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**TRENDS OF CULTURE CHANGE AMONG
SELECTED TRIBAL POPULATIONS OF
THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
OF
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY
IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL STUDIES**



**BY
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2004**

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify UPASANA DATTA has worked under my guidance and supervision for the thesis entitled **Trends of Culture Change Among Selected Tribal Populations of the Brahmaputra Valley**, which is being submitted to Tezpur University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The thesis is the result of her own investigation into the subject. Ms. Upasana Datta ~~has fulfilled all the requirements under the PhD regulations of Tezpur University.~~

This thesis, or any part thereof, has not been submitted by the candidate for any research degree to this university or any other university / institution.

Date: August 16, 2004


(Prof. Ajit K. Danda)

PREFACE

After doing my post-graduation in Anthropology with specialization in Cultural Anthropology, I had been cherishing a desire to take up research work in the field of my interest, that is, culture change. At this juncture I had the chance to undertake a short-term research project entitled **“Trends of Culture Shift: A Study in Two Karbi Villages of Kamrup District, Assam”** under the auspices of O.K.D. Institute of Social Change and Development. This strengthened my urge to go for a more comprehensive research project with a wider scope. When I broached the idea before Prof. A.K. Danda, he not only encouraged me but also graciously agreed to be my research guide. Thus began my journey into the charmed land of academic research – A journey that has been rather arduous and exacting on the one hand and highly satisfying on the other.

This work would never have been possible without the help, cooperation and encouragement from a large body of well-wishers, and benefactors, to all of whom I feel deeply beholden. My greatest debt of gratitude is to Prof. A.K. Danda who has not only inspired me with his great scholarship but also unflinchingly given me the benefit of his boundless kindness and compassion. I can never dream of ever redeeming the debt I owe him. I consider myself fortunate that he took me under his wings.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr. Sunil Kr. Dutta, Head of the Department of Cultural Studies of Tezpur University, from whom I have received constant academic and administrative support. I also feel heavily indebted to Dr. Bhubaneswar Saharia, Academic Registrar of Tezpur University, for the sympathy and encouragement shown towards me.

While I have received help and cooperation from a large number of persons in different ways and at different times, I shall be failing in my duties if I do not make special mention of some particular persons. Shri Murulidhar Das of Khaloibari village was my contact person, local guide and also host in all my field visits in Dimoria area. The entire family treated me with great care and kindness. I feel greatly indebted to them. I received similar help and cooperation from Shri Maheswar Patar and his family of Marjong village; Shri Sukhen Deuri and his family of Mahadevpur village, Arunachal Pradesh; Shri Komison Mili and his family of Baligaon Miri village (Sonitpur), Dr. Rajat Rabha and his family of Dappara, Dudhnoi; Shri Mahendra Bora and his family of Narayanpur (Lakhimpur); Captain Nakul Ch. Bez and his family of Duliajan and Guwahati; Late Baliram Teron and his family of Narakasur village (Guwahati); Shrimati Parvati Pegu and her family of Jonai (Dhemaji); and Shrimati Mayuri Bordoloi of Tezpur.

I express my profound thankfulness for providing the academic help at various times to the following persons: Dr. Birinchi Kr. Medhi, Dr. Kishor Bhattacharjee, Dr.(Mrs.) Upala Barua, Shri Udayan Hazarika and Shri Biswa Barua.

I also feel obliged to the following persons from whom I received special help and support in different ways: Shri Rabindranath Sarma (Guwahati), Shri Karuna Kanta Kakati (Narayanpur), Shri Sachindra Mohan Deka (Goreswar), Shri Hara Kalita (Tezpur), Shri Tirtha Phukan (Narakasur), Shri Keshab Rabha (Boko), Shri Mukul Rabha (Dudhnoi), Shri Deba Deuri (Duliajan), Shri Bulu Barua (Duliajan), Shri Bharat Barua (Tezpur), Late Surjyakanta Majumdar (Mirza), Dr. Dinesh Baishya (Guwahati), Shri Biren Lahkar (Guwahati), Shri Nandeswar Bharali (Madhupur, Dibrugarh), Late Medini Choudhury (Guwahati), Shri Paramesh Dutta (Tezpur), Shri Parashmoni Dutta (Tezpur), Sri Rajiv Dole (Jonai), Shri Kanak Das (Khaloibari), Shri Ujjal Goswami (Guwahati), Shri Prabin Deuri (Kinapathar, Lakhimpur), Shri Lila Deuri (Kinapathar, Lakhimpur),

