

## Foreword

I am greatly pleased to introduce the inaugural issue of “rediscovering Assam- An Endeavour of DPS Guwahati” . The need for familiarizing the students with the rich historical background, unique geographical features and varied flora and fauna of Assam had long been felt both by the teaching fraternity as well as the parent community. The text has been prepared by the teachers of Delhi Public School Guwahati with the sole aim of fulfilling this need. The book which has three parts will cater to the learning requirement of the students of classes VI, VII, VIII. I am grateful towards the teachers who have put in their best efforts to develop the contents of the text and I do hope that the students will indeed rediscover Assam in all its glory.

With best wishes,

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**CLASS-VI**



# ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE

## BAMBOO AND CANE OF ASSAM

Cane and bamboo have remained inseparable parts of life in Assam. Grown in abundance here and hence most of the household articles in the homes of Assamese are made of cane and bamboo.

Assam forests are richly stocked with bamboos and canes of various species. Bamboo is a raw material of great versatility and forms an integral part of the lifestyle and economy of Assam. Special mention may however be made of the forests of Mizo Hills, Cachar, Mikir and North Cachar Hills, Nowgong and Lakhimpur districts.

The important species of bamboos of economic value are the Muli (*Melocannabambusoides*), Dalu (*Teinostachyum dalloa*), Khang (*Dendrocalmus longispatus*), Kaligoda (*Oxytenanthera nigrociliata*) and Pecha (*Dendrocalamus*). The Muli and the Dalu have great commercial importance, the former for pulping, constructional and fencing purposes, and the latter for the mat and basket industry.

This industry has carved for itself an important place among the handicrafts of the State. It provides part time employment to the cultivators in their spare time, and full time employment to the few highly skilled artisans who produce only fine decorative baskets, furniture and mats on a commercial basis.

### Cane

Various cottage and small-scale industries in Assam are dependent on the supply of different kinds of cane and reeds. It is observed that generally three species of cane are exploited in commercial quantities- Jati (*Calamustenuis*), Tita (*Calamus leptes adix*) and Lejai (*Calamus floribundus*). Some less important varieties like Sundi and Raidang are also used.



## **Bamboo and Cane products manufactured for use in domestic purposes**

### **Chalani (sieve):**

It is woven with fine bamboo slips in a criss-cross way, keeping some open spaces between the different slips as required for different purposes. The 'chalani' is a round-shaped disc-like object and its diameter varies from 1½ ft- 3½ ft. It is used sieving rice, paddy, tea-leaves, etc. and also for washing fish.

### **Kula (winnowing fan)**

It is prepared out of flat bamboo slips for winnowing purposes in different sizes and shapes. Twilled design is used for a 'kula'. The edge of the 'kula' is made strong by fixing of two sets of one-inch wide bamboo pieces wrapped up in flexible cane strips.

### **Khorahi (small basket)**

Khorahi is made of fine bamboo splits for washing rice, vegetables, fish, etc. It is a small basket-like thing with provision to allow water and dirt to pass out.

### **Dola (bamboo tray)**

Dola is prepared out of flexible bamboo slips in twilled design. The shape of a dola is exactly like a disc with various sizes for different purposes. The dola is used specially for rearing silk worms and for winnowing in addition to other domestic purposes.

### **Doon (Assamese) Kathi (Bengali)-Measure**

It is prepared in an almost conical shape with fine bamboo strips for measuring rice or paddy. A ring is attached at the bottom to enable it to stand on the ground.

## **Fishing Implements**

Polo is used for fishing in shallow water. The man who uses it hold it by the side of the stem, presses its rim on the mud, then pulls it back and lifts above or up to the level of water and again presses it as before while moving on through water. Whenever any fish is caught, he puts his hand inside through the stem to catch hold of the fish.



The 'jakoi' works like shovel that is either dragged along the bottom or placed on the water bed to catch the small fishes which take refuge in it when the weed is trampled.

The 'khaloi' is also prepared with bamboo strips. This is used for keeping of fishes temporarily during hand-net fishing.

The chepa allows the fishes to enter inside with no scope for going out.



'Japi or Chhata' (Bamboo / leaf head-gear)

Bamboo and leaf headgear is the most indispensable item of the open air workers. Many varieties of 'Japis' such as 'haluajapi', 'pithajapi', 'sorudoiyajapi', 'bordoijajapi', 'cap japi', etc. are produced in the districts of Kamrup, Nowgong, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. Nalbari and its neighbouring villages (such as Kamarkuchi, Mughkuchi, etc.) of Kamrup district deserve special mention in respect of manufacturing of 'fulamjapis' (decorated bamboo umbrellas).

### Bamboo Musical Instruments

Flute is a commonly used musical instruments made out of bamboo. Besides this, other musical instruments like bamboo beater, do-tara etc., are used in the Bihu festival of Assam. "Gogona" is another musical instrument shaped from a thick bamboo outer split, so that one end forms the handle while the other end can be struck by fingers when the instrument is held against the mouth.



### Some common bamboo products

- Bamboo brooms
- Bamboo handbags
- Folding fans
- Knife handle
- Flower vases
- Walking sticks
- Bamboo curtains
- ash trays
- Wall hanging

**Cane furniture:**

In the manufacture of cane furniture, Cachar district enjoys a special advantage over the other districts of the State as far as skilled artisans are concerned. The craft has commercial production in almost all the important urban areas of the State.

