

Chapter 4

ASSAM: THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

In the most ancient time Assam was known as Pragjyotishpura. The modern name of the state is of recent origin. Assam is known for its hills and valleys, the mighty Brahmaputra, goddess Kamakhya and its tea. Chang Kien, a Chinese explorer, had traced his country's trade with Assam as far back as in 100 B.C. According to him, Himalayan malabathrum and silk from Assam had reached Egypt and Rome in Pre Christian times. Assam also figured in Ptolemy's geography. Culturally, Assam has been a melting pot. Over the centuries various migrant groups entered in Assam from neighboring countries including China, Myanmar, and South East Asia. Most of them were mongoloids. From the west, Aryan influence also entered in Assam. Till the advent of the 16th Century, Assam was the seat of hardcore Tantrik practices. The vaishnavite saint Srimanta Sankardeva brought in radical transformation in Assamese society & culture, art and literature. Since the present study is initiated in Assam, this chapter attempts to give a brief recent history as well as social, political and economic issues of the state.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before analyzing the theme of our study it may be useful to present a concise sketch of modern Assam. The Ahoms, a migratory Tai race first carved out a small kingdom in eastern Assam in 1228 A.D. which with the passage of time expanded gradually towards the west along the banks of Brahmaputra and by sixteen century became the political power of Assam. In depth historical review is not necessary here, as such a quick look of origin of name of the state, pre-colonial situation, colonial and post-colonial phases.

1.1. Origin of the Name Assam

The word 'Assam' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Asoma' meaning peerless, reflected in the exquisite natural beauty, cultural richness and human wealth. Asom (Axom) or its

anglicized version Assam is a comparatively modern name. The exact origin of the name vary with some ascribing it to the Bodo word Ha-Cham which means 'low level country' and a second view ascribing it to the word Asoma, meaning 'unequaled' or 'peerless', and used to denote the Ahoms, a Shan tribe which ruled the land for six centuries from the 13th Century A.D.

1.2. Assam in Pre-colonial Phase

Pre-colonial Assam is to be explained by looking briefly into its topography and political boundary, social mosaic as well as mode of production.

Topography and Political Boundary: Before the advent of the British, the Ahoms ruled Assam. The Ahoms were an off shot of Shan or Tai races in the northern and eastern hill tracts of upper Burma and western Yunnan. In the thirteen century this migratory group came into Assam through the Patkai range under the leadership of Sukhapa (1228-1268 A.D.) It soon conquered and absorbed the petty tribal chiefdoms that existed in the area. The most powerful kingdom also fell to the Ahoms in 1523. The Ahoms have successfully thwarted repeated Mughal attempts to extend their dominion over Assam in the seventeenth century by holding the Kachari state in Vassalage and absorbing the Koch-Hajo state. The Assam was under the Burmese rule between 1819 -1824 and the British wrested Assam from Burmese Control after the Treaty of Yandhaboo in 1826 A.D.

Social Mosaic: Assam has been the meeting place of different races, languages, culture and religions since pre-historic period. It is seen that at the time of immigration of the Aryans into India, various groups of people belonging to Mongoloid races entered into Assam in phase manner from the directions of China, Tibet and Burma. The Aryan entered into Assam through Bengal. This has been the meeting place of two great world's civilization, Indian and Chinese. That why there is diversity in race, religion and culture of Assam. Their interaction, assimilation and integration of different culture and civilization to produced a distinctive synthesis of Assam's culture, economy, polity and society (Hussain, 1993). Hinduism played

a very important role among the people living in Assam, though the major portion of the population belonged to Mongoloid stock. Compared to the other parts of India, caste system in Assam was less rigid, but it is true that Brahmanism had played role in society. As a result of Pan-Indian Bhakti, which was lunched by the Sankar Dev attained popularity in the 15th & 16th century of Assam? The comparative laxity of class distinction in Assam's social system was primarily due to the Vaishnava reformation along with inter- mixture of peoples, during the Ahoms rule (Choudhury, 1966) Vaishnavite movement not only quenched the Asamiya Language, literature along with dance and drama but also helped in reducing the gap of Assam's isolation from India. The Ahoms kings also favored Shaktism. Syed Shah Milan (Known as Ajan Fakir) who was a great Sufi reformer in Assam attracted a large number of non- Muslims. Together with Hinduism and Islam, there were a small section of people in Assam who followed Sikkism and Budhasim.

Mode of Production & Economy: Tribal groups inhabited in Assam were primarily practicing a rice economy. They used to produce a short variety rice (Ahu) on the slopes harvested by slash and burn method. The Ahoms ushered in a permanent, wet rice economy. People adopted agriculture as the chief source of livelihood. Barter system facilitated the growth of trade. However before medieval time, evidences of inter- state trade was not found. The Ahom rule introduced 'Paik system'. 'Paik' means foot soldiers –cum-peasants (Kundu, 2007) Paiks were employed on public works such as road and bridge, embankment, temple etc, even paiks were used as peasants, fishermen goldsmiths etc. (Hussain, 1993). During the Ahom rule, the mode of production was not at all developed one. Hence the ruling classes had to introduce the 'Paik' & 'Khel' system (Puyasi, 1989). This system was called 'Bureaucratic Feudal' or Feudalism based on tribalism (Guha, 1991). Kautilya in his Arthasastra mention some objects of high commercial importance like sandal aloe and incense to be found in various parts of Assam. Arthasastra also suggest manufacture of silk as an industry in Assam.

1.3. Colonial Phase

The British Colonized Assam after the conclusion of the Treaty of Yandhabo in 1826 and saved the Asamiyas from the brutalities of the invading Burmese soldiers. Colonization not only ended the isolation of Assam but also linked it with the capitalist world economy, as it became a part of British India. From 1826 to 1874, the colonial rulers administered Assam; the British Raj formed Assam into a province in 1874. Besides Brahmaputra Valley the entire hill areas of Khasi jaintia & Garohills, Lushai hills and Naga Hills, Sylhet and Cachar were also included.

