

## CHAPTER – III

### Formation of the Heterogeneous Society in Western Assam (Goalpara)

Erstwhile Goalpara district of Western Assam has a unique socio-cultural heritage of its own, identified as Goalpariya Society and Culture. The society is a heterogenic in character, composed of diverse racial, ethnic, religious and cultural groups. The medieval society that had developed in Western Assam, particularly in Goalapra region was seriously influenced by the induction of new social elements during the British Rule. It caused the reshaping of the society to a fully heterogenic in character with distinctly emergence of new cultural heritage, inconsequence of the fusion of the diverse elements.

Zamindars of Western Assam, as an important social group, played a very important role in the development of new society and culture. In the course of their zamindary rule, they brought Bengali Hidus from West Bengal for employment in zamindary service, Muslim agricultural labourers from East Bengal for extension of agricultural field, and other Hindusthani people for the purpose of military and other services. Most of them were allowed to settle in their respective estates, resulting in the increase of the population in their estate as well as in Assam. Besides, most of the zamindars entered in the matrimonial relations with the land lords of Bengal. As a result, we find great influence of the Bengali language and culture on this region. In the subsequent year, Bengali cultivators, business community of Bengal and Punjab and workers and labourers from other parts of Indian subcontinent, migrated in large number to Assam and settled down in different places including town, *Bazar* and waste land and char areas. The immigrants of land hungry

Muslim peasants from Maimensingh, Pabna, and Bogura and from other places of Bengal, entered Assam in huge number and settled down in various waste land and char areas, is known as Bhatia in Goalpar district. The demographical, social and cultural fabric of this region has been seriously affected by the subsequent immigration, beginning from the last decade of Nineteenth Century continued up to the partition of India and even thereafter. The immigration problem of Assam, has reached to a danger level, threading to the interest of indigenous people of Assam. Infact, the migration of people from Bengal and other parts of India, caused by the British Government and the local zamindars, gave birth of distinct misunderstand between the immigrants and the indigenous. It seems that some of the Assamese people have apprehended the immigrants to be illegal foreigners and treated erstwhile Goalpara district as the domicile of Bangladeshi.

So, an attempt has made in this chapter to focus on the formation of the heterogenic society and development of the culture in undivided Goalpara district in Western Assam. Endeavour has made, further to analysis the role of the zamindars of Western Assam that they played in the reshaping of such society and culture.

### **3.1. Formation of the Assamese society**

Assam is the melting pot of human races and culture of both hills and plains. The composition of the population in Modern Assam is a complexion of diverse racial and ethnic groups poured into this region from time immemorial. Waves of people belonging to different ethnic groups migrated to Assam from South East, West and from the oceanic world, and even from different parts of Indian subcontinent right from pre-historic period. The medieval Assamese society was a tribal society that was formed because of the admixture of diverse racial and tribal

people migrated from the East and the South- East Asia. In course of time the Caucasian-Aryans stock came from the west and entered Assam and through long process of assimilation of the Aryans and Non Aryans people the modern Assamese society has come into being. The prehistoric and other remains definitely prove that Assam was inhabited by various racial elements and infact, this land is considered as a great anthropological museum.<sup>1</sup>

In ancient time, the North Eastern Region, especially, Assam and its neighboring region, was known as the land of Kiratas, i.e. the habitat of the Indo Mongoloid people. During the time of the Mahabharata war and earlier, the tribes speaking the Bodo languages were called Chinas, Kiratas and Mlechhas. The ancient literature states, that Naraak, a prince of the Dravidian stock, overthrew Ghatak, the Kirata king of Pragjyotisha. Bhagadatta, who was probably a Kshatriya king participated in the war Mahabharata with an army, composed of Kiratas, Mlecchas and Cinas.<sup>2</sup> It must be admitted that his subjects were mostly non-Aryans and that is why he was called Mlecchadhinatha.<sup>2a</sup>

The population of Assam during Medieval time primarily composed of the non-Aryans stock belonging to various Indo-Mongoloid tribes, speaking various Tibetan Burmese dialects. The Mongolians belonged to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Indo-Chinese group and are now represented by the Bodos, the Cacharis, the Morans, the Borahis, the Koches, the Rabhas, the Hajong, the Nagas, The Kukis the Chutias, the Ahoms, the Garos, the Dimachas, the Karbi, etc.<sup>3</sup> They were called Kiratas in the Epics and Puranas and even in the Yuginitantra, a work of the late medieval period.<sup>3a</sup> Different scholars of modern times are of the opinion that the geographical position of Assam is such that any movement of human races from south east towards the west and from

west toward the east could not be possible without entering Assam since the ancient time. The migration route of mankind from the remote past had been through Assam and various elements passing through it from India on one side and South East Asia on the other, leaving their substratum in both the hills and the plains.<sup>4</sup>

Based on some anthropometric data, the great anthropologist, A.C. Haddon found several ethnic types in Assam, such as: (a) delicocephalic Platyrrhine type (b) Delichocephalic-mesorrhine type (Nesiot element) (c) Mesocephalic-Misorrhine type, (d) Bracehycephalic-leptorrhine type, (e) Brachycephalic-platyrrhine type, and (f) Delochocephalic leptorrhine.<sup>5</sup>

Anthropologist, find traces that most of the tribes of Assam contains in varying proportions Negrotic, Austro-Asiatic, Alpine-Aryans and Mongolian elements.<sup>6</sup> It is confirmed by scholars who have carried out extensive research on the prehistory of Assam that the principal races migrated to Assam in twilight of civilization are the Austro-Asiatic, the Dravidian, the Mongoloid of the Tibeto-Burman family of the Indo-Chinese group and the Aryans.<sup>6a</sup>

No doubt, the tribes of North East India are predominantly Mongoloid. They entered Assam through various routes at different times. Though, these population differ from each other in respect of certain traits of physical features, culture and language, yet basically they are of Mongoloid origin and speak Tibeto-Burmese languages. In Assam the Mongoloid in the very early time intermixed with the Austroloids and Coucasoids from whom they accepted certain genes as a result acquired varied physical features. The northeast China was the original home land of the Tibeto Burmese. They at one time migrated to Burma and split up into two groups. One group went to further south and other group moved westwards along with foothills of the Himalayas to reach Nepal, Bhutan

and Tibet, from where they entered to Assam. They established themselves in different region and came to be known by various names, like Bodos, Garos, Rabhas, Hajong, Karbi, Koch, Mech, Cachari, Tiwa, Dimacha etc.<sup>7</sup>

Linguagically, the Tibeto Burman group, as a whole is divided into two main branches, North Assam and Assam Burmese. The North Assam branch is formed by the various Arunachal tribes; viz-Akas, Dafalas, Abors, Miris and Mishimis. The Assam Barman group includes three groups –the Bodos, Nagas, and Kukis-Chins. Thus the term Bodos is used to denote a large number of people, the Garos,Rabhas, Cacharis, Koch, Mech, Hajong, Lalung, Tiwa, Dimacha, etc. who speak Bodo languages. They occupied almost the entire Brahmaputra valley. They extended their area of occupation even to Northern Bengal, and Garo hills. They spread over to Northern Maimensingha where the Hajong still living, who belongs to Bodo stock. From the district of Nowgong in Assam their territory extended to Cachar, Syllhet and further south to Tipperah.<sup>8</sup>

The Bodos group includes most of the tribes, occupying not only the hills but also found spread over the valley from Dhubri to Sadiya, in modern Assam. They were once a very dominant people of the valley, and they established the petty kingdoms, such as those of the Cacharis and Chutias, even before the intrusion of the Ahoms.<sup>9</sup>

In course of time, some of the Mongoloid tribes accepted Assamese, an Indo- Aryan speech but few other still retained their own languages or dialects. The Indo Mongoloid was usually designated as Kiratas in the Epics and Purans, the word Kiratas, perhaps, used to mean the indigenous Mongoloid people of Assam.