**Folk Medicine from bamboo as used in Rural Areas of Assam****Fresh Cuts:**

Greenish portion of the bamboo stem is grounded and made into a paste for application over the fresh cut area. It usually serves as an antiseptic and acts fast in the wound healing process.

**Toothache:**

Toothache is relieved by heating young bamboo twigs and applying over it.

**Hypertension:**

White part of the new bamboo leaf is to be taken on empty stomach early in the morning, which helps to control hypertension.

**Body pain:**

Sleeping in a bed made of whole bamboo relieves body ache.

**Chicken pox, Small pox and Ulcers:**

Dried young bamboo shoot is to be grounded and taken with cooked Catfish which helps in early healing of chicken pox, small pox and ulcers.

**Giddiness and Chronic Pain:**

Curd prepared with young bamboo shoots taken with black pepper relieves giddiness and chronic pain.

**Headache and Sinusitis:**

Dried bamboo burnt and the inhaling of the smoke of the bamboo relieves headache and sinusitis.

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## MEDICINAL PLANTS OF ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE FOUND IN ASSAM

**Table representing different medicinal plants found in Assam and their uses:**

Plant	Common Name	Botanical Name	Parts Used	Medicinal Use
	Amla (T),	<i>Emblica officinalis</i>	Fruit	Vitamin - C, Cough, Diabetes, cold, Laxative, hyper acidity.
	Ashok (T)	<i>Saraca asoca</i>	Bark Flower	Menstrual Pain, uterine, disorder, Diabetes.
	Aswagandha (H)	<i>Withania somnifera</i>	Root, Leafs	Restorative Tonic, stress, nerves disorder.
	Bael / Bilva (T)	<i>Aegle marmelos</i>	Fruit, Bark	Diarrhea, Dysentery, Constipation.
	Brahmi (H)	<i>Bacopa monnieri</i>	Whole plant	Nervous, Memory enhancer, mental disorder.
	Chiraita (H)	<i>Swertia chiraita</i>	Whole Plant	Skin Disease, Burning, sensation, fever.
	Kalmegh/ Bhuincem (H)	<i>Andrographis paniculata</i>	Whole Plant	Fever, weakness, release of gas.
	Long peeper / Pippali (C)	<i>Piper longum</i>	Fruit, Root	Appetizer, enlarged spleen, Bronchitis, Cold, antidote.
	Sandal Wood (T)	<i>Santalum album</i>	Heart wood, oil	Skin disorder, Burning, sensation, Jaundice, Cough.
	SarpaGandha (H)	<i>Ranwolfia serpentina</i>	Root	Hyper tension, insomnia.
	Satavari (C)	<i>Asparagus racemosus</i>	Tuber, root	Enhance lactation, general weakness, fatigue, cough.
	Tulsi (perennial)	<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>	Leaves/Seed	Cough, Cold, bronchitis expectorant.

	Pippermint (H)	<i>Menthapipertia</i>	Leaves, Flower, Oil	Digestive, Pain killer.
	Henna/Mehdi (S)	<i>Lawsenniaiermis</i>	Leaf, Flower, Seed	Burning sensation, Anti Inflammatory.
	Ghritkumari(H)	<i>Aloe vera</i>	Leaves	Laxative, Wound healing, Skin burns & care,Ulcer.
	SadaBahar (H) Periwinkle/ Nyantara	<i>Catharanthusroseus</i>	Whole Plant	Leukemia, Hypotonocitv, Antispasmodic, Antidote.
	Vringraj (H)	<i>Eclipta alba</i>	Seed/whole	Anti-inflammatory, Digestive, hairtonic.
	Swetchitrak Perennial (H)	<i>Plumbagozeylanica</i>	Root	Appetiser, Antibacterial, Anticancer.
	RaktaChitrak (H)	<i>Plumbagoindica</i>	Root	Dyspepsia, colic, inflammation, cough.
	Harida (T)	<i>Terminaliachebula</i>	Seed	Trifala composition, wound ulcer, leprosy, inflammation, Cough.
	Neem (T)	<i>Azardirchataindica</i>	Rhizome	Sedative, analgesic, epilepsy, hypertensive.
	Bach (H) Sweet Flag	<i>Acoruscalamus</i>	Rhizome	Sedative, analgesic, epilepsy, hypertensive.
	Benachar (S) Khus/khus	<i>Vetiveriaziziinoides</i>	Root	Hyperdipsia, Burning, ulcer, Skin, Vomiting.
	Mandukpami (H) Indianpennywort	<i>Centellaasiatica</i>	Whole plant	Anti-inflammatory, Jaundice, Diuretic, Diarrhoea.
	Dalchini Perennial (S)	<i>Cinnamomumzeylanicum</i>	Bark, Oil	Bronchitis, Asthma, Cardiac, Disorder, Fever.



### Wild edible plants of Assam:

1. *Dillenia indica* : Outenga(As.) Sampa (Mishing) Thaigir (Bodo) Pumplung (Karbi)  
An evergreen tree upto 20 mts in height. Uses :- eaten raw as well as cooked; pickles, jam etc. are also prepared from it. Mucilage found in the fruit is used to wash hair as shampoo.

2. *Euryle ferox* : Nikori, Utpal (As.)(Upper Assam) Makhna (Kamrup, Goalpara)  
A very prickly aquatic herb. Leaves are large, 30- 40 cm in diameter. Uses :- The seeds are considered good food for babies & invalids ; eaten either raw or roasted.

