

CHAPTER: V

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF FRONTIER TRADE IN ASSAM DUARS

5.1 Introduction

The trade fairs or haats were an essential part of the socio-economic lives of the people in Assam. Since the late eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century, there was the existence of various trade fairs and haats on the premises of Assam Duars. Both the people of Bhutan and the inhabitants of Assam Duars sold and bartered or exchanged their excess produce. But during the course of the Burmese invasion of Assam, these trade fairs ceased to exist.

The colonial government, after the annexation of the Assam, revived these trade fairs, and under their initiative, these trade fairs underwent a complete transformation because of the fact that the policy of the British adhered to the maximum realization of revenue collection. These trade fairs were organized by the British to serve their own interest of popularizing British manufactured goods¹ and more importantly, the trade fairs presented a platform for the Colonial Government to exert political and economic influence over the inhabitants of Assam Duars and Bhutan. However, these trade fairs established by the British had both positive and negative impacts on the people of Bhutan as well as on Assam Duars.

5.2 Socio-economic impact of frontier trade

During the medieval period, Assam had a unique industry of manufacturing cloths from the thread of silkworms.² Under the Ahom rule, it was customary to donate a part of their silk products to the Kings and nobles.³ The country silks- Eri, muga, and pat- were intended for domestic use and sale in the markets.⁴ A small bush commonly known as 'Phutaka' was the source of rearing muga silkworms, while a castor oil plant was commonly used for rearing eri silkworms.⁵ It was customary under the Ahoms for the elderly women of a village to rear silkworms and weave silk. H.F Samman in 1897 wrote that '*in the province of Assam, weaving is an integral part of a girl's education as well as a woman's daily*

household duties. Both men and women in the family are expected to make their own clothing.”⁶ However, now ready-made western-imported goods have taken precedence over weaving. William Hunter on the manufacture of muga silk described that “*the muga silk, so common in Assam, is manufactured from the cocoon produced by the worm of the muga moth (Taturnia Assamungis). This moth, which is remarkable for its great size, is found wild in the jungles, where the natives know it as the deo-muga. However, the cocoons used in the manufacture are obtained entirely from domesticated worms of the same breed, which are hatched in the district from worms imported annually or bi-annually from Nowgong and Kamrup; otherwise, the breed is always liable to become extinct in these parts. The muga worms are fed entirely on the sum tree, which abounds in Assam. The rearing of this breed is not confined to any particular caste. Their bringing up requires great care and attention, as the worms are reared in the open air. The sum trees are found growing wild in great abundance, and though they would grow easily from seed, the Assamese never plant them in this way but content themselves with transplanting the young trees which they find produced spontaneously from seed fallen from the full-grown trees. These young trees are planted out at regular intervals of ten to twelve feet, and thus form plantations which are fit to feed the worms in from three to four years*”⁷.

Cotton a fundamental commodity in Assam Duars was cultivated expansively by using the system of clearing forests commonly known as Jhum. Cotton was cultivated in two main varieties, the Bar kopah and the Saru kopah.⁸ The Bor kopah was fast-growing cotton and possessed fewer seeds; thus, could be ginned easily, while the Soru kopah, unlike Bor kopah, had to be sown annually and could be plucked once a year.⁹ Besides, the seed pots of Simil trees also provided cotton for making cushions.¹⁰ There was no particular caste involved, especially in preparing cotton for spinning.¹¹ Every family had a loom, and cotton was spun and woven by the women for domestic use. Only an insignificant quantity was exported to Bengal or bartered to acquire essential items with the hill tribes.¹² Cotton was cultivated extensively on the slopes of the Bhutan hills, especially in Chapaguri Mauza of Kamrup and in the hilly portion of the Goalpara district in Bijni and Sidli Parganas.¹³ The items churia, chador, borkapor, khaniya Kapor, cheleng, gamosa, Riha, mekhela and paridiya Kapor were prepared out of cotton.¹⁴ The areas of Mangaldai, Nalbari, Tamulpur, and Rangia in Assam Duars produced the finest eri or endi fabrics.¹⁵

The products of silk and cotton were sold by the natives of Assam Duars in the trade fairs. But towards the first half of the 19th century, trade-in silk and cotton products received

a jolt with the introduction of British cheap mill-made clothes. Edward Gait in 1896 described that '*when the British opened up the province to external trade, cheaper and better-imported foreign goods began to supplant indigenous goods, and the majority of the people engaged in manufacturing indigenous products abandoned their trade and turned to agriculture when their trade became unprofitable.*'¹⁶

B.C. Allen in 1905 wrote that '*in Darrang and Kamrup districts there were about 700 and 7000 respectively employed in the profession of pottery making.*'¹⁷ In Assam Duars albeit agriculture being the primary occupation, people also engaged in the profession of pottery making. Kumars and Hiras both practised pottery making extensively.¹⁸ The articles of pottery were cooking pots, water Jars etc. these articles were sold at the trade fairs. The large brass cans were popular among the Bhutias who bought them to filter their country-made spirits.¹⁹ But with the development of transport and communication, superior quality articles from Bengal were brought down in the trade fairs by the merchants, which gradually replaced the local pottery articles. Similarly, the industry of sugar and mustard oil also suffered the same fate at the trade fairs and haats.

