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Sociology of Northeast India

SEMESTER IV

SOCIOLOGY

BLOCK: 1

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course of Fourth Semester of M.A Sociology Programme of KKHSOU is titled 'Sociology of Northeast India'. It is designed to help the learners to have a deep understanding about various aspects of Northeast India. By going through this course, the learners shall have an understanding about the population dynamics of the Northeastern Region , Impact of Colonial rule in Northeast India, Formation of different States in Northeast India,Issues of Autonomy and Indentity Crisis in Northeast India, Border Relations and Border disputes in this region, Tradational Land relations in the region and its changing trends, Issues of Development so on and so forth. The contents of the units have been designed in a way that not only provides information about the region but also help the learners develop a critical perspective on the issues and concerns of the region.

The Course consists of 13 units and is divided into two blocks. The first blocks consist of 7 units (Unit 1-Unit 7) and the second block consists of 6 Units (Unit 8- Unit 13).

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This is the first block of the course titled 'Sociology of Northeast India' offered in M.A. Fourth Semester Sociology Programme of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. The block consists of seven units (Unit 1-7) of the course and mostly gives us an understanding of the region from the historical perspective. By going through this block, we will have an understanding of how Northeastern region evolved over the preiod of time into what it is today. We will learn about the pre-colonial, colonial as well as the post-colonial socio-political condition of the region.

Unit 1 discusses Northeast as a conceptual category. **Unit 2** discusses the genesis of state formation during the pre-colonial era. **Unit 3** familiarises the learners to the process of sanskritisation in the pre-colonial times. **Unit 4** explains the impact of Colonial rule in Northeast India. **Unit 5** discusses the process of State Formation in Northeast India in the Post-Colonial Period**. Unit 6** discusses the growth of Autonomy Movements in the region. **Unit 7** explains the concept of Border and the nature of interaction among people across the different border regions in Northeast India.

While going through the units of the block, you will find that unit is further divided into certain sections and sub-sections, wherever necessary, for your better understanding. Again, the units carry certain *activities* after a particular section where needed. These "ACTIVITIES" will provide you the opportunity to practically apply your own thoughts based on the knowledge gained from reading the text in a particular section. Besides, in order to give you additional information on certain relevant topics, you will find a category called "LET US KNOW" after the sections in each unit. Another category that has been included at the end of each section of a particular unit is "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS". The purpose of this category is to help you to asses for yourself as to how thoroughly you have understood a particular section. You may then match your answers with "ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" given at the end of each unit. The section "FURTHER READING" in each unit contains the names of a few books which you might want to consult if you are intereted in learning more elaborately about the concepts discussed in a particular unit. Furthermore, the category called "POSSIBLE QUESTIONS" is intended to give you a hint of the type of questions you are likely to get in the examination.

UNIT 1 : CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE NORTH-EAST

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Conceptualising the North-East

- 1.3.1 Brief Historicity of the Region
- 1.3.2 Colonial construction of the North-East as a frontier region

1.4 Let Us Sum Up

1.5 Further Reading

1.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.7 Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- describe the historicity of the region 'North-East' India
- explain the consequences of colonial intervention in this region
- discuss the underlying processes which led to the transformation of the region into a periphery and security frontier
- discuss the issues relating to India's nation-state building and the North East, focusing especially on political developments and reactions to them during the process of administrative integration.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the British colonial period, the North East was treated separately and differently from other regions of British India. In the early colonial period, the region formed part of Bengal Province and it was governed as though it were an adjacent subordinate area of Bengal Province even after it became the separate province of Assam in 1874. Moreover, with the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, a Line System was introduced

on the pretext of protecting the minority indigenous ethnic groups in the hill areas of Assam by restricting outsiders' entry, business activities, land transactions and settlement. For the same purpose, in 1935, the hill areas were demarcated and divided into "excluded Areas" and "partially excluded Areas". The former fell under direct British jurisdiction and the latter were given a limited representative system under British administrative control. In short, separation and isolation formed the core of British policy towards the NorthEast.

An examination of the emergence, shifts and perceptions surrounding the 'Inner Line Regulation' in the North East Frontier reveals that the Inner Line seems to be more of a civilisational frontier than a territorial one. Regulation of the Inner Line has played an important role in postcolonial political construction of the highland–lowland duality and in the creation of a contested social space in the Sibsagar–Naga Hills.

The history of separation and isolation from the rest of India in the colonial period created a problem for the national formation and integration of independent India. In the North East, a sense of incompatibility grew into one of resentment against being made a part of India, and an anti-India sentiment emerged amongst the region's people, especially when the Indian government cold shouldered local aspirations. Given the region's historical background, antagonism could be easily instigated.

The most urgent task for the Indian government after independence was the consolidation of a new nation state. As national integration was the most pressing of the issues confronting the new sovereign state, any movement that might disrupt the process of integration had to be dealt with stringently, and in some cases oppressively. Moreover, after the India-China border conflicts in 1962, the North East became a strategic region as regards the national security of India. Any indigenous ethnic movement was considered as "anti-national" and became a "security trouble". As such, it had to be suppressed. Suppression invited resistance and resistance was countered with more oppressive measures from the government, creating an antipathy among the people, and providing the groundwork for armed confrontation and, furthermore, a growing aspiration for an independent homeland.

1.3 CONCEPTUALISING THE NORTH-EAST

North East India in this study consists of eight states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim), and is enclosed by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China(Tibet), and Myanmar. An arrow corridor between Bhutan and Bangladesh provides the only overland connection between the North East Region and mainland India. The population of the North East consists of the original, indigenous inhabitants together with various ethnic groups, including people from Tibet, Burma, Thailand and Bengal, who migrated into the region at various periods of history. Although there are migrants of long standing, who have become integrated into the local population over very many years, an increasingly large inflow of recent migrants over a short period has caused friction with the local population. During the British colonial period and even after independence, the North East, adjoining China, has been a difficult frontier region.

1.3.1 Brief Historicity Of The Region

The Ahom kingdom was established in the Brahmaputra valley by the Shans, who migrated from upper Burma in the first half of the 13th century. In 1818, disturbed by repeated invasions from Burma, the Ahom king requested assistance from the British East India Company, which was then based at Calcutta. The British East India Company responded to the request, and fought and defeated the Burmese armies. The war ended with the Treaty of Yandaboo (signed in 1828 between the Burmese and EIC), by which the Burmese agreed to withdraw from Assam and the Ahom king ceded a part of his territory to the British East India Company as a reward. The history of the North East until independence in 1947 is a history of the expansion of British rule and of social, economic and political changes in the region.

After the great Indian revolt of 1857, British rule over the North East gathered pace and the '*North East*' was tossed about by colonial

policy. Expansion of the area under control and administrative rearrangements were among this policy's characteristics. For example, Assam was ruled as a part of Bengal Province until 1874, when it became Assam Province governed by a Chief Commissioner who was subordinate to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal Province. Between 1905 and 1921, Assam Province was merged with Bengal Province to become East Bengal and Assam Province, a unit that was again divided into two in 1921 following strong protests against the merger. Under the new arrangements, Assam was named Assam Province, and was directly administered by the Governor-General of Assam Province. Even so, Assam's independence as a province remained unsatisfactory.

Another critical aspect of the administrative change was that hill kingdoms such as Khasi and Jaintia were annexed one after another, while hill areas like the Lushai (Mizo) hills and the Naga hills, where distinctive ethnic groups had lived, were merged into Assam Province. There was a growing sense of loss,and a feeling of being deprived and anxiety for the future among the people in the region were verystrong.

Together with these developments, another issue poured fuel on to the flames of this volatile situation. This was population inflow, especially an inflow of Bengali Muslims from Bengal Province in pursuit of land and jobs. The inflow created political tension. The major reason for the population migration into Assam was the economic development of the region during the British period. Among the opportunities for employment were the tea gardens that were established in the 1930s. Assam's tea gardens expanded rapidly by mobilising a large-scale workforce from outside the region. As for the tea garden workers, there were many who, after the end of their employment contracts, obtained land in the vicinity of the tea gardens and settled down. Labour was also in great demand in the oil and coal fields, and in road and railway construction projects, and as a result, the inflow of population increased continuously.

Above all, the arrival of immigrants from Bengal Province was widely perceived as a penetration into the living space of the local people that changed the demographic as well as the economic situation. The colonial administration and political rivalry were related to these changes.

The population inflow became an issue with the introduction of the representation system under the Government of India Act of 1935. Political rivalry gradually took on the aspect of a confrontation based on places of origin, namely Assam and Bengal, and on religions, namely Hinduism and Islam. Public opinion was divided on the future of the North East after British withdrawal. On the one hand the Assam State Congress Committee, which was set up in Assam in 1921, drew support from Hindu Assamese, who claimed that Assam should belong to independent India. On the other hand, the Muslim League, supported by a growing number of Muslims, many of whom were immigrants from Bengal Province, argued in favour of affiliation with Pakistan. The cleavage became wider, especially when partition became imminent and the religious composition of the population took on greater importance as a factor deciding the future of Assam. Each side used tactics that were clearly designed to increase its own population numbers within the region. For example, while the Congress government banned immigration into Assam, the Muslim League, when it came to power in the province, reversed the previous government's decision and tried to encourage Muslim immigrants by easing land holding regulations for immigrants from Bengal Province.

Another focal point was the status of the North East after British withdrawal. It was not clear whether Assam would be separate from India or independent from it, and the extension of the region's autonomy became the subject of heated discussion. Even before independence, there were calls for an exploration of the possibility of establishing a separate political entity especially among the hill ethnic groups such as the Nagas and Mizos. In other words, merger with India was not a foregone conclusion, at least not so far as some

people in the region were concerned.

The final decision was left to the last Governor-General of British India, Mountbatten, who decided in June 1947 that Assam and the North East should belong to independent India.

1.3.2 Colonial Construction of North East as a Frontier Region

The colonial construction of the North-East is important to have a better understanding of the narrative of the region. In doing so, we are going to investigate some of the strategies pertaining to colonial expansion via exploitation in North East India. We are going to look into colonial policies like Inner Line construction, dividing the plains (administered areas) and the hills (unadministered areas). The line was constructed and then subsequently was revised to be reconstructed to extend the areas under colonial administration as it suited the erstwhile colonial interests.

The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, commonly known today as Inner Line Regulation, further draws attention to its subsequent implementation in the Naga Hills as what is popularly known as the Sibsagar Inner Line, which demarcated the administered and unadministered territories of British India in Sibsagar district (Seebsaugor, as per colonial records), bordering the Naga Hills of the then colonial Assam.

The rules were laid down in colonial official documents and thus, there existed confusions regarding official definitions which were interpreted and reinterpreted as per the existing developments taking place in a particular area which suited colonial interests. Along with definitions, laws of the land were also not clear.And that these were intentional, is quite evident from official correspondences (personal and official letters exchanged among colonial administrators). Alterations were made very cautiously in such a manner that there were no administrative inconveniences.

Local concerns were ignored. Chiefs of the hill communities

were often not consulted, and interests of the hill communities ignored while making/extending the line as well as other similar policies. Often while extending the line to include areas previously unadministered or under tribal control, the compensation to the hill community and the consultation with the chiefs depended on the chances of protest against such extension from the members of the hill community. If the administrators saw no threat of protests from the hill community, they'd carry on their changes in a rather arbitrary manner.

Also, the colonial administrators portrayed themselves as the paternal guardians who wanted to protect the tribal people's interests and identities via various policies like regulating the movement of people to and fro from the plains to the hills and vice versa. While the administrators' public argument was that it'd help protect the tribal identities, we see from colonial administrators' correspondences that the real motive was to secure the capitalist expansion and protect the areas under capitalist forces from invasion and raids by the unruly hill's people. (DebjyotiDas's special article in EPW cited at the end of the unit give evidences of such correspondences).

The moral high ground provided scope and legitimacy for colonial penetration in areas which seemed viable for-profit accumulation. The policy of non-interference with Naga culture helped to create the colonial administration's "benevolent humanist" image of the colonial government and maintain the isolation of the tribes from "exploitation by outsiders" who came from the plains by adopting the legislative smokescreen that the Inner Line controlled migration and mixing of the plains natives with the hill tribes. The interests of the European businessmen (planters and others seeking land on lease for various purposes, be it tea and rubber plantation or mining) and the colonial administrators were in coherence.

In the postcolonial official literature and correspondences, we see the same notion deeply ingrained in policy circles. In notes on the border dispute between Assam and Nagaland in 1967, D K Zeliang, the officiating Indian Forest Service officer in Kohima, observes that

the Inner Line Regulation was enforced by the British with the sole purpose of protecting the Nagas from exploitation by outside invaders.

Verrier Elwin, who was appointed as the tribal advisor to the North East Frontier Agency by Jawaharlal Nehru, carried forward the colonial 'administrator–anthropologist' view in the post-independence period, which furthered the "idealist– humanist" preservationist dogma for the protection of tribal culture in North East India.

Consequently, these valuable gazetteers that represented the official descriptions of the Naga Hills produced discourses on the Inner Line that lacked in academic rigour and misrepresented the spirit of the regulation.

If we look at the colonial production of gazetteers, policy documents, annual reports, parchments, and census reports, we will observe that these official dossiers were used to inform colonial administrators on duty about tribal life.

The general purpose of preparing district gazetteers was the political motive of introducing the natives, their social life, village organisation, customs, norms, taboos, rituals, and social practices to the colonial administrators. The sense of paternalism spread through notifications that circulated in public and the colonial office.

The recurrent use of certain language at the end of every notification relating to implementation or modification of the Inner Line convinced postcolonial spokespersons to believe that the regulation of 1873 was part of British paternalism and a mark of respect for native culture and tradition, which needed protection from outside influences.

The pedagogy of ethnographic textual descriptions represented the natives as the "noble savage" (Guha R 1999), "head-hunters of Assam" (Hodson 1909), "naked Nagas" (Von Furer-Haimendorf 1939, 1969), warriors, and primitives needing protection (Hutton 1921a, 1921b). These ethnographic representations were responsible for the "ethnogenesis" (Van Schendel 1992) or "ethnic involution" (Guha R 1999) of the tribes and caste communities in the

plains.

However, these anachronistic representations of the Nagas were effectively used to create differences between tribes and the non-tribes, which necessitated the fostering of the Inner Line as part of British paternalism and their strategy to subjugate the autonomy of the hill people under a common administration.

The post-independence Indian state in the North East had adopted and implemented the colonial strategies of governance in which the Inner Line was used tactically to control and monitor population mobility to these restricted and scheduled "disturbed areas."

So, on the one hand, we have the conventional discourse that the inner line was constructed by the British administrators to protect the identity of the tribes living in the hills, on the other hand, records of correspondences of the officials present us a different story. It shows that the line created a boundary between the administered and the unadministered areas and thus the hill people now cannot enter the plains for so called 'raids' and vice versa. The purpose of creating such a divide was to prevent disturbances from the unadministered areas (people in the hills). The line was extended as per the requirements/interests (profit motives) of the British capitalists, miners and planters. Thus, under the veil of carrying out a noble ideal of protecting tribal interests, the colonial administrators were protecting the interests of their own kind.

The key point being the colonisers left the hills untouched not because they cared much about the hill communities' rights but because they did not see those territories as fertile enough to generate surplus. They filled their cup up to the brink. That is to say they extended the boundary to wheresoever surplus generation was possible. They left out the hills not because of ethical reasons caring about the tribals' rights but because they didn't see them as avenues of surplus creation or revenue generation or even if they did, the stakes were too risky. Now let us consider the forest cover in the

northeast region.

To protect their interest in the Garo Hills the British passed a series of regulations in the district,viz. Regulation Act of 1876 imposed restrictions of unauthorised entry of non-tribal persons into the district for trading and other purposes. It also restricted other British subjects, save those who were native of Garo Hills, from acquiring any interest in land or anything contained therein without the sanction of the Chief Commissioner of Assam. Subsequent to this, Regulation 1 of 1882 authorised the latter to prohibit even the natives of the district from exploiting forest resources without possession of a licence. The prohibitions covered a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from the cutting of wood to hunting and collection of forest produce like ivory, rubber and wax; significantly, these materials constituted valuable items of exchange for the non-monetized Garo economy. By 1897 the Government had converted 14 forests into Reserves where all rights of the people were extinguished. In 1882 the areas populated by elephants were declared as Elephant mahal and rendered the free capturing of elephant as illegal. That these measures were directed at the 'generation of revenue' for the state exchequer than at conservation per se is demonstrated by the fact that rights to exploit natural resources can be obtained for fee (Battacharjee, 1984).

Following the transfer of the district headquarter to Kohima the British authorities proposed to open up Namboor forest and settle it with people from the plains as it was not considered advisable to administer the plains portion of the district from Kohima which was far off. Further, to encourage expansion of the tea industry it was decided to allow the new railway line to pass through the heart of Namboor forest and, after settling it with plains people, extend normal laws to it (N.I.C, 1970).

The tribe's respect for nature is clearly reflected in their attitude to land. Among many tribes land is not a commodity but a gift of nature. Hence it couldn't be bought and sold or owned like a thing by an individual. As a gift of nature land belongs to the community. That

is why proprietorial right over land and forest is a concept traditionally alien to many tribal communities (Nongbri, 2016). So, the colonisers considered this attribute of the tribal population when it seemed remunerative to them while on other occasions, when it was not remunerative, like in the case of forests in the region, they declared the forests under reserved category thus preventing activities of the tribal communities in these regions. According to the need of different contexts, large tracts of lands were announced as non-accessible(whether be the non-administered areas of the Naga hills, for enabling autonomy of the hill tribes or be it the reserved forest areas, for preserving the forest cover) such that Colonial surplus generation and revenue creation was not in crisis. Colonial morality was thus a direct reflection of their economic interests.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In which year and between whom was the treaty of Yandaboo signed?