3. *Averrhoa carambola* :Kardoi (As.) Kamranga (Bodo& Lower Assam)  
Fleshy fruits quite acidic. They are eaten raw or cooked with sugar. Pickles, jelly and squash can be prepared. It is used as medicine for jaundice and kidney stone

4. *Elaeocarpus floribundus* : Jalphai (As.) ThengKoreng (Karbi) Uses : The mature fruit is eaten fresh, or cooked and also as pickles.

5. *Moringa oleifera* : Sajina (As.)  
The fruit known as drum stick. Uses: it is good for treating anemia, arthritis, asthma, cancer, constipation, diabetes, kidney stone.

6. *Bryophyllum pinnatum* :Pategoja, Dupartenga (As.)  
Leaves eaten as vegetable. It is acidic during morning to midday and gradually reduces thereafter; also less acidic in April. It is medicinal for kidney stone and constipation.

7. *Terminalia arjuna* : Arjun (As.)  
It is considered highly medicinal for heart diseases, diabetes and in lowering high blood pressure. In Western Assam barks are cut into small pieces dried and use as substitute of tea.

8. *Terminalia chebula* : Silikha (As.)  
It is considered as one of the best known medicinal plant or tanning material in world. The both unripe and ripe fruits are eaten raw or used as medicine.

9. *Centella asiatica* : Bormanimuni (As.)  
It is considered medicinal in stomach complaints and usually used locally as liver tonic making curry with small fishes. Pounded leaves are used to treat wounds, cuts etc.

10. *Paederia foetida* : Padurilota / Bhedailota (As.) Bonkirepuk (Mishing ) Pakhibendang (Bodo)  
It is considered medicinal for stomach ache, gastric problem etc.

11. *Eclipta prostrata* : Keharaj (As.)  
It is considered highly medicinal for liver problem. Tender leaves are used as vegetable.

Assam consists of rich varieties of medicinal plants and herbs. Most of those plants and their medicinal uses are known only to the inhabitant and the tribes residing in various parts of Assam. The active ingredients present in these plants may be used for designing some new drugs and pharmaceutical agents which can pave some new alleys in the world of pharmaceutical sciences and be a blessing for mankind.

## GEOGRAPHY

# ASSAM : AN INTRODUCTION

Assam, the north-eastern sentinel of the frontiers of India, is a state richly endowed with places of tourist attractions (Fig.1.1). Assam is surrounded by six of the other Seven Sister States: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Meghalaya. Assam has the second largest area after Arunachal Pradesh. Geographically, Assam and the adjoining states are connected to the rest of India via a strip of land in West Bengal called the Siliguri Corridor or "Chicken's Neck".

It is surrounded on three sides by hills and mountains. The rivers Brahmaputra and Barak, in the north and south respectively, carve out deep valleys that represent the major part of the State. Between the two valleys there lies a strip of highland made up by hills and plateaus.



Fig 1.1: Location of Assam in India

**LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE:** Assam, being T-shaped, is situated in the heart of the north-east corner of Indian Subcontinent. It is located in the tropical latitudes  $24^{\circ}10' N$  to  $27^{\circ}58' N$  and eastern longitudes  $89^{\circ}49' E$  and  $97^{\circ}26' E$  between the foothills of eastern Himalayas and the Patkai and Naga Ranges.

**SIZE:** Assam has an area of 78, 438 sq.km representing 2.39 percent of the Indian Landmass and a population of 31,205,576 (2011) accounting for 2.58% of India's population.

**NEIGHBOURS:** Assam is surrounded by seven Indian States i.e Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and West Bengal. Assam shares international borders with Bhutan and Bangladesh. There are only a few Indian States which have such a strategic location. Assam is surrounded by international boundaries extending up to nearly 3,200 km.

