The district covers an area of 3,843 square miles and is extremely sparsely peopled, there being on the average only 68 persons to the square mile. There are however, marked variations from this mean and in spite of the ravages of kalā azar, there are still considerable areas in Nowgong which support a moderately dense rural population. Mr. Mills thus describes his voyage up the Kalang in 1853.* "The villages are situated on the banks, and the scenery from the steamer was, after the immense tracts of jungle I had seen unvaried by the sight of a village, most gratifying, it was of densely populated villages with good gardens and rich cultivation. There is perhaps no part of Assam more populous and prosperous."

The banks of the Kalang between Nowgong and Kaliabar are still lined with villages, and in the Nowgong tahsil there was a density of 386 to the square mile in 1901. Hatichong and Kachamari, two mauzas which

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lie west of the Kalang opposite Nowgong town, had a density of 303 over an area of 50 square miles; in the Samaguri tahsil there were 212 people to the square mile; and in the Chutial and Barbhagia mauzas immediately to the north 322. There is in fact a belt of fairly populous country on either side of the Kalang from Kaliabar to Jagi. On the other hand the mauzas which fringe the Brahmaputra are inundated in the rains and can only support a very scanty population. Juria, for instance, had a density of only 21 over 124 square miles, and Mayang and Gerua Bokani were little better. It is, however, the hills mauzas and the upper valleys of the Kapili, the Jamuna, the Dhansiri and the Langpher, which bring down the average of the district to its unusually low level, for here over a total area of 2,070 square miles there was in 1901 an average population of only 21 to the square mile.* There is of course abundance of good culturable land which is still awaiting settlement in Nowgong, but the district is not so absurdly underpeopled as the figures of density would at first suggest. There is room no doubt for an enormous increase in the population, but there are hundred of square miles included in the chapari mahals, the hills, and probably a considerable portion of the Kapili valley, which would never be able to support a really dense agricultural population. The density of each mauza and the decrease in population between 1891 and 1901 will be found in Table II.

The district contains one town, Nowgong, which in 1901 had a population of 4,430 souls, and 1,117 villages. The villages are not, however, well defined units, clusters of huts which stand out clearly in the centre of the fields tilled by their inhabitants. Rice, the staple crop, is grown in wide plains, dotted over with clumps of bamboos and fruit trees in which are buried the houses of the cultivators. It is groves and not villages that the traveller sees when riding through the more densely populated portions of the district, and not a house can usually be discerned till he has penetrated this jungle of plantains, betel nut trees and bamboos. There is generally no dearth of building sites, there are no communal lands, and there is nothing to keep the population together. It is difficult to tell where one village ends and another begins, or to which of the larger clumps of trees should be assigned the smaller clumps which are freely dotted about amongst the rice fields. The result is that the statistics of villages are of little practical importance, but taking them for what they are worth it appears that villages as a rule run small, three-fifths of the population living in hamlets containing less than 500 persons. The Mikir village, it should however be premised, is quite different from that inhabited by the ordinary Assamese. Like most of the hill tribes they build their houses in clearings near their fields, and the boundaries of the village site can be easily ascertained. They usually live in small hamlets varying in size from three or four to thirty or forty houses.
The earliest estimate of the population was one framed by Mr. Robinson in 1841 who stated that the area was supposed to be 3,870 square miles and the population about 90,000 souls, an estimate which appears to have been too low. The eastern boundary was at this time the Dhansiri and in 1853, after the Naga Hills had been incorporated in Nowgong, the area was given as 8,769 square miles, and the population as 241,300 persons, exclusive of about 100,000 Angami Nagas. This estimate was probably not much beside the mark, but it was not till 1872 that a regular census was taken of the people.

The statement in the margin shows the population recorded at the last four enumerations and the variation in the intercensal periods. The census of 1872 was not a synchronous one. It made no pretensions to scientific accuracy, and the excessive increase that occurred during the next nine years affords good grounds for supposing that it was incomplete. The Deputy Commissioner himself pointed out that too much reliance should not be placed upon the returns. The census was a novelty, its objects were not fully understood, and many of the people were afraid that it might only be the preliminary to the introduction of a poll tax. The census of 1891 was probably as accurate as these things can be, and if we assume that the population increased by 25 per cent. in the 19 years that elapsed between the two enumerations, an assumption
which would seem to err, if it errs at all, on the side of over-estimation, the population of 1872 must have been at least 277,000. Between 1881 and 1891, the district was fairly prosperous and healthy, and the natural growth* of the population amounted to nearly 11 per cent. But the seeds of disease had already taken root, and before long the effects of kala-azar began to make themselves apparent in the revenue returns, though the awful ravages of this disease were never fully realized till they were expressed in the census figures for 1901.

The history and character of this dreadful fever will be described in the section dealing with the medical aspects of the district, and here it is only necessary to refer to its effects upon the population. Aided by the severe epidemics of cholera and small-pox with which this sorely afflicted district has been visited, it succeeded in reducing the population to about three-fourths of that recorded in 1891. Terrible though such a reduction is, it fails to give a complete idea of the full effects of this appalling scourge. The gross population of 1901 was swelled by a large number of foreigners brought up to the railway or the tea plantations, and the caste and language tables show that the decrease in the indigenous population during the last intercensal period must have been fully 30 per cent. At the close of the nineteenth century plague and famine were at work in India, and the terrible

* Natural growth here means increase in the number of those born in Nowgong and censused in the Province.
mortality they produced was blazoned abroad to the very ends of the earth. Yet not a single British district in the whole of the Indian Empire lost so large a proportion of its population as the unfortunate district of Nowgong.* The people suffered in silence, the fever killed them steadily but quietly and slowly, and the extent of the havoc wrought was never realized till the results of the census were made known.

But little could be done to mitigate their sufferings. A large number of dispensaries were opened but the treatment and the origin of the disease were alike obscure, and medical science could offer little help. In its initial stages kala-azar in no way differs to the casual observer from ordinary malarial fever, and it is only of recent years that the medical profession have admitted that malaria is communicable. Even now that this fact has been realized the difficulties of isolation are immense. The sick linger on for from three months to two years, and it would not be easy to segregate thousands of people for such prolonged periods even if they were willing to submit to this course of treatment. Detection and the subsequent isolation would not take place until the disease had taken a firm hold upon its victim, and had already had ample opportunity of infecting the friends and neighbours.

*Kala-azar passed on, leaving behind it a trail of deserted villages and untilled fields, with the jungle creep-

* Bombay and the Central Provinces had the greatest losses. The worst British district in Bombay was Kaira with a loss of 17·8 per cent. the worst British district in the Central Provinces was Saugor with a loss of 20·4.
ing year by year over the kindly works of men. Between 1893 and 1900, the land revenue demand for ordinary cultivation declined by 23 per cent. and the population sank to some fifteen or sixteen thousand less than the probable numbers nearly 30 years before. With such a melancholy record before our eyes it is satisfactory to know that the disease at last is dying out and that the people are again beginning to increase in numbers. The epidemic was most virulent in the Raha tahsil which lost 42 per cent. of its population. The part of the district which escaped most lightly was the northeast corner where many of the tea gardens are situated.