After the Mongoloid, the Caucasian came to Assam in different waves or batches. Anthropologist has noticed strains of three Caucasiad types in Assam. In Yuginitantra it is stated, "There are evidences to prove that a type of Mediterranean people came to Assam at an early period, but it is difficult to ascertain the exact date of their arrival. Mediterranean elements are noticeable in the present day Assamese population. The other element, called Alpino-Armenoid has also entered into the Indid Assamese population. The Alpino Armenoids are broad headed people and thereby they are distinguished from the Mediterranean. Probably, they also came at the same time along with the Mediterranean, but following a different route."<sup>11</sup>

The last element to ancient Assamese society was the Indo-Aryans strains that were with tall stature, long head, fair complexion and pointed nose. The migration of the Indo Aryans to eastern India can be traced back to the early century before Christ. References are made in Vedic literature, "Aitareya and Satapatha Brahma about the Aryan migration to Assam crossing the river Kartowa. Yuginitantra and Kalika Puran conceived the view that the Karatoya River was the boundary of ancient Assam or Kamrupa.

Narak is said to have settled Aryans in Pragjyotisha, which included then major part of Assam and North Bengal bounded by the Karatoya River in the west. There are evidence of even earlier settlement of Aryan in Assam from Ramayan in which it is stated that Pragjyotisha was founded by Amruta Raja , who was an Aryan king of Madhay Desha.<sup>11a</sup> The Indo- Aryan had arrived North Bihar at leased by the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. From that region they moved to Assam in different waves. The Nidanpur Copper plate inscription of Bhaskar Barman which was a renewal of his grand father's charter contains no less than two hundred

name of Brahman who were said to be of the Indo Aryan stock. The different copper plate inscriptions issued during the rule of Barman dynasty indicate that the Indo Aryans people were invited by the Kamrupi king and settled them in their kingdom. They were granted rent free land and employed to the high offices of the kingdom. The Brahmans played the crucial role in transforming the society who entrusted with the duty of diffusing the learning to the people. The Barman king, in their bid to spread Aryanism, adopted a systematic policy of "Agrahara Settlement" for the Brahmans in the midst of the Non- Aryan people.<sup>12</sup> The Brahmanic mission, propagating Aryan culture and values, had apparently confronted stiff opposition from the Non Aryan and had to make large scale compromises in course of time. As a result, strict observance of caste rule and practices of untouchability failed to strike deep roots in this land.<sup>13</sup> The Caucasoid, both pre-Vedic and post Vedic were responsible for evolving the Assamese language as well as Hindusing the people of this region.

Kautalya also referred to the conclusion of his book that during the Maurya period an Aryans wave entered the land. The Brhatsamhita's reference to Pragjoytisha and the Lauhita, based on the geography of the Parasara Tantra of the first century A.D, has an important bearing on the entry of the Aryans. From the fourth –fifth century A.D, we have a number of sources like the Raghuvamsa, Yuan Chwang's account and Purans, which definitely pointed to the settlement of the Aryan at least in the Brahmaputra valley.<sup>14</sup>

Most of the classical works have furnished the information that rulers of Pragjyotisha like Narakasur and Bhagadatta patronized the settlement of the Aryans. Kalika Puran states that Naraak patronized the

Aryans settlement. The Hara Gauri Samvada pointed out that Bhagadatta associated with the settlement of the hundred Brahman in Kamrupa.

The migration of the people speaking Indo-Aryan languages to Assam during first millennium A.D. was rapid and intensive and the process continued with varying degree of intensity during the next few centuries also. Kings of successive dynasties encouraged such migration and settlement of Brahmins and Kayastha in different parts of Assam.<sup>17a</sup> The Assamese being an Indo-Aryan speech was powerful enough to influence the indigenous people residing on the periphery of the Indo-Aryan speaking settlement who in course of time accepted Assamese as their own language.

Dr. B.M Das divided Assamese people in two major groups, the 'Indid Assamese' and the 'Mongoloid Assamese'. Indid Assamese mostly comprises the Hindu castes and the Muslims who are of the Caucasoid blood.<sup>15</sup> Most of the Mongoloid tribes became Assamese by embracing Assamese languages as their mother tongue and Hinduism as their creed. On the other hand, some of them retained their Tibeto-Burmese languages or dialects, but they use Assamese in dealing with the government as well as with the person of other communities. Some of these tribes, after their formal acceptance of Hinduism, treated as sub castes of the Sudras. The Ahoms, the Chutias, the Rajvamshi, the Moran, the Motaks are some of the Hinduised communities which accepted Assamese language centuries back as their mother tongue and became Assamese.<sup>16</sup>

The interaction of the Indo-Aryan speaking Caucasian stock and the Tibeto-Burman speaking indigenous people and the consequent fusion of blood contributed to the evolution of the society where in the Aryan and non-Aryan believes practices and way of living interfused to form a

composite culture of Assam. P.C Choudhury, one of the great Anthropologists of Assam, opines, "Assamese which was not fully developed in the ancient period, is now the only Indo-Aryan language; but the Austric and Tibeto-Burman elements have largely contributed both to the language and to the culture of Assam. Though the process of Hinduisation of the non- Aryan tribes carried on from early times, the conversion was very slow. The state remained; therefore, a land of heterogeneous racial strains with linguistic diversities, notwithstanding, the modern Assamese language has occupied the place of a vehicle of expression of a composite Assamese civilization".<sup>17</sup>

The most notable contribution of the Ahom rule was the political unification of the country from Sadiya to Manas in the west under their rule. In consequences, in the course of time, it led to sociocultural and linguistic unity and succeeded in awakening the spirit of homogeneity among the people. Perhaps, the most important contributory factor for streamlining Assamese society was the Vaisnavite movement initiated by Sankardeva in the sixteenth century. The new Vaisnavite movement heralded a period of cultural renaissance that brought into being an efflorescence of literature, music, drama. The salient features of what is known at present as Assamese culture are mostly gifts of the Vaisnavite renaissance.

Close political and social contact for nearly two thousand years between the Indo- Mongoloid tribes and the Caucasian Aryans has produced a syncretic culture in which, though the Indo Aryan elements are predominant the tribal and non Aryan elements also played a conspicuous part in evolving the social and cultural life in Assam.

The Assamese society was further influenced by the growth of Muslim population in Assam from thirteenth century, A.D. The Muslim

invasion of Assam, under Turk-Afghan Sultan of Gauda and the Mughal, which continued for a period over four hundred years, resulting in growth of Muslim settlement in Assam.<sup>18a</sup> It not only alter the demography of Assam but contributed a lot to the socio- cultural arena of Assam too.

The diversity of the Assamese population has been further expanded due to immigration of different classes of people from various parts of the British Empire. Thus, the Biharis, Marwaris, Oriyas, Punjabis, Nepalis, Tea garden labours, Bengali clerks and Muslim agricultural labourers imported from East Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and some other parts of India. The business community like Marwari, Punjabi and Bengali and others came to Assam with their commercial objectives, but most of them settled down here. The migration of agricultural labourer from Maimensing, Pabna, Bogura, districts of East Bengal right from the first decade of the twentieth century until the partition of India, even thereafter, and their settlement in different Char and Wasteland, not only increased the Muslim population in Assam but influenced tremendously the socio-economic condition of Assam. However, most of the immigrants accepted Assamese as their Official languages; they have been maintaining their own culture and speak their own languages at their home.