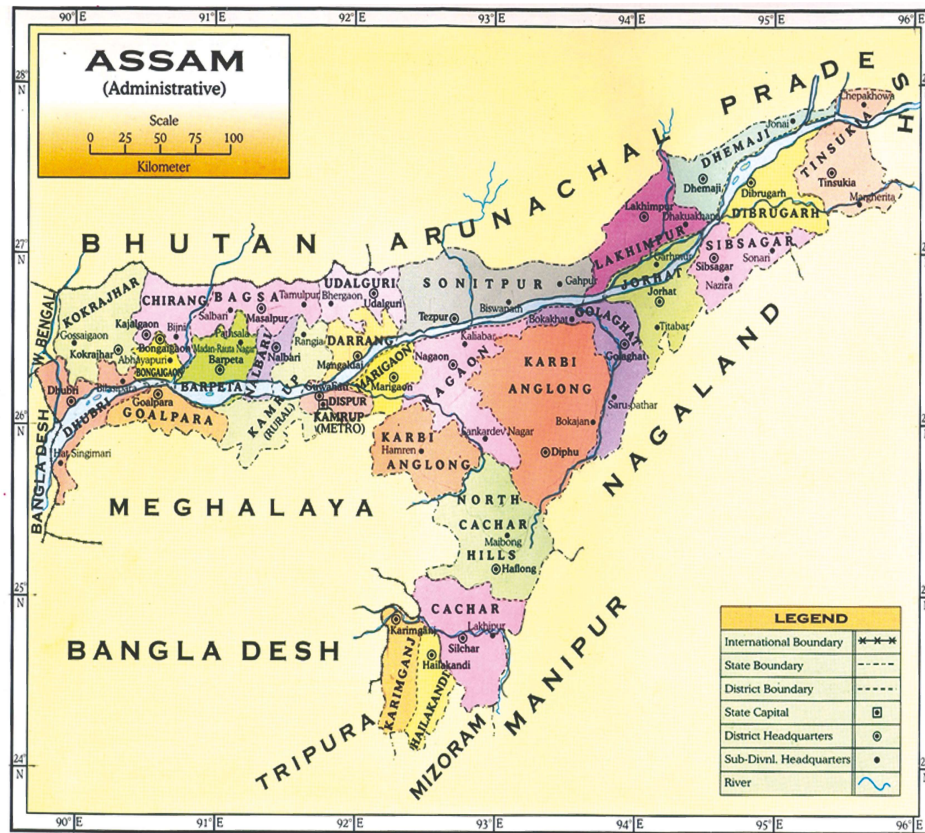


Fig1.2: Political Map of Assam

## DISTRICTS : Assam has thirty Three administrative districts.

SL.NO.	DISTRICT	SUB-DIVISION	TOTAL AREA (in sq.km)	TOTAL POPULATION (2011)	DENSITY (persons/ sq.km)
1.	Baksa	Mushalpur, Salbari, Tamulpur	2,007.50	9,50,075	387
2.	Barpeta	Barpeta, Bajali	2,677.33	16,93,622	742
3.	Bongaigaon	Bongaigaon, North Salmara	1,725.29	7,38,804	676
4.	Cachar	Silchar, Lakhimpur	3,786	17,36,617	459
5.	Chirang	Chirang, Bijni	1,974.80	4,82,162	251
6.	Darrang	Magaldoi	1,850.58	9,28,500	586
7.	Dhemaji	Dhemaji, Jonai	3,237	6,86,133	212
8.	Dhubri	Dhubri, South Salmara, Bilasipara	1,664.10	19,49,258	896
9.	Dibrugarh	Dibrugarh	3,381	13,26,335	392
10.	Dima Hasao (N.C.Hills)	Haflong, Maibong	4,888	2,14,102	44
11.	Goalpara	Goalpara	1,824	10,08,183	553
12.	Golaghat	Golaghat, Dhansiri, Bokakhat	3,502	10,66,888	305
13.	Hailakandi	Hailakandi	1,327	6,59,296	497
14.	Jorhat	Jorhat, Majuli, Titabor	2,851	10,92,256	383
15.	Kamrup	Guwahati, Rangia	3,483.77	15,17,542	489
16.	Kamrup (Metropolitan)	Guwahati	627.18	12,53,938	1,313
17.	Karbi Anglong	Diphu, Hamren, Bokajan	10,434	9,56,313	92
18.	Karimganj	Karimganj	1,809	12,28,686	679
19.	Kokrajhar	Kokrajhar, Gossaigaon, Parbatjhora	3,165.44	8,87,142	269
20.	Lakhimpur	North Lakhimpur, Dhakuakhona	2,277	10,42,137	458
21.	Morigaon	Morigaon	1,551	9,57,423	617
22.	Nagaon	Nagaon, Hojai, Kaliabor	3,973	28,23,768	711
23.	Nalbari	Nalbari	1009.57	7,71,639	733
24.	Sivasagar	Sivasagar, Charaideo, Nazira	2,668	11,51,050	431
25.	Sonitpur	Tezpur, Biswanath, Gohpur	5,280.58	19,24,110	370
26.	Tinsukia	Tinsukia, Margherita, Sadiya	3,790	13,27,929	350
27.	Udalgudi	Udalgudi, Vergaon	1673.94	8,31,668	13
	<b>ASSAM</b>		<b>78,438</b>	<b>3,12,05,576</b>	<b>397</b>

\* In 2015, five new districts of Assam were formed - Biswanath, Charaideo, Hojai, South Salmara Mankachar and West Karbi Anglong.

\* In 2016, one more district was announced taking the total number from 32 to 33 which is Majuli (Carved out of the northern parts of Jorhat). It is the first river Island district of India

### Sources:

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## CLIMATE OF ASSAM:

The State of Assam lies in the regime of monsoon climate of the sub-tropical belt. It enjoys heavy summer rainfall, winter drought, high humidity and relatively low temperature during the year. During summer the plains become hot and the air over the hills and mountains remains relatively cool.

The Himalayan ranges standing on the north and east of the Brahmaputra valley protect the area from the chilly cold winds of the Tibetan region in winter and obstruct the warm moist winds blowing from the south-west in summer. The cloud brought by the south-west monsoon that passes over the southern hills including the Meghalaya Plateau, precipitates in the Brahmaputra valley. The precipitation decreases on the lee-ward side of the hills, especially the eastern portions of the hilly areas of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar and increases towards the foothills of the Himalayas.

Under varying intensities of the weather elements and resultant weather conditions, Assam normally experiences four climatic seasons, viz. (i) Pre-Monsoon, (ii) Monsoon, (iii) Retreating monsoon and (iv) Dry Winter.

**(i) Pre-Monsoon-** The pre-monsoon begins in the early part of March and continues up to the end of May. Temperature starts rising gradually from the beginning of the season onward. Rainfall increases both in amount and frequency as the season advances which greatly favours the cultivation of tea, jute and ahu rice.

**(ii) Monsoon:** The monsoon sets in by the last week of May or in early June and it lasts up to September or the first part of October. It is the rainy season when the state receives spells of continuous and moderate to heavy rains. June, July and August are the rainiest months when more than 70 percent of the total annual rainfall occurs. This is the most important season during which Sali rice, the principal crop of the state is cultivated on the one hand, and the rivers of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys start rising causing extensive floods on the other.