Economic Transformation

Colonization helps to replace feudal economy by a more or less capitalist economy. The most important gift that Assam received from the British Colonial rule was the tea-plantation, In 1833, the first tea garden was established by the colonial government in Assam. Due to the British capital and support of colonial state apparatus, very soon Assam was recognized as the most important tea-producing place of the world. For tea plantation massive migration of labour force from outside the province started. Even the Bankers and Traders from other Indian princes flocked to Assam and in the absence of local business acumen, they provide the economy with the necessary, get exploitative services of trading and banking (Guha, 1988) According to Gait (1992) the total number of immigrants and their descendents numbered about 1.3 million. Almost all the tea gardens were owned and managed by British Companies particularly in the early period of the exploration of tea plantation; a meager percentage was under Indian owned out of total area under tea. Exploration of tea barring a few middle class jobs did not benefit much the mass people of Assam; rather the dividends went out of Assam (Kunda, 2007)

Petroleum was discovered in Assam in 1825, and a refinery was established only in 1901 at Digboi. Until 1921 the Burma Oil Company did not take over the management of the Assam Oil Company because the British Capitalist were not very keen to invest in the petroleum

industry as they had early access to oil from neighboring Burma in the South –East and from Iran in the West (Husain, 1993). Although Coal was discovered, it received less attention from the colonial rulers until the development of railways in Assam. The colonial rulers tried to improve the Communication system thought the province in the interest of the development of tea industry, petroleum and coal mining industries by 1939 Assam had 13000 unites of railway which was indeed very impressive (Kunda, 2007).

Social Change

In 1826 when the British took over the administration of Assam, it was included in the Bengal Presidency. As Assam was included in Bengal Presidency, Bengali was enforced as the official language and medium of instruction in Assam for the purpose of economy and convenience. The colonial rulers, very systematically introducing Bengali in the schools and Govt. Offices of Assam and became successful in diverting the attention of the emerging new educated middle class of Asamiya people who in the initial years of colonial rule was the loyalist collaborators of colonialism. Because of their class position in a particular colonial situation and their loyalist nature, the Asamiya middle class failed to comprehend adequately the language policy of the colonial rulers and found the scope goat in Bengali Boboos (Huesain, 1993).

Another important issue which sock the society was the process of migrant from different parts of colonial India. Although the migration started before colonial rule, massive migration started only under colonial aegis. The local labour did not bow down to white planters, labour forces brought from other parts of country, Among Bengalis Hindus are brought British clerks and officer to run company administration. The Marwaris arrived here as traders and bankers. The Muslims emigrants had migrated from Eastern Bengal as settler on agricultural land of Brahmaputra Valley.

It is a fact that due to the exploration of tea plantation massive migration took place into Assam as a result of which static demographic structure of Assam had been altered.

The earliest Muslims attempted to enter Assam forcibly was their invasion of 1205 led by Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khalji from Bengal (Kar, 1990). It may be noted here that the Mughal Emperor of India attacked Assam several times, because of this invasion many Muslims soldiers were taken into prison, although they were rehabilitated in the subsequent years into different parts of the Brahmaputra Valley. (Kunda, 2007) The migration took place from Eastern part of Bengal since 1891 (Das, 1983) This advent of thousand of farmer migrants was a slow but steady process covering the Brahmaputra valley where there was no end of waste lands awaiting the cultivators plough. The main cause behind the inflow of migration from East Bengal was the excessive pressure of population on land in different parts of East Bengal (Kar, 1990) This large scale migration to Brahmaputra Valley of Assam generated strong apprehensions among the Asamiya Hindus (Hussain, 1993). Ever since the British occupation, there has been a continuous flow of the Nepali population in Assam. Nepal is economically a backward country for which the poor hilly Nepalese have been migrating to India in general and Assam in particular selling means of livelihood .

Marwaris during colonial period, proved themselves very strong emerging group. Marwaris acted as money lenders, bankers, mouzaders and agents of tea garden management (Barpujari, 1996). However the Marwaris migrants in no way threaten the demographic status of the Asamiyas in Assam (Kunda, 2007).

Freedom Movement

The share of Assam in the historic mutiny of 1857 cannot be ignored. The Manigram Dewan & Piyali Burma were found guilty of Henson and hanged publicly on February 26,1958. We can also witness peasant upsurges in colonial Assam against the enhancement of land revenue first in 1861 and then again in 1893-94. Prior to the emergence of the Assam Provincial Congress in 1921, 'Assam Association' had played a very important role in the political advancement of the province. The popularly known Quit India Movement where in Assam too performed its own sacrificing a large number of people along with women folk. The later

part of 1930s and first part of 1940s were very significant in the history of freedom movement of Assam.

1.4. Post Colonial Phase

India attained Independence in 1947, but the Colonial rulers became successful in dividing the people and the country into India and Pakistan. On eve of independence Assam lost the Muslim and Bengali district Sylhet to East Pakistan. Thereafter formation of units like Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal and Mizoram has substantially altered the map of the state Assam. Even after formation of separate states, different organizations have been demanding for the creation of separate homeland outside of Assam, although different autonomous councils were constituted. Demands for separate states Bodos, Karbi, Dimasas are gaining momentum. All these demands may require a territorial re-adjustment of political boundaries of the present state of Assam in the remote future.

Demographic Change

It may be noted that different races of mankind –Austrian, Mongolian, Dravidian and Aryan had migrated into the Assam since the ancient time, which made Assam a multi-racial region. Although migration took place from time to time it is important to note here that rapid demographic transformation of Assam particularly the Brahmaputra valley was made during the colonial aegis. Assam's rate of population growth during 1901-1951 has been the second highest (137.80%) in the world. The share of Assam to the population of India during 1971 nearly doubled from 1.38 per cent to 2.67 per cent. The high growth rate of population in Assam during the decade 1961-71 is attributed to the migration; high-birth rate and declining in death rate (Economic Survey, 60A, 1978-79).

Social Identities

Assamese language has been the most important symbol of the Asamiya nationality and became more so after prolonged agitation for its due recognition. As stated earlier the traditional outsiders in Assam have been the Bengali Hindus and Muslims, the Black tribals

the Nepalis and Marwaris, among these the Asamiya identity clashed more sharply with that of the Bengalis. The conflict arose because the Asamiya language was not given the same status in Assam. Instead of giving this status to Asamiya language, this status was given to Bengali language in Assam till 1837 and continued till 1873. In the post independence period it is witnessed a series of popular movement in Assam. These movements were launched over the issues like the recognition of Assamese as the official language and its introduction as the medium of instruction at the college level, establishment of oil refineries in Assam.