I feel indebted to all the villagers of the villages from where I had collected my data. But I express my special thankfulness and gratitude to those who helped and supported me as local guides and informants – Shri Guyen Deuri of Bherakuchi village (Kamrup), Shri Hemen Teron of Belguri village (Kamrup), Shrimati Bhanu Teron of Narakasur village (Guwahati), Shrimati Guneswari Mili, Shrimati Rupanita Mili, Shri Gajen Mili, Shri Dilip Mili of Baligaon Miri village (Sonitpur), Shri Jagat Narah, Shrimati Binita Narah, Shrimati Akai Narah of Rangajan Miri village (Sonitpur), Shri Pramod Deuri of Bordeuri village (Lakhimpur), Shri Kripa Deuri of Upar Deuri village (Jorhat), Shri Jitram Rabha of Uttar Saoni village (Goreswar), Late Sotai Teron of Belguri village (Kamrup).

However, this work would not have materialized without the constant support, cooperation and encouragement of all the members of

my family. My parents Prof. Birendranath. Datta and Sm. Eva Datta not only encouraged me to take up the research project but also actively helped and supported me throughout the entire period and stood by my side at all the times of difficulty and crisis that I had to face while carrying on the project. My father not only helped me by accompanying me to many of the remote villages for field work, providing books and other resource materials, discussing various field experiences ~~but also~~ ~~guiding~~ at the final stage of the work in various ways. At the same time, I feel that the work would remain only a dream without the help and encouragement of my husband Dr. Mans Das. His constant encouragement and moral support throughout the work have enabled me to complete and submit the thesis. In fact, I have no words to express my gratitude to all of them.

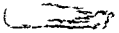
Last but not the least, Shri Nur Ahmed deserves my very special thanks not only for undertaking the entire typing work, which he has done with great care and patience but also for keeping up my spirit when it seemed to suffer a set back. I must thank Dee Key Communications for smoothly carrying out the entire processing operation.

I also offer my apologies to those of my well-wishers and benefactors whose names may have been left out through inadvertence.

