

CHAPTER - II

THE LOCALE OF THE STUDY

The second chapter 'The Locale of the Study' describes the study area of this research work. Describing study area is very important because through defining locale of the research we can present an authentic document in an organised manner that could be convenient as well as helpful to understand, evaluate and describe the research work. The locale of the present study is located in Silchar Town of Assam.

2.1. ASSAM

The word 'Assam' as interpreted by some scholars is derived from the Sanskrit word '*Asoma*' meaning '*peerless*' or '*unparalleled*'. But the widely accepted opinion of the academic circles today is that the term has come from the original name of the '*Ahoms*', who ruled the land for about six hundred years prior to its annexation by the British. The races like Austric, Mongolian, Dravidian and Aryan that came to this land long-long ago have contributed to its composite culture. Thus, Assam has a rich legacy of culture and civilization.

Assam was known as Pragjyotisha or the place of eastern astronomy during the epic period and later named as Kamrupa. 'The earliest name of the Assam was Prajyotishpur. Scholars think that in ancient times astrology was studied in the north-east region of India and that was why the region came to be known as Pragjyotishpur. The name Pragjyotishpur found mentioned in the epics and in the ancient Puranas', (Dutta: 1995: 1). The earliest epigraphic reference to the kingdom of Kamrupa is found in the Allahabad pillar inscription of king Samudragupta. 'Kamrupa is mentioned as a '*Pratyanta*' or frontier state outside the Gupta empire but with friendly and subordinate relation to it Hiuen Sang, the Chinese scholar pilgrim who visited Kamrupa in about 743 A.D. on an invitation of its monarch, Kumar Bhaskar Varman, left a record of the kingdom he called Kamolupa. Kamrupa also figured in the writings of the Arabian historian Alberuni in the eleventh century. Thus, from the epic period down to the twelfth century A.D., the eastern frontier kingdom was known as Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa and kings called themselves Lords of Pragjyotisha', (www.assamgovt.nic.in).

The advent of the Ahoms across the eastern hills in 1228 A.D. was the turning point in Assam history. They ruled Assam nearly for six centuries. The Burmese entered through the eastern borders and overran the territory at a time when court intrigues and dissensions were sapping the vitality of the Ahom royalty.

‘Ruled by various dynasties - the Palas, Koches, Kacharis, and Chutiyas - Assam was in constant warfare among these princes until the coming of the Ahoms in the thirteenth century, who were later overthrown by the Burmese warriors. The British, whose interests elsewhere were threatened by these developments, ultimately drove out the Burmese invaders, and, after the Treaty of Yandabo was concluded with Burma (now Myanmar) in 1826, Assam became a part of British India. A British agent, representing the governor - general, was appointed to administer Assam, and in 1838 the area was incorporated into British - administered Bengal. By 1842 the whole of the Assam valley had come under British rule. In 1874 a separate province of Assam was created (administered by a chief commissioner), with its capital at Shillong’, (Encyclopaedia Britannica: 2008).

In 1905, Bengal was partitioned and Assam was amalgamated with eastern Bengal; this created such resentment, however, that in 1912 Bengal was reunited, and Assam was once more made a separate province. During World War II, Assam was a major supply route for allied forces operating in Burma. Several battles fought in the area in 1944 (for example, at Bishenpur in Manipur and Kohima in Nagaland) were decisive in halting the Japanese advance into India.

With the Partition and Independence of India in 1947, the district of Sylhet (excluding the Karimganj subdivision) was ceded to Pakistan. Assam became a constituent state of the Indian Union in 1950. In 1961 and 1962, Chinese armed forces, disputing the McMahon Line as the boundary between India and Tibet, occupied part of the north - east Frontier Agency (present Arunachal Pradesh but then part of Assam). In December 1962, however, they voluntarily withdrew to Tibet.

Since the early 1960s, Assam has lost much territory to new states emerging from within its borders. In 1963, the Naga Hills district became the sixteenth state of the

Indian Union under the name of Nagaland. Part of Tuensang, a former territory of the north-east Frontier Agency, was also added to Nagaland.

In 1970, in response to the demands of the tribal peoples of the Meghalaya plateau, the United Khasi and Jaintia hills and the Garo districts were formed into an autonomous state within Assam; in 1972, it became a separate state called Meghalaya. Also in 1972, Arunachal Pradesh (the North East Frontier Agency) and Mizoram (from the Mizo hills in the south) were separated from Assam as Union Territories; both became states in 1986.

Despite the separation of these ethnicity-based states, communal tensions and violence have remained a problem in Assam. In the early 1980s, resentment among the Assamese against "foreigners", mostly immigrants from Bangladesh, led to widespread violence and considerable loss of life. Subsequently, disaffected Bodo tribesmen (in Assam and Meghalaya) agitated for an autonomous state. The militant United Liberation Front of Assam waged a guerrilla campaign for the outright secession of Assam from India until agreeing to end their rebellion in 1992.

Assam is the sentinel of north - east India and gateway to the north - eastern states. The state is close to India's international borders with Bangladesh and Bhutan. Assam is surrounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on the east and Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram on the south. The physical features of Assam dividing the hills and the plains into component parts drawn by nature herself, have greatly contributed to the growth of heterogeneous culture.

Assam is the state of India, located in the north - eastern part of the country with an area of 78,438 sq km. It is bounded to the north by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh; to the east by Nagaland and Manipur; to the south by Mizoram and Tripura; and to the west by Bangladesh, Meghalaya, and West Bengal. The name "Assam" is derived from the ancient Ahom word *Asama* (peerless). The neighbouring states of Arunachal, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya were once part of Assam. The capital, formerly Shillong (now the capital of Meghalaya), was shifted to Dispur, a suburb of Guwahati, in 1972, (Encyclopaedia Britannica: 2008).

‘Average temperatures vary between 35°C and 38°C and 6°C and 8°C. Fogs and brief showers mark the cool season. Assam escapes the normal Indian hot, dry season. Some rain occurs from March onward, but the real force of the monsoon is felt between June and September, when widespread and destructive flooding often occurs. Rainfall in Assam is not only the highest in the country but also ranks among the highest in the world; its annual average varies from 1,778 mm in the west to more than 3,048 mm in the east’, (Encyclopaedia Britannica: 2008)

‘The state of Assam is located in the heart of India’s north - eastern region and lies between 24.48⁰ and 27.9⁰ north latitudes and 89.42⁰ and 96.10⁰ east longitudes. It is the gateway to the sister states of the N.E. Region for essential supplies and communications and hold substantial part of defence installations which have made the state strategically very important and justify speedy development and progress’, (Sharma: 1993: 3-4). On the eve of the coming of Ahoms in the 13th century, the Kacharis and Chutias were ruling over a large part of eastern Assam. Next came the Aryans who settled in the Brahmaputra valley at an early time. Of course, among different races, the Aryans could establish their cultural supremacy over this country.

A land of plains and river valleys, Assam has three principal geographical regions: the Brahmaputra river valley in the north, the Barak river valley in the south, and the hilly region within the districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills, lying between these two valleys. The main physical feature is the valley of the Brahmaputra, which according to Hindu mythology is the son of Lord Brahma, and rises from a sacred pool of Brahmakund in neighbouring Arunachal. It enters Assam near Sadiya in the extreme north - east and runs westward across the length of Assam for nearly 724 km. before turning south to enter the plains of Bangladesh. Studded with low, isolated hills and ridges that rise abruptly from the plain, the valley is rarely more than 80 km. wide and is surrounded on all sides, except on the west, by mountains. Numerous streams and rivulets flowing from the neighbouring hills empty into the Brahmaputra.