.....

.....

Q 2: What is the significance of Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873?

.....

.....

Q 3: Give a brief description of what constitutes the population of the region.

.....

.....

Q 4: What necessitated the British colonisers' portrayal of moral high ground?

.....

.....

Q 5: In which year in the 19th century, Assam was carved out of Bengal as a separate province?

.....

.....



1.4 LET US SUM UP

- Throughout the British colonial period, the North East was treated separately and differently from other regions of British India. In the early colonial period, the region formed part of Bengal Province and it was governed as though it were an adjacent subordinate area of Bengal Province even after it became the separate province of Assam in 1874.
- North East India in this study consists of eight states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim), and is enclosed by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China (Tibet), and Myanmar. An arrow corridor between Bhutan and Bangladesh provides the only overland connection between the North East Region and mainland India.
- The population of the North East consists of the original, indigenous inhabitants together with various ethnic groups, including people from Tibet, Burma, Thailand and Bengal, who migrated into the region at various periods of history.
- Although there are migrants of long standing, who have become integrated into the local population over very many years, an increasingly large inflow of recent migrants over a short period has caused friction with the local population.
- The colonial construction of the North-East is important to have a better understanding of the narrative of the region.
- Colonial policies like Inner Line construction, dividing the plains (administered areas) and the hills (unadministered areas) reflected colonial interests and ignored local interests.

- The colonial policies to a great extent shaped the dynamics and dimensions of the North East region which are relevant even today.



1.5 FURTHER READING

1) Battacharjee, J. (1984). Pattern of Economic Change in Garo Society. In L. Gassah(ed.), *Garo Hills: Land and People* (pp. 125-196). Gauhati: Omsons Publications.

2) Das, D. (2018). Colonial Construction of a Frontier. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52-61.

3) (1970). *N.I.C.* Kohima: Naga Institute of Culture.

4) Nongbri, T. (2016). Forest Policy in North-East India. *jstor*, 1-36.



1.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The treaty of Yandaboo was signed in 1828 between Burma and East India Company.

Ans to Q No 2: With the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, a Line System was introduced on the pretext of protecting the minority indigenous ethnic groups in the hill areas of Assam by restricting outsiders' entry, business activities, land transactions and settlement.

Ans to Q No 3: The population of the North East consists of the original, indigenous inhabitants together with various ethnic groups, including people from Tibet, Burma, Thailand and Bengal, who migrated into the region at various periods of history.

Ans to Q No 4: The moral high ground provided scope and legitimacy for colonial penetration in areas which seemed viable for-profit accumulation.

Ans to Q No 5: 1874.



1.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write a short note on the moral high ground portrayed by colonial administrators?

Q 2: Write a short note on the political processes in the region till the time of independence.

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: How do you think the British colonial policies affected the colonial interests in comparison to local interests?

Q 2: How do you think the inner line regulations shaped the North East region as we see it today?

*** ***** ***

UNIT 2 : PROCESS OF STATE FORMATION IN THE REGION

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Assam and the Brahmaputra valley in the Pre-British Era

2.3.1 Formation of States in the North-East

2.4 Let Us Sum Up

2.5 Further Reading

2.6 Answers to Check Progress

2.7 Model Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- describe the formation of states in Pre-British era
- explain the regin of the Ahoms in the region
- discuss the system of Tribal Chieftainship
- discuss the other smaller kingdoms like the Dimasa Kingdom and Jaintia Kingdom or State that existed in the pre-colonial era.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

North East India as we have already learnt in the previous unit consists of eight states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim), and is enclosed by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China (Tibet), and Myanmar. A narrow corridor between Bhutan and Bangladesh provides the only overland connection between the North East Region and mainland India. The population of the North East consists of the original, indigenous inhabitants together with various ethnic groups, including people from Tibet, Burma, Thailand and Bengal, who migrated into the region at various periods of history. Although there are migrants of long standing, who have become integrated into the local population over very many years,

an increasingly large inflow of recent migrants over a short period has caused friction with the local population. During the British colonial period and even after independence, the North East, adjoining China, has been a difficult frontier region.

In this unit we attempt to understand the historical context of state formation in the tribal societies of the region in the pre-colonial period.

2.3 ASSAM AND BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY IN THE PRE-BRITISH ERA

While the so-called Aryans and many later invaders, such as Greeks, the Huns, the Pathans and the Mughals entered India from the North-West; in the North-East, through Assam, have come hordes of immigrants from the great hive of the Mongolian race in Western China. In Assam (then Assam consisted of most of the states of present NE India), although in the plains there are large sections of population who have a mixed origin like that of Bengal, there are tribes who are almost 'pure Mongolians' (Gait).

The religion of the region has had trace of strange tantric developments, both of Hinduism and of Buddhism. The temple of Kamakhya in Guwahati is one of the most sacred shrines of the Sakta Hindus and the whole land is famed in Hindu traditions as a land of magic and witch craft. The old tribal beliefs are gradually being abandoned and Edward Gait in his 'Introduction' to *History of Assam* mentions the way in which Hindu priests established their influence over non-Aryan chiefs and gradually drew them within their fold is 'repeatedly exemplified. Now let us understand the process of formation of states in the tribal societies of the region in the pre-colonial period as exemplified by one of the noted economic historians of Assam, Amalendu Guha.

2.3.1 Formation of States in the North-East

The transition of tribes to statehood in north-east India was varied in point of time and space. The kingdoms of Assam, Jaintia, Cachar, Tripura and Manipur emerged as sovereign states in medieval

times and survived till the early l9th century. All these kingdoms provide us with opportunities to study the problem of state formation in depth. To any study of the transition from tribalism to statehood, both history and social anthropology can contribute: the former by examining extant records and recorded oral tradition and the latter, by scrutinising the fossilised traces of the process which are still extant within the tribal social structures.

The first and the most ancient of plans of government, according to Morgan, was "a social organization founded upon gentes, phratries and tribes"; the second and the latest in time,"a political organization founded upon territory and upon property". Why and how, and at what point of time did the custom-enforced tribal social organisation gave way to a coercive authority that was separated from and placed above the society? This is precisely the question to be answered in this part. The considerable time lag found in every society between the first appearance of property and the emergence of a special type of organisation, which could be called a state, needs to be adequately explained. The other question is as to how, once brought into existence, this authority gradually matured into full statehood. In fact, anthropologists have come across many tribes like the Apatanis of Arunachal, who had developed a degree of private property rights, even in the means of production, but yet had no special organisation as such that could straightway be called a state. Segmentary- type primitive societies in the pre-state situation (the 'gentile' constitution of Morgan and Engels) were not transformed into states overnight even by the magic touch of property. It is necessary, therefore, to identify the retarding or accelerating factors, if any, in the corresponding ecology and economy of these societies.

No tribe leaped to statehood while it was still at its pristine stage, when it still lacked a sedentary agricultural population, a degree of division of labour and social stratification. Statehood emerged only when a community was either itself capable of producing a surplus sufficient for the maintenance of a non-producing public authority, or

of systematically appropriating as tribute the requisite surplus from a subject community or both. Smaller the surplus, less elaborate was its public authority structure. In north-east India, tribal state formations, early or medieval, were made possible by the generation of the requisite surplus from either their own or other people's wet rice cultivation. Rain-fed or irrigated, such wet rice farming was again technically made possible by the use of cattle-powered ploughs and, in some cases, even hoes. However, in India it was mostly the plough that ensured a relatively large surplus and, therefore, also a higher surplus of political organisation. Larger the surplus, more developed was the state.

But why should a surplus-producing community, at some point of time, be necessarily transformed into or adapted to statehood unless there were also other compelling circumstances? Amalendu Guha argues, this transformation took place when the leading families, who had the customary monopoly of supplying important public functionaries, began to realise that their public capacities could also be utilised to promote their own specific economic interests. In other words, a process of state formation started when they began to realise that they formed an interest-group—a class in themaking. At the borderline of statehood, two forms of property coexisted side by side—communal property in some form or other and private property. These conditions created the objective basis for an urge for statehood so that the community could reconcile the nascent class antagonisms while still maintaining the public functions for general benefit. At this juncture, the noble and relatively wealthy families emerged as a special privileged aristocracy, a ruling stratum as distinct from the rest of the tribe. It became a sort of a 'class' though still at its rudimentary stage, and the authority structure it represented was the inchoate state. The actual process of a tribes breaking up into classes and transformation into a state was a long-drawn one, and it reached its terminal point in more than one way, depending on the circumstances in each case. The period from the 13th to the 16th century saw the

emergence and development of a large number of tribal political formations in north-east India. The Chutiya, the Tai-Ahom, the Koch, the Dimasa (Kachari), the Tripuri, the Meithei (Manipuri), the Khasi (Khyriem) and the Pamar (Jaintia) -all these tribes crystallised into rudimentary state formations by the 15th century. In each case, the process involved transformation of some of the organs of the pre-existing tribal organisation and replacement of the rest by new organs which facilitated usurpation of the public power by a privileged class in the making. At this stage, generally, a written language (in most cases not the tribe's own) was also adopted for purposes of the Court. The most developed of the tribes in the 15th century were the Chutiyas. Their kingdom was annexed and absorbed by the Tai-Ahoms by 1523. The remaining tribes however went on elaborating and sophisticating their respective state formations until their subjugation by the British in the early 19th century. The process meanwhile involved the spread of wet rice cultivation and the use of plough, the subjugation of neighbouring peoples, the migration of scribes and artisans from a relatively advanced area to the tribal kingdoms, greater lesser degree of Hinduisation of the tribal ruling families and the growth ot petty commodity production to a limited extent.

Now let us briefly take up some of the major kingdoms of the region:

- **Ahoms**

Ahom conquerors of Assam had a keen historical sense and they have given us a full and detailed account of their rule, which dates from early thirteenth century. Another claim to notice is supplied by the circumstance that Assam was one of the few regions in India whose inhabitants best tackled the tide of Mughal conquest and maintained their independence in the face of repeated attempts to subvert it. Full accounts of these invasions have come down both from Ahom and from Mohemmadan sources, and are interesting not only in themselves but also from the light which they throw on the old methods of warfare, and from the evidence which they afford of how

little superior arms, numbers and discipline can avail against difficulties of communication, inadequate supplies of food and an unhealthy climate.

The Ahoms were a tribe of Shans who migrated to Assam early in the thirteenth century. They were endowed with the historical faculty in a very high degree and the priests and leading families possessed Buranjis, or histories, which were periodically brought up to date. The later Buranjis were written in Assamese which was gradually adopted by the Ahoms after their conversion to Hinduism, but the earlier one are in the old tribal language, which is similar to that of other Shan tribes.

The form of government amongst the ahoms was somewhat peculiar. The king was at the head of the administration, but he was assisted by three great councillors of state called Gohains. The Gohains had provinces assigned to them, in which they exercised most of the independent rights of sovereignty, but, so far as the general administration of the State and its relations with other powers were concerned, their functions were merely advisory.

The military-cum-civil officers had control over the administration of justice with respect of the men under them-formed a chain of command from the top downwards. A Phukan was in command of a division (Khel) of 6,000, a Hazarika of a thousand, a Saikia (centurian) of a hundred and a Bora (headman) of 20 militiamen. The actual strength of the units, however, might fall short of the norms. A Rajkhowa was ordinarily a governor of a territory and head of the levies from his jurisdiction. There were also other officers- the Baruas for instance - with mainly civil functions.

The hierarchy of the militia throughout the 17th-18th centuries had at its base the other ranks, i.e, the paiks, consisting of all adult males in the 16-50 age group, excepting for the members of the nobility, privileged persons of high castes.

All slaves and the serfs attached to the soil (agriculture related) were all registered for state service as paiks, and four (sometimes

three) paiks constituted a unit called *'got'*. One member of each such got "was obliged to be present, in rotation", as Sir Edward Gait puts it, "for such work as might be required of him, and during his absence from home the other members were expected to cultivate his land and keep his family supplied with food. In time of peace it was the custom to employ the paiks on public works; and this is how the enormous tanks and the high embanked roads of Upper Assam came into existence.

In times of an extreme emergency, the second and even the third member of the *got* could be called up simultaneously, even at the risk of disrupting agriculture. The main sources of revenue were the commutation money realised by frozen men exempted from personal service, rent paid by paiks for their cultivated lands in excess of the tax-free allotment and the miscellaneous duties. The tax-free allotment per paik was nearly 2.66 acres of wet rice land in Upper Assam. It was a little higher in Kamrup which was annexed by the Ahoms in the 17th century. When a paik died or went out of service, his land was allotted to another-generally to a member of his own extended family, newly registered as a paik on his attaining the qualifying age.

- **Tribal Chieftains during the Ahom period**

There were various tribal chieftains which were existing simultaneously in the region during the Ahom period. The Ahoms has mixed relationship with such communities. The hill tribes payed annual tribute to the Ahom Kings and various other forms of tributes. Relations with the hill tribes and tribal chieftains were conducted by duly appointed frontier wardens and governors. Thus the '*Sadiya-khowaGohain*' was in charge of conciliating the tribes of the Sadiya country viz, the Adis, Miris and Mishmis. Similarly, the Marangi-khowaGohain and the RahialBarua were in charge of the Kacharis and Mikirs, the JagiyaliaGohain and the KajalimukhiaGohain of the Jayantias and the Barphu- kan and the Darrang Raja, of the Bhutanese. They were helped in their duties by the Duarias or guards

of the passes on different frontiers. Let us now briefly understand the Chutia and the Tiwa chieftain.

The Chutiya Kingdom (1187–1673), alternatively spelt Sutia, Chutia, Sutiya or Sadiya, was a state established by Birpal, a Chutiya chieftain in 1187 CE in the areas comprising the present-day Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Birpal was one of the numerous Chutiya chieftains/ rajas who ruled present-day Upper Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Over the years he and his successors united all the Chutiya kings of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in the hills and plains to form the greater Chutiya kingdom after the fall of Pala dominance. It was the largest kingdom in Assam after the fall of Kamrupa and before the rise of Ahom kingdom. The kingdom absorbed the ancient Pala dynasty of Kamarupa and reigned for over 400 years in eastern Assam and Arunachal Pradesh with its capital at Sadiya and Ratnapur. Swadhyadhipati/Sadhayapuriswar is the Assamese name for the king of the Chutiyas. Sadiya was the name of the kingdom as well its capital. It became the dominant power in eastern Assam in the 12th century and remained so until the 16th century with its domain from ParshuramKund in the east to Vishwanathin the west.The hostilities with the Ahoms began when the Chutiya Kingdom expanded to the south during which the Ahom king, Sutuphaa, was killed by the Chutiya king during a friendly negotiation. This conflict triggered a number of battles between the two sides which saw the great loss of men and money. The simmering dispute often flared till 1524 when the Ahoms struck the Chutiya Kingdom at its weakest state, took Sadiya and killed the then king, Nityapal. The Ahoms established their rule by instituting the position of Sadiyakhowa Gohain. But the Chutiya had dispersed to frontier regions, and continued raids against the Ahoms. It finally ended in 1673 when they fell under the domination of the Ahoms.

Now let us understand the Tiwas. Before the advent of Britishers, the Tiwas had principalities that enjoyed sovereign political powers in the area. The Tiwa kings (Rajas) ruled over kingdoms or

principalities, were known as Deoraja as because they also perform some rituals and religious functions in their society. The octogenarians of the Tiwas in the hills believe that the first Tiwa kings were Sotonga Raja, Mallowa Raja and Lampha Raja. The Gobha was the great kingdom by its name and fame in latter stage. The other smaller kingdoms like; Nellie, Khola and Sohori were the state subordination to the Gobha kingdom; which itself was under the authority ofJayantia kingdom in transition.

During the time of Ahom rule in Assam, the Pasorajya and Satorajya were the chieftains under Ahom suzerainty. The Pasorajya was the five clustering principality like- Kumoi, Baghara, Torani, Kacharigoan and Gukhanagug. The Satorajya was the seven clustering principality like - Ghagua, Tetelia, Mikirgoanya, Baropujia, Tupakushi, Khaigarh and Sara-rajya. A legend of the Tiwas goes to the extent that there were about one hundred chieftains in different areas of the Tiwas. Sources reveal that during the Pre-British period the all the Tiwa kingdoms were under the suzerainty of Jayantias for a long time. Later on, the Ahoms made an expedition over and the Rajas of Pasorajya and Satorajya were surrendered in the first stage. For a long period of time it was the vessel kingdoms under the Ahoms. The Ahoms ruled the kingdoms as appointing the existing Tiwa Rajas as chieftains. They called the Tiwa kings as Raja Poowalis acted under the behest of the Ahom rulers. During that period of time the Tiwa Rajas were exercising the powers and functions in coordination with the Council of Ministers (PatraMantris). The system of governing was based on theoretically limited monarchy, but in practice on the basis of imposing democratic principle, where the customary laws and traditional rules and practices got top priority. There were ministerial portfolios distributed by the kings with common consensus. The Council of Ministers decided on all the matters of socio-cultural, traditional, public policy and external relations. Each member of the Council of Ministers were known by the portfolios given as; Doloi, Dekadoloi, Dekaraja, Pali-Senapati, Patar, Dewri, Sangdoloi,

Sangmaji, Koraimaji, Loro, Phongorai, Bhandari, Hari-khunguri, etc. The Meetings of Council of Ministers or Raj Dorbar were held in a regular manner. Opinions of the different office bearers of different level of political hierarchy were taken with due importance in the process of decision making. So the system was run by participatory democracy, wherein the public opinions played a significant place.