In the process of assimilation of these diverse elements of different races, tribes, ethnic groups, the great Assamese society has been formed and the colourful Assamese culture has been developed.

### **3.2. Background of the formation of Goalpariya society**

Goalpara district had never been a separate political entity and it was an integral part of various kingdoms, like, Pragjyotisha, Kamrupa, Kamata and Koch, from the time of the traditional king Narakasur of

Pragjyotisha to Parikshit Narayan, the last king of eastern Koch kingdom or Koch Hajo kingdom. Ultimately, it came under the Mughals in 1613 A.D who ruled it till it was ceded to the British with rest of Bengal in 1765.

As mentioned in other references, that with the fall of the Pala dynasty in early part of twelfth century, the powerful kingdom of Kamrupa disintegrated, and numerous independent and semi-independent kingdoms were emerged. The western part of the kingdom retained the name of Kamrupa where a line of kings' exercised power till about the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, after which the Bhuyans gradually rose to power.<sup>19</sup> The kingdom of Kamrupa, came to be known as Kamata since its capital shifted to Kamatapur. In the closing decade of fifteenth century, Kamata kingdom declined in the wake of the invasion of Alauddin Hussein Shah, who conquered it in 1498, and established Muslim rule there. The Muslim rule was, however, short live, and with in a short period the Bhuyans unitedly uprooted it and established their power in Kamata.<sup>20</sup> Under such circumstances, Viswa Singha founded Koch kingdom on the ruin of the Kamata kingdom, subjugating the Bhuyans in 1515. The Koch kingdom reached its zenith during rule of Nara Narayan and Chilarai but the Koch kingdom disintegrated in 1580 when Nara Narayan ceded eastern part of his kingdom to Raghudev Narayan, the son of Chilarai, stretching the tract of land from Sankosh on the west to Barnadi on the East. The territory of the Goalpara district was an integral part of Eastern Koch kingdom, which was called Koch-Hajo in Persian literature.

The Mughal conquered eastern Koch kingdom in 1613, defeating Parikshit Narayan but soon war broke out between the Ahom and the Mughal on the question of the supremacy of western Assam. The Ahom

Mughal conflict, finally, ended with fixing river Manas as the boundary of these two powers. Since then territory west of Manas including territory under undivided Goalpara district came under the Mughal as a conquered land and became part of Bengal province who held it till it was, with the rest of Bengal ceded to the British in 1765 A.D.<sup>21</sup>

The district under went several changes in jurisdiction under the British. Initially the area of Goalpara district had been included to permanently settled district of Rangpur.<sup>22</sup> For administrative convenience the area from Manas in the east to Sankosh in the west were divided into three Thanas, viz: Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari. By the regulation of 1822, the area comprising three Thana of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari separated from Rangpur along with Garo hills to form the district of North East Rangpur later came to know as Goalpara district. David Scott was appointed as administrator of the new district, called Civil Commissioner.<sup>23</sup> When Assam was occupied by the British in 1826, after first Anglo Burmese war, Goalpara was annexed to Assam Valley Division and its administration was placed in the hands of the commissioner of Assam.<sup>24</sup> Goalpara was again separated from Assam and placed under the commission of Koch Bihar division in all matters in 1866. After Bhutan war, the jurisdiction of Bhutan Duars were annexed to the British Empire and formed two districts, viz. Eastern Duar, and Western Duar; the Eastern Duar was added to Goalpara district in 1866.<sup>25</sup> Goalpara district was finally incorporated to the new province of Assam, when Assam was created into chief Commissioner Province in 1874.

It is seen that the fall of the kingdom of ancient Kamrup, in early twelfth century was, indeed, a thrusting of blow to the political social and cultural unity of the people of Kamrupa what had been existed since the

remote past. The absence of the central authority was a boon to the local chiefs to rule their respective territories independently. This political disunity helped the land thirsty foreign powers to invade Assam and we find that the Ahoms entered Assam from the East and the Muslim from the west in early thirteenth century. The introduction of Ahom kingdom in upper Assam in 13<sup>th</sup> century brought a major political change in Brahmaputra Valley. Within next two hundred years the Ahoms established themselves as the major political force on Brahmaputra valley and by 17<sup>th</sup> century whole Brahmaputra valley up to River Manas came under Ahom rule. The political unity of Assam was, thus, revived under the Ahoms, who ruled Assam for about six hundred years. During this long period of rule, Assam not only politically but socio- culturally also reorganized under the guidance of the Ahom ruling families. However, the Ahoms had their aboriginal language, religion and culture but for the greater political interest, they assimilated with the local people accepting Hinduism and Assamese. Under their guidance, the greater Assamese society and culture was reshaped.

By 16<sup>th</sup> century, we find two strong political powers in this region, the Ahoms and the Koch, under whom the ancient Kamrupa reorganized politically, socially and culturally, with distinct identical characters. The Assamese society was re-organized under the Ahoms and Kamatapuri society was re-organized under the Koch.

The division of the Koch Kingdom and occupation of its eastern part by the Mughals, comprising the land from Sankosh to Barnadi in 1613 A.D. laid the foundation of the separate society and culture in western Assam, especially in Goalpara district area. The Ahoms succeeded in recover the territory west of Barnadi up to river Manas from the Mughals in 1667. Since then the territory under Goalpara district

came under the Mughal who ruled it till 1765, a period of 152 years. During this period Goalpara had been part of Bengal Subah with a common administrative, economic and cultural condition. The British also followed the same path, and ruled this tract of land, incorporating with Bengal province till to 1826 a period of 61 years.

During this long separation of Goalpara from Assam and underwent separate political, administrative and cultural atmosphere unlike that of Assam, resulted in formation of a unique society in this region with separate cultural heritage. The region of Goalpara, after separation with rest of Assam, came in close contact with Bengal in political, administrative, social and cultural point of view under the Mughal and the British rule. As a result, Goalpariya society and culture witnesses the distinct influences of Koches, Mughals, and Bengal's socio-cultural features.

Though, there were affinities in regard to the racial and ethnic elements of the population of both the societies, Assamese as well as Goalpariya, composed under same kingdom of Kamrupa, but after fall of it, we can witness some political as well as administrative changes, influencing deeply on the society of Goalpara. As a result, Goalpariya society and culture attained some unique features of its own. The most important factor that contributed much in the growth of unique society in Goalpara is the prolong rule of the Muslim. Since the early part of thirteenth century Goalpara came to the contact of the Muslims, and went under Muslim rule occasionally even before the establishment of the Mughal rule on it. Goalpara came under the Mughal in 1613 who ruled it till 1765. Thus, the prolong Muslim rule, not only brought a demographical change in the society of the region but influenced on the socio, economic and cultural field too, especially, in language, food

habits, dresses, art architecture, revenue administration, war technology and way of living. The long attachment of the region with Bengal also influenced the Goalpariya society and culture. Goalpara had been considered as a part of Bengal and went through a long journey under common administrative, political, social and economic condition; in consequences, we find wide influences of Bengali society and culture upon the socio-cultural arena of Goalpara.

In the matter of revenue administration Goalpara came under zamindary system like that of Bengal which was unknown to rest of Assam. The zamindary system affected the people of Goalpara in such a way that most of the laymen of this region turned to poor due to the economic exploitation of the zamindars.

To sum up, the growth of unique Goalpariya society and culture was due to the long separation of the region from rest of Assam politically, socially and culturally in one hand and impact of long time attachment with Bengal under the Mughal and the British under same political, administrative, economic and socio-cultural condition on the other. As a result, the society that formed in Goalpara and the culture that developed there was unique in features unlike that of Assamese society and culture.

