

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA AND NORTH EAST REGION

KEY POINTS

- The source of the cultural heritage of India
- Characteristics of Indian culture
- Heritage of Indian culture—literature, architecture, sculpture, arts, music, dances, yoga
- The base of the cultural heritage of the North East Region and Assam
- Cultural Heritage of North East Region — literature, religion, arts, sculpture, architecture, folk culture

5.01 : The source of Cultural Heritage of India

If we need to go into the source of the cultural heritage of India, we have to study the oldest of the civilizations of the country that is Indus Valley civilization. Around 4000 BC, a developed civilization was formed in the Sindhu valley. This civilization included major towns including Harappa and Mahenjodaro and it was extended from Sindhu valley to Meerat in Ganga valley. Many experts are of the view that the Dravidians were the main architects of the Sindhu civilization. Items like statues of Pashupati, Shivalinga, Mother Goddess and seals with symbols of swastika were recovered from different sites of the Indus Valley civilization. Again, discovery of seals having bulls, unicorn, etc. gives an idea that the people were mostly worshippers of totemism.

Historian R. C. Mazumdar was of the view that the Indus valley civilization left its mark on Indian cultural heritage.

The Vedic era started after the fall of the Indus civilization around 1500 BC. On the basis of the time of the writing of the oldest written religious book, the Rig Veda, the period between 1500 BC to 1000 BC is considered to be the early-Vedic era, while, the period between 1000 BC to 600 BC is considered to be the later-Vedic era. The other three Vedas (Samhitas) –Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda as well as the Upanishads and Aranyak were written in the later-Vedic era. It is assumed that the Ramayana and Mahabharata were written in the last part of the later-Vedic era. At that time, the Arya culture extended towards the Brahmaputra valley and to Kanyakumari in the south. The Arya culture extended to the entire India by 400 BC.

It is worth mentioning that India now has 705 recognized Scheduled Tribes. According to the 2001 census, as many as 1013 languages are used as mother tongue in India, of which 122 are considered main languages. Altogether 22 languages have been recognized as the state languages by the Constitution of India. Apart from these, more than 3,000 local dialects are used in India.

It is believed that the main architects of the Vedic culture were a group of Nordics who spoke the Aryan language. Before the Dravidians or Mediterraneans and the Nordic Aryans entered India, other groups of people like the Proto- Australoids, Negros, Austries and then the Mongoloids, and Western Brachcephalic groups of people entered India and started staying in the country. These ethnic groups created many communities and sub tribes in the later stages through assimilation. Similarly several cultural groups of people were created through the assimilation of custom, social tradition, beliefs, rituals and linguistic variations across the groups. The experts have identified a number of contributions of these pre-Aryan groups of people to Indian culture and civilization. For example, cultivation of rice, preparation of molasses from sugarcane, making cloths from cotton etc were the contributions of the Austries. Similarly, use of sindoor in religious works, use of turmeric, taming of elephants etc were also the contributions of the Austries. They also knew how to train wild elephants for domestic use.

At the time when the Arya culture was expanding in India, the social and religious traditions of different areas were also assimilated. As a result, the root of the Aryan culture began to transform. At the same time ethnic tribes also acquired elements of Arya culture and language. In the holy books like the Samhita, Brahman, Aranyak, Ramayana and Mahabharata, Upanishadas and those written in the later stages like the Puran, Smriti, Vedangas etc, these transformation can be witnessed.

During the Indus valley civilization, diverse ways of worshipping could be seen and various Deities (Gods) and Goddesses were worshipped by the people. But at the same time belief in one supreme power (God) also existed in Vedic system. Similarly, the ancient religious tradition of India accepted the principle of tolerance, co-existence and assimilation among new traditions or religions. They also respected reforms, change, even arguments in own beliefs. The religious beliefs in India also added new ways of worshipping over the years and there was no conflict between the Hindus and those following the Buddha and Jain religions. The kings also accepted religious tolerance and Emperor Ashoka¹ had always maintained that no one should consider his or her own religion as superior to others. Rather, peoples should follow a path of unity by acquiring essence of other religions. This message of Ashoka was found in the No.12 main stone writings of Girnar of 3rd century BC. This message bears the oldest witness of religious tolerance of Indian rulers. In later stages, people of different religions like Christian, Islam, Jew, etc entered India. In addition to those main religions, there are a huge number of local ethnic religious faiths practised in India.

Apart from religious differences and co-existence, the spirituality greatly influences the social life, culture and civilization of Indian people. The impact of the religious faiths can be seen in the culture, traditions literature, art, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, painting, morality, values, rituals, festivals and lifestyle of the people of India. The invasion by the Parsi in the sixth century BC, followed by the invasions by the Greeks, Suk, Hun, Turki-Afghan, Portuguese, Moghul, Dutch, French, British etc also had an impact on Indian culture. Many of these people stayed back permanently in India and enriched the Indian culture.

The geographical diversity of India also resulted in diversity of the cultural heritage of the people. Some areas of the vast country have fertile land and the communication system is also much improved. That is why those areas are economically and culturally advanced. While, on the other

hand, some areas do not have these facilities and the people living in such areas have to face a hard life.

The two main characteristics of Indian culture are multi-culturalism and unity in diversity. The multi-culturalism refers to the respect that different groups of people of the country have for each other's cultural heritage and traditions. The term "unity in diversity" was made popular by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, Subhash Chandra Bose and others during the time of freedom movement of India. Nehru, in his book, "Discovery of India" also used the term "unity in diversity" and thereby the message was established. Despite the linguistic, religious, geographical and economic diversity, the Indians are tied by a bond of unity. Different factors have been acting to create this unity. The multi-culturalism of Hinduism, political unity created by the empires of different ages, religious and cultural generosity of different rulers have also contributed to this unity. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata also united different parts of the country with the main stream of culture. Moreover, the different groups of the country seem to be tied to each other by cultural exchange. The issues creating diversity, in turn, unites the parts in other way. If two groups are divided geographically, they are being united by language or religion. If some are religiously different, they may be tied geographically or by language.

A few fields of cultural diversity of the vast country India are briefly discussed below.