The Barak river valley in the southeast forms an extensive lowland area that is important for agriculture and supports a - relatively dense population. Only a small portion of this valley, however, is within the state's borders. Geologically, the

Brahmaputra and Barak valleys lie on alluvial sediments up to 1.6 million years old, which themselves cover a variety of tertiary deposits (from 1.6 to 66.4 million years old). Among these deposits is hard sandstone, soft and loose sand, conglomerates, coal seams, shales, sandy clays, and limestone.

The Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar hills form part of the Meghalaya plateau, which may have been an extension of Gondwanaland (ancient landmass in the Southern Hemisphere that once grouped together South America, Africa, Australia, and part of the Indian subcontinent). Isolated from the main plateau by the embankments of the Kepili river, this upland displays a rugged topography. It has, roughly, a northerly slope, with average elevations ranging from about 457 m in the Mikir hills to about 1,006 m in the central portion of the Karbi Anglong district.

The northern ranges, which extend from Dabaka (east of Dispur) in the south - west to Bokakhat in the north - east, attain an average elevation of 610 m. Major peaks in the north include the Basundhari hills (774 m), Raisang (738 m), Mehekongthu (639 m), and the Kud hills (626 m). The Rengma hills in the south average about 914 m; their most prominent peaks are Chenghehishon (1,359 m) and Khunbaman hills (1,311 m).

Earthquakes are common in Assam. The most severe ones in modern times occurred in 1897, with the Shillong plateau as the epicentre; in 1930, with Dhubri as the epicentre; and in 1950, with Zhihou (Rima) in Tibet at the Arunachal Pradesh border as the epicentre. The 1950 earthquake is considered to have been one of the most disastrous in history. It created heavy landslides that blocked the courses of many hill streams. The floods that followed the bursting of these artificial dams caused more loss of life and property than the earthquake itself, (Sen: 1999: 228).

Social and Cultural Life:

Broadly, the inhabitants of Assam can be divided into three categories, namely the tribal population, the non - tribal population and the scheduled castes. The Tribal's consist of different ethno - cultural groups such as the Kacharis (Bodos), the Miris, the Deoris, the Rabhas, the Nagas, the Garos, the Khasis, etc. The non-tribal groups include Ahoms, the Kayasthas, the Kalitas, the Morans, the Muttaks, the Chutias, etc.

The scheduled castes includes the Basfors, Baniyas, the Dhobis, the Hiras, the Kaibartas and the Namasudras, etc. The immigration was mostly from Bengal, Bangladesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Nepal and Rajasthan. Another group was known as “Baganias” who were brought from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh by the British tea planters during the British period for employment. Some of the early settlers of Assam were of Aryan and Dravidian stock. The original inhabitants were known as the Kiratas of divergent tribal groups as mentioned in the ‘Mahabharata’. The fusion of divergent cultures of the Aryan, the Dravidians, the Austriacs and the Mongoloid races take shape into composite culture.

According to the census of India 2001, the population stands at 2, 66, 55,528 of which 1, 37, 77,037 are male and 1, 28, 78,491 female. The decadal growth rate of population of the state was (18.92 per cent).

Following table has some main indexes of the population of the Assam:-

Table 2.1.: The Population of the Assam

Sl. No.	Unit	Categories	1991 Census	2001 Census	2011 Census
1.	Population	Lakh	224	267	335
2.	Decadal growth	Percent	24.24	18.92	32.33
3.	Density	Per sq. km.	286	340	470
4.	Sex ratio	Females per 1000 males	923	935	987
5.	Literacy	Percent	52.89	63.25	76.49
6.	Urban Population	Percent	11.10	12.90	68.90
7.	Rural population	Percent	88.90	87.10	90.89
8.	S.C. Population	Percent	7.40	6.85	12.78
9.	S.T. Population	Percent	12.83	12.41	14.78

Source: Economic Survey of Assam, 2010-11

There is a gradual development of liberalism in religious system in Assam. The indigenous groups are Animism, Tantricism, Brahminism and Vaishnavism. The Assamese were practising Tantric forms of rituals until the advent of the new

Vaishnavite religion formed by Shrimanta Sankardeva, (1449-1568). The pristine form of Hinduism began only when the Aryans arrived in Assam.

The present Hindu caste system had emerged with the immigration of outsiders. Neo Vaishnavism entered the land in the 15th century and is the dominant faith of the Assamese people at present. The Assamese society is an open society based on the principles of liberalism. It allows the idol worshippers of Durga, Kali, Saraswati, and others to follow the Vaishnava faith. The Muslims started coming in the 13th century and established mosques in Assam. Christianity began to grow in the state from the time of the British rule and spread out to all corners of the eastern regions quickly. Caste system has never taken firm roots in the Assamese social stratification.

The distribution of population is uneven, reflecting the hilly terrain, the number of rivers, the forests, the small amount of cultivable land, and the lack of industrialization. Population growth in the twentieth century has been unusually rapid, owing mostly to the immigration into Assam of tea - garden labourers, herders from Nepal, Muslims from West Bengal, and refugees from what is now Bangladesh. The state is inhabited by about 26.6 -million people, of which (12.4 per cent) are Scheduled Tribes and (6.9 per cent) Scheduled Castes. The density is 340 persons per sq km. About (87 per cent) of the population is rural. Recent increases in the urban population reflect the growth of industries, increased commercial activity, and the desire of the Bangladeshi refugees to live near towns. The annual growth rate is (1.73 per cent). Only Guwahati has a fairly large urban population. The sex ratio is 932 females per 1,000 males.

The Ahoms are considered to be a Thai - Buddhist tribe who arrived in this area during the thirteenth century and established their capital in Sibsagar. Later they adopted Hinduism. The people of the plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys are mainly Indo-Iranian. By the time of their arrival in the Brahmaputra valley, it would appear that the original Aryan people of Assam had become intermixed with Asiatic peoples. Assamese is the official and principal language of the state. An unbroken record of Assamese literary history is traceable from the fourteenth century. The people of the Cachar district in the Barak valley mostly speak Bengali.

‘About two-thirds of the Assamese are Hindus, and about a quarter are Muslims. The Muslims are mostly recent settlers from Bangladesh or converts belonging to the lower strata of Hindu society. The percentage of Hindus varies from (29 per cent) in Dhubri district to (94 per cent) in Dhemaji district. Over (50 per cent) of the Muslim population in the state is in Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, and Hailakandi. There is a considerable concentration of Christian population in Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Karbianglong, and the North Cachar hills. A majority of the Hindus follow Vaishnavism, which venerates the- deity Vishnu’, (India: 2010).

Assamese tribes are classified among the Asiatic peoples, and speak dialects of Tibeto-Burman origin, with the exception of the Khasis, who speak an Austro - Asiatic tongue. Missionaries have converted many of the hill tribes to Christianity, but the majority still observes the customs and festivals of their traditional religion, which is based on animism. The Mikirs and Kacharis of the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills are mostly Hindus; although they speak dialects of Tibeto-Burman origin, they have adopted Assamese as their first language.

Festivals and Tourism:

Assam is a land of fairs and festivals. Most of the festivals celebrated in Assam have their roots in the diverse faith and belief of her inhabitants. They reflect the true spirit, tradition and life style of the people of Assam. The culture of Assam is a rich tapestry woven with multi-coloryarns of distinct heritage of all the races that inhabit there. The predominant language is Assamese.

The cultural life of Assam is interwoven with the activities of a number of cultural institutions and religious centres, such as the satra (seat of a religious head, the Satradhikar) and namghar (prayer hall). Satras in Assam have been looking after the religious and social well being of the population for the last 400 years. The Assamese people observe all the pan-Indian religious festivals, but the most important celebrations are the three Bihu festivals. Originally agricultural festivals, these are observed with great enthusiasm irrespective of caste, creed, and religious affinity. Weaving is another important aspect of the cultural life of the people of Assam, particularly of the women. Every Assamese house, irrespective of caste, creed, and

social status, has at least one loom, and each woman is required to be skilled in producing fine silk and cotton cloths.