### **3.3. Ethnic elements of the population of Goalpara**

The composition of the heterogenic society of Goalpara in western Assam was the outcome of admixture of various racial, tribal; and ethnic elements, both Aryans and Non Aryans stock, belonging to diverse linguistic and religious groups, like what was happen in the case of Assamese society. As stated earlier, the ancient society of Kamrupa of which Goalpara had been a part, a tribal society composed of Non Aryan

stock but this was Aryanised by introduction of Aryan population, brought from the west by the king of Kamrupa, who followed the policy of *Agrahar*. Thus, the Non Aryans tribal society of ancient Assam gradually Aryanised by the Royal patronage in ancient times and with due course of times various racial groups entered Assam in medieval period from the east and the west and even from different parts of India. The process of formation of the society of ancient Assam began in the pre-historic period and continued for several hundred years to attain its maturity. Goalpariya society has developed to an independent social unit due to historical evolution of a long course of period.

The Goalpariya society has been composed of various racial and tribal elements. Among the social elements are Garos, Rabhas, Hajong, Bodos, Cacharis, Chawtal, Koch Rajbangshi, Mech, Jaddha, Sutradhar, *Napit*, Jogi (Nath) Namsudra, Gossain, Mahanta, Kalita, Raslun, Hira, Kamar, Kaibarta etc.

**Garos:** The Garos inhabits the tract of mountainous areas to the South East of the district now with in the district of Garohills and formerly included in Goalpara district <sup>26</sup>. They are agriculturist people and live by villages. The Garos are sub divided into many petty tribes. Although they are hill tribes but a considerable number of Garos are live in plain area in Goalpara district, which returned in the Census report of 1872 at 9957. Many Garos migrated to Goalpara who are now dwelling in the north bank of Brahmaputra within the present district of Dhubri and Kokrajhar.

**Bodo-Cachari:** The Bodo-Cacharis are the most numerous tribe of the plain district of Assam. They are mostly concentrated in Goalpara, Kamrupa and Darrang district of Assam. According to the latest Census enumeration, their total population in Assam is over six lakhs. According to the census report of 1872, the numbers of Cacharis in Goalpara

excluding Eastern Duars was 22,755 and in Eastern Duar their number were much more. Presently in Kokrajhar and Chirang district of undivided Goalpara, the Bodos forms the predominant group of the population. Considerable sections of the Bodos are Hindus but the larger section still professes their aged old tribal faith of worshipping 'Bathau Brai'.<sup>27</sup>

The Cacharis are called Bodo in Goalpara, Kamrupa and Darrang district. They are doubtlessly an offshoot from the original great Cachari race and speak a language similar to that of the people of Cachar. In addition to their language, the Bodo- Cacharis of Goalpara also understand Assamese and Bengali and speak it in dealing with those people or others not of their own tribe but with a strong nasal pronunciation.

**Koches or Rajbangshi:** The Rajbangshi or Koches constitute a sizable population of Kamrup, Goalpara and Koch Behar. The Koches are frequently referred to as *Kuvacha* in the Purans and Tantra.<sup>28</sup> Entomologically; they belong to the Mongoloid stock allied to the Bodos. They accepted Hinduism and entered into Hindu caste. They are dominating figure in Bongaigaon and Dhubri district of present times, which had been within erstwhile Goalpara district.

The Koches of Goalpara and North Bengal called themselves as Rajavamsi or Rajabangshi and claimed to be Kshatriyas having sprung from the same community to which Coch Bihar Royal family descended. The Rajbangshi speaks Assamese in their own intonation while the Koches of central and eastern Assam speak like any other Assamese of their locality. The Koches observe and perform the principal rites and observances according to the Hindu Smrities. Grierson sub divided Koches into six groups. The Rajbangshi or Koch and the Hajong,

principally engaged in agriculture. They were one of the tribes who ruled this part of the country in the past. Their number rose to 118,091 in 1872 excluding Eastern Duar. In the Census report of 1872 the Rajbangshi were subdivided to various classes and acquired social status as well. Some holding rank of Kayastha and Kalita and they were classed among the degraded Sudra caste.

**Rabhas:** The Rabhas belong to Mongoloid tribe akin to the Bodo Cacharis. The Rabhas are more Hinduised than the Bodos. The Rabhas are sub divided into Pati and Rangdheni. Rabhas, Maitaria, Jotla, Betlia, Kochrabha, Dahari. All of them speak their own language at home and accepted Assamese as official language. According to Census report of 1872 their number in Goalpara district excluding Eastern Duar was 30,124.

**Bhutias:** A few Bhutias inhabited in the Eastern Duars portion of the district and resemble in every respect their countrymen in the Bhutan hills . According to Robinsons Account of Assam, 1849 the Bhutias speak a language which is said to be a dialect of the Tibetan more or less blended with words and idioms. Their religion is a form of Buddhism.

**Hajong:** Another tribe called Hajong is living in Goalpara district on the slopes of the hills especially in the slope of Garo hills. They are Hindus in creed and language, Cacharies in blood. Their number in the population of Goalpara is small.

**Mech:** The Meches are also Cacharis, although they don't acknowledge the relationship. They belong to Mongoloid stock. The distinction between Mech and the Koch are meager and confused. The founder of Koch dynasty Viswa Singha was son of Hariya Mandal, a Mech chief. By accepting Hinduism Viswa singha identified them as Kshatriya. Still we

find some Mech family in Goalpara who speak their own language and profess their aboriginal faith.

**Castes and classes:** Casteism is a special feature of the Hindu social system. But in the modern context of civilization it has lost all of its former significance and as a rule, all caste distinctions are now on the wane and a casteless Hindu society is now in the offing.

### **High Hindu Castes**

- (1) **Brahman:** Brahmin is the first or priestly caste in the Hindu social system. Its members were employed as priests, Spirituals instructors, ministerial officers, landowners etc. The majority of the Brahman of Goalpara is the descendants of early immigrants from upper India, Koch Bihar or Kamrupa. Some Brahmans belonged to Vedic class. The census report of 1872 records the number of Brahman in Goalpara is 2366.
- (2) **Kshatriyas:** They are next to Brahman in regard of high status in society. They were warrior caste now engaged in trading and works under the government. In Goalpara, the Kshatriya engaged in trade and commerce and in census of 1872, they were recorded as mercantile caste. Their number in Goalpara were 199.
- (3) **Kayastha:** Kayastha are also high-class people of Goalpariya society. They migrated from upper India or Bengal and employed in various respectable jobs under Kamrupa government. They were government official, clerks, accountants and landlords of Goalpara. Hunter mentions their number as 1438 in 1872. The Bhuyans of Goalpara belonged to Kayastha caste.
- (4) **Baidya:** Another high-ranking class in Goalpara was Baidya. It is an occupational class not caste. They were physician and later on they

abandoned their original profession and embraced government job and other professions. They are supposed to have originally been the off spring of Brahmans father and Sudra mother.

- (5) **Kalita:** Kalitas are said to have high rank in Goalpara, ranking above all the Sudra castes. Prior to coming of Brahman, Kalitas formed the highest class among the people and acted as priests. At present, they enjoyed high status in the society, exercises commanding influence over other castes, and held in high esteem by all. Their number was 11529 according to the Census report of 1872 and their main occupation was agriculture.
- (6) **Vaisya:** They are third or trading caste in original fourfold Sanskrit social organization. In Goalpara, they were degenerated to such a degree as to be classed among the Sudra castes.
- (7) **Ganak:** They were a degraded class of Brahman who has lost rank owing to their indiscriminate acceptance of gifts from low caste. Ganak are astrologers and fortunetellers.