**Immigration**

The tea industry is not nearly so important in Nowgong, as in the Surma Valley or in Upper Assam, and the proportion of foreigners, (11 per cent.) is comparatively small. The total number of persons born outside the Province in 1901 was 29,629, more than a third of whom came from the division of Chota Nagpur. Details for the other Provinces of origin are shown in Table IV. Most of these foreigners were working as coolies either on tea gardens or on the railway. Immigrants other than coolies are represented by the Marwari merchants of Rajputana, artizans from the Punjab, a few Kabuli traders from Afghanistan, and Nepalese who usually earn their living as sawyers or as herdsmen, though some have settled down to agriculture. That Nowgong loses considerably by inter-district transfers is hardly matter for surprise, as it is difficult to understand why any one should voluntarily settle in this much afflicted district while there was
every inducement to the residents to leave its fever stricken villages. Most of the immigrants came from Kamrup and Goalpara, while the emigrants went to Sibsagar and Darrang. The proportion of the latter to the former was nearly three to one in 1901.

As in most of the other districts of Assam, the men in Nowgong exceed the women in numbers, and in 1901 there were only 963 females to every 1,000 males. This disparity is entirely due to the fact that women are in a minority in the immigrant population, and amongst persons born in Nowgong and enumerated in the Province in 1901 there were 1,016 females to every 1,000 males. It is a significant fact that in the last decade there was a large increase in the female element in the population in those parts of Assam in which the mortality was unusually high, and there seem grounds for supposing that the proportion of women tends to increase when public health is bad and vitality low.

The people of Nowgong have no pedantic ideas with regard to early marriage. The statement in the margin shows the percentage of Hindu girls under 10 and between 10 and 15 who have performed the marriage ceremony, and the proportion between 15 and 20 who are still unwed. For purposes of comparison similar figures are shown for Goalpara, as in this district the idea has unfortunately gained ground, that the social status of the family can be raised by imposing the responsibilities of matrimony.
on immature girls before they are physically fitted for its functions. Amongst an equal number of girls under 10 there are 24 child wives in Goalpara for every one in Nowgong, and between 10 and 15 the proportion is as 6 to 1. Two fifths of the girls between 15 and 20 in Nowgong are still unmarried, and it is satisfactory to know that the stagnation of the population during the last decade was not due to any unnatural attempt to compel small children to undertake the functions of maternity before their bodies were fitted for this great strain. Such a proceeding, it may be added, only tends to defeat its own ends, as the age statistics recorded in India show, that fertility varies inversely with the extent to which infant marriage is in use. The attempt to pluck the unripe apple in many cases kills the parent tree, or even where this dire calamity is avoided, deprives it of the power to put forth a second crop.

The growth of the people depends to some extent on the proportion of potential mothers i.e. of married women between 15 and 40 in the population. In this respect Nowgong is somewhat at a disadvantage as in 1901 only 14 per cent. of the population were included in this category as compared with 15.7 per cent. in the Province as a whole and 16.9 per cent. in the Central Provinces.

Infirmities. The abstract below shows out of 10,000 males the number afflicted with the four special infirmities selected for record at the census in Nowgong, in the Province of Assam, and in

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<td>Insane</td>
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<td>Deafmute</td>
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* In this connection see Report on the census of India, 1901, Vol. I, P 48.*
the Indian Empire. Deafmutism is exceptionally prevalent, but from the remaining three infirmities Nowgong is comparatively free.

Assamese is the standard language of the district and in 1901 was used by 66 per cent. of the population. Assamese is described by Mr. Grierson as the sister not the daughter of Bengali.* It comes from Bihar through northern Bengal, and not from Bengal proper. The plural and feminine gender are formed in a different way from that in use in Bengali, and there is a considerable difference in the conjugation of the verb, in the idiom, the syntax, and even in the vocabulary. The pronunciation is also different, the Bengali sh. being converted into h. by the Assamese and ch. into s. The chief aboriginal languages are Mikir which is used by 13 per cent. of the people, and Lalung which is used by 5 per cent. Lalung is a member of the Bodo family and forms a link between Bodo, or the Kachari spoken in the submontane tracts of Kamrup and Darrang, and Dimasa or the Kachari spoken in the hills of North Cachar. Mikir is a link between the Bodo and the Naga groups. Rather more than 2 per cent. of the people returned Kachari as their usual form of speech, but the exact dialect whether Bodo or Dimasa it is difficult to ascertain.

The principal foreign languages were Hindi (5 per cent), and Bengali which was returned by a little under six per cent of the population. Bengali, however, means little more than "foreign language," "Bengali" and "foreigner" being almost inter-changeable words in the

mouts of the Assamese, and the Bengali of the census tables probably includes many forms of speech of the Dravidian family which would be by no means understood of the people of Nadia.

Historically Nowgong has been somewhat of a border land. It is doubtful whether it ever contained the capital of a powerful prince, and, as a natural consequence, none of the great race castes, which are found in considerable numbers in other parts of the valley, are very strongly represented. It was never colonized by the Ahoms and the number of that caste now found within the district borders is comparatively small. It was some distance from the centre of the Chutiya power, and, in spite of the fact that after the downfall of that kingdom, the Ahoms deported many Chutiya families to other parts of the Brahmaputra Valley, there were less than 7,000 members of that caste in the district in 1901. The Kalitas, the caste that stands for middle class respectability in Assam, numbered a little over 16,000, and there were only 7,000 Kewat's who rank next after the Kalita according to Assamese ideas. The bulk of the population are members of the aboriginal tribes, the Mikirs (36,000), the Lalungs (29,000), the Kacharis (12,000), and the Koch, the Hindu caste to which the hillmen are admitted on conversion, (34,000.) In the following pages a short account is given of those indigenous castes which had 5,000 representatives or more in the district in 1901.*

* An alphabetical glossary of all castes censused in the Province will be found in chapter XI of the Census Report for 1901.
The Boria are a caste peculiar to Assam, which is formed from the offspring of Brahman and Ganak widows and their descendants. Boria is said to be derived from "bari", a widow, but the people prefer to call themselves Sut. This term is said by some to be connected with the word Sudra, and by others to be derived from Sut, the expounder of the Puranas, who was himself the son of a Brahman widow, but the most plausible explanation seems to be that it is an abbreviation of Suta, the name given in the Shastras to the offspring of a Brahman woman by a Vaisya or Kshatriya father. One authority defines a Boria as the child of a Brahman widow, and a Sut as the result of union between a Sudra widow and a Brahman, but it is doubtful whether this explanation is correct, as in the latter case the child would presumably be of the same caste as its mother. The children of Brahman girls who have attained puberty before marriage and so have to be married to men of a lower caste, are also classed with Borias.