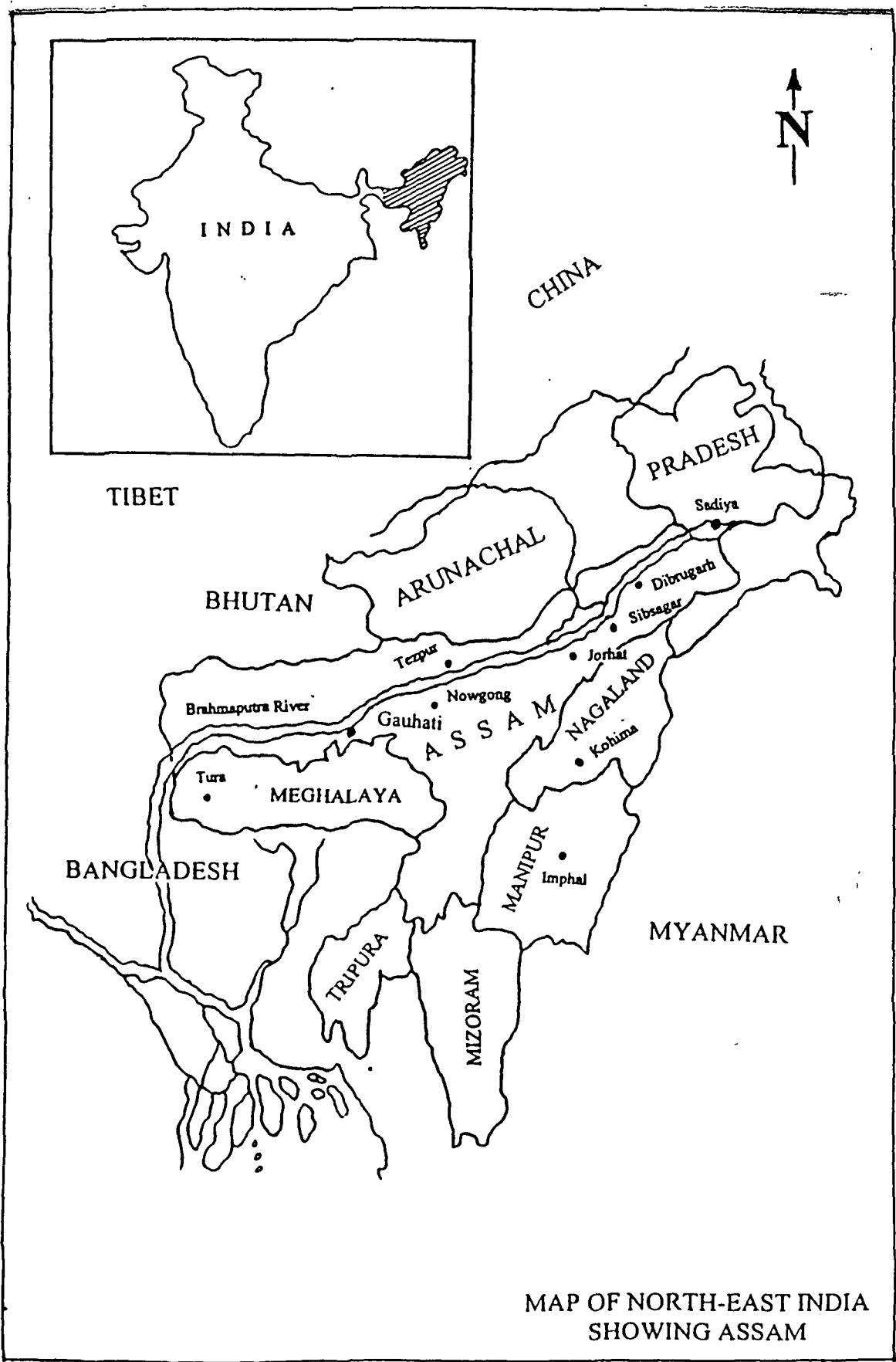
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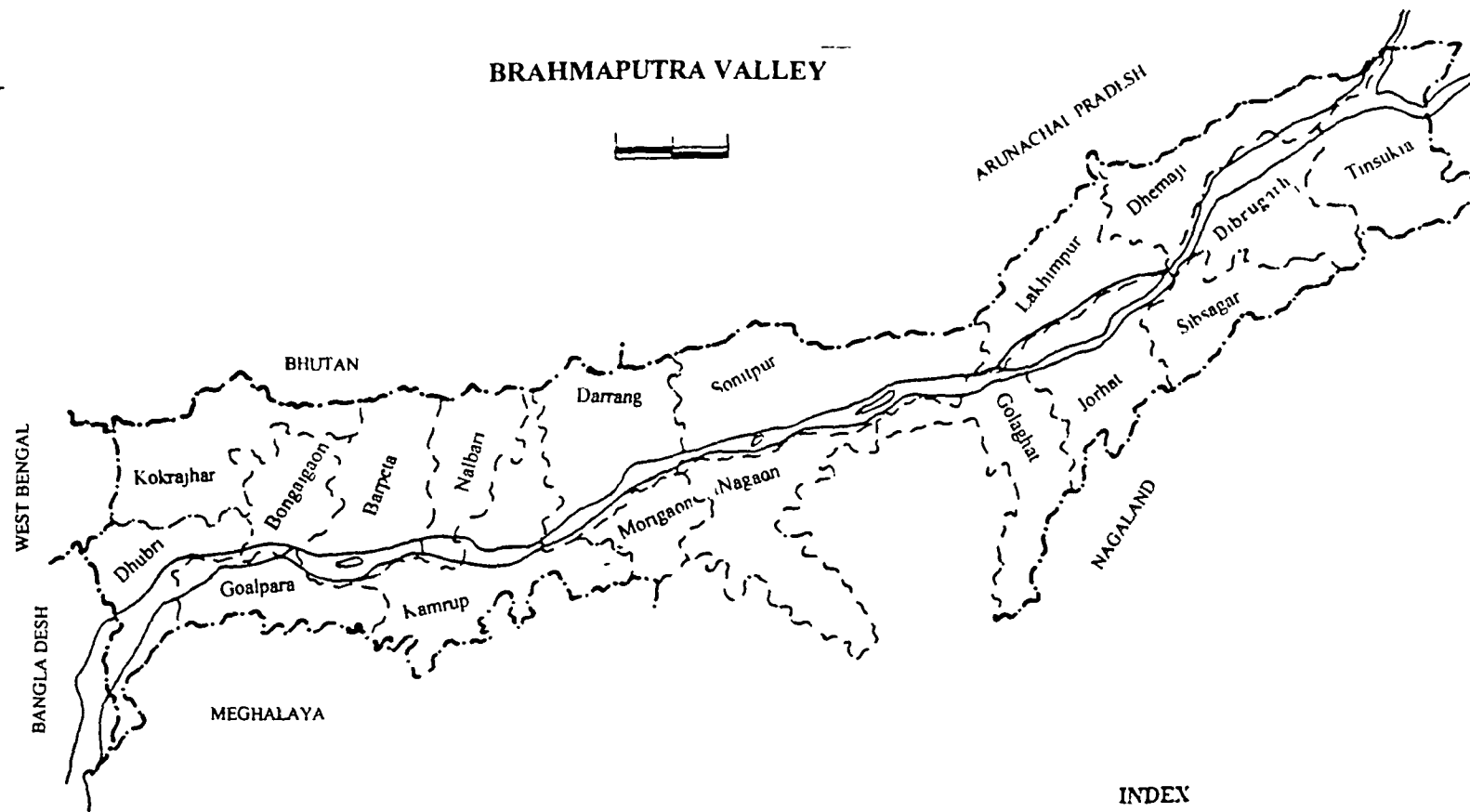
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MAP OF NORTH-EAST INDIA
SHOWING ASSAM

BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY



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CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

I. Scope of the Study :

a) The Brahmaputra Valley : The Brahmaputra is one of the major rivers of the Indian subcontinent. Born in the glacial womb of the Kailash range of the Himalayas, south of Rake Kaggyen Tso (Gunkyed) lake in the south-west of Tibet at an elevation of 5300 meters, it transverses the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, passes through the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, before cutting across the length of Bangladesh to meet the Ganges and finally plunge into the Bay of Bengal. Inside Assam the major portion of the river flows from east to west through the plains of the state. Therefore, basically the plains of Assam are referred to as the Brahmaputra valley. It may be noted that the plains and foothills of neighbouring states contiguous to Assam also come under the Brahmaputra valley although they are not politically within the boundary of Assam. Thus the plains of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Meghalaya bordering on this valley also form its parts. Entering into Assam, the Brahmaputra meets two other major rivers, the Lohit and the Dibong and they together take on an incredibly wide, braided, westerly course through the Brahmaputra valley, turn southward around the Garo Hills below Dhubri in Assam and make its journey to the sea across Bangladesh.

b) A Demographic Melting Pot with Focus on the Tribal Population: According to R.C. Majumder, the Brahmaputra was a highway of migration,

leading to potentialities of a high civilization. On one side of the river lay western China, which anthropologists call the great repository of Mongoloid races, from where people fanned out in prehistoric eras to claim the Himalayas, the plateaus, the slopes and South-East Asia as their own. On the other side lay the Indian sub-continent with its own pattern of ethnic conflicts and assimilation, cultural synthesis, and evolution. The Brahmaputra valley was the corridor and the river itself was the highway linking the two, allowing religious and cultural transference. The river, too, facilitated waves of migration into this region from all directions, enabling the people to move in and out along with their respective cultural traits (See Dutta 2001:87-88).

Broadly speaking, the Caucasoid elements entered into the region through the west and the Mongoloid through the east, north and to some extent through south. In the process, the hills and the plains of what today is called the north-east India constitute a melting pot of different ethnic groups, cultures and religions. That brewed up a mechanism for identity formation having a resulting set of ethos scarcely to be encountered anywhere else in the country.