### **Low caste or sudra caste**

According to the census report of 1872, we find some Sudra Castes in Goalpara such as Napit, Kumar, Barai, grower of pan *Mali*(gardener) *Goala* or cattle keepers, *Madak* or sweet maker, Kauri or Madhukauri, *Kansari* or braziers or coppersmith, *Lahor*, *Tele* or oil pressurer, *Sutradhar* or Carpentars and Keot. Keots are two classes- *Halua* and *Jalua*. Halua belong to the profession of cultivation while the Jalua engaged in fishing.

Ahoms in Goalpara district migrated from Assam and intermixed with Rajvamsi, the Khen, a branch of Rajbangshi or Koch tribe resides bordering Rangpur. Besides, Hunter mentions some cultivating caste like

*shalos, Balvia, Basiya, Bhatia* who migrated from downwards their number were 45 in 1872 Census, *Behiya, Boria, Das, Haalgir, Jarua, Kaibarta, Kveri-Kurmi* etc There were some professional class, such as *Kandu*, preparers of Parched gram, *Suri* or *Sunri*, were makers, *Suburna* banik or bankers and jewelers, *SoNara* or gold smith.

### **Lower Caste: (professional)**

We find some low caste Hindus in Goalpara, viz., *Dhoba, Kahar* (Palanquin bearer) *Jogi, Katuni, Dhunuk, Hira* (potter maker) *Dom, ChuNarai* or limeburners, *Tati* or weavers who were subdivided into many clans, *Baidyakar, Nat* or dancer, migrated from Assam, *Met* or seller of the fish and vegetable, *Jaluya, Jaladhur, Mala, Jhal, Palni* (ferryman) and other labourer class are considered lower caste of the society.

### **Semi aboriginal castes**

The following are the semi-aboriginal caste, forming the very lowest section of the Hindu community. They are chiefly employed as labourer, such as, *Bagdi, Bediya, Chamar* or *Muchi, Chandal, Kaora, Hari, Dom, Methar* or sweeper, *Shikari* or hunters, Gold smith etc., are considered very low caste of the society.

### **Muslim community**

The Muslim Population in Assam is Called *Garia, Mariya, Miah*, and *Bangladeshi*, in central and upper Assam, and *Deshi, Ujjani, Bhatia, Dakhina* and *Charua* in western Assam, especially in undivided Goalpara district. The original pattern of Muslim population in undivided Goalpara district is quite different from the Muslims of the other states of India. Like Hindus, Muslims of Assam also entered in different succeeding waves.<sup>28</sup>

The Muslim people of Goalpara are profoundly divided into two groups, viz., *Ujjani* or *Deshi* and *Bhatiya* or *Dakhina*. The immigrants Muslim from East Bengal are called "*Bhatia*" or "*Charua*" in Goalpara and "*Miah*" or "*Bangladshi*" in rest of Assam. The indigenous Muslims are called "*Deshi*" in Goalpara and "*Garia*" in other part of Assam. The word *Garia* relates to the immigrants from Gauda, the former Bengal.<sup>28.b</sup> The term *Bhatia* and *Ujjani* are relatively indicative of the original homestead of the Muslim residing in Goalpara. The term *Bhatia* is derived from the word *Bhati* or downward. This is used to indicate the immigrants came from downward, i.e. from East Bengal or East Pakistan, presently from Bangladesh. The *Deshi* Muslims are said to be the indigenous people of this region. The term *Deshi* is derived from the word *Desh*, which connotes the meaning locality.

### **3.4. Role of Zamindars of Western Assam in Reconstruction of the Society of Goalpara**

In regard to the formation and expansion of the Goalpariya society, the zamindars of the district of Goalpara played an important role. As stated earlier, zamindars of this region procured huge agricultural labourers from Maimensingh, Pabna, Bogura, Rangpur and Rajshahi district of east Bengal of the British India for expansion of agricultural land. Besides, Bihari, Bengali, Rajasthani, Punjabi, Nepali and other Hindusthani people were invited and engaged in various works by most of the zamindars of this region. It is to be mentioned here that in the first decade of 20th century the zaminders of western Assam were offered opportunity of rent free for a term of five years by the British Indian government for waste and char land converting agricultural land in a bid to expand agriculture in such areas. As a result, each zamindar of Assam began to import agricultural labourers from East Bengal to clear off the jungles and bushes of the forest and riverine area and started cultivation thereof. The

land thirsty *Bhatia* were attracted with this opportunities and wave of huge crowd flowed to Assam. They were settled down in different char and the forest land of Goalpara district as well as to the various *khasland* of Assam. Thus, the population of Assam increased enormously from the first decade of twentieth century. The process of immigration was continued for several decades, which seriously altered the demography of Goalpara in particular and Assam in general. The large number immigration of *Bhatia* from east Bengal not only affected the demography of this region but influenced very seriously the socio economic and cultural foundation of Goalpara as well as of Assam. The British Government encouraged the immigration of the agricultural labourers from East Bengal to increase the agricultural production, especially, for the jute production in Assam. They mostly concentrated in Goalpara district, resulting expansion of Muslim population there. The flow of immigrants to Goalpara districts from Maimensingh, Pabna, Bogra and Rangpur districts of East Bengal began during the decade 1901-1911 and settled on Char land of Goalpara. During the decade, population of the district increased by 30 percent whereas its increase in earlier decade was 2 percent in 1891-1901 and 1.4 percent in 1881-1891.<sup>29</sup> The immigration of the land thirsty people from East Bengal continued after wards and it had become as a problem for the Assam Government even before independence. In the post Independence period the immigration of the people of East Pakistan was also continued. During freedom movement of Bangladesh, huge Bangladeshi both Hindus and Muslims took shelter in Assam and in West Bengal. Of these fugitives, a part did not return and remained in India, especially in Assam and Bengal. These immigrants have socio-cultural affinity with the people of present Bangladesh, for which the immigrants are called

Bangladeshi, Bhatia, Dhakhina and Miah. In Goalpara, they are generally called Bhatia.

### 3.5. Deshi (Indegenous) Muslim of Goalpara

The origin of the Deshi Muslim in Goalpara can be traced back from the invasion of Mohammed Bin Bakhtiyar on Kamrupa in 1206. Since then the Turk Afghan Sultan of Gour continuously invaded Kamrupa. This was also followed by the Mughal who invaded Assam in many occasions.<sup>30</sup> The Muslim invaded Assam from 13<sup>th</sup> century to 17<sup>th</sup> century for about 19<sup>th</sup> times.<sup>31</sup> Though, the Muslim failed to establish their power on Assam on permanent basis, but they succeeded to bring western Assam, specially the territory between Manash to Sankosh under their control. As a result, the Muslim settlement was made in large number in Goalpara district during this period. Besides, a large number of local people converted to Islam due to existing caste system in Hindu society and liberal principles of Islam. Hussein Shah, the Nawab of Gauda established Muslim colony on Kamata kingdom. During this period huge Muslim settlement was made in Rangamati area under Goalpara district, and in Hajo under Kamrupa district. Hajo was one of the colonies of the Muslim.<sup>32</sup>

From 1613 to 1765, the Mughal governed Western Assam. All the expeditions against the Ahom kingdom, comprised of Eastern Assam, carried out, from Rangamati Thana of the Mughals. During this period Rangamati was Headquarter of the Mughal soldiers, administrators, traders, preachers, and visitors. The *Peer*, *Aulia*, *Darbesh* and other religious Gurus frequently visited Goalpara and adjacent areas. Many of them settled down in this region. The *Panch Peer Dargah* of Dhubri and *Poa Mecca* of Hajo are some of the examples of these events. The religious priests of Islam were engaged in the propagation of Islam,

founding Dargah in several parts of Assam. For their restless efforts, many local people of lower castes converted to the Islam, which was the vital reason of the growth of Muslim population in Assam in general and in Goalpara district in particular. Thus, during Mughal rule Muslim Population in Goalpara was rapidly increased.