Politico Legal Situation

It is found that the democratic and secular electoral politics during the initial years of post-independence period changed that Assam's politics qualitatively. Some sections of people were trying to mobilize politically on the basis of language, tribe, caste, ethnicity, of course, issues of communalism and factionalism were also found in Assam. Then we witness violent agitation in Naga Hills and creation of Nagaland in 1963. In 1960 Assam language Act was passed, which had emerged the people of the hills, particularly, Khasis, Jantias Bengali Population of the Barak Valley, which also led to Asamiya- Bengali riots in Assam. Due to secessionist movements of Mizos under MNF, GOI decided to create Mizoram, then the Meghalaya which transformed into full-fledged state in 1972. In 1972, Assam witnessed again Asamiya Bengali Conflict in Connection with medium of instruction. This helps the ethnic groups and minorities came close together over the language issue; even in course to time we can see that a long struggle gained momentum against the hegemonic role of Assamese ruling class over the recognition of Bodo language. Missing and Karbi tribals also tried to organize themselves for the development of their own language.

Since post colonial period till 1972, the Indian national Congress swept the five assembly elections in Assam right from the 1st election (1952) but it is to be noted here that till 1972 since beginning of the Freedom Movement in Assam, Asamiya high caste dominated the congress party not only in relation to its organization but also in the politics of Assam.

During 1970s, the interest of the high castes were not served so far as party's organization was concerned; even this politics of Assam was transferred to Sarat Chandra Sinha a backward community leader. The S.C. Sinha Government failed to implement some progressive measures such as major land reform programme because of non cooperation from bureaucracy belonging to high castes (Kunda, 2007) . Also the high caste congressmen with their allies in bureaucracy and press patronized the movement Asamiya as medium of instruction at the college level in 1972. To understand the present political situation and legal dimension the importance of Assam movement (1979-85) bodo movement, ethnic-clash and insurgency and terrorist activities need a brief discussion. The foregoing paragraph we will raise the issue very briefly.

In the seventies, we can witness two important regional parties in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, one of them was Asom Gatiatabadi Dal and another was Pwebanchaliya Lok Parishad. Both the parties along with All Assam students Union had crated a strong regional sentiment in Assam. These regional forces discovered a new theory that “ Bahirayota (Outsiders) swamps Assam and they are plundering the resources of Assam and polluting the culture of the Assamese (Biswas; 1992 ed. L.S. Gassah). Even both the parties became successful in raising their voice against the issue voice against the issue of ‘bohiragatas & bideshi which became the popular slogan of the agitations during Assam movement (Kunda, 2007).

Assam movement began in 1979 on the eve of Mangaldoi Bye-Elections although agitational activities had started since 1978. It is worth mentioning that at that point of time Mrs. Indira Gandhi was out of parliament and she was looking for a safe seat to contest elections and some of her party men from Assam wanted her to contest election from the Mongaldoi Constituency (Hussin; 1993) This alarmed the communal factor of Janta leadership in Assam which was determined to step Mrs. Gandhi's possible victory at any cost, even at the risk of tampering with the electoral rolls. During the time of revision of electoral 40,000 names were

deleted in an arbitrary manner questioning the issue of 'foreign nationals'. The issue of foreign national received the attention of the people of entire Assam and the press along with the agitationist became successful in highlighting the issue of foreign from all the electoral roles of Assam. The agitation has taken gradually violent direction against the religions and linguistic minorities for instance, the North Kamrup massacres in 79-80, Nongang killing in 1980, Nellie massacres in 1983 and Gohapur Killings in 1983. The major issues of the movement (1979-85) have been concerned with a) the alleged intrusion of 'foreigners mainly from neighboring Bangladesh; (b) the prevention of Bengali domination; and (c) the prevention of national and outsiders exploitation of Assam, the most explosive issue was the issue of foreigners (Dasgupta, 1991) It is worth mentioning here that the Assam movement was initiated by AASU but it was not merely a student movement. Behind the AASU stood the Asamiya bourgeoisie, their press and journalist, the rural gentry, a large section of the middle class including some powerful bureaucrats and high police officials, the employees of the state government, contractors, transport operator's owners of Assam's popular mobile theatre groups and a few socialist and communist renegades. Significantly the Marwaris also financed the movement liberally (Hussain, 1993). As the mass participation became highly spontaneous, movement became stronger, mobilization became easier and systematic (Hussain, 1993).

The central government was initially in favour of solving Assam problem in the line of AASU & AAGSP, Indira Gandhi is of opinion " The Assam problem can not be resolved by surrendering to the wishes of the AASU and AAGSP leaders' But association of Mrs. Gandhi and change in the leadership also change the fate of the movement. The Rajib Gandhi led government signed the Assam Accord with the AASU & AAGSP on 14-15 Aug. 1985. The congress welcomed the record, but opposed the disenfranchisement of the 1966-71 streams. Other regional parties and organizations much as PTCA UTNLF, ABSU, AATSU etc. criticized the Assam Accord because the Accord because the accord was signed disregarding

the ethnic interest. The AAGSP converted to a political party in the name of Assam Gana Parishad and come at power after election of state Assembly.

Assam Accord has complicated the issue of citizenship along with intensifying the autonomy aspirations of the various ethnic groups in Assam. In fact, the post -accord Assam witnessed an accentuation of autonomy movements. This has been called by some as the 'politics of identity' (Phukan, 1985) while this term is appropriate for autonomy aspiration of such groups like Ahom Tai Mongoid Prajya Parishad, Plain Tribal Council of Assam, Bodo-People's Action Committee, United Tribal nationalist Liberation Front, Autonomous State Demand Committee. The All Bodo Students organization with its intensive movement ultimately signed a memorandum of statement popularly known as Bodo Accord. The primary objective of the Bodo Accord is to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the constitution to the Bodo for social economic educational, ethnic and cultural advancement. After the conclusion of Bodo accord some of the Bodo groups were not satisfied. Since the conclusion of the Accord ethnic tensions have been prevailing. The student organization revived their original demand for statehood. The Bodo Land Security Force and Bodoland Liberation Tigers Force are operating in Assam for 'Sovereign Bodoland and 'Full-fledged' state respectively.

As stated above Bodo accord could not bring stratification amongst all bodo, demand for full fledged state sovereign state raised. Some groups started armed struggle in the shape of terrorist activities similarly the Assam accord could not bring peace in Assam. The united Liberation front of Assam started its Arm struggle, feat insurgency activities, bomb blast etc. The success story of extremism of ULFA, BDSF, NDFB there is other kind violence that the 'insurgents' have unleashed is 'extortion' kidnap'. In the mirage of jewel in 'insurgency' which of late, is mostly terrorism and enterprise based on extortion as lures the unemployed into the jungle for the sheer adventure of having to wield power and authority over the less privileged innocents, while the state fumbles for a formula without the basic in place.