The Buranjis (Assamese chronicles) recount the meeting of Assamese soldiers with "people of the margins"(*datiyaliya*) and the settlement of 12 families of Lalung and Mikir, i.e. Tiwas and Karbis, in the plains in the 17th century.Tiwa people are closely associated with the principality of Gobha.The Gobha raja belongs to a Tiwa clan and his territory covers more or less the Tiwa cultural realm. Gobha is mentioned in the Buranjis since the early 18th century, as an important market for the trade between Tiwa (Lalung) Kingdom of greater Assam, and the Jaintia Kingdom.These two powerful neighbours have since been competing to keep Gobha principality under their authority, with varying success. The historical role of Gobha and the Tiwas as mediators between plains and hills in Central Assam is enacted every year during an old fair, the Jonbeelmela.

- **Dimasas**

The Dimasas belong to the Bodo family of the Tibeto-Burman speech group of the Indo-Mongoloids. They are said to be among the earliest inhabitants of the Assam Valley. During 16th to 18th century AD they established a State of their own which covered modern South Assam (Barak Valley, parts of Assam Valley and intervening North Cachar Hills) and some parts of Nagaland and Manipur.

The state formation processes among this group had started at a fairly early time in the Assam Valley ever since the emergence of private property and the concept of special clans had created inequality in the society. In the 13th century the Dimasa kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmputra, from Dikhou to Kallang and included the Dhansiri Valley and the North Cachar Hills, with its capital at Dimapur. The remnant of the place, fort and tank

are still found in Dimapur area. The expansionist policy of the Ahoms brought them into conflict with the Dimasas and the wars between the two are recorded in the Ahom chronicles since 1490 AD. In 1536 the Ahoms sacked Dimapur, its ruler Dersongpha was killed, and the Dimasas shifted their capital to Maibong in North Cachar Hills. It was here that the Dimasa state formation process entered into a crucial phase under Brahmanical influence. The Brahmana priests occupied important position in the court, myths were created to establish divine origin of the ruler, the first king at Maibong assumed the name Nirbhoyanarayana, the coins and inscriptions were issued in Sanskrit in Assamese/ Bengali script, the traditionaiDimasa deity Kachcti Kati was transformed into Ranachandi, and the ruling clan and the aristocracy got kshatriya status in Hindu society. The state expanded over the adjoning areas of the Bengali-speaking Barak Valley, and, in 1745, the Khaspur state in that valley merged into the Dimasa state, when the only dnughter of the last ruler of Khaspur was married to the Dimasa prince, and capital of the Dimasa state was shifted from Maibong to Khaspur in the Barak Valley.

- **The Jaintias**

Jaintia state was one of the oldest states in North-Eastern India and it is mentioned in the Puranic and Tantrik Literature when the Jaintiapur or the Jaintia plains was added to the HimaSutnga. With regard to its origin, it is relatively complicated to mark out as the Jaintias lack written records about their past history. Like other tribal communities, the Jaintias are found to be preserving their past history in their oral traditions and folklores. There are different factors that have contributed to the development of this early state over a period of time. The process of transition that took place in one way or the other had brought about significant changes in their tribal state formation. Some scholars opine that in their process of migration from their original home till they reached their present homeland, the Jaintia must have had certain ideas about the concepts of state and political organisation. The coming of private ownership of land,

improvement in agriculture, centralised form of administration, diplomatic relations, matrimonial alliances and the process of sanskritisation, etc have contributed in their own way to the transformation of the Jaintia political structure. These progresses and developments had great implications when the ruling family came under the influence of Hindu religion and culture. The evolutionary changes due to population growth and spatial distribution of the population, the threat of raids and conquests, legitimisation of a particular ideology, surplus extraction by the state or economic development, and the influence of the already existing states served as an effective instrument that inspire the development into the Jaintia statehood.

The beginning of agriculture and settled way of life paved the way to the idea of private property and was also the source of many problems relating to its maintenance and protection. Under such conditions, the people had to submit to certain authority for the protection of their private property and regulation to mutual relations among them. Thus, desire and cooperation to establish a state of their own based on political consciousness to determine their fate by themselves and also to free themselves from outside might have contributed towards the origin of their state.

- **Burmese Invasions**

There were three Burmese invasions of Assam between 1817 and 1826, during which time the Kingdom of Assam (Ahom) came under the control of Burma from 1821 to 1825. Locally, this period, called the *manor din* (Assamese:, "The days/period of the Burmese") by the Indigenous Assamese people and *Chahi-TaretKhuntakpa* (seven years of devastation) in Meitei, is remembered with horror. It was the climactic period of the 600-year history of the Ahom kingdom. The sharp drop in population due both to depredations as well emigrations left the erstwhile kingdom in shambles. The British, who were earlier reluctant to colonise Assam, came into direct contact with a belligerent Burmese occupying force. Following the First Anglo-

Burmese War they annexed not just Assam but also Burma.

➢ **Consolidation of British rule**

The problem in the Brahmaputra valley was more difficult. Not only had the Burmese been in possession for several years, in the course of which they had overthrown most of the old administrative landmarks, but the people were split up into many conflicting parties. This facilitated the consolidation of British rule in the Brahmaputra valley.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What was 'got' in the Ahom system?

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Q 2: The Ahoms in Assam belonged to which tribe?

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Q 3: Who are the Dimasas?

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Q 4: Who are the Jaintias?

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Q 5: When did the Burmese invasion take place?

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.....



2.4 LET US SUM UP

- In this chapter we analysed the transition of tribal societies in North-East India to statehood in the precolonial period.
- The actual process of a tribes breaking up into classes and transformation into a state was a long-drawn one, and it reached its terminal point in more than one way, depending on the circumstances in each case.
- The period from the 13th to the 16th century saw the emergence and development of a large number of tribal political formations in north-east India. The Chutiya, the Tai-Ahom, the Koch, the Dimasa (Kachari), the Tripuri, the Meithei (Manipuri), the Khasi (Khyriem) and the Pamar (Jaintia) -all these tribes crystallised into rudimentary state formations by the 15th century.
- The chapter briefly talked about the state formation in 3 kingdoms- the ahoms, the dimasas and the Jaintias.
- The chapter also briefly mentions the Burmese invasions.



2.5 FURTHER READINGS

1) Gait, E. 1906. *History of Assam,* Calcutta: Thacker, Spink& Co.
2) Guha, A. (1983). *The Ahom Political System: An Enquiry into the State Formation Process in Medieval Assam (1228-1714).* Social Scientist*, 11(12), 3*.
3) *B*. *Pakem*, "*State Formation in Pre-Colonial Jaintia*, Surajit Sinha (ed.)
4) Bhattacharjee, J. (1987). The Economic Content of the Medieval State Formation Processes among the Dimasas of North East India. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 48*, 222-225.

2.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Four paiks (sometimes 3) combined to form units called 'got'.

Ans to Q No 2: The Ahoms belonged to the Shan tribe.

Ans to Q No 3: The Dimasas belong to the Bodo family of the Tibeto-Burman speech group of the Indo-Mongoloids. They are said to be among the earliest inhabitants of the Assam Valley.

Ans to Q No 4: Jaintia state was one of the oldest states in North-Eastern India and it is mentioned in the Puranic and Tantrik Literature when the Jaintiapur or the Jaintia plains was added to the HimaSutnga.

Ans to Q No 5: The Burmese invasions took place between 1817 to 1826.

2.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write a short note on the formation on Ahom Kingdom.

Q 2: Write a short note on the Burmese invasion.

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Describe the process of state formation in pre- colonial North-East?

Q 2: What are the factors that influence state formation in tribal societies?

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UNIT 3 : PROCESS OF SANSKRITIZATION IN THE REGION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives
3.2 Introduction
3.3 History of migration of Indo-Aryan Groups to the Brahmaputra valley
  3.3.1 Sanskrit as an Official Language
3.4 Sanskritization under the Kamrupa Kingdom
3.5 Spread of Sanskritization under the Ahoms
  3.5.1 Change of Language
  3.5.2 The Religion of the Ahoms
  3.5.3 Ahom King's Patronization of Hinduism
3.6 Neo-Vaishnavism in the Brahmaputra Valley
  3.6.1 Role of Satras in Tribe-caste Relationship
3.6.2 Assimilation of the Tribes into Sanskritized Hinduism Fold
3.7 Let Us Sum Up
3.8 Further Reading
3.9 Answers to Check Your Progress
3.10 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- describe the process of Sanskritization of the Brahmaputra valley
- explain the history of migration of Indo-Aryan groups into the Brahmaputra valley
- discuss how Sanskritized Hinduism penetrated the major group of the Brahamaputra Valley – the Ahoms
- discussthe spread of Neo-Vaishnavism in the Brahmaputra valley
- analyse how the Neo-Vaishnavism movement impacted the tribe-caste relationship.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Sanskritization is a process by which a lower caste or tribe or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a higher or more often twice-born caste.Sanskritization process is not only confined to the caste people of Hindu society, it is also found among the tribal society.

It has been established, as evident in various literatures, the earliest settlers in the present-day territory of Assam were the Bodo stock of peoples.These communities, who are frequently clubbed together under the label of Indo-Mongoloids and who had made Assam their homeland in their respective territories, are distinct by virtue oftheir traits of language, religion, customary practices and expressive cultural forms. By the beginning of the last millennium, large scale Aryan migration from central and northern India to Assam started. A major significance of this migration is that the Aryans brought along with them advance methods of agriculture, experts in administration as well as priests.

In this unit, we shall discuss about the process of Sanskritisation in this region and understand the process of assimilation among the tribes in this region.

3.3 HISTORY OF MIGRATION OF INDO-ARYAN GROUPS TO THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

People speaking Indo-Aryan languages first migrated to Assam in approximately the fifth century BCE. They came from Videha and Magadha regions of the Gangetic Plains into a region already inhabited by people who spoke Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman languages.The 8th- to 6th-century BCE text, Shatapatha Brahmana, describes the Sanskritization of East India up to the Karatoya River, the western boundary of the historic Kamarupa kingdom. The Aitareya Brahmana indicated spread of Aryan culture to ancient Assam.

To the east of Magadha, Kamarupa continued as an independent kingdom, ruled over by an indigenous line of kings who traced descent from

heroes named in the epics as Naraka, Bhagadatta and Vajradatta. Indo-Aryan accounts of the region between 500 BCE and 4th century CE come from the revised Mahabharata and Puranas (from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE), and the c. 10th-century KalikaPurana. The accounts in these Hindu texts conflict with each other, but the Kamarupa dynasties claimed ancestries going back thousands of years. It is supposed that bands of Indo-Aryan people moved from Magadha to the forested regions of the Brahmaputra valley; the leaders of these bands are remembered in later myths as Parashurama, Bashishtha and Naraka. The KalikaPurana reports that Naraka displaced an indigenous Danava dynasty.

Archaeologically, the Northern Black Polished Ware, a pottery style associated with the development of the first large states in Northern India, reached the Karatoya Riveronly by the 2nd century BCE. The sanskritization of Assam cannot thus be pushed beyond the 6th century BCE. It is also significant that neither early Buddhist sources, nor Ashokan epigraphs (3rd century BCE with the capital in East India) mention the Assam region.

The earliest historical mention of this region in Indo-Aryan comes from Samudragupta's Allahabad inscription, where two kingdoms from the region—Kamarupa and Davaka— are mentioned. The earliest evidence of Indo-Aryan in Assam are the 5th-century Umachal and Nagajari-Khanikargaon rock inscriptions.

Two inscriptions of Bhaskaravarman (600-650 CE) on copper plates are re-issues of grants to Brahmins to settle in parts of the Kamarupa kingdom during the reign of Bhutivarman (518-542). This policy, of the local kings settling Brahmans from other places in the kingdom, was a common policy of all Kamarupa kings that gave rise to pockets of Brahmanic influence. From the inscriptions it can be made out that the Brahman came to Assam from present-day Bangladesh, Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Indo-Aryan presence and influence became significant by the 7th century. Whereas the early grants had natural boundaries such as trees or water, those from the later Pala rulers (10-11th century), increasingly bordered on other granted lands, thereby indicating that the pockets of Indo-Aryan settlements were becoming contiguous. Nevertheless, the process of Sanskritization was never

complete in Assam, and significant sections remained outside Brahmanic influence.

3.3.1 Sanskrit As An Official Language

The subsequent Kamarupa inscriptions, written in Sanskrit, suggest that a majority of the Indo-Aryan immigrants spoke Kamarupi Prakrit the precursor of Assamese language and the Proto-Kamata; and that the learned few knew Sanskrit. Sanskrit was the liturgical language of Hinduism and the state language of Kamarupa; and Assamese became a link language, accepted as a second language by some of the aboriginal peoples; over time, it became the first language for many. In return, Assamese acquired linguistic features of the native speakers. The writing shows an evolution from the early Gupta script towards modern Assamese script. The latest examples, such as the Kanai-boroxiboa inscription, use a proto-Assamese script.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Which language was the precursor to the Assamese language?

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Q 2: In which inscription is the earliest historical mention of the Brahmaputra valley region in Indo-Aryan found?

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3.4 SANSKRITIZATION UNDER THE KAMRUPA KINGDOM

In the historic period, the Kamarupa kings encouraged immigration from North India, and settled Brahmins as 'islands of private domains in a sea of communally held tribal lands of shifting cultivation'. One such settlement

was Habung, where Ratnapal of the Pala dynasty of Kamarupa settled Brahmins in c. the 10th century, then known as Ha-VrngaVishaya.

Though traditional accounts claim that the kings of Assam were Indo-Aryan, modern scholarship is not clear. Sanskritization, was a process that occurred simultaneously with localization, or tribalization in Assam. From epigraphic records, so far brought to light, it is possible to trace an almost unbroken genealogy of these kings from about the middle of the 4th century CE down to the 12th century or a period of nearly nine hundred years. Very few of the old Hindu kingdoms in India can present such unique genealogical records covering such a long period.

No less than twelve copper-plate inscriptions, inscribed seals and rock-inscriptions recorded by various kings of Kamarupa during this period have been discovered and deciphered. Epigraphic records left by the famous Gupta emperor Samudra Gupta, Yasodharman, king of Malwa, who was a famous conqueror, Adityasena, who belonged to the line of Later Guptas of Magadha, Jayadeva, a well-known king of Nepal and some of the Pala kings and Sena kings of Bengal provide useful material for the history of Kamarupa during this period. Other materials include Raghuvaugsa of Kalidasa, the Chinese writers, the Harsha-Charita of Banabhatta, the Raja-Tarangini of Kahlan, and translations from Tibetan records.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How many copper-plate inscriptions, inscribed seals and rock-inscriptions recorded by various kings of Kamarupa during the 4th to 12th century have been discovered and deciphered?

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Q 4: What was the ancient name of the place where Ratnapal of the Pala dynasty of Kamarupa settled Brahmins in the 10th century A.D?

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3.5 SPREAD OF SANSKRITIZATION UNDER THE AHOMS

The Ahoms of Assam have abandoned their original tribal religion and have undergone the process of Aryanisation and adopted Hinduism. Today the Ahoms are among the many tribes of Assam that have become Aryanised and Hinduised, such as, the Bodos, Chutiyas, Morans, etc.The Ahom prince Sukapha is said to have left Maulung with a following of eight nobles, and 9000 men, women and children. Since they had brought with them very few women they were forced to intermarry with local tribes. In the beginning the Ahoms wanted to maintain feudal superiority and separate existence as a ruling community and did not allow its members to have social relationship with the peasant population of the country. With the passage of time they found it impossible to administer the vast country with a small number of their own people who came with the first conqueror Sukhapa. They were compelled to increase their number by marrying in non-Ahom or Hindu families and by conferring upon some non-Ahom families the privileges and status of the ruling race. These new entrants were thoroughly assimilated with the pure Ahoms and they and their descendants were not disabled from holding high offices and enjoying privileges to which the older Ahoms were entitled.

When the Ahom ruler Tao-Khamti (1380-1389 A.D) made peace with the Kamata king the latter gave his daughter to the Ahom king in marriage. This is the first recorded marriage of an Ahom king with a Hindu princess.This event definitely brought some Hindu elements to the Ahom royal house.The Ahoms intermarried and incorporated many of the conquered tribes into the Ahom fold. Several of these tribes were already Hinduised then.

3.5.1 Change of Language

In case of Ahom people, the change in their language was not due to only the process of language contact but there had been other factors, namely the political and social factors. These factors were due to the rulers who came from outside with different culture

and language. The best way to govern the local people peacefully was learning their language and customs so that the subject population becomes friendlier.

In the early period of Ahom rule in the Brahmaputra valley, the purpose of using Assamese language by the Ahoms was to make friends with the local people. It was however, necessary to make the local inhabitants feel like that the rulers were not the others but they were one with them. The Ahoms assimilated with the existing culture of the local people in many aspects. The conqueror accepted the culture, religion and language of the conquered people. The Tai language, the Ahom religion, rituals, dress, food habits and sociocultural institutions gradually passed into oblivion. The Hindu religion, culture, life style and Assamese language were imbibed replacing the ones of original Tai.