There is a general presumption in central and upper Assam that the Muslims speak Assamese at their home are Garia Muslims, and those speak Bengali, or dialect of present Bangladesh are Bangladeshi.

*Garia Muslims* are said to have come from Gauda (Bengal), so they are called Gauriya, alias Garia. But all the Muslim of Assam is not Gariya in that point of view. Infact, the composition of Muslim population of Assam in Medieval time made with the persons coming from Gauda, war prisoner, converted, and religious priests from Middle East countries. We find that huge local people converted to Islam due to the efforts of the famous Muslim Saints, like Giasuddin Aulia, Shah Akbar, Shah Milan, Shah Kamal and many others. Besides, some Muslim religious saints came from Arabian land, Turkey or Afghanistan who settled in Assam. They are of Sayyeid, Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan clans. Although, the term Garia implies to identify the indigenous Muslims in Assam, infact, a portion of Assamese Muslim are Garia but it is too hard to distinguish the Garia from that of Sayyeid, Pathan or other clan of medieval immigrant Muslim. It is because of the long course of assimilation of various groups of Muslim population in Assam with the indigenous, accepting Assamese language and culture forms a single class, commonly known as Garia.

On the other hand, Goalpara, being the part of Gauda or Bengal till the formation of Assam as a province in 1874, the Muslim came during Sultanate period or Mughal period from Gauda to Goalpara are not called

*Gouriya* but are called *Deshi*. We find huge conversion of local people to Islam from the time of Baktiyar Khilji's invasion to Kamrupa to the last part of Mughal rule, even thereafter, and these Muslim populations are called *Deshi* Muslims. Beside, many soldiers, *Peers*, *Aulias*, *Darbeshes*, administrators, officials, traders' technicians, and cultivators came to Goalpara, some of them settled here and assimilated with the local people. The assimilation of the converted and the outsiders forms the basis of *Deshi* Muslim in Goalpara. The term "*Deshi*" derived from "*Desh*" or locality. They are presumed as the son of the soil, because major portion of the Muslim Population in Goalpara are converted of the lower caste Hindu of the locality.

According to the census report of 1872, the total population of Goalpara was 4, 44,761 of which 89,916 were Muslims. They constitute 22.05 percent of the total population of the district.<sup>32a</sup> The term *Garia* which is prevalent in Assam other than old Goalpara district is synonymous to the term *Deshi*, prevailing in Goalpara. The indigenous Muslims are called *Garia* in central and upper Assam and *Deshi* or *Goalpariya* in Erstwhile Goalpara.

The *Deshi* Muslims are subdivided in Goalpara because of their origin and profession, viz, *Jarua*, *Daider* or *Maimmel*, *Bahirbandi*, *Bhitarbandi*, *Sandar* or *Bepari*, *Teli*, *Habraghati*, *Jola* etc. Commenting on the Muslim population of Goalpara, W.W.Hunter says, that almost the whole of the Muslim population of Goalpara belong to the Sunni Sect, although, Shiekh, Sayyied, Mughal and Pathan families are also found here.<sup>33</sup> They are not Indian, their original home was in either in Arabian world or Afghanistan or Turkey.

It is to be mentioned that the Muslim population of Goalpara except the immigrants from East Bengal or East Pakistan, are comprised

of the descendants of the Muslim coming from Gauda, as soldiers, administrators, officials, technicians and religious preachers like, Peer, *Aulia*, and *Darbesh* from Arabian world or from Afghanistan or Turkey, and the local convertents. They are the settlers of earlier period and hence they can be considered as the native Musalmans of Assam.<sup>34</sup>

W.W.Hunter mentions, "Goalpara as being the frontier district of Assam, and having been often included within the political limit of Bengal, naturally presents mixed ethological features. Excluding the population of Eastern Duars, the census of 1872 registered 86,001 Hindus proper or 21.08 percent of the entire population of Goalpara. The Muhammedan of Goalpara, for the most part of the same ethnic origin, is 89,916 or 22.05 percent of the total population, being more than one half of the entire Musalman population in all Assam. The semi aboriginal is 1, 32,095 in number or 32.89 percent of the total population; and among them the Koches were especially numerous. The original tribes, numbering 97,732, or 23.99 percent, chiefly made of Rabhas, Meches, Cacharis and the Garos. Both the Meches and Garos of Assam appear to be absolutely confined to Goalpara district, which also contains just one half of the total Rabhas to be found in the province".<sup>35</sup>

### **3.6. Immigration during colonial rule**

As stated earlier, that after establishment of the British Rule in Assam the British administrators brought with them some persons, expert in some particular fields from other parts of India. Thus, they brought Bengali clerks from West Bengal, labourers for work in railways and in constructions of roads and bridges from Bihar, tea garden labourers from Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh. Owing to the British occupation of Assam, people of different classes came to Assam with a view to have their livelihood. Thus, Marwari, Panjabi, Bihari, Nepali, Munda, Bengali, and

some others came to Assam and most of them settled down here permanently including Goalpara district.

Shortly, before the Burmese invasion of Assam, a few hundred Sikhs brought from Punjab as sepoys by the British. They were stationed at Hadira Chauki, opposite of Goalpara town that fought against the Burmese. After British occupation of Assam, they scattered and settled in different places of Assam including Goalpara. They are still locally called Singhs. A few families are residing in Dhubri and Goalpara town and retained their national customs and habits. As they did not bring with them their wives, they married women of the lower caste Hindu, like Koch or Mech.

The immigration was the main factor contributing to the rapid growth of the population of Goalpara district. Its impact was increasingly felt in the district since the beginning of twentieth century. Goalpara had all sorts of immigrants, viz., inter district, inter states, international immigrants etc.

The flow of immigrants to Goalpara district from Mymensing, Pabna, Bagura and Rangpur districts of East Bengal ( Bangladesh) began during the decade 1901-1911, the population of Goalpara increased by 30 percent, whereas in the previous decade its increase was 2% only. By 1921, a large batch of immigrants came and their movement extended as far as to Assam valley. The persons born in East Bengal but enumerated their name in Goalpara went rising decade by decade. Their number stood 77,000 in 1911, 151000 in 1921, and in 1931, it rose to 170,000, which visualized the picture of the large number of the immigrants from East Bengal. In 1941 no census were done due to World War II, but in 1951 census huge immigrants registered their name in Goalpara, who born in East Pakistan and their number were 136,000. As a

result of this influx, the population of Goalpara was rapidly growth. According to Census Report of 1951 the total population of Goalpara rose to 1108124 of which Muslims was 475828, constituting the percentage of total population was 42.94.<sup>35a</sup>

The influx of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan constituted the highest migration stream into Assam during 1941-51 decade. There was steady and continuous influx of Hindu refugees to Assam during Noakhali riots and at the time of partition of India. Of these refugees, 85,986 were settled in Goalpara district. Out of 23611 families, 2827 were sheltered in urban areas of which 2544 families settled in Dhubri subdivision and 283 families were settled in Goalpara subdivision.<sup>36</sup>

Though the immigrants from East Bengal, later on from East Pakistan were predominant in to the district, other immigrants except Nepalis were negligible.