**(iii) Retreating Monsoon:** The south-west monsoon withdraws sometimes in between the last part of September and first part of October. Consequently, the intensity of rainfall and the number of rainy days go on decreasing. This season continues up to the middle of November, when fogs commonly occur.

**(iv) Dry Winter:** The winter season begins in the middle of November and continues up to the end of February. This Season is characterised by low temperature, regular morning fogs and very little amount of rainfall. December and January are the driest months and generally, January is the coldest month.

## CULTURE OF ASSAM:

Assam has always been a melting pot of various cultures emerging with their distinct characteristics.

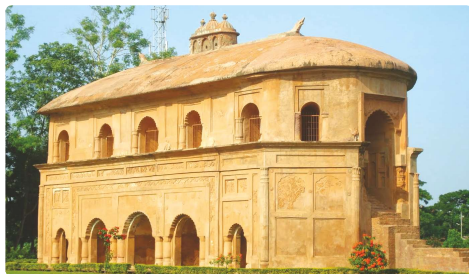


Fig2.1: View of Rang Ghar in Sivasagar



Fig 2.2: The Kamakhya Temple

There are two broad divisions of the festivals observed here: religious festivals and agriculture based festivals.

### (i) SOME RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS OF ASSAM:

**(a) Shivaratri:** Shaivites constitute a large part of Assamese population, thus Shivaratri is one of the most celebrated festivals. A few famous places where Shivaratri is held are Umananda (at Guwahati), Mahabhairav (at tezpur), Singari, Biswanath, Nagshankar and Shiva Doul (at Sivasagar).



Fig 2.3: View of Shiva Doul in Sivasagar

**(b) Asokasthami:** It is held in the month of March. On this day people perform some rituals by the banks of the Brahmaputra river. It is believed that on this day the river Brahmaputra was born.

**(c) Ambubachi Mela:** It is celebrated in the month of Aahar (third month of the assamese calendar). It is believed that beginning from the 7<sup>th</sup> day of this month the earth becomes impure for three days.

**(d) Me-Dum-Me-Phi:** It is the most important festival of the Ahoms. The Festival is celebrated annually on 31<sup>st</sup> January at some common venues.



Fig 2.4: Me-Dum-Me-Phi

Other such festivals are Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Agni Puja, Eid etc. Among the Vaishnavites, Janmashtami is a popular festival celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna.



Fig 2.5: Satriya Dance of Assam

### (ii) SOME AGRICULTURE BASED FESTIVALS OF ASSAM:

Bihu is a famous and popular festival which is largely based on agriculture. Bihu can be broadly divided into three categories: Bohag bihu, Kaati bihu and Magh Bihu.

**(a) Bohag Bihu:** Bohag Bihu is observed from the last day in the last month of the Assamese calendar Chata(called Sankranti, transit or passage from one zodiacal sign to another). Earlier Bohag Bihu was celebrated for seven days together and each day had a different name like Goru bihu (for cows), Manuh Bihu (for mankind), Tator Bihu (for loom), Gossain Bihu (for Gods), Nangalor Bihu (for plough), Bihu for domestic animals and Chera Bihu (concluding day of the Bihu). Bohag Bihu is the season of unfettered greenery with early monsoon, and with Nature clad in beautiful colours. Such variety is not to be found elsewhere.



Fig 2.6: Bihu Dance



Fig 2.7: A lady lighting earthen lamps in her paddy field

**(b) Kaati Bihu:** Towards the end of Aahin (sixth month of the Assamese calendar) month of the farmers' labour brings forth the golden glow on the ripe grain. In the month of Kaati (seventh month of the Assamese calendar) following Aahin, the farmer gets ready to welcome Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. It is done by lighting Chakis (earthen lamps) under the Tulsi (black basil) plant. Kaati Bihu is the time when the granary is empty hence leading the name Kangali Bihu.



Fig 2.8 : A - Famous delicacies of Assam

**(c) Maagh Bihu:** it is observed to celebrate the harvesting of grain. It is usually celebrated on the 14th and 15th of January (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Maagh, the tenth month of the Assamese calendar).



Fig 2.8 : B - Meji

The first day is called Uruka, when people build a temporary shed and have feast. Four bamboo rods are placed beside the four posts and then a Meji is built in the shape of a temple, in a conical shape. In the early hours of the next day, people take bath and after the Meji is lighted, they pay their respect and the Bihu is officially started. The ashes of the burnt Meji is scattered over the fields, for it is believed that doing so would increase the fertility of the soil. Delicacies like pithas are served together with jalpaan. Various kinds of potatoes (Kaath Aloo, Mitha Aloo etc.) are eaten on this day.

**(d) Karam Puja and Tusu Puja:** Among the tea tribes of Assam, there are many festivals which are very popular, among which mention may be made of karam Puja and Tusu Puja. Karam is celebrated on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of Bhadon month. There are many types of songs which are sung on the occasion of Karam Puja like Bandana, Khemta, Dat, Jhumur, Rang and Bhincheria songs. Tusu Puja is celebrated in the month of Puh and Maagh (Makar Sankranti). The idol of Tusu devi is installed in a place and a puja is performed in her honour.

**(e) Ali-Aai-Lrigang:** It is celebrated by the Mising community with great enthusiasm. Community Feast and “gumrag” dance (a kind of line-dancing) are the main attractions of this festival.