As per newspaper reporting most of the insurgent and militant groups have foreign links and taking shelter for safety and training at Neighboring Countries of Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar etc. It has been reported in many occasion that ULFA maintains close links with ISI and other Islamic Fundamentalist and amid terrorist wings. Further top level Govt. servant agreed that alliance among the terrorist outfits for tactical purpose of Shelter, hideout procurement of Arms

Though the Assamese speaking indigenous people of the state, known by the generic name of Assamese are not only ethnic constituency in India to have a secessionist group, it is the largest among ethnic group in the country which have rebel elements practicing armed activities for avowedly secessionist goals. The Government of India has shown remarkable flexibility in dealing with secessionist outfits elsewhere. By contrast, the proposal for talks with ULFA though much desired by the people, has received only lukewarm response from the Government. Though the ULFA was founded on April 07, 1979, it came to be noticed as a nascent-armed organization only in 1983, when it commenced a series of political assassinations and audacious bank robberies, often abortive. Following the bulldozing through of elections to the State Legislative Assembly by the then Prime Minister, Indra Gandhi, in inspiring 1983, secessionist sentiments were rising amongst the normally timid Assamese. Though quite a few secessionist insurgent outfits appeared on the scene in Assam at this stage, only ULFA survived the Assam Accord signed between the GOI and the Assamese nationalist leaders of the famous or notorious (as the perspective might be) Assam agitation against unabated and unchecked illegal immigration from erstwhile East Pakistan and present day Bangladesh. Other linguistic ethnic groups in Assam have since sprouted their own secessionist insurgent organizations like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) among the Bodos, United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), amongst the Karbis and Dima Halim Daoga (DHD) amongst Dimasas. Nevertheless, for the Assamese the single linguistic group in Assam – the ULFA remains the most serious issue.

Irrespective of the level of activity of ULFA, not a single week goes by in Assam without the demand being made in one or the other widely circulated Assamese dailies for the GOI to negotiate a settlement with ULFA. It is also to be noticed, that though ULFA has come up with some uncompromising pre-conditions for negotiations with the GOI, the basic thrust of most of the local commentators, including some leading Assamese intellectuals, is towards the GOI accepting the pre-conditions rather than of ULFA withdrawing them. Till a few years ago, criticizing the ULFA was an assured means of earning unpopularity in Assam.

2. GEOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The physical location, natural division, climate and rainfall, river and hills etc give an idea of the geography of an area. In the following paragraphs a brief outline of this would be discussed.

2.1. Physical location and boundaries

Present day Assam lies between 24°N to 28°N latitude and 89°E to 97°E longitude. Except on its western frontier, Assam is encircled by mountain ranges inhabited by numerous tribal groups. In the north, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh bind the State, which separate it from China and Burma. In the south, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya bound it, which separate it from Bangladesh. In the east are Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. In the east are Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. In the west, Assam borders West Bengal and Bangladesh. The Ahoms kingdom was comprised of the area of present-day Assam excluding Goalpara, the Surma valley and the hill districts. It was centered in the Brahmaputra valley.

2.2. Natural Division

The province of Assam falls into three natural divisions, the valley of Surma or Barak, the valley of the Brahmaputra or Assam proper, and the intervening range of hills. The Assam hills have an average elevation above the sea level of about 4,000 feet. The whole of the Assam Hills have been divided into two parts: (a) the Assam Range in the Garo-Khasi-North Cachar tableland, with the Barail Range joining the Himalayas, and (b) the Assam Himalayas

in the northeast and the north. It can be divided into three principal geographical regions – the Brahmaputra valley in the north; the Barak valley in the south and Mikir and North –Cachar Hills that divide the two regions.

2.3. Rivers

The major river system of Assam is the Brahmaputra and the Barak. The Brahmaputra, which is a major international waterway of the east, has its source in glacier mass in the northernmost chain of the Himalayas in the southwest of Tibet about 80°East, called Kumbhanga. Several tributaries join the infant river from the pass of Majumla, which separates its basin from the great Manas soroever in which two other great rivers the Indus and the Sutlej have their sources also. The total length of the river is about 2880 km of which 1625 km lay Tibet, 918 km in India and 337 in Bangladesh. The river Barak originates from the mount Japvo and rises on the southern slopes of the hills ranges to the north of Manipur and flows towards south west until it takes a sharp 280° bend at Tipaimukh towards north. After traversing for a distance of about 90 km from Tipaimukh it debouches into the plains of Cachar. The length of the Barak from its origin lap to the border of Assam is about 550 km. Other important rivers in Assam are Danshiri, Subansiri, Kopili, Lohit, Kalang, Kulsi, Janji, Gangadhar, Ronganadi, Dhaleshari, Rukhmini etc.

2.4. Climate & Rainfall

Assam is freely open to the moisture-laden winds from the Bay of Bengal. She lies beyond the influence of the dry air current, which flows down the Gangetic plain during the hot weather. The climate is, therefore, very damp. There is wide variation of temperature between summer and winter months. There is abundant spring and monsoon rainfall in the state. The average temperature of Assam is about 29-33 degree Celsius in the hottest month of August, most of the rainy season both the valley witness moderate to heavy floods. Assam does not have the normal Indian hot, dry season. Rain falls due to southwest monsoon start

from June onwards. Assam annual rainfalls vary from 70 inches in the west to 120 inches per year in the east.

2.5. Soil

Assam is composed of plains and river valleys. The state has four major types of soils and these are (i) Alluvial soils; (ii) Laterite soils; (iii) Red loams and red sandy loams and (iv) Old alluvial soils. The areas under different soil orders are as follows: (a) Entisol-28 lakhs hectare, (b) Inceptisol-34 lakhs hectare, (c) Alfisols-7.5 lakhs hectare, (d) Ultisols- 3.70 lakhs hectare, (e) Marshy land-0.92 lakhs hectare.

2.6. Forest

In 2005, actual forest area of Assam was 19.32, lakhs hectare comprising 24.63% of total geographical area. As on 31.3.2007 total forest area was 20, 75,163.86 hectare including 13, 86,923 hectare reserved forests and 3, 90,979 hectare protected area. Assam has five national parks, and 17 wild life sanctuaries.

3. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

3.1. Population Density

The population density per sq.km in the state was stands at 340 as against India's 324 (Census, 2001). In Assam 12.72 per cent population were urban dwellers.

3.2. Sex Ratio

As per the census report of 2001, sex ratio, i.e. number of female per 1,000 male of Assam was 932, where as in India the ratio was 933.