5.02 : Literature

The old Sanskrit literature of India may be regarded as the soul of Indian culture and civilization. Indian literature is glorified by some great works like Vedas, Vedangas, Upanishadas like Brahmana and Aranyak, great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, Gita and Puranas. Politics related book Kautilya's Arthashastra, medicine related book Susruta Samhita, pure literature of Kalidasa, Sudraka, Banabhatta etc. are some bright examples. Philosophical works of Kapil, Patanjali, Gautam, Badarayana, Konad, Jaimini-Ramanuj, Madhacharya; Historical works like Rajtarangini by Kalhan, scientific works by Aryabhatta, Barahmihir, Brahmagupta, Bhaskaracharya-I and II and Maharshi Bharadwaj; Books like Sangam Sahitya of South India are some great works to recognise the pursuit of knowledge and taste of literature of the Indians. These writings truly reflect the ways of life of the people of that time and their values, beliefs, knowledge in different fields like medical treatment, engineering, science and politics. These books are the result of serious studies, deep insight and tireless intellectual exercise by the great

History

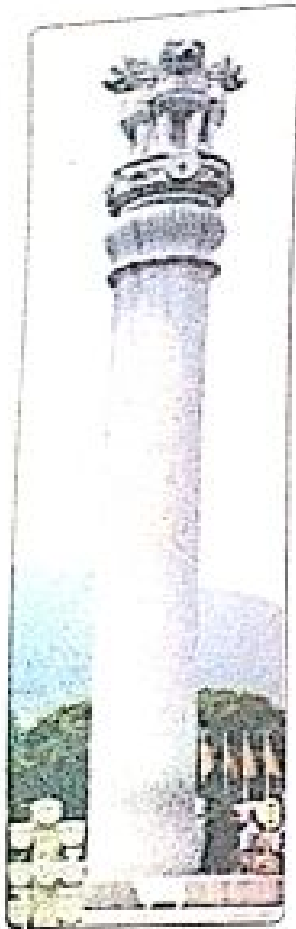
personalities of that time. These writings also played a great role in shaping the Indian society and brought about a cultural unity. These great books spread values like respect to parents, teachers (Gurus), guests, pursuit of knowledge and scholars and the system of four-casteism in Hinduism. Likewise, concepts of transmigration, liberation (mokshya), heaven and hell, sin-virtue etc. also popularised by this books. Some universal messages like 'Satyameva Jayate' from Mundak Upanishad, 'Ahimsa param dharma' from Mahabharata, 'Janani Janmabhumi cha Swargadapi Gariyasi' from Ramayana, 'Basudhaiva Kutumbakam' from Mohopanishad etc. have been the base of Indian value system. The popular prayer - "Om osoto maa sadgamaya, tomoso maa jyotirgamaya, mrityurmaa amritangamaya" has great influence on Indian psyche. These writings in Sanskrit were later translated into other Indian languages. Great values of these books have been followed in the Indian families heirarchically in terms of group singing (Nam-kirtan), customs and traditions etc. The teachings of these books have been applied by the people as the values of life.

5.03 : Architecture

Temples and other places of worship reflect the architecture of India in ancient times. During the Sultanate and Badshahi era, we get to see at least four types of architecture, that is, Mosques (Masjids), Pillars (Minars), Palaces (Manjils) and Makowara. These architectures were constructed mostly with the patronage of the kings. There are differences in the architectures in North and South India and the difference is more visible on the top half of the structures. Three architectural styles have been seen in the ancient stone temples. These are Nagar in north India, Dravid in south India and Vesara style in between Bindhya mountain and Krishna river. The peaks (Sikhar) of the north Indian temples are semi circular and in south India it is rectangular and gradually smaller rectangulars in shape (Biman) towards the top. Vesara styled temples are mixture of Nagar and Dravid style. Every style is full of many macro and micro artistic skills. In some temples a couple of co-peaks were constructed along with the main peak (Biman) which were gradually declined like peaks of the mountain. Some peaks were designed with lines of statues of Deities. The architecture and art of these temples were very beautiful. The Ajanta cave



Sanchi's Stupa



Ashoka Pillar



Statue of Lord Gautam Buddha

temples were constructed by cutting stone of Ajanta Hills. The beauty of the front of these temples and technical skills applied in construction also bears testimony to the architectures of ancient India. The temples also have eye catching and beautiful sculptures of the deities and most of the temples were constructed according to the Hindu Vastu. Among a large number of Stupas in the country, the one in Sanchi is said to be the most beautiful and ideal.

Parsi style was used in the architectures during the Turkey, Afghan and Moghul eras. The Taj Mahal constructed during the Moghul period, is considered one of the most beautiful construction during that era. The Taj Mahal along with the caves of Ajanta and Sanchi stupa have been declared the World Heritage Sites by the UNESCO.

5.04 : Sculpture

The Indian sculpture reached the pinnacle of glory during the ancient days and right from the days of Indus Valley civilization, beautiful eye-catching sculptures were made. Ancient sculptures were made with soils, stones, bronze, copper, silver and gold etc. The sculptures of ancient India made in own style were also mounted with foreign designs. Among these sculptures some statues were simple, straight and unproportional and others were of proportionally bifurcated, trifurcated and quadrifurcated styles. The feelings of the people like peace, comfort, anguish were reflected in the faces of the statues. Several statues of this kind crafted with micro artistic hands are found in different parts of India. The people made statues of Gautam Buddha, Mahavir, different Gods and Goddesses of the Hindus, fairies and even of different animals related to Buddhism. The animal statues crafted on the top of the Ashoka Pillars are closely related to Gautam Buddha's life and these are important elements of Indian culture. Several kings of ancient era patronized the art of making of these sculptures. The sculptures of ancient India can be broadly divided into three major categories, Gandhara, Mathura and Amarawati sculptures. The Gandhar sculptures were developed mainly in North-West Pakistan and East Afghanistan. It had been a living sculpture form from 1st century BC to 7th century. A number of Buddha statues were made by the practitioners of the Gandhar style and Greek-Roman style was also used to build several

Buddha statues. The Mathura style, though developed by itself, was also influenced by the Gandhar style and this style reached its peak during the Gupta era. The Amarawati style was practised for about 600 years from the 3rd century BC. Mainly Satbahanas patronized this art form. Indian sculpture got declined during medeaval period.

5.05 : Paintings

The paintings of ancient India can be broadly divided into two categories—the big wall paintings and smaller paintings. The smaller paintings were used mostly in the books for decoration and pictorial description. Paintings were made in both styles on the walls of Ajanta (Maharashtra), Bagh (Madhya Pradesh), Chittanavachal (Tamilnadu), Armamalai (Tamilnadu) caves based on the subject matters of Buddha, Jain and Hindu religions. Among these, Ajanta Cave paintings are world famous. From about 10th century, smaller paintings were done on the barks of Sanchi tree



Ajanta cave painting

(Sanchipat), silk cloth etc. in places like Assam, Rajasthan, Orissa (Odisha), Mysore (Karnataka), Tanjore etc. These were made mainly for demonstrating pictorial description of the texts of the books.

