neighbourhood of Guwahati and Tezpur. The remains of a brick temple at Da-Parvatia near Tezpur prove the Gupta style of art making easy inroads to the heartland of Assam.

The development in North India influenced the trend of production in Assam. The Salastambhas continued to build in the Post-Gupta style. The buildings grew in height with the addition of more rathas and the outer layer of the structures had more ornamentation and increasing number of sculptures, as was in the case of North India. The only regional specialty in these architectural works was the use of heavy stones.

Building activities during the time of the Palas spread in the entire Brahmaputra valley. The tradition of building during the early medieval period served as a source of inspiration for the later development in the art of architecture in the late medieval period.

In the 13th century A.D., building activities did not collapse and it maintained the earlier mode and medium. However, it displayed a lack of vitality and intensity. The old grace and glamour had faded away. The door frames which stood as a testimony of artistic expression had now lost its utility and the sculptures and carvings remained limited only to the lower part of the door jambs and latatavimba.

Besides the use of stone, burnt bricks were extensively used in construction as indicated by the temples belonging to this period. Architectural evidence of this phase has been found in places like Guwahati, Suwalkuchi, Tezpur and Bhaitbari, Baghapara in Goalpara district.

The remains unearthed at Ambari do not have any architectural significance and it is confusing to come to any logical conclusion regarding the sculptures. From the structural point of view, the sculptures at Ambari throw light on the building activities and the trends within it. The icons belong to Surya, Mahisamardini and Visnu and lack complete finishing which points to the fact that the sculptures had been shaped and moulded in one phase. The sculptures unearthed at Ambari can be divided into several

dimensional groups. It must have been intended to use it as a decoration of the outer wall of the proposed temple.

Small Siva lingas appear to have been made as votive lingas to be offered by the devotees which can find its origin in the Buddhist traditions where the devotees offer stupas as offerings in the places of Buddhist pilgrimage. Offerings like the tridents (trisula) and silver copper or even gold foils simulating the gold leaves of the Bael tree were made to the Siva temples along with small terracotta Sivalingas.

Two components of architectural work now being exhibited at the State Museum indicate a deviation from the traditional style thus belonging to a phase when North India entered a new phase of temple building. Of the two architectural components one is a huge stone column which is half done with a square base which is separated from the shaft. The other is a monolithic frame with three arms intending to shape a monolithic door frame, with lintel and the jambs, done separately.

The Ambari stone inscription of king Samudrapala of 1232 A.D. indicates the existence of satra from which it can be surmised that the barracks with the brick walls were meant as a residence for the priests and devotees. It might have been possible that it was intended to build a large Siva (Nataraja) temple as seen from the sculptures unearthed at Ambari, the largest image of which was that of a ten handed Nataraja.

The availability of two different types of raw materials is indicated by the wide range of plastic activities especially in the Bhaitbari area of Goalpara district and the Malini Than at the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh. Terracotta works were found at the Bhaitbari Zone and stone works at Malini Than. Some stone and brick ruins found at Tezpur and Guwahati and some spots in the Jamuna Kapili valley seem to belong to the 13th century A.D.

Except for the reference in the Ahom chronicles and the Chandra-Bharati inscription, there is no evidence whatsoever of the building activities in the 14th and 15th century. The only example of architectural work in the late medieval Assam is the renovation work of the Kamakhya temple, which characterizes the work of this period. Most of the temples of Lower Assam seem to have been built over the foundation of others. Even more recent studies have revealed that the older lacerated structures have been copied from the old. An example of the rejuvenation of an old structure is the Guptesvara temple at Singri (Sonitpur). The sikhara of this temple survived which was covered in the latter period. Such cases of survival inspired the later architects to follow them as mels.

The buildings belonging to the late medieval period were dull and traditional in looks without following any fixed conceivable shape. The late medieval architecture showed signs of assimilation of different forms without developing into any strict singular discipline.

The late-medieval structure of architecture derived its inspiration from the rulers of the Muslim period. It developed a distinct style of its own through assimilation. Indigenous architecture did flourish in Assam as seen through the practice of making coronation halls (sringari ghar) and the victory pavilions. Other forms of impermanent works were the construction of roads, tanks, ramparts, memorials and such others which could not survive the ravages of time.

The Ahoms immensely contributed to the development of secular architecture in later medieval Assam. The records of the Ahom architecture are found in the account of Shihab-ud-din Talish, who accompanied Mir Jumla in his campaign in the year 1662-63. He mentions the gates of Garhgaon, the audience hall (solang) and the royal palace in detail. The chronicler added the fact that most of the secular structures were basically timber houses and the perfection attained in such work only seemed to point that it could have been in existence since long time back. He mentions that wo, bamboo and straw were the common materials for the building of houses of all men, rich and poor alike. Brick masonry was adopted but the use of timber was not totally abandoned.

It is believed that Rudra Singha was keen to build a city of bricks and hence had imported an artisan from Koch Bihar by the name of Ghanashyam to erect brick buildings. It was under his instruction that the Jaisagar tank, a temple of Visnu and another of Siva was built along with the royal palace. He gave the name of Rangpur to this locality, wherein he also built the Hewali-ghar (pleasure house). The Talatal ghar (multi-storeyed building) was constructed at Tengabari which is mentioned in the Satsari Buranji. The Satsari Buranji mentions that Rajesvar Singha adopted brick masonry in building architectural structures at Rangpur and Garhgaon.

Rudra Singha is given the credit of building architectural edifices in various forms which served as a basis for the development of later civil architecture. The most popular architectural form was the do chala or the cottage type, used mostly for secular buildings. However, it was adopted originally for using as a mandapa attached to the Vimana of a temple.

The Gola ghar (magazine house) located at Rangpur is the best example of the do chala type. The building consists of a porch or a mukhamandapa and stands isolated with paddyfields all around. At Garhgaon lies another massive structure without the porch. Architectural specimen of this type exists at Jaisagar within the Vaidyanath Siva temple complex, locally known as the Bhog ghar (kitchen house). Another one of similar type exists near Jai-daul.

The Rang ghar at Rangpur is an outstanding example of secular architecture of its own type. The structure is assigned to the Ahom king Pramatta Singha and shows the sign of Islamic influence. Consisting of columns and pilasters with semi-circular arches, the ornamental remains speak of the grand embellishment. The Rang ghar served the purpose of a royal pavilion for witnessing sports like wrestling, bull fighting, falconry etc. The roof appears to give the impression of its parabolic form.

The royal palace at Garhgaon also popularly known as Karengghar, is another example of secular architecture. Built in bricks during the reign of Rajesvar Singha, the palace consists of four storeys of tall pilasters planking each doorway and semi circular arches.

The Talatal ghar is another shining example of the exemplary feat of work under the Ahoms in the field of architecture. Aligned in a north south axis, the ground floor of this structure consists of rows of columns and semi-circular arches. Some portions are found enclosed whereas others are converted into chambers. The open structures were used as stables and the enclosed ones as granaries. It is also noticed that the upper floor is an open terrace. However, the terrace may not be an open space as it seems, since rows of

holes circular in nature have been found, implying that these must have been used for erecting woen pillars/posts. It is to be believed that the Talatal ghar was used for the governmental functioning where the king gave his judgments, convened assemblies to deliberate on important issues.

Another building of a secular nature at Rangpur is the Ghanashyamar ghar, which is believed by the local folks as the temple of Ghanashyam, an artisan of Koch Bihar brought by Rudra Singha. The structure is a secular institution, except for the terracotta works depicting the different gods and goddesses and the mihrab.

Structural evidence of any architectural building of the Kacharis exists in three centres, Kasomari, Maibong in the North Cachar Hills and Khaspur. However, the remains of the buildings are in a dilapidated state. In Khaspur two secular structures have survived. It is numerically too insignificant to portray the building activities of a known dynasty like the Kacharis.

Stylistically the Kachari architecture is similar to the religious structure found in the Barak Valley. The plain Kacharis follow the chala style. The two structures that exist at Khaspur represent the Bengal do chala style. The Gate house at the eastern boundary of Khaspur has a rectangular plan with a low plinth, stout walls and bow ridged do chala style roofing. Pointed arches adorn the door openings, which are bigger in width. The other building at Khaspur is the baraduwari or the twelve door house. It is a two storeyed building with twelve door openings per storey. However, in reality the openings are closed with brick masonry. Evidences from the outer walls depict the ornamentation of the arches with borders. The bow ridged style roofing is seen here too.

Of the secular structure, tanks excavated during the Ahom period is an outstanding example. Most of the tanks are associated with kings. Excavation of tanks was considered the highest act of piety and was popularly known as sagar. It had a huge impact on the minds of the people often leading to naming the town by the name of the tank. Sivasagar is a glaring example of such tanks. It was named after a large tank, Sivasagar. Interestingly the tanks which were dug by the Ahoms still maintain much higher water level than the topography of the land under them.

Besides the tanks, other secular structures were the ramparts, barricades, road-cum-bunds and others. The ramparts were often re-inforced at the core with a brick wall. The ramparts were made from bricks and block stones. An evidence of massive ramparts is seen in the old Kachari capital of Maibong. Similar ramparts encompassing the royal and residential establishment are found in Rangpur and Garhgaon (Sibsagar), Pratapgarh (Sonitpur), Sahe Rajar Garh (Darrang), Bhaitbari (Goalpara), Pratimanagar (Dibrugarh) and Maibong (North Cachar Hills). Shihab-ud-din Talish refers to bamboo ramparts built around the city of Garhgaon.

Roads, highways, bridges formed a significant part of the non-religious structures in Assam. One of the most important and oldest highways was established between Caraideo (first Ahom capital) and the northern plains of the Ahom kingdom. Roads were built as memorials like the Dhai Ali Road and some others like the Dhar Ali Road were built to commemorate a particular event of importance. Defence, communication and strategic reasons were the chief motive behind road construction. As for the bridges, stone bridges exist on the rive Numdang, Dijaikhona and Darika. Culverts were also constructed and

often the locality got its name from it. Sil sako (Sil meaning stone and sako meaning bridge) in North Guwahati is a late medieval culvert. The Chang rung Phukanar Buranji records a systematic description of the works on public utility.

The Maidams are another architectural wonder credited to the Ahoms. These are burial mounds, which appear hemispherical in shape from the exterior and at the same time they vary in size. The size of the maidam depends on the power, status and resources of the deceased person. The vault inside the maidam holds the mortal remains of the dead. Chronicles mention the existence of spacious vaults indicating the burial of huge quantities of valuable and attendants. That the vaults were made of stout woen poles and beams is mentioned in Shihab-ud-din Talish's account.

The Chang rung Phukanar Buranji refers to certain features of a masonry Maidam- i) underneath a super structure in the shape of a dome with a small opening (chow chali), lays a massive vault ii) the earthen mound covering the entire masonry work pitched with layers of brick, excluding the chow chali and iii) a boundary wall around the base of mound having an arched gateway on its west.

The maidams are a massive structural pieces built with timber, wo and masonry vault. In case of timber vault, beams and planks of the highest quality were used. Large stone slabs were used for the ground level chambers, whereas for super structures, brick stones and masonry were used. The structural pattern of the vaults ranged from domical, single, multi-storeyed building to an elliptical one.

The trend during this period was the ever increasing use of brick in place of stone masonry. The building tradition of the medieval age continued due to their utilitarian purpose and economical and less technical meth of manufacturing.

The religious buildings of late medieval Assam highlight the Islamic influence. The Hindu temples were designed using Saracenic principles by masons experienced in Islamic architecture. However, a guild was formed later by the local artisans with the aim of assimilating indigenous and exotic elements.