### **3.7. Rural population**

According to the census of 1872, there was not a single town in the district of Goalpara, containing population upwards of 5000. The population of Goalpara was entirely rural inhabitants. Mr. Magrath's District Census compilation had classified the villages of Goalpara according to the number of inhabitants. According to his survey there were 777 villages which had population less than 200 people, 306 villages having inhabitants between 200-500, 175 villages whose population were between 500-1000, 60 villages containing population between 1000-2000, 9 villages which had population between 2000-3000, and there only three villages having population above 3000.<sup>38</sup>

In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century the number of villages growth rapidly to Goalpara district which is shown in the following table.

B.C.Allen has described in his report the condition of the villages of the district of Goalpara, he writes, "These villages are not, however, well defined units, clusters of huts which stand out clearly in the centre of the fields tilled by their inhabitants. Rice the staple crop grown in wide plains, dotted over with clumps of bamboos and fruits trees in which are buried the houses of cultivators. It is groves and not villages that the traveler sees when riding through the more density-populated portions of the district, and not a house can usually be described until he has penetrated this jungle of plantains, betel nut trees and bamboos. There is no dearth of building sides, there are no communal lands, and there is nothing to keep the population together. Except in the Eastern Duars, it is difficult to tell where one village ends and another begins or to which of the larger clumps of trees should be assigned the smaller clumps that are freely dotted about amongst the rice fields. The result is that the statistics of villages are of little practical importance. Taking them, however, for what they are worth, it appears that villages as a rule run small and in 1901, nearly half the total population were living in hamlets with less than 500 inhabitants".<sup>39</sup>

The growth of population in Goalpara resulted in cleaning up jungles and bushes, especially, in south bank of Brahmaputra for domicile and extension of cultivable lands and thus, converted the wilderness into prosperous villages. Roads and rails have penetrated deep into the villages and modern vehicles, where bullock carts reigned supreme. Villages, which were not well defined units having schools, colleges, hospitals, dispensaries, post offices and other basic amenities of life, especially after independence. However, villages are still islands of bamboos, betel nut groves and hidden homesteads in a sea of paddy fields.<sup>40</sup>

The expansion of the population resulted to the increase of the number of villages in Goalpara, from the beginning of the Twentieth century. The following table shows how fast the number of the villages of Goalpara been increased. The table is prepared in decade wise.

Year	Number of villages in Goalpara
1901	1,461,
1911	2,135,
1921	2,550,
1931	3,188,
1941	3765,
1951	3990,

Sources: <sup>41</sup> Census of India shown in the Gazetteers of Assam State, Goalpara district, 1979, p=85

### 3.8. Urban population in Goalpara

“The population of Goalpara district is entirely rural and the people do not evince any tendency towards urban life” the aforesaid remark of W.W. Hunter reflects the picture of urbanization of Goalpara district in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was not a single town in Goalpara district having population exceeding 5000 souls. Hunter has mentioned some of the towns of Goalpara district. Among them important towns were: Goalpara, the civil headquarter of the district, inhabited by 4678 persons, Gauripur, next to Goalpara having population of 1805 as per census report of 1872, Dhubri, with population of only 477, being the sub divisional headquarter and the seat of the subordinate judge’s court and also the headquarter of the Executive Engineer of the Lower Assam division. He also mentions the name of some other town, like Lakhipur, Bilasipara, and Chapar being the residence of the respective Estate.<sup>44</sup>

Census report of 1901 had mentioned only two towns in Goalpara district, viz, Goalpara with population of 6287 and Dhubri having population of 3737. Gauripur was declared as town in the census report of 1921, containing a population of 4311. Thus, in 1921 about 17230 persons found living urban areas in Goalpara. The urban population rose to 40629 in 1951. In the following decade six more towns were declared in Goalpara district, namely, Bilasipara, Kokrajhar, Mankachar, Bongaigaon, Sapatgram and Abhayapuri. Bijni and Lakhipur with increased of the urban population to 1, 72,294, forming 8 percent of total population of the district. Thus, over 92 percent of the total population of Goalpara was living in rural areas during the decade.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, it comes clear that in the second half of twentieth century the Goalpariya society was predominantly a rural society, forming by the Aryans and Non Aryans stock, comprising of the indigenous and outsiders, of the diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups.

### **3.9. Languages**

According to the Census Report of 1951 the people of Goalpara speak about sixty languages and dialects as their mother tongue. Assamese was the predominant language in the district and 56.29 percent of the districts of total population spoke it as their mother tongue.<sup>45a</sup> Infacts, the record of the Census of 1951 reflects the number of people who accepted Assamese as their official language or medium of instruction. There are numerous classes of people living in Goalpara, who accepted Assamese as their official language but speak their own in home. The majority person of Goalpara people speaks their mother tongue, which is called Goalpariya language or Deshi language (a branch of Assamese).

The Koch Rajbangshi claimed that the language they speak to be Rajbangshi language. Presently, controversy is being going on the issue of the name of the langue prevalent in Goalpara region. A good number of the people of undivided Goalpara district are in the view that the language spoken in this region is called Deshi language. On the contrary, the Kosh- Rajbangshi claimed that the prevalent language in this region is Rajbangshi language. They put forward the comment of Grierson who termed this language as the Rajbangshi language in his work, the Linguistic Survey of India. The language that spoken by the indigenous people of Goalpara both Hindus and Muslims is neither akin with Assamese nor Bengali but a language developed by the admixing Assamese, Bengali, Rabha and Cacharies.<sup>46</sup> There are sharp controversy among the scholars about the origin and development of the Goal pariya language .

“The Assamese language spoken in the district of Goalpara is called (Goalpariya or Rajbangshi) in western Assamese, owing to its variance in pronunciation from the Assamese spoken in the eastern Assam.”<sup>47</sup> Grierson identified Goalpariya language as a branch of Bengali and termed it as Rajbangshi language in his book but this has not been accepted by the modern scholars like, Bani Kanta Kakati, S.N Sarma and some others. The nontribal people of Goalpara both Hindus and Muslims have termed their spoken language as Deshi or Goalpariaya language, what is called Rajbangshi language by the Koch Rajbongshi people. The latest researches has proved, that the prevalent language of Goalpara is a branch of Assamese not Bengali. They have forwarded their arguments, on the basis of the use of “Ra” in ancient plate, which has been discovered in Eastern Bengal and Goalpara in the shape of singular peculiarity of Assamese script.<sup>48</sup> Grierson also remarks that the

Rajbongshi dialect is not confined to the Bengal province but extends to the Goal Para district of Assam in which it gradually merge into Assamese.<sup>49</sup> Next to Assamese, Bengali is spoken by a large number of populations of Goalpara.

Besides, other language such as Bodo, Santali, Garo, Rabha, Nepali, and Kurukh are also spoken in Goalpara. The immigrants Muslim who are called "*Bhatia*" speak a language at their home, which is akin with the language what is prevalent in Maimensingh of Bangladesh.

Although there are numerous linguistic groups in the district, bilingualism has blunted the edge of their differences and has brought about emotional integration of the people. The spirit of tolerance and urge to live a life of love, friendship and co-operation has forged unity among different linguistic groups.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.10. Religion

The religious life of the district is predominated by Hindus who constituted 53.92 and Muslim forming 42.25 percent of total population as per Census of 1951. The other religious communities, as Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains etc. together formed a very low percent of the district population. According to the Census report of 1951 the populations of Goalpara under religious banner are shown below:

Religious community	Population	%of total population
Hindus	57112711	51.54
Muslims	475828	42.94
Christians	31027	2.80
Others	30140	2.72

Sources: Census Report of 1951.<sup>51</sup>

The Hindus are divided into three principal sects viz. Saktism, Saivism and Vaishnavism. Nearly 6% of Hindus returned as such in 1901 and described themselves as followers of Sakta or worshippers of the reproductive power as manifested in the female. The percentage of follower of Saivism was four while 90% had registered as the follower of Vaishnavism in Census of 1901.