Assam has an exclusive range of colorful festivals. Bihu is the chief festival celebrated on the three occasions. Rongali Bihu or Bohag Bihu marks the advent of the cropping season and it also ushers in the Assamese New Year. Bhogali Bihu or Magh Bihu is the harvest festival and Kati Bihu or Kongali Bihu coming in autumn is a simple affair.

Religion accounts for a large variety of festivals. Vaishnavites observe birth and death anniversaries of prominent Vaishnava saints through day-long singing of hymns and staging of Bhaonas (theatrical performances in traditional style). Ambubachi in Kamakhya shrine, Sivaratri Mela at Umananda and other places near Siva temples, Durga Puja, Diwali, Dol-Jatra, Id, Christmas, Ashokastami Mela, Rash Mela, Parasuram Mela are other religious festivals.

Important places of tourism in and around Guwahati are Kamakhya temple, Umananda (Peacock Island), Navagraha (temple of nine planets), Basistha Ashram, Dolgobinda, Gandhi Mandap, State Zoo, State Museum, Sukreswar temple, Gita Mandir, Madan Kamdev temple, a magnificent archaeological place of interest, and Saraighat bridge.

Other places of tourist interest in the state are: Kaziranga National Park (famous for one horned rhino), Manas Tiger Project, Pobi-tora and Orang (wildlife sanctuaries), Sibsagar (Shiv Temple - Rangghar - Karengghar), Tezpur (Bhairavi temple and scenic beauty), Bhalukpung (Angling), Haflong (health resort with Jatinga hills), Majuli (largest river island in the world), Chandubi lake (picnic spot), Hajo (meeting point of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam), Batadrava (birth place of great Vaishnava saint Sankaradeva) and Sualkuchi (famous for silk industry), (India: 2010).

Economy:

About (63 per cent) of the state's working force is engaged in agriculture and allied activities. More than (79 per cent) of the total cropped area is utilized for food crops production. Rice is the principal food crop. Jute, tea, cotton, oilseeds, sugarcane, potato and fruits are the main cash crops. Forest account for (22.41 per cent) of the

total area of the state, (India: 2010). Assam's tea gardens produce just over half of the country's tea and contributes about one sixth of the world's entire tea production.

In Assam, the tea industry provided a stimulus to the development of communications in areas which were previously inaccessible. Many ancillary industries like plywood, fertiliser, aluminium foils are supported by tea industry as they find an organised market for their product in it. At present more than one million workers are directly employed in the plantation and in the factories producing tea. Besides a large number of people get indirect employment from the tea industry, (Phukan: 2001: 16).

Assam holds a unique position in respect to mineral oil production. Coal, limestone, refractory clay, dolomite and natural gas are the other minerals found in the state. Extensive oil reserves were found in the 19th century and Digboi became the site of Asia's first oil refinery.

Agriculture is of basic importance to Assam, engaging about two - thirds of the total working population. Another 10 per cent are employed on tea plantations, in forestry, or in other occupations related to agriculture. Rice accounts for about two-thirds of the sown area. Tea and jute, widely cultivated in the Brahmaputra valley, are important foreign - exchange earners. Assam grows about half of the country's tea. Other crops include oilseeds, pulses (legumes such as peas, beans, or lentils), sugar cane, rape (an oil-yielding plant, the leaves of which are used for fodder), mustard, potatoes, and fruits. The state produces a surplus of cereals, but there is a shortage of oilseeds and pulses. Double-cropping and other improved methods of cultivation are being introduced. Rice, jute, and maize are grown. There are over 9,000 sericulture villages.

The largest of the north-eastern a state of India, Assam is the Gateway to the north - east of India. Assam, the land of unexplored opportunities welcomes to its land of plenty. Both the Central and State Governments are attaching a great deal of importance to create an investment friendly climate in the state and are offering a whole range of subsidies and incentives to set up industrial units in the state with the Central Government earmarking (10 per cent) of Union Development Budget for north-east India.

The economy of Assam can be broadly divided into three sectors-Primary (agriculture, mining, etc.), Secondary (manufacturing) and Tertiary (services like electricity, water, trade, finance, banking, telecommunication, etc). Assam has few industries of significance except for tea and oil. Industrial development is inhibited by its isolation from the rest of India, by a bad transport system, a small local

market, and the lack of sufficient capital. Several industrial enterprises have nevertheless been started, including a fertilizer plant; jute, paper, silk, and sugar mills; and a cement factory. Sawmills and plywood and match factories make use of timber resources. An oil refinery at Digboi dates from the early twentieth century, and a refinery near Guwahati started production in 1962. A refinery in Bihar is supplied with crude oil from Assam through a pipeline.

The index of industrial production in the state moved to 152.82 in 2006-07 from 159.10 in 2005-06. The index of industrial production has been worked out at 152.82 in 2006-07 which is lower by 3.94 per cent than the previous years.

The production of some selected items is shown below:-

Table 2.2.: Industrial Production

Sl. No.	Item	Unit	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
1.	Tea	000 Tonnes	454.1	443.3	654.7	438.9	530.9
2.	Wheat Flour	000 Tonnes	94	174	207	220	202
3.	Coal	000 Tonnes	629	738	628	956	1058
4.	Jute Textile	000 Tonnes	7285	7291	7903	5910	7227
5.	Petroleum Crude	000 Tonnes	4746	4571	4724	4429	4426
6.	Cement	T000 Tonnes	313	336	341	251	175
7.	Fertilizer	000 M.T.	186.5	240.6	203	222	308

Source: Economic Survey of Assam, 20010-11

Forest Resources:

The state of Assam has a rich forest cover encompassing nearly a quarter of its land area. Roughly half of the forests are reserved. Blessed with plentiful rainfall, the forests are a reserve of such commercially useful produce like timber, bamboo, stone, cane, etc. Bamboo is the best natural engineering material on this planet. Government of Assam's objective is to promote bamboo as a substitute for wood, to make it the timber of the 21st century. India's (64 per cent) and world's (20 per cent) growing stock of bamboo grows in N.E. India. North-east annually harvests bamboo worth of 500 billion rupees. Consumption of wood is rising at (10 per cent) per annum in India. As a substitute for wood, it can be extensively used as a material for building, scaffolding and furniture.

Among the wildlife reserves are Kaziranga National Park (on the bank of Brahmaputra river) and Manas Wildlife Sanctuary (bordering Bhutan), both refuges for the fast - disappearing great Indian one - horned rhinoceros and both declared World Heritage Sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. Timber and bamboo, firewood, and lac (the source of shellac) are important forest products. There are about 74 species of trees, of which two - thirds are commercially exploited. The production of commercial plywood amounts to some 32,956,000 sq. m. Wild animals such as elephants, tigers, deer, and wild pigs inhabit the forests.

Mineral Resources:

Assam is rich in mineral resources like Coal (320 Mn.T.), Limestone (703 Mn.T.), Iron Ore (11 Mn.T) and Granite (1 Bn. Cu. Mtrs) along many more resources like Fireclay, Lithomarge, Fuller's Earth, Sillimanite and Glass Sand. The coal found in Assam has a high sulphur content and high volatile matter content, thereby reducing its coke ability.

Limestone with reserves of about 500 million tones is another important resource and is available in various grades. The China clay available in the Karbi-Anglong district is a vital input for the ceramics industry and has already spawned a few small plants. Deposits of decorative stone like granite estimated to be more than a billion cubic

meters are available in various shades and colours, which have a huge market potential locally and abroad.