There was no special caste involved in the manufacture of brass and bell metal. However, according to Buranjis, it was a particular caste called Morias who were captured by the Ahoms during Turbak's invasion of Assam in about 1506 A.D., but due to their unworthiness in various activities, they eventually resorted to brass working as a means of livelihood and developed into an expert manufacturer of brass utensils²⁰ Traditionally, utensil manufacturing involved hammering and casting into moulds.²¹ They fashioned amalgamated metal cooking and household utensils in a variety of shapes and sizes.²² According to William Hunter in 1879, the manufacturer of brass and bell metal earned between six and eight annas, or nine pence to a shilling. Locally manufactured brass-metal utensils gradually declined in popularity as a result of competition from inexpensive enameled ironware and brassware imported from other places.²³

Lac and rubber were the important articles of import in the trade fairs. Lac apart from being used as a dye was also used as a medicine.²⁴ William Hunter wrote that '*in 1875 Assam merchants imported 26 maunds of lac amounting to rupees 209 annas 10 in the Kherkheria Trade fair and in the Doimara Trade fair imported 85 maunds of rubber amounting to rupees 2,720 from the Bhutias in the trade fairs.*'²⁵

However, the Darrang and Kamrup Duars produced a trace amount of lac. Lac industry was not caste or tribe specific. Lac was primarily reared in Darrang District on Pakari (*ficus rumphii*) and poma (*Cedrela Toona*). Lac came from Nahara, Orang, Odalguri, Kalaigaon, Paneri, Sipajhar, and Barpathar in the Mangaldai subdivision of the Darrang district. Lac production in the district is estimated to be around 4,000 maunds per year. The villagers sold the lac for between Rs. 25 and Rs. 30 per maund.²⁶ Lac was exported as stick lac. The Eri garments known as bhumoka, which were primarily manufactured in Mangaldoi, were dyed red for sale to the Bhutias using the lac.²⁷

During the early years of British rule, Indian rubber was discovered in Assam. However, until then the rubber was imported from Bhutan. W.W. Hunter mentions that in 1875 at Doimara fair Assam imported rubber from Bhutan at the rate of Rs. 32 per maund.²⁸ But, as the demand for rubber increased in the nineteenth century for the manufacture of various articles in European countries, the lucrative rubber trade naturally attracted the attention of British entrepreneurs, and the British began encouraging rubber cultivation in vast areas. Rubber plantations were established in the Kamrup and Darrang districts in 1874 at Kulsu and Chariduar, respectively. Due to the pure white complexion of Assam rubber, it commands a 40 per cent premium over rubber imported from other regions. Despite its rubber production, the British made no attempt to process rubber in Assam.

The sole reason for the decline of indigenous industries was the British de-industrialization policy. This is evident from the Report on Trade between Assam and Adjoining Foreign Countries 1889-90, which states a steady increase in the demand for European cotton piece goods, cotton twist, and yarn at trade fairs.²⁹ H.K. Barpujari states the decline of the cotton industry was a result of increased imports of foreign textiles.³⁰ Moreover, the British Government's policy to promote British industrial interests following the declaration of the Charter Act of 1833 contributed greatly to the decline of the indigenous industry of cotton and silk.³¹ M.L Bose observes that *'the spinning and weaving were discouraged by the influx of mill-made goods and yarn. Making dyes from indigenous materials was a widespread practice among the indigenous people but the British imports substituted and discouraged the manufacturing of indigenous dyes.'*³²

Besides, to add to the dilemma of the indigenous industries the development of railways in Assam further intensified the misery of the rural indigenous industries as the railways provided an opportunity for the British producers to reach the far-flung areas of the

region.³³ The autarky of Assam was shattered, and once acclaimed as an exporter of commodities became an importer of British manufactured goods. The consequences of de-industrialization resulted in the displacement of traditional economic activities. Besides, de-industrialization paved the way for the introduction of a new economy in the region.

In Assam Duars, the establishment of the sovereignty of the Colonial Government was instrumental in establishing peace and order after the Burmese invasion. Assam Duars under the Colonial Government witnessed a significant development in the trading activities as the improved means of communication attracted the traders of far-flung places to venture into the haats and trade fairs held in the vicinity of Assam Duars. The traders from the far-flung places sold and purchased various commodities in the haats and trade fairs. This led to the beginning of changes, especially in the age-old method of the barter transaction.

In the province of Assam including Assam Duars in the pre-colonial period barter system was the most prominent form of economic activity of the people in the rural areas.³⁴ Besides, in lower Assam, a Koch coin called Narayani was also in circulation along with the use of cowries for small transactions.³⁵ The colonial intervention in Assam and Assam Duars led to the introduction of a monetary economy. In 1840, with the introduction of British administration uniformly throughout Lower Assam, the old traditional system of revenue collection i.e., the Khel system, was gradually phased out in favour of cash payment. The ensuing introduction of the cash economy created a dilemma for peasants and indigenous traders in Assam Duars who were accustomed to a traditional barter economy. The Marwaris readily took advantage of the prevailing situation and invested their fortunes in Assam Duars to capture the lucrative frontier trade. The introduction of the monetary economy affected the native poor traders, who had to soothe themselves with the traditional transaction system.