In the 1st century B.C. itself, the culture of six skills (saranga) of painting was started. This includes—

(1) shape, (2) measurement, (3) feelings expressing techniques, (4) artistic presentation, (5) knowledge of similarity and (6) rule of using brush. These skills were first applied in wall paintings and later on in smaller paintings also. Colours were made from turmeric, sindur, earth worm etc. natural objects and the paintings were multicoloured. Recently the evidence of painting culture in Parsi style of Sultanate era has been discovered. In Moghul era, mass culture of smaller paintings were done as patronised by Akbar, Jahangir and Sahjahan. This was mainly done in the biographies of Moghul emperors. Among pictorial books of that time the important ones were, Padsahnama, Tutinama, Jahangirnama, Dastan-e-Amir, Khansa etc. Parsi style of painting was also used in the pictorial descriptions of Hindu religious books like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The paintings of Moghul era were done on the subjects like portrait of Kings,

Darbars, war wining, hunting, garden, flower, animals etc. and these were found very skillful.

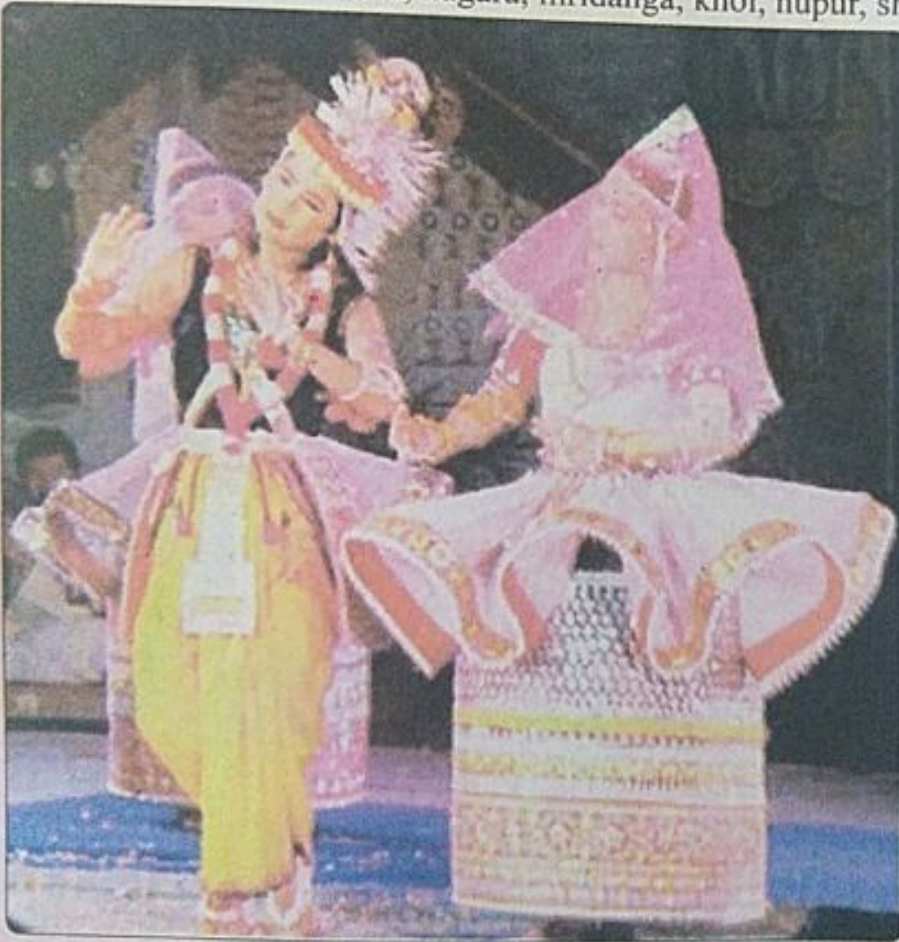
5.06 : Music and Dances

India has a rich cultural heritage in music. The slokas of Sam Veda were read like song by the priests named 'Udgata' for the appeasement of the deities. In later stage, 'Udgata's were divided into various groups depending on their changing styles of singing of slokas.

The Mentor-disciple (Guru-sishya) tradition in classical music is still prevalent in India as a strong tradition. This tradition reached a high standard during Moghul period. Along with the music, different types of musical instruments were invented to accompany classical and folk music. Among those instruments shehnai, tabla, santur, sitar, beena, flute, dhol, taal, nagara, mridanga, khol, nupur, sharinda, dotara etc. were important.



Satriya Dance
of Assam



Manipuri classical dance of Manipur

These musical instruments are still popular India and certain classical instruments like sitar, flute, beena, tabla etc. are becoming more popular abroad. Like music, dances have also a rich tradition in India. Of the hundreds of traditional dances in the nook and corner of the country, eight dances have been recognised by the Govt. of India as the Indian Classical Dance forms. These are – Kathakali (Malayalam, Kerala), Mohiniyattam (Kerala), Bharatnatyam (Tamilnadu), Kuchipudi (Andhra Pradesh), Odissi (Odisha), Kathak (Northern India), Manipuri (Manipur) and Satriya (Assam).

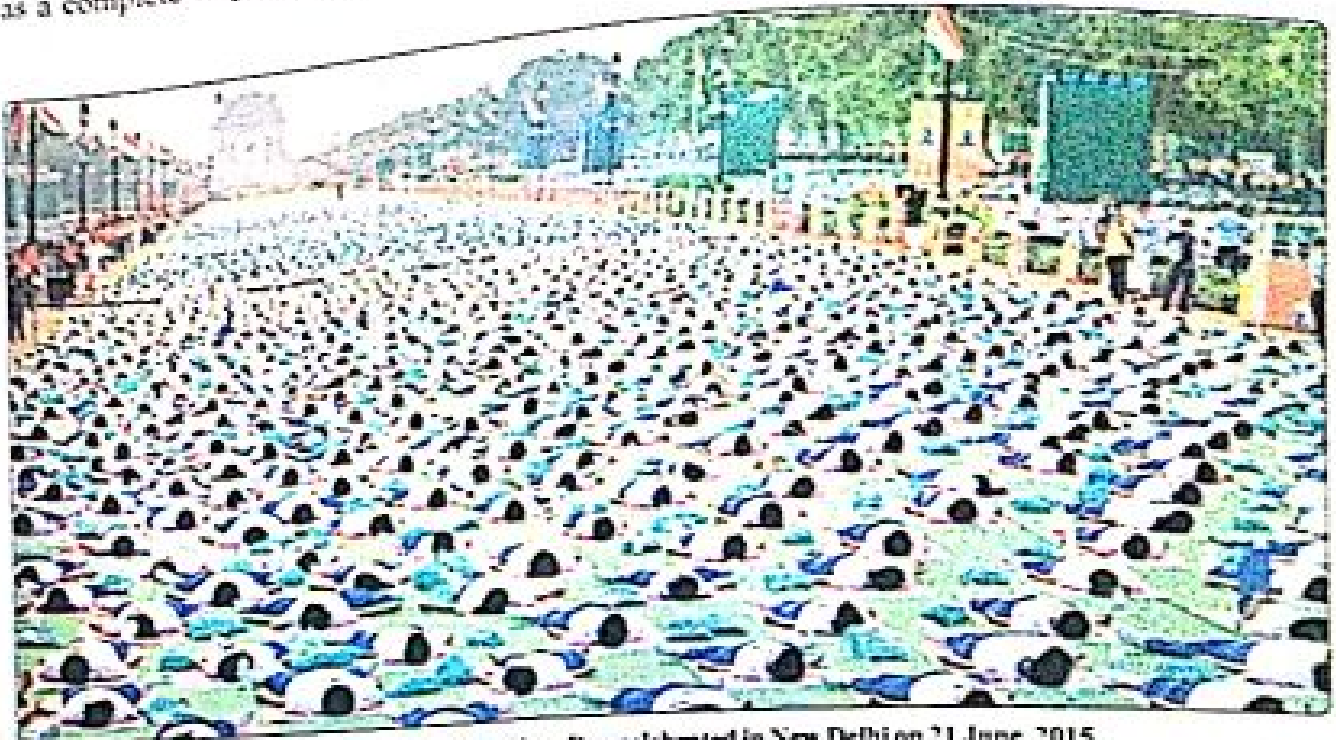
The Natyashastra by Bharat Muni was written between 200 BC to second century. In the Natyashastra, different rules of drama, music and dances were outlined in around 6000 slokas