It is a singular fact that Borias are more numerous in Nowgong than in any other district, though the number of Brahmans there is comparatively small. The explanation offered by an educated Brahman of that district was that the gosains and mohants of Nowgong had put pressure upon householders to give away young Brahman widows in marriage to men of lower caste. The suggestion seems a strange one from the mouth of a Brahman, but is given for what it is worth. Agriculture is the ordinary occupation of the Borias,
and their manners and customs do not differ materially from those of other low caste Assamese. The Nowgong tahsil is the principal centre of the Boria population.

The majority of the Brahmans of Nowgong are Assamese as distinguished from Bengalis or up country men. They are said to be the descendants of Brahman families who were brought to Assam towards the end of the fifteenth century from Kanouj, Mithila, Gaur and other places. Most of them live by agriculture, though, as they are unable to touch the plough themselves, they have to get the actual work done for them by hired labourers. The poorer amongst them act as priests, a calling which is considered to entail a certain loss of social status.

The Chutiyas, like the Koch and the Ahoms, are one of the race castes of Assam. Their physical appearance suggests a Mongolian origin, their language, which is still preserved amongst the Deoris or priestly clan, belongs to the Bodo family, and it seems probable that they are a section of the great Bodo race which includes the Garo, the Kachari, and the Tippera. It is supposed that their original home was in the hills through which the Subansiri makes its way, and that they entered the Assam Valley before the beginning of the 13th century A. D. They founded a kingdom in the neighbourhood of Sadiya, whose western boundary extended as far as the Disang river, and were overthrown by the Ahoms at the beginning of the 16th century. Their conquerors wisely deported the leading families to different parts of the Assam Valley, but the great mass of the Chutiyas...
are still to be found in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. The caste is divided into four subdivisions, Hindu, Ahom, Deori, and Borahi. The latter, as their name implies, are still unconverted and eat pork, but the number of Borahi Chutiyas is very small. The Ahom Chutiyas have for some generations been converts to Hinduism but in the social scale they rank below the Hindu Chutiya, and their presence in a house is said to debar a Brahman from drinking water there. The Ahom and Hindu Chutiyas can smoke but cannot eat together, and, in theory, cannot intermarry. A member of the Ahom section can, however, obtain a Hindu Chutiya girl if he is willing to pay a slightly higher price for her, but the bride sinks to the status of her husband. Hindu Chutiyas are sometimes united by the hompura ceremony, while the chaklong rite, which is the Ahom form of marriage, is in vogue amongst the Ahom Chutiyas. This ceremony consists in the interchange of the tem and katari, the box in which betel nut is carried, and the knife with which it is cut, the tying of the nuptial knot, and a feast to the friends and relations. A hole is then cut in the corner of the house through which the bride is removed. The Chutiyas are far from strict in their views on matrimonial matters, and one native gentlemen reports that 50 per cent of the so-called married couples have performed no ceremony at all, and that a girl sometimes changes her husband nine or ten times. The social position of the caste is low, and almost all of them are petty cultivators. They burn their dead and perform the sradh ceremony at the
expiry of a month. Brahmans of inferior social standing act as their priests.

The Jugis are a low caste whose traditional occupation is weaving, and who are looked down upon by their superiors in the social scale. Like other humble castes, they lay claim to a high origin. According to one account, they are the offspring of Brahman widows and ascetics, while others assert that they are descended from Gorakshanath, who was an incarnation of Siva. They recently submitted a memorial to the Local Administration asking for permission to assume the title of Nath, and they are endeavouring to improve their position by introducing the use of the hompura marriage ceremony. They are divided into two subdivisions the polupohas and katanis, and are ministered to by degraded Brahmans. Very few Jugis now earn their living as weavers, and the caste as a whole has taken to agriculture as a means of livelihood.

An account of the origin of the Kachari tribe has already been given in the preceding chapter. In Nowgong they are divided into two different sections. Those who live in the Barbhagia, Dhing, and Khatoalgaoon mauzas near the Brahmaputra, are said to be Bodos akin to the Kacharis of Darrang, while those in the valley of the Kapili are Dimasa. The former are known as Jharuas or Chaiduaria Kacharis, the latter as Hojaies. The two sections are quite distinct and have nothing to do with one another. There are no subdivisions amongst the Jharuas, but the Hojaies are said to be divided into the following clans most of which
are endogamous:—Rabha, Ramsa, Kheremia, Thengal Sonoal, and Jaladha. Their social position is of course low, but the Hindu gosains are willing to receive them as their disciples, and, if they are prepared to abandon their pork and beer, will even enrol them as members of the Koch caste.

Their villages are surrounded with fences, but present a dirty and untidy appearance, as pigs and fowls are allowed to wander about in every direction. Agriculture is their normal occupation, and rice the staple crop grown. But though efficient agriculturists, they have not that contempt for daily labour which is so marked a characteristic of the Assamese. They readily take work on tea gardens, and in 1901 nearly 14,000 Kacharis were censused on the plantations of Assam. Though still using their tribal form of speech in their own villages, most of them can speak and understand Assamese. The national religion is of the ordinary animistic type. The principal god is called Siju and is represented by the cactus which is to be seen growing in the courtyard of every Kachari house. In addition to Siju there are a large number of other spirits, most of which are hostile to men; and the main object of religion is to ascertain in times of trouble the name of the spirit responsible, and the way in which it may most easily be appeased.

Marriage is generally by purchase, a bride ranging in price from Rs. 60 to Rs. 100. Where the man is unable to provide this sum, he works for his father-in-law, a year's labour being usually reckoned as being
worth about Rs. 30. Pregnancy prior to marriage does not entail any social disability, provided that the father acknowledges the child and is a Kachari by caste.

The following paragraphs are taken from the Census Report of 1901.

