

Among the legendary accounts of Assam, in Hindu mythological writings, there seems to be mention of several places and individuals in connection with their gods. It is evident from these writings that Hinduism existed in Assam at a very early date. Hiouen Thoang, in 640, described the people; and he commented on the fact that a prince was on the throne in Assam at that time and that Hinduism was the state religion; and that the Buddhists were very few. Many hill tops in Assam are crowned with temples that stand on foundations infinitely older than the Ahom rule.

It was not until the reign of Rudra Sing (1696-1714), the greatest of all Ahom kings, that Hinduism became the predominating religion of the Assam Valley. Rudra Sing, himself, never completely embraced the Hindu religion but his Hindu proclivities increased as he grew older. He found it difficult to reconcile his regal dignity with the humble act of taking the *smaran*.^{*} He could not bear the thought of prostrating himself before one of his subjects, be he ever so saintly. A Bengali pundit, Krishnaram Bhattacharjya was summoned to be the king's guru, but the king was disappointed to find him an ordinary human being and dismissed him soon after his arrival. The pundit departed in high dudgeon; but just as he left, a great earthquake took place, which the king interpreted to mean displeasure on the part of the gods, and so he recalled the priest. The king, however, died from consumption in Gauhati before he had made an open confession of the Hindu faith, but promised the pundit that his son Sib would become a Hindu.

When Rudra Sing died, Sib ascended the throne and became a disciple of Krishnaram Bhattacharjya, whom

^{*} Which consists of the neophyte prostrating himself before a "guru" who teaches him the "mantra".

he made lord of the temple Kamaikhya. Sib Sing, with the prodigality of a new convert, erected a number of temples and excavated many tanks,^{*} the greatest of which was "Siva's Sea", or Sibsagar.^{**} Through him Hinduism became the predominating religion in the province. The Ahoms resisted for a time; but they finally took Hindu priests and abandoned their old tribal customs and ceremonies. Gait ascribes the deterioration of the Ahoms to their adoption of Hindu customs which brought with them rules that were not conducive to physical growth and vigor.

"The process of deterioration has gone on steadily, and no one looking at an average Ahom of the present day would suspect him of being the descendant of a race of conquerors, who, though small in number, gradually extended their rule over the whole of the Moguls, even when the latter were at the zenith of their power."[†]

The great Mogul empire had subdued one province of India after another and so came to be considered well nigh unconquerable. Assam also became the object of its desire, and several invasions were attempted. It was the ambition of Mir Jumla in 1660-1662 to bring the province into subjection; and he wrote to the emperor "that the next campaign would carry him to the confines of China". Due to a combination of ignorance of the country, inability to withstand the climate, want of communications, and the impossibility of repairing

^{*} The entire country around Sibsagar is dotted with artificial lakes which were dug by ancient kings in commemoration of one thing or another.

^{**} The Sibsagar tank is a half mile square. The legend has it that it was dug in one single day. Its surface is considerably higher than the surrounding country. It is constructed by throwing up a large embankment taking earth from nearby fields and from the center of the lake. It is believed to be fed by springs which make the water clear and beautiful in comparison to other mud holes.