5.07 : Yoga Culture

Yoga is a traditional Indian culture and it is a gift to the entire humanity. It is believed that the Indians were experts in yoga even during the Indus Valley civilization and it was widely practised during the Vedic era. This traditional practice was brought into a standard by Maharshi Patanjali by compiling a book called Yogasutra in the second century. He described yoga as a way of physical, mental and spiritual well being. He shaped yoga as a complete way and philosophy of life.



Yoga



A view of the International Yoga Day celebrated in New Delhi on 21 June, 2015

There are 'Astanga' Yoga rule in Patanjali yoga system named Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahar, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Keeping in view the benefits of yoga, the United Nations has declared 21 June as the International Yoga Day.

5.08 : North East

The term North East was coined by the British rulers of India. The states of the region—Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram,

Cultural heritage of India and North East Region



Tripura, Meghalaya and Assam, each has traditional and distinctive cultural heritage and political history. At the same time, the states of the region have some common features and giving recognition to that, the Government of India has formed the North Eastern Council. However, Sikkim is also included in the North Eastern Council.

The north-eastern region has got a different common identity due to its unique geographical boundary. The fertile Brahmaputra and Barak Valley plain being in the middle, the other states have been distributed in the north, south and east. The region is again surrounded by the foreign countries Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. All neighbouring

states are hilly. Due to this type of natural setting, Assam is used by all the states as the central place for comfortable transport connection. It is believed that a civilization grew in the Brahmaputra valley even in the pre-historic days, but written history is available after the Barman rulers assumed power in the 4th century. The rulers of the neighbouring states sometimes expressed their subordination or sometimes obeyed to the rulers of the powerful royal families of Assam in different times. Information on above relationship between the neighbouring states during the reign of Ahom royal families (1228 - 1826 A.D), is found in the histories written in that age. The ruling families had ties with each other through marriages and during the time of crisis, the kingdoms helped each other with military might. Communication was set up among the kingdoms through messengers (dut). Barter of different items also took place between kingdoms. Thus unity and integrity among the people were set up. Majority of the people

of the region belong to the Mongoloid group, while, the Khasis of Meghalaya belong to the Austric group.



Hornbill festival of Nagas

During the British days, the Missionaries started expanding Christianity in the North East, particularly in the hill states, while, the Hindu religion established roots in the area during ancient times. Hinduism was expanded in Manipur and Tripura in ancient times. It may be mentioned here that several tribes of the region

still follow the Animist traditions. For example, some tribes of Arunachal Pradesh follow the Hindu, Christian and Buddha religions but at the same time they also worship Doney Polo, that is their popular Deities, the Sun and the Moon. Hornbil is one of the most popular festivals in Nagaland and it is celebrated



Khasi dance

in the first ten days in the month of December where all the tribes showcase their traditional and rich cultural heritage. As the Nagas believe the bird hornbill to be sacred, the festival is named after the bird. Freedom fighter

Rani Gaidalu launched a movement named 'Heraka' for the revival and preservation of the traditional religious beliefs and cultural heritage of the tribes of Nagaland. Majority of the Maitei people of Manipur are followers of Chaitanya's cult. The impact of Vaishnava religion is seen in their rich cultural heritage. Songs,



Cheraw dance of Mizos

dances and musical instruments influenced by Vaishnava religion are seen among the Manipuris. The Manipuri Dance form developed mainly on the basis of the childhood of the saint Chaitanya, and of Lord Krishna etc.

is recognised as a classical dance by the Sangeet Natak Akademy, Govt. of India. Some of the people of Manipur still follow the Animist way of life. Majority of the people of Tripura are Hindus and impact of Bengali culture is seen in the state. However, the culture of Tripura is a mixed culture enriched with the elements of various tribes. The Khasi, Garo and Jaintiya people of Meghalaya started following Christianity from 1830 and now more than 70 percent people of the state are Christians. Around 80 percent of people of the state depend on agriculture and a number of them are



Stilt house (Chang ghar) of Mizos

involved in jhum cultivation like other hill states, Meghalaya has a matriarchal society and various tribes of Meghalaya have been able to preserve their traditional cultural heritage. Mizoram has different tribes and sub-tribes and they are called the Mizos together. The term Mizo means inhabitants of the Hills. Majority of the people of the state are Christians but some follow Buddhism and Hinduism. After transforming into Christianity, Mizo traditional culture and festivals began to diminish. But since 1973, they restarted to observe traditional festival 'Chapchar Kut'. Along with this, Mizos have made efforts to revive many other traditional dance, music etc.

Many tribes are found in NE states, living with their patriarchal families and branches of families developed in due course. So a colourful culture is seen in every state with different traditional dresses, dances, songs, instruments (musical), festivals, dialects, beliefs etc. of each community. Every state has practices like jhum cultivation, drinking of local wines, non-vegetarian foods, village administration, stilt houses made of bamboo and wood etc. The hill peoples are generally hard worker, self dependent and courageous because of their hard life and livelihood.

5.09 : Assam

Among the states of the North East region, Assam has the most varied cultural traditions and mixture of cultures. Assam is rich in natural resources and the fertile land, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley added to the richness of the state. At one point of time, Assam was connected with China by great Silk Route, while, China was connected to the Roman Empire through Assam. From ancient times, different groups of people came to Assam for various reasons—for doing business, for pilgrimage and even as invaders and some stayed back in the state.