The renovation of the Kamakhya temple on Nilachal is attributed to the Koch. The reconstruction of the temple brings into light a strong deviation from the traditional structure which had a huge impact on the later architectural developments. That the masons were ill equipped in stone work of Hindu type is evident from the fact that the vimana was done in a spherical style rather than the traditional sikhara. Moreover, the different carved stone blocks lack the original sequence from its original position. The construction of a dome in bricks was an innovation in Hindu architecture while being Islamic in nature. This hybrid form of architecture came to be subsequently known as the Nilacal type. The plan of the Kamakhya temple contains an antarala and three other mandapas known as Jagamohana or the calanta, the pancaratna or the bhogamandapa and the natamandira. As for the style of roofing, the antarala is roofed with a do chala style, the chalata with a pyramidal roof and the bhogamandapa with five domes or ratnas. The roofing style indicates the direct influence of Bengal. The walls of the building were made of stone blocks and the cracks were packed with brick masonry and coated over with surki plaster.

The renovation of *Kamakhya* temple influenced the architectural style in later times. The Islamic dome style vimana, pyramidal roof of Jagmohana became very popular. The

term ratna was used for *Navagraha* temple of Guwahati due to the nine dome like structures which include the eight angasikharas along with the main dome.

The reconstruction of the *Hayagriva Madhava* temple at Hajo in 1583 by king Raghudeva is marked by the total disregard for traditional principal, evident from the outer geometric profile and lack of discipline of the carved components. However, the pabhaga of the rebuilt temple is assumed to have retained its originality.

The *Pandunath* temple constructed by Raghudeva in 1583 is dedicated to Visnu. The dome is round here and not polygonal from its outer surface and the extrados are not horizontal but are rather vertical ridges radiating from the base of the pinnacle and ending at the reem of the springing line.

Another fine temple of the Koch period is the temple at *Mahadeo* in the Darrang district. The outer wall still displays decoration with parallel horizontal band. Based on the nilacala style this structure has lost much of its grandeur.

Other structures built during the Koch period are mutilated beyond repair and hence not worth any description. But it cannot be denied that the Koch contribution laid the foundation for the development of late medieval architecture.

Religious structures, especially the temples, were built in large numbers by the Ahoms who were inspired by the hybrid form of architectural traditions passed on by the Koches. The Ahom architecture can be studied under the three phases- a. Formative phase, b. Primary phase and c. Decadence and fall.

The formative phase lies in the group of those structures which were built prior to the 18th century without any date or known builder. In this regard, the Nagsankar Devalaya of Jamuguri (Sonitpur district) built by Susenpha (1439-1488) in 1480 A.D. deserves mentioning. Similarly, the Buranjis have credited King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) A.D. and king Jyadhvaj Singha (1648-1663) A.D. with the building of some temples. However, it is hard to locate the buildings. The Garakhiya daul at Nazira which is assumed to have been built by King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) A.D. is similar with Islamic style monuments. The conical dome with vertical edge is smaller in diameter and its lower portion possesses a drum. Each niche of the two registers of rectangular devakosthas in its outer walls is inset with another depression with a triangular top, as similarly seen in certain kind of Islamic structure.

The Hindu craftsmanship style architecture is seen in the form of Siva temple at Bisvanath (Sonitpur district). The temple is a saptaratha structure with the absence of any mukhamandapa. The rathas are wider compared to their depth which is rare to be found in any medieval temple architecture. The outer surface is plain and the masonry massive and precise. Such treatment of a temple points to its late medieval origin. Unfortunately, the temple was the only one structure of its type in the early late medieval times.

Thus, the formative phase witnessed sporadic building activities but lacking any distinct style.

The building activity was carried forward by Gadadhar Singha (1680-1696 A.D.). The Siva temple on Umananda was renovated which was originally built in nagara style. And this style was subsequently chosen as an accepted model for the later phase of temple architecture. The nagara style of temples of late medieval Assam retained the geometrical profile. Another fine product of this period is the Thaora daul in Sibsagar

district. The daul is a unicellular temple with a square vastupurusamandala and roofed with pointed pyramid having curvilinear eaves. The walls have geometric and floral designs.

King Rudra Singha (1694-1714) A.D. was a great builder who imported artisans along with technology from Bengal. He erected do-chala structure as independent structure and the best example was the Devi ghar on the western bank of the Jaisagar tank. Rudra Singha also attempted to construct a semi permanent structure using brick and timber. Example of this type is the Jaisagar temple where the plinth and the walls are done in brick masonry while the rest was completed in timber and straw. Among the best of the Ahom edifices is the Kesavarayana temple (daul) at Jaisagar. Built in a nilacala style with pancaratna bada and a domical sikhara, the temple has external decorations.

Another architecture which has retained its originality is the Fakuwa daul at Jaisagar. It consists of a stepped plinth, topped by a small vimana. There were eight angasikharas at the 8 corners of the plinth at its ground level, which are now destroyed.

It was during the reign of Siva Singha that the Ahom architecture reached its zenith. His projects at Gaurisagar and Sibsagar produced the largest edifices of the period. Under his patronage the extensive Gaurisagar tank was excavated and also laid the construction of three temples with independent boundary with a central alignment. The three temples were consecrated to Devi, Siva and Visnu. The largest and finest of the 3 temple is the Devi temple which can claim to be the first temple of nagara style built in brick. The earlier rulers limited their works to renovation of medieval stone nagara temple only. The Devi daul consisted of a nagara style type having a pancaratna Vastupurusamandala. It has an antarala and a spacious mandapa of the Assamese do chala type.

The Siva temple and the Visnu temple are a nilacala type of structure, with the latter lacking the grace of the former. In planning the Sibsagar temple complex too, the same process of excavating a tank and then erecting a temple aligned centrally was followed.

While the deities remained the same, their order changed. Siva occupied the central position. The Siva temple is a nagara style structure, whereas the Visnu and Devi temples are of nilacala style. The Siva temple is the tallest monument of the Ahom period with a height of 40 metres. As for the other two temples, the bada of these temples too has been done in stone masonry and selective stone carved with designs in low relief decorates the outer most layer. The mastaka of this temple virtually takes the form of a chatravali found in Buddhist caityas.

The Sibsagar temples show a divergence from the old traditions of the ratha style. Unlike the odd number of salients at its diagonal points in a traditional ratha plan, the Sibsagar monuments have even number of salients. The imposing feature of the monuments of Sibsagar made it the most popular shrines among the people. The outer look of these temples was followed by the later architects in temple construction. The tradition prevails even today.

King Pramatta Singha brought novelty in the building activities. The Hatimura Durga Temple near Jakhalabandha (Nagaon) was built but with certain blunders leading to its disintegration. The Rudresvar Siva Temple in North Guwahati built during this time in

the memory of king Rudra Singha proved too costly to serve as an inspiration for further architectural developments.

The Negheriting daul of king Rajesvar Singha (1751-1768) is the only pancayatana temple of Assam of the late medieval period. The ground plan consists of four transepts each possessing an isolated sikharas. The plinth and the walls of these subsidiary structures are built by extending the portion from the main temple. The natamandir of the Kamakhya temple on the Nilachala hills is the only work of merit during this period.

King Rajesvar Singha built the largest number of temples in Lower Assam and except for the natamandir of the Kamakhya temple, the other monuments were mere renovations of medieval stone temples.

The Kacharis due to their animistic beliefs were hardly inclined to develop a permanent abode for their deities. However, the Tamresvari temple (Dibrugarh) is believed to belong to the Kacharis. Most of the architectural remains of the Kacharis are found in Kasomari in the Doyang Valley (Golaghat districts), Maibong (NC Hills) and Khaspur and some adjoining areas of the Barak Valley. The Kachari architectures were merely a continuation of the earlier tradition of the medieval Kamrupi kings. The ruins at Kasomari consist of megaliths and Brahmanical stone sculptures and old brick fragments.

At Maibong, not a single structure is found intact, except for a labyrinth of ramparts and stone and terracotta sculptures. The latter indicates the existence of a Hindu temple and a study of the features of the sculpture highlights the assimilation of the local features along with the traditional Hindu idiom. The Ranacandi Temple is the only complete religious structure that has survived in Maibong. It is a monolith do-chala style temple with curvilinear eaves and a hipped ridge indicating Bengal influence.

The city of Khaspur contains four temples out of six structures. Three of the temples are alike in sizes and follow the same do chala style of Bengal. The temples are a reflection of the work of skilled architects who made a sincere attempt to transform it into an impressive work. Their dedication is revealed by the reliefs of the plinth, the rectangular portals and other features of the temples. The fourth structure is the Snan mandir which reflects a direct Islamic influence. It is a small pavilion bordering a water tank which is assumed to have been used to bathe the deities. The plinth is not very high and its four walls are punctured by a door opening each and topped by a slopped cornice and a dome.

The other two structures are the Siva mandir and Nandi mandir at Sintilla near Sonai. It is interesting to note that these structures were an attempt at evolving a distinct style of itself by the Kacharis, due to the fact that they were neither similar to any structures at Maibong and Khaspur nor to any of those found in the Brahmaputra valley. While the Nandi mandir is smaller and simpler in outlook the Siva temple stands on a square platform with walls containing elongated devakosthas, and the outer rectangular ones being inset with a smaller one with a semi-circular top.

Unfortunately, the Kacharis were unable to contribute any spectacular architectural edifice. However, the temples which have survived constitute the second largest group of the late medieval architecture of Assam.

Some of the late medieval religious structures have been assigned to kings of unknown lineage or to one builder or dynasties. The Bilvesvar Temple at Belsor (Nalbari) assigned to one Nagaksha Raja follows the modified ratha plan similar to the Sibsagar

monuments. The devakosthas seen in the temple are common to the Sultanate period of the Islamic architecture. The devakosthas are of unusual proportions and originally contained large terracotta or stone image. The sikaharas contains four big devakosthas on its four rathas in the form of Sukanasas.

The Basudev Temple (Sonitpur) is a nagara temple of the Pancaratna type. Typically Ahom in style its angasikharas, tryangabada and the form of mastaka speak of an advanced stage of development. The Maghnowa Temple in Lakhimpur is a nilacala type of structure but with an octagonal bada and sikhara. It resembles the Garkhiya daul except that the Maghnowa Temple exhibits better workmanship. The Ghaguwa daul is an octagonal temple but appears to be inferior in terms of workmanship.

Besides temples, erection of stones as memorials and megaliths are also seen in many areas of Assam. The megaliths of Barmaryong in Karbi Anglong are huge in size and its features mark a transition from rough to a developed form of megaliths.

Two types of megaliths are found at Kasomari, while one is typically chessman type having a shaft and a hemispherical head carved all through, the other is sword type shaped out of a huge stone slab. The front surfaces of both these megaliths are carved with word, scroll and other geometric designs. The simpler form of megalithic culture is reported to be continuing in the interior hill tracts of Assam.

Most of the late medieval structures reveal Islamic influence. Mention can be made here of the gateway in Dimapur built of brick. With its pointed arches, octagonal bastions curved roofings and battlements above the eaves line, the gateway is the earliest example of Islamic influence in North East India. Similarly, Kareng ghar and Talatal ghar too exhibit certain features which indicate the huge impact of Islamic culture.

The Hindu temples have equally been influenced by Islamic style as seen in the layout and execution of the Ghanshyam daul. The cella of the temple contains mihrub common in mosques. Likewise the Ranganath temple near Rangpur, with its absence of any devakosthas in the walls and its outlook all clearly mark out the inherent Islamic touch.

The examples of the Fauwa daul and the Snan mandir will be appropriate in this context. The dome profile, shape of the doors, arches in Fakuwa daul and the slopped cornice and onion shaped sikhara with a prominent drum all point to the Islamic influence.

Among the structures which are completely Islamic in style are the masjid, idgah, majhar and other secular structures. A go example would be the tombs and annexes of Azan Fakir and his four contemporary Pirs, and the other is the majhar of Ghiyasuddin Aulia at Poa Macca (Kamrup) and Mir Jumla at Mankachar (Dhubri).The only Islamic monument to have remained intact is the Panbari Masjid (Dhubri). The mosque is built of brick masonry and has a rectangular ground plan. The walls are plain and the facades are provided with pllasters and horizontal bands. The top of the walls are decorated with a cornice projected in steps. The doors have pointed arches. Three hemispherical domes decorate the roof and each carries a proportionate mastaka at the top. The Panbari Masjid is marked by perfection in measurement and proportion and its survival speaks at length of the superior workmanship.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions-

Q 5. Which dynasty initiated the development of architectures in early Assam?