Assam is rich in natural resources, minerals, forests and water and has vast tracts of fertile land. It is primarily an agrarian economy, with (74 per cent) of its population engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Cereals like paddy, wheat and plantation crops like tea are grown extensively. Amongst mineral resources, oil takes the top place. Oil was first struck more than one hundred years ago and the oil well of Digboi and other areas are a major source of fuel for not only the north-east but for the country as a whole.

Minerals exploited commercially in the state include petroleum, coal, natural gas, and limestone. Oil is found, in the districts of Dibrugarh and Sibsagar in northeastern (Upper) Assam; Assam produces petroleum and natural gas. In the last century extensive oil reserves were found, and Digboi became the first oil refinery in Asia. Later such refineries were also established in Guwahati and Noonmati. Coal, used locally by the railways, tea estates, and steamships, is found in Upper Assam and in the district of Karbi Anglong. Limestone is quarried in the Mikir hills.

Energy/ Oil/ Gas Based industry:

Assam has over 1.3 billion tones of proven crude oil and 156 billion cu. mt of natural gas reserves. Superior quality of natural gas is available at an attractive price. Assam accounts for about (15 per cent) of India's crude output. The wells at Digboi, Duliajan, Sivasagar, etc. also produce Natural gas accounting to about (50 per cent) of India's total onshore production.

Communication Infrastructure:

Poor transport and communication systems have hindered economic development in Assam. Geography has limited accessibility and inhibited the growth of efficient transport systems. The Brahmaputra, for example, is a major barrier to integrating the road and rail networks lying north and south of the river. (Assam is linked to India by only one railway line and one major high - way.) Inland - water transport, historically of major importance, was curtailed after 1947, when the partition of India placed the

lower Brahmaputra in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). There is considerable air traffic between Assam and Kolkata. Towns with air service include Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur, and Silchar. The road length is 34,423 km.

Transportation:

The major modes of transportation in Assam are roadways, railways, airways and inland waterways. At present, there are two roads cum rail bridges and one road bridge over the river Brahmaputra. Construction of a fourth bridge is about to start and feasibility report on a fifth bridge has been recently completed.

Roadways:

Assam has total road length of approximately 69,000 km. covering both metalled and non-metalled surfaces. That accounts for approximately (60 per cent) of the total road length in the north-east. The major towns in the state are connected by National Highways. During the next five years, the Government will strive for the development of roads specifically in the industrial areas.

Railways:

The total route length is about 2435.13 km. Assam has a convenient railway network connecting the state to the rest of the country. Within the State, all the major towns like Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Jorhat, Nagaon, Guwahati, Tezpur, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, etc. are well connected by the railway network. B.G. line connection is up to Dibrugarh and M.G. line with Haflong and Silchar.

Airways:

The Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport at Guwahati is 18 km. from the city centre and is well connected to New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai. Indian Airlines, Air Sahara, Jet Airways, Air Deccan, Kingfisher Airlines, SpiceJet and Indigo fly operate regular flights to and from Guwahati.

Air India also operates an international weekly flight between Bangkok and Guwahati. There are also regular intra - state air services connecting the six civil airports (Guwahati, Tezpur, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, and Silchar and North Lakhimpur) of

the state. Some of the tea gardens have their own air - strips and aircrafts. Air traffic is sometimes emerged as the only way in the region.

Inland Water Transport:

The river Brahmaputra has been declared as the second National Waterway of the country. Two Government-owned organisations (Central Inland Waterways Corporation and Directorate of Inland Waterways, Assam) operate water transport services on the river Brahmaputra and Barak on a commercial basis. These services are used for the transportation of passengers and goods alike. To many places in the hinterlands, a waterway is the only mode of transport.

Assam's internal waterway network connects it to Bangladesh, giving it access to the ports of Chittagong (Bangladesh), Kolkatta and Haldia (West Bengal, India). The Government has taken a major initiative for the development of port infrastructure in State.

Telecommunications:

The present telecommunication network in the state is growing fast in comparison to the other parts of the country. Currently, individuals and industry alike face no problems in procuring telephone and other telecommunications facilities Assam has 269 telephone exchanges with approximately 1, 20,000 working connections. The growth rate approximately matches the demand and the shortfall if any, is marginal. Mobile telephone services are available throughout the state.

Media scenario in Assam comprises of newspapers, magazines, television channels and radio channels. Some of them are:-

News Papers: *Asomiya Pratidin, Asomiya Khabor, Amar Asom, Dainik Asom, Aajir Dainik Batori, Dainik Janasadharan, Dainik Janambhumi, Dainik Agradoot, Aji, The Telegraph, The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, The Times of India (Guwahati Edition), Samay Prabha, Dainik Jugasankha, Dainik Purvadaya, etc.*

Magazine: *Angana, Bismoi, Gariyashi, Maya, Priyo Sakhi, Rahasya, Trishnatur, Nandini, Sishinfak, Electic, Prantik, Saha Parivar.*

Television: *News Live, Ne TV, DY 365, DD North - East, Rang, Ne HiFi, Ne Bangla.*

Radio: *All India Radio, Big FM 92.7, Gup Shup 94.3, Radio - ooolala, 93.5 SFM.*

The use of radio and television is more in urban centric in nature. The causes of this lack in media usage may be due to lack of electricity, poor income, etc. In the world of fast changing Communication and Technology; people using extensive internet and various software's etc, it is depressing to note that people in Assam do not use these basic means of mass communication or to be said in an more appropriate manner do not have access to these basic technologies i.e., radio and television which has become an important member of our family. It is a fact that television has acquired a special position in our lives in a way that people think of placing the television in the most appropriate place with designing their home especially the drawing room of middle-class and upper- middle-class families.

2.2. BARAK VALLEY

Barak Valley, which derives its name from the nature of the main river Barak, is situated in the southern part of the Indian State Assam with area of 6,922 sq. kms. It is bounded on the north by Jaintia Hills, North Cachar Hills and Nagaland, on the east by Nagaland and Manipur, on the south by Mizoram and Tripura, and on the west by Bangladesh and Jantia Hills of Megalaya.

The Barak river valley in the south-east forms an extensive lowland area that is - important for agriculture and supports a relatively dense population. Only a small portion of this valley, however, is within the state's borders. Geologically, the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys lie on alluvial sediments up to 1.6 million years old, which themselves cover a variety of tertiary deposits (from 1.6 to 66.4 million years old). Among these deposits is hard sandstone, soft and loose sand, conglomerates, coal seams, shales, sandy clays, and lime stone.

According to Bhattachrjee, geographically the valley is an extension of the Bengal plains, registering slow and gradual changes in the physical features as one travels from here to anywhere in Bengal or vice versa. Naturally Indo - Aryan settlement extended into the valley from Bengal in early time in its spontaneous east ward march

to farthest limits of the ploughable areas, which the flood prone plain regions remained uninviting to Jhoom cultivators of the neighbouring hills.

The river Barak which forms the valley divided itself at Karimganj into two tributaries; namely, Surma and Kushiara which flowing through Sylhet confluence and fall into the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh. River flows through north - eastern India and eastern Bangladesh with 900 km. in length. It rises in the Manipur Hills in northern Manipur, where it is called the Barak, and flows west and then south - west into Mizoram. There it veers north into Assam and flows west past the town of Silchar. The river next splits into two branches, the Surma (north) and the Kusiara (south) which enter Bangladesh and turn south - west. The Surma flows past Sylhet in a rich tea - growing valley, while the Kusiara subdivides into two more branches, both of which rejoin the Surma. At Bhairab Bazar, in east-central Bangladesh, the river enters an old channel of the Brahmaputra and becomes the Meghna river, which flows south past Dhaka (formerly Dacca) and merges with the Ganga. Steamers can navigate the river as far upstream as Silchar in the rainy season, (Encyclopaedia Britannica: 2008).