If the North-East is an ethnographic warehouse, the contribution of Assam, particularly of the Brahmaputra valley, towards adding colour to the spectrum is by any standard marvelous, considering the plethora of tribes and groups which inhabit the land and who have contributed to make the Assamese identity a pluri-cultural reality. Anthropologists broadly divide the population living in the Brahmaputra valley and surrounding hills into two constituents – the tribal and the non-tribal. The tribal population by and large belongs to the Indo-Mongoloid racial stock. Linguistically they can be

divided into Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan and Austric speaking groups. The largest among the tribal segment, are the Bodos. The other important tribes are the Mising (Miri), the Karbi (Mikir), the Tiwa (Lalung), the Deuri, the Rabha, the Sonowal, the Dimasa, the Hajong, the Chutiya, etc. belonging to Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. The tribes like the Tai-Phake, the Tai-Khamti, the Tai-Aiton, the Tai-Turong etc. belong to the Sino-Tibetan linguistic group and they are the followers of the Hinayana Buddhism.

The non-tribal Assamese communities mainly comprise of the Hindu castes as well as Muslims. The Hindu castes can be broadly divided into Brahmins and non-Brahmins (*sudirs*). The non-Brahmins are sub-divided into several castes such as Kayastha, Kalita, Ganak, Kaibarta, Hira, Kumar, Jogi, Keot, etc. The socio-cultural fabric of the valley has also been enriched by the presence of a sizable Muslim community. This population has been founded by four different ways – a) Muslim soldiers captured in war, b) artisans brought by ruling houses, c) Muslim proselytizers and d) local converts.

The annexation of Assam by the British brought in its wake another groups of people to this region. The Bengalis were brought in large number by the imperialists to man the clerical stratum of the administration. The British also resorted to large scale importation of tribal from other parts of India to work in their tea-plantations, creating a well-defined tea-worker community. These workers are recruited from different areas of the country such as West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh.

Along with the British also came the Marowari community of traders who not only contributed to the economic life of the Brahmaputra

valley but also to its socio-cultural vitality. Nepalis also constitute a substantial portion of the population, who made their entry after arrival of the British.

Apart from the entry of people from other parts of India, the post-independence decades have witnessed large-scale migration from erstwhile East Pakistan, now Bangladesh (See Dutta, 2001).

c) The Tribals and the Non-Tribals in the Context of the Assamese Society:

From the cultural point of view, the population of the valley could be divided into two categories –

- i) Those tribal groups, both in the hills and the plains, who have retained their tribal identity but who have been acculturated in various degrees as a result of living in close proximity to or contact with the non-tribal Sanskritized majority, or through the impact of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam.
- ii) Those societies which are more or less fully Sanskritized, where the population is substantially made up of erstwhile Indo-Mongoloid stocks. Local Muslims of this region, although not Sanskritized from the religious point of view, culturally form a part of this milieu.

In the process of Sanskritization of the latest category of the population, two agencies have been at work : the Hindu religion and an Indo-Aryan language, i.e., Assamese. In the present-day Assam valley, almost all the tribes are bilingual as they have accepted Assamese as their second language. In some cases, the tribal language has been given up altogether

and Assamese has replaced the same as the mother-tongue. Even the Sanskritized Hindu communities of this region retain elements which, according to orthodox Hindu standard, are patently tribal. For example, the caste-system in the Assamese society is flexible and fairly liberal. While Brahmins do occupy a high position in the society, they do not dominate the scene. All the non-Brahmins are lumped together as *sudirs* (shudras), among whom there is considerable inter-caste mobility; and there are practically no untouchables. Castes are not profession oriented and caste based disabilities are few. In the Assamese society, weaving is a most honoured and desired skill for women of all categories, unlike in any other part of India. Similarly, in the matter of food, not to speak of non Brahmins and non-Vaishavas, even the purest Assamese Brahmins have no scruples about eating fish and meat.

In the field of religion, side by side with the Brahminical gods and goddesses of pan-Indian affiliation, hosts of pre-Brahminic deities continue to receive veneration and propitiation. Often in the Assamese society belief in and worship of such deities are more or less confined to the Sanskritized peripheral communities.