Q 6. Which Ahom ruler is said to have instructed for the building of the Hewali-ghar?

Q 7. Name the artisan believed to have been imported by Rudra Singha from Koch Bihar.

Q 8. Give the name of the text that gives a systematic record of the works of public utility?

Q 9. What is a daul?

Q 10. Name the only pancayatana temple in Assam.

10.5 PAINTINGS

The earliest evidence of paintings is found in the gifts presented by the Kamarupa King Bhaskaravarman to his ally Harshavardhana in the form of colours and such other tools for painting, as referred to in the Harsacarita. The presents included 'carved boxes of panels for painting with brushes and gourds' and gold painted cages. Besides these, there were a few tinted manuscripts and volumes of pink hued fine writing leaves made from the aloe bark.

The Niddhanpur grant of Bhaskaravarman informs of the kings' portraits adorning the palace walls of his tributary rulers. Similarly, the palace of Balavarman is said to contain pictures, as mentioned in the Uttarbil copperplate of the king. The Da-Parbatiya sculptures and the elephant motifs executed on the copperplate grants of the Varman dynasty sheds light on the nature of painting in Assam in the distant past. In the medieval times, the art of painting reached its glorious height with the spread of the Neo- Vaishnava movement. There is also a mention of painting seven vaikunthas (heaven) on tulapat (local paper) by Sri Sankardeva.

It is noteworthy to mention here is the existence of a professional class of painters called "patuas" who had their specific style of painting. The use of terms citrakara (painter), pata or citrapata (painting) and citra putala or putali (a figure in painting) in the old literature of Assam reveals the familiarity of the common people with the art of painting. The association of painting with the professional community of singers and dancers also finds mention in the Kamrupi dialect.

Manuscript writing also popularized the art of painting in medieval Assam. The painting largely bears the stamp of Assamese culture while featuring the genres from the rest of its Indian counterparts. The local folk characteristics are found in these paintings. The Hastirvidyarnava manuscripts contains an assimilation of the Hindu- Mughal style of painting along with the native folk element. It is also believed that certain elements from terracotta and pith toys have also been used in the manuscript paintings.

The Assamese manuscripts are made of the either of aloe-bark (sachipat) or a locally made hand paper (tulapat). Palm leaf (kona) manuscripts are available. The manuscripts contain illustrations of various categories in accordance of the subject matter

in the text. The paintings of the Assamese manuscripts are examples of "elite art", bourgeois art" and "court art". It is often too difficult to rank the paintings as folk due to its sophistication. A few manuscripts are: the Citra Bhagavata (1539 A.D.), the Lava Kusara Yuddha, the Gita Govinda, Ananda-Lahari and others which are heavily influenced by the Buddhist Pala, the Rajasthani and the Mughal School of painting. A few Assamese works like Tirtha Kaumuda and Anadi- Patana which bears a 'non-elite" or "folk" impression.

There are five different Schools of manuscript paintings according to Rajatananda Dasgupta. These are the **Tai-Ahom School, the Satriya School, the Darrang School, the Garhgaon School and the School akin to Garhgaon.**

- **Tai-Ahom School**

The Tai-Ahom School of Painting has connections with Burmese tradition in relation with style and technique. Thus, the Assamese painting bears a resemblance to the Burmese tradition as revealed in the votive pedestal (guru asana), the lion and the peacock motifs of the Assamese Vaishnava decorative sculptures. Most of the Tai manuscripts belong to the Buddhist Tai groups, with illustrations and pictures. These paintings depict the plight of the souls. Some of the important paintings of the Tai-Ahom School are: the *Suktanta Kyampong*, the *Phung Chin*, and others. The folio of a manuscript is very often designed with geometric or floral designs along the borders or the centre and it is rarely repeated. The term *lata-kata* has been used to define such designs.

The paintings were a prized item for dowry. The Shan style of painting was primarily a religious art and hence, conservative. The *Phung Chin* manuscript dating back to 1437 A.D. and *Suk-tanta Kyempong* manuscripts are the earliest examples of manuscript illustration belonging to the **Tai Ahom School of painting**. The **Suktanta Kyempong** is a treatise on Lokadharma of Theravada Buddhism. The language and script is Tai Phake and Ahom respectively.

However, the manuscript illustration can be hardly called paintings but they are rather fine drawings outlined in black and sometimes filled with colours. Gold paint (kham) has been used very sparingly like in the case of Mahaparinirvana where the heart of Buddha is indicated by using kham or for that matter Bodh Gaya in a conventional mandala showing the holy sites in Buddhism.

Most of the illustrations are of human or semi-divine beings. The landscapes do not serve as a background for the illustrations. The Ahom style of painting contains the traits of the pre-Shan Pagan syle. This must have been due to the cultural exchange between the Shan kingdom and Assam, wherein the Shans had come under the influence of Pagan elements and other form of superior culture.

The Shan style of painting is continued by the Khampti Buddhist priests or bapus. The importance of this School lies in the fact that it is the only surviving School of Assamese painting and continues the trend for six centuries.

A painted version of the Tai Ahom style of painting has been found in the Assam state Museum. It is a Bhagavat, Book III, on sacipat dating 1762 A.D. It contains most of the traits of the Tai Ahom painting even though it absorbed some characteristics from the Darrang School. Due to the intimate connections of the Buddhist of Upper Assam and Upper Burma, the Burmese style of manuscript writing and illustration was copied.

The manuscripts were made from the bark of agaru tree, known as sacipat. Another material used for writing and painting was tulapat, a sheet made from cotton by felting it. The process of making tulapat was indigenous to the people of Assam. Similarly, palm leaves were used for writing manuscripts even though it was not grown in Assam. Manuscripts and scrolls on silk (pat and muga) cloth were stitched to form a pad.

- **Satriya School of Painting**

Paintings have been a part of the Satra setup. They were found on the walls, book-rest (thagi), pleasure boats (khel-nao), litters (dola), wooden votive structures (asana and Singhasan) and others. The paintings were more lavish and creative in the asanas and Singhasans. Simple paintings by khanikass were also seen in the non-Vaishnava shrines by the Khanikars. Their creativity was not just limited to the painting of the Vaishnava shrines but musical instruments and household appliances like the weaving accessories. The Khanikar style shares an affinity with the Satriya School of Painting as suggested by Dasgupta. The combination of colours and hues used for the paintings by them stand out for its durability and the capacity to retain its freshness for a long time.

The themes of the bulk of Satra painting has been drawn from the Vaishnava world- the incarnations of Vishnu, characters from Bhagavata Purana and events from the holy texts, great Vaishnava saints and such others.

There have been changes in contemporary times in the painting with the new artists bringing new style, techniques, colour schemes and thus a new effect to the Satra Institution.

The next form of painting which has survived from early times is the painting on pith. The sheets of sola pith with local names like shola, botla, kuhila is used for these paintings. Verrier Elwin opines that the painting on the pith originated in the North East Region as the reeds grew here abundantly and the local natives were known to be go in using local resources.

Pith is soft and fibrous and also brittle. The figures are shaped by cutting out pieces from whole length of the reeds, and the joining of the different pieces.

The pith artists were called the Mali, Maleya or Phulmali. They pruce a lot of articles like toys, headgear, images and so on and decorate it with the use of vibrant colours, designing images or independent pictures on the flat surfaces made of pith sheets. The finished products thus display the sensitive creativity of the Malis.

The tradition of making pith articles were found in two distinct zones- eastern zone (erstwhile Goalpara and Kamrup districts on the south bank and some pockets on the north bank of the Brahmaputra) and the western zone(north bank of the erstwhile Goalpara district).

The pith products are connected with the folk beliefs of the areas where it is produced. In the western zone, the images of local Gods and Goddesses are found in varied numbers. However, the most intimate connection of the pith art is with the serpent Goddess, Manasa locally known as Padma or Padda, Bishohori, Barmani and such others. The worship of Manasa is one of the important folk ceremonies in Lower Assam. The rituals of this ceremony require the need of a house like votive structure popularly known as *maju*, (*manjush, madisha* and *tepari* in other parts). The paintings of these structures

are mostly concerned with the Mansa cult and the popular legends. Thus the paintings depict scenes from such legends and stories.

The distinct feature of pith paintings are:

- The pith paintings are distinctly triangular.
- It heavily relies on drawing and hence an outline is first drawn and sometimes few lines are applied on the painted surface.
- The lines are bold and strong.
- Primary colours were mostly used.
- The paintings are dominated by human figures like the Gods and Goddesses.

There has been a definite change in the present form of painting on the pith due to scarcity of piths and the making of non-traditional products.

Sri Sankardev initiated the Satriya School of painting or the Sankari School of painting. The Rajputana art influenced the early Sankari painting and so did the advent of mongoloid stock of South East Asia.

The Charitputhi refers to the painting of seven vaikuntha (heaven) for his play "Sinhajatra". The Naam ghosa (Sivasagar) and Ahom Jyotish have paintings on the Muga cloth. The Satriya painting was marked by its simplicity.

The Khanikars were a class of artists and artisans who were skilled in artistic works like wood carving, mask making, painting, and make-up for theatricals, stage setup, image making and so on. Their inspiration has basically been derived from the neo-Vaishnava movement. Mention has been made of two painters by the name of Dilbar and Dusai whose work include the Hastirvidyarnava. Similarly there is a mention of one Bijoy Khanikar.

The widespread popularity of Satriya painting was unique to Assam. This School of painting reached its height during the times of Rudra Singha. As the name suggests, the Satriya painting included paintings not related to Satras as well. It was on the orders of the Bar Raja Prathameshwari Devi that Ananda Lahiri was illustrated with pictures.

The only exclusive me of painting during the Ahom periodod was book illustration. Mural or scroll paintings did not find favour in the court circles or the Vaishnava monasteries. Manuscript illustrations belonging to the Ahom period, a few of which remains, are found in the following places - the British museum (London), the Sawai Man Singha II museum (Jaipur) and, in Assam, the State Museum, the Department of Historical and Antiquarian studies of the Government of Assam and the Gauhati University Library. The museum of painting in Tezpur also preserves some of the manuscript paintings of the Ahom period.

The Satriya School of painting can be ascribed to those works of art that owed its genesis to the Vaishnava movement of the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The earliest manuscript painting belonging to this School dates back to 1539 and it is the Bhagavata Book X from the Bali Satra in Nagaon. The Satriya School of painting shows its similarities with the North Indian Schools of miniatures and Pala traditions. The Aprabhamsa style of painting influenced the Satriya School in Assam. The paintings of the human forms have pointed nose, broad chest, thin waist with ultra stylized landscapes and trees and peculiar methods of depicting rivers and clouds have a decorative and symbolic meaning. The

Satriya miniatures like the Jaina miniatures are an example of bourgeoisie art as termed by N C Mehta. It was adopted as a court art later during the time of the Tunkhungiyas.

The layout of the paintings of this period is horizontal due to the shape of the folios which was generally long and required stretching at the sides, the long shape of the painting being inspired by the tradition of scroll painting in Assam. The scripts were written in the manuscripts and space (alekhya sthana) was provided for the miniature paintings. The background of the painting is always monochrome and the spaces is painted in flat green. The entire composition appears to be in eye level view which conforms to the style of painting popular in Nepal.

The association of the Satriya style with the religious institution gave much popularity to it as seen from the references made to the royal patronage for the artists commissioned to illustrate texts like the Gita Govinda, the Ananda Lahari, the Ramayana (Lanka kanda) in the Satriya style.

LET US KNOW

A few examples of the Satriya style manuscripts:

- Vanamali Devar carita by Ramakanta Dvija
- Sri Bhagavata Matsya Carita of Nityananda Kayastha
- Gita Govinda translated by Kaviraja Chakravarti
- Lava Kusar Yuddha of Harihara Vipra
- Ananda Lahari of Ananta Acarya Dvija

In its later phases, the Satriya School of painting was marked by lavish decorations and ornamentation, expansion of the pallete with mixed colours and minuteness of perfection as influenced by the sophistication of the Tungkhungiya court.