3.3. Population

As per calculation of the census 2001, total population of Assam is 26,655,528 out of which 13,777,037 are male; and total females are 12,878,491. Table IV.3 .3 gives the details regarding population of various districts in 2001.

Table 3.3. District wise population scenario

No	District	Population in lakhs (2001)	No	District	Population in lakhs (2001)
1	Barpeta	16.42	12	Jorhat	10.09
2	Bongaigaon	9.06	13	Kamrup	25.15
3	Cachar	14.42	14	K. Anglong	8.12
4	Darrang	15.04	15	Karimganj	10.04
5	Dhemaji	5.89	16	Kokrajhar	9.30
6	Dhubri	16.35	17	Lakhimpur	8.89
7	Dibrugarh	11.72	18	Morigaon	7.76
8	Goalpara	8.22	19	Nagaon	23.15
9	Golaghat	9.56	20	Nalbari	11.38
10	Hailakandi	5.43	21	Sibsagar	10.53
11	North Cachar Hills	1.86	22	Sonitpur	16.78
			23	Tinsukia	11.50

Source: Census of India 2001

3.4. ST, SC People of Assam

Table IV.3.4 illustrates the percentage of ST, SC people against total population of each district. It is found that majority population of North Cachar district and more than half of the people of Karbi-Anglong as well as more than one third of the people, Hailakandi, Karimganj and Cachar have a negligible presence of ST population. So far SC population are concerned Cachar, Karimganj and Marigaon have 14.4 per cent, 13 per cent and 12.9 per cent respectively.

Table 3.4: District wise ST and SC Populations Percentage in Assam

Sl No	District	Percentage of STs to Total population of the District	Percentage of SCs to Total population of the District	Sl No	District	Percentage of STs to Total population of the District	Percentage of SCs to Total population of the District
1	Kokrajhar	33.7	3.4	13	Dhemaji	47.3	5.3
2	Dhubri	2.0	3.9	14	Tinsukia	5.8	2.7
3	Goalpara	16.0	4.8	15	Dibrugarh	7.5	4.1
4	Bongaigaon	12.2	10.3	16	Sibsagar	3.9	3.4
5	Barpeta	7.5	5.7	17	Jorhat	12.3	7.9
6	Kamrup	9.9	6.8	18	Golaghat	9.9	5.4
7	Nalbari	17.6	7.5	19	K. Anglong	55.7	3.6
8	Darrang	16.6	4.6	20	NC Hills	68.3	1.8
9	Marigaon	15.6	12.9	21	Cachar	1.3	14.4
10	Nagaon	3.9	9.3	22	Karimganj	0.3	13.0
11	Sonitpur	11.6	5.2	23	Hailakandi	0.2	10.9
12	Lakhimpur	23.5	7.9				

Source: Census of India 2001.

4. SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

4.1. Employment

Endowed with relatively rich natural resources and despite the rising trend in non-firm sector, the employment scenario of the state is not improved. The live register of the employment exchange revealed that the number of persons seeking jobs through the employment exchange at an alarming rate. The table.4.1. (a) depicts employment trends in public and private sectors in Assam during the year 2001, 2002 and 2003. The table 4.1(b) shows the composition of labourer employed in Tea Industry during 2003-2006.

Table 4.1. (a) Employment trends in public and private sectors in Assam

Sl No	Sector	Year wise employment		
		2001	2002	2003
1	Public Sector	525938	530434	526692
2	Private Sector	605013	553701	570956
Total		1130951	1084135	1097648

Source: Statistical Handbook 2004.

Table: 4.1. (b) Composition of Labourer employed in Tea Industry

Year	Average Daily Number of Labourer Employed						Total
	Male		Female		Adolescent		
	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India	
2003	300644	289210	279264	339366	39414	8312	12,56,210
2004	306133	291702	279064	341686	32321	6704	12,57,610
2005	306335	293700	286096	337631	25708	9330	12,58,800
2006	306497	324145	286788	313392	25881	2797	12,59,500

Source: Tea Association of India 2006.

It may be noted that data in the table above cannot give correct information pertinent to unemployed persons. It informs only those seek employment in Government sector. The unorganized sector has seen change in the last few years. In order to increase employment for many more people various programme as Swarnajyanti gram Swarozgar Yojana, Prime Minister Rozgar Yojana, Small Scale Entrepreneur Programme, Special Employment Programme for Urban and Rural areas, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme are in operation.

4.2. Education

There are seven Universities in Assam including institutions of national importance. The universities include Assam University (central), Tezpur University (central), Assam Agricultural University, Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University. K.K Handique Open University, Sankardev University. There is one Indian Institute of Technology and one

NIT. The table 4.2 below brings to our notice the number of recognized institutions of Assam during 2006-07.

Table 4.2 Number of educational institutions Assam vis-à-vis India

Sl No	State / Country	Number of Schools			Number of Higher Educational institutions			Universities
		Primary/Junior Basic	Middle /Senior basic	High/Higher/Inter/Junior College	General	Professional/Education	Other	
1	Assam	30499	9716	5527	348	54	29	7
2	India	772568	288493	159667	11926	5610	2746	371

Source: Economic Survey-2008-09

As per gross enrolment ratio of students are concerned during 2008-09 there were total ratio of 98.42 in classes I to V (6-11 years). For classes VI-VIII (11-14 years) the ratio is 63.46 and for classes I-VIII (6-14 years) ratio is 85.92 during the same period the ratio for India is 111.2, 73.63 and 96.92 respectively. Regarding literacy rate census data show it has increased in Assam during last ten years. In 2001 percentage is 63.25 where as it was 52.89 in 1991. Though the literacy rate has escalated, the performance of Assam among all the states has not improved much.

4.3. Health Status

The table 4.3.(a) indicates the birth and death rate during the period 2003-2007. The rate of birth and death is a little higher in comparisons with national average.

Table .4.3. (a). Birth rate, Infant mortality rate and Death rate

Year	Birth Rate		Infant Mortality Rate		Death Rate	
	Assam	India	Assam	India	Assam	India
2003	26.3	24.8	67	60	9.1	8.0
2004	25.1	24.1	66	58	8.8	7.5
2005	25.0	24.8	68	58	8.7	8.0
2006	24.6	23.1	67	57	8.7	7.4
2007	24.3	23.1	66	55	8.6	7.4

The table 4.3 (b) based on NFHS-3 shows the total fertility rate of rural and urban Assam, it is comparatively low in comparison to India.