The Marwaris are the traditional merchants of Western Rajasthan. During the Mughal era, these traditional merchants moved along with the Mughals in the East and established business headquarters along the Ganga- Jamuna valley and Bengal.³⁶ After the British cemented their political supremacy, the Marwaris expanded their role as intermediaries for the British. In the early nineteenth century, after the British advanced their dominion towards Assam and established tea gardens in the various sites of Assam Duars, the Marwaris, enterprising, moved along with them, established stores, and provided banking services.³⁷ Mention may be made of Mahasingh Rai Meghraj Bahadur, one of the firms in Assam that

the Marwari Oswal family established.³⁸ Further, the Marwari Oswal family, in the absence of an indigenous leading trading class in Assam, deeply perpetrated in the rural areas of Assam and cemented their role as a leading jute trader in Assam. Report on Administration of the Province of Assam for the year 1878-79 reports that '*the Bhutia traders visited several trading places at the foot of the hills to conduct trade with the Kacharies, Marwari merchants, and others who had gathered there to trade their wares.*'³⁹ Further J.E. O'Conor, Assistant Secretary to the Government of India Department of Finance and Commerce stated that '*the Marwari merchants stocked their goods at Kumarikhata and other frontier villages to trade with the Bhutias.*'⁴⁰

In Assam Duars, the wealthiest and most important traders were the shrewd Marwari merchants, locally known as Kaiya. In Assam Duars, the Marwaris dominated the trade of important commodities. They were not only the supplier of essential goods such as clothes and blankets, grain and pulse of various kinds, salt, oil, ghee, cement, corrugated iron, metal utensils, and thread, but they were also chief exporters of mustard seed, lac, unhusked rice, hides, and timber. In lower Assam, Gauhati and Barpeta were the most important trading centres.

The Marwari merchants established grocery stores in and around the tea gardens in Assam Duars to supply essential commodities, as well as practised money lending business to the local inhabitants. Apart from trading, the Marwari merchants were also involved in governmental duties as the Mauzadar and manager of the haats. The Marwaris merchants controlled nearly all of the profitable export and import business in Assam Duars. The Marwaris were instrumental in transforming the subsistence economy of Assam Duars into a monetised level. As a result, local traders were unable to compete with the Marwaris, and they were gradually displaced by the Marwaris.

Besides the Marwaris (Kayahs), another class of traders' natives of Kamrup district cemented their role as an exporter of mustard seeds in Assam Duars. With their excellent proficiency in business, these traders explored new avenues of trade, especially with the Bhutias. They did not confine their business only to exporting mustard seeds but also to other locally produced grains, betel nuts, etc. This became a lucrative business for them. Besides these traders, there were also a few Bengali Muhammadan traders who sold furniture, haberdashery and oil man's stores in towns such as Mangaldai.⁴¹ These traders took

possession of the profitable trade away from the control of local traders. Further, the traditional system of Posa payment introduced by the Ahom King Pratap Singha to reconcile the Bhutias from committing raids was now paid by the colonial government in cash.⁴² This initiation of monetary settlement in Assam Duars by the Colonial government resulted in the shifting of trade favouring the business communities than the local traders. The latter had no commercial aptitude and thus allowed the whole of the trade profits to pass into the hands of the foreigners.

In the history of Nepali immigration in the colonial Assam, social scientists attribute their migration to about the 1820s.⁴³ However, Nepali immigration may be traced back to 1817, to be precise, with the foundation of the Cuttack Legion followed by its deployment in the Sylhet operation.⁴⁴ After its service in Assam, this Cuttack Legion came to be acknowledged as the 1st Assam Light Infantry. The recruitment of Nepalis into the British military and police forces began shortly after the Sagauly treaty of 1816. On the immigration of Nepalis from Bhutan to Assam Smriti Das observes that *'the Nepalis settlers in Southern Duars of Bhutan were agriculturists but over time, they engaged themselves as traders. In the early nineties, the differences between Nepalis and Bhutanese started to prevail because of the discriminatory nature of the Bhutanese government towards them. Various issues related to the destruction of forests, the smuggling of antiques, and the corruption in Bhutanese society were dictated to the Nepalis. In fact, the differences prevailed to such an extent that the Bhutias started threatening with arms. As a consequence of such discriminatory attitude of the Bhutanese government, the Nepalis started migrating to Assam Duars.'*⁴⁵

The expansion of the British rule in Assam and the discovery of tea in Assam necessitated physically strong labourers to clear off the jungles for the commercial cultivation of tea. The British saw the Nepalis as rightful for the task. Therefore, they were enticed by the British in large numbers to the forest, tea plantations, road construction etc. The Nepalis also provided a pliant labour force for tea gardens and menial jobs. Having completed a term of enlistment as labourers in the tea gardens, these immigrated labourers started practising cultivation, especially in the districts of Darrang and Kamrup.⁴⁶ The Nepali immigrants cultivated sugarcane on a considerable scale and produced jaggery, one of the chief import items for Bhutan.⁴⁷ Besides, after their retirement, many of the Gurkha