- **Darrang School of painting**

The Darrang School of painting emerged in the Koch principality of Mangaldai. It was influenced by the Garhgaon School of painting. The most important of the manuscripts belonging to this genre are the Tirtha Kaumudi (1686 A.D.) and Anadi Patana. They are identical in their styles. The Tirtha Kaumudi acts as a guide to the places of Hindu worship and pilgrimage centre within Assam and India. The Anadi Patana deals with the creation as depicted in the Bhagavata Purana (Book IV) and Vamana Purana. This book dated to the late medieval period and was the work of Sri Sankaradeva and it contained certain Pali traits. Another work under this School is the Sahapari Upakhyan (1790 AD) which has no illustrations but the few figures marked on the borders are painted

- **Garhgaon School of painting**

The Garhgaon School of painting emerged as a secular School of art breaking away from the traditional Satriya School. This School of art is also termed as court art as the works were executed strictly under court orders. A few works of this School was the illustration of Gita Govinda under the orders of King Rudra Singha. Likewise under the orders of Pramathesvari Devi and Amvika Devi, consorts of Siva Singha many manuscript paintings were composed. A few works of this School are- the Sankhachuda Vadha, Dharmapurana of Kavichandra Dwija, Bhagavata Book VI, Hasti-vidyaranava and the Darrang Raj Vamsavali (1791 AD). The Garhgaon paintings were never popular among the common people.

The Garhgaon School has many similarities with the Mughal School of painting. The three quarter profile was inherited from the Mughal School. Portraitures under the Garhgaon School had all the qualities of the Mughal School and at times even surpassed them. The portraits of the women were in three quarter profile while male figures were done in profile. However, the two Schools have their own differences. The Mughal School of painting was masculine unlike the Garhgaon School where women featured in many of the paintings. The Mughal School of painting did not show a king and his queen or consort sitting together side by side, but the Ahom ruler King Siva Singha had his portrait made along with Ambika, his queen. Likewise, the royal ladies made public appearances as depicted from the Bhagavat Book VI which shows the ladies being carried in open dolas which was not seen in the Muslim societies.

The artists of the Grahgaon School did not restrict themselves to portrait painting but they equally dedicated their skill to the painting of landscapes. They managed to capture the beauty of the hills, plains, rivers, animals etc.

10.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt -

- The various types of sculptures belonging to different Schools in Assam and the use of various mediums.
- The architectural activities in Assam which were heavily influenced by the trend followed in the neigbouring territories.
- The traditional manuscript paintings of Assam under different Schools.

10.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROG-RESS

Ans to Q No 1: Rudra Singha
Ans to Q No 2: Tabakat-i-Nasiri
Ans to Q No 3: These are stone icons having folk elements
Ans to Q No 4: Da-Parbatiya

Ans to Q No 5: The Varmans
Ans to Q No 6: Rudra Singha
Ans to Q No 7: Ghanashyam
Ans to Q No 8: Chung Rung Phukanar Buranji
Ans to Q No 9: A unicellular temple
Ans to Q No 10: The Negheriting daul
Ans to Q No 11: Harivamsa and Dwarik- lila
Ans to Q No 12: A class of professional painters
Ans to Q No 13: A term to define the designs made under the Tai-Ahom School of painting
Ans to Q No 14: Pith works made in the north bank of erstwhile Goalpara district
Ans to Q No 15: N.C. Mehta

10.7 FURTHER READING

1) Barpujari, H.K. (2004). *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. III, Assam Publication Board, Guwahati
2) Datta, Birendranath (2012). *Cultural Contours of North East India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi
3) Neog, Hariprasad & Gogoi, Leela (2003). *Asomiya Sanskriti*, Banlata Publication, Guwahati, Dibrugarh.

10.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q 1. Who is "Phulmali"?
Q 2. Why was the Garhgaon School of painting never popular with the common people?
Q 3.Where is the Fakuwa daul situated?
Q 4.Name the earliest example of manuscript illustration belonging to the Tai-Ahom School of painting.
Q 5.What do you understand by the term maju"?

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150-300 words)

Write short notes on-

a) Nilacala architecture
b) Kachari architecture
c) Maidams
d) Late Medieval Architecture
e) Do chala architecture
f) Architectures of non-secular type
g) Metallic sculptures
h) Stone sculptures
i) Nagara style architecture
j) The Garhgaon School of painting

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question in between 300-500 words)

1. Elaborate on the development of sculpture under the different Schools in Assam
2. Discuss the influence of the Guptas in the architectural growth of Assam.
3. Assess the role of Rudra Singha as a builder in reference to the architectural growth.
4. Explain the influence of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in the field of manuscript painting with reference to the Satriya School of painting.

UNIT 11: ISLAMIC CULTURE AND THE MAKING OF ASSAMESE SOCIETY

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives
11.2 Introduction:
11.3 Settlement (early)and formation of Muslim society in Assam
11.3.1 Muslim Invasion
11.3.2 Settlement through Trade
11.3.3 Settlement of war prisoners
11.3.4 Import of Muslim Artisans and Learned men
11.3.5 Propagation and Conversion
11.4 Contribution to the Assamese Culture
11.5 Islamic Architecture
11.6 Paintings
11.7 Music and Dance
11.8 Let us Sum Up
11.9 Further Reading
11.10 Model Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- to explain about the origins and settlement of the Muslims in Assam.
- to discuss about the different factors which help for the settlement of the Muslims in Assam.
- to elaborate how Muslim people helped for the formation of Assamese society with new elements.
- to trace the growth and development of Islamic Art and Architecture.
- to analyze the development of Islamic Music in Assam and how it related to Assamese Music.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

The Muslims of Assam have been playing a very significant and positive role in the formation and development of Assamese society and their culture from ancient time to today. Being integrated by the various socio-economic and cultural factors, they are spread over the length and breadth of the state, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley which is the home land of the Assamese culture. The Muslims is the largest minority group in Assam, with strength of 34.22% (2011, census report) of the total population. Assamese Muslims like other Muslims in India reflect significant variations in terms of culture, caste,

class, language, occupation, geographical distribution and ideology. The contemporary Assamese society is fundamentally a multi-religious, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-caste, multi-class and dominantly unilingual, composite and by and large a secular society. The Muslims are scattered in all the areas of Assam, with high concentration of 75% of total population in Dhubri district, western part of Assam and the lowest density of 1.96% in Dhemaji district as per the census report of 2011.

11.3 SETTLEMENT (EARLY) AND FORMATION OF MUSLIM SOCIETY IN ASSAM

Formation of the Muslim society in Assam can clearly trace back to the last decade of the 12thcentury before the Ahoms. Since then, this community has been evolved gradually over a very long stretch of time. The early settlement and growth of Muslim population in Assam has been discuss below.

11.3.1 MUSLIM INVASION IN ASSAM (1206-1682)

Towards the close of the 12thcentury, Mahammad Bin Bakhtiyar, a military commander under Qutubuddin Aibak, the founder of the slave dynasty in India invaded Assam in 1206 A.D. According to Tabaqat Nasiri of Minhajudin Siraj, it was during this time that Assam for the first time came in contact with the Muslims. Thereafter began a series of Muslims invasion over a period of 475 years, which eventually culminated in the battle of Itakhuli that was fought between the Ahom and Mughal in 1682 CE. Although Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khilji was defeated severely and most of his soldiers that, it can be presumed from that fact that some of the Muslims who survived their lives preferred to stay in Assam instead of going back with their defeated General. They may be regard as the first batch of Muslims settlers who decided to stay in Assam even before the advent of the Ahoms to this land. Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar Khiliji was guided to Assam by a local chief of this land, Ali Mech. It indicated that from this time or much earlier to it, the Muslims had established contact with Assam large section had accept this region as their home land.

It is depicted in the account of Minhajuddin that the invasion of Malik Yuzbak Tugril Khan (1256-57) was mainly inspired by the desire of spreading the Islamic faith. It is also recorded in the history that Malik Yuzbak erected a mosque on the soil of the country celebrating his victory. It is mentioned in the Assam Buranji that the southern partition of the erstwhile district of Goalpara and Kamrup remained under the authority of the Gauda Sultan from the time of Ghiyassudin Bahadur Shah's invasion of the south western part of the Brahmaputra valley in 1320-21, till the Kamata king Mriganko conquered the entire region to the east of the river Korataya sometime during 1397-1407, with the help of the Ahom monarch Sudangpha.

11.3.2 SETTLEMENT THROUGH TRADE

The trade relation between Assam and Bengal might have flourished during the middle of the 15thcentury and some of the Muslims traders and travelers with other travelers from Bengal had entered and settled at last in western Assam. A regular and systematic process of Muslim influx into Assam seems to have commenced since the reign of Niladhwaja s successors Chakradhwaja, the king of kamata. During the war of Hussain Shah with Nilambar the influx of Muslims continued with growing more intensity. It was actually during the period of Muslim occupation of the Kamrup and Goalpara region and particularly after the creation of the colony of the Afghan warriors in Hajo by Hussain Shah that a large number of Muslim could find an opportunity for the first time to settle in erstwhile district of Goalpara and Kamrup permanently.

11.3.3 SETTLEMENT OF WAR PRISONERS

The settlement of the Muslims in the eastern region of Assam started from 1530, when the Muslims army under Turbak invaded Assam and Ahom king Suhungmung defeated the Muslim invader and those who were taken as prisoners were settled in different parts of the state and they subsequently came to be known as the Mariyas. In this regard Edward Gait remarks that the Muslims who were taken as prisoners by Suhungmung were the earliest Muslim settlers in the eastern valley of the Brahmaputra.

During the 17thcentury the Islamic faith grew more intensity when a major part of western Assam was occupied by the Muslims and also established their court at Rangamati (near Gauripur) and Hajo (in Kamrup). Later on the Muslims settlers in those region stayed by freely mingling with the indigenous people. Again, the 2nd phase of the Muslims influx into the western part of Assam began with the Koch-Mughal alliance and these Muslim soldiers settled there and increased the Muslim population of Assam when the Koch-Hajo region fell under the Muslim power. Many Muslims serving in the fighting forces of the Mughal in Assam and employed in other activities might have poured into this region in continuous streams from different parts of the Mughal Empire to help the local Muslim authorities in the war and the civil administration besides trade and commerce.

It is one of the important points that they had to marry non-Muslims from Assam due to absence of their wives. During the region of Ahom King Gadadhar Singha the last battle of Ahom-Mughal conflict broke out in 1682 where Mughal vacated Kamrupa in 1682 and retreated again to Rangamati and thus the long period of Assam's tedious warfare with the Muslim began in 1206 A.D., came to end. The direct and indirect outcome of the intermittent wars and conflicts between the rulers of Assam and the Muslim power was really fruitful for the political and socio-cultural life of Assam in many ways. It helped to strengthen the Muslims population in Assam.

11.3.4 IMPORT OF MUSLIM ARTISANS, LEARNED MEN BY THE AHOM RULERS

Another important aspect for the growth of Muslim population in Assam is import of Muslim artisans and educated and skilled men by the Ahom rulers. A large numbers of Muslim artisans and learned men were brought by the Ahom Rulers and were appointed in various developments of the state during the medieval period. These people were mainly employed in the professions in which they possessed. Especially skills, like embroidery, engraving, wood carving, cannon casting, sward making and similar fine works. Muslim artisans and craftsmen belong to the Khanikar khel and under a superintendent known as Khanikar Barua. 'Nawab Deka' is a post in the Ahom court absolutely for talented Muslim nobles, carried a vast tract of revenue free land.

There are many instances where the Muslims and Hindus of Assam combined to resist a Muslim invader. These Muslims were assimilated into the Assamese society so deeply that the Ahom army included many Muslim soldiers and officers who fought against the Mughals in several battles including the historic battle of Saraighat in 1671. The Assamese Buranjis provides us with ample evidence about the patriotism and influential high position of the Assamese Muslims as for example, Rupai Goriya, a Muslim officer of Ahom Court, Bagh Hazarika, the Muslim captain under Lachit Barphukan, Sardar Julfikar Barua, one of the martyars of Assam's freedom struggle which ended in 1858 etc. perhaps the full supports of our contention.