In the 16th- and 17th-centuries, the small Ahom community expanded their rule dramatically toward the west and they successfully saw off challenges from Mughal and other invaders, gaining them recognition in world history. The rapid expansion resulted in the Ahom people becoming a small minority in their own kingdom, of which they kept control. Eventually, the Ahom court, as well as the Ahom peasants took to Ekasarana dharma, Shaktism and Saivism over the traditional Ahom religion; and adopted Assamese over the Ahom language for secular purposes. The modern Ahom people and their culture are a syncretism of the original Tai and their culture and local Tibeto-Burman peoples and their cultures they absorbed in Assam. Some local ethnic groups, including the Tibeto-Burman speaking Borahi, were completely subsumed into the Ahom community; while members of other communities, based on their allegiance to the Ahom kingdom or the use of their talents, too were accepted as Ahoms. Even though the Ahom made up a relatively small portion of the kingdom's population, they maintained their original Ahom language and practised their traditional religion till the 17th-century, when the Ahom court, as well as the commoners, adopted the Assamese

language, and Ekasarana dharma and Saktism religions.

During the reign of Ahom king, Rudra Singh (1696-1714), Hinduism became the dominant religion. At that time the Ahom who did not accept Hinduism were looked upon as a degraded class. The influence of the Deodhais (Assamese word) the priests of the old Ahom religion, revived for a time about 1775. Similarly, Assamese, as a language, began to oust Ahom about the beginning of the eighteenth century and from about 1720 it was no longer necessary for Hindu office-seekers to learn the latter language. The historical records that show changes in the names of the Ahom kings provide further information about the evolution of the Ahom language. It is clear trace of the change of the Ahom speaking language into Assamese language by observing the change of their inscriptions. Initially the inscriptions of Ahom were in Ahom language. Later they appear in a bigot form, and finally in Assamese or Sanskrit. After adopting Hinduism by the king, the official language which was used in the Ahom court at first continued to be Ahom. The use of Ahom language was gradually supplanted by Assamese and slowly the Ahom language was known to only a few priests.With the acceptance of Hinduism by the Ahoms the 'buranjis' or chronicles came to be written not only in Ahom but also in Assamese. This practice was continued even after the British occupation of the State.

After the Hinduisation of the Ahoms from about the beginning of the sixteenth century A.D Hindu Law as expounded by the Brahmins seems to have been generally followed. Edward Gait says that when the mass of the Ahoms accepted Hinduism the Ahom priests gradually fell into disrepute, although they themselves had long resisted the proselytizing efforts of the Brahmins. The result was that the new generation of Ahoms was taught the Aryanised Assamese language and not Ahom, and in a few years the knowledge of the latter language practically disappeared from the Ahom kingdom.

3.5.2 The Religion of the Ahoms

The Ahoms believed in an all-powerful God who created the universe. He is a spirit and cannot be identified with any power in nature. Edward Gait has identified the Supreme Being of the Ahoms as Pha. Ancestor worship was an important aspect of their religion. Worship of Chom-Cheng was common among the Ahoms of the Brahmaputra valley and they continued to do the same till the end of their rule with the belief that the deity would bring them success in war, peace and prosperity.

The Ahoms had their own priests, the Deodhais, Mohans and Bailongs, who also acted as their political advisors in the beginning. But gradually their role was overshadowed by the Brahmins. Probably the name Deodhais was applied to them after the conversion of the king and his court to Hinduism for in Ahom language the priests are called Sangman. The Ahoms considered Charaideo as the most sacred place of their faith.

Though many Ahom kings became Hinduised, they did not altogether abandon their ancestral religion and practices. Their coronation ceremony was solemnised by both Ahom and Hindu rituals. From the time of Suhungmung or Dihingia Raja practically all the Ahom kings on ascending the throne assumed two names, one in Assamese Hindu form and the other in Ahom.

The Ahom gods and legends came to be identified with Brahmanical ones so that both the Ahom and the Hindu population were made to feel that after all the pantheons of the two peoples were essentially the same. Thus, we find that Chaopha (king of heaven) was identified with Lengdon or Indra the progenitor of the Ahom kings; Jaching-pha was identified with Saraswati. Lung-chai-net with Vayu; Khan-Khampha-pha with Sakti; Khun-tun with the Sun god; Khun-ban with the Moon-god and Lan-khe with Visvakarma.

The Ahom kings patronised both Ahom priests and Brahmins and allowed them to perform their rituals and to officiate at ceremonies

like marriage, funerals and coronation of kings. The Ahoms performed their marriages according to their own rites called Chaklang. But when the Ahom kings married Hindu girls, Vedic rites were observed.

3.5.3 Ahom King's Patronization of Hinduism

With Sudangpha (1397-1407 A.D) the influence of Brahmanism in the Ahom court began to be felt. Prior to that the reference to Brahmin nobles in court was hardly recorded. But with Sudangpha their number in court became numerous. Evidently, then, the reign of Sudangpha was an important stage in the Hinduisation of the Ahoms. Sudangpha was known as the 'Brahmin Prince' as he was born and brought up in the house of a Brahmin.

His reign marks the early stage in the growth of Brahmanical influence among the Ahoms. He brought with him, from the Habung country, the Brahmin who had given his mother shelter and raised him up along with his own children. He appointed the Brahmin as his confidential advisor and the sons of the Brahmin and other relatives were given high posts in the administration.Thus during Sundangpha's reign the seeds of Hinduism were sown in the Ahom kingdom.

The Hindu influence was more marked in the reign of King Susengpha or PratapSingha (1603-1641) who was personally grateful to the Brahmin priests for ridding him of a demon which had possessed him during his youth. He vigorously patronized Hinduism and showed his inclination towards it. He recruited the non-Ahoms to a number of responsible offices and proved his confidence in them by replacing many Ahom officials by the non-Ahoms, preferably Brahmin. Pratap Singh also patronized Hinduism by rebuilding the Naga-Sankar temple on the north of the Brahmaputra. This act of the king gained him the good will of the Aryanised mongoloid tribes of the region who helped him on his subsequent conquest of Habung and Panbari.

Sutyinpha or Jayadhvaj Singh (1648-1663) was the first Ahom

king to formally accept Hinduism, who wanted to propitiate the gods by his devotion to religion and atone for his patricide. Jayadhvaj Singh and his successors up to Sulikpha or Lora Raja (1679-1681) accepted Vaishnavism as their creed, which was the predominant faith in Assam at that time. But Supatpha or Gadadhar Singh (1681-1696) lent towards Saktism and persecuted the Vaishnava mahantas and gosains. His son Sukhrungpha or Rudra Singh (1696-1714) in the later part of his rule became an open supporter of Sakta faith and from his death onwards that faith became the creed of the Ahom monarchs and of the principal nobles and officers. Thus Saktism became the religion of the kings and Vaishnavism that of the majority of their subjects. It was at this time that the monarchy adopted a policy designed to win support of the heads of the satras and yet to maintain the spiritual status of the Deodhais unimpaired. In this way they consciously shaped a liberal policy towards all the creeds which, however they could not continue for long because of the threat of danger inherent in Vaishnavism.

Ahom kings assuming Hindu names was another expression of the increasing influence of the Brahmins in the court. In most cases the Ahom kings maintained both Ahom as well as Hindu names. Gradually they began to use their Hindu names than Ahom names in official records. Out of the forty-four Ahom rulers about half of them assumed Hindu names. Among the Ahom kings Suhungmung (1497-1539) was the first to assume a Hindu title – Svarga Narayan – and Hindu way of life. But he was better known as Dihingiya Raja because he made his capital at Bakata in the Dihing. The title Svarga Narayan or its variant Svarga Deb became henceforth the designation by which the Ahom kings described themselves in their official documents.

Sukhampha or Khora Raja (1552-1603) was succeeded by his son Pratap Singh who is referred to by his Hindu name in preference to his Ahom name Susengpha. The earlier kings had no Hindu titles but were satisfied to rule with their Ahoms names only. Thus the death of Sukhampha marks a further stage in the

Hinduisation of the Ahoms

Originally the Ahoms buried their dead. But in later years, following the Hindu custom they cremated their dead. In some cases first they cremated and then the bones and ashes of the dead were buried. At times Hindu priests were appointed to offer prayers at the Ganges for the dead kings. Generally the kings were buried with all their paraphernalia including living attendants. The practice of burying men alive was stopped by Rudra Singh. Since the time of Surampha or Rajeswar Singh (1751-1769) the Ahom kings took to cremation and performed their funeral ceremonies according to Vedic rites

Several Ahom kings patronised Saivism by constructing new temples and renovating old ones. They built huge temples called Siva Dol and Joy Dol with their capital complex near the modern Sibsagar town in Upper Assam and dug a huge lake called Joysagar close by. However, later some of the Ahoms kings patronised Vaishnavism and zealously established satras and allocated large areas of revenue free land. Brahmin influence grew rapidly in the capital and the Vaishnava movement of Sankardev was making itself felt more and more in the north-western part of the kingdom.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Who was the first Ahom ruler to marry a Hindu princess of the Kamata kingdom?

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Q 6: What are the priests of the Ahoms known as?

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Q 7: Who was the first Ahom ruler to assume a Hindu title?

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Q 8: How is Susengpha better known as?

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3.6 NEO-VAISHNAVISM IN THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

When Sankaradeva was born in 1449 AD, Assam was in a state of socio-political turmoil. Since the beginning of the 13th century, the ancient kingdom was slowly undergoing a process of political disintegration; and prior to and even during his time, there were rise and fall of about half a dozen of royal dynasties and kingdoms of small to moderate size. In the East, Ahoms (a Chinese-Tai race) who invaded in 1228, had captured a large portion of Chutiya and Kachari tribal kingdoms.In the fifteenth century Assam presented a varied picture of diversified culture. The majority of the people belonged to non-Aryan tribes have their own distinctive manners, customs and religious beliefs and practices. In that period, Saktism was also widely prevalent.

The Neo-Vaishnavite movement, spearheaded by Saint Sankardeva is a great socio-cultural revolution in Assam, which takes an important role to create a strong social bond among the people of Assam. It started on the theme of working towards the upliftment of the backward classes and minimization of the rigidity of caste distinctions.The Neo-Vaishnavism faith developed a democratic outlook which permeates the entire teachings and practices in Assam. Moreover, Neo-Vaishnavism of Srimanta Sankardeva became a powerful mechanism, and a cementing force in the process of acculturation of the different social groups.It is also referred to as eksarana Hari naam dharma.

He established some religious institutions, which were used as powerful instruments to bring about a much reform among the people of Assam. The impact of this movement cut deep into the fabric of the Assamese society transcending all barriers of caste and tribe. The ideas and philosophy ofSankardeva gradually became an integral part of the life Assamese people. Ekasarana Dharmais a pantheistic religion propagated by Srimanta

Sankardeva in the 15th-16th century in the Indian state of Assam. It rejects Vedic ritualism and focuses on pure devotion (bhakti) to Krishna consisting primarily in singing (Kirtan) and listening to (Sravan) his deeds and activities.

The simple and accessible religion attracted already Hinduized as well as non-Hindu tribal populations into its egalitarian fold. The neophytes were inducted into the faith via a system of initiation itself referred to as Sarana. Institutions propagating EkaSarana like sattra (monasteries) and village Namghar (prayer houses), had profound influence in the evolution of the social makeup of Assam. The artistic creations emanating from this movement led to engendering of new forms of literature, music (Borgeets or songs celestial), theatre (AnkiaNaat) and dance (Sattriya dance).

Assam vaishnavism has been constantly playing a significant role in the process of assimilating diverse elements-indigenous and non-indigenous into Assamese culture. Under the auspicious of Satra Institution, which is the greatest contribution of Neo-Vaishnavism of Assam the process of assimilating the non-Hindus to the Hindu fold started with new spirit. Satrasplays a vital role in the life of Assamese society as well as in the formation of Assamese society.

3.6.1 Role of Satras in Tribe-Caste Relationship

The process of Sanskritisation, which was started long years back in Ahom and the tribal society in the Brahmaputra valley become faster after the initiative taken by the Satras. By giving ‘saran’ to the tribal people positioned themin the Hindu caste hierarchy. They had given the opportunity to uphold their position in Hindu caste hierarchy by adopting the customs and manners of higher caste.

By taking sarana under a guru through a very simple procedure anyone could enter into the fold of neo-vaishnavism. It thus facilitated the entry of a largenumber of tribal people into the fold of Hinduism. The tribal neophytes were known as the saranias and still are addressed as such as a community who had over the years been assimilated into the Assamese society. One notable contribution of Satra is its works towards the upliftment and betterment of the backward classes and bordering communities of Assam.

3.6.2 Assimilation of the Tribes into Sanskritized Hinduism Fold

The assimilation of indigenous elements or non-Aryan traditions to the Aryan fold can't explain in simple narrative of assimilation. In the process of upward mobility, most of the indigenous communities retained some of their beliefs and practices and refused to fully conform to the casteist codes and regulations. The Sonowal Kacharies accepted dual religious system. They are 'Kirata dharma' and 'New-vaishnavism' or 'Eaka Saran Namdharma'. But there is vast difference between the systems of the two religions in terms of beliefs and practices. Though they have faith in Namdharma, which is against the worship of any other god or goddess with or without sacrifice, yet they can't abolish their traditional religious system. So they still continue to hold sacrificial worship to their traditional deities. Ahoms, Morans, Mataks, Chutias, etc. came to fold of Hinduism, yet they retained some of their distinct identities and this helped in asserting in the modern period as ethnic communities as against caste identities.

Neo-vaishnavism brought socio-cultural changes among tribal and depressed castes largely in accordance with the peace of their social development. Neo- vaishnavism contributed immensely towards the formation of a broader de-tribalised homogeneous society in the Brahmaputra valley. The Satra Institution, which is the greatest contribution of neo-vaishnavism to the people of Assam, plays a vital role in this regard.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: How is the neo-Vaishnavism movement led by Sankardeva better known as?

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Q 10: How is the neo-Vaishnavism movement different from other forms of Hinduism?

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3.7 LET US SUM UP

- The Sanskritization process of the Brahmaputra valley began from the migration of the Indo-Aryan groups.
- The earlier rulers of the Kamarupa Kingdom like the Varman and the Pala dynasties gave huge land grants to the Brahmins, thus, giving them a foothold into the fabric of the early Brahmaputra valley societies.
- The process of Sanskritization continued under the major ruling group – Ahoms, who had migrated and settled in the eastern Brahmaputra valley during the 13th century.
- Ahoms gradually accepted Hinduism and it impacted their language, customs and even their religion.
- With the advent of neo-Vaishnavism the process of sanskritization spread even further as under the tutelage of Ek Saran Nam Dharma the rigidity of the caste system was negated and a number of tribal people came to be accepted as Hindus.



3.8 FURTHER READING

1) Neog, M. (1965),Sankardeva and His Times, MotilalBanarasidass, Delhi.
2) Bhuyan, A. (2007), Socio-cultural and Political Role of the Naamghar, Towards Freedom, Kolkata.

3) Boruah, N. (2008), Sanskritization and De-tribalization in Early Assam: Some Geographical Aspects, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 69.

3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Kamarupi Prakrit.

Ans to Q No 2: The earliest historical mention of this region in Indo-Aryan comes from Samudragupta's Allahabad inscription, where two kingdoms from the region - Kamarupa and Davaka are mentioned.

Ans to Q No 3: Twelve copper-plate inscriptions, inscribed seals and rock-inscriptions recorded by various kings of Kamarupa during this period have been discovered and deciphered.

Ans to Q No 4: Ha-VrngaVishaya (Habung).

Ans to Q No 5: Tao-Khamti (1380-1389 A.D.

Ans to Q No 6: The Ahoms had their own priests, the Deodhais, Mohans and Bailongs.

Ans to Q No 7: The Ahom kings Suhungmung (1497-1539) was the first to assume a Hindu title – Svarga Narayan.

Ans to Q No 8: PratapSingha.

Ans to Q No 9: EkSarana Hari Naam Dharma.

Ans to Q No 10: Neo-Vaishnavism rejects Vedic ritualism and focuses on pure devotion (bhakti) to Krishna consisting primarily in singing (Kirtan) and listening to (Sravan) his deeds and activities.



3.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: How did the rulers of the ancient Kamrupa kingdom aid the process of sanskritization of the Brahmaputra valley?

Q 2: What are land-grants?

Q 3: What are the sources of information to trace the genealogy of the kings who claim Indo-Aryanised genealogy?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: How did the Ahom kings help in spreading Hinduism?

Q 2: Discuss was Ahom tradition and culture impacted by the spread of Hinduism?

Q 3: Explain how did neo-Vaishnavism impact the caste-tribal relationship in the Brahmaputra valley?

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UNIT 4 : COLONIAL RULE IN NORTH EAST INDIA AND IT'S IMPACT

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Colonialism and North East India

- 4.3.1 Definition of Colonialism
- 4.3.2 The Treaty of Yandaboo and the Beginning of Annexation
- 4.3.3 Impact of Colonialism on Society and Politics
- 4.3.4 The Emerging Middle Class in Assam
- 4.3.5 The Anti Imperialist Movement and North East India

4.4 Let Us Sum Up

4.5 Further Readings

4.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.7 Model Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- describe the different facets of Colonial Rule in India's North East.
- explain how Colonialism and British Colonial Rule has changed the politico-economic and well as societal scenario in this region.
- discuss the emergence of Middle Class in Assam
- analyse the Anti-Imperialist Movement in North East India

4.2 INTRODUCTION

The entire tract presently known as North East India had it's first contact with the British in 1792. Though, missionary works were continuing in the Tibetan border areas and in Bhutan, areas neighboring North East, it was only at the time of *Moamaria Rebellion* that Captain Welsh entered this area at the invitation of the Ahom *Swargadeo* Gaurinath Singha to help him

defeat the *Moamarias.* After that the next important event that cemented East India Company's foundation in Assam was the Burmese invasions and the subsequent treaty of Yandaboo in 1826.