(also known as Nepali) soldiers were persuaded by the British Government to settle in the Duars area. For their livelihood, they practised dairy farming and even agriculture.⁴⁸

The immigration of the Nepalis greatly intensified between 1901 and 1925, who took advantage of the decency of the inhabitants of Assam Duars and started migrating into Assam. Besides, in 1911, to facilitate trade with Bhutan, the colonial government requested the Deputy Commissioners of Goalpara, Kamrup, including Darrang to issue passes to Nepalese, Bhutanese, and Tibetans so that they could travel across the Inner Line.⁴⁹ The Nepalis took the privilege of the situation and started migrating to Assam Duars.

These Nepali immigrants settled especially in the districts of Kamrup, Darrang and Lakhimpur because of the availability of vast tracts of wastelands and grazing grounds for Cattle-breeding.⁵⁰ This, on the contrary, provided an opportunity for the British Government the collection of grazing tax which was previously held as a traditional right by the natives.⁵¹ Besides, several Nepali immigrants also breed buffaloes, make ghee, and work as sawyers in government forests.⁵²

The Nepali (Lhotshampa) of Bhutan started immigrating into Assam towards the beginning of 1960 with the Bhutan Citizenship Act in 1958, many of the Lhotshampas who could not produce proof of being the resident of Bhutan before 1958 were declared immigrants.⁵³ In 1961 the rate of Nepal immigration in India was 82,000, of which 20,000 settled permanently, and by 1970 there were about 1.5 million Nepali inhabitants in India.⁵⁴ In Assam, the Nepalese immigrants settled particularly in the foothill region of Assam Duars, thereby impacting the socio-economic structure of Assam Duars. Therefore, Rajib Handique, in "*British Forest Policy in Assam*", rightly remarked that '*migration of non-indigenous people in the forest areas of Assam resulted in enhancement of population and social change*'.⁵⁵

Table 5.1

Nepali Population in Assam, 1901-1951

Year	Population
1901	21,347
1911	47,654
1921	70,344
1931	88,306
1941	99,363
1951	1,01,338

Source: Sanjib Kumar Chetry, *Nepalis in Assam: A Historical Perspective*, *Research Journal of Language, Literature and Humanities*, Volume-3(3), March 2016, p.23

Salt is of the essential commodities of human life. In the Ahom period, there was very little salt production in Assam. Salt was procured from the brine springs of Barhat, Sibsagar, Mikir Hills, Cachar and hilly regions of Assam.⁵⁶ But the production of salt in these places was confined to the Ahom royal family. Since salt production is limited and expensive in Assam, the local inhabitants produced alkaline from plantain trees to substitute salt.

In the pre-British period, the people inhabiting the Kamrup and Darrang Duars carried out frontier trade with the Bhutias in the trade fairs. One of the most important articles the Bhutias brought down was the salt in these trade fairs. B.C. Allen wrote that '*at the Udalguri trade fair, the Bhutias traded salt for rice at rates that benefited them*'.⁵⁷

Since there was a lack of salt in Assam, they took the opportunity of salt scarcity to barter salt with the rice at an advantageous rate. Odalguri (udalguri) trade fair was one of the prominent trade fairs in the Darrang district known for the salt trade.⁵⁸ Besides, Udalguri trade fair trade in salt was also carried out in Doimara, Kherkheria and Darranga and Subankhata trade fairs in Kamrup district.⁵⁹

In the early part of the 19th century colonial Assam, one of the marked developments witnessed was in transport and communication. With the development of transport and communication, the British introduced Liverpool salt to Assam. This Liverpool was accessible at a much cheaper price than the salt of Bhutan. B.C. Allen wrote that the introduction of Liverpool salt in Kachari Mauzas of Darrang marked the beginning of

changes in the value of imported salt of the Bhutias.⁶⁰ This Liverpool salt was made available in the Darrang district. Ultimately the introduction of a cheap rate of salt proved a threat to the monopoly of salt of the Bhutias. Besides, much to the discouragement of the Bhutias, the traders of Tezpur who bought rice from Odalguri and orang escalated the worth of rice. Therefore, the Bhutias started retreating to Darranga and Subankhata trade fairs in Kamrup Duars for a better exchange rate. The consequences of the policy of the British on the introduction of Bengal salt proved the decline of the udalguri trade fair. More importantly, there were also events related to the extortion of the local inhabitants for not accepting the exchange rate of salt fixed by them. Thus, the British policy created social tensions among the Bhutias and the local inhabitants of Assam Duars.