### FOOD HABITS:

Assam's climatic conditions are conducive for the cultivation of rice, since rainfall occurs most of the time of the year. There are three varieties of rice grains available in Assam: Aahu, Saali and Bau. Rice is one of the main agricultural products in Assam and it is also the staple food of the people.

Assamese people relish a variety of cereals made from rice like Chira, Muri, Aakhoi, Hurum, Pithaguri, Sandah etc. Pithas or rice cakes are a delicacy which are made from rice and has many types such as Tila Pitha, Ghila Pitha, Pheni Pitha, Sutuli Pitha, Tekeli Mukhar Pitha, Pusi Pitha, Lau Pitha, Khola Soporla Pitha, Kola Pitha, Jakai Pitha, Chunga Pitha, Nangal Dhua Pitha, Bhurbhuri Pitha, Pani Pitha etc. Komal Chowal is also a delicious Jalpaan of Assamese Society.

There are some green vegetables which are peculiar to this state only, like the Lafa, Mati Kanduri, Dhekia, Manimuni, Bhedai Lata, etc. Non-vegetarian food is common among the people of all status, be it fish, eggs, or meat of duck, chicken, mutton, pigeon etc.

Apart from all these, Assamese people are downright lovers of Khar (a dish seasoned with alkali). The preparation of this dish is a yardstick of a person's culinary skills. People of this state also consume bitter vegetables like Kerela, Sukuta, Bet Ganj, Sewali flower etc.

Rice is consumed in different ways like Bhatatdiya Bhat or Topat Bhat (steamed rice), Bahi Bhat(left over rice), Paita Bhat ( fermented rice). The last kind is eaten with fried potato, brinjals, etc.

Medicinal qualities are attached to some of the foods consumed by Assamese people. These are Kolldil, Ponounoua, Suklati, Masandari, Helesi, Matikanduri, Doron bann, Bhutmula, Neempat, Narasingha, Purakoll, Nef afu, Kunji Thekera, Modar Pat, Madhusuleng, Khutara, Hati Khutara, Banjaluk, Kolmou, Moroliya, Chazina, Laizabari< Tithabahok etc.

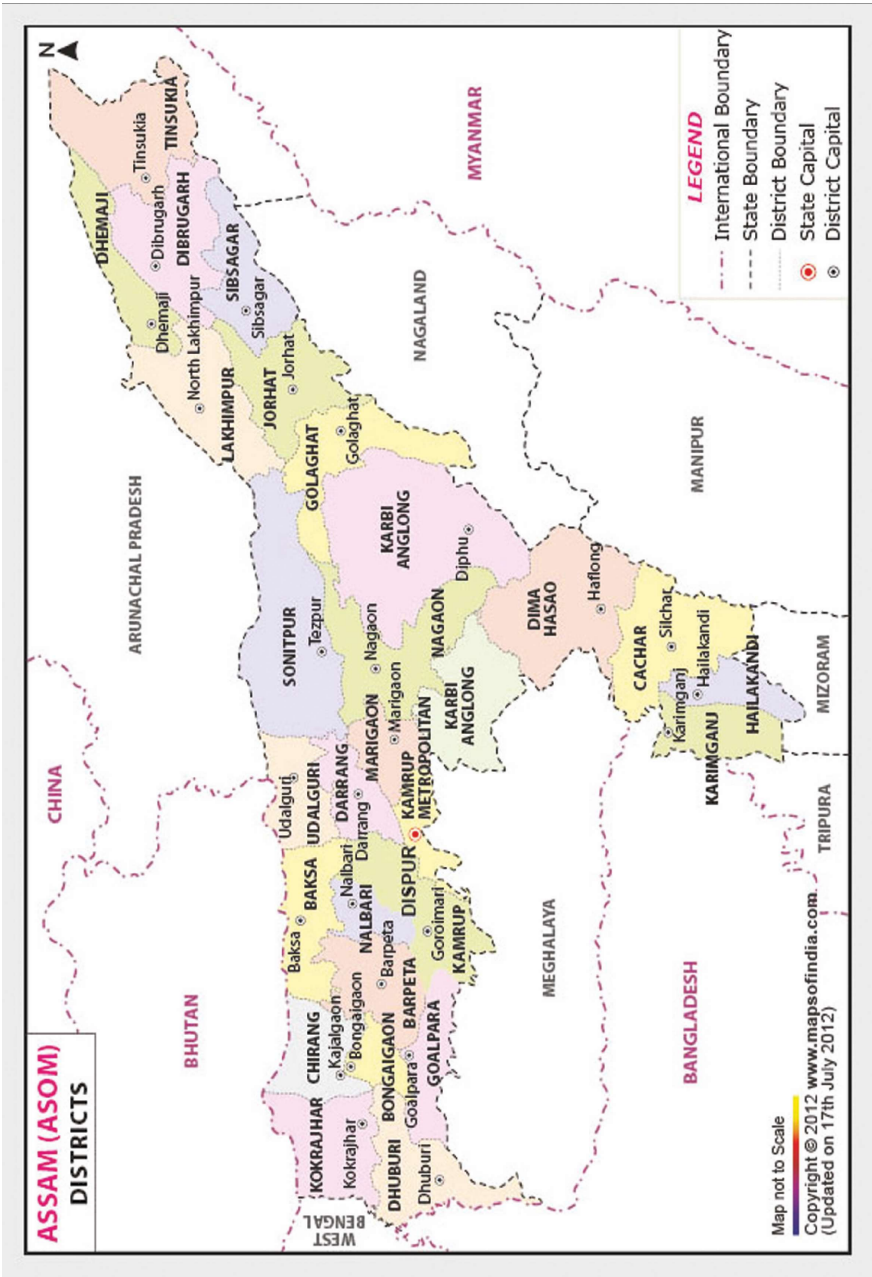
But the impact of modernity and modern medicines has reduced the use of such plants to quite an extent. But such food habits are examples of the knowledge and experience of the Assamese with medicines. The lack of food products, the influence of modern civilisation, change in peoples' tastes etc. have rapidly and constantly been changing the Assamese "menu". There are changes in the preparation of food also, thereby accounting in the change in food habits of the Assamese people.