All parts of valley depicts a uniformity in landscapes, natural resources, climate and vegetation while differ significantly from the rest. The hill ranges consisted of the Khasi - Jaintiya Hills, the North Cachar Hills and the Mizo Hills pose a sudden barrier but towards Bengal the gradual change disturbed the valley formation at no stage.

Different kings ruled different parts of the valley from ancient times. In the fifth century A.D. the valley was ruled by the Deves of the Bhatara plates. According to Rajendralal Mitra their Rajas were the Sovereign of Kachar (Cachar) in the sixth-seventh century A.D. The valley must have been included in the territory of the Varmans of Kamrupa as Maharaja Bhaskar Varman, who ruled the valley is found in six copper plates recovered from Nidhanpur village in Panchkhanda Pargana of Sylhet district of undivided Surma valley. The accounts of the Huen-t- Song also suggested that Sylhet and Cachar were parts of Bhaskara's empire. In the seventh century A.D. Varmana empire fell down and the Harikela (ancient name of Srihatta or Shrihatta Deshe) state emerged. The existence of the Harikela state clearly rules out the

possibility of such a state during seventh to tenth century. The fall of Harikela led to formation of Tripura state which initially covered Cachar, Sylhet and Tripura plains. The Tripuri capital in the region was first established on the bank of the Rukni river in Cachar. Even today, the cave temple of Shiva in Bhutan till was established by the Tripur's (R.K. Nath 1981) and then it moved to Tripura in the thirteenth century A.D. Sylhet including Karimganj passed into hands of the Muslim ruler of the Bengal from the fourteenth century A.D. where as the Cachar remained under the Tripuri Rajas. The Tripuri rule in Cachar did not last long after the separation of Sylhet. Chila Ray, the brother of the Maharaja Naranaryana of Cooch Behar defeated the Tripura Raja and the Raja of Cooch Behar appointed Kamalnaryan the governor of Cachar who eventually declared his independence and laid the foundation of the Khaspur state popularly known as Dehan Kingdom, (Bhattacharjee: 1991).

From the 16th century, the Dimasa rulers of Maibong had in the meantime started to expand their territory towards the Cachar plains. Jasnaryan the Dimasha Raja of Maibong (1583-1613) annexed a portion of Cachar valley bounded the North Cachar Hills and pushed the boundary into the Moughal district of Sylhet. He claimed himself as Shrihatta Vijayina or conqueror of Sylhet.

In fact the process of state building in Mailbong that started with Nirbaynarayana reached its climax during the reign of Kirtichandranarayana (1735-45). By the time his son Gopichandranarayana (1745-57) became the Raja the state was fairly large and prosperous and then his son Harishchandra was Yuvraj and the Commander - in - chief of the army. While his nephew Lakshmichandra was the Aditya or head of the Dhrampur Visaya (central Cachar), meanwhile the last king of Coch, Bhim Singha, grew old and his only daughter Kanchani was married to Lakshmichandra Demasa, Raja of Mailbong in 1745. Afterward Bhim Singha died and the capital of Cachar was shifted to Khaspur (today near Udarbong of Cachar district). Cachar thus passed under the Demasa rule of Khaspur. Gopichandra was succeeded by his son Harishchandra II (1757-72). But he preferred the life of a Sanyasi (Baul Raja) and abdicated in favour of his cousin Lakshmichandra Narayana (1772-73), but he died after a year. Then his son Krishnachandra (1813-30) succeeded him and then came the end of the Dimasa rule in Cachar. Meanwhile the British annexed the south Cachar in

1832. Cachar was placed under a superintendent and eventually made a district in Bengal. In 1874 when the chief commissionership of the Assam was constituted, consisting of the Assam valley and the hill, the Surma valley district of the Sylhet and Cachar were transferred to the new province, (Bhattacharjee 1986), (Nath: 2001: 24-26).

After independence, Silchar, Hailakandi, Karimganj and Halflong were sub - divisions of the Cachar of the valley. But in 1953 the Halflong (North Cachar Hills) was separated from the Cachar plains region of Barak Valley. The Barak Valley or Cachar district was divided into two districts, Karimganj in 1984 and Hailakandi in 1989.

The valley consists of three districts namely, Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi having three -district portion - the hills, which are tales of Barial Range, the plains, which form the exception of certain extremity of the Surma Valley of Greater Bengal and the water lands which are linked with marshes of today's Bangladesh. It must not, however, be supposed that the whole of this valley is actually level land though it is generally classed as plain. To the south much of the country is still covered with primeval forest. Further north the higher land has been cleaned and planted out with tea, while the lower levels are covered with both rich crops of weaving rice and crystal water. Also rubber plantation is a major contribution factor in the development of Barak Valley's economy.

The main city of the valley is Silchar whereas, Karimganj, the district head-quarter of Karimganj district, is the second largest town in valley. It is considered the cultural center of Barak Valley.

The population of Barak Valley is 29, 94,977. Men population is 15, 40,362 and women comprises of 14, 51,215. The literacy percentage of Barak Valley is (64.82 per cent) of which male comprises of (72.56 per cent) and female is (55.93 per cent).

The official language of Barak Valley is Bangla. However, majority of people speak a dialect, which is known as Sylheti Bangla. Religious composition of the valley population is Hindu (50 per cent), Muslim (46 per cent), and others (4 per cent).

Hindus are majority in Cachar (60 per cent) while Muslims are majority in Hailakandi (57 per cent) and Karimganj (53 per cent).

This beautiful valley is a natural continuation of the Bengal and is considered as north-east Bengal even today.

Media scenario in Barak Valley:-

Pre-independence period: The media of Barak Valley is essentially print media oriented. The first newspaper of Barak Valley, *Silchar* came out in the year 1889. It was edited by Bidhu Bhushan Sen who was a teacher by profession. The first English language newspaper, *Eastern chronicle* came out in 1908 from Karimganj. It was started by national leader Bipin Chandra Pal. The newspaper greatly contributed towards Indian freedom struggle which was a newspaper as well as a views paper. The first daily newspaper of Barak Valley was *Surma* which was earlier a weekly newspaper but was transformed into a daily newspaper during the World War I. The first English magazine to be published from Barak Valley was the *Surma Valley Magazine* in 1927. *Graha Laxmi* was the first women edited newspaper of Barak Valley published in 1937 from Karimganj. Its editor was Kanakprabha Devi. On the backdrop of World War II, a Newspaper named *Azad* was published in 1940. It was edited by the Veteran journalist Hurmat Ail Bar Laskar. This paper was a strong supporter of Indian freedom struggle. *Bijoyni* was a monthly magazine edited by Jyotsna Chanda in the year 1940. The work of Jyotsna Chanda was highly encouraged by Rabindra Nath Tagore.

Post-independence period: The first Bengali daily newspaper published after independence was *Dainik Prantajyoti*. In the year 1948, a Veteran journalist Badhya Nath started, a weekly newspaper named *Muktipradip* which was later discontinued. Later in 1950 he started another weekly newspaper named *Jugasanka* which is still in publication as a daily newspaper from Silchar under the name *Dainik Jugasanka*. Presently, a number of newspapers are published from Barak Valley and they are:- *Dainik Jugasankha*, *Dainik Prantajyoti*, *Samayik Prasanga Ploknofom* (Manipuri), *Dainiki Batori* (Assamese), *Purvadhaya* (Hindi), *Silchar Times*, *The Sentinel* (English), *Navabarta*, *Prashanga* (published from Karimganj), etc.