Table: 4.3. (b). Fertility rate of Assam vis a vis India

SI No	State/country	Fertility rate		
		Rural	Urban	Total
1	Assam	2.65	1.43	2.42
2	India	2.98	2.06	2.68

4.4 Health Infrastructure and Services

The entire NE states including Assam depends largely on the Government established health services. One plausible reason for high dependence on governmental health facilities in NE states is that the private facilities are very low. Whatever private health care providers are available they tend to be concentrated in bigger urban center like state capital and district headquarters. In case of Assam, there are only 131 private sector hospitals scattered over 13 districts. The table .4.4. (a) show the number of state government hospital. Primary health centers, community health centers, sub-divisional hospital. sub center, dispensaries and beds. The tables 4.4(b) indicate the numbers of qualified allopathic doctors in Assam during 2003-2007. The Table 4.1. (c) show the number of registered nursing personnel and pharmacist

Table: 4. 4. (a) State Governments hospitals and health institutions in Assam

SI No	District Hospital	Sub-Divisional Hospital	Primary Health Center	Community Health Center	Sub-Center	Dispensaries	Bed
1	24	13	610	100	5109	331	7534

Source: Statistical Handbook 2007-08.

There are three Medical College and Hospital, one each Dental, Ayurvedic and Homeopathic College. One B.Sc Nursing College, 15 GNM and 18 ANM training centers are there in Assam. Also the table 4. shows the number of registered nursing personnel and pharmacist

Table 4. 4(b). Numbers of qualified allopathic doctors in Assam vis-a-vis India.

SI No	State/Country	Assa		India	
	Year	Actual number	Growth Rate	Actual Number	Growth Rate
1	2003	15526	-	643964	-
2	2004	15849	2.04	660856	2.56
3	2005	16401	3.37	682646	3.19
4	2006	16800	2.38	682646	3.19
5	2007	17121	1.87	696747	2.02

Source: Medical Council of India report (2007)

Table 4. 4(c). Number of registered nursing personnel and pharmacist

SI No	State/Country	Total number of registered nurses		Pharmacist
		Auxiliary Nurse and Mid-wife	General Nursing Mid-wife	
1	Assam	16,657	12,082	2,429
2	India	5,27,482	9,30,528	6,81,692

Source: Medical Council of India Report (2007)

5. CULTURAL ISSUES

5.1. Food habits

Assamese food is mainly based on rice and fish. For desert, or for those with sweet tooth, there is a wide range in “Pithas”. Rice is staple diet in Assam and is eaten in various forms throughout the day. Assamese cuisine is bland and yet delicious. Very little oil is used and practically no spice.

5.2. Festivals

Most of the festivals celebrated in Assam have their roots in the diverse faith and belief of the inhabitants, but a spirit of accommodation and togetherness characterizes the celebration of all festivals. The perfect fusion of heritage of numerous races has made Assam, the home of the most colorful festivals, which are passionate, compelling and mesmerizing, reflecting the

true spirit, tradition and lifestyle of the people of Assam. The major festivals of Assam are as follows:

Bihu- This festival marks the root of our agricultural society. It is celebrated during mid-April with nimity. There are three Bihu festivals. Rongali Bihu celebrates the coming of spring and the beginning, Kongali or kati Bihu is the barren bihu festivals when but the barns are empty. Bhogali or Magh Bihu is the festival after the crop harvest and the barns are full each bihu is known as 'Uruka'.

Ali-ai-ligang- This is a colorful annual festival of Mishing tribe. It is held on the first Wednesday of the month of 'Ginmur Polo' (February-March). The ceremonial sowing of paddy starts on this day.

Rongkher-The most important festival of the karbis, is celebrated in april to worship various gods and goddesses for the well being of the entire village.

Me-Dum-Me Phi- The most important Ahom festival is the Me-Dum Me Phi. This is a worship festival, observed by the whole Ahom performed annually on the 31st of January. It is marked by colourful processions with finery.

Rajini Gabra & Hami Gabra- It is an annual festival of Dimasha tribe. This socio-religious festival is celebrated before starting of new cultivation.

Baikho- The Rabha tribe celebrates the 'Baikho' festival during the spring season in order to worship the goddess of wealth "Baikho".

5.3. Clothes and Jewelry

The natives of Assam proper still largely practice the weaving of cotton cloth. The work is carried on entirely by women, and in almost every house is to be found a loom, on which most of the clothes worn by the members of the family are prepared; but these articles are chiefly intended for home use. Weaving form one of the most essential parts of girls' education, and skill in this art does much to enhance the value of a bride. In the Barak Valley weaving was never a home industry except for small tribal, Manipuri and professional

weaving castes. The Hillman's clothing, on the other hand, is usually home made, and the cloths though rough, are generally dyed a rich blue or red, the necessary ingredients being readily obtained from the surrounding jungle. The jewelry made in the province does not, as a rule poses much merit; but really artistic necklaces of gold filigree work are produced at Barpeta, and the enameled lockets and ear ornaments of Jorhat are not unpleasing.

5.4 Music and Musical instruments

Assam is known for its music both classic and folk. There are various types of Assam musical instruments. The Assamese people have made good use of bamboo. There are some of the most exquisite types of flutes made from bamboo available in the land of Assam. The other wind instruments used in this region are pepa, kali, gagana and the singa. The dhol, mridanga, nagara, khol, jaidol and daba are some of the most important percussion instruments of Assam. These accompany famous bihu dance of Assam. The gogona is another musical instrument that is essential part of the traditional Bihu music. This instrument is made from reed and is a vibrating wind instrument.

5.5. Marriage

In Assam, as in other parts of India, wedlock is taken as a matter of course: the rate of child marriage is decreasing among Hindus and Mohammedans. In the tribal society the purchase of a bride by service is still found, and during the time that the man is serving in the house of his prospective father-in-law, he is usually allowed free access to the girls of his choice.

6. POLITICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Assam have its 126 seated Legislative Assembly, it don't have any upper house. Like other states of North-East India its too have autonomous district council under the sixth schedule of the constitution. It has fourteen Loksabha and seven Rajya Sabha seats.

6.1. Panchayat Raj Institutions

After the 73rd amendment of the constitution of India in 1992, the Assam Panchayat Act 1994 was enacted. A three tier system with Zilla Parishad has been introduced. The three tires

After the 73rd amendment of the constitution of India in 1992, the Assam Panchayat Act 1994 was enacted. A three tier system with Zilla Parishad has been introduced. The three tiers are Gaon Panchayat, Anchalyk Panchayat & Zilla Parishad. As per census 2001 the state has 2849 Gaon Panchayats, 189 Anchalik Panchyats and 20 Zila Parishad.