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## 6. Atlas of Assam



# HISTORY

## INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF ASSAM

### Origin of the name Assam

The state of Assam has a rich and ancient history. It is believed to have mythological roots. The earliest name of Assam was Pragjyotishpur which means “centre of the study of astrology in the east.” According to Kalika Purana, a text composed in Assam in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century, 'here Brahma first created the stars and hence the city was called Pragjyotishpur.' The Nabagraha temple dedicated to the nine planets on the Chitrachal hill in Guwahati suggests Assam's association with the study of astronomy.



Fig. Nabagraha Temple

Then Assam came to be known as Kamarupa. The earliest historical reference to the name is found in the Allahabad Prasasti of Samudragupta (C.E. 335-375) of the famous Gupta dynasty. It is said that Kamadeva, the Indian god of love, who was destroyed by the fiery glance of Lord Siva returned to his original form in this land and thus the name came to be known as Kamarupa. It is said that the beautiful archaeological site of Madan Kamdev, about 40 Km. from Guwahati is the place where Kamadev was reborn.



Fig. Ruins of Madan Kamdev temple

According to scholar Banikanta Kakati, the name Kamrup derived from an Austric formation like Kamru or Kamrut, the name of a lesser divinity in Santali, which suggests the association of the land with magic and sorcery.

With the advent of the Ahoms in the Brahmaputra valley in the thirteenth century, the name of the land changed to Asom. Scholars suggested the meaning of Asom as uneven or invincible. Under the British, Asom, gradually was changed into Assam.

### Geographical extent:

On the basis of the various references found in the epics, puranas and tantras, it is suggested that at the time of the Mahabharata war, the kingdom of Pragjyotisha included the greater part of present Assam, together with Jalpaiguri, Dacca, Tippera, part of eastern Nepal. From the account of Hiuen Tsang, it has been surmised that the kingdom of Kamarupa included a portion of Bihar, northern and eastern Bengal and nearly the whole of Assam valley.

Ancient Assam was divided into four territorial divisions. They are-

1. *Kam-pith from Karatoya to the Sonkosh*
2. *Ratna-pith from Sonkosh to the Rupohi*
3. *Suvarna-pith from Rupohi to the Bhoroli*
4. *Saumar-pith from Bhoroli to the Dibang*

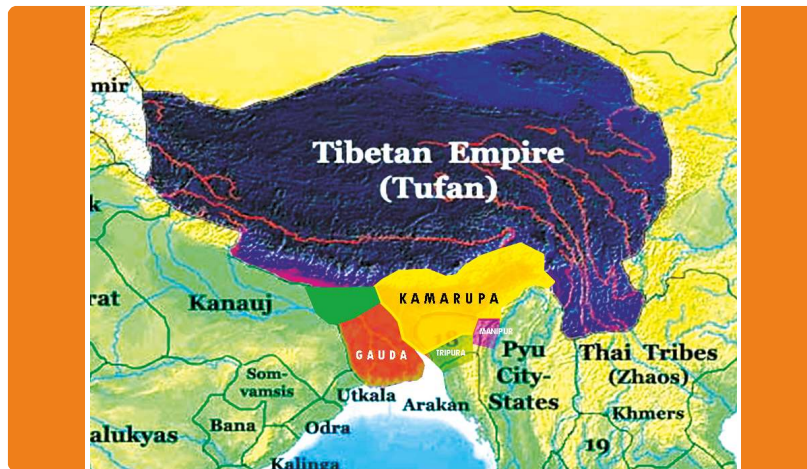


Fig. This is the 7th and 8th century extent of Kamarupa kingdom in Bengal and Assam. The map is created using historical data from reliable books and on the basis of archaeological findings in this region. The Kingdom of Kamarupa included areas comprised what is now Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh.



## SOME PROMINENT RULERS OF ANCIENT ASSAM

### Legendary or Pre-historic Period (up to fourth century)

This early phase of Assam's history is obscure, though there are several references to it in the Mahabharata, the Puranas and the Tantras. According to Kalika Puran the oldest legendary figure of Assam is Mahiranga Danava, a non- Aryan ruler. Even today there is a hill named Mairanga near Guwahati which suggested being associated with Mahiranga.

**Narakasur:** Ghatakasur, the successor of Mahiranga was killed by one Narakasur who became the ruler of Pragjyotishpur and established the Bhauma dynasty. The legend goes that Naraka was son of Vishnu and brought up by Janaka, the king of Videha (North Bihar). In his early life he was worshipper of Goddess Kamakhya. But later he came under the influence of Banasura, a non- Aryan king of Sonitpur and became irreligious and presumptuous.



Fig. Kamakhya temple at Nilachal hill

Naraka proposed to marry mother goddess Kamakhya. The Goddess accepted the proposal on condition of construction of a temple, a tank and a road from the foothill to the temple at the top within a night. As all these were nearly completed, the goddess made a cock to crow before the usual time to indicate dawn. Thus Naraka's proposal came to a naught. Out of rage Naraka slew the cock and the place of this incident is still known as Kukurakota. He became hostile to Vedic culture and began to oppress the followers of Vedic rites and rituals. Shri Krishna, king of Dwaraka killed him and placed his son Bhagadatta on the throne.