With the plea to save Assam from the atrocious Burmese rule between 1821-1825, the Company's rule solidified it's presence. Alongside, missionary works also stared to flourish. Tilottama Misra, in her seminal work '*Literature and Society in Assam'* gives a detailed history of the activities the missionaries carried out here in Assam. She, mentions that the first group of missionary reached Sadiya, in upper Assam, in the year 1836. Initially, they limited their activities to education and religious works, later they became the harbinger of modernizing Assamese language and literature. But it was not all rosy and glorious, the advent of the foreign rule slowly raised it's ugly head. Economic exploitation led to many peasants' rebellion. Political subjugation gave rise to the sentiments of nationalism. Assam along with the rest of the North Eastern frontier, had for the first time expressed national affinity, a moment most glorious in the history of Colonial Rule in India. In one sense, Assam became an actual part of the Indian peninsula with the rise of the National Movement in the early decades of the twentieth century. So, it is utterly interesting to look at how events unfolded and moulded the history of this part of the world. This unit discusses about the definition of Colonialism and Colonial rule in India in general. Secondly, it explores the confrontation of the British East India Company with the local rulers in this region. Thirdly, it includes the impact of colonialism in society, culture and politics of the region. Fourthly, it introduces the Middle Class in Assam as a consequence of these developments. Lastly but not the least the unit focuses on the growth and development of nationalism and the National Movement in North East India.

4.3 COLONIALISM AND NORTH EAST INDIA

4.3.1 Definition of Colonialism

Colonialism is a process of political subordination through economic exploitation. In Indian context the process of colonialism took place in three stages. The first stage covered the time period

between 1757-1813. It was called the period of mercantilism. The main features of this stage were plunder and direct seizure of power. Extraction of material at a very cheap rate and sell of industrialized products at a very high rate along with elimination all enemies in the competition. After consolidation of the first stage, the second stage started from 1813 and lasted till 1860. This period is called the period of industrial capital or free trade. This stage capitalized itself through portraying the East India Company's rule as a boon for Indian society and economy. It did so by popularizing modernity and development as an invention of the colonial rule in India. The third and the final stage is finance capital and it lasted between 1860-1947. This period is marked by a struggle for new, secure and exclusive markets and raw materials among the industrialized countries.

4.3.2 The Treaty of Yandaboo and the Beginning of Annexation

The annexation of the entire tract then known as the North Eastern Frontier of British India took about seventy years to complete the process. Though Yandaboo Treaty of 1826 opened the gate for Colonial intervention into the tract, the actual process was quite gradual. Initially a small part of the land was taken into direct administration and the rest was restored to the native rulers. One agent to the Governor General of Bengal was appointed to the administration of the Brahmaputra Valley except for Sadiya and Matak. David Scott was the first agent of the Governor General of Bengal in the Brahmaputra Valley. With the annexation the most expected outcome was the resistance movements, first led by the Ahom prince Gomdhar Konwar in 1928. As a result upper Assam, except Sadiya and Matak which were placed under native rulers, was formally made over to the Ahom prince Purandar Singha. With this the first stage of the annexation got over. The second stage came in 1832 with the annexation of Cachar. Cachar which was earlier given to Ganbhir Singh's rule was annexed on 14th of August, 1832. It was followed

by Jayantia Hills in 1835, Purandar Singha's territory in 1838, Sadiya and Matak in 1842, Naga Hills in 1878 and Lushai Hills in 1898.

4.3.3 Impact of Colonialism on Society and Politics

Impact of Colonialism on Indian society in general and North East in particular is a complex study to dwell on. On the one hand the country had broken it's path from Medieval to Modern. Yet this modern phase was not quite happy and prosperous for it's people. Foremost, it was not only a foreign rule, it also was an alien culture altogether. Secondly, language played a very vital role in it. The introduction of English brought in a new era of linguistic politics in India. Thirdly, the impact on economy was unprecedented. The whole country had gone through the lowest phase of it's economy during the colonial rule. In terms of politics, new arrangements were introduced. For example Police, bureaucracy, chambers of commerce etc had brought in a new structure of politics to India.

Before the advent of Colonialism most parts of North East India were ruled by native rulers of different stature, if there were the larger Ahom, Koch and Chuitya Kingdoms, there were smaller kingdoms of Matak, Borahi, Khampti, different chieftains in the Hills. Yet, there existed very few instances of clashes between these rulers. Another significant aspect of the political life in this part of the world is that they had been living in isolation from the rest of India. There was no direct link with the rest of the country before the advent of the British. Tilottama Misra refers to this phase as a phase of darkness in Assam's history as the people living in this region were kept blind to the developments of events those were going on in the other parts of the country.

So, with the annexation of the whole tract of North East Frontier to British India, the land was merged to the rest of the country for the first time. The administrative set up was also quite alien to the people here. The establishment of courts, schools, colleges and all the rest of the government offices, there came the influx of the Bengali people

into Assam. The reason behind this development was that Bengal was already under Colonial rule for sometime then. Hence, the people there had already been accustomed to the colonial administrative machinery. So, the government found it easier to bring the trained officials to Assam than to train the local people here. But this led to the imposition of Bengali in all government offices, schools and courts in Assam in the year 1836. This marked the beginning of the identity politics in Assam. As the subsequent era had given rise to the anti-Bengali sentiments among the Assamese people. One of the most significant outcomes of this was the revival of Assamese language and literature. Starting from *Orunudoi (1841-1863)* the first Assamese magazine, which also served the purpose of a news paper, the period saw the rising numbers in terms of periodicals in Assamese. *Orunudoi* is also a pathbreaker in terms of unfurling the era of secular prose writing in Assamese language. Although the medieval era had witnessed great writers like Madhab Kandali, Sri Sri Sankardev and Sri Sri Madhabdev, they all had been confined to the realm of *Bhakti. Orunudoi* was soon followed by *Assam Bandu, Assam Bilasini, Mou, Assam Hitoisini, Jonaki* etc. But among all *Jonaki* which was started in the year 1888 had remained the most crucial in terms of determining the future course Assamese literature. It also helped to strengthen the identity of an Assamese. The efforts right from 1841 to gain recognition for the Assamese community and to remove the Bengali influence from Assam finally became successful in 1873 when Assamese language was replaced with Bengali in schools and offices in Assam. After this Assamese language has remained the most significant marker of Assamese identity. The people, especially in the *Jonaki* era, who worked valiantly towards securing Assamese from merging it into Bengali were Lakhminath Bezbaruah, Hemchandra Goswami, Guanbhiram Baruah etc.

Another significant impact on society of Colonial domination was the coming of the missionaries into Assam. As mentioned in the introduction, the first batch of the missionaries came in 1836. Though,

they worked independently of the Colonial government, the American Baptist Missionaries worked in close co-operation with the Colonial State. Apart from establishing schools, they were most celebrated for introducing the printing press into Assam. It was the missionaries who started the *Orunodoi*, which eventually changed the course of politics in Assam.

In terms developments in political consciousness, the emergence of different tea clubs established in Calcutta started the new era. In the subsequent section of emergence of national consciousness and participation in the national movement, this particular point is elaborated further. Here we will learn more on the changes in the political structure of Assam in the Colonial rule. Once the annexation process gained pace, for the convenience of the rulers, Assam was made to a chief commissioner's province in February, 1874. In September, 1874, Sylhet from East Bengal was added to this newly formed Chief Commissioner's province. It was a non-regulation province and it's capital was located at Shillong. This set up was continued until 1905, when partition of Bengal was initiated. According to the new setting Bengal was partitioned into two divisions: Western and Eastern Bengal and Eastern part was added to the Chief Commissioner's province and renamed as Eastern Bengal and Assam. This set up continued till 1911 when partition was revoked and administrative unit was put back to Chief Commissioner's Province of Assam (with Sylhet). The next development was the introduction of the establishment of the Assam Legislative Council. The Council had 25 members. Of these 25 members, 13 were nominated and rest were elected. Later according to the Montague-Chelmsford Act of 1919, the numerical strength of the Council was increased to 53, of which 33 were elected.

In terms of the people, as mentioned in the beginning, the entire period of the Colonial rule was a curtain raiser. The people got introduced into a new world. Along with it the concept of nationalism also crept in. So, it can be said that there is a very interesting co-

relation of nationalism to colonialism. It is true to most of the formerly colonies of the world. The colonial administration introduced the Indians to not only a new world, it also taught them to value the strength of their own countrymen. It made the people aware of the power of sovereignty. Hence, Indians realized the power of nationalism. Though, nationalism and patriotism are two different concepts, the core remains the same. It's the consciousness that binds one citizen to another in the same country to work together for the betterment of their country and countrymen while envisaging a brighter future for them. Nationalism is one of the most crucial political concept that developed during the colonial rule. So, among all the political impacts of colonialism on India, growth of nationalism remains the most important.

4.3.4 The Emerging Middle Class in Assam

The emergence of the middle class in Assam is very closely linked with Colonialism. The coming of the missionaries, the introduction of modern education and the expansion of European Tea Planters had founded the base for the rise and growth of the middle class in Assam. People from the old aristocracies came in direct contact with the Tea Planters, a technique that had furthered the process of their continued aristocracy. So, this had given boost to this emerging affluent class' purchasing capacity. This new class was benefitted by the new land revenue system. They were moulded to become a faithful partners of the Colonial State by providing them authority over the land and landless people. So, this landed class could send their sons to Calcutta, the hub of the Colonial modernity, for higher education. It must be remembered that English education is another class determinant of the middle class. So, slowly and steadily there emerged the Assamese middle class who were not only educated but at the same time had hold over the land.

According to Manorama Sarma, one significant aspect of the Assamese middle class was that they were distinct from rest of the

country. In absence of the rich merchants and zamindars, to take advantages of the colonial set up, the Assamese middle class was created differently. It was mainly the families of the British created officials like *Sheristadars, Sadar Amins* and *Mauzadars* who created the bulk of the middle class in Assam. Among them again it was the *Mauzadars*, who were numerically stronger than the rest of the officials. The *Mauzadars,* therefore, formed a very large segment of the well-to-do section of the Assamese society. From the very early days of the British rule, the revenue collectors were called *Chaudhuri* and later *Mauzadar.* Their recruitment was not only done through their ability to collect revenue, but it was mostly done by taking into account their social respect among the people. So, the most convenient mode of appointing the *Chaudhuri* or *Mauzadar* was by selecting people who served in the Ahom administration earlier. As mentioned in the beginning of this sub-section, the process of the making of the middle class in Assam enhanced the prestige of the old aristocracy by broadening the class gap.

In the subsequent times this middle class in Assam helped to create the Assamese intelligentsia right from the end of the nineteenth century. And the Assamese intelligentsia had been the force behind Assam's large scale participation in India's Struggle Against Imperialism.

4.3.5 The Anti Imperialist Movement and North East India

The first phase of anti-imperialist movement in Assam was the resistance to the British annexation of Assam and it's adjacent areas. Gomdhar Konwar first revolted against that annexation in 1828. His lead was followed by many others. These resistances, though could not result in any significant gain in terms of ousting the British influence, instilled the sentiments of patriotism among the people. Soon, the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 connected the region with the mainland in it's fight against imperialistic designs. In Assam, Maniram Barbhandar Barauh more popularly known as Maniram Dewan led

the activism of the movement. Interestingly, two women also took part in the movement, they were Rupahi Aideo and Lumbai Aideo.

The next phase of the anti-imperialist struggle was peasant uprisings in different parts of the province. Mention should be made of *Phulaguri Dhewa (1861)* and *Patharughator Ron (1894).* The popular peasant grievances found expression in these places where the peasants had taken on violent propaganda to uphold their demands.

Next comes the Gandhian Phase of the National Movement. Mahatma Gandhi's arrival into the political scenarios of India in 1916 had marked the emergence of a national leader, a vacuum that had been felt for quite some time. He has been described as the only Indian back then who had traveled across the country in pursuit of building bond with the people of India. He had visited Assam four times. The first time was in 1921. In the year 1920, according to Gandhi's suggestion, provincial congress committees were established in line of linguistic representation of people in a particular area. Accordingly, the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee was established in 1920. The next year Gandhi visited Assam for the first time on invitation of the leaders of the movement in Assam. Gandhi was welcomed with such enthusiasm that made him write his most celebrated article on Assam *Beautiful Assam* in Young India. As part of the Non-Co-operation Movement, his first visit saw large scale participation of both men and women in Assam. During this time Tarun Ram Phukan and Nabinchandra Bordoloi were the president and the secretary of APCC respectively. The Non-Co-Operation Movement was a huge success in Assam. Gandhi visited Assam for the second time in 1926 for the Congress Annual session. This year, the annual session of the Congress was held at Pandu, Guwahati. The President of this 41st session of Congress was S. Srinivasa Iyengar. After that Mahatma Gandhi's name did the magic. The subsequent phases *viz* the Civil-Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement also received large support from the masses. During the Civil Disobedience

Movement, the first lawyers to quit their practice were from Assam. Large demonstrations were taken out against everything that was a symbol of the foreign rule. Since, salt is not produced here in Assam, picketing of shops selling foreign goods and carrying out *Prabhat Ferries* were the main activities. But the Quit India Movement is immortalized for the participation both men and women in all phases of the movement. The two main groups those were active in Assam were *Shanti Bahini* and *Mrityu Bahini.* Above all, the Quit India Movement is immortalized in the history of Assam because of it's youngest martyr, a young girl named Kanaklata Baruah, who died a martyr at a gunshot in Gohpur for defying the Union Jack and leading towards replacing it with the *Tiranga.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1 : What is Colonialism?

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Q 2: When was Assam annexed into British India?

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Q 3: When did Gandhi first come to Assam?

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Q 4: When was Pandu Congress held?

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Q 5: What was the first Assamese periodical?

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4.4 LET US SUM UP

- The treaty of Yandaboo marked the beginning of annexation process of the whole range then known as the North Eastern Frontier of British India.
- The process was actually quite gradual.
- It took over seventy years to complete the process.
- The impact of the Colonial Rule in society and politics of North East India was very eventful. Firstly, it gave rise to linguistic politics. Secondly, it created an atmosphere for the growth and development for Assamese language and literature at the same time.
- This was the time when many periodicals and magazines came into light, among which *Jonaki* stands tallest.
- The *Jonaki* era, beginning from the late nineteenth century founded the ground for the Assamese intelligentsia.
- Another significant aspect of the Colonial rule in North East India was the emergence of the middle class. It was facilitated by three events: the coming of the missionaries, the beginning of modern education and the expansion of the European Tea Planters.
- As resistance against the British annexation started as early as 1828, the domination was vehemently opposed by the people here.
- The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 was joined by Assam through efficient leadership such as Maniram Dewan.
- The next phase was the peasants' uprisings in the late nineteenth century.
- Gandhi's arrival marked the most vigorous phase of the movement.
- The Non-Co-Operation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement had seen full co-operation in Assam.
- The 41st session of the Indian National Congress was held at Pandu, Guwahati, in 1926.



4.5 FURTHER READINGS

1) Barua S. L., *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1985.
2) Gait E, A *History of Assam*, Surjeet Publications, New Delhi, 1905.
3) Misra Tilottama, *Literature and Society in Assam,* Bhabani Publishers, Guwahati, 2011.



4.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q.1 : Colonialism is a process of political domination through economic exploitation.

Ans to Q No 2: Assam was annexed to British India in the year 1826, though the adjacent areas were annexed later, the Brahmaputra Valley, expect for Sadiya and Matak were annexed in this year.

Ans to Q No 3: Gandhi first visited Assam in the year 1921.

Ans to Q No 4: The Pandu Congress was held in the year 1926.

Ans to Q No 5: *Orunudoi* was the first Assamese periodical.



4.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What were the three stages of colonialism in India?

Q 2: Name a few of the Assamese periodicals of the nineteenth century.

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Elaborate the annexation of the Northeastern Frontier to British India.

Q 2: Describe Assam's participation in India's Struggle for Independence.

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UNIT 5 : REORGANISATION OF THE REGION IN THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Reorganization of the Region in the Post-colonial Period

- 5.3.1 Demand for Statehood
  - 5.3.1.1 Bodoland
- 5.3.2 Formation of Different States in NorthEast India
  - 5.3.2.1 Nagaland
  - 5.3.2.2 Mizoram
  - 5.3.2.3 Manipur
  - 5.3.2.4 Tripura

5.4 Let Us Sum Up

5.5 Further Reading

5.6 Answers to Check Progress

5.7 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- describe the process of the reorganisation of the region in the post-colonial period
- explain the demands made for statehood and autonomy by various groups over time and the demands that had been considered to make the region what it is in the present day
- analyse the formation of different states in the region.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Apurba Kumar Baruah in his work *Social Tensions In Assam: Middle Class Politics* states that "Defining a nation in terms of a state means that all states will have to be 'nation states' and therefore accepting this definition of

a nation would imply that in the multicultural societies which have the bond of a state the dominant nationality will either slowly assimilate the minor ones into itself or various nationalities will, over a period of time move towards formation of their own independent 'nation states' and thus a threat to integration will always be imminent in these countries".