There is much uncertainty as to the origin of this caste. The popular explanation is that Kalitas are Kshatriyas, who fleeing from the wrath of Parasu Ram, concealed their caste and their persons in the jungles of Assam, and were thus called Kul-lupta. Other theories are that they are Kayasthas degraded for having taken to cultivation, an explanation which in itself seems somewhat improbable, and is not supported, as far as I am aware, by any evidence, or that they are the old priestly caste of the Bodo tribe. The latter theory can hardly be said to account for their origin, and though it is possible that Kalitas may have originally acted as priests this fact throws little or no light on the problem of what the Kalitas are. The most plausible suggestion is, that they are the remains of immigrants from India who settled in Assam, at a time when the functional castes were still unknown in Bengal, and that the word "Kalita" was originally applied to all Indian immigrants who were not Brahmins. The Kalitas are divided into two main subdivisions, Bar and Saru, and into a number of professional sub-castes. In Upper Assam, Bar Kalitas are said to decline to use the plough, though they occasionally work with the spade, but there is no such restriction in Kamrup, where the great bulk of the caste is found. Cultivation is, in fact, the traditional occupation of the caste, and they even consent to work as coolies on tea gardens. The usual procedure for a Kalita who has succeeded in rising above the necessity for manual labour, and is no longer compelled to follow the plough, is to call himself a Kaist or Kayastha. Two explanations are given of the origin of the Saru Kalita—one that he is the offspring of persons who for three generations back have not been united by the "Hom" ceremony, the other that he is the child of a Bar Kalita and a Kewat woman. Whether the Bar Kalita can inter-marry with, and eat kachchi with the Saru Kalita seems open to question, and the practice apparently varies in different districts; but there seems to be no doubt that the functional subdivisions of the caste are debarred from the privilege of close intercourse with the Bar Kalita. These subdivisions are the Mill, Sonari, Kamar, Kumhar, Napit, Nat, Suri
and Dhoba. The first two inter-marry with the Saru Kalita, and also with the Kamar Kalita. The last four groups are endogamous. All these functional groups are to some extent looked down upon, probably because followers of these professions, who were not true Kalitas, have occasionally succeeded in obtaining admission within their ranks; but the goldsmiths, from their wealth, have secured a good position in society. Kalitas have a good Brahman for their priest, and their water is taken by every caste, a fact which no doubt explains the high value attached to Kalita slaves in the time of the Assam Rajas, when two Koches could be purchased for the price of a single Kalita, though the Koch is generally the hardier and stronger man of the two.

Early marriage is common in Goalpara, but not in Assam Proper except amongst the upper sections of the caste. They take, in fact, a liberal view of the relations between the sexes, and cohabitation is the essential part of marriage. Well-to-do Kalitas are invariably united by the hompura rite and employ a Brahman, but the poorer people often content themselves with the agchauldia or juron ceremonies. Some authorities hold that this, though a valid form of marriage for the lower Assamese castes, is not sufficient for the Kalita. They regard the hompura rite as the one essential ceremony of purification, but it can be performed after cohabitation has begun, and sometimes takes place after the death of the husband. An unmarried girl who becomes pregnant does not forfeit the position in the society unless her lover is of a lower caste.

The great centre of the Kalita population is to found in the Samaguri and Nowgong tahsils and in the mauzas immediately to the east.

Many of the Kayasthas are foreigners and most of them earn their living as clerks or officers in the employ
of Government or of Managers of tea gardens. A certain number of Kayasthas are also really Kalitas who have risen above the necessity for performing manual labour.

The Kewats are a respectable Hindu caste, from whose hands Brahmans will take water, and who according to Assamese ideas rank immediately after the Kalita. These remarks only hold good, however, of the Halwa or cultivating Kewats, as the Jaliya or fishing subdivision of the caste occupy a very humble position in the social scale, and are considered little better than the Nadiyals. The two sections of the caste have nothing whatever in common except the name Kewat or Kaibartta, but the number of Jaliya Kewats is comparatively small. The ordinary occupation of the caste is agriculture, but a few of them have succeeded in reaching that desirable position in which the pen takes the place of the ploughshare as a means of livelihood. A respectable Brahman acts as their priest. The Patias are a section of the Kewats who migrated to Nowgong from Upper Assam at the time of the Burmese invasions. Mat-making was their occupation and this was the origin of their name. Most of them have now taken to agriculture and intermarry with other Kewats.

The Koches are one of the race castes of Assam. Originally they were an aboriginal tribe, apparently of Mongolian origin, which at the beginning of the 16th century rose to power under their great leader Viswa Singh. His son, Nar Narayan, extended his
conquests as far as Upper Assam, Tippera, and Manipur, and by the middle of the 16th century, the Koch king had attained to a position of such power that the aboriginal people were anxious to be enrolled as members of his tribe. The result is that at the present day the name is no longer that of a tribe but of a caste into which new converts to Hinduism are enrolled. In Sibsagar and Lakhimpur these converts still retain their tribal names, and the Koch is a respectable Sudra caste, which is not broken up into various subdivisions. This is not the case in Lower Assam, and the different groups are there allotted a different status, which is dependent on the time that has elapsed since conversion took place, and the extent to which aboriginal habits have been shaken off. The principal subdivision is the Bar Koch, who are looked upon as a clean Sudra caste and from whose hands Brahmans will take water. The same distinction is not accorded to the Saru Koch, though they conform in most essentials to the somewhat lax standard of Hinduism exacted in Assam. Three other subdivisions are graded in accordance with the extent to which they have forsworn the attractions of unconverted life. The Kamtali abstain from intoxicating liquor and usually from pork, the Hiremia still keep pigs but no longer indulge in the use of liquor, while the Madahi are Hindus only to the extent of having taken saran, and still permit themselves great freedom in all matters of food and drink.

The Lalungs are a member of the Bodo family and their language forms a link between Bodo or Plains.
and Dimasa or Hills Kachari. Their name is said to be derived from *lal* (saliva), as, according to the tribal legends, they sprang from the saliva of a local god. The bulk of the tribe are to be found in the *chapari* north of the Kalang, the Raha tahsil, and the mauzas near the junction of the Kapili and the Kalang, but their numbers were terribly diminished between 1891 and 1901. *Kala azar* was especially prevalent amongst them, and in the short period of ten years the Lalungs declined in numbers from 46,658 to 28,985, a loss of life which it is positively painful to contemplate. Part of this decrease was possibly due to the inclusion of converted Lalungs in the ranks of the Koch, but there can be little doubt that the mortality amongst the tribe was quite appalling. According to their own account, they originally lived near Dimapur, but moved into the Jaintia Hills to avoid the necessity of providing the Kachari Raja with human milk, an article of diet for which he had an unreasonable craving. This legend is referred to in a history of the Dimarua Rajas compiled in 1772 A.D. This history has it that when Pratappur, a city on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, was captured by Arimatta, a large number of the inhabitants fled to Demera, a fertile region in the country of the Kachari Raja. This prince was in the habit of drinking human milk, a habit which earned for him the dislike of his subjects young and old. One day, two of the king's messengers entered the house of a Mikir woman and found her nursing her baby. One man seized the infant while the other attempted to
milk the mother, who, furious with indignation, stretched him dead at her feet with a blow from a hoe. The Demera Raja feared that the Kachari prince would punish him for this murder, as it occurred within his territories, and migrated westwards to Dimarua with all his people.