Besides, eight Muslims families said to have come to Assam and employed in different capacities and created some new avenues for prospective employment in various field like engraving, painting, tailoring, music, arts and architecture etc. These eight families are known as Parsi Parbiya (Persian transcribers), Akbar kuliya, (the royal engraver), Khanikar, (masons and artisans), Silakutiya, (stone engraver), Guna katiya (makers of gold and silver thread), Negeriya (the player of negera), Darji (tailors), Jala (weaver).

Apart from the above Muslims families there are some other Muslim professional groups, who were employed in different departments according to their capacity and skill, such as Kharghariya, Senchowa, Jalambata, Rajmistri etc. Thus, Muslim community found a favourable atmosphere to assimilate with the broader Assamese Hindu Society and harmoniously merged with the socio-cultural milieu.

11.3.5 PROPAGATION AND CONVERSION

Minhajuddin Siraj tells us that the Koch and Mech people were the inhabitants of the western part of the old kingdom of Kamrupa. This show that with the first political contact of Assam with Muslim powers, the Islamic faith found its way into this lands through the process of conversation. It can be assumed that the influence of Islam on the people of east Bengal and western Kamrupa was felt to some extent since few centuries back before the invasion of Muhammad Bin Baktiyar Khiliji. Most of the historians acknowledged that there existing several trade routes connecting India with China and

South East Asia through Kamrupa in ancient times. Some historians believe that this route was known as Rajgarh Ali which remnants can be seen in Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, it appears that the land of China and Kamrupa, and perhaps its routes was known to the Muslim world from the very ancient times. Bhajan, a Brahman converting into Islam in the early part of 13thcentury when Alberuni visited India. These adequately proved that the impact of Islam in North Bengal and Kamrupa kingdom was noticed much earlier than the first Muslim invasion of Assam.

The accounts of King Ratnadhwaja Pala of the Chutiya Kingdom show and Deodhai Assam Buranji indicate that this King of the Chutiya Kingdom established friendly relations with the Sultans of Gauda. It is mentioned that during the reign of Sukaranka, the successor of Arimatta, Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah conquered the kingdom of Kamrupa and including western part of the Brahmaputra valley. Many Muslim saints had entered Assam and some of them came with invading army at different historical times. Some of them settled in the country, while other might have returned after a short stay. Shah Mian, popularly known as Azan Fakir was one of the saint who came to Assam in 1630 and through the preaching of him, a large section of the indigenous population was converted into Islam. Most of the Ahom rulers patronized many ways in Assam.

Again establishment of Madrasa schools, mosques, dargahs, mazars, etc. tremendously helped to growth Muslim population of Assam that the great majority of persons professing the Islamic faith in Assam are as in Eastern Bengal, local converts from the lower castes and aboriginal tribes who on conversion described themselves as Sheikh. Gait also mentioned that a good numbers of Muslims in Assam, especially in western Assam have designed themselves as Sheikh and many of their ancestors appear to have been early local converts, as manifested through their physical features, manners and customs. The Imperial Gazetteers of India, vol.-1 refers to the converts Muslims of Assam who were as ignorant of Islam as the Hinduism. Some of them have never heard of Muhammad, some regard him as a person corresponding in their system of religion to Rama or Lakshmana of Hindus.

Although, the Assamese Muslims are Islamic, they share some Hindu customs and practices, which are contradictory to Islamic conventions. While intermarriage with Hindus is rare, many Assamese Muslims identify more strongly with other Assamese who are Hindu than with other Muslims. Their identity is inexorably connected with the Assamese language and the region of Assam.

11.4 CONTRIBUTION TO THE ASSAMESE CULTURE

The Assamese speaking Muslims of Assam developed their culture through continuous contact between Islam and native regional cultures. They have many cultural traits in common with Assamese Hindus and are less orthodox than other Indian Muslims. Agrarian Assamese Muslims inhabit clustered hamlets and villages surrounded by their fields. Hindu and Muslim Assamese generally live separately; some do live together, however, keeping their separate identities but sharing some common institutions. Approximately 70% of Assamese Muslims are farmers by occupation. The principal crop of the region is paddy (rice) of several different local varieties. Other important crops include,

maize, wheat, oilseeds such as mustard, jute, and sugarcane, and various seasonal vegetables. Many farmers also engage in small commerce, trade, and work as wage laborers. The Marias are traditionally brass workers. Most urban Muslims pursue varied occupations including the professions.

Assamese Muslims combine many Islamic and Hindu customs. Assamese Muslim families are patriarchal and patrilineal. Women are allowed to inherit one-eighth of their father's property. The kinship terminology is very similar to the Hindu. Avoidance relations between father-in-law and daughter-in-law and between husband's elder brother and younger brother's wife are practiced among both Muslims and Hindus. Marriage among Assamese Muslims entails two separate events: the ring ceremony, which is followed by the actual marriage. After the negotiations are fixed, the future groom's parents and kin visit the bride's home. The entourage brings a gold ring, silk clothes, and sweets as gifts. The marriage ceremony is consummated with the reciting of verses from the Quran by a Muslim cleric. Cross-cousin Marriage is not encouraged.

Components of the Hindu caste system are present among Assamese Muslims. They are divided into a three-tier system: **(i)**the Sayyids, who hold the highest status and claim to be descendants of the prophet Mohammed, **(ii)**the Sheikhs, composed of the local peoples, who are second in social Status, **(iii)**the Marias, who hold the third social slot and are the descendants of the Muslim soldiers captured in the Muslim invasion of 1532.

The vast majority of Assamese Muslims are Sunni of the Hanafi juridical rite; however, they observe many local Hindu rites that put them at odds with Islamic practice. For example, many are attracted to the Vaishnavite philosophy preached in Assam by the sixteenth-century philosopher Sankaradeva.

It may be noted that the Muslim settlers when they initially settled in Assam not only did they have to adjust themselves to the climatic conditions of the region nevertheless they also were said to have adopted the dietary system of the Assamese people. As it is in the present day, the use of chira or fried and flattened rice, 'Sandah' a kind of flour from fried rice, laru a kind of balled sweetmeat from rice and pitha or cakes made out of rice comptised a part of the main meals for both Hindu and Muslim families. 1 The Muslim on the other hand, introduced many food items to Assamese dietary system such as polao, khichri, kabab, halwa. The Musalmans were also created with the introduction of fruit pickles (achar) and various other items like khichri, polao (peas polao) which according to B.K. Barua were said to have been popular among the Aristocratic sector of the Assamese society. Again the Persian chronicles mentioned that the Mughals were fond of spicy food and prepared them by using spices such as almond, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, raisin, saffron and many others. This type of food preparation is at present quite popular in Assam.

The Assamese chronicles mentioned that in the beginning of the 17th century tobacco was first brought to Assam by a Mughal trader, this implies the introduction of the habit of smoking tobacco in Assam by the Mughals. It is also said that the use of smoking pipes and hookahs among the Ahom royalty and nobles was a result of the Mughal influence. Added to this the Mughals knew the use of wine prepared from the juices of fruits which they termed 'Sarbat'. This habit became prevalent among the Assamese only after they had come into contact with the Mughals.

Assamese chronicles also mentioned that the Mughal traders imported Agar wood from Assam for the purpose of producing Atar which is a kind of a perfume. Ahom rulers were also said to have imported a section of Muslims known as Atargharias for the purpose of producing perfumes for the royalty.

Nevertheless, it can be truly said that the coming of Islam and the Muslims to Assam certainly created an impact in the social system prevalent in the region. The very liberal nature of Islam appealed to the sentiments of the commoners in Assam especially those belonging to the lower divisions where they became drawn towards Islam. Islam with its liberal nature certainly made an impact in Assam whereby people came to realise the burden of ritualism. This paved the way for the emergence of the Vaishnavite movement led by Sankaradeva in the 16th and the 17th centuries which brought about considerable changes to medieval Assamese society.

11.5 THE ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

The architecture of the Muslims contains two types of buildings, i.e. Mosque and Rowza or tomb. According to religious need the essential parts of a mosque in India consist of a Western Wall containing a recessed alcove called mihrub in its centre denoting the direction of Qibla or direction towards Baitullah, the House of God at Mecca; a mimbar or a small room structurally in the form of stairs and a tank in the open courtyard for making cleansing.

In Assam, early extent of mosques is only in the form of remains. In Brahmaputra valley remains of these form of mosques is found in Dhubri (at Panbari) and Kampup (at Hajo) district. But in Barak valley, numerous sites with ruins of mosques in the Karimganj district alone have begun to show attention of the scholars. In the area under the Karimganj Police Station alone contains the remains of as many as three mosques. But as no archeological excavation has hitherto been undertaken, nothing can be said with certainty about the architectural features of these edifices except about one situated at the village Suryadas near Kaliganj. The mosque near Kalinganj in the Karimganj district is in a very fragmentary condition.Only the four walls with a corridor in the front, with octagonal corner turrets are visible. An inscription written in Arabic carved on a piece of black stone was also found there. According to this inscription the mosque was built during the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah in the month of Shaban of 909 H.H (1501 CE).

As a result of the employment of Musalmans in various capacities in the department, notable Islamic influences could be seen in the realm of art and architecture in Assam. The salient characteristics of the Muslim types of decorative art or masonry construction which comprised of rounded pillars, carved door frames, windows, calligraphy or decorative writing with intricate designs of geometrical patterns and floral representation, the domes and minarets wearing the shape of inverted pitchers could be well traced in some buildings and temples of medieval Assam. Some of these motif could also be seen in the Kamakhya temple which was reconstructed by the Koch Kings in the 16thcentury whereby the door frames of the front hall of this temple contain dome shaped curves on the top, decorated with small curves linked together. Similarly, the entrance gate

of the Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo is also decorated with small domes in the shape of inverted pitchers.

11.6 PAINTINGS

The influences of the Muslims can also be seen in Assamese paintings. During the medieval period with the advent of the Mughals, miniature painting came to form an important feature of Indian art and in the 18th century. These miniature paintings consisted of the culmination of Persian art form into the realm of Mughal painting and according to Percy Brown these paintings represented scenes from actual life, hunting, combat, mythological stories, durbar scenes, representation of plants and animals as well as bearing religious stances.

It was in the regime of Ahom king Siva Singha which marks the remarkable development of Assamese painting in the Ahom court under Muslim influences. Most notable among them were, the miniature of 'Hastividyamava', 'Dharma Purana' and 'Gita Govinda'. These painting both in their style and character depicted influences of the Mughal school of painting. The 'Hastividyarnava' was compiled under the orders of king Siva Singha and his wife Ambika Devi whereby two painters were appointed to illustrate the manuscript namely Dilbor and Dosai the Muslim painter. Similar paintings in the manuscript called 'Lava-Kushar Yuddha' bear indelible marks of the influence of the Mogul school of painting.

11.7 MUSIC AND DANCE

The greatest contribution of the Assamese Muslim to the popular, Music of Assam is the 'Zikirs' and 'Zaris' which were composed in the period of Ahom rule. They were composed by the Muslim Pirs, most notable among those who compiled the Zikirs were Azan Pir, Chandsai, Sheikh Farid etc.

These Zikirs and Zaris side by side with the preaching of Islam sing the glory of Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and Bhakti and in their form, style and expression resembles the Assamese folk songs and neo Vaishanava poetry. The Zikirs and Zaris succeeded in ensuring a harmonious blend between Hinduism and Islam and remained an important part of modern Assamese literature.