Television and Radio: Television was started in Barak Valley on 4th December, 1984 by relaying programmes from Delhi through its Low power Transmitters. High power Transmitters started on 26th September, 1987. The regional Bengali language programme was initially started for 30 minutes a day on 11th October, 1991. The 30 minutes programme was telecasted for 5 days in a week. There is only one Doordarshan Kendra in Barak Valley which is located in Silchar Town. All India Radio, Silchar is serving the people of Barak Valley by imparting education, information and entertainment for last 36 years.

2.3. CACHAR DISTRICT

In ancient period this tract of land was known as 'Haidimbadesh'. According to mythology 'Haidimba' a demon was inhabiting this place. While in exile Prince Bhima, one of the heroes in Bhagavat Purana the sacred text, happened to meet 'Haidimba' and married to her. To them there was born Ghototkoch who ruled this country. Hence, the name of 'Kotch' as 'Kachari' came into usage from the 16th century A.D. and the Kachari kings were known as 'Haidimbeshwar' according to several inscriptions of the time.

The Kacharis did not get their name from Cachar. It is rather possible that the district of 'Cachar' got its name from the word 'Kachar' which is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kaccha' which means lower region of a mountain. It is also possible that the district came to be known as 'Cachar' when the 'Kacharis' settled here. The tribe possibly came to be known as the 'Kachari' as they preferred to live in the 'Kachar', i.e., the lower region of mountains, (Dutta, 1973).

The Kacharis of Cachar are generally supposed to be a section of the Tibeto-Burman family. The original place of this powerful race was somewhere between the Yearkhanoldaria and the Khasqardaria rivers in the Gobi desert of central Asia. They came down to Assam in successive waves and settled down permanently. Gradually, their population increased and they travelled on land and water to 'Nilachal' the hill near Guwahati, from Nilachal they moved forward and finally they settled down at Dimapur. At the beginning of the 13th century, they occupied the western portion of Sibsagar and large part of Nowgaon district.

Being harassed by the Ahoms, a race of the people of the great Shan - Thai family who migrated to Assam in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. the Kachari kings retreated southwards in the middle of the 16th century A.D. to Maibong in the North Cachar Hills, (Choudhury, 1972).

The Ahoms never gave up chasing the Kacharis as they were determined not to be subdued by the Ahom. In December 1706 A.D. Rudra Singh, one of the most powerful Ahom king successfully invaded Maibong whereupon the Kachari king, Tamradhwaj, fled southwards to Khaspur and appealed to the Jaintia king for help to recover his last territory. But, unfortunately he was treacherously seized by the Jaintia king. Lastly, the Jaintia king was severely defeated by the Ahom army. The captured Kachari king was rescued by the Ahom and as reinstated on the Kachari throne. From that time onwards, the Kachari princes seemed to have settled in the plains of Cachar, their Court being located at Kashpur. The Kachari king Suradarpa Narayan re - organised the people and improved the capital.

The first connection of the British with the district dates from 1762 A.D. when Mr. Verelst marched from Chittagong to assist the Manipur King Jop Singh, who was driven away from his throne by the Burmese and halted with his army at Jatrapur near today's Silchar town. The army remained there for about a year but due to the difficult route to Manipur the army could not proceed further. Ultimately, Mr. Verelst was recalled. The next historical event of importance was the conversion of the King Krishna Chandra to Hinduism in 1790 A.D. A few years later, the last prince Govinda Chandra was driven away from the throne by Manjit Singh of Manipur with help of the Burmese. Afterwards, the Burmese drove Manjit Singh from this place to Surma Valley. The Burmese then threatened to annex Cachar, but the British Government which was in possession of Sylhet was unable to permit a powerful nation to extend its territory close to the frontiers of Sylhet. Taking the side of the Kachari King, they expelled the Burmese and handed back the state of Govinda Chandra in 1830. But he was assassinated by a batch of Manipur marauders. During the Kachari reign numerous Bengali emigrants came from Tripperah, Mymensingh, Rongpur and Sylhet to Cachar and settled here.

The district of Cachar was formally annexed by the British under the proclamation of August 14, 1832. After the annexation of Kachari Kingdom by British the management of the affairs of the district was entrusted to Lt. Fisher, an officer of approved ability and great local experience for some months. Cachar continued to be administered from Cherrapunji, the headquarters of the Agent to the Governor General. But considering practical difficulties, early in 1833, Fisher had his headquarter at Dudpatil which was however soon shifted to Silchar for the sake of convenience. In 1832, Viceroy Lord Bentick captured Cachar, which was then a small part of undivided Bengal. Before Cachar had been taken over by the British it covered great area of land, present day's Nawgoan, Hojai, Neelbagan and Doboka were also within the border of Cachar. But as soon as the British came they completely changed the scenario of Cachar.

In 1950 under the leadership of Surendranath Banerjee the people of India destroyed Lord Curzon's scheme to divide Bengal into two parts. But in 1911 the three districts; namely, Cachar, Srikhatta and Goalpara were transferred from undivided Bengal to Assam. Cachar and Sylhet were the twins of the valley of Surma. The language and literature, state and politics, everything, of the two areas were dependant on each other.

Cachar district in the Barak Valley is bounded on the north by the North-Cachar Hills district, on the east by the Manipur state; on the south of the state by Mizoram and on the west by the Sylhet district of Bangladesh and Tripura state of India. It is the gateway to Manipur and Mizoram states of north - east. The total area of the district is 3,786 sq. km. Its population according to the census report is 14, 44,921 with male population comprises of 7, 43,042 and female 7, 01,879. The people are settled in both rural and urban areas. There are approximately 1,050 villages in Cachar district. The urban population is (11 per cent) and rural is (89 per cent). Cachar has two subdivisions:- Silchar and Lakhimpur. Its head - quarter is Silchar Town, (Mazumder, Acharjee and Bhattacharjee, 1998, *Assam Tribune*, Wednesday 8th Sept, 2004).

The economic condition of Cachar is good. Tea, rice, timber, bamboo, cane, stone, sand, natural gas are the major products. Area of land under agriculture is 1, 42,146 hectares. The total percentage of male workers is 41.85 and female is 7.52. It has

literacy rate of (68.42 per cent) of which male comprises of (76.51 per cent) and female (59.85 per cent). The Cachar district has 9 Police Stations, 15 Development Blocks, 5 Revenue Circles and 163 Gaon Panchayats. There are a number of educational and other institutions. Cachar district administrative set - up is in such a way that there is one deputy commissioner office.

Since a long time Cachar district has been economically, socially and culturally sound. When it was under British rule, first tea seed was sown in Cachar, now a number of tea gardens were established where a number of labourers and officials are working. Most of them were migrated from other parts of India. Tea industry of Cachar district is contributing a lot to the economy of Assam.

There is only one paper mill at Panchgram in Cachar district. Like all other districts of Assam, Cachar is also depends on agriculture. More than (70 per cent) of the total population depends on agriculture for their livelihood directly or indirectly. Due to frequent occurrence of flood, the peasants do one - time cultivation.

In Cachar there are number of tourist centers like, Khashpur Cachari Rajbari, Kachakanti Bari, Bhuban temple, Sidheswar Siva temple, Gandhi bag, Sonai Park, Srikona Park, etc.

2.4. SILCHAR TOWN

History and Origin of Silchar:

Silchar did not exist prior to 1832-33. It was found in the inscriptions and various historical documents that there existed small villages like Ambicapur, Dudhpatil, etc. during pre - colonial regime, etc which are now - a - days a part of Silchar Town. It was Captain Fisher who spotted the land on the bank of Barak to lay down the foundation of the town, (Dutta, 1996). The British colonists made up their mind to annex Cachar area after the Burma war (1824). Silchar seemed to be base of their political and military centre over the entire southern part of north-east India leading upto Manipur, Mizoram and Myanmar. A substantial portion of Silchar Town was under cantonment.

