

Cultural Zones of Lower Assam: A Study with Specific Classification of Muslim Population

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Abstract

Assam situated in the north-eastern part of India has a diversified socio-cultural background. The different parts of Assam almost has similar cultural group of people since ancient times. Even during the colonial rule also Assam was divided geographically, keeping in mind social and cultural factors, viz. Lower Assam and Upper Assam. Even different cultural zone arose in Lower Assam. There are some cultural zone in Lower Assam. Kamrup cultural zone, Goalpara cultural zone, Habraghat cultural sub-zone, Darrang cultural zone are found here. Among this cultural zones Kamrup cultural zone is important. In the cultural zone of Assam, Lower Assam has occupied peculiar features compared with other regions of Assam. Lower Assam's cultural zone comprises different tribes like- Bodo, Garo, Hajong, Rabha, etc., but it is predominantly rich with Musalman inhabitants. The present study will focus on different cultural zone in Lower Assam, with specific demographic characteristics.

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Introduction

Assam or Kamrup has been special cultural zones i.e. "Upper Assam" or "Eastern Portion" and "Lower Assam" or "Western Portion". The inner cultural differences had exhibited since early past, even in the Ahom regime. During Ahom period separation of these two region i.e. Upper and Lower Assam was less, but after the Divide and Rule Policy of British had been applied to Assam, it divided Assam into two different zones and clearly separated Upper Assam and Lower Assam.

Objectives

- To find the cultural variance in Lower Assam.
- To study demographic pattern of Lower Assam.
- To identify the different cultural zone in Lower Assam.

Data source and Methodology

Data Source

The study is based on secondary data like records of Government departments, census report of Assam, books, journals, periodicals, and gazetters (Govt.).

Methods

To fulfill the objectives of the study, figures and tables are used to interpret the result.

Cultural Zone of Lower Assam

The cultural and socio-political differences were visible in these two zones which helped them to divide Assam. Thus, Lower Assam with its cultural differences can be divided into three cultural zones viz. i) Kamrup (which comprises the undivided Kamrup district), ii) Goalpara (which comprises the

erstwhile Goalpara district) and iii) Darrang (the present Darrang district with Mangaldoi region). Goalpara district can be divided into two cultural sub-zones i.e. a) East Goalpara and b) West Goalpara. Another specific zone was Habraghat, which comprises the South Eastern Block of East Goalpara and a portion of Kamrup district.

The differences evolved due to certain causes i.e. historical, geographical and sociological. These are evident in various aspects like dialects, food habits, customs and practices, ceremonies and festivals, various other forms of verbal arts, etc. The cultural zones of Lower Assam are shown clearly in the following charts.

Cultural Zones of Lower Assam

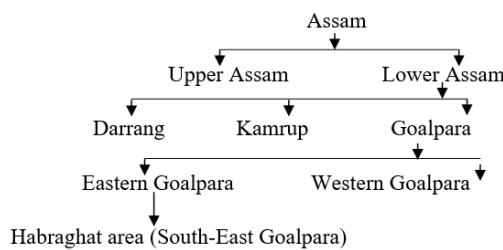


Table 1: The number of Musalman Population in Lower Assam in 1872, 1881 and 1961.

S. No	Districts	Year		
		1872	1881	1961
1	Kamrup	45,823	50,305	6,05,524
2	Darrang	13,859	14,677	2,49,585
3	Goalpara	89,916	1,02,773	6,68,748

Table 2: District-wise Population of Musalmans of Lower Assam, 1991.

S. No.	Districts	Musalman Population	Percentage
1.	Kamrup	4,67,544	23.37
2.	Nalbari	2,02,653	19.93
3.	Barpeta	7,76,974	56.07
4.	Bongaigaon	2,64,393	32.74
5.	Dhubri	9,38,789	70.45
6.	Goalpara	3,35,275	50.18
7.	Kokrajhar	1,54,801	19.33
8.	Darrang	4,15,323	31.97
9.	Sonitpur	1,89,859	13.33

The number of Musalman population is growing higher as evident from the census report of Assam 1872, 1881, 1961 and 1991.