It is said that the temple of Ashwaklanta, which means “ascended by horses” on the northern bank of river Brahmaputra is the place where Shri Krishna had rested when he came to invade Pragjyotisha. The small holes in the rock near river were pointed out as the footprints of his horses.



Fig. Ashwaklanta Temple, Guahati



**Do you know?**

Ashwaklanta Temple was built by Ahom King Shiva Singha in 1720. Mythology says that while Lord Krishna searched for Narakasur to kill him, his horse got tired in this place. This is how this place was named Aswa-Klanta. Aswa means 'Horse' and Klanta means 'Tired' in Assamese.

**Bhagadatta:** Bhagadatta is described in Mahabharata as the “Lord of the Mountain”. It is said that he married his daughter Bhanumati to Dujyodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas. He demonstrated great heroism in the Kurukshetra war on behalf of the Kurus with an army consisted of “Chinas, Kiratas and dwellers of the eastern sea”. He is said to have been killed by Arjuna, the greatest hero of the Pandavas.

**Do you know?**

*The Dighali Pukhuri tank at Guwahati was dug at the order of king Bhagadatta for wedding rituals of his daughter named Bhanumati to Duryadhajan.*

**Bhismak:** According to Bhagavad Purana there was a king named Bhismak in Vidarbha identified with Sadia region. Bhismak had a beautiful daughter named Rukmini whose marriage was arranged with a prince named Sisupal. On her wedding day Krishna carried her off in his chariot and married her after defeating Bhismak's force.



Fig. Krishna and Rukmini

**Bana Raja:** There was another legendary king named Bana whose kingdom was Sonitpur, identified with modern Tezpur. According to legend Bana captured Aniruddha, the grandson of Shri Krishna when he secretly married Usha, the daughter of Bana. Krishna came to Sonitpur and rescued Aniruddha after defeating Bana in a great battle. There are several relics associated with the legends of Bana scattered in modern Tezpur. His grandson Bhaluka made his capital at Bhalukpung near Balipara at the foot of Aka hills where remains of his fortifications are visible.



Fig. Ruins of Bana Raja's Kingdom, Tezpur



Fig. Entrance of the Dahparbatia temple

## EARLY HISTORICAL PERIOD (4<sup>TH</sup>- 12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

### Varman Dynasty (4<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> century)

The real historical period of Assam's history begins with the establishment of the Varman dynasty by Pushyavarman who claimed his lineage from king Naraka. Altogether thirteen rulers of this dynasty ruled for about 300 years. The main sources of information for this period are inscriptions such as Nidhanpur and Doobi copperplate inscriptions, coins, various literary sources such as Harsha-charita by Banabhatta, Gaudabaho by Vakpati, Rajatarangini by Kalhana.

**Bhaskar Varman (C. 600- 650):** Bhaskar Varman was the greatest king of the Varman dynasty. He initiated an alliance with Harsha-vardhana of Kanauj by sending one ambassador named Hamsabega with valuable presents against their common enemy King Sasanka of Gauda (Bengal). Jointly with him he defeated Sasanka of Gauda (Bengal) and forced him to flee to Orissa. Sasanka's kingdom was then parcelled out between Harsha and Bhaskara.



Fig. Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription of Bhaskara Varma



Fig. Hiuen Tsang



Fig. Nalanda Seal of Bhaskar Varman

Bhaskara attended the pompous religious festivals organised by Harsha Vardhana at Kanauj and Prayag. However his friendly relation with Harsha ended with the death of the latter and aided the Chinese invasion against the successor of Harsha-Vardhana. Then he declared himself as the master of Eastern India. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang lived in the court of Bhaskar Varman for few months and left a valuable account on Kamarupa.

#### **Salastambha Dynasty (7<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> century):**

After the fall of the Varmana dynasty, there was the rise of the Salastambha who is described as “a great chief of the Mlechchas”. Altogether twenty one rulers of the Salastambha dynasty ruled for about 340 years.

**Sri Harshadeva (C 725- 750):** Sri Harshadeva was the greatest of the Salastambha dynasty. From the Pashupati temple inscription of Nepal it appears that his rule extended over Gauda, Orissa, Kalinga and Kosala and Jayadeva, the king of Nepal married Harshadeva's daughter Rajyamati. He was described as “a king of great prowess and piety.

**Hajjara Varman:** He was another remarkable ruler of the dynasty who was described as “Maharajadhiraja Paramaswara Parambhattakara”. He established his capital at Haruppesvara. The Hajjara tank at Tezpur even today bears the memory of Hajjara Varmana.





Fig. The Hazara Pukhuri is a large tank that is named after Hajjara Varman, Tezpur.

### **Pala Dynasty (10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> century)**

When Tyaga Singh the last Salastambha ruler died childless, people elected Brahmapala, a scion of Naraka line to be their king who founded the Pala dynasty. The fall of the Pala dynasty in the twelve century led to the rise of many individual kingdoms till the foundation of the Ahom dynasty by Chukapha in AD1218. It marked the end of the Kamarupa kingdom and the ancient period of Assam history.

The literary accounts contain lists of many other kings whose historicity is obscure. However all such stories bear testimony to Assam's link with Indian culture and politics with significant contributions.