Many Muslim Pirs compiled Zikirs with the objective of reorganising the Assamese Muslim society by regenerating their faith. Thus the Zilirs and Zaris which formed the devotional. Songs of Ajan Fakir is a notable example of the development of music during the period. It is important to note that the Zikirs of Ajan Fakir were very much in harmony with the 'Nam Kirtan'or congregational prayers of the Vaishnavas and therefore we may say that not only did the Zikirs projected the harmonious relationship between Islam and Hinduism especially with Yaishnavism preached by Sankaradeva but in fact it also projected the influence of the latter on the Muslims. The Zikirs sings the glory of the religious preceptor or Guru in conformation with the concept of guruship prevalent in Vaishnavism. The Zikirs also in their subject matter resembles the Bargits or the

devotional songs of the Vaishnava saints. However, the Zikirs in their_ line of expression bears much resemblance to the 'DehVicharar Git' or devotional songs of Assam as well as with other folk songs such as the Bairagigeet and others. The Zikirs bears much resemblance to the congregational songs or 'Nam Kirtan' of the Vaishnava saints.

Added to the Zikirs we also have the compilation of the Zaris or Marshiyas which are songs depicting sorrow and misery relating to the tragic tale of Karbala. The Zaris were very much popular among the Muslims in different parts of the world and in course of time they also gained popularity among the Hindus of Assam. Assamese chronicles mentioned that in some parts of Western Assam, some sort of a religious song known as the 'Marfati Geet' was commonly sung by the Muslims of the area bearing influences of the Vaishnava congregational songs.

The period of the Ahom ruler King Rudra Singha witnessed the enrichment of Assamese music. Being a great lover of music, he came to be intensely influenced by the Hindustani music whereby during his reign we have its importation into Assam. It is recorded that he imported and settled a large number of Hindustani musicians in the country. The Assamese chronicles mentioned that he sent Assamese artists to Delhi and other places for training in Indian music as well as for learning the use of various musical instruments used in those places.

Besides these we can also trace the influences of the Assamese Muslims in the growth of Assamese folk songs such as the 'Nawariyageet' or songs sung during the sowing seasons, the 'Nichukanigeet or children's songs, 'Ainam' or the songs sung to please 'Ai' the goddess or mother of pox and most notable are the songs sung during the Bihu festival known as the Bihu Geet. All these songs hinted at the presence of Islamic influence. Thus, the Muslim contact have greatly led to the enrichment of Assamese music and have widened the use of musical instruments in Assamese music.

Establishment of historic mosques, dargahs, mazars, in various places of Assam also proved that Assam became richer and healthier with the establishment of Assamese Muslim society in the Brahmaputra valley. Finally, Many Muslim soldiers and officers who fought against the Mughals in several battles including the historic battles of Saraighat in 1671 and it was one of the fact that the Mughals were defeated because of the active participation of Muslim soldiers in the battles like Bagh Hazarika, sardar Julfikar Barua, Ramjan khan etc. So it can be argued that the Muslims of Assam are an inseparable and integral part of the contemporary Assamese political and socio-cultural milieu.

11.8 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt about

- the origins or history of the early Muslim settlement in Assam. Along with their contribution towards the formation of Assamese society.
- the Muslims entered this region before the Ahoms in 1206 CE. Though at the beginning they invade Assam on political purpose, the military generals, soldiers wanted to remain here permanently. Some of them were settled here as war prisoner.

- during Ahom rule, they imported some Artisans and skilled Muslim men from India to Assam.
- during mid of 17th century indigenous people were converted to Islam by the influence of Islamic saints viz. Shah Milan or Azan pir.
- in this long period of Muslim settlement in Assam helps in different way for the formation of greater Assamese society by giving a unique identity.

11.19 FURTHER READING

1) Ahmad, Imtiaz (1976). "For a Sociology of India." In Muslim Communities of South Asia, 172-178. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
2) Syed Abdul Malik, Zakir Aru Zari, Gauhati, 1958.
3) Ali, A. N. M. Irshad (1979). "Hindu Muslim Relations in Assam.
4) S.N. Dasgupta, Fundamentals of Indian Art(Bombay, India: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1960).
5) Ahmed, Kamaluddin (1984) Art and Architecture of Assam.

11.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very Short Questions (Answer each Question within 50 words)

Q.1 : Mention some common professions among the Assamese speaking Muslims.

Q.2 : What were the main contributions of Assamese Muslims to the popular Music of Assam?

B) Short Questions (Answer each Question within 150 words) Write short note on

(a) Influence of Islam on Painting
(b) Islamic Architecture
(c) Azan Pir

C)Long Questions (Answer each Question Within 300-500 words)

Q.1 : Discuss the Islamic Culture Towards Assamese Society.

UNIT 12 : ASSAMESE SOCIETY AND SPORTS

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives
12.2 Introduction
12.3 The role of sports in the society and culture of Assam
- Sports sponsored by the royal family:
- Festival-centric sports:
- Animal-related sports:
- Children's games
- Some games and sports of ancient Assam

12.4 Some traditional sports of Assam
- Elephant Fight
- Hawk Fight
- Bull Fight
- Bulbul Bird Fight
- Hen Fight
- Egg Fight
- Coin Games
- Boat Game
- Ring Hiding Game
- Ghila Khel (Mud Ball Games)
- Open Bead Game
- Spinach Seed Game

12.5 Let Us Sum Up
12.6 Further Reading
12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress
12.8 Model Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to learn

- The role of sports and traditional games in the society and culture of Assam.
- The historical development and cultural significance of various traditional sports practiced in Assam.
- The contribution of traditional games to social unity, physical development, folk traditions, and the preservation of Assamese cultural heritage.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

Assam is a state rich in natural abundance and heritage. Along with its natural diversity, there is also a rich cultural diversity. Geographically, Assam is located in the northeastern part of India and has a variety of cultural elements. Festivals and environmental arts alone do not represent its cultural identity. In addition to these, sports is an integral part of Assamese culture – which expresses the spirit of Assamese peasant life. In this lesson we will discuss—the value of sports as the focus of Assamese culture and identity, and various traditional games.

12.3 THE ROLE OF SPORTS IN THE SOCIETY AND CULTURE OF ASSAM

Sports are a means of physical and mental development. It is also an integral part of culture. Various archaeological sources prove that sports played a special role in human evolution from the early stages. Hunting scenes carved in various Stone Age cave paintings suggest that hunting was not only a food gathering technique, but also a means of entertainment for early humans. Various hunting practices that have been practiced until very recent times strongly support this argument. Over time, cultural development is visible along with the evolution of society. Similarly, sports evolved as a means of entertainment and physical and mental development.

There are many sports in the ancient historical sources of Assam such as history, folklore, songs etc. These games were used as a means of entertainment, physical and mental development and acquisition of knowledge and skills. There are many sources that say that archery and war games have been practiced in Assam since ancient times. These sports were symbols of physical strength, courage, pride and masculinity. Sports have contributed to social life since ancient times as symbols of physical pursuits.

The traditional sports of Assam can be divided into several special categories. These include royal sponsored sports, festival sports, animal sports, children's games, etc. These sports will be briefly analyzed below.

Sports sponsored by the royal family:

It has already been mentioned that various sports have been held in Assam since ancient times under the patronage of the kings. The histories of the Ahom period in particular testify to the holding of royal sports festivals. Apart from the Ahom dynasty, other dynasties that ruled Assam also sponsored various sports festivals. These royal powers emphasized the introduction and sponsorship of various sports for the entertainment of the people as well as for their physical and mental development. The Rangghar was established during the reign of Swargadeo Rudra Singh during the reign of the Ahoms and was a major venue for holding sports festivals. There are many sports such as horse racing, wrestling and elephant racing held in the courtyard of the Rangghar under the

patronage of the king. These games were held in the courtyard of the Rangghar during the Ahom era under the patronage of the king. The main purpose of these games was to entertain and create a sense of unity among the people.

Festival-centric sports:

There are many different types of games and entertainment that have been played around the folk festivals of Assam since ancient times. Over time, these games have become an integral part of a particular folk festival. There are many games and sports related to the national festival of Assam, Bihu, which are still widely popular and prevalent in the farming life of Assam. These traditional games are popular especially around Bhogali Bihu and Rangali Bihu. There are many games like bullfighting, egg fighting, butterfly fighting, palm tree climbing, jar breaking, rope pulling, coin games etc. which are popular during Bihu. Apart from Bihu, other folk festivals are also celebrated with various traditional games and sports. These vary in popularity from place to place. For example, in southern Assam, elephant races and pitcher races are still practiced in conjunction with folk festivals like Bhatheli and Suwari. There are many such indigenous games and games that are celebrated during the folk festivals of the various ethnic groups of Assam. These games play a special role in creating a sense of unity and harmony among the people while providing entertainment during the festivals. At the same time, these traditional sports also carry special significance in a symbolic sense. For example, the game of climbing palm trees during Bihu is considered a symbol of strength in different parts of Assam. There are many different types of coins played during Bihu. Therefore, it is important to understand the significance of the agricultural festival of Bihu.

Animal-related sports:

There are many games and games centered around animals in Assam since ancient times. The aforementioned games include bullfighting, elephant racing, butterfly fighting, etc. There are many animal-centric games in different parts of Assam. Examples of animal-centric sports include bullfighting, chicken fighting, elephant racing, butterfly fighting, deer fighting, monkey dance, snake dance, etc. There are many different types of sports in the country. These traditional sports have been discontinued due to legal obligations but they have carried special significance in the cultural history of Assam.

Children's games:

There are many games and games that have been played among children and youngsters in Assam since ancient times. There are many traditional games and games that have disappeared due to globalization and modernity. However, various traditional games are still played among children and youth in villages of Assam. These games are especially helpful for children's physical and psychological well-being. At the same time, these games play a special role in involving children and young people in social life. There are many different types of games played by children and adolescents in Assam.

Some games and sports of ancient Assam:

There are many different types of games and games that have been played in Assam since ancient times. Some games are described in the Ramayana by Madhava Kandali. They are akuti-bhrukuti, khedi, gowal-gowali, ghila, gambling, jhunti, tokra, topkheri, dali yuj, dice, fruit-flower games, bhanta, malyudha, larmara, luni and hata-hati (source: Assam Culture Cell, Dr. Narayan Das). (Ed.), Pragjyotish College, Guwahati, 2009). These games are believed to have been prevalent in medieval Assam. There are many other games played in ancient Assam besides these -

Ring games, ginger games, ali chiga games, irikti-mirikti (ichni-bichani) games, ukuli-mukuli, waist chiga, spinach seed games, egg fights, parrot-ku-games, karikhel, pot breaking games, egg-muni games, (blindfolded). There are many different types of games, such as games, games, games, games, games, games, games, games, games, games, games, games, games, games, games, games, There are many different types of games such as knocking, topa games, sword turning, tai-bai, tangoti, bride and groom, dol (daul) making, daibabanda, dola, dhop, boating, nagari, rat-cat, turning, dice, bata, tiger-cow (tiger-bol). Kut, wrestling, Mangal, Moi fighting, Muthi fighting, Mughal Pathan, Lathikhel, Lukavaku (Lukaluki), Leteku, Shalika Jot, Shan fighting, Sol Khel, Hao (Hai Gudu), Hat Uliwa, Elephant fighting, Hathabata, Hafola, Hetali etc (Ed.), Pragjyotish College, Guwahati, 2009). Some of these games are indigenous and others are a mixture of other cultures. Some of these games are still prevalent in the villages of Assam, while many of them have now disappeared with the passage of time.

12.4 SOME TRADITIONAL SPORTS OF ASSAM

In this section we will briefly discuss some of the traditional sports of Assam. Due to the limitations of the discussion, only selected sports will be discussed.

Elephant fighting

Elephant fighting was a prominent sport in medieval Assam. According to Ahom history, elephant fights were held in the courtyard of the Rangghar since the reign of Swargadeo Rudra Singh. Since the elephant was an essential part of the Ahom warfare strategy, this special sport was held as a symbol of entertainment as well as strength and warfare strategy. According to the history of Tamuli Fukan, during the reign of Swargadeo Rudra Singh, the toothed elephants were trained for fighting in the elephant cave north of the Rangghar. These elephants were fed rice, ground bean soup, etc. and were specially trained for fighting from the day of the battle. Elephant fighting was held in two ways. Sometimes two elephants were left open and engaged in battle. There were yard bells attached to the necks of the elephants fighting openly. Sometimes, one elephant was trapped in the elephant's nest and the other was kept outside the nest. The two elephants fought head-to-head and tooth-to-tooth. If the battle was won, a new elephant was fought. The skilled Maute conducted the elephant fight on the back of an elephant.