As already mentioned that the main ethnic groups of people in India are also found in Assam and the process of cultural assimilation also happened in Assam as occurred in India. As a result, a mixed culture was developed in Assam with the integration of Arya and Anarya. The old name of Assam was Pragjyotishpur and Kamrup. These names are found in old writings including the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vishnu Puran, Kalika Puran, Yoginitantra, writings of Hiuen Tsang and even in the inscriptions of ancient Royal families. These two Sanskrit words have connected Assam to the Hindu mythology or Hindu astrology. Noted scholar Banikanta Kakati was of the view that the words Pragjyotishpur and Kamrup originated from similar words in the Austric language. The Ahoms ruled the state from the 13th century.

Some experts opined that the name Assam (Asom) emerged from sanskritization of the words 'a-cham' and 'ha-chom' used by the Ahom and the Bodo people respectively.

5.10 : Literature

The Barman dynasty established in the middle part of the 4th century and the following royal dynasties first used Sanskrit and later on Assamese (evolved from Sanskrit) as the official language. However, the modern Assamese language has been formed after crossing various stages from the time of evolving from Sanskrit. From the scriptures of Barman dynasty, Salastambha dynasty, Paul dynasty, Koch royal dynasty and Ahom scriptures this fact comes out. However, the Ahoms used their own Tai language. The modern form of Assamese language has been developing from the time of the first Assamese Journal 'Arunodoi'.

During the period from 10th to 14th century, the only written Assamese literature was mostly a collection of songs called Charyapada. In the 14th century, Hem Saraswati, Rudra Kandali, Haribar Bipra, Kaviratna Saraswati and Madhab Kandali created literature in verse form based on Purana and other ancient Indian epics. Madhab Kandali was patronized by Barahi King Muhamanikeya. Other scholars were patronized by the kings of Kamata. It is important to mention that Madhab Kandali translated the Ramayana into Assamese, titled 'Saptakanda Ramayana', which was the first work of translation from Sanskrit into a North Indian language.

The Vaishnavite movement launched by Sankaradeva and Madhabdeva in the 15th century influenced the life of the people of Assam in all aspects. This religious movement had a major impact on Assamese literature and a lot of poetry, songs, prose, charit puthi, drama etc. were written during that time. The main subject matters of these literary works were Ramayana, Mahabharata, Purana, theories of Hindu religion etc. Sankaradeva and Madhabdeva themselves wrote a number of classics. Sankaradeva's Kirtan, Madhabdeva's Namghosha and the Borgeets of both the gurus were most popular among these.

The plays (Ankiya Naats) of Sankaradeva- Patniprasad, Kaliya Daman, Keli Gopal, Rukmini Haran, Parijat Haran, Ram Bijay; Dadhi Mathan of Madhabdeva and his Jhumuras 'Chordhara' and 'Pimpura Guchowa' etc. are presented before huge gathering of spectators at Namghar and Satras. The first naat (drama) Chhfnajatra of Sankaradeva was even written and staged before Shakespeare's drama. The famous



The first Assamese Magazine- Arunodoi

textile design of Sankardeva the Brindabani Bastra was a magnificent creation of the Assamese weavers. This textile design has been preserved in British museum and in a few other famous museums in parts.

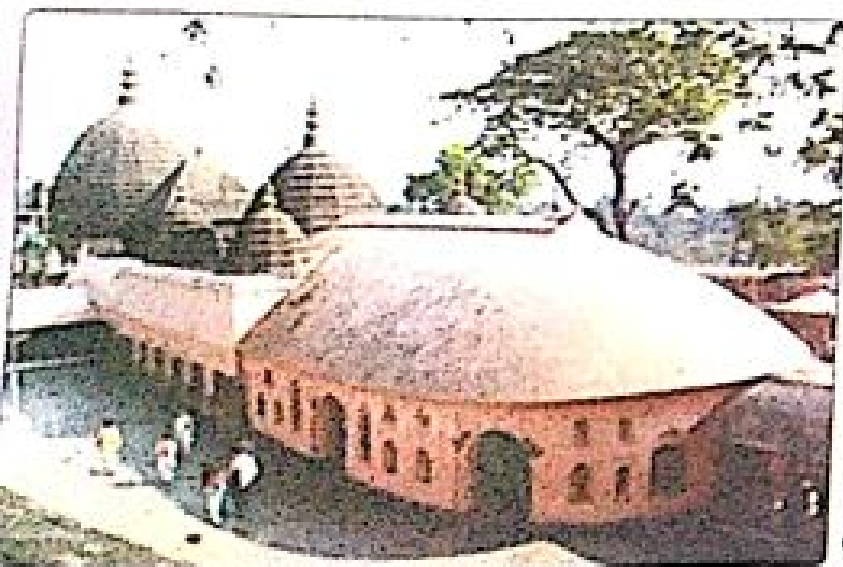
After Sankardeva and Madhabdeva, prominent writers like Bhattadeva, Ananta Kandali, Ram Saraswati and other kept up the tradition of Assamese literature. The real Assamese prose writing was first introduced by Bhattadeva with his writings like Katha Geeta, Bhagawat Katha, Ratnawali Katha etc.

Staying away from the ambit of the Sankari style of writing, writers like Pitambar Kavi, Durgabur Kayastha, Su-kabi Narayandeva, Mankar and others also enriched Assamese literature. They composed story based on lyrics like Devi Manasaa, Padmaa, Sati Beula etc. The "Padya Geeta" written by Govinda Mishra born in 16th century is still widely popular.

The histories written under the patronage of the Ahom kings also enriched Assamese literature. First those were written in the own language of Ahoms, but from the 16th century onwards, those were written in Assamese language also. During the British rule, a number of such histories were restored, preserved and printed. Those include Deodhai history, Tungkhungiya history, Kachari history, Jayantiya history, Tripura history, Padya history, Padshyah history etc. The modern Assamese language evolved after the American Baptist Missionaries published the first Assamese magazine Arunodoi in 1846. Gradually, the Assamese literature was influenced by various styles and characteristics of European literature.

5.11 : Religion

Majority of the people of Assam are Hindus. They are followed by people following Islam, Christian, Jain, Buddha, Sikh and other religions. The people following Hindu religion in Assam can be broadly divided into those following "Sakta", "Shaiva", "Vaishnav" and "Sourya" cults. There are several Saktipithas in Assam. Among those the Kamakhya temple in the state is famous all over the world. The neo Vaishnavite movement resulted in a large number of people of



Kamakhya temple of Guwahati

the State following Vaishnavism. Trace of Islamic religion was first found in Assam in the 13th century. Poa Macca in Hajo is a holy place of Islamic people. The Zikir and Zari written by Ajan Peer (Sah Milan) are popular religious songs. Ajan Peer came to Assam during the reign of Gadadhar Singha. During the invasion of the Burmese (Mans), Ranjit Singh of Punjab sent a group of Sikh soldiers to assist Ahom King Chaudrakanta Singha. Some of them stayed back in the state and though their descendants now follow the Sikh religion, they have become Assamese by accepting Assamese culture. Some of the people living in the eastern part of the state including Tai Phake, Turung, Aitan, Khamti, Khamyang, Nora (Shyam), etc follow Budhha religion. The Ahom kings followed a secularist outlook and they patronised for setting up places of worship of different religions.