Cultural Zone of Kamrup

The old name of Assam is "Kamrupa" or "Pragjyotishpur" which specifies some historical evidences, basically found in "Ramayana", "Mahabharata" and "Vishnu Purana", "Yogini Tantra", "Kalika Purana", etc., but now it comprises the districts of Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrupa. The socio-cultural and political system of Kamrupa was high than the other cultural zones of Lower Assam. In the 16th century, Kamrupa was included with Koch Kingdom. However, the dissimilarity which can be noticed at present in different cultural zones is mainly due to the divergence of political associations. Thus Kamrup region constitutes an important separate cultural zone both from the point of view of its language and culture as well.

Goalpara Cultural Zone

During Mughal regime, Goalpara remained under the Mughal sway for a long period, and it was ruled from the East Bengal. For a period of time, Goalpara was under Koch-Bihar as well. Thus the Goalpara region constitutes a distinctive socio-cultural and linguistic feature due to these politico-historical reasons. Finally, in 1912, Goalpara district was permanently attached to Assam. This political inclusion by Musalman rulers and Koch rulers, mixed religious groups, were formed, with a complex culture developed into Goalpara. Thus, its socio-cultural aspects are different from the other parts of Assam. The mixed language and cultural forms shaped a peculiar culture among Lower Assam.

Habraghat Cultural Sub-Zone

Habraghat has been a special cultural region from the early period. It is one of the important regions of Goalpara district. The greater part of Habraghat consists of Krishnai, Dudhnoi, Jinari, etc. It contains an area of 213838 acres or 334.11 square miles. Habraghat bounded by Brahmaputra in the north on the east by the district of Kamrupa, on the South by the Garo Hills and on the West by the Mechpara Pargana, comprise a special culture into this region.

Darrang Cultural Zone

Darrang is situated on the north bank of Brahmaputra river. During 16th century Darrang was under Koch Hajo. In Ahom-Mughal hostilities, a part of erstwhile Goalpara and Kamrup district, were captured by the mighty Mughals and some portion remained under the Ahoms. Since that time Darrang became practically a buffer state between the Ahoms and the Mughals.

According to 1901 census, the largest racial group of this region was the Bodo-Kachari including the Rabhas, while the Koches or Rajbansis formed the second largest group. Musalman population has a significant percent, nearly 32 percent, among the population of Darrang district. The socio-cultural activities of Darrang district is quite spectacular and old as well. The culture of Darrang is an inseparable and integral part of the contemporary Assamese political and socio-cultural milieu.

Conclusion

Assam is in the centre of North East Indian and Lower Assam is the gateway of the Muslim invaders, which pave the way advantages to setting the Muslims in Lower Assam. The newly Muslims of Turk, Afghan, Arab, Persian and other backgrounds, mingling with newly converted Muslims and the Non-Muslims too pave the way for the enhancement of language, polity, economy and society of Assam. In this connection local languages and dialects become filled with new words used by the adventurous. Both Assamese and Bengali language are fraught with Arabic and Persian words. So, Muslims added new dimension to Assam, what every new community develops certain trends and cultural diversities in the society and polity of that land, which is turn enrich the existing one. Thus, the Islamic culture had gained its popularity at least in Lower Assam.

The cultural activities of Lower Assam have been playing a decisive role in the formation and development of Assamese society. The cultural differences evolved for certain causes i.e. historical, geographical and sociological.

These are found in some separate characteristic, that were as dialects, food habits, customs and practices, ceremonies and festivals and other various forms of verbal arts etc. The Muslims also add their cultural influences in this field too. The Muslim influence in the Assamese culture is prominent in the contemporary Assamese society. The growth and development of Muslim population in Lower Assam in the 13th century is one of the important dimensions in the history of Assam. The Muslims were penetrated into Lower Assam and led to the gradual growth of the Muslim population in the entire Assam. The Muslim preachers, imported Muslims and Muslim war-captives, who were settled down in Assam and increased the Muslim population. It is noted that even, a ample number local domiciles converted to Islam by the preaching of Islamic saint in Assam, during this period, and also this number enhanced the Muslim population in Assam.

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