5.3 Introduction of European Goods

Mr. Rutherford, the principal Assistant of Central Assam, established a trade fair and exhibition hall in Udalguri in 1833. To his disappointment, the Bhutias never attended; rather, the Bhutias preferred hawking from village to village.⁶¹ Therefore, the collector of Darrang, Captain Vetch, put forth the proposal in 1838 of distributing Posa or allowances in cash to the Bhutias. It was approved by Commissioner Jenkins and the Supreme Government of the company.⁶² However, the Bhutias refused to accept the allowances in cash. They raided the plains in 1843-44, leading to the economic blockade of the Bhutias until the three agents of the Governor of Tawang, along with local chiefs, negotiated the settlement.⁶³ Udalguri trade fair was the site wherein the Posa or allowances were distributed. Besides Posa or allowances, the British, to accustom them to British goods, presented wine, cigarettes, broadcloth, handkerchief made of cotton and silk, tobacco pipes, mirrors etc. The Bhutia chiefs obsessed with European goods bought these the money they received as a Posa payment. Durbars were held during the fair to explain political or administrative policies, announce successions, and settle disputes.⁶⁴ The huge pendals were built, visitors accommodated, and police and military guards were deployed to maintain order.⁶⁵ Moreover, local officials organised songs and dances, games, and sports, including horse races to add to the glamour of the trade fair. The total cost of organising the fair at Udalguri and feeding the Bhutia visitors was only Rs.1000, which was more than double the amount originally accessed by the colonial government.⁶⁶

Trade fairs were the policy of the colonial government to popularise European goods. Therefore, in their anxiety to exercise political control on the Bhutias, the colonial

government organized trade fairs and haats on several frontiers of Assam Duars. Smriti Das observed that *'the demarcation of the Assam-Bhutan boundary in 1872-73 was very useful to the Government of British India in the long run. Graham, the Boundary Commissioner, stated that by constructing a road through the Dewangiri, it could be developed into a significant trading centre. The Bengal government readily accepted the suggestion. A bridle path through the Darranga pass was built following a survey for Rs. 10,000.'*⁶⁷ This very fact testifies to the interest of the British in promoting trade fairs to popularise European goods and, in the process, exert political pressure on the Bhutias.

The trade fairs were instrumental in spreading tea, sugar, molasses, oil, and other luxuries to the plains and hills. People who were already familiar with these products began to buy them at fairs. According to a report on trade between Assam and a neighbouring foreign country in 1890, demand for European cotton pieces, cotton twists and yarn, brass and copper, opium, and other European goods has increased significantly.

At the trade fairs organised in Assam Duars, the British introduced the European mill clothes, which attracted both the Bhutias and the people of Assam Duars. The inhabitants of Assam Duars, who had been traditionally involved in the manufacture of clothes, fell prey to cheap machine-made goods. Instead of manufacturing clothes themselves, the inhabitants of Assam Duars now started purchasing them in the markets. As a result, the old traditional industries of Assam received a setback and, with time, ceased to exist.

The British subjects' sale of liquor, opium, tobacco pipes and other illicit substances in the trade fairs had a detrimental effect on the villages in the vicinity of trade fairs.⁶⁸ The villagers fell victim to these intoxicating substances; some even had to mortgage their lands to the Marwaris and village Mahajans to satisfy their habit of consuming them.⁶⁹ Moreover, the opening of liquor stores in the trade fairs, which were easily accessible, had a demoralizing effect on the general population of Assam Duars. Those who escaped the clutches of opium have fallen victim to the spirits.

Trade fairs were crucial in keeping the Bhutias in touch with inhabitants of Assam Duars, thereby facilitating socio-cultural exchanges despite their geographic separation. The Bhutias established close ties with the Kacharis living in Assam Duars, becoming more than just neighbours.⁷⁰ Additionally, trade fairs also facilitated cultural, ideas, and technology exchange.

The trade fairs were a source of a lucrative revenue for the colonial authority. In fact, from the very beginning of the reinstatement of the trade fairs, the British Government was well informed of the economic prospects and trade relations in Assam Duars. Therefore, Lieutenant Rutherford wrote about the importance of restoring the Udalguri trade fair stating that *'if resumed, it is likely that this trade will flourish to levels never seen before, and will serve as a means of widely disseminating British products throughout Tibet and Bhutan.'*⁷¹

The duty levied on the goods for sale in the trade fairs also fetched lucrative revenue for the British authorities. Besides, the local chieftains and officials' introduction of tolls on goods for sale in trade fairs led to economic and social differentiation.

With the development of communications in Assam Duars, the Punjabis, the Marwaris, the Biharis, the Nepalis, and the Bengalis from East Pakistan penetrated in the Assam Duars to try their luck, displacing local traders and capturing the markets. Assam Duars' demographic pattern was altered by these immigrants. Furthermore, these traders established themselves near trade fairs and monopolised the sale and supply of commodities to the Bhutias.