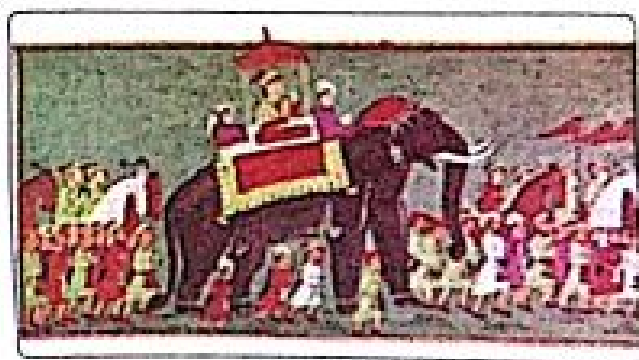
Poa Macca (Mecca) in Hajo.

5.12 : Art and Paintings

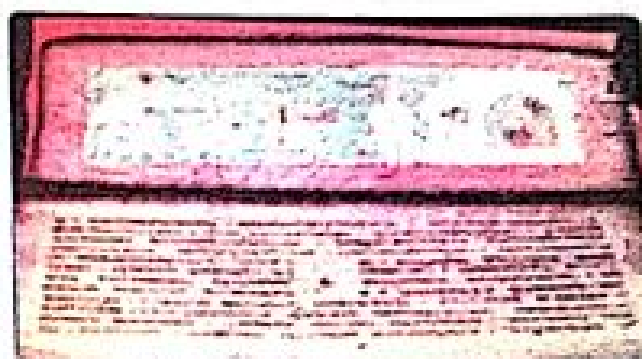
Paintings in Assam started to take proper shape from the 17th century onwards mainly with the patronage of the kings, while, the pictorial books were developed in the satras like small pictured books of North India. Most famous pictorial books of that time include Hastibidyarnava, Ananda Lahari, Chitra Bhagawat, Geet Govinda, Kumor Haran, Sankhachur Badh, Lava Kushar Yuddha etc. written on Sanchipat. The multi-coloured pictures were drawn with natural colours. A certain colour was painted on the Sanchipat first, then pictures of kings, palaces, deities, animals etc. were drawn as



The famous pictorial book Geet Govinda



Hastibidyarnava



Pictorial book on Sanchipat

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per the demand of the subject matter. The blank spaces were filled with flower, cripples etc. The colours mostly used were red, green, yellow and black. The book *Hastibidyarnava* written by Sukumar Borkaith had huge number of pictures of elephants of different sizes and colours. The pictures in the book were drawn by two artists named Dilbar and Dosai. Later, several of those books were published in print.

5.13 : Sculptures

A huge number of sculptures are seen mainly on the temples in Assam. Some of these are two-dimensional wall statues and others are three



Old sculpture of Madan Kamdev temple

dimensional complete statues. The sculptures were made of stones as well as with elephant trunk, gold, silver, copper and wood etc. The sculptors mostly made sculptures of different deities like Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Surya etc. while, sculptures of lion, sun, elephant, horses etc. are also seen. Examples of beautiful sculptures of Assam can be seen in places like Da-Parbatia in Tezpur, Bamuni Pahar, Madan Kamdev, Ambari, Dabaka, Surya Pahar, Borganga, Numaligarh, Deopani, Hojai, Dibrugarh, Sukreswar, Paglatek of Goalpara, Mangoldoi etc. Though the Ganga Yamuna

statue in the stone gate of Da-Parbatia is smaller in size, from the artistic view point it is well appreciated. The Da-parbatia sculptures were made in 6th century influenced by Gupta sculptures.

5.14 : Architecture



Shiva Doul of Sivasagar

Majority of the old architectures in Assam were constructed in the middle age and in the patronage of the Ahom and Koch kings. The famous of the architectures of that time including Rong Ghar, Kareng Ghar, Talatal Ghar and a number of temples built by the Ahom kings still bear testimony to the architecture of that time. The most famous of the temples constructed during that time include Kamakhya, Ugratara, Umananda, Shiva Doul, Joy Doul, Devi Doul, Fakua Doul, Haygrib-Madhab temple of Hajo, Sukreswar-Devalaya Temple, Shiva temples in Dergaon and Bishwanath, Navagraha etc. temples. The temples were commonly of Nagara

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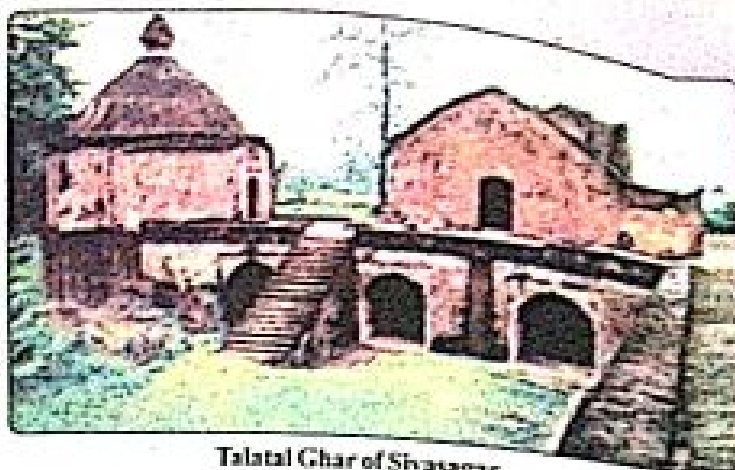
or Vesara style. The architectures of that time were made with stones and bricks.

The construction of the multi-storied Talatal Ghar was started by Ahom King Rudra Singha and it was later completed by Rajeshwar Singha and the kings following him. The Rong Ghar was constructed in two storied form for enjoying celebration of the Bihu festival in the courtyard. The roof of the Rong Ghar was made in the style of a play-boat (Khel-nao). A number of stone bridges were also constructed during the time of the Ahom kings. Of those, the bridges at Namdang, Darika and Dinjoy are still being used.