Another legend represents the Lalungs as moving back from the hills into the plains, as they disliked the ruling of the Khasi chiefs that inheritance should go through the female line. Their own rules of inheritance are, however, strange. A woman may either enter her husband's clan or the husband may enter that of the wife, but all property and children of the marriage belong to the clan which was adopted at the time of the wedding. If a man enters his wife's clan he can leave it at her death but generally loses all claim to his property and children. In the plains the Lalungs live in houses similar to those occupied by the ordinary Assamese, but in the hills they build, like other aboriginal tribes, on platforms or changs raised a few feet above the ground. They are great opium eaters, and the indifference and idleness produced by that drug combined with the heavy cash expenditure incurred on its purchase, tend to keep them poor. The story of the Phulaguri riot, when the cultivation of opium was prohibited in 1861, has been already told in the preceding Chapter. The tribe is very faithful to its ancestral faith and the number of Lalungs who described themselves as Hindus in 1901 was very small. Their religion is of the ordinary animistic type, and is chiefly
concerned with the propitiation of evil spirits and with sacrifices to ensure prosperity. Like other animistic tribes they eat pork and fowl and drink rice beer; but as poultry and pigs are incompatible with gardening, the houses of the Lalungs are not surrounded by the dense groves of fruit trees found in the villages inhabited by the Assamese. The most important part of the marriage ceremony is the feast to the relatives and friends, and their girls, prior to marriage, are allowed a considerable degree of latitude as long as they do not confer their favours outside the tribe.

According to Colonel Dalton, the Mikirs were originally settled in the North Cachar Hills but were driven westward into Jaintia territory by the Kacharis. Dissatisfied with the reception accorded to them there, they sent an embassy to the Ahom Governor at Raha, offering to place themselves under the protection of his master, but, as the luckless delegates were unable to make themselves understood, they were forthwith buried alive in a tank which that officer happened to be excavating. Hostilities ensued, but the Mikirs were soon suppressed, and were settled in the hills that bear their name, though a considerable colony are still to be found in south Kamrup and the northern slopes of the Khasi Hills. They are divided into four tribes Chintong, Ronghang, Amri and Dumrali, and these tribes are again subdivided into various exogamous groups. In the hills the Mikirs live by jhum or shifting cultivation, and raise crops of cotton, chillies, rice, and vegetables. All the members of a family live in
one house, which is thus of considerable size. Their religion is of the usual animistic type, and is chiefly concerned with the propitiation of evil spirits. Infant marriage is unknown and sexual license within the tribe prior to marriage is tolerated. A full account of the Mikirs will be found in the monograph now under preparation.

The Doms, or as they prefer to call themselves, Nadiyals are the boating and fishing caste of Assam. They are anxious to assume the name Jaliya Kaibartta, but the Kaibarttas are unquestionably a different caste, though their manners and customs do not differ materially from that of the Assamese Nadiyal, except in the following particular. The Kaibarttas decline to use the ghakata net, and in theory only, sell their fish on the river's bank within a paddles throw of the boat, whereas the Nadiyals regularly take their catch to market. The Nadiyals are probably descended from the aboriginal race of Doms, the ruins of whose forts are still to be seen in India, but migrated to Assam before the Dom caste had been assigned the degrading functions now performed by them in Bengal. They are cleanly in their habits and particular in their observance of the dictates of the Hindu religion, and account for the objectionable expression "Dom," which undoubtedly they have borne for centuries, by saying that they were the last of the Assamese to be converted from Buddhism. They are darker in complexion than most of the Assamese, but have a good physique and by no means uncomely faces. Their women are most
prolific, and the Dom villages are full of fat brown babies. They rank very low in the social scale, and, according to Assamese ideas, are superior only to the British Baniya or Hari. The bulk of the caste still live by fishing, and education has made but little progress among them. Marriage does not take place till the girl is fully grown, and they are free from any puritanical notions with regard to the relations between the sexes. Their priests are said to be descended from a Brahman father and Nadiyal mother, but for all practical purposes they are Nadiyals and intermarry with Nadiyal girls. The bulk of the caste are found in the Nowgong and Raha tahsils near the banks of the Kalang. In the reign of Kamaleswar (1795–1809 A.D.) all Doms were compelled to have a fish tattooed upon their foreheads, and in 1855 Major Butler reported that there were still men living in Nowgong who were branded with this mark.

The Chandals are a boating and fishing caste, said by Manu to have sprung from the union of a Brahman woman with a Sudra, and therefore to be the lowest of the low. They are a cheerful and hardworking people but are heartily despised by their Hindu neighbours, and a degraded Brahman acts as their priest. A section of the Chandals has formed itself into a separate caste called Hira. They work as potters but do not use the wheel, laying on the clay in strips. Many of the Chandals have now taken to agriculture. Most of them live in the western portion of the district, north of the Kalang.
Classified by religion the population of Nowgong was distributed in the following proportions in 1901.—
Hinduism 64 per cent, Muhammadanism 5 per cent. Animism 31 per cent. The three principal sects of Hinduism recorded at the census of 1901 were Saktism, Sivaitism, and Vaishnavism.

Nearly eight per cent. of the Hindus in 1901 described themselves as followers of Sakti, but almost five-sixths of the Saktists were censused on the tea plantations or the railway. The great majority of these persons were no doubt so styled, because they ate meat and drank liquor, though this in a garden coolly is not so much an indication of his adherence to the goddess Kali as of the uncertainty of his title to the name of Hindu at all. Saktism is a foreign growth in Assam and Vaishnavism is the national form of Hinduism.

Sivaitism is the counterpart of Saktism and is concerned with the worship of the procreative energy as manifested in the male. In 1901, only 644 persons in Nowgong professed this special form of Hinduism.

A considerable number of Hindus did not attempt to specify their sect in 1901, but of those who committed themselves to this extent 90 per cent. declared their adherence to Vaishnavism. This form of Hinduism is thus described in the Census Report for 1901.