The issue of ethnicity, in the Indian context, not only remains an important part of the reality, but also happens to be the source of a series of major problems. Many separatist demands for autonomy, controversies over linguistic and religious issues and insurgent situations are seen to be rooted in the failure of the State to fulfil aspirations of the competing ethnic communities and address such questions in an objective manner.

As put by SubirBhaumik, "India remains a cauldron of many nationalities, races, religions, languages and sub cultures". Similarly, in the Northeast, language, ethnicity and religion has provided the roots of identity which have been sometimes conflicting and sometimes supporting. For Bhaumik, the real threat for the north eastern region of India is the growing criminalization of the movements for self determination and the conflicting perceptions of ethnicity-driven homelands that turn tribes against each other.The struggling ethnicities of the region with conflicting visions of homelands have challenged the 'national-building processess' from time to time.The north eastern region of the country has seen a mixing of different races, cultures, languages and religions which can be rarely seen elsewhere. With an area of about 2.6 lakh square kilometres and a population of over 39 million, the 8 states of northeast is a mixture of around 475 ethnic groups and sub-groups that speak over 400 languages or dialects.

In the Previous Unit, we have learnt about the impact of Colonial Rule in the region. In this unit we shall discuss the formation of different states in Northeast in the Post Colonial Period.

5.3 REORGANIZATION OF THE REGION IN THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

Tribal areas make the bulk of the territory of Northeast India. Special provisions for what were earlier called "the Tribal Areas in Assam" are made

by the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In the colonial period those tribal areas were called 'backward tracts', later replaced by the term 'excluded areas'. They were called so as those areas were excluded from the operation of laws that were applicable in the rest of the British controlled India.

During the British rule, Assam's boundaries were extended to include most of the areas of what constitutes the north east today. The people were to accept Bengali as their official language. After the promulgation of the Inner Line Regulations for the hill areas, Assam was reconstituted as a province in 1874. With the end of the colonial rule, anadvisory committee headed by GopinathBordoloi was set up by the Constituent Assembly, to make recommendations for the development of the tribal areas. The committee recommended formation of autonomous regional and district councils that could provide adequate safeguards to the tribals in preserving their lands, customs, language and culture. And under this recommendation, the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution was created. In the year 1952, five district councils were created in Assam, one each for the Garo Hills, the united Khasi-Jaintia Hills (now Meghalaya), the Lushai Hills, the United Mikir (Karbi) Hills and the North Cachar Hills. However, the Naga National Council's demand for separation from India was not given the benefit of autonomy under the Sixth Schedule as a result of which armed separatism grew in the Naga Hills.In the year 1963, India was prompted to give a separate state status to the Nagas.

In December 1953, the State Reorganization Commission(SRC) was set up in order to consider the question of reorganizing the states of the Union, giving importance to language and culture. After states in India were reorganised along linguistic lines so as to create a closer fit between ethnicity, territoriality and political power, the numerically dominant linguistic groups in each state made a claim to the territory it occupied. Especially in states like Assam and Maharashtra where the proportion of migrant population was high, there were demands for ordinances and legislations to restrict the opportunities and cultural position of the migrants. Political parties from around the northeast region opposed moves for a possible merger with Assam. Proposals were put forward for a Kamtapur state which would encompass

the Goalpara District, the Garo Hills, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal. A proposal for a Purbanchal state with the Bengali-majority Cachar district as its core was also placed. On grounds that the autonomy provisions of the Sixth Schedule did not adequately protect tribal interests, leaders of the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills also raise the demand for a hill state. The armed separatist movement that was growing in the Naga Hills, the mass movement for a hill state below the Brahmaputra Valley and the outbreak of rebellion in the Mizo Hills district led to the break-up of Assam within fifteen years of the linguistic reorganization of India. The Surma Valley was lost to East Pakistan but the Bengali dominated Barak Valley remained in Assam and so did the ethnic rivalry between the Bengalis and the Assamese.

When the process of dividing Assam into smaller states began, by the 1960's five of the eight states of present day Northeast India- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram- were part of the state of Assam. The other two states of Tripura and Manipur were princely states under the Colonial rule. They became 'Part C states' soon after independence and later Union Territories.The States Reorganization Commission in 1955 recommended that Manipur and Tripura be eventually merged with Assam and NEFA was expected to become fully a part of it too.After the reorganization, Assam became just another state, controlling a much smaller piece of territory made up of the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys, KarbiAnglong and North Cachar Hills. H.K. Barpujari, the state's leading historian had argued that breaking up Assam was a disaster. He stated that the policy makers in Delhi utterly failed to realize that in a multi-racial and multi-lingual country, creating linguistic states would open the gates of racism, linguism and parochialism.

5.3.1 Demand for Statehood

Assamese was made the official language of the state in 1960, on the basis of a thin majority which antagonised the small tribe elite. First the hill population launched a separatist movement which ultimately led to the carving out of the state of Meghalaya out of the

territory of old Assam. The first demand for a separate state by the plains tribes of Assam, whose proposed name was 'Udayachal', was made by the plain tribal council in 1967.The aggressive policies of the Assam political leadership of undivided Assam, such as their attempt to make Assamese the official language of Assam, is often cited as one of the major factors of the break-up of Assam and the creation of a new regional order.

In Arunachal Pradesh there was no such demand from within at all. At the time of India's independence, Arunachal Pradesh was known as North East Frontier Area or NEFA. The Panchayati Raj Regulations were extended to NEFA in the year 1969. This led to the creation of GaonPanchaytats, AnchalSamitis and ZillaParishads under the supervision of the Pradesh Council. Its name changed to Arunachal Pradesh when it became a Union Territory in 1973 and it finally became a full state in 1987 along with Mizoram.There was a mild political movement seeking the separation of the hill areas of Assam into a separate state, in parts of Meghalaya. On the other hand, Nagaland and Mizoram were created as a response to the Naga or Mizo rebellions that had sought sovereign statehood. The seven units were all brought together into an institutional arrangement called the North Eastern Council (NEC). Although the Nagas and the Mizos fought for a separate country and settled for a separate state within India, the smaller ethnicities like the Bodosand the Hmars have fought for autonomous homelands that they wished to carve out of the States of Assam and Mizoram. After Assam signed the 1985 accord with the Indian Government, groups like the Bodos, the Karbis, the Dimasas, and the Rabhas felt left out. As a result, agitations which often took the form of violent insurgencies, spearheaded by smaller ethnicities demanding separate homelands emerged.

5.3.1.1 Bodoland

Bodos are the largest of Assam's plain tribes. The feeling of neglect among the Bodos had been accentuated

by the progress made by the hill tribes since the Mizos in the Lushai Hills, the Nagas in the Naga Hills and the Khasi, Jaintias and Garos in Megalaya have been able to establish their separate and distinct identities. Even the tribals in KarbiAnglong and North Cachar Hills have enjoyed limited autonomy due to the autonomous district councils. Because of the presumption that the plaintribals would eventually be assimilated within the larger community of Assam, the problems of the plain tribes had not received due consideration during the formation of the Northeast states. The Bodos being 'plain tribes' could not be covered under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution which provides autonomy to tribal areas and were hence denied autonomy for a long time. As stated by UdayonMisra, the Bodo movement for the assertion of ethnic and cultural identity dates back to 1967 when the two organisations- the Plains Tribal Council Of Assam (PTCA) and the All Bodo Students' Union(ABSU) were formed.Only after the Government of India signed an agreement with the Bodoland Liberation Tigers Force(BLTF), the Sixth Schedule was amended to include the Bodoland Territorial Council in western Assam. This amendment had prompted the Adivasis in the region to demand recognition as Scheduled Tribes. Within two years of signing the accord, militant Bodo groups started armed rebellions and terrorism, attacking politicians and non-Bodo ethnic groups with the slogan: 'Divide Assam fifty-fifty'. The Bodo movement for a separate state destabilised the AGP government as a result of which the government dealt with the movement with vengeance, with the Assam police playing an active role. Ultimately the leadership of the movement gave up the demand for a separate state and agreed to have autonomy instead under the provision of the Bodo Accord of 1993. But the lack of a clear cut boundary and presence of a significant

number of non-Bodos in the proposed Bodoland area created problems and complicated the question of autonomy and the relationship between the Bodos and the non-Bodos living in the BAC area.In2003, a settlement was reached with the Bodoland Liberation Tigers Force(BLTF) which led to the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Council.

5.3.2 Formation of Different States in North-East India

5.3.2.1 Nagaland

The Nagas live on both sides of the hilly border region between India and Burma i.e. in the Northeast states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and Sagaing and Kachin states of Burma. The Naga conflict began when Naga leaders rejected the idea that their land, which was under a special arrangement during the colonial rule, could simply pass on to the Indian hands at the end of the British colonial rule. The politicisation of the Nagas was influenced by ZapuPhizo who had assisted the Japanese and the Indian National Army with the hope that the former would recognize a sovereign Naga state. The Naga National Council which was formed in the year 1946, protested against the grouping of Assam with Bengal and resolved that the Naga Hills shouldcontinue to be included in an autonomous Assam, with local autonomy and due safeguards for the interests of the Nagas. On June 29, 1947, the then Assam Governor, Akbar Hydari had reached a nine-point agreement with the NNC in Kohima. Although a majority in the NNC was initially ready to give the agreement a trial, a minority under Phizo declared independence on August 14, 1947. Their disagreement turned into an armed conflict in the 1950s and the Nagas had to abstain from both the country's first general elections in 1952 and the District Council Scheme as well.

Phizo was criticised by the liberal Naga leaders for changing the meaning of "independence" from "freedom to enjoy the Naga way of life" to a sovereign statehood. On the other hand, Nehru sought an alternative platform to independence and said that given national security and unity concerns, he was prepared to evolve a framework for the fullest Naga Freedom in consultation with the Naga opinion. Accordingly, a Naga People's Convention of five days took place in Kohima in August 1957, with 1760 delegates representing every tribe in the Naga Hills and Tuensang District of NEFA. The Convention agreed to seek a single Naga-Tuensangadministravive unit within the Indian Union and on December 1, 1957, the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area (NHTA) was created as an autonomous district under the Governor of Assam, acting on behalf of the President. A third Convention was held on October 1959, with 3000 representative delegates, where a 16-Point agreement was adopted with the Government of India. Under this agreement, NHTA was to be redesignated as Nagaland and would become a state, administratively placed under the Ministry of External Affairs. Special arrangements were made for the backward Tuensang area for a period of 10 years. But a few months later, Phizo appealed to the United Nations as President of the NNC and denounced the Agreement. In the year 1963, December 1, the Government of India constituted Nagaland as the sixteenth full-fledged state of the Indian Union and that same month Nagaland went to the polls to elect its first assembly of 60 members.

5.3.2.2 Mizoram

Unlike the Naga insurgent movement which was built up slowly over several years in the 1950s, the uprising in the Mizo Hills had a definite time frame.Mautam, a devastating

rat famine in the mid 1960s, ignited passions in the Mizo Hills. The people's anger was directed at both the Assam government and the leadership of the Mizo District Council. After the need for relief was addressed, the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) became a political party the Mizo National Front (MNF). The MNF unleashed 'Operation Jricho' on the midnight of 28 February 1966, which led to the capture of as many as 11 towns in the Mizo Hills by the rebels. The Indian army had to organise one of the most comprehensive counter-insurgency operations to take back the towns. Between 1967 and 1969, the army undertook very comprehensive groupings of villages in the Mizo Hills and at least 80 percent of the population was affected by the regrouping programme. By the late 1970's the MNF's resolve to fight India had weakened and negotiations with the MNF broke off in January 1982. Rajiv Gandhi carried the negotiations to a successful conclusion by giving Mizoram full statehood in June 1986 and by accommodating the MNF in a power sharing arrangement with his own party.

5.3.2.3 Manipur

Many scholars see the state of Manipur as 'miniature Indian state' as multiplicity in ethnic composition and demographic variations in the state have substantive similarities with what mainland India has with the rest of the country.The total population of tribes in the state is a little more than 0.71 million. Meiteis, forming the majority, comprise 56.9 percent of the total population of the state. According to studies, the tribal population comprises 29 tribes in the scheduled list and many other smaller tribes and sub-tribes that are included in the category of 'unspecified tribes'. The Nagas and the Kukis are the two major tribes by current nomenclature. As put by Bhagat Oinam in one of his works,

the series of ethnic conflicts in the state of Manipur- first the Naga-Kuki clash, followed by the Kuki-Paite clash and then the Meitei-Naga tension - find their reference in the type of demographic configuration giving rise to different identity formations and subsequent clash of interests.

According to one of the schools of thought, since the British did not annex Manipur in1891, the state remained independent until paramountcy lapsed in 1947. After that, the Maharaja assumed a new status and the state adopted a new monarchical constitution under which it was governed until its merger with India on October 15, 1949. The politicisation ofManipur can be traced back to the formation of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha by a group of Manipuris in the year 1934. In the year 1938, the forum was renamed as Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. On August 11, 1947, the Maharaja of Manipur signed the Instrument of Accession, which entrusted defence, communications and foreign affairs to the Government of India. The same year, a Manipur Congress seeking complete merger with India came into being which won 24 seats in the 53- member Assembly. The Maharaja's signature for merger was obtained on September 21, 1949 after which the state was formally merged with the Indian Union on October 15.

Manipur, during the Colonial period, was ruled as a princely state. The king of Manipur, four days before India's independence, signed the instrument of accession entrusting defence, communication and foreign affairs to the government of India. After this Manipur adopted a new state constitution under which elections to a state assembly took place and Manipur had a democratically elected state government. Manipur as an independent kingdom was incorporated into India not as an equal member state butas a 'Part C state' and was subsequently made a union territory. Manipur's protest

movements have centred around the demand of a full-fledged state under India's federal framework, which it acquired only in 1972. Also for those seeking the recognition of Meiteilon or Manipuri as one of the official languages of India, the status was granted only in the year 1992.

5.3.2.4 Tripura

Tripura, situated in the Northeastern region of India, was a princely state in the Colonial period. The state is often described as Parbatya Tripura since 70 percent of its total area consists of hills or small hillocks and the rest of the area is plains land situated in river valleys.Historic records of the state show that the then Hindu rulers had encouraged the immigration and settlement of non-tribals in the region, especially Bengalis. The motive behind this was not just cultural contact with Bengal but also the facilitation of revenue collection for the state exchequer through expansion of wet rice cultivation. In the reign of Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya, around 15,000 Hindu Bengali refugees that had fled from East Pakistan were received by Tripura. The CPI had already started working actively among the refugees from 1945. After partition, four-fifths of Tripura's 1001 km long frontier constituted the border with erstwhile East Pakistan but in fact, that frontier was open and unguarded till early 1980s. During the first two years after partition, there was no immediate interchange of population but with the signing of the Delhi pact in the year 1950, about 175,000 Hindu Bengali refugees crossed the border and took shelter in Tripura from the adjoining districts. After 1952, the Government of India adopted different rehabilitation measures to tackle the rehabilitation issue. These included the colony scheme, type scheme, land purchase scheme, etc. About 75 colonies were set up accordingly. The Tripura Government stopped the process

of official registration of refugees from May 1, 1958. Another refugee exodus began from the middle of 1963 due to the riots that took place in Khulna, Jessore and other districts of East Pakistan. The refugee registration resumed in 1964 and finally stopped on March 26, 1971. The number of refugees that came to Tripura during the period of Bangladesh war was a little less than the state's total population. This created a different type of demographic and especially environmental concerns as well as conflicts between the locals and the refugees.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What, according to SubirBhaumik, has challenged the 'nation-building process of the region'?

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Q 2: What was the role of the Bordoloi Committee?

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Q 3: When was the State Reorganization Commission set up?

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Q 4: Which were the two princely states of the region?

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Q 5: What was the proposed name of the state demanded by the Plains Tribal Council?

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Q 6: What was the slogan used during the Bodo-movement?

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5.4 LET US SUM UP

- The history of states reorganisation goes back to the freedom movement of India. Mahatma Gandhi was among the few who opined that the states be reorganised on a linguistic basis, based on his own experience of the Congress witnessing a massive fillip when it started releasing periodicals in their own languages.
- However, after Independence, the Dhar commission and JVP committee negated this division along linguistic lines.
- A major shift in stand towards state reorganisation came in 1952 when a separate Andhra Pradesh was created out of the erstwhile Madras state. This opened up the gates for the demands for statehood by various states. And finally the State Reorganisation Act, 1956, signalled the creation of 14 states and 5 union territories.
- The history of state formation in the North East has not been any different from the rest of the country. If one looks into the history of the region, the first demand for statehood from Meghalaya came precisely because of the Assam Cabinet chose to impose itself on the rest of the hill population.
- According to Udayon Misra, the Asom Sahitya Sabha's demand that Assamese be made the official language of the state and that barring those in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Mizo Hills and Garo Hills, all schools be switched to Assamese was one of the major contributions to the alienation of Assam's smaller nationalities and their demand for separation.
- The "us versus them" debate is very real in the northeast since the ties of ethnicity are not encompassed to territory alone but also to the rights within the territory and the distribution of economic resources.



5.5 FURTHER READING

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5.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The struggling ethnicities of the region, resulting in conflicting visions of homelands.

Ans to Q No 2: The Bordoloi Committee made recommendations for the development of the tribal area by the formation of autonomous regional and district councils that could provide adequate safeguards to the tribals in preserving their lands, customs, language and culture.

Ans to Q No 3: December, 1953.

Ans to Q No 4: Manipur and Tripura.

Ans to Q No 5: Udayachal.

Ans to Q No 6: Divide Assam fifty-fifty.