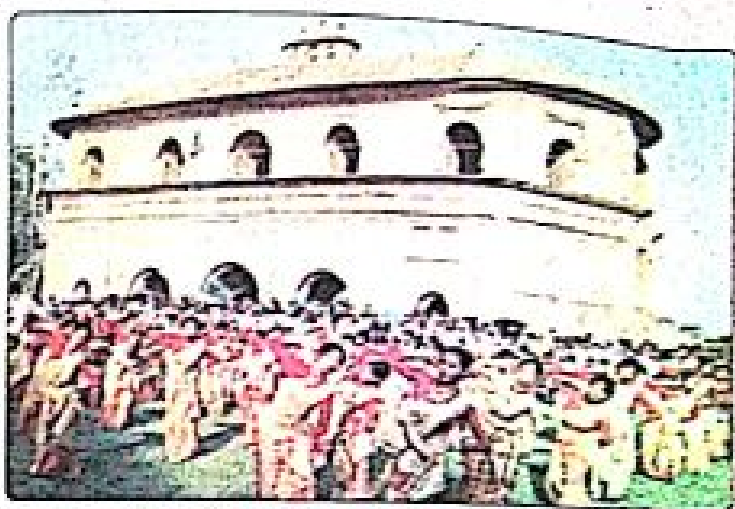
In Ahom period, one indigenous type of concrete (pulp) was made by mixing eggs, rice (Bora), cat fish etc. materials for framing the bricks. There was an officer called Changrung Phukan to supervise the construction and measurements of the roads, palaces, temples, houses etc. The histories written on the activities of the Changrung Phukan is called the Changrung Phukan's history.

5.15 : Folk Culture

Assam has a very rich cultural heritage. In addition to the common cultural heritage, every tribe and sub tribes have their own rich traditional cultural heritage. Every tribe has its own dialects, folk-literatures,



Talatal Ghar of Sivasagar



Rong Ghar of Sivasagar with Bihu dance



Karbi dance



Rabha folk dance - Pharkanti

Cultural heritage of India and North East Region



Bodo folk dance - Bagumtha



Tiwa dance

ornaments, food habits, housing culture, agriculture, fishing culture, various festivals, style of using cane & bamboo, family & social relationships, customs and traditions, dresses, music, traditional musical instruments etc. The natural feelings and expressions of a society or community is reflected by its folk culture. These traditional cultures practised for years are acquired by the people without any formal training. But a person can understand the tradition of other's culture through special observation only. Of late, the social scientists have shown keen interest in the traditional folk cultures of different groups of people of the world.

A few elements of folk culture of Assam are briefly discussed below :

Bihu Festival of Assam :



Garu bihu - the bihu festival of cow

Bihu is the community festival of Assam. Three bihu festivals are observed in Assam - Bohag (Bongali) bihu, Kati (Kengali) bihu and Magh (Bhogali) bihu are observed in the months of Bohag (Baishag), Kati (Kartik) and Magh respectively.

Bihu is celebrated by all people of Assam with traditional gaiety. The Bohag Bihu is celebrated from the last day of Assamese month of Sot (Chait) to the first six days of Bohag. The last day of the Sot month is called the Sankranti or Domahi and that day is observed as "garu bihu" (bihu festival for the cows). Cows

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are an important part in the life of the Assamese people, who mostly depend on agriculture and that is why the day is dedicated in the name of cows. Cows are specially treated on that day. On that day, cows are given a good bath in the rivers and ponds. The first day of the month of Bohag is called "Manuh bihu" (bihu for the human). People wear new cloths on that day and the younger ones seek blessings from the



Bihu dance

elders. Different sports and cultural activities are organized in public places. Bihu naam (Huchari) followed by bihu dance are performed by the groups of people in all houses. The hosts welcome them and seek blessings. The women of Upper Assam perform typical Jeng bihu. Different Communities of Assam observe Bahag bihu with their own style in a befitting manner. Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Missing, Deuri, Tiwa etc. communities have different dresses, songs customs to observe bihu in a very colourful manner. The vast Assamese culture means these multicolour cultures of all ethnic groups of people. The people also greet each other with "Bihuwans". Different tribes of the state also observe Bihu with their own traditional ways.

Some of the old traditions of observing Bihu are not seen in modern times. Instead, cultural programmes and different sports activities are organized in public places in towns and cities. Perhaps, Ahom King Rudra Singha first organized Bihu in public place by organizing the festival in the courtyard of Rong Ghar. During the British rule, some of the conservative Assamese people looked down upon the love songs sung in Bihu, but at the same time, some persons with modern outlook brought Bihu to the towns by organizing the festival on open stage.

The bihu dance is accompanied by some instruments like Dhol (Drum), horn pipe (pepa), flutes (siphong of Bodos), gagana etc., which are different in different communities. Some other festivals are observed in some places which are homogenous to Bahag bihu. Among those, Deul in Darrang, Bhatheli, Suweri, Bar Gopal etc. in old (undivided) Kamrup, Baash puja in Goalpara are important.

Kati Bihu is observed on the last day of Assamese month of Ahin. People observe fasting in the day and light lamps under Tulsi and in paddy fields in the evening. Sky lamps (Akash Benti) are also lit in the paddy fields. Bodo people lit lights under Cactus (Giju) tree with holiness. Some religious faiths are also associated with these traditions.



Haystack (Meji) of Magh Bihu

Magh Bihu or Bhogali Bihu is celebrated on the last day of the Assamese month of Push. The day before the Bihu is called Uruka. People construct bhulaghar (temporary hut made of bamboo, straws etc.) and meji in fields and community feasts are organized near those on the night of Uruka. In the morning of the day of Bihu the mejis are set on fire and people take blessings from the God of Fire. People also prepare different traditional snacks, sweets, jalpan etc. in the festival and receive guests. During the time of Magh, all types of food become available. The Magh bihu is called 'Bhogali', because people observe this festival with heavy food enjoyment, i.e., bhoga.

Various festivals are observed in different parts of India, which are similar to Bihu, Magh and Kati bihu festivals of Assam. A cultural assimilation of different tribes and communities is reflected in bihu festivals of Assam.

Folk Songs:

Assam has a rich tradition of folk songs, which are sung on different occasions and in different environments. Some of these have been obsolete and others are flowing with force. Marriage songs (biya naam), appeasing song (nisukani geet) Kamrupi and Goalparia folk songs are most popular among other folk songs like Aainam, Dhainaam, Dotara (tokari) song, chiyageet, Nangeli geet (cow-boy song), cherradlick etc.

A number of folk song artistes of the state including Khagen Mahanta, Rameswar Pathak and Pratima Pande Baruah have been honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi awards, while, Pratima Pande Baruah, a prominent Goalparia folk song artiste was also awarded the Padma Shree by the Government of India.

In addition to the folk songs, Assam also has a rich tradition of folk dances and Ojapali is one of the most popular among those. Ojapali has two styles- Byash oja and Sukannani oja. Stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata are sung in Byash, while in Sukannani, story is sung for

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appeasement of Manasa Devi. Ojapali is more popular in the districts of Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta and Darrang. Two popular ojapali performers- Lalit Chandra Nath and Kinaram Nath were awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi awards. The other most popular of the folk dances include Dhepadhulia, Bordhulia, Deodhani of Darrang, Mohoho, Bhortal dance, Thiyanaam, Ojapali etc. of Lower Assam, Dhulia ojapali, Jhumur of Upper Assam etc.



Bhortal dance

The whole society is like a book to study the folk culture of it. To know valuable elements of folk culture, one has to observe the activities and behaviours of the common people of the society.