"Sankar Deb, the apostle of Vaishnavism in Assam, was born in 1449 A. D., and was the descendant of a Kayastha, who, according to tradition, had been sent, with six of his caste fellows and seven Brahmanas, to Assam by the king of Kanaiipur as a substitute for the Assamese prime minister, who had fled to..."
his court for refuge. The licentious rites of Saktism had aroused his aversion while he was still a boy, and his desire to found a purer system of religion was increased by the teachings of Chaitanya in Bengal. Like most reformers, he met with vehement opposition from the supporters of the established order, and he was compelled to leave his home in Nowgong and to fly to the inhospitable jungles of the Barpeta subdivision, where, in conjunction with his disciple, Madhab Deb, he founded the Mahapurushia sect, the main tenets of which are the prohibition of idolatry and sacrifice, disregard of caste and the worship of God by hymns and prayers only. Sankar himself was, like a true follower of Chaitanya, a vegetarian, but the low-caste people, who formed a large proportion of his converts, found his injunction a counsel of perfection, and the Mahapurushias are accordingly allowed to eat the flesh of game, but not of domesticated animals, though, with a subtlety only too common in this country, they observe the letter of the law, prohibiting the spilling of blood, by beating their victims to death. The great centre of the Mahapurushia faith is the Sattra at Barpeta, where a large number of persons persist in living huddled together, in defiance of all the laws of sanitation, and resist with surprising pertinacity all efforts to improve their condition. They are a peculiarly bigoted people, and are strongly opposed to vaccination, with the result that the mortality from small-pox in the neighbourhood of the Sattra is exceptionally high. It was not long, however, before the Brahmans re-asserted their influence, and shortly after Sankar's death, two of his followers, who are members of this caste, established sects, called, after their founders, Damodariya and Hari Deb Panthi, which are distinguished from the Mahapurushias by the respect paid to the distinctions of caste, and a certain tolerance of idolatry. A fourth sect was founded by one Gopal Deb, but it originally seems to have differed in no way from the Mahapurushia creed, and subsequently its followers adopted the teaching of Deb Damodar. There is, in fact, practically no distinction between the Damodariyas, the Hari Deb Panthis, and the Gopal Deb Panthis, and the Vaishnavites of the Assam Valley can be divided into the Mahapurushia and Bamunia or "other Vaishnavas", as they have been called in the census tables. The former will accept a Sudra as a religious guide, worship no God but Krishna, and are uncompromising in their hostility to idols; the latter will only recognise Brahmans as their Gosains, permit the adoration of other deities, such as Siva and Kali, in addition to that of Krishna, and allow sacrifices to be offered in their honour."
The Bamunias are also more liberal in their diet, and will eat goats, pigeons and ducks, a form of food that is not allowed to orthodox Vaishnavites in Bengal. Madhab Deb, like most religious reformers, was a strict disciplinarian. The story goes that the breach between him and Gopal Deb, arose one stormy day when the party were returning to Barpeta by boat. Gopal Deb, anxious for the safety of his teacher, apostrophised the storm clouds passing overhead, and begged them to restrain their fury till Madhab had reached the shore in safety. This innocent remark was construed into an invocation of Varuna the god of rain, Gopal Deb was denounced as an idolater and was incontinently by order of Madhab, flung out of the boat. Such treatment was enough to damp the enthusiasm of the most ardent disciple. Gopal Deb, wallowing in the water, gallantly shouted out defiance to his former leader, and warned him that in future he would be treated with uncompromising opposition. The proportion of Mahapurushias in Nowgong is exceptionally high, and in 1901 about two-thirds of the Vaishnavas declared themselves to be members of this sect.

The chief exponents of the Vaishnavite faith are the gosains who live, each in his sattra or college, surrounded by his bhokots or resident disciples. Many of these sattras are supported by large grants of revenue free land, made by the Ahom kings and confirmed by the British Government, and the gosain receives an annual contribution, varying from four or five annas to two rupees or more, from each of his
shishyas or non-resident disciples. This subscription is generally paid through a medhi or agent, who holds an important position in the social economy of the village, and often ranks with the gaobura or village headman appointed by the Government. At certain seasons of the year the gosains tour through the villages, are visited by their followers, and receive into the Hindu faith members of the aboriginal tribes who are considered worthy of admission. These progresses are generally attended with considerable pomp and dignity. If the journey is made during the rainy season, the gosain and his followers travel in state barges, whose curved prows and slender lines distinguish them from the ordinary rough-built country boat. Most of the sattras own one or more fine elephants, and these ponderous animals take a prominent part in the procession that escorts the spiritual leader of the people. The gosain himself is carried in a litter, drums are beaten and cymbals clashed before him, and when he alights he is not permitted to touch the ground with his bare feet. It is not always that the influence of the priest is used for good. Bigotry and intolerance and a dislike to change or progress in any form are often found in those who profess to be the ministers of God, but from reproaches of this kind the Vaishnava gosains of Upper Assam are almost entirely free. Dignified but courteous in their demeanour, they have ever been noted for their loyalty to Government, and their influence is altogether beneficial in encouraging purity of life and obedience to the authorities. The
bulk of the Assamese Hindus in Nowgong are disciples of one or the other of the following gosains, whose sattras are situated on the Majuli in Jorhat—Auniati, Dakhinpat, Garamur, Kamalabari, Elengi, Karatipur, and Mahara. The Matak gosain of Lakhimpur has also a certain following in the district.*

The typical sattra consist of a namghor or prayer house, which is a large open shed supported on massive wooden pillars. The roof is generally made of thatch supported on massive wooden pillars, and at one end there is often a shrine in which the titular idol is carefully screened from the vulgar eye. The floor is made of beaten earth, and there are generally a few drums and cymbals lying about which are used in the daily ritual. The house of the gosain is situated near the namghor, and, in close proximity, there are store rooms which contain a liberal stock of rice, and all the various products of the country, fine silk cloths, and a valuable collection of native jewellery. The resident bhokots live in lines of cottages. The whole premises are usually enclosed by a fence or wall, which is entered through a rustic lichgate, and, as they often contain really magnificent umbrageous trees, the general effect is very picturesque. In the more important sattras gosains and bhokots alike are celibates, and the place resembles some mediæval monastery; but in the smaller institutions, a category to

*For an account of the Mataks reference should be made to the Gazetteer of the Lakhimpur district.
which all the *sattras* in Nowgong belong, celibacy is not enforced and women and children are found living round the *namghor*. Hinduism is so liberal in Assam that in many of these colleges the presiding priest is a Kayastha, often no doubt a Kalita, and Assamese Brahmans are sometimes to be found who consent to accept as their spiritual guide a man of lower caste.

Statement A appended to this chapter shows the situation of each *sattra* in Nowgong, the date of its foundation, and the amount of land which is held on privileged terms. Though Kuruabahi is a comparatively small *sattra* and holds but a small area of land at privileged rates, it is one of the four premier *sattras* of Assam, the other three being Auniati, Dakhinpur, and Garamur. The founder of the three great *sattras* on the Majuli enjoined celibacy upon their inmates, but such an injunction obviously requires that provision should be made elsewhere for each succeeding generation of gosains. The people of Kuruabahi were accordingly allowed to marry, so that from their community priests could be obtained who had grown up amongst the traditions and surroundings of a *sattra* and who could be trusted to carry on the policy of their predecessors.

Nowgong never came much under the influence of the Muhammadans, and in 1901 less than 5 per cent. of the population professed the faith of Islam. Nearly all of these persons were members of the Sunni sect.

The Muhammadans of Nowgong are said to be a fairly enlightened, if not a numerous community. The villagers
understand the principals of their faith, and it is still fairly free from Hindu superstitions. They try, however, to ascertain an auspicious day for the commencement of any undertaking, and sometimes consult a Hindu pandit for this purpose. They also observe the nowai tolani and nowai ceremonies, when a girl attains puberty or is married, and bathe their cattle on the occasion of the Bihu. A class of semi-Muham-
madans called dhakari worship Bishohari the goddess of snakes. The Morias are a section of the Muham-
dans who are said to be the descendants of 900 men who were taken prisoner when Turbuk was defeated in 1532. They were first employed to tend the Ahom elephants but offered grass to their tails instead of to their trunks. They were then ordered to grow paddy but they plastered the seedlings over with mud. They were finally made braziers, and at the present day are to some extent looked down upon by their co-religionists. Service is usually held in a small thatched hut, and there is no organized system for the propagation of the faith. In spite of this conversions occasionally take place, and the decrease amongst Muhammadans during the last decade was only 11 per cent. as compared with 25 per cent. in the district as a whole.

