A LINGUISTIC STUDY OF 24 PLACE NAMES OF ASSAM

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Introduction:
Name is a product of man's linguistic attribution to a given object. It is not a meaningless entity but cultural necessity to communicate ideas or express significance. Naming a place marks a turning point in the history of the development of human civilization. The study of place name of a given region reveals many interesting aspects of human civilization, which may not be otherwise known. So place names are called 'foot notes of history and fossils of archaeology of the past'. They are a valuable representation of the real speech of the people. Due to the retentive power of the form and content, place names are opposed to changes in the language of a community over time. Yet whenever language undergoes major phonetic changes place names are subject to such changes. The study of Linguistics, Anthropology, Ethnology, Geography and other kindred subjects is incomplete without the application of the results of place-name studies. The aim of the study of place names is to find out the original, forms and meanings and interpret them. Important clues regarding origins and human habitation are supplied by place names. Place names call for interdisciplinary study, like: Language, Anthropology, Culture, Environment, Archaeology, Narrative, Mythology, Epigraphy etc.

The study of place names on a linguistic basis is the present trend. The acoustic transformation in word utterances, the etymology of a place and semantic changes are the main points of interest through which the linguists work. These studies are named under the caption of phonology, morphology, semantics, lexicography, dialectology and so on. The state of Assam falls within the latitudes of N to N and longitude E to E. It lies on one of the important routes of migration of mankind and can be said to be the cradle of heterogeneous culture. This region is frequented by the Austroic speaker Mongoloids (the Khasis and Sytengs), Dravidas, Tibeto-Burman groups like –Bodos (Kacharis, Rava, Garo, Lalung, Karbi, Tipra etc), Tai-Ahom and the Aryans. All these groups left here, an indelible impression on Language and Culture. Their contributions can be well seen in the region in the form of place name elements.

In this work we have selected 24 place names of Assam for linguistic analysis and the stages of the method adopted here are: the correct form of the names are chosen from reliable records, alphabetical order, the territorial location, approximate period of naming, namer (language or ethnic groups), prefix or suffix and specific words in the place name, etymology, structural formations like, noun-noun, noun-adjective, adjective-noun etc, semantic changes, corruption, re-christening, old names, hybrid formation, superimposition, transliteration and categorization etc.

Brahmaputra: The main river of Assam. In the tenth century A.D, this name was conferred by the Indo-Aryans of Assam. Brahmaputra, Brahm, N. Brahma, the Hindu trinity, + case ending -r, Brahmar + suffix -putra, son, = Brahmaputra, i.e. son of Brahma (Kalika Purana), here the loss of consonant 'r' has taken place. Old name: 1. Lauhitya-sindhu, aryatisation of the Aus. name 'Lao-ti' or 'Leuti', Lau-hit, (here, change

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Old name : 1. Silpani, Old As. Sil, stone, cold, + suffix –pani, water i.e. a cold water river. 2. Tai. Mung-ri-mung-ching, a town, Tai name for Silpani area. Physical characteristic origin.


Dibrugarh : Name of a district (Lat. 27-32-03 N. and Long. 94-55-35 E.). The name Dibru, name of the river was prior to the 10th century A.D, given by the Bodo-Kacharis; Dibrugarh, in the 18th century A.D in the reign of Ahom king Siutanpha @ Sivasimha. A word of hybrid formation : Bodo and Assamese, N.bd. Di, river + suffix –bru, mouth + NIA As. gar, (garh, anglicised form, consonant ‘h’ is added here due wrong transliteration and pronunciation of the word, it does not bear any meaning) a rampart = Dibrugarh, i.e. a rampart on a river mouth. Transliterated form : Tai. Ti-phao to denote ‘Dibru’. Semantically, name of a rampart elevated to the name of a District.

Physical origin.

Gargaon: The third capital of the Ahoms (26-54-35 N. Lat. and 94-48-40 E. Long.), founded by Siu-klen-mung @ Gargayan raja in A.D 16th century and shifted from 'Cheregua' or 'Chorogua'(due to wrong pronunciation by the non-Ahoms, Cheregua becomes 'Chorogua', change of first and second vowel 'e' to 'o') the second capital. Gargaon, NIA As. Gar, rampart + suffix -gaon, village, a city of rampart. Old name : Hemenabari, Hemen, personal name + suffix -bari, enclosure or compound. Tai-name Che-hung, Che = town, hung = rampart, a transliterated form of 'Gargaon'.