British took over and reduced the position of Cachar from a kingdom to that of a district under a provincial headquarters at Cherapunji. After the annexation, the British established the district headquarters in Dudhpatil and functioned from there for one year. To keep communication with Khaspur as well as Cherapunji by river, Dudhpatil was the ideal place. The rulers had to keep in touch with Kaspur following the annexation. Having settled the accounts with the Dimasa kingdom, Captain Fisher, found the new possibilities, crossed over the river Barak and marked a patch of land close to Janiganj to build his sadar station as well as to expand and develop into an important centre of the Barak valley, (Laskar, 1996).

The Chinese traveller, Huen-Tsang, in course of his trip around India happened to land by boat and found the river side stream with stone and from this discovery came the name '*Silchar*' (Dutta, 1996). The word '*Silchar*' is derived from the Bengali word '*shil*' i.e. '*rock*' and '*char*' means '*shore or bank*'. The town situated on the 24.40° N latitude and 92.48° E longitudes, comprising of 13.24 sq. km. of land is surrounded by river Barak in all three sides, except south.

The development of Silchar was related with the development of Bengal especially with Sylhet. In 1911, Cachar along with Srihatta and Goalpara transferred from Bangladesh to Assam. The Cachar and Srihatta together named as Surma Valley, both of which were just two sides of a coin having same language, literature, etc.

After Independence:

After independence, Silchar became the melting pot of influx of refugees from Sylhet. It became the head-quarter of Cachar district having Silchar, Halflong and Hailakandi sub - divisions. Slowly the town started to grow up. Geographically, it is isolated from the rest of the country being surrounded by the Borail Hills on the north, Mizo Hills on the south, Manipur on the east and Bangladesh on the west.

Climatic Conditions:

The town has the tropical humid climate as found in the rest of the state. Generally the outskirts of the town get flooded, causing extensive damage to the poor farmers. The winter is pleasant and has generally no rains. Wind below is generally from the north

east in the morning and from the south east in the afternoon. About the end of February stormy weather sets in and in March there are often thunderstorms and frequently heavy fall of hails, doing much damage to the tea. In April and May these storms become mild. A fair amount of rainfall takes place in summer (March to May). The average annual rainfall at Silchar is 121 inches. June to August is generally the wettest period in the year. So, the summer reaches to extreme. The early rains in the summer bring the most needed relief to the people. Like the rest of Assam, Silchar is a seismic prone area and experiences earthquakes pretty often. In general, the climate of Cachar District is temperate, (Bhattacharjee and Sen, 2005: 25-26).

Floods in Silchar as in the rest of Barak Valley are more or less a regular phenomenon. Almost every year, huge tracts of land get submerged and property worth crores of rupees is damaged. The floods of 1913, 1915, 1916, 1929, 1932, 1934, 1936, 1941, 1942, 1946, 1952, 1953, 1959, 1962, 1966, 1969, 1972, 1985, 1986, 1991 and 1994 are fresh in the memory of the inhabitants of this valley. The floods of 1929 are said to have been the worst of all. In that year, the flood level is said to have risen to about 5 feet above the Silchar railway platform. The main reason for the chronic flood menace is deforestation of the catchments areas and heavy siltation of the Barak.

Economy:

The town possesses no heavy industries worth the name except the few cottage industries here and there. The only organized industry that is localized around this town is tea industry. In fact, the town is encircled by a number of tea-gardens and, therefore, it was once known as tea-town. But the conditions of these tea-gardens are no more satisfactory as compared to the tea-gardens of the Brahmaputra Valley in respect of both production and productivity. There are about 61 registered small and medium size industries like small-scale candle, hume pipe, dalmut, match stick, flour mill and brick industries. Tea, oil, bamboo, cane, rice and natural gas are the major contributions to Silchar's economy. It has largely agrarian economy and some extent of business service is done.

Economic indicators show that the Cachar district, by all accounts is economically backward. The economy of the district has a pre - ponderant agrarian bias as is reflected in the relatively large proportion of population employed in agriculture. The working force of the district accounts for around (28 per cent) of its total population, a fact that establishes beyond doubt the wastage of human resources. In the absence of any industry worth the name, the agrarian surplus population is flocking to Silchar in search of employment. There being no avenue of employment in and around Silchar other than few Central and State Government establishments, it is no wonder that unemployment and under-employment are two serious problems of Silchar town.

Silchar Municipality Board was constituted in 1998 under Act V (B.C. of 1976). The town has been growing in size during the last one hundred years. At present, the Municipal area of the town covers 15.78 sq. km., (Bhattacharjee and Sen, 2005: 1, 3).

The municipal area of the town is 15.78 sq. km. divided into 28 wards. Each ward has a ward commissioner in the board. In each ward, a commissioner is elected directly. In the Municipality Board, all the commissioners elect one chairman and one vice chairman.

The road length of the town is 96 km., surface length is 95 km. (average different diagonal distance of the surface) and unsurface length is 71 km. (average diagonal distance of unsurface length). Water tape connections supplying water from tanks in various localities are 12,802 and street lights are 4,403. Though there are numerous market places in the town, yet under the municipality board, there are only six main market places and eight shopping markets. In the north of the town a park 'Gandhi Bagh' and a District Library Zila Granthagar, are situated. The municipal board has provided two recreation halls; viz, R.D.I. Hall and District Library Hall, (Municipal Record 2001).

A national club founded in the year 1900 A.D. is today known as Silchar India Club. Another club, Silchar town club, was established in the year 1940 A.D. the cultural and sports club like Jyoti, Cachar Club, Dishari, Bhabhikal and Shantosena accords the town a cultural relief, (Bhattacharjee and Sen, 2005: 43).

The military cantonment within the limits of the civil station of Silchar contains 140 of land, (Bhattacharjee and Sen, 2005: 6).

Silchar has the best education institution in the region, which attract a good number of students every year for education. Some of the reputed government and private educational institutions are listed below:-

Government Institutions:

Silchar Medical College, Assam Central University, NIT, Polytechnic, ITI, G.C. College, Cachar College, A.K. Chanda Law College, Women's College, KendryaVidyalay Silchar, Public H.S. School, etc.

Private Institutions:

Ramanuj Gupta Junior College, Hamanginee Junior College, Surendra Memorial Junior College, Silchar Collegiate School, Holy Cross School, Ramanuj Gupta School, etc.

Hospitals:

The town has a good number of hospitals and nursing homes as listed below:-

Government Hospitals:

Silchar Medical College Hospital, Satindra Mohan Dev Civil Hospital and State Veterinary Hospital.

Private Hospitals/Nursing Home:

Siva Sundari Nari Sikkha Niketan, Valley Hospital and Research Centre, Red Cross Hospital, Nightingale Hospital, Mediland Nursing Home, South City Hospital, Cachar Cancer Hospital, Green View Nursing Home, Lions Eye Hospital, Sudipta Nursing Home, Ishita Hospital, Life Line Hospital, etc.

Banks:

In the town banking services are provided by 18 branches of various banks: viz., Allahabad Bank, Assam Cooperative Apex Bank Ltd. Bank of Baroda, Central Bank

of India (Central Road) Cachar Gramin Bank (Hospital Road), State Bank Of India (Main Branch), State Bank of India (Nazirpatty), etc.