In Assam Duars, the colonial government established markets, apart from reinstating the trade fairs. Mentioned may be made of Kumarikatta located in the northern part of Kamrup district under the Barpeta Sub-division. Col. Hopkinson proposed the establishment of the Kumrikatta market to ease the burden of traders and the Bhutias on the collection of food.⁷²

The colonial authority for security established a chain of an outpost.⁷³ These posts were established along the routes through which the Bhutias made inroads into Assam Duars. These outposts served as a measure of protection against the raids of the Bhutias for the people of Assam Duars. Behind every outpost, a strong reserve was garrisoned, and, in an emergency, they marched towards the frontiers. In 1861, at Kuriapara, there were 70 men of military force to guard against a possible attack of the Bhutias. Moreover, during the event of trade fairs, these military guards were stationed to guard against any possible mishap in the trade fairs held at Udalguri, Subankhata, and Darranga. On the establishment of a military outpost in Assam in 1862 Colonel Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Assam commented that *'in Assam, a military outpost serves as protection against Bhutias in the same way that an umbrella does against rain'*.⁷⁴

Bhutan, apart from trade relations, had social relations with Assam. The development of these social relations was more or less due to religious traditions. The zenith of these religious relations with Assam took place after Guru Padmasambhava visited Bhutan in the eighteenth century.⁷⁵

On the north bank of the Brahmaputra River under the Kamrup district of Assam, about 16 kilometres northeast of Guwahati, lies the Hindu Madhava temple on the Monikut hill situated in Hajo. Hajo is located on the latitude 26° 11' 18" and longitude 91° 47' 26".⁷⁶ The word "Hajo" in the Kachari language means "hill". While according to the Buddhist traditions, Hajo is a word with two combinations Ha meaning Sun and Jo meaning setting. Therefore, the word Hajo means setting sun.

The most important site of the Buddhists at Hajo is sited at the northwest base of the hill, a bare rock about eight yards in diameter. According to L. Austine Waddell, the Buddhist pilgrims believed the rock to be the pyre of a cool grove, where the Lord Buddha died and was cremated.⁷⁷ The basis of this belief is the Tibetan inscription inscribed with the Buddhist mantra "*Om mani PadmeHum,*" "*Om ah hum,*" "*Om*", etc.,⁷⁸

The Bhutanese identify Hajo as the Kusinagara, where Gautam Buddha attained nirvana.⁷⁹ For centuries Hajo attracted the Buddhist pilgrims from Bhutan, who visited the place, especially in the winter season just before the Udalguri trade fair each year. The Bhutias believed that the statue of Hayagriva Madhava situated in the monastery of Lhasa was brought by the Brahmin to Hajo.⁸⁰ At the beginning of each year, as the Bhutias came down to Kherkheria for trade, they visited the Hayagriva -Madhav temple at Hajo and performed the rituals based on their beliefs. The Bhutias were assisted in the performance of rituals by the traditional local agents known as the Hatkhevas.⁸¹

5.4 Bhairabkunda

Bhairabkunda is another famous pilgrim centre that lies north of Gohain Kamal Ali Road. The place is located at Balem in the vicinity of Kuriapara Duar. Bhairabkunda is a consecrated site for both the Bhutias and Hindus. The Bhutias descended the hills (Amratola) during the winter season and took bathe Kunda (pond) before embarking on a pilgrimage to Hajo. After returning from the pilgrimage, they attended the Udalguri trade fair. According to the traditions, it is generally believed that the Pandavas used the site of Kunda to bathe on their enroute to heaven.⁸²

5.5 Jorphukri

Jorpukhuri is a renowned place for numerous small ponds. The site is about 4 kilometres from Ghograpara. The origin of the name Jorpukhuri is associated with the twin pond located in the area. On the bank of the twin pond, there was a large temple, which according to the inhabitants of the area, was a Shiv temple. However, according to Dineswar Shama, it was a Hagriv Madhavdeva temple, which unfortunately sank underground due to the earthquake of 1897.⁸³ This place was regarded as a consecrated by the Bhutias. During the winter season, the Bhutias came down to Kherkheria and visited the place for worship during the time of Buddha Purnima.

Fig. No. 5.1

Picture of the relics of Hagriv Mahadeva Temple



From the above discussion, we may conclude that the British occupied Assam Duars because of its commercial and strategic importance. Assam Duars was an indispensable region for the Bhutias because every essential item was procured through trade in the Duars. The colonial government in order to exert political and economic influence over the Bhutias restored trade fairs in the various parts of Assam Duars. These trade fairs served their

intensions of popularizing foreign goods. More importantly, the trade fairs also generated surplus revenue.

The Bhutias brought down in these trade fairs various hill products including salt in order to trade with the plains people. They imported rice, cocoons, cotton twisted, cotton piece goods, silk cloth and various other products of the plains. With the increasing participation of the Bhutias within a short span of time, the trade fairs in the various places of Assam Duars started increasing by leaps and bounds. However, the occupation of Assam Duars caused the self-sustaining village economy to collapse, paving the way for a capitalist economy. Moreover, the introduction of various European mill made goods proved a death kneel to the indigenous cotton, silk, brass-metal industries etc.

The development of roads, railways etc. in Assam Duars also paved the way for the far-flung merchants i.e., Marwaris, East Bengal traders and traders of Kamrup, to the trade fairs. The Marwaris being business-minded captured the wholesale trade in Assam Duars and monopolized the trade. The introduction of the cash economy by the colonial government discouraged the indigenous traders who lacked cash payments for transactions in the trade fairs. As a result, the lucrative frontier trade was captured by the outsiders. Moreover, certain policies adopted by the colonial government also proved detrimental to the social relations between the Bhutias and the plains. The introduction of rum, cigarette, opium and other intoxicants as gifts to the Bhutia chiefs and the sale in the trade fairs also produced a demoralising effect on the society.