6.2 Political Parties and Elections

Apart from national parties Assam has three major regional parties viz. Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF) & Bodoland People Front (BPF). Muslims comprises 30.9 per cent of Assam's 26.6 million people. Six of the state's 27 districts have a Muslim majority population and the community is believed to control the electoral verdict in 60 of Assam's 126 assembly constituencies (Hussain).

7. ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

7.1. Agriculture

Agriculture forms the backbone of Assam's economy, as per the 2001 census, 53 per cent of the total workforces of the state are engaged in agriculture and agro allied activities. The soil, topography, rainfall and climatic condition of Assam are congenial for cultivation of paddy, which covers nearly 70 per cent of the gross cropped area and more than 90 per cent of the total area under food-grains. The Assam have five agro climatic zones viz. (i) North bank plains zones, (ii) Upper Brahmaputra valley zone (iii) Central brahmaputra valley zone (iv) Lower Brahmaputra valley zone (v) Barak valley zone. The agriculture is mainly dependent on rainfall. The state belongs to rainfall belt where rainfall varies from 80 to 1580 mm during different periods of the year. The contributions of agriculture sector alone to the NSDP at constant price during 2004-2007 are illustrated below. In the table 7.1 (a) The land utilization data of Assam has been shown for last two decades and the table 7.1(b) shown the crop wise food grain production in Assam for the period 2005-06.

Table 7.1 (a) Land utilization pattern

Sl No	Classification	Area under land Utilization (in hectare)	
		1995-96	2005-06
1	Net area sown	27,44,000	27,34,461
2	Area sown more than once	12,45,000	13,52,880
3	Gross cropped area	39,89,000	38,43,000

Source: NEDFi Data Bank 2006.

Table 7. 1(b) Crop wise food grain production during 2007-08

Sl No	Crops	Assam (million tonnes)	India (million tonnes)
1	Kharif food Grains	3.53	109.9
2	Rabi food Grains	9.22	98.7
3	Oil Seeds	2.33	28.0

Source: Economic Survey 2007-08.

7.2. Trend of Per Capita Income in Assam

Per capita income of a state calculated at the constant prices is a good indicator of the change in the standard of living of the people of the economy concerned. The state per capita income is calculated by dividing the total state income by the total population of the state. If Y represents the total state income of a particular year and N presents the total population of the state in the same year, then the per capita income P of the state will be: $P = Y/N$

When the rate of growth of income at constant prices increases faster than the growth rate of population, then the standard of living of the people of the state concerned will improve, but if the growth rate of population rises faster than that of NSDP or state income, then the standard of living of the people of the state will go down and poverty like situation will arise in the state. The table shows the trend of the per capita income of Assam, at both current and constant prices, and its radical movement over last 60 years. It is clear from the table that there have been many fluctuations in trend of state income of Assam over the periods of time. The per capita income of Assam calculated at constant prices (1948-49) was at Rs 258.6 in 1950-51. It rose marginally to Rs. 262.1 in 1955-56, but declined to Rs 251.3 in 1960-61, and

increased again to Rs 264.9 in 1965-66 at the base year prices of 1948-49. Then in 1970-71 per capita income of the state was calculated at constant prices of 1970-71 and found it increased to Rs 538.6, which further increased to Rs 559.4 at constant prices (1970-71) in 1975-76. The per capita income of the state at 1993-94 prices increased to Rs 4606 in 1980-81, to Rs 5544 in 1990-91, to Rs 5715, Rs 5760, Rs 5785, Rs 5943, Rs 6122, and Rs 6254 in 1993-94, 1995-96, 1999-2000, 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2002-03 respectively. Another new base year prices of 1999-2000 had been used to estimate the per capita income of the state for the years 2003-04 to 2005-06 which also show the rise in the per capita income to Rs 6466(P) to Rs 6721(Q) and Rs 7020(Adv) respectively.

Table 7.2. Trends of state Per Capita income at constant vis-a-vis current prices

(In Rupees)

Year	At Current Prices		At constant (1993-94) Prices		
	Per Capita income in Assam	Per Capita income in India	Per Capita income in Assam	Per Capita income in India	Difference of Assam and India
1999-2000	10080	15626	5785	10068	-4283
2000-01	10718	16707	5943	10306	-4363
2001-02	11423	17947	6122	10774	-4652
2002-03	12247	19040	6254	10964	-4710
2003-04(P)	12827	21142	6466	18517	-12051
2004-05(Q)	13633	23222	6721	19647	-12926
2005-06(Adv)	14523	25788	7020	20813	-13793

NB: P= Provisional, Q= Quick Estimates, Adv= Advance estimate

Sources: Statistical handbook of Assam 1981-82 to 2004-05

Thus the growth rate of per capita income of Assam is not at all encouraging, though it has been increasing over the years. The rate of growth of per capita income 1990-91 and increased moderately to 7.79 per cent during the period of 1995-96 to 2002-03. During the period 2002-03 to 2003-04 the annual growth rate of the state per capita income was 4.81 per cent but it declined again to 3.62 per cent in 2004-05. The per capita income of Assam at

current prices also shows a gradual increasing trend over the years with some marginal declines in certain periods. The per capita income of Assam at current prices was 1990-91 and to Rs 10718 in 2000-2001. In the following years the per capita income increased to Rs 11423 in 2001-02 to Rs 12247 in 2002-03, to Rs 13663 in 2003-04 and then to Rs. 14523 in 2004-05 showing a rate of growth of 6.58 per cent, 7.21 per cent, 11.56 per cent and 6.29 per cent respectively over the previous years, it has remained below the all India average which has kept on increasing in the successive periods from Rs 12.9 in 1960-61 to Rs 4710 in 2002-03 and then jumped up to Rs 13793 in 2005-06.

Thus it has been seen that the increase in per capita income of Assam at both constant and current prices has not been continuous. Whenever the projected increase in population has exceeded the increase in income, the level of per capita income of the state has declined. The gap between the per capita income of the state and that of all India average has been widening over the past years. As has been mentioned earlier, the per capita net domestic product of Assam was much higher than the all India average during the period from 1950-51 to 1955-56, but it has become much below at the moment.

7.3. Industry

Assam the largest economy in the northeastern region of India is the most industrially advanced state in the region by virtue of its comparatively favorable location and the availability of reasonable infrastructure. The state is rich in natural resources like petroleum, natural gas, Coal and limestone. It is well known for its vibrant tea and petroleum sector. Both the sectors have made considerable progress over the years and are way ahead of other industries in the state. Besides these two industries, the other important industry in the state is mining of coal and limestone.