5.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write a note on the politicization of the state of Manipur.

Q 2: Write about the refugee problem in the state of Tripura

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 3: How is the demand for statehood by communities like the Bodos and the Hmars different from the demand for statehood by the other states of the region?

Q 4: Is the state reorganisation process in North east different from the reorganisation process in the rest of the nation?

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UNIT 6 : ISSUES OF IDENTITY ASSERTION AND AUTONOMY MOVEMENT IN THE REGION

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Meaning and Definition of Ethnicity

6.4 Crisis of Ethnic Identity in Assam: Causes and Consequences

6.5 Autonomy Movement in Assam

6.6 Emergence of Middle Class in Assam

6.7 Let Us Sum Up

6.8 Further Readings

6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.10 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- identify the meaning of ethnicity
- identify the crisis of the ethnic people
- explain the causes and consequences of the crisis of ethnic identity
- discuss the autonomy movements in Assam
- discuss the emergence of middle class in Assam.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

North East India, is perhaps the most heterogeneous region of India characterised by diverse landforms and climatic patterns as well as inhabitance of more than 250 social groups and use of 75 languages. In the previous unit we have discussed about State formation in the Post-Colonial North East India. In this unit, we are going to discuss the crisis of ethnic identity in Assam and the autonomous movements in Assam. We shall learn how the crisis of ethnic identity has resulted in the increasing demands for Autonomous Regions in Assam.

6.3 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF ETHNICITY

Ethnicity is a natural condition of mankind. It is one of the most widespread ways in which people declare and affirm their identity by saying who they are not. In modern world, however, with growing interdependence and interaction among the global communities, there seems to be a kind of extension of the boundaries of the acknowledged humanity. But, not withstanding the various forces of globalization, issues relating to ethnicity, may be in varied forms, seem to continue as a global problem. The problem becomes more problematic when it is associated with militancy and violence. Ethnic, according Webster's Third New International Dictionary, relates to the gentiles or nations not converted to Christainity; community of physical and mental traits possessed by the members of a group as a product of their common heredity and cultural tradition; or indicates the racial, linguistic and cultural ties of people with specific group or exotic primitive culture. According to the Oxford Dictionary, ethnic pertains to race originating from a specified racial, linguistic and cultural group, usually a minority group. Thus, members of an ethnic group, may distinguish themselves on the basis of certain common physio-cultural characteristics. These characteristics arising out of sharing a common habitat and culture, including language and social traditions, give the tribe or nation the resources for developing a common identity, essential for a unified action as a group. Identity – formation on a group level is the very basis of community solidarity.

In any case, atleast two different percetions of ethnicity seem to be apparent. *One*, emphasis is laid on the condition of belonging to a particular bio-culturally defined group or category. *Two,* through an emphasis on the dynamic character mostly reflecting sub-national sentiments. The latest in the series is the stir over the issues of refugee, migrant, and foreigner. It seems, the need of the hour is to build up democratic institutions for dispelling the inter-community mistrusts. Several factors resulted in the migration of a large number of people with wide variety of backgrounds into Assam. As the colonial power wanted to consolidate administration, exploit natural resources, develop the plantations and improve transport and communication, they had

to encourage migration either for dearth of sufficient local human resources or sometimes for administrative and other reasons.

6.4 CRISIS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY IN ASSAM: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

The region is the homeland of various tribal societies with distinct cultural diversities. These communities, though originating from the Mongoloid racial stock, are culturally and linguistically different from one another. Some of the communities of this region belong to the Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman races. Apart from them, Bengalis, Assamese and Nepalese are also living in the region. Cultural diversities also rooted into their religious practices having faith in Animism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism and Christainity. More than 70 percent of the population of the tribes still cling to their traditional occupation of shifting cultivation which helps them to remain with the subsistence ecnomy without much economic and social mobility and development. Politically, they were independent under their respective tribal chiefs, and a form of territorial administration was controlled by them. Thus, the region was divided into a number of independent administrative territories of various tribal communities who frequently fight with each other for the control as well as protection of their lands from other communities. These autonomous tribal territories were not ruled by any king, and thus tribalism was the main feature of the political economy of the tribe-based egalitarian social structure. Feudalism did not penetrate into those territories even to the recent past. The distinct tribal cultures came under the threat of alien culture after the annexation of these territories by the colonial rulers from 1826 onwards. After independence, the reorganisation of Assam further affected the tribals of the region resulting in a number of movements for autonomy. The development of communication brought these communities closer to Christainity, Hinduism and Vaishnavism, and interaction with the alien culture ushered in rapid transformation of these societies. Political domination by the alien people was from time to time protested by the tribals. The decline of tribalism was noticed conspicously along with its egalitarian social values.

The seeds of feudalism and division of population into classes brought impact on their social structure. These ultimately resulted in the emergence of a number of secessionist movements. The Britishers could not control them completely, and thus continuous tension prevailed in the region during their rule in India. The colonial rulers separated the hill tribes from the people of the plains for direct administration and control of the tribals. They, from time to time, matched policies for tribal administration which directly kept the tribals in isolation from the main currents of Indian civilization. The Government of Assam had no power over the excluded areas in regard to their administration. This area was administered by the special power of the Governor of Assam under the Sixth Schedule. But, in the partially excluded areas, the Assam Government had power only over some specific matters. After independence the Government of India by following the act of 1935, provided Autonomous District Council to each hill district under the Sixth Schedule.

After the independence reorganisation of Assam was made on the basis of claims made by some tribals of North-East India. Althought the demand was not fully accepted by the Central Government, a similar new policy was introduced in a hilly area where no such demand was raised by the tribals. With this policy North Eastern Forntier Agency (NEFA) was created, and the administration was run by the Cenral Government through the Governor of Assam till 1972 when it was elevated to the status of state namely Arunachal Pradesh.

Demand for independece or for rule by themselves under the clan chiefs of the respective tribal communities can be traced back to the historical past during the British domination. Sometimes these demands were for the creation of new states within the Republic of India, and some other such demands were separatist in character and even sought to establish sovereign states outside India. The real causes of such movements are not being attended to by successive governments. The Bodos, Nagas, Mizos, Karbis, Ahoms and Tripuris are all having similar causes for launching movements in North East India. All these movements aim at achieving freedom from the alien rulers and their culture to establish their own rules by their own government. This, they think, will provide them political autonomy and allow

the preservation of identity through development of their own language, culture and social values. The decline of political autonomy of the tribal chief and the assimilation of the communities with the non-tribal societies have been perceived as a threat to their identity and existence.

6.5 AUTONOMY MOVEMENT IN ASSAM

The North East India has experienced a good number of tribal movements for the creation of autonomous states. The tribals of Assam percieve themselves to be exploited and oppressed groups and have been protesting for a long time. The factors responsible for such tensions are many such as languge issue, economic deprivation, political transformation, Christianity and cultural transformation under the impact of outsiders. Since all these factors are detrimental to maintaining the identity of a group, the movements appeared to be identity movements. These identity movements are actually political movements for overcoming their percieved socio-cultural oppression and attaining political power and autonomy. The root cause of the social tension and movement lies in inappropriate administrative policies adopted by the British colonial rulers, and the independent Indian governemnt which followed the foot-steps of those colonial policies. Colonialization of the tribal territories of the North East India was not accepted by the tribals which led to frequent confrontation between the tribes and the colonial rulers. The government of India Act, 1935 provided provisions for “Autonomous District Council” for hilly tribal areas with autonomous power under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The “Autonomous District Council” has a number of effects. This provision has encouraged the tribals to demand for an “Autonomous State” although this is not the sole factor for such a demand. The strongest motivating factor seems to be the demand for autonomous state, an independent tribal political system that existed in the region before colonization. The tribal political system was based on independence under the chieftainship. Every tribe of this region had their own respective territory under their own chief and none of them was either ruled by any alien rulers or had they accepted

any alien rulers. This sense of independence has been carried over by the tribals during the colonial rule by the British Government and then by the Indian Government. To them, both are colonial rulers and exploiters. It has been seen that the Bodos, Karbis, Dimasas, Riangs, Rabhas, Kacharis, Morans, Koches, Hazongs, Lalungs, Meches, and many other tribes of Assam have their own respective dialects as a symbol of their own identity. Before the colonial period territorial administration of each tribe along with their respective dialect helped them to remain seperated from other communities. The Assam Government's language policy did not take care of their identity. In 1960 the Assam government declared Assamese as the official language of the state in which hill areas of the tribes were also included. The multi-ethnic and multi-lingual character of the state was being ignored. Morever, the language issue became more acute when Assam Government introduced Assamese as a medium of instruction at the under-graduate level in the universities. While implementing the policy the government did not consider the tribal students' difficulties in getting higher education through Assamese. Both hill and plain tribals demanded English as a medium of instruction.

Administrative responses to these movements were virtually absent or negative and various oppresive method were used to supress these movements. These movements were against the cultural domination and political supression, as the tribals wanted to maintain their cultural, linguistic and religious identities, which they thought would be possible only when a separate state was established. On 20th February 1993, Assam and the Central Government signed the Bodoland Accord, creating Bodoland Autonomous Council. The accord provided autonomy to the Bodos in social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Similarly, the Karbis and the Dimasas of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill districts respectively have been organizing a movement for creating an autonomous state within the state of Assam. The districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar have their own district councils created under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, with the provision to provide autonomy in managing their own societies.

Another movement was being launched from time to time by the Ahoms although their demand is not strongly articulated.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name the act following which the Government of India provided Autonomous District Council to each hill district in the Sixth Schedule.

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Q 2: When did the Assam and the Central Government signed the Bodoland Accord for creating Bodoland Autonomous Council.

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Q 3: In which year was Assamese declared as offical language in Assam?

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6.6 EMERGENCE OF MIDDLE CLASS IN ASSAM

In many ways 'middle class' is the least satisfactory term which attempts in one phrase to define a class sharing common work and market situations. The middle stratum of industrial societies has expanded so much in the last hundred years that any category which embraces both company directors and their secretaries must be considered somewhat inadequate. In popular perception, all white collar work is middle class, but sociologically it is necessary to sub-divide this class into distinct groups sharing similar market, work, and status situations. Conventionally, these class is referred to as the upper-middle class; the junior service class; and the others as the lower-middle class. Thus defined, in India the upper-middle class comprises some 10 percent of the population; the middle class accounts for around 20 percent; and the lower-middle class is 20 percent. Taken together, the middle class is the largest single class in the overall structure.

However, some sociologists would not accept that most white-collar

workers are middle class on the grounds that their employment situation is generally equivalent (or even inferior) to that of many working class people. They prefer to call this group the 'new working class'. This is not a view which most white-collar workers themselves share, nor one which is substantiated by sociological evidence. Equally, the term 'middle class' is new often used by journalists and politicians to refer to what might better be called the 'middle class' of those earning somewhere close to average incomes.

As regards to the term 'upper class', distinctions can be made between the 'old' and 'new' middle class. The former generally refers to the independent professionals whose existence as distinct groups pr-dates the twentieth century expansion of the class as a whole. While the latter refers to all other elements of the middle class; that is, salaried professionals, administrators and officials, senior managers and higher grade technicians who together form the service class, and routine non-manual employees, supervisors, and lower grade technicians who form a more marginal middle class.

According to Professor Dodwell, on the consolidation of British rule the growing demand for administration of professional skill created the urban middle class educated on western lines possessing of professional qualifications. A knowledge of English or English education became essential for securing a job under the government or for liberal profession in law, teaching, medicine or journalism. Hence, there was mushroom growth of English schools and colleges and unprecedented rise in the number of students seeking western education. After the British occupation of Assam, David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, sought to convert the dispossesed nobility of the former government into middle class by absorbing them in the revenue and judicial departments. The spread of eduation, however, elementary, created a middle class of lower income group mostly in rural areas of Assam. Though a few occupied the posts of clerk, copyist and accountant, the majority of them were Choudharies, Bishayas, Patgiris, Gaokakotis, tea-garden mohorrers and teachers in village schools. They had little or no inclination for trade which was then a monopoly of the

outsiders. Since the sixties of the last century when it was obvious to the intelligent section of the Assamese that with the knowledge of Assam alone, they could not expect any other than jobs under the government, and as a result there was a growing demand for English education that would make them eligible for holding higher posts of responsibility and trust under the government. With the spread of English education there emerged the upper middle class intelligentsia in Assam. The members of this class were 'non productive and non commercial in character'. Assamese upper class includes doctors, engineers, lawyers and journalists. The leadership of the community passed from the old official aristocracy to the middle class elite educated on western lines. Inspired by their counterparts in Bengal, they took the lead in trying to remove every evil of the Assamese society and advocated social reforms. Thereby they had a significant role in converting Medieval into Modern Assam. The middle class Assamese appears to have laid greater stress on issues cocerning material interests ot its own class than those of the masses in general. Assamese middle class also played a significant role in the nationalist movement from its very beginning.



ACTIVITY 6.1

Write down some of the autonomous regions of North Eastern States of India.

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6.7 LET US SUM UP

- Ethnicity is a natural condition of mankind. It is one of the most widespread ways in which people declare and affirm their identity by saying who theyare not.

- Two different percetions of ethnicity seem to be apparent. Firstly, emphasis is laid on the condition of belonging to a particular bio-culturally defined group or category, and secondly emphasis is on the dynamic character mostly reflecting the sub-national sentiments.
- The factors responsible for such tensions are languge issue, economic deprivation, political transformation, Christianity and cultural transformation under the impact of alien rulers.
- The government of India Act, 1935 provided provisions of the hilly tribal areas under 'Autonomous District Council' with autonomous power under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.
- Most white-collar workers are said to belong to the middle class on the ground that their employment situation is generally equivalent or even superior to that of many working class people.
- English education has helped the emergence the upper middle class intelligentsia in Assam.



6.8 FURTHER READINGS

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2) Bhattacharjee, C. *Ethnicity and Autonomy Movement*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
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5) Hussain, M. *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity*. New Delhi: Manak Publications.
7) Nuh, V.K. *Struggle for Identity in North-east India: A Theological response*. New Delhi: Spectrum Publications.
8) Phukon, Girin. *Politics of Regionalism in Northeast India*. New Delhi:

Spectrum Publications.

9) Sanjayya. *Assam: A Crisis of Identity*. New Delhi: Spectrum Publications.

6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q No 1: By following the act of 1935, the government of India provided Autonomous District Councils to each hill district in the Sixth Schedule.

Answer to Q No 2: On 20th February, 1993, the Assam and the Central Government signed the Bodoland Accord for creating Bodoland Autonomous Council.

Answer to Q No 3: Assamese was declared as the official language in the year 1960.

6.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Define Ethnicity.

Q 2: What are the two different perceptions of ethnicity?

Q 3: What policy led to the creation North Eastern Forntier Agency (NEFA)

Q 4: What is "Autonomous District Council"?

Q 5: Define the term "middle class".

Q 6: Why did English education become essential during pre-indepedence in Assam?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300 to 500 words)

Q 1: Members of this class were 'non productive and non commercial in character'. Elaborate this statement.

Q 2: Discuss the crisis of ethnic identity in Assam.

Q 3: Explain the role of 'Autonomous District Council' with autonomous power under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Q 4: Write an essay on the Autonomy Movement in Assam.

Q 5: Write an essay on the pre- Indepedence and post- Independence middle class of Assam.

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UNIT 7 : BORDER AND BORDERLAND PEOPLE OF NORTHEAST INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Concept of Border in Northeast India

7.4 Various Policies and Rules Relating to Borders

7.5 Concept of Foothills

7.6 Markets in Borders

7.7 Relationships Among People Across the Borders

7.8 Let Us Sum Up

7.9 Further Reading

7.10 Answers To Check Your Progress

7.11 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will able to-

- describe the concept of border in northeast India
- explain the concept of foothills
- explain how Markets facilitate interaction in borders
- discuss the relationships among people across the borders within the region .

7.2 INTRODUCTION

Border is a dominant theme both in the nation-state discourse as well as in other areas of cultural studies. The term 'border' has multiple meanings and, therefore, has been used to refer to a number of ideas, ranging from a geographically demarcating borderline to its use as a metaphor for cultural and other 'borderlands' of post-modern discourses such as gender, race, social and psychological border. However, the present study focuses mostly on the sociological and geo-political nature of border, especially the

study of a borderland society from a non-statist paradigm and non-territorial epistemology, and chooses to avoid the use of other metaphors associated with border. State-centric paradigm on border and territorial epistemology perceived borders only from the angle of state security and territorial sovereignty and, thereby, overlooked the human side of border. There has been a wide range of academic research and scholarly works on international borders based on state security paradigm. Nonetheless, the present study attempts to investigate the international border by adopting the sociological and anthropological approach and the ethnography method. This thesis attempts to portray the Indo-Myanmar border as the centre arena and the borderlanders as the main actors. The border acts simultaneously as barrier and bridge between differentnation-states. As barriers, borders put both psychological and physical barrier,restricting the flow of people and goods. At the same time, it is also the same spacebridging the nation-states and their citizens, especially those living at the border.