Nearly one-third of the population are still faithful to the primitive forms of tribal religion which are usually described as animistic, most of whom are living in the Mikir Hills or in the Raha tahsil and the mauzas to the south.

Most men find considerable difficulty in giving a
clear and intelligible account of the faith that is in them, and these simple people are no exception to the general rule. Broadly speaking their religious beliefs seem to fall under the following heads. Unlike the German metaphysician, they have no uncomfortable doubts with regard to their own existence and the existence of the material world. To account for the production of these visible phenomena, they put forward various theories, which are hardly more improbable than the accounts of the creation given in most religious systems. But the way in which the world came into existence is, after all, a matter of no very great importance, and the essential object of religion is to ensure a comfortable passage through life to its followers. No country or community is exempt from pain and trouble, and to the dwellers in the plains of India has been allotted a fairly liberal portion of the ills of life. When the cattle die, or small-pox or cholera visit the village, or other trouble comes, it is only natural to suppose that somebody or something is the cause of these misfortunes. The simple tribesmen then endeavour to ascertain the particular spirit from whose displeasure they are suffering, and to appease him in whatever way they can.

But, apart from special pujas of this nature, it is usually thought desirable to sacrifice at least once a year to the Deity to secure immunity from sickness and good harvests. Amongst the Hojais and Lalungs this sacrifice was invested with great ceremony, and the most acceptable of all offerings, human life, was made
prior to our occupation of the country. The connection between religion and morality is very slight, and the Lord their God is a jealous god, whose wrath must be averted by the proper offerings. Amongst the Mikirs success in theft is said to be due to skill in sacrifice, and though they believe in a future life, and have some idea of a special state of bliss, entrance to this heaven depends upon the somewhat peculiar qualifications of having danced the one legged dance and eaten the fat of the great lizard, and duck, pheasant, and cocoanut.

The Hojais on the other hand seem to be very doubtful as to the existence of a life beyond the grave and certainly do not trouble themselves very much about it.

The religions which were not strongly represented in the district in 1901, were Jains (243), Sikhs (214), Buddhists (49), and Brahmos (7). The Jains are Kaiyas or Marwari merchants who have succeeded in securing a practical monopoly of the wholesale trade of the Assam Valley. Like the English, they are temporary visitors and have not permanently settled in the Province. The Sikhs are the descendants of soldiers who came for service to Assam about 1825 or a little later. The original settlers have inter-married with Kewats, Koches, and Kalitas, and all, except the latest arrivals from the Punjab, have now an admixture of Assamese blood. The majority have taken to agriculture but their community includes a few carpenters and contractors. They are found in the Singaon and Hatipara villages in the sadr tahsil and at Chaparmukh. Most of the Buddhists were censused on the railway, and the fact that they
were nearly all males, suggests that they were temporary visitors.

**Christianity.**

The number of Christians in Nowgong is smaller than in any district in the Province except the Lushai Hills. A branch of the Baptist mission is located in Nowgong town, with an off-shoot in the Mikir Hills, and most of the native Christians were members of that sect.

From the statement in the margin it appears that Christianity has been spreading steadily if slowly amongst the natives during the past twenty years, but it is doubtful whether at present it has many attractions for the plains-men in Assam. The number of degraded castes is comparatively small, and, if the animistic tribesman once makes up his mind to abandon the religion of his fathers, he finds greater attractions from the social point of view in Hinduism than in Christianity. The gosains show considerable tact in the treatment of their converts, and do not expect them to abandon all at once the forbidden food to which for many generations they have been accustomed. The desire for material progress has not much hold upon the natives of Nowgong, and they prefer an idle opium eating life with the additional social distinction that Hinduism gives, to the more strenuous existence enjoined by the teaching of Christ's ministers.

**Occupation.**

Nowgong is a purely rural area and nine-tenths of the population in 1901 were supported by agriculture. As is only natural in a district in which there are broad tracts of land available for cultivation, the bulk of these
agriculturists are small farmers who hold direct from the state, and the number of tenants is inconsiderable. About one-twelfth of these cultivators were garden coolies, a proportion much lower than that prevailing in Darrang and Upper Assam. The only other occupation which supported as much as one per cent of the total population was general labour, a head which included the coolies engaged on the construction of the railway. The extraordinary preponderance of agriculture as a means of occupation is due to two causes. In the first place the district is a purely rural one. It contains only one small town, and the urban population is less than two per cent of the whole. There is moreover an almost complete absence of the functional castes. There is no village barber or dhobi in Assam Proper, and, though there are a considerable number of Jugis in Nowgong, they no longer earn their living at the loom. It would hardly be correct to say that they have forsaken their traditional occupation, as they, in common with most of the villagers in the district, are weavers; but the work is carried on by the women, and only enough clothing is produced to satisfy the requirements of the family, or perhaps to provide a few silk cloths to sell when money is urgently required. Occupation has not been specialized in the Assam Valley, and each household supplies almost all its simple wants. There are a considerable number of fishermen, but many of them have either abandoned their traditional occupation for agriculture, or have at any rate preferred to return it as a more respectable avocation.
on the census schedules. The proportion of priests is fairly high, but that of teachers and village doctors low. Both the Assamese and hillmen are cultivators pure and simple. They have no aptitude for trade, no liking for the arts and crafts, no desire for any other means of livelihood than the plough and hoe. In the social as well as the material world great masses tend to attract the smaller units by their weight. It is the fashion amongst the natives of Nowgong to earn their living as Adam did. There is an abundance of land in the district, so that there is no reason why every man should not be in the fashion, and, as far as possible, he is.

At the census of 1901 the occupations of the people in Nowgong were divided into the following main classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasture and agriculture</td>
<td>335,751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal services</td>
<td>2,867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation and supply of material substances</td>
<td>8,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce, transport and storage</td>
<td>3,253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professions</td>
<td>1,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled labour, not agricultural</td>
<td>5,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means of subsistence independent of occupation</td>
<td>2,616</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second part of the Census Report details will be found for the 520 separate heads into which the occupations of the people were divided, but in the immense majority of cases the figures are so small as to hardly repay examination.

The forms of marriage in vogue are the āmpūre* or

* A description of this ceremony as practiced in Assam will be found on p. 63 of the Census Report for 1901.
full Hindu rite, when the sacred fire is lighted and a priest is engaged to perform the ceremony; the *khara moni pindha*, in which a feast is given to the friends and relations and ornaments are given to the girl; and the system under which the bridegroom, who is called a *caponiya*, enters the house of his prospective father-in-law, and works for his wife as Jacob worked for Rachel. Brahmins, Kayasthas, and well-to-do Kalitas invariably perform the *hom pura* ceremony, which sometimes costs as much as Rs. 500. This expenditure is incurred on the purchase of ornaments and clothing, on the payments of priests, musicians, and palki bearers, and on a feast to the relations and friends, the principal ingredients of which are rice, molasses, curds, and betel nut.