The government has adopted its new industrial policy to gear up various industrial activities and attraction of outside capital in both public sector and private sector development. The industrialists like Tata, Ambani and Birla have shown interest in setting up industrial units in

Assam in view of changing scenario of law and order and availability of resources. The table 7.3(a) shows the registered factories and daily workers employed.

Table 7. 3(a) Registered factories and daily workers employed

Year	Number	Average number of Daily workers
2004	2923	96677
2005	3070	105452
2006	3182	112794
2007	3319	114233

Source: Economic Survey Assam 2008-09.

The Annual Survey of Industries provides some basic characteristics of the industries under manufacturing sector. The ASI results of 2004-05 reveals that Assam has 1702 Nos. of functioning Registered Factories with an employment of 119033 persons against 1593 Nos. of factories with 115082 employees during the previous year. The results also show that the value of output increased by Rs. 5735.85 crore during the year 2004-05 over the level of the previous year. The net income by factories for the State was Rs. 3270.16 crore in 2004-05 as against Rs. 3430.09 crore during 2003-04. The following table IV.7. (b) Shows some basic characteristics of Annual Survey of Industries in Assam for last five years.

Table 7.3 (b) Characteristics industries in Assam

Item	Unit	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
1. Factories	Nos.	1423	1533	1593	1710	1864
2. Fixed Capital	Rs. Lakh	361737	596543	670965	702998	752036
3. Invested Capital	Do	505381	790402	934228	1022608	1090977
4. Total Employees	Nos.	111030	111058	115082	119548	128662
5. Value of Output	Rs. Lakh	802278	1204070	1634167	2205002	2560914
6. Net Value Added	Do	96860	253882	373164	372082	357617
7. Income	Do	77420	221673	343009	347551	329431

Source: Economic Survey Assam 2008-09

8. POWER & ELECTRICITY

Power is the basic infrastructural requirement for the growth of industries as well as over-all economy of the State. The Assam State Electricity Board (ASEB), which was constituted in 1958 under Electricity (Supply) Act 1948, has been taking prime responsibility of integrated power development of the State. The Board underwent a minor reorganization in 1975 following the formation of the State of Meghalaya carved out of Assam in 1971. But, right now, ASEB is poised for a major breakthrough by way of reorganization and restructuring owing to various factors. ASEB had accumulated huge losses over the years to the extent that it was not possible to run it profitably or get rid of its liabilities. Because, of this, there is a heavy revenue deficit in every month in the running of ASEB. To tide over this unsustainability in the operations of the Board and to improve the performance of ASEB, the Government of India has taken up the Assam Power Sector Development Programme with effect from December 2003. As a part of the programme, an amount of US \$205 million has been sanctioned by the ADB as loan to ASEB.

In pursuance of the Indian electricity Act 2003 and as a part of the Assam Power Sector Development Programme, the Government of Assam has set in motion the process of unbundling the ASEB into five Government Companies. The five companies are- the Assam Power Generation Corporation Limited (GENCO), the Assam Electricity Grid Corporation Limited (TRANSCO), Upper Assam Electricity Distribution Company Limited (UA-DISCOM) for the areas of supply in the Upper Assam Region, the Central Assam Electricity Distribution Company Limited (CA-DISCOM) for the central areas and the Lower Assam Electricity Distribution Company Limited (LA-DISCOM) for the areas of supply under the lower Assam Area. These initiatives are in the interest of all the stakeholders in the electricity sector in the State, i.e. consumers, shareholders, suppliers, creditors, infrastructure builders and the Government of Assam. The installed capacity of generating plants in the State has come down to 415.5 MW in 2006-07 from 574.4 MW during 2005-06. The following table shows the installed capacity of various generating plants during the year 2005-06 and 2006-

07. The installed capacity for generating power has come down due to inclusion of 240 MW installed capacity of Bongaigaon Thermal Power Station (BTPS) as NTPC is implementing a new 750 MW coal based thermal power plant by replacing BTPS Unit-1 (50MW) and Unit-2 (50MW) of 100 MW Karbi Langpi Hydro-electric Project commissioned on 31-01-07 and 20-03-07 respectively. 18.9 MW installed capacity of Mobile Gas Turbines (MGT) located at Kathalguri and Geleky have been including as it was decided to scrap these units due to an economic operation. Disposal of the MGT units is almost completed

During the year 2006-07 the generation of power has moved up to 867.539 MU from 808.047 MU in 2005-06. During the year 2006-07 Hydel Power Project has started to function and generated 15.438 MU of electricity during the year. Since the several years the overall power supply position and per capita availability position has not been much satisfactory. The consumption of electricity in the State has increased to 2243.98 MUKwh during 2006-07 as against 2118.98 during 2005-06, thereby registering 6.0 per cent increase of electricity consumption in the State over the year. The statistics for the last few years on the pattern of consumption of power reveals that the consumption was always highest in respect of domestic sector followed by industrial sector and commercial sector of the State. During the year 2006-07, domestic sector accounted for 39.0 percent of the total consumption of power in the State followed by industrial sector 17.0 per cent and commercial sector 12.0 per cent of the total power consumption. The following table shows the type of consumption in the State during the last three years State during the last three years.

8.1. Rural Electrification

The total number of villages electrified in Assam was 18,168 as on 31st March 2006, out of the 25,124 inhabited villages of the State as per 2001 Census. Thus, the percentage of villages electrified in the State was 72 per cent at the end of March 2006.

From the above discussion, it is found that, Assam is the largest state in the northeast India and is a meeting point of different races, languages & culture. The interaction, assimilation

and integration of diverse culture have produced a distinctive synthesis of Assam's culture, economy, polity and society (Hussain, 1993). The comparative laxity in caste and class distinction in Assam is due to tribal society's liberal ethos and vaishnavite movements. The economy is agriculture based, but mineral & resource based industries are growing in numbers; there is indication of growth of SSI. The agriculture provides employment to nearly sixty percent of the state's population, but lack of proper irrigation facilities, lack of modern techniques application and dependence on monsoons hampered the growth. Though the state is politically stable and militancy apprehended, the communication & infrastructure bottlenecks are coming in the way of accelerated growth. There is lack of transparency and delivery systems gaps in welfare and developments. The muslim vote bank, illegal migrants and foreigner issue plays dominant role in political arena. The present study is being carried out within this socio-cultural, politico-legal & economic scenario.

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