Notes & References

¹ M.L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Concept Publishing, Company, New Delhi, 1997, p.201

² *Provincial Gazetteer of Assam*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2018, p.60

³ Jahnabi Gogoi, *Agrarian System of Medieval Assam*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2002, p.77

⁴ Smriti Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations 1865-1949*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.58

⁵ R.C. Muirhead Thomson, *Assam Valley: Beliefs and Customs of the Assamese Hindus*, Luzac and Company Ltd. London, 1948, P.82

⁶H.F. Samman, *Monograph on the Cotton Fabrics of Assam*, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1897, p.3

⁷ W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol.1, Trubner & Co., London, 1879, pp. 381-82

⁸ Priyam Goswami, *Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1999, p.30

⁹ Priyam Goswami, *Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1999, p.30

¹⁰ R.C. Muirhead Thomson, *Assam Valley: Beliefs and Customs of the Assamese Hindus*, Luzac and Company Ltd. London, 1948, p.82

¹¹ Priyam Goswami, *Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1999, p.30

¹² William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, Sanskaran Prakashak, Delhi, 1841, p.240.

¹³ Priyam Goswami, *Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1999, pp.29-30

¹⁴ Priyam Goswami, *Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1999, p.31

¹⁵ H.K. Barpujari (Ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Volume- V, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2018, p.98

¹⁶ *Notes on Some Industries of Assam from 1884-1895*, Superintendent of Assam Secretariate Printing office, Shillong, 1896, p.112-13

¹⁷ B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Darrang District*, Volume- V, pioneer press, Allahabad, 1905, p.157 also B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Kamrup District*, Volume- IV, pioneer press, Allahabad, 1905, p.159

¹⁸ H.K. Barpujari, *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Volume- III, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2004, p.116

¹⁹ B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Kamrup District*, Volume- IV, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1905, p.183

²⁰ Sudeshna Purkayastha, *Indigenous Industries of Assam (1870-1925)*, K.P. Bagchi & Company, Kolkata, 2005, p.11

²¹ Priyam Goswami, *Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1999, p.33

-
- ²² Priyam Goswami, *Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialization and Colonial Penetration*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1999, p.33
- ²³ H.K. Barpujari (Ed.), *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Volume- V*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2018, p.106
- ²⁴ Amrita Bora, "Lac Industry in Colonial Assam", *Research Guru*, Volume-13, Issue-1, June 2019, p.917
- ²⁵ W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam, Volume- I*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1998, p.145
- ²⁶ B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Darrang District, Volume-V*, pioneer press, Allahabad, 1905, p.160
- ²⁷ Smriti Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations 1865-1949*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.65
- ²⁸ W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam, Volume- I*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1998, p.145
- ²⁹ Assam Secretariat Records, *Report on Trade between Assam and Adjoining Foreign Countries 1889-90*, p.3
- ³⁰ H.K. Barpujari (Ed.), *Political History of Assam, Volume- I*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, Fourth Edition, 2014, p.58
- ³¹ Sudeshna Purkayastha, *Indigenous Industries of Assam 1870-1925*, KP Bagchi & Company, Kolkata, 2005, p.36
- ³² M.L. Bose, *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency*, Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2017, p.183
- ³³ Ian J. Kerr, *Building the Railways of the Raj 1850-1900*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995, p. 175
- ³⁴ H.K. Barpujari (Ed.), *Political History of Assam, Volume- I*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, Fourth Edition, 2014, p.56
- ³⁵ Jahnabi Gogoi, *Agrarian System of Medieval Assam*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2002, p.150
- ³⁶ Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris: From Jagat Seth to the Birlas*, Penguin Random House, Gurugram, 2014, pp.4-5
- ³⁷ Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris: From Jagat Seth to the Birlas*, Penguin Random House, Gurugram, 2014, pp.24-25
- ³⁸ Thomas A. Timberg, *The Marwaris: From Jagat Seth to the Birlas*, Penguin Random House, Gurugram, 2014, pp.24-25
- ³⁹ *Report on Administration of the Province of Assam for the year 1878-79*, Chapter 1, Section 2, Assam Secretariat Press, Shillong, 1880, p.6
- ⁴⁰ J.E. O'Connor, *Review on the External Trade of British India for 1898-79*, Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1880, p.18