Guwahati: In Kamrup district, (26-11-05 N/91-46-30 E), a district headquarters. The name was first found in the official and cannon records of Assam, as 'Guvakahatta', in the 17th century A.D in the reign of Gadadharsimha @ Siu-patpha. Earlier in the 4th century A.D Sanjali inscription of Gujarat, it reflected as 'Gugabhatti', a trade centre. Some scholars traced the name in A.D 10th century as 'Guvak-hatta', an Aryan formation, i.e., a betel-nut market near present Machkhowa area of the city, cf. Sri-hatta, present Sylhet in Bangladesh. Hamilton, in his 'An Account of Assam', and others, say the name Guwahati, derived from 'Go-hat', a cattle market. Guwahati, is adopted from anglicised form, 'Gauhati' (the word 'Guwa' is wrongly accepted as 'Gau' by the Britishers, which does not bear any meaning) in late the 20th century. N. Guwa, betelnut + suffix -hat, -hati, = Guwahati. Old name : 1. Pragiyotisha, Prag, former + N.suffix –Jyotish, a star, astronomy, i.e., a city of astronomy, an Aryanisation of Austric word 'Pagar-juh (jo)-tic (c'= ch)', a region of extensive hills (B.C era). 2. Kamarupa, according to the Puranic legends is associated with Kamadeva, the god of love. It is here that Kama was sent by the gods to put to an end to Siva's mourning after the death of his consort and reawaken in him the passion of creation. He was burnt to ashes by the angry glance of the god, but later recovered his original form (rupa), hence the name, Kamarupa. 3. Sri Duriyja or Durjaya, OIA Skt. Durjaya, means, invincible to enemy, founded by Ratnapala in the 11th century A.D. Cultural origin.


Hatigar: A place (26-47-04 N. Lat. and 94-14-20 E. Long.) in Jorhat district. A.D 17th century, originally founded by Pratapsimha @ Siuchengpha.

Hati-gar, Hati, elephant + suffix -gar, cf. British 'garh', rampart. Old names : 1. Gajpur, Gaj, elephant + suffix -pur. The king Pratapsimha proposed to make a city equivalent to 'Hasthinapur' (city having 1000 elephants) old name of 'Delhi', the present capital of India, by collecting 1000 elephants to this place, but he could not succeed in his venture, so he declared the place 'Gajpur' in stead of 'Hasthinapur'. 2. NIA As. Jamiriguri, OIA Skt. Jambir, a soury fruit tree > NIA As. Jamir + suffix -guri, the root, surrounding. 3. Tai-name for Gajpur, Che-chang, a transliterated form, city of elephants. A city becomes a village, semantically, degraded. Cultural origin.

Jorhat: Name of a district and its headquarters (26-47-10 N. lat. And 94-14-15 East long.) in upper Assam.A.D 18th century. The last capital of the Ahoms named by the Aryans. Jorhat, NIA As. Jor, a pair + suffix -hat, market, cf. Maglou-hat, Magara-hat, i.e. combination of 'Phukanar-hat' (the market founded by Parvatia Phukan) and 'Machar-hat' (market meant for fish).
Old name: 1. Dichoi-bahar, Bd. Dichoi, a shallow water river. + NIA As. suffix -bahar, a rest house or camp or an out station. 2. Tai-Ahom. Cham-che-hat. Cham = two, che = town, As. hat = market, a transliterate form of Jorhat. 3. Na-nagar, Adj. Na, new + N. suffix -nagar, town; prime minister Purnanda Buragohain founded this name after renovation of Jorhat in early A.D. 19th century. 4. Anglicised formation, ‘Jorehaut’, here As. ‘Jor’ is wrongly adopted by the British as ‘Jore’ which does not bear any meaning.

Name of a pair of market semantically elevated to the status of a district.

Cultural origin.

Cultural origin.

Semantically, name of a river island expanded to a subdivision of Jorhat district of upper Assam. A place known for Vaisnavite Satras since 17th century A.D (religious shrines of Vaisnava cult). Semantically, a name of a river island elevated to name of a subdivision. Physiographic origin.

1.18. Nazira: In Sivasagar district (Lat. 26-54-06 N. and Long. 94-42-07 E.). the 14th