The Muslim population is said to have increased rapidly and census report of 1951 has shown their number as 475828 against 128388 in 1901. This large increased in Muslim population is attributed to heavy influx of East Bengal Muslim, which started with the beginning of the twentieth Century.<sup>52</sup> Initially, the Muslim cultivators were procured from East Bengal by the Zamindars of Goalpara to expand agricultural product. The British government also encouraged the Muslim migration to Assam and they settled on Char and wasteland to expand agricultural product especially for Jute production for the industries of England.<sup>53</sup>

It is to be mentioned that not only the Muslim but a large number of Hindus sheltered in Goalpara during Noakhali Riots and Partition of India. From 1941 – 51 about 85,986, Hindus settled in Goalpara district.<sup>54</sup> The advent of such immense number of East Bengal immigrants, whose language manners and customs differ widely from those of the indigenous people, has affected the economic Political and Social structure of the district.

The number of Christian population in Goalpara was 98 only in 1872. However, their number had grown in subsequent years due to conversion of the local tribal people through the efforts of Christian Missionaries. In 1951 the number of Christian Community rose to 31027. The other communities, such as Buddhist, Jain, and Sikhs are few in number.

### 3.11. Feast and Festivals of Goalpara Region

Colourful festivals in the district enliven the lives of the people. The feast and festivals are greatly influenced by the religions and the traditions. The Hindus, who constitute the bulk of the total population of the district, observe many festivals and ritualistic and other local nature.<sup>55</sup> Besides the Hindus, the other communities of the district observe their own festivals according to their rituals and customs.

#### Hindu Festivals:

The principal festival of the Hindus is Durga Puja, a festival held in honour of one of the incarnation of the wife of Siva, the Lord of Destruction. The town, tea garden, the thickly populated villages become agog with the Puja festivals from the *Mahalaya day* and continues for four days in the month of September or October. *Doljatra*, or swinging festival, is another festivals observed in Goalpara with great Joy and pleasure. It is observed in honour of Lord Krishna held in February or March. *Ashakastami* or Bathing festival is celebrated in April or May. Shivratri is widely observed in the district with much éclat in the Shiva temples of Jhogighopa, Marnai, Dalgoma, Bongaigaon, Boitamari and Lakhipur. Besides, Kalipuja, Rathjatra, Viswakarma Puja, Lakshmi puja, Kartik puja. Saraswati Puja etc are observed throughout Goal Para region. Guru Kirtan Puja, a Vaishnavit festival held in Aug or September celebrated by the Vaishnavit sect.

Among the traditional festivals observed in the area under review is "Bisua" festival or a New Year festival. All section of people of Goalpara observes *Visua* since the very early time. It is from the last day of month of Chaith to the 6<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the year *Baisag* or *Bahag*. The festival is observed to welcome New Year. *Bisua* observed in

the spring or basant for which the festival is also called *Basanta utsav*. In Assam Bisua is being celebrated as “*Bohag Bihu*”.

Another traditional festival of Goalpara is “*Pushan*”. From the last day of the month of Push to 1<sup>st</sup> day of Magh, the festival is held. It is also called *Domahi* (Bimonth). After harvesting of crops, this festival is celebrated. The festival is called *Magh Bihu* in rest of Assam. *Kartigusha* or Kati Bihu being observed in the month of Kartik. It is also called Kangali Bihu. *Euri Magan* or *Pushna Khowa* is another festival of Goalpara. The boys collected alms from door to door in the month of Pus and arrange feast. This is a traditional festival in the rural area of Goalpara.

Among the Rajbongshi-Khatriya *Manasa Puja* is known as the *Bisahari Puja* or *Marai Puja*. Marai Puja is also chief Puja of the Cacharis and the Rajbangshi. In many places in the area under review, the *Marai Puja* is performed at the time of epidemic or at the fear of the snake, otherwise, *Marai Puja* or *Bisahari Puja* performed in the month of Shraban.

**Muslim Festivals:** Among the Muslim festivals mention must be made of *Id-uz-Zoha*, *Muharram*, *Fatiha-i-duaz daham* and Id ul Fitre are the important festivals of the Muslims of Goalpara like other Muslims. After one month fasting of the Arabic month “*Ramjan*” *Idd ul fitre*, a festival of joy is observed through collective Namaj in *Iddgah* or in Mosque. More stresses are given on the new dresses and on preparation of various kinds of foods.

Muharam is observed to commemorate the tragic episode of Imam Hussain, the grandson of the prophet who was slain on the bank of Karbala. Way of celebration of Muharram is different for *Shiya* and *Sunni*. The Sunni sect is the dominant part of the Muslim in Goalpara.

Though observe Muharram as a day of condolence of the slained Imam, but they don't support *Tazia* procession. *Tazia* are brought out in procession, which is marked by the display of mock fights, by the *shiya*. *Fateha duaz daham* is observed as the birth anniversary of prophet Muhammad. It is interesting to note that *Jikir*, a kind of folk song caught in Assamese language is popular among the Muslims. The object of these folk songs is to convey his word to all the believers. Several scholars are of opinion that *Jikir* shows te influence of the *Nam Kirtan* of the Hindus on the local *Kirtan* of the Hindus on the local Muslims.<sup>56</sup>

**Bodo Cachari festivals:** The religious festivals of the Cacharis of the district are different from those observed by the Hindus. The impact of the Hindu proselytisation is noticeable among them. Some of the Hindu God and Goddess such as Lakshmi or Kali are worshipped by the Cacharis.

The main God of the Bodos is Sibrai or Bathau. "Of these house hold Gods by far the most important is the Bathau who is pre-eminently the guardian of the family interested and the family honour"<sup>57</sup>. They believe in Bathau or Siju who is looked upon as the tutelary deity of the house. The Siju worship involves the slaughter of goats, chickens; pigeon etc and at times eggs are also offered to the deity.

The Cacharis believe in the super natural power and at times make some offering toward off the evil spirits. They observe, besides these, *Kheraipuja*, *Habajanai*, *Natpuja*, *Bagrumba* and *Maiganai* as their traditional festivals. The *Deodhani dance* is a common feature of the *Kheraipuja*. Large number of people gathers about the end of November or in the beginning of December and again in April to perform *Deodhani dance*. Among the spirits which are believed by the Cacharis, mentioned must be made to enjoy the of *Maian*, the Diety of food and drink,

Khober, the Diety of paddy field, Hashung Madai, the Diety of travelers,, besides a host of others *Dolagobang, Saraumarai, Buragohai, Hagrani Madai* and *Daini Madai*. These are only a few as festivals in which these spirits are propitiated.

The majority of the people of Goalpara are agriculturist and they live in villages, for which their all festivals related with the agricultural production, harvesting and with the Natural phenomenon. They observe *Baisaki, Pushnai, Kartik Puja* and other festivals, which are synonymous with the *Bahag Bihu, Rangali Bihu and Kangali Bihu* in rest of Assam. The people of Goalpara irrespective caste, tribe and creed are observing the Bihu of the Assamese society, now days. Besides, the National festivals, like, Independence Day, Republic Day and the People of the region like other Indian observe Gandhi Jayanti.

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