International borders can also be seen as markers or lines of change andcontinuity in the sense that international borders are the creations and products ofmodem nation-states that altered or changed the age-old geography of a community orcommunities by a new and modem system of cartography. At the same time, it is anundeniable fact that most international borders today still act as lines or points ofcontinuity, especially of cross-border movements of people, cross-border ties andrelationships, cross-border culture, and trade in goods and services which have continued forcenturies.Borderland refers to territorially and socially distinct zones between two nationstates.Bolton defines the Spanish borderlandsas culturally and geographically distinct regions that housed a distinctive mixture ofnatives and the Europeans. The distinctness of the region lies in itsdistinct socio-cultural, economic, political and geographical nature. According toWillem Van Schendel (2005) “A ‘borderland’ is a zone or region, within which liesan international border, and a ‘borderland society’ is a social and cultural systemstraddling that border.” These borderland societies have distinctive socio-cultural,economic and political character, and have triangle power relations between the states,regional elites and the local people. In this unit we shall discuss the concept of Border in Northeast India and the relationship

among people across the different borders in Northeast India.

7.3 CONCEPT OF BORDER IN THE NORTHEAST

Border is a dominant theme both in the nation-state discourse as well as in other areas of cultural studies. The term 'border' has multiple meanings and, therefore, has been used to refer to a number of ideas, ranging from a geographically demarcating borderline to its use as a metaphor for cultural and other 'borderlands' of post-modern discourses such as gender, race, social and psychological border. The Indo-Myanmar borderland argues that borders are not merely fixed dividing lines demarcating state's territories but they also encompass multiple webs of relations and meanings. This is because of the fact that though the structure of physical border is fixed and static, the border populace are active, mobile, dynamic, and share multidimensional networks of relations. In the northeast, India shares 1643 km of border with Myanmar covering 520 kmin Arunachal Pradesh, 398 km in Manipur, 510 km in Mizoram and 215 km in the stateof Nagaland. In fact, most of the north eastern statesin India are bounded by other neighbouring countries except through the small Siliguricorridor through which this region is connected to 'mainland' India.

Even in the post-colonial era, this region remained as a marginal space or aperiphery of both India and Myanmar in terms of integration, assimilation,development, academic research and media. This marginalisation is more intense inacademic research, for very little or no work has been done on the borderlanders of thisborder. It was only in the recent years especially in the post 1990s that the Indo-Myanmarborderland and the communities inhabiting this mountainous tract have emerged as asite of debates and discussions. The reasons are numerous, which include the menace ofinsurgency, violence, ethnic clashes, drug and illegal arms trafficking and, moreimportantly, for its strategic location in proximity with China and other South EastAsian nations. The seemingly strategic engagement of India with Myanmar in recent years isseen as a ploy to contain the growth of Chinese influence in the neighbourhood, and a plan to promote economic

ties with the Association ofSouth East Asian Nations (ASEAN) through the Look East Policy (LEP). However, it is often overlooked that along this static border,there are communities and ethnic groups who for centuries have maintained relationshipsoverriding the recent demarcated Indo-Myanmar border. Ethnic communities such asthe Naga tribes and sub-tribes, Kukis, Chins, Mizos, etc., have been living along thisborder for ages. Moreover, most tribes in northeast India have an emotional bond whichruns over the Indo-Myanmar borderland, as they share similar historical roots and racial andcultural affinities with the people of South East Asian countries.

Even at the time of independence of India and Burma, the Indo-Burma boundarywas not specified in the Independence Acts of both the countries. This was left to bedecided by the newly independent states. But it was left undemarcated formany years especially due to the casual relationship between India and Burma.Anotherprominent factor could be the growth of insurgency in Northeast India and theirlinkages across the border with their ethnic cousins.After a gap of more than 20 years of independence, the first bilateral agreementon boundary was signed between India and Burma in 1967 at Rangoon, which delimitedthe entire India-Burma boundary. From 6th to 10th April 1968, the joint India-BurmaBoundary Commission held its first meeting in India and formulated tentative plans foractual demarcation from November 1968 to April 1969. However, the actual physicaldemarcation of the boundary could commence only on 1st December 1968(Government of India, Ministry of External, Affairs, Report 1968-69). Subsequently,several boundary pillars were planted along the boundary. However, the Indo-Myanmarboundary remains largely porous without any fence, though the Assam Rifles, aparamilitary force under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, isstationed along this border. This is how the Indo-Myanmar border came into being,initially as a means to satisfy the colonial interests of the British, which was inheritedand sustained by post-colonial India and Myanmar till the other day. The demarcation of thisboundary, based on state-centric security paradigm, had negated the essence of thosepeople who have been living in this region prior to the advent of the British. They wereneither consulted nor informed about the

border demarcation which runs through theirbackyards and houses. Families, villages and tribes were divided and placed under twonation-states. They were separated and given the citizenship tags as Indian and Burmeseor Myanmarese. However, despite this imposed division, the ethnic bonds and clan tiesremained very strong across the border. There is a vibrant cross border linkage in termsof socio-economic, cultural and kinship relationship.

7.4 VARIOUS POLICIES AND RULES RELATING TO BORDERS

The India–Myanmar barrier is a border barrier that India is constructing to seal its 1,624-kilometre long border with Myanmar. India hopes to curtail cross-border crime, including goods, arms and counterfeit currency smuggling, drug trafficking, and insurgency. The United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) also warned that the region could become a major transit point for illicit drugs because of the poor state of border security facilities. Indian security forces blamed the porous border for the deaths of 200 security personnel and civilians in militancy-related violence in the region in 2001-2003.Four Northeast Indian states share border with Myanmar: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur. Both national governments agreed to conduct a joint survey before erecting the fence. The Indian Home Ministry and its Myanmar counterpart completed the survey within six months and in March 2003 began erecting a fence along the border. For permitting locally produced commodities, to be traded as per prevailing customary practices on both sides of the India-Myanmar border, an agreement on border trade between India and Myanmar was signed on 21st January, 1994 and operationalised on 12th April, 1995. The Agreement envisages that border trade will take place through Custom Posts at Moreh in Manipur and Zowkhathar in Mizoram, corresponding to Tamu and Rhi respectively in Myanmar. Two important developments have taken place since the operationalisation of border trade agreement. This includes a shift from Barter to Normal Trade and another shift from Border Trade to Normal Trade that can take place through land border.

The effects of a border on economic interaction depends on the nature

of that border with respect to degree of openness, degree of cultural, racial and linguistic differences, political relations and the degree of economic disparities. Economic and political tensions are directly related to the degree of economic disparity. At the same time, large differentials in relative factor costs, for example cheaper capital on one side and cheaper labour, skilled as well as unskilled on the other, tend to encourage cross border production sharing as well as cross border shopping and employment. The extent and shape of such behaviour vary widely and are strongly influenced by the degree of asymmetry in the economic, social and political organization The Basics of Public Policy 9 in each. Public Policy with such a broad and holistic view raises certain interesting methodological questions.

The relations of this region with the neighbouringcountry of Myanmar is based on long historical and cultural ties. Butdue to colonial occupation of this region and lack of proper developmentand connection to mainstream India, the region became a safe haven forinsurgents, criminals and drug trafficking. These activities have itstransnational connections in the countries like Myanmar and plays verycrucial role in determining the relations of both the countries. In the decade of the 90s, with the start of LookEast Policy initiatives, India focused on the south East Asia region andgave preference to this region on account of changing political, economicand strategic dynamics. The northeastern region of India is a major link which not only has the possibilityof establishing good ties with ASEAN countries, but also has scope forboosting growth and development of India in general and northeast Indiain particular. Myanmar is a major border country of India which has a longshared border area with India. India is looking forward to enhancinggood relations with Myanmar, thereby alleviating the underdevelopment andpoverty of the region and eradicating the problems like insurgency in theregion. Boosting ties with Myanmar will also rekindle the old cultural tiesgenerating the feeling of goodwill among the people. It is said thatmaintaining cordial relations with a country only on economic grounds is tiresome and temporary.However, if the relationship is based on common culturalheritage and social and religious affinities, it can providea great impetus not only to economic ties, but also to bilateral solidarity.

7.5 CONCEPT OF FOOTHILLS

Foothills or piedmont are geographically defined as gradual increases in elevation at the base of a mountain range, higher hill range or an upland area. They are a transition zone between plains and low relief hills and the adjacent topographically higher mountains, hills, and uplands. Frequently foothills consist of alluvial fans, coalesced alluvial fans and dissected plateaus.The hill stations in *North East* India spread across the *foothills* of the Himalayas form the rich landscape of the *region*.

7.6 MARKETS IN BORDERS

North Eastern India shares land border with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal and has agreements of overland trade with these countries through Land Custom Stations notified under Section 7 of the Customs Act, 1962. While for trading through LCSs situated on Bangladesh and Bhutan borders, there is a Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), Border Trade Agreements have been entered into with China and Myanmar.Border trade is different from trade through air, land or sea ports as trade through ports involves clearance through customs and has large volume. Border trade in contrast is “over-land trade” by way of “exchange of commodities” from a bi-laterally agreed list by people living along both sides of the international border.For permitting locally produced commodities, to be traded as per prevailing customary practices on both sides of the India-Myanmar border, an agreement on border trade between India and Myanmar was signed on 21st January, 1994 and operationalized on 12th April, 1995. The Agreement envisages that border trade will take place through Custom Posts at Moreh in Manipur and Zowkhathar in Mizoram, corresponding to Tamu and Rhirespectively in Myanmar. 40 items are permitted for border trade between India and Myanmar, with 5% duty. The undersigned is directed to refer to Department of Commerce OM No.9/3/2009-FT(EA) dated 28.9.2010 on the above subject and to state that Moreh and Zawkhathar Land Customs Stations have been notified under Section 7 of the Customs Act, 1962 without any restriction regarding the mode of trade. Notification 9/95 Customs as amended

by Notification 62/2010 Customs allows a concessional rate of duty of 5% ad valorem only on 40 items specified in the notification. However, normal trade can take place through the above LCSs as per the prevailing Foreign Trade Policy provisions and on payment of duty at applicable rates.

One of the apparent constraints on the growth of trade, which is often talked about, is the poor state of infrastructure, starting with road connectivity and telecommunication to facilities at border transit points and banking and other financial networks. State of infrastructure and connectivity influences transit and transaction costs involved in trading. Obviously better connectivity and overall state of infrastructure would lower transit and transaction costs and facilitate trade. But the fact that informal trade continues to sustain with the state of infrastructure remaining what it has been, indicates that its poor state is not the fundamental constraint on the growth of border trade. If other issues related to trade are sorted out and the people and the governments on both sides of the border come to view trade to be a beneficial prospect, the infrastructure bottlenecks can be dealt with through a suitable investment package. Insight gathered in my investigations, directs me to argue that the institutional factors, especially those relating to trade and exchange rate policy of Government of Myanmar, are more fundamental hurdles in moving towards an orderly and legitimate system of Indo-Myanmar border trade.

NER, therefore, must modernise cross-border supply chains to unlock value and create business opportunities. This has to be done jointly by state and union governments. First, the rise of synchronised commerce needs integrated supply chains. The expansion of e-commerce supply chains and start-ups pave the way for further visibility globally. Second, NER states may undertake drastic reforms in labour and land regulations.

7.7 RELATIONSHIPS AMONG PEOPLE

The ethnic composition of Northeast India is complex and unique.This is mainly because of the extensive migration of variousethnic groups from the surrounding East and Southeast Asianregions in the ancient times. There had also been raids andinvasions by many invaders from Burma on the one

side andfrom the Indian plains on the other. A large number of tribal groups living in Northeast India aredescendents of those who migrated here centuries ago fromcountries like Mongolia, Tibet, China, Laos, Cambodia andThailand. Therefore, this region can better be called a'Mongoloid India' and culturally it is a part ofSoutheast Asia.

The most important characteristic feature of the region is its ethnic heterogeneity comprising people that speak more than a hundred languages and dialects providing· a unique cultural mosaic. Some of the ethnic communities of the region includes: Assam (Bodo, Karbi, Koch-Rajbanshi, Mishing, Mishimi, Ahom, Chutia); Arunachal Pradesh (Nishi, Dafla, Sulung, Sherdukpen, Aka, Monpa); Manipur (Meitei, Naga, Kuki); Mizoram (Lusei, Pawi, Paite, Bru, Reang); Meghalaya (Khasi, Garo, Pnar); Nagaland (Angami,Ao, Chaksang, Makware, Zeliang); and Tripura (Reang, Chakma, Deobarma, Usai). The Constitution of India provides special protection (autonomy) of the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Assam under the Sixth Schedule qualified by Article 244 and 244A of Part X of the Constitution. Beside this, the Constitution also protects the socio-cultural practices of the states of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh under Articles 371A, 371B, 371C, 371G and 371H. As this region is situated in the transition of East, Southeast and South Asia it has seen diverse groups migrating there in different points of time. Nagas have sub-tribes in Myanmar; the Singphos of Arunachal have in Myanmar, Yunnan (China) and Laos under the name of Jingpho; the Sherdukpens and theMonpas of West Arunachal are from Tibet; Zomi and Chins in Manipur and Mizoram are from Myanmar; Tai Ahoms of Assam are from Thailand. The Ahom community of Assam belongs to the Shan branch of Tai family who had migrated from Yunnan through Upper Burma. In Burma, Thailand and Yunnan (China) they are called as Shan, Siamese and Dai respectively. Kinship ties, relationships through marriages and the usage of common language further cement the ties between Tripura and Bangladesh. The movement of people throughout this region can be explained from the fact that various trade links existed across borders since ancient period.

Many people in northeast share similar cultural and genealogical

backgrounds with the people in Myanmar. The ethnic Burman is generally associated with Tibeto-Burman language family and so has been the case with ethnic Ahoms. Again Mons or Nagas of Nagaland have ethnic connection and social interaction with their counterparts in Myanmar. Again Chins situated in the western part of Myanmar and Mizos in the Northeast are bound by ethnic connections. Shans of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand have ethnic bondwith Shans of the Northeast. Khamtis and Singphos of Arunachal Pradesh are seeking Shan identity. They are interlinked with Kachin also. All of them are Buddhists and have similarity of customs and traditions. In short, it can be stated that various groups of Myanmar have their counterparts in the Northeast.

This is also revealed that there had been extensive migrations in the region covering the trans- Himalayan and other Asian areas. Through such migrations there had been transfer of cultures along with populace. The people of the region are aware about their ethnic-cultural links with surrounding areas. However, in present times, most of them are on the verge of losing such linkages due to a number of factors which include nationalising tendencies penetrating from rest of India. The potential points of such linkages could serve the purpose of building a strong bond with the countries of East and Southeast Asian nations. This would, in the present age of globalisation, serve the economic purpose of India, and in turn bring prosperity to the region as well. Such potentiality seems to have exerted influence in the minds of policy makers of our country. But sections of people are still optimistic that such policy, if implemented properly at a sooner date, would transform Northeast India into a hub of Indian trade with Asian economic giants, and this would develop the region and many of the problems from which the region has been suffering would disappear automatically. The usage of various modern technologies of communication would help in reenergizing the age-old cultural relations. In the present age of globalization where there is increasing cultural assimilation, there is scope for reshaping the ancient cultural contacts. This would greatly contribute to the strengthening of social aspects of the relations of people across the border.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Which are the states in the Indo-Myanmar border?

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Q 2: Briefly state the concept of foothills?

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7.8 LET US SUM UP

- Border is a dominant theme both in the nation-state discourse as well as in other areas of cultural studies. The term 'border' has multiple meanings and, therefore, has been used to refer to a number of ideas, ranging from a geographically demarcating borderline to its use as a metaphor for cultural and other 'borderlands' of post-modern discourses such as gender, race, social and psychological border. The Indo-Myanmar borderland argues that borders are not merely fixed dividing lines demarcating state's territories but they also encompass multiple webs of relations and meanings. This is because of the fact that though the structure of physical border is fixed and static, the border populace are active, mobile, dynamic, and share multidimensional networks of relations.
- Informal trade,which continues to sustain with the state of infrastructure remaining what it has been, indicates that poor infrastructure is not the fundamental constraint to the growth of border trade.
- Theethnic composition of Northeast India is complex and unique.This is mainly because of the extensive migration of variousethnic groups from the surrounding East and Southeast Asianregions in the ancient times.

- The most important characteristic feature of the region is its ethnic heterogeneity compromising people that speak more than a hundred languages and dialects providing· a unique cultural mosaic.
- If Northeast India is transformed into a hub of trade with Asian economic giants, the region will see development and many of the problems from which the region has been suffering would disappear automatically. The usage of various modern technologies of communication would help in reenergizing the age-old cultural relations. In the present age of globalization where there is increasing cultural assimilation, there is scope for reshaping the ancient cultural contacts. This would greatly contribute to the strengthening of social aspects of the relations of people across the border.



7.9 FURTHER READING

1) Bareh H.M. *Encyclopaedia of North East India, Volume 6 Nagaland.* Mittal Publications, New Delhi 2011.

2) Barpujari H.K.*North East India Policies, Problems and Prospects.* Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1998.



7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The India–Myanmar barrier is a border barrier that India is constructing to seal its 1,624-kilometre (1,009 mi) long border with Myanmar. Four Northeast Indian states share the border with Myanmar: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur.

Ans to Q No 2: Foothills or piedmont are geographically defined as gradual

increases in elevation at the base of a mountain range, higher hill range or an upland area. They are a transition zone between plains and low relief hills and the adjacent topographically higher mountains, hills, and uplands. Frequently foothills consist of alluvial fans, coalesced alluvial fans and dissected plateaus.



7.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Answer Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What do you understand by the term Border?

Q 2: Explain in brief the Various Policies and Rules Relating to Borders?

Q 3: Write short notes on Markets in border areas?

Long Answer Questions (Answer each question in about 350-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the concept of border in northeast India?

Q 2: Explain the markets in the bordering areas of Indo-Myanmar border?

Q 3: Discuss in detail the relationship of the people across the border?

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