Other Offices:

Many offices of Assam Government and Government of India are located in the town; viz., All India Radio, Doordarshan Kendra, Water Treatment Plant, Treasury, Silchar Municipal Office, Head Post Office, Telephone Exchange, Income Tax Office, Indian Airlines Office, Fire Brigade, Tea Association of India Barak Valley, Silchar Development Authority Office, District Development Office, District Commission Office and Superintendent of Police Cachar.

Police Services:

The town has the police outposts in four different corners; viz., Sadar Police station, Malugram Police Outpost, Tarapur Police Outpost and Ghungoor Police Outpost. Besides, there is a Traffic Branch of Police for controlling vehicular traffic in the town.

Transport System:

The actual contact of the town with the rest of the country was happened with the extension of the Rail-Link, the Assam-Bengal Railway which covered Silchar in 1899 A.D. The rail line entered into Cachar near Badarpur Junction, across Sylhet. A branch line from Badarpur, through the south bank of Barak, pushed up to Silchar, past Katakhal, Salchapra and Gagra, Later, at the time of world war - II (1939-1945 A.D.) the services of Indian Airlines started from the airport in Kumbhirgram, 20 km. from the town, (Bhattacharjee 2005 : 15, www.silchar.com:silcharairport).

The town is connected with other districts of Assam as well as other states like Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland by road. Assam State Transport Corporation and private transport corporations like Jagannath Travels, Capital Travels, Blue Hills, Moti Travels, Zam Zam Travels, Zed Travels, etc. are providing bus services.

Within the districts of Barak Valley bus and sumo services are available between the towns. Within the town the people moves by cycles, rickshaws, auto rickshaws, city buses and private vehicles.

The town was connected with Kolkata through waterways also. There was a Steamer Service between Silchar and Kolkata via the erstwhile East Pakistan. But the service discontinued with the outbreak of hostility between India and Pakistan in 1965 causing innumerable difficulties to trade and commerce in this region.

Political Climate:

Politically Silchar has been all through different from the rest in Assam. When the Assam Gana Parishad formed the government in the state, the Congress won in Silchar. When the Congress is in the state, the Bharatiya Janata Party has won in Silchar. At present the people of the town are B.J.P.

Though situated in one of the remotest corners of the country, the town can take pride in producing some national leaders like Late Kamini Kumar Chanda, Late Arun Kumar Chanda and many others who took part directly in national freedom movement. It can also take pride in having the great revolutionaries like Late Ullaskar Dutta who spent his last days in Silchar and Late Gopen Roy who spent a number of years of his life in Cellular Jail of Andaman.

Recognised as the 'island of peace' in the midst of political turmoil's, the people of this town along with the people of Barak Valley as a whole had to resort to long and successive agitation for the recognition of Bengali as the official language of the Barak Valley. The language movement of 1961 which saw the martyrdom of 11 youths of this town included a woman and is believed to be the turning point in socio-political development of this region.

Most of the people in Silchar speak Sylheti a dialect of the Bengali. Once renowned for its cleanliness and scenic beauty, this town has lost much of its past glory in this regard because of unusually high growth of population due to unrest in the neighbouring regions and country resulting in unplanned expansion of the town in all

directions. It is the largest town in the south of Assam and the second largest town of the state of Assam as a whole.

The total population of Silchar is 1, 43,003 of which male population constitutes (51 per cent) and female (49 per cent).

The non-tribal population (99.76 per cent) comprises Bengali, Meithei - Manipuri, Vishnupriya - Manipuri, Bihari, Marwari and a little of Nepali and Assamese population. Of these, the Bengali Hindus and Muslims constitute most of the population. The tribal population (0.24 per cent) comprises Barman, Dimasa, Rongmai-Naga, Zemi-Naga, H'mer and Khasi population, ([www.silchar.com:silchar town](http://www.silchar.com:silchar_town)).

The tribals have been migrating to the far off places in the district to take up employment as the tea - garden labour and the unskilled labour at construction sites. Their descendants hardly return to their home lands.

Silchar exhibits occupational distribution on community lines. Generally non - tribal as well as tribal people are working in government and semi - government establishments. Marwaris are in the garment and other businesses. Some Bengalis are also engaged in business for long time, Biharis are mainly engaged in cycle rickshaw pulling, coolie jobs, selling of street foods, etc. Some Bengali Hindus and Muslims are also engaged in the rickshaw pulling. In the market, the Bengali Hindus and Muslims are engaged in selling of vegetables, fish, meat and groceries. A number of hotels, restaurants and sweetshops are owned by Bengalis and Marwaris. A few popular ones of these are Hotel Maruti, Hotel Borail View, Hotel Geetanjali, Hotel Sudakshina, Hotel Satabdi, Hotel Ellora, etc. Some small scale jobs such as door to door selling of vegetables, petty trade and commerce, unskilled labour for construction works, rickshaw pulling, coolie and various kinds of business have emerged. A few tribals, especially Nagas in the urban setting, indulged in prostitution for livelihood. Many educated tribals are employed in Government offices, Schools, Colleges, Medical Institutions.

Silchar the nerve centre of south Assam, was a small place in the recent past, having only a few brick buildings such as the Court House and the Church in the recent past. Yet

now-a-days, it has phenomenally grown into an urban centre of various facilities such as better educational facilities, good number of hospitals, nursing homes, better transportation facilities, better banking facilities and large number of shops and markets. These facilities attract the people of various ethnic identities in the region to migrate to the town for civic services, jobs, education, trade and commerce. Tribal people are also part of the migration and urbanization, to some extent.

It has a literacy rate of (79 per cent) higher than the national average of (59.5 per cent). Male literacy is (83 per cent) and female literacy is (76 per cent) according to census 2001.

Media scenario in Silchar town:-

Newspapers: Some of the Bengali daily newspapers are *Danik Jugasanka*, *Samayik Prasanga*, *Prantajyoti Dainik*, *Dainik Gati*, etc.

Television: Doordarshan Kendra Silchar is located at Malinibil, Tarapur. It started telecasting locally produced programmes from 30th April, 1993. The programme was for half an hour. In 3rd September, 1995, the duration of the programme extended to 1 hour and the timing was from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. and now it is extended to one and half hour for 5 days a week i.e., Monday to Friday and three hours once a week (Saturday). DDK Silchar started telecasting commercials from 30th October, 2008. News bulletin in Bengali was started in the year 1991. This bulletin initially was for 5 minutes and was telecasted once a week (Monday). Later the news bulletin was extended to 2 days i.e., Monday and Thursday for 10 minutes duration with effect from 1st October, 2003. DDK Silchar also telecast employment news bulletin in Bengali for 20 minutes duration once a week (Friday). At present DDK Silchar also telecast live sports coverage of cricket and football, phone - in programmes, coverage of general election, assembly election, municipal and panchayat election and also live budget analysis. Besides, some local private cable television channels are also operating in Silchar. The channel like *BTN (Barak Television Network)* telecasts entertainment programmes along with local news in Bengali, Hindi and English.

Radio: All India Radio Silchar was established on 11th August, 1972. It has the transmitter power of 20 K.W. and frequency of 828 K.Hz. The programmes are

broadcasted in Bengali, Manipuri and Dimasa. Its primary coverage area is 5540 sq. km. and secondary is 6940 sq. km. It has one talk studio, one music studio and one playback studio. It is the only radio station in Silchar. It broadcast daily news bulletin in Hindi and Bengali. Sanskrit news bulletin is broadcasted once a week. The programmes are broadcasted in Bengali, Manipuri and Dimasa languages respectively. Some of the programmes are 'Amrit bani', 'Khetu Khamare', 'Lokogeet', 'Nazrulgeet', 'Rabindra Sangeet', etc. It has a special women program called 'Mahila Mazlish' broadcasted twice a week. The latest annual revenue of the last financial year 2009 is approximately 12 lakhs.