Hawk Fight

Bird fighting has been practiced in Assam since ancient times. These include swan fights, chicken fights and butterfly fights. During the Ahom rule, Hawk fighting was a significant form of entertainment. The Ahom king created a special officer named Shenchwa Barua to train the Shan birds for this fight. The main responsibility of the Shenchwa Barua was to train the Shen birds (hawk) for fighting and to conduct the fighting on the day of the fighting.

The Shen Juj (Hawk Fight) was usually held from the month of Magh to the month of Bohag. There were bird's nests in places for deer fighting. Hundreds of young birds were fed on small fish and allowed to graze in these ponds. On the day of the Hawk fight, the trained hawks were released among the young birds. The rule of the fight was that the hawk would fight the egg in the open air and catch the egg and fall into the hands of its owner. If the warrior Shen caught Kanua and fell into the hands of Shenchwa Barua, he was rewarded. Therefore, it is important to understand the importance of these issues. Therefore, it is important to understand the importance of these issues. Therefore, it is important to understand the importance of these issues.

Bull fight

Another animal-centric game that has been prevalent in Assam since the Middle Ages is bullfighting. Bullfighting was very popular in Assam during the Ahom rule. There are many different types of bullfights, especially during Magh Bihu. In this context, bullfighting was considered an integral part of Magh or Bhogali Bihu. There are many examples of bullfighting in Assam since the Middle Ages, as well as in Bihu songs and folk tales. The bullfight, which was recently stopped following a court order, was a symbol of strength for the lives of the peasant Assamese people. This struggle requires strength as well as strategy and efficiency. The bulls are specially trained by the owner a few months before the bullfight. The bulls are specially decorated and brought to the battlefield. Trained Gona bulls are fought in the open field or in the pen on the day of the fight. Sometimes they fight by holding the nose of the bull. The fight is conducted by an experienced cowboy or bull owner. If one bull loses the fight and runs away, the other bull is declared the winner. During the Ahom rule, bullfights were held under the patronage of the royal family. There are many different types of bullfights in the country. These are the most popular bullfights in the country.

Bulbul Bird Fight

Bulbul bird fight is an interesting folk sport centered on Bihu in Assam. There is evidence that this sport has been practiced in the Hajo region of southern Assam since several centuries ago. This is a special game held on the first day of Magh Bihu in the premises of the Hoygriva-Madhava temple in Hajo. They are trained for a month and a half to catch butterflies for fighting. On the night of Magh Bihu, the birds trained for this fight are fed specially prepared ragial bhog and released for the fight the next day. Two birds are allowed to fight at a time. The people who conduct the fight are called marchers. The two marchers showed a piece of bean sprouts and started a fight between two butterflies. At the end of the fight, the winning butterfly is fighting another new bird. Three birds were declared as

the first, second and third winners in the final stage. There are many reasons why you shouldn't go to the gym. There are many reasons why you shouldn't go to the gym.

Hen fight:

Hen fight is a traditional and popular sport in Assam. There are two types of this game. One is a fight between chickens and the other is a game between men. Historically, chicken fighting was a popular pastime during the Ahom era. The Ahom kings enjoyed chicken fighting inside the royal court. Facing off two equally powerful chickens, fighting them until one of them died. The fight is still held in some places today. Sometimes a sharp weapon is tied to the tail of a chicken to make the fight more dangerous.

Chicken fighting is a folk game among men in which men participate as chickens. The player holds one foot behind his back, the other hand holds his arm and tries to hit each other with one foot. Games are played in a circular arena and a director gives the signal to start the fight. A player who spreads his leg, falls his arm or goes out of bounds is eliminated from the game. The player who survives to the end wins.

Egg fight:

Egg fighting is a popular Bihu game in Assam. The game continues from before Bohag Bihu until Bihu flies. The game usually uses the hard eggs of the duck, called saiya or haiya. Players find hard eggs from different places and test the hardness of the eggs by smashing them with coins or nails. Before the game starts, the price is agreed between the two sides. This price means deciding which direction to hit the egg. Then, one player hits the designated side of the other player's egg with his egg. Whoever breaks the egg must give up and give the egg to the winner.

The egg of the person who keeps it unbroken for seven Bihu is called the Saiya Kani of Sat Bihu. It is considered a symbol of pride to be able to keep the eggs intact. There is equal participation of people of all ages in this Bihu-centric game.

Coin Games:

Coin game is an old traditional game of Assam. This game is mainly associated with folk beliefs related to agriculture, fertility etc. The coin is considered a symbol of fertility. Therefore, Karikhel is considered as a symbol of fertility and crop growth. Karikhel has been widely practiced in Assam since the Middle Ages. This game is played at the beginning of the year. According to folk belief, if a coin breaks, it brings good luck, that is, nature is destroyed, while if it does not break, it brings bad results—such as disasters such as drought or floods. For these reasons, coin play is considered to be a symbol of the worship of Vasumati and agricultural life.

This game is played by drawing a coin shield on the ground. The game is usually played by two or four people for 5 coins. In the game, coins hit on the ground with their hands are scored according to the number of coins upside down—1 for one upside down and 10 for five upside down. The player who gets 10 points can raise the ball. When a seed falls on someone else's coin, the coin "dies" and must be revived. The eight numbers on the coin

shield are counted as Athor, Kathob, Nalab, Jaba, Bamun, Atai, Banshi and Ghora. The first to pick up the ball on the wound wins.

Boat game:

Assam is a riverine country with a variety of traditional recreational activities. One such special and popular sport is boating. In ancient times, the people organized this game for the pleasure of kings and emperors. There are many examples of boat races in the country, especially during the reign of the Ahom king Swargadeo Rudra Singh. Boating is usually associated with various festivals in Assam. This tradition is still alive in Shuwalkuchi, Barpeta, Ramdia, Dhubri, Kukurmara, Gauripur, Dharapur etc. There are many different types of boat races held on the river Brahmaputra on the birth anniversary of Mahapurush Sankardev. There was also a time when boat games were held at the Barpeta Satra along with the kirtans of Sankardev, Madhavdev and Mathura Das Budha Atar. Although the stage has now replaced the river, the tradition continues.

The boats used in the boating are well equipped with hangul-haital and decorated with various designs. Peacock boats are especially popular, which are about 180 feet long and 4 feet wide. This boat can accommodate many sailors. While sailing, the sailors sing special songs in groups called boating songs. These songs describe the love story of Krishna and Radha, their journey to Saudi Arabia and the separation of his wife, the stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, etc. Some of the songs are entirely centered around boats and rivers. Along with the songs, the gital or reader sings songs in a special dance style, which delights the audience. This song is secular. Hindus sing about Allah, and Muslims sing about Hari. This tradition keeps harmony and social unity alive.

Ring Hiding Game:

Ring hiding game is a popular and fun tradition in Assamese wedding ceremonies. After the wedding, the bride and groom are seated at home and the bride's family organizes this game. A pot is filled with rice and the bride and groom's ring is hidden in it and the bride and groom are allowed to find it. This game is used to wish for happiness and peace in the household life, protection of wealth and prosperous family life. The game is played in the homes of both the bride and groom and often the atmosphere is filled with jokes and cheers. After the game, the groom puts the ring on the bride and the bride gives it back to the groom. This game is not part of the Vedic tradition. It is an integral part of the wedding customs of Assamese society.

Ghila Khel (Mud Ball Games):

Ghila is a popular traditional game in Assam. The game is called Ghila Khel"because mud is used as balls. To play this game, six house-like parts are drawn on the ground. The names of the houses from bottom to top are — Elephant, Maut, Dali (Dali is divided into two parts). They throw the mud out of the drawing, they step outside the drawing with their feet, they step on the Dalit, they don't step into their own slaughterhouse, they cross someone else's slaughterhouse,

Then he "dies" means he is out of the game. When the mud crosses all the houses, you have to step on the elephant and throw the mud up and cut a house, ie you can claim it as your own. Whoever cuts the most houses wins the game.

Open Bead Game:

Khuli guti game is a traditional game played between two players. This game is played for pleasure during rest. In the game, five holes are dug in the ground in two equal rows and each hole is filled with 5 beads. Stones, tree seeds or clay batlu seeds are used as seeds. The player takes beads from any of the shells on his side and fills each shell with one bead. When the seeds are filled, the seeds are removed from the next shell and filled again in the same way. While filling the seeds, some of them open and remain empty without falling. The player receives the ball after the empty shell. If he cannot save his twenty-five beads in this way, the player must open them and pledge or borrow them. He who opens everything and brings it into his hands is the winner.

Spinach seed game: (kachuguti)

Spinach ball game is an old and popular game in Assam, which is played between two people or teams. In the game, one person hides a seed (garlic, chickpea or vol) in one hand and the other person guesses the location of the seed by singing a song. 'Alou seeds Talou seeds Spinach (Kachuguti) seeds Lai, this hand gets the seed in this hand. They sing the song and open the hand on which the song ends. Once the bead is found, the second player can hide the bead. Otherwise, the previous person hides the seed again. In team games, players on one side throw balls into one of the other side's hands, and the rest search by singing songs. When they get the seeds, their team hides them. This game requires pleasure, patience and focus.

In addition to these, many other folk sports have enriched the farming life of Assam. Examples of folk sports prevalent in Assam include How Gudu or Hadugudu, Latum, Chow, Kadhara Tana, Luka Bhaku, Rochi Tana, Chor-Police, Tanguti, Dhop, Tekeli Bhanga, Par-Pani, Dara-Kaina, Alang-Dalong. These folk sports have enriched the Assamese society and culture for many centuries.

Assamese folk sports songs Matah

Folk sports have not only enriched Assamese culture as a means of entertainment. There are many folk songs or proverbs associated with sports that have also enriched the culture and literature of Assam. These songs have a special impact on the mental development of children. One such sports song that affects the minds of children is:

The big cat goes to the small house
They remove the lid and eat the potato rice
Bhakut Kut. Bhakut Kut.
Similarly, the spinach hide song of the spinach game -

Alou seeds Talou seeds

Spinach seeds,
The one with the seeds in her hand
He gets it in his hands.
Another popular children's game is the song sung in the game of raising hands -

Ichni Bichni Darika fish kitchen
Honey from honey to honey
They can egg from the egg.
L hand bell hand
The king cuts off Srihat
Kuch Lanka Budhi Mare Nahat.

Children sing in the Along Bridge game-

"They've built a bridge along

The king and queen have come.

These rhythmic songs have greatly influenced the mental development of children and have enriched the folk culture of Assam.

There are many examples of how songs associated with folk sports have inspired the culture of Greater Assam. The cultural importance of these songs is so immense that they have gained a place on stage in recent times. These songs have been able to reflect various social images and have gained a place in the mainstream of culture. A boating song widely used in South Assam is as follows:

Diha:
Oh, my dear
Oh my Molua who killed Oh my oh my Molua he.
Position:
A ya ya ya ya her does she
Oh, my precious one.
I brought it to him
Hey, my dear.
I'm holding the wire and crying, my mother-in-law.
Who killed my precious one? Woe to me, woe to Mob Molua.
A netha netha does she
Hey, my dear.
I brought a netha
Oh, my precious one.
A netha holds and cries my moluah.

Dice is a folk sport associated with Assamese weddings. There are also special wedding names associated with this game. This game is played in conjunction with the wedding ceremony.

"Lai ne dherua tirota serua/Oi Ram follow him/Wherever he takes you, you will go, O Ram/Oi Ram, you are under your wife.

There are many ways in which you can improve your self-confidence. There are many ways in which you can improve your self-confidence.

Conclusion:

Sports is deeply associated with Assamese culture and social life. Sports are not only physical activities, they are an important part of the thought, tradition and folk life of the Assamese society. The unique characteristics of the traditional games and sports of the various ethnic groups of Assam reflect the diverse cultural identity of Assam.