SUMMARY

- ☛ Indus valley civilization has a significant contribution towards formation of Indian culture and Hindu religion. The Vedic and Arya culture, integrated culture of Buddha, Jain, Christian, Islam are the important features of Indian culture.
- ☛ Multi culturalism and unity in diversity are two main characteristics of Indian culture. Four Vedas and the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are some great elements of Indian culture.
- ☛ The architecture of Ahom period has covered the major portion of the history of architectural arts of Assam.
- ☛ The folk culture of Assam means the diverse cultural heritage of all sections of people including the tribes and sub tribes.

EXERCISE

Very short answer type questions :

1. What was the eastern border of the Indus Valley civilization extended up to Ganga Valley?
2. When was the town culture developed during the Indus Valley civilization?
3. What was the presumed time of writing of the Rig Veda?
4. The term Satyameva Jayate in the National symbol was taken from which book?
5. Which book did establish the term 'unity in diversity'?
6. Greek-Roman techniques were used in which style of sculptures of India?
7. What is the name of the famous book on political science written in ancient India?
8. When was the Natyashastra by Bharat Muni written?
9. How many slokas are there in the Natyashastra?
10. What is Heraka movement?
11. Hornbill festival of Nagaland is based on which name of organism?
12. The traditional festival Chapchar Kut belong to which state?
13. What is the meaning of the word Mizo?
14. Which state of the North East has a matriarchal society?
15. What is the main theme of Manipuri dance?
16. What is the ancient name of Assam?
17. From which Bodo word the name Assam is considered to be derived?
18. What is Charyapada?
19. When was the Charyapada written?
20. Under whose patronage did Madhab Kandali translate the Saptakanda Ramayana?
21. Who was the first to introduce prose literature in Assamese?
22. Who composed Jikir and Zari?
23. Who is Ajan Peer?
24. When did Ajan Peer come to Assam?
25. When was the stone gate of Da-Parbatia made?
26. What was the duty of the Changrung Phukan?
27. Which artist got Padmashree award for the contribution in folk song?
28. What is the name of the first news magazine of Assam?
29. Which tribe of North East is a part of the Austric ethnic group?
30. Name the writers of the books : *Arthashastra*, *Harshacharitam*, *Kirtan*, *Narayana*, *Chandhora* and *Pingana Goshora*, *Kaliya Damod*, *Ramajoy*, *Katha Greta*, *Rajtarangini*, *Bharat Sambheda*.

Short answer type questions :

1. Write the names of two foreign communities which came to India after 6th century.
2. Name two statues used for worshipping and which were discovered during Indus Valley civilisation.
3. Mention two contributions of the Austries to Indian culture.
4. How does the geography of India play a role in creating cultural diversity of India?
5. Write the names of the four Samhitas of the Vedas.
6. What is written about religious tolerance in the 12th main stone carvings of Ashoka?
7. What is multiculturalism?
8. What are the divisions in the ancient Indian culture?
9. Write names of two scientists in ancient India.
10. Write names of two medical books written in ancient India.
11. Write names of two Moghul emperors who patronized arts.
12. Write names of two pictorial books written in "Sanchipal" in Assam.
13. Write the names of the two painters of Hastibidyarnava.
14. What is jhum cultivation?
15. What is Zeng bihu?
16. Write two divisions of Ojhapali.
17. Write names of two philosophers of ancient India.
18. Write names of two histories written during the Ahom era.
19. Write the names of two homogenous festivals of Bihu celebrated in lower Assam.
20. Write names of two folk dances of Darrang.
21. What are the main ethnic groups of India?
22. Write three factors that create unity among cultural diversity in India.
23. What are the main divisions made for the Indian architectural setup?
24. Write names of three architectural setup of India which are declared as World Heritage Site by the UNESCO.
25. What statues were mainly created in the field of Indian sculptures?
26. What are the three main styles of Indian Sculptures?
27. Name three pictorial books of Moghul age.
28. What are the six skills (sorangas) of paintings?
29. Write about three places of India having ancient wall paintings.
30. Write briefly on the culture of Yoga in India.
31. By what names the first seven days of Rongali Bihu are commonly known?

32. What are the main subject matters of Kamrupi and Goalparia folk songs?
33. Name three books where the ancient names of Assam- Kamrup and Pragjyotishpur are mentioned.

Long answer type questions :

1. Write briefly on the source and development of multi-culturalism in India.
2. The soul of Indian culture and civilization is regarded to be existed in the Sanskrit literature of ancient India- discuss the meaning of the sentence.
3. Write about religious traditions in India.
4. Write how the common and separate identity of the North-East is developed.
5. Write briefly about the religious environment in the North-East.
6. Assam has a mixed culture due to assimilation of Aryan and non Aryan cultures— discuss briefly this aspect.
7. Write briefly on the heritage of paintings in Assam.
8. Write about religious unity and diversity in Assam.
9. Why the cultural diversity, assimilation and change are taking place more rapidly in Assam than the other states of the region?
10. Really the society is like a book for studying the folk culture- provide your views on this issue.

Write short notes on:

1. Sculptures of ancient India.
2. Indian paintings.
3. Traditions of songs and dances in India.
4. Sculptures of Assam.
5. Architectures of Assam.
6. Vaishnavite literature of Assam.
7. Folk songs of Assam.
8. Religious unity in Assam.
9. Historical literature of Assam.
10. Bihu festival.

Cleanliness, Hygiene and Sanitation

For students :

- Wastes such as animal and human excreta, solid wastes, domestic wastewater etc. may cause health problems if pit latrines, dry toilets, urine-diverting dry toilets, septic tanks are not built and maintained properly. For sewage treatment and excreta management septic tanks are necessary at home and in school compound.
- There should not be any garbage or waste material gathering dump near our residences.
- Lack of sanitation usually results in open defecation and open urination which leads to serious public health issues. Even if toilets are available, people still need to be convinced to refrain from open defecation and to use toilets. Therefore, the need for behavioural change is critical in addition to the provision of toilets. The microorganisms contained in human faeces may enter the body through contaminated food, water, eating and cooking utensils and by contact with contaminated objects. Some fly species are attracted to or breed in faeces. Infectious diseases are transmitted through contact with soil contaminated with faeces and may spread rapidly where open defecation occurs. These infections will contribute to several disease and malnutrition, and therefore also render people more susceptible to other diseases.
- Recycle bins must be placed at various places in schools to promote recycling of waste among students, teachers and other employees. Develop the habit of disposing of waste properly in appropriate bins only.
- Use disinfectant and pest control measures on a regular basis. But pesticides should be kept separately with care.
- Cleanliness, Personal hygiene, Good sanitation provide a clean school environment that nurtures good health.



NON-VIOLENCE IS THE BEST PRACTICE

Mahatma Gandhi



**One horn Rhino is the pride of Assam
Poachers are enemies of Assam**