The practice of taking a bride price is still fairly common amongst the lower castes, but it is falling into disfavour and is by no means as universal as in Kamrup. A girl can sometimes be obtained for Rs. 20, but, if she is an expert weaver and is generally skilled in house work, the parents will sometimes ask for and obtain five or six times that sum. An Assamese woman is a house keeper, weaver, and cook as well as a wife, and in many cases a farm labourer as well; and parents and guardians do not always see why a young man should be given such a valuable helpmeet, when they have had the expense of feeding and clothing her when she was too young to work, and paying for the various ceremonies that are prescribed by local custom at certain stages of her career. If the price
demanded is too high the young people often take the law into their own hands, and the girl arranges to have herself abducted; as, when her lover has once obtained possession of her person, he is generally able to induce the parents to be more moderate in their demands. This form of marriage by capture is very common amongst the Nadiyals, Brittial Baniyas, and Charals or Namasudras; and, according to the mauzadar of Garubat, nine girls out of ten belonging to these castes are abducted in this manner. The caponiya is a person who works for his prospective father in-law in lieu of making a cash payment for the bride. He is generally accorded all the privileges of a husband as soon as the parents of the girl are satisfied that he intends to remain faithful to his engagement. Marriage even by the simplest rites entails a heavy charge upon the bridegroom. Twenty rupees is the lowest estimate quoted by any of the officers consulted, and the ordinary cultivator often spends between one and two hundred rupees upon his wedding, a sum out of all proportion either to his capital or income. The result is that many men have to borrow at high rates of interest to obtain a wife, and are often crippled for years by the expenses incurred on the occasion of their marriage.

Amusements and festivals. Feasts, singing parties, and bhaonas or simple theatrical performances are the principal amusements of the villagers. The bhaonas are often held in temporary sheds constructed by the road side, and on a winter’s morning the traveller who is early abroad, frequently comes upon parties of revellers still lingering over the
pleasure of the previous night. The *doljatra* or *festival* in honour of Krishna in February or March, when the image of the god is swung to and fro, and the people pelt one another with red powder in memory of his amorous exploits with the milkmaids of Brindaban, is observed indeed, but with much less ceremony than in other parts of India. On the gardens, however, and amongst the foreign cooly population this festival, which is styled the *fagua*, is an occasion of very boisterous merry-making. The Janmastami in honour of Krishna’s birth in August or September, and the Sivaratri, in memory of Siva in March, are kept as fasts rather than feasts. The Durga Puja is observed by Saktists, but, as this sect has only a small following in Nowgong, it is not a local festival of much importance.

The special festivals of the Assamese are the three *Bihus*, and the *sraddh* ceremonies of Sankar Deb and Madhab Deb, the founders of the Mahapurushia sect. The Kartik *Bihu* is celebrated on the last day of Asvin (Oct. 14th), and is not an occasion of very much importance. Hymns are sung in honour of God, and in place of their usual meal of hot rice and curry the people take cold food such as curds, molasses, plantains, and cold rice. The *Magh Bihu* is the harvest home, and begins on the last day of Pous (January 14th). For weeks beforehand tall heaps of rice straw piled round a central pole are a prominent feature in the rural landscape. At the dawn of day the villagers bathe and warm their chilled bodies at these bonfires which must be most acceptable to young and old alike, as at this
season of the year the morning are always cold and generally foggy. The Magh Bihu is to some extent a children's festival, and most of the jollification is confined to the young children who sing and dance, and feast in small grass huts that have been specially constructed for the purpose. The Baisak Bihu which begins on the last day of Choet (April 14th) is held in honour of the new year. The cattle are smeared with oil, mixed with matikalai, turmeric, and rice and are then taken to the nearest stream and bathed. The villagers go from house to house visiting their friends and relatives and present one another with cloths and other products of the country. Buffalo fights are organised in the rice fields but these contests are rather tame affairs, and the animals very seldom injure one another. The villagers leap, wrestle, and race together and try to see who can run the furthest without drawing breath (han khel) Other games played are a kind of chevy and an Indian variety of tip cheese. Various games of ball, which include a good deal of wrestling and pushing, are also played. The festival is an occasion of some licence, as boys and girls dance together in the fields and sing suggestive songs, and lapses from chastity between members of the same caste are considered almost venial. It is at this season of the year that run-away matches are most common, and during the next few weeks the outraged but avaricious parent complaining of the abduction of his daughter is by no means an uncommon sight in the local courts. The sradh ceremony of Sankar Deb is celebrated in August—September and that of Madhab three days before the Janmastami. All
work is laid aside on these days and the people devote their time to feasting and the singing of hymns.

The temples of Nowgong are small and unimportant, and none of them have any pretensions to architectural merit. But this is nothing strange, as Saktism was never warmly accepted by the inhabitants of the district, and it is not to be expected that many shrines would be erected in its honour, or that those which existed would be carefully preserved. Statement B appended to this chapter shows the position of the various temples supported by grants of land. All except two, the temple at Kamakhya and the Sada Siva temple, are wretched temporary buildings of reeds and thatch.

Apart from the sattras and temples and the shrines to which reference has been made in the account of the mountain system of the district, there are not many sacred places in Nowgong. There are the remains of a temple dedicated to Buragohain in the Bar Kolagaon forest in the Jagial mauza, and in the Namati mauza there is a sacred pool called the Akashi Ganga in Parkhoa village. Barduar in Dhing mauza is venerated as it was once the residence of Sankar Deb, and there is an altar to Mahadeo, which is still the scene of local sacrifices, in the Sahari mauza. Traces of the primitive form of Bodo worship are also to be seen near Silghat where there are some rock sculptures which are said to be sacred to Kechakhati, the savage goddess who delighted in the quivering flesh of the human victim, and to whom for many centuries a male without blemish was offered in the little copper temple near Sadya,
None of these satras except Kuruabahi are of any great importance, and as has been already pointed out the bulk of the inhabitants of Nowgong are disciples of the gosains residing on the Majuli.

### Statement A.  

**Satras.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mauza</th>
<th>Name of Sattra.</th>
<th>Name of founder and date of foundation.</th>
<th>Area of Nishikhiraj land held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BRAHMAN GOSAINS.</td>
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<td>Chalchali</td>
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<td>Bangshi Gopal Sarma about 1790 A.D.</td>
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<td>Parusuttam Deb about 1660 A.D.</td>
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<td>Jakhalabandha</td>
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<td>Uppar Chutiai</td>
<td>Ram Chandra Mohunt about 1730 A.D.</td>
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<td>Kalsila</td>
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<td>Do. Chotahishya</td>
<td>Chandibar Gosain about 1800 A.D.</td>
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<td>Do. Sarabari</td>
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<td>Rupnaryan</td>
<td>Padma Narayan Mahanta about 1775 A.D.</td>
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## Statement B.

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