There are many sports held during the Bihu festival such as egg fighting, climbing palm trees, coin games, etc. which convey a message of social harmony and joy. Animal-based games like bullfighting, elephant fighting, deer fighting etc. also reflect the courage and traditional lifestyle of the Assamese. These traditional games are not only entertainment but also a means of developing social cohesion, traditional knowledge and physical attitudes. With the change of time, many traditional games are now on the verge of extinction. In such circumstances, the preservation and revival of these should be the responsibility of social life.

12.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this text, you have learnt:

- Sports and games are an important part of Assamese society and culture. They reflect the traditions, lifestyle, and collective identity of the people of Assam.
- Traditional sports helped in the physical and mental development of people from ancient times. They also encouraged discipline, courage, and social participation.
- Traditional sports in Assam can be divided into different categories such as royal-sponsored sports, festival-centered sports, animal-centered sports, and children's games. Each category reflects a unique aspect of Assamese cultural life.
- Bihu-related games such as egg fighting, buffalo fighting, and coin games are deeply connected with Assamese folk traditions. These games symbolize joy, fertility, strength, and agricultural prosperity.
- During the Ahom period, sports festivals were organized under royal patronage at places like the Rang Ghar. These events promoted entertainment, unity, and physical fitness among the people.
- Many traditional sports carried symbolic meanings in Assamese culture. Games like bullfighting and climbing palm trees represented strength, bravery, and masculinity.

- Assamese folk sports are closely connected with folk songs and rhymes. These songs enriched children's mental development and strengthened the folk culture of Assam.
- Many indigenous sports of Assam are disappearing because of modernization and globalization. Therefore, preserving and reviving these traditional games is important for protecting Assamese cultural heritage.

✓ 12.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q 1: Royal-sponsored sports, festival-centered sports, animal-centered sports, and children's games.
Ans. to Q 2: Swargadeo Rudra Singha.
Ans. to Q 3: Bihu festival.
Ans. to Q 4: Fertility and agrarian life.
Ans. to Q 5: Hide the ring game.

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? 12.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

(A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)
Q 1: Who built the Rang Ghar?
Q 2: What is "Shen Juj"?
Q 3:What is the traditional boat race of Assam called?
Q 4: Which traditional Assamese game is played with eggs?

(B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)
Q 1: Discuss the importance of traditional sports in Assamese culture.
Q 2: Write a short note on buffalo fighting in Assam.
Q 3: Explain the cultural significance of boat racing in Assam.

(C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the role of sports and games in the society and culture of Assam. Explain how traditional sports contributed to social unity, physical development, and cultural identity.

Q 2: Discuss in detail the festival-centered traditional sports of Assam. Analyze the cultural and symbolic significance of the games associated with Bihu.

Q 3: Discuss the historical background and cultural importance of animal-centered sports in Assam. Give examples of elephant fighting, buffalo fighting, and hawk fighting.

Q 4: Analyze the relationship between folk sports and folk songs in Assam. Discuss how songs associated with traditional games influenced Assamese folk culture and the mental development of children.

UNIT 13 : ASSAMESE CINEMA AND THEATRE

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives
13.2 Introduction
13.3 Background of Assamese Cinema
13.4 Trends of Assamese Cinema: From Jyoti Prasad Agarwala to Bhabendra Nath Saikia
13.5 Mobile Theatre
13.6 Let Us Sum Up
13.7 Further Reading
13.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
13.9 Model Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- discuss the background of the Assamese cinema,
- describe the trends of Assamese Cinema from Jyoti Prasad Agarwala to Bhabendra Nath Saikia,
- discuss the development of mobile theatre in Assam.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

Cinema and drama are integral part of cultural life of any civilization. These are regarded as one of the best way to reflect the public life at a public platform. In this unit we shall discuss the growth and development of Assamese cinema and theatre.

13.3 BACKGROUND

Assamese cinema had a kaleidoscopic growth. The first Assamese film was Jyoti Prasad Agarwala's 'Joymoti' released in 1935. 'Joymoti' was made at a time when there was no infrastructure available for such ambitious efforts. Jyoti Prasad took up this mammoth project after he was exposed to Bengali films while he was at Calcutta. This initiative made him establish a small temporary studio at factory office of the Bholaguri tea estate. However, all his toils did not yield lucrative result as his maiden venture failed on the audience. But he did not lose heart and went on to make 'Indramalati', his second film in the year 1939.

Notably, a little over 300 films in Assamese language and other dialects of Assam have been produced so far since the time of the first Assamese film "Joymoti". Out of the lot some of the films could earn national recognition. The themes of these films ranged

from mythological to love story, historical to comedy, patriotic to horror and gave the audience an overwhelming experience of celluloid.

It is worthwhile to mention that Assamese films have won awards at the national as well as international level from time to time. Films like 'PiyaliPhukan', 'Mak Aru Maram', 'Tezimala' produced in the fifties were awarded President's Silver Medal. Similarly, during the same period 'Puberun' got international acclaim in the Berlin Film Festival.

The golden era of Assamese film Industry:

The golden era of Assamese film industry was marked by proliferation of film activities in Assam. This period not only saw an increase in number of films produced per annum but also uplift in the kind of films produced in terms of themes and other cinematic techniques. It all happened during seventies and eighties in which films like 'Jug Biyug', 'UpajaSunarMati', 'Bhaiti', 'ChameliMemsaab', 'Meghamukti', 'Duronir Rang', 'AjoliNabau', 'Sendur', 'GharSansar', 'Buwari', 'Sunmaina' and host of other hits and super hit films were produced.

Some of the popular film makers of Assam are Jyoti Prasad Aggarwal, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Phani Sharma, Parbati Prasad Baruah, Kamal Narayan Choudhury, Dr.Bhupen Hazarika, Shiva Thakur, AjanBarua, PadumBarua, Nip Baruah, SailyaBaruah, BrajenBaruah, Abdul Majid, JahnuBaruah, DrBhabendraNathSaikia, MuninBaruah, Manju Bora, Rima Das to name a few.

13.4 TRENDS OF ASSAMESE CINEMA: FROM JYOTIPRASAD AGARWAL TO BHABENDRA NATH SAIKIA

The name of the Jyoti Prasad Agarwala shines gloriously in the annals of Assamese film for his being the pioneer of Assamese film industry. An artist of composite talents he was equally apt at composing songs, giving music, play writing, film making, besides writing poetry and excelling in other creative fields. This has made him a cultural icon of Assam.

With his first film '*Joymoti*' he set the trend for Assamese film industry in the year 1935. He studied music at Edinburgh and Cambridge but introduced the traditional forms of Assamese music in his plays and films.

With the passing away of Jyotiprasad, the Assamese film scene witnessed a temporary lull for about a couple of years. But things changed with the onset of World War II, Taking advantage of this, Rohini Kr. Baruah made a film on a relevant historical topic called *Manomati* in 1941. It was followed by films like Parvati Prasad Baruwa's *Rupahi* (1946), Kamal Narayan Choudhury's *BadanBarphukan* (1947), Phani Sharma's *Siraj*, Asit Sen's *Biplabi*, PrabinPhukan's *Parghat* and Suresh Goswami's *Runumi*.Bhupen Hazarika also produced and directed his first film *Era Bator Sur*. Bhupen Hazarika made his musical *Shakuntala* in 1961, which proved equally successful with critics and the press, winning the president's silver medal. Following this, a chain of films went into regular production and got released, including Nip Barua's *Narakasur*,

Another notable film maker of Assam was BhabendraNathSaikia, who made seven films during his short career as a film maker. A physicist from London, Saikia was not only

an established film maker but also earned as an established short story writer and play wright of great excellence who can claim credit for laying the solid foundation of Assamese film industry after the initial efforts of Jyoti Prasad.

Bhabendra Nath Saikia will always be remembered for his contribution to Assamese film movement through his films like Sandhyaraag (1977), Agnishnaan (1985), Kolahol (88), Sarothi ('91), Abartan (93), Kalasandhya (97) and Exploration (95). It is significant that in all his films he made sensitive and sympathetic portrayal of women.

13.5 MOBILE THEATRE

Jatra

The *jatra* groups that acquired great popularity in Bengal found their way into Assam with the coming in of the Bengali *bab us* who were employed by the British administration. Local *jatra* groups, modeled upon the Bengali visiting *jatra*groups, began to emerge. The basic meaning of the word *jatra* was to travel from one place to the other particularly on a special occasion or festival. In such group travels, different kinds of entertainment and acting was done to help the travellers relax and enjoy. At the second level, it means festivity. At the third level, *jatra* came to mean drama or acting. Generally, in festivals some kind of dramatic performance was organized.

Though at first the *jatra* troupes performed only Bengali drama, later Assamese translations *were* done and after that original Assamese plays were performed on the stage. In this regard the role played by Mr. Ambikagiri Rai choudhury, who was a poet, radical thinker and nationalist, to wipe out the trend of performing Bengali dramas or in Bengali in the Barpeta region. It was he who first wrote the Assamese play *Jayadratha-badh* and performed it on stage in 1910 thus rooting out the tradition of Bengali *jatra* performance in Assam.

The Assamese jatratroupes performed mythological and historical dramas and this led to the creation of original Assamese plays like *Purushottama, Maya Nari, Debala Debi, Praya chitta, Nagak onwar, Madan-Basanta, Nal-Damyanti, Harischandra, Sri Ram chandra, Kalapahar,* etc. Another pioneer of Assamese theatre was Braja nath Sarmah, he actually contributed towards the professional development of Assamese theatre. Unfortunately lack of proper preservation led to the manuscripts as well as the names of many play wrights being lost with time.

Mobile Theatre

The shift from *jatra* to mobile theatre was initiated by the *jatra* actor Sadanada Lahkar when he established a modern *jatra*troupe, Nataraj Opera, in 1959 in Pathsala. The main architect of this transformation was Mr. Achyut Lahkar, who wanted to bring in something new into the scenario. He did not like certain aspects of opera, like, male actors enacting female roles, delivery of dialogues through singing, wrong pronunciations, misrepresentation of social issues in translated dramas, lack of drama based on the settings of Assamese society, etc. He thought about the financial security of the artists. The establishment of Natraj Theatre was the turning point in the History of Assamese Theatre. Nataraj Theatre was to be 'mobile' in every sense of the term. Every required

paraphernalia was to be movable. A proscenium stage made of wooden planks that could be set up and dismantled, an auditorium in the form of a huge tent that could sit at least a thousand people- basically a set up that would travel all over and take theatre to the masses instead of vice-versa. The performances presented would be modern drama and not *jatra* or opera. Nataraj Theatre would have its own light and sound equipments, generator for power supply, everything necessary for music and acting, like, instruments, costumes, Makeup, etc.

Thus the concept of modern mobile theatre in Assam was initiated and shortly a number a mobile theatre parties were developed which in course of time became a larger cultural industry in Assam.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer the following questions:

Q. No 1: ……was the first Assamese Cinema. (Fill in the blank)

Q. No.2: Who produced Siraj?

Q.No.3: Name the first film of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika.

Q. No.4: Sandhyarag was produced by…… (fill in the blank)

13.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt

- the history of Assamese film.
- contributions of Jyoti Prasad Agrwala to the Assamese film industry.
- development ofJatra groups in Assam.
- growth and development of mobile theatre in Assam.

13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer no 1: Joymoti

Answer no 2: Phani Sarma

Answer no 3: Era Batar Sur

Answer no 4: Dr.Bhabendra Nath Saikia

13.8 FURTHER READING

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13.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) VERY SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 50 words)

Q. No.1: Where did Jyoti Prasad Agarwala establish his first temporary studio?

Q. No.2: Name the first mobile theatre group of Assam.

Q. No.3: The Jatra group of Assam was influenced by Bengali Jatra group. (True or False)

B) SHORT QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 150 words)

Q. No.1: Write a short note on Jyoti Prasad Agarwala as a film maker.

Q. No.2: Write a short note on BhabendraNathSaikia as a film maker.

C) LONG QUESTIONS (Answer each question within 300-500 words)

Q. No.1: Discuss the growth and development of Assamese cinema.

Q. No.2:Discuss the growth and development of Assamese mobile theatre.

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