

HISTORY OF ASSAM
TOPIC: LAND AND PEOPLE;
MIGRATION ROUTES.

INTRODUCTION

“Assam is called the anthropological museum or the miniature of India.”

Assam is called an anthropological museum because it is situated in one of the great migration routes of mankind. Since ancient times different racial elements entered the land from different parts of the world. The strategic position of Assam located between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

“Assam is the enriched land with rich in geography and also enriched with ethnic diversity among natives of Assam including the tribal groups.”

For further depth study, before entering the topic, it mainly focuses about the geography and about the land; the boundaries of *“Ancient Assam.”*

NOTE: According to historical sources, in present Assam there are 23 tribes out of which 14 from hills and 9 from plains.

GEOGRAPHY OF ASSAM

Ancient Assam known as Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa comprising the modern seven states is situated on the north-eastern part of India. It is bounded on the north by the sub-Himalayan ranges of Bhutan, Aka, Dafla, Miri, Abor and Mishimi. To the west of this region lies the territory of Bhutan. On the east the state is bounded by the Patkai range, which defines the western boundary of Burma (Myanmar). Towards the south Mizoram, Tripura and bounded by Meghalaya.

Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa covered the whole of Assam. The boundaries of ancient Assam was changing from time to time but there is no denying fact that it was much larger than the present state of Assam.

Pragjyotisha was a famous ancient kingdom. The earliest mention of the city Pragjyotisha is traced back to the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the two great Indian Epics.

BOUNDARY OF ASSAM

The boundary of Assam varied from age to age. The boundaries of Kamarupa or Pragjyotisha are clearly mentioned in the Puranas and the Tantra literature. It is likely that the kingdom of Kamarupa at times included the present Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan, Rangpur, Cooch Bihar and a few adjoining areas.

In ancient times, the geographical boundary of Assam was not static. It had changed from time to time. The land of present Assam was known as Pragjyotisha in the ancient period, while in the early medieval period was known as Kamarupa encompassing a vast territory from the foothills of the Himalayas in the north, to the Bay of Bengal in the south and from Karatoya in the west to the Patkai ranges in the east.

According to the great historian K.L. Barua, the ancient kingdom included not only the whole of the Assam –valley, but also parts of northern and eastern Bengal, part of Bhutan, the Khasi and Garo hills and the northern portion of the district of Sylhet.

The 'Assam Range' broadly divides Assam into two valleys i.e., the Brahmaputra valley or Assam valley and the Surama valley or Barak valley. The Brahmaputra is one of the largest rivers of the world, flowing majestically through the heart of Assam. The Surama valley or the Barak valley comprises the southern plains of Assam with its tributaries. The history and culture of ancient Assam is very intimately connected with the Brahmaputra river.

ASSAM AND ITS PEOPLE

India presents a picture of great variety. The same is true in case of Assam, where people of diverse religion, language and customs lived through the ages. It has hills and forests, rivers and streams, plain lands and wide valleys and in a very real sense, it seems to be an India in miniature.

From the pre-historic period, Assam has become the hub of different migrating groups of people from various parts of India, with varied cultural identities. It is the only land in India, where different races and tribes are united. There are many tribes like Garo, Tai Ahom, Deuri, Rabha, Mising, Bodo, Nagas etc.

The majority of the people of Assam are belonged to Mongolian tribe. There are varied religions followed by different groups of people living in Assam. It is for this reason that Assam is described as a land of remarkable variety- from the point of view of ethnology.

RACIAL ELEMENT OF MIGRATION

The major racial elements of ancient Assam are: Negrito. The Negrito element originated in Africa and came to this land. The early stage of migration and present few of the characteristics are found among the Nagas. The practice of hanging comb of bees at the entrance of the house, the practice of open exposure of the unnatural death etc. are found among the Nagas.

The second major racial element of ancient Assam are the Austro-Asiatic. The Khasis of present Meghalaya followed few of the traditions of this element. They are the neolithic people who introduced the cattle rearing, terrace cultivation as well as erection of megalith.

The Dravidians are the chalcolithic people who entered India through Baluchistan in pre-historic period. They introduced the use of turmeric in wedding ceremonies as well as the practice of worship.

One of the important group of people of Assam is the Tibeto-Burmans. The Indo-Mongoloid linguistic group entered into Assam before the arrival of Aryans. They used the river routes of Brahmaputra, Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong as well as the mountain passes. The ancient Indian literature referred to them as the Kiratas.

The Aryans were the last linguistic group who came to Assam through the north-western part of India. It is believed that the process of Aryanisation in Assam started since the time of Naraka-Bhagadutta. The rulers of ancient Assam also promoted the Aryan civilization through the policy of land grants.

ROUTES OF MIGRATION

“Assam is called the anthropological museum because it is situated in one of the great migration routes of mankind.”

Various racial elements entered into this land using the different routes. It is believed that there were three or four important routes in ancient times; the first was through the north or the mountain passes of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, the second was through the river routes of Ganges and Brahmaputra, the third was the Bay of Bengal route, the fourth was the Assam-Burma routes.

The existence of the northern routes is mentioned in some of the classical text but it is very difficult to say that the existing trade routes between ancient Assam and the northern territories had been used by people for settlement in Assam. Ptolemy's Geography and Periplus of Erythrean Sea also referred to the land route between Assam and Tibet. That route was probably by few Alpine and Indo-Chinese.

The water routes of Ganges and Brahmaputra was used by the Austro-Asiatic, the Negrito elements. Apart from the classical text even Hiuen-Tsang also mentions about this river route. The oceanic elements had come to Assam using the Bay of Bengal route. The Dravidian also used the same route to come to Assam.

J.H.Hutton believed that some elements of the Nagas migrated from Southern India by this sea and entered Assam through Burma.

The Assam-Burma route was running through the land and water. The river valley areas of present Burma and Assam was used by the Indo-Mongoloid group. It is believed that in ancient time three important routes from India to China were running through Assam and Burma; the first through the Patkai to Upper Burma, the second through Manipur up to the river Chindwin and the third was through Arakan to the Irradawy river.

CONCLUSION

Assam, the eastern most sentinel of India is endowed with enchanting, picturesque and fascination natural beauty. It has been the living place of various races, tribes and ethnic groups since time immemorial. The dynamics of synthesis and assimilation of the races make Assam glorified and rich in every prospects of the region.

NOTE: The Assamese language is an Indo-Aryan language. It is developed from Sanskrit and was mostly spoken in the Brahmaputra valley.

THANK YOU

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