-
- ⁴¹ *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Provincial Series, Eastern Bengal and Assam, Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1909, pp.86-87
- ⁴² Tade Sangdo, “Posa System: A Case Study of the British-Nyishi Relations”, *Research Guru*, Volume-12, Issue-2, September 2018, p.1056. *website: www.researchguru.net*
- ⁴³ Lopita Nath, “Migrants in Flight: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement of Nepalis in North East India”, *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Volume 1, Number 1, January 2005, p.57
- ⁴⁴ L.W. Shakespear, *History of the Assam Rifles*, Cultural Publishing House, Delhi, 1983, P.6
- ⁴⁵ Smriti Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations 1865-1949*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.86
- ⁴⁶ H.K. Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Volume- V, Publication Board Assam, Gauhati, 2007, p.48
- ⁴⁷ Smriti Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations 1865-1949*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, pp.60 & 61
- ⁴⁸ Lopita Nath, “Migrants in Flight: Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement of Nepalis in North East India”, *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Volume 1, Number 1, January 2005, p.64
- ⁴⁹ Smriti Das, *Assam Bhutan relations with special reference to duars from 1681 to 1949*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Gauhati University, 1998, p110
- ⁵⁰ Sanjib Kumar Chetry, “Nepalis in Assam: A Historical Perspective (1816-1985)”, *Research Journal of Language, Literature and Humanities*, Volume- 3(3), 2016, p.23
- ⁵¹ Lopita Nath, “Migration, Insecurity and Identity: The Nepali Dairymen in India’s Northeast”, *Asian Ethnicity*, Volume- 7, Number 2, June 2006, pp.140-142
- ⁵² E.A. Gait, *Census of India 1911*, Volume I, Part I- Report, Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1913, p.97
- ⁵³ Maximillan Morch, “Bhutan’s Dark Secret: The Lhotshampa Expulsion”, *The Diplomat*, 2016, p.3
- ⁵⁴ Srikant Dutt, “Migration and Development: Nepalese in Northeast”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume-16, No- 24, 1981, p.1053
- ⁵⁵ Rajib Handique, *British Forest Policy in Assam*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2004, p.109
- ⁵⁶ Pratap Chandra Choudhury, *The History of the Civilisation of the people of Assam to the twelfth century AD*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1987, p.348

-
- ⁵⁷ B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Darrang District*, Volume- V, pioneer press, Allahabad, 1905, p.182
- ⁵⁸ B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Darrang District*, Volume- V, pioneer press, Allahabad, 1905, p.160
- ⁵⁹ W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Volume-I, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1998, p.143-45 & B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Kamrup*, Volume- IV, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1905, p.183
- ⁶⁰ B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers, Darrang District*, Volume-V, pioneer press, Allahabad, 1905, p.182
- ⁶¹ H.K. Barpujari, *Assam: In the Days of The Company 1826-1858*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Gauhati, 1963, p.246
- ⁶² M.L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1997, p.55
- ⁶³ M.L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1997, p.55
- ⁶⁴ Smriti Das, *Assam Bhutan Relations with special reference to Duars from 1681 to 1949*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Gauhati University, 1998, p.122
- ⁶⁵ Smriti Das, *Assam Bhutan Relations with special reference to Duars from 1681 to 1949*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Gauhati University, 1998, p.122
- ⁶⁶ M.L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1997, p.33
- ⁶⁷ Smriti Das, *Assam Bhutan Relations with special reference to Duars from 1681 to 1949*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Gauhati University, 1998, p.121
- ⁶⁸ Smriti Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations 1865-1949*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.70
- ⁶⁹ Smriti Das, *Assam-Bhutan Trade Relations 1865-1949*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.70
- ⁷⁰ James Daimari, S/o- Thekhere Daimari, Village- Bhergaon (Paneri), Dist- Udalguri, Age- 90, said that the Bhutias visited the Bodo villages located nearby Assam- Bhutan border for the sale of goods. As a result of trade contacts between the Kacharis and the Bhutias, sometimes a Bodo individual and Bhutia individual tie fisiki (Bodo word for a bosom friend).
- ⁷¹ R. B. Pemberton, *The Eastern Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2018 (reprint), p.81
- ⁷² Smriti Das, *Assam Bhutan Relations with special reference to Duars from 1681 to 1949*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Gauhati university, 1998, p.121
- ⁷³ Assam secretariate Records, Foreign Proceedings, March 1885, No.24

-
- ⁷⁴ National Archives of India, Foreign Political Proceedings of the Government of India, June 1866, Nos. 37-39
- ⁷⁵ Hasrat Bikrama Jit, *History of Bhutan Land of the Peaceful Dragon*, Education Department of Bhutan, Thimphu, 1980, p.37
- ⁷⁶ L. Austine Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd., Waterloo Place, 1895, p.309
- ⁷⁷ L. Austine Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd., Waterloo Place, 1895, p.310
- ⁷⁸ L. Austine Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, W.H. Allen & Co. Ltd., Waterloo Place, 1895, p.310
- ⁷⁹ Michael Aris, *Bhutan: The Early History of the Himalayan Kingdom*, Aris & Phillips Ltd., Warminster England, 1979, p.113
- ⁸⁰ Smriti Das, *Assam- Bhutan Trade Relations 1865-1949*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.78
- ⁸¹ Smriti Das, *Assam- Bhutan Trade Relations 1865-1949*, Anshah Publishing House, Delhi, 2005, p.78
- ⁸² N.C. Dutta, *Assam District Gazetteers*, Darrang District Gazetteer, Government of Assam, Gauhati, 1978, p.531
- ⁸³ Tara Nath Kalita, *Udalguri Zilar Jagrata Tirthasthan Aru Upasanathali (Assamese)*, Anupam Kalita, 2020, pp. 4-5