Again, although neo-Vaishnavism has deeply touched the Assamese society, Saktism, and more particularly Saivism, continue to prevail in different forms. Apart from Bathou-Barai and Mouthansri of the Bodos, Gira-Girasi of the Deuris, Pha-Mahadeu and his consort of the Tiwas, and so on, which are original tribal versions of Siva-Parvati, the influence of Siva-Parvati on Assamese society is evidenced by the innumerable Siva temples and shrines scattered all over the land. Thus Hinduism has assumed in this region some peculiar features through the processes of syncretism.

In the field of material culture, there are certain distinctive peculiarities. Much of the traditional pattern of life in the hills center round jhuming (or shifting cultivation) which at best makes for a bare subsistence economy, gradually giving over to settled cultivation in the plains, even where the indigenous economy is hardly above subsistence level, professionalism and trade mindedness not being the strong points of the local population. Weaving exquisitely coloured and designed textiles by the womenfolk in their indigenous looms is a distinctive feature common to the lives of all the communities of the region including those who have been Sanskritized. What is more, even the dress worn by women of different group has a basic similarity and are practically variations of the same traditional format.

All this – and many other traits – make the distinction between the tribal and the non-tribal lose much of its relevance in the context of the socio-cultural milieu of this region. Here we have something which can be called tribe-caste continuum rather than tribe caste polarity. (See Datta et.al. 1994: Chapter-I).

d) Choice of the Topic:

Since our childhood, even in the vicinity of the growing city of Guwahati, we have been meeting people of different tribal communities and enjoying the privilege to learn about their cultures, often observing the so-called tribal and non-tribal peculiarities. In our own family, I grew up in an atmosphere where such matters were freely discussed. My father, a folklorist, always encouraged us to learn about different groups of people, their cultures and folk heritages. My elder brother and sister-in-law also studied Anthropology with specialization in Cultural Anthropology for their

post-graduation. As a young student of Anthropology, I became more and more involved with the implications of the cultural dynamics of the tribal – non-tribal relationship in the Assamese society. When we started doing fieldwork, I got further direct exposure to the realities of the situation. My first fieldwork for Part-I graduation course was in a plains Karbi village of Kamrup district. That experience was so exciting and enlightening that I became deeply interested in such kind of work. For our Part-II graduation course we had to do our fieldwork in a Bodo village of South Kamrup. Again, for our M.A. Previous course we studied the Garos of Assam and Meghalaya border, who live in the plains and are surrounded by the Rabhas. For the M.A. Final dissertation, I worked among the Misings of Central Assam and tried to understand their mechanism for cultural adaptation. All these experiences have given me the opportunity to learn about these plains tribal groups and their changing trends, especially due to contact with the neighbouring groups - in most of the cases, with the caste Hindu Assamese populations. After studying the cultural adaptation among the Mising of Baligaon village of Sonitpur district, I became seriously interested about the trends of culture change among different tribal groups of the Brahmaputra valley. The exposure I so far had provided me with an adequate background and emboldened me to involve myself in the present study.

For this present project I have selected five tribal groups from different areas representing the whole of the Brahmaputra valley. The geographical distribution of the five tribes is given below:

Eastern Assam – Mising and Deuri

Central Assam – Mising and Plains Tiwa

Western Assam – Plains Tiwa, Plains Karbi and Rabha.

Through this study an attempt has been made to inquire into the details of the processes of culture change that are in progress among the selected groups. It was presumed that more or less identical processes ~~could~~ could be observed among all of them. The parameters that have been considered for our study are of the following nature:

- a. In the field of socio-economic life
- b. In the field of social institutions
- c. In the field of socio-religious life.
- d. In the field of socio-political life.
- e. In the field material culture and language.

A period of fifty years, that is, from the time of Independence upto the turn of the century has been taken as the time-frame of the study. Most of the data belong to this particular period although some of the information relate back to much earlier periods. The data have been collected from persons belonging to three generations-- the elderly people above sixty years, the middle aged persons between thirty to fifty years, and the younger generation upto twenty years of age. These three generations represent the experiences and perspectives relevant to their respective age groups.

II. Methodology :

In the preparation of the study two kinds of work were involved deskwork and fieldwork. For the study of this nature, fieldwork is the most essential way of data collection, and we have done that extensively. However, prior to fieldwork, desk work is also equally important. According to Donald A. Mac Donald – “systematic field work usually begins at the desk, in the library and in the archive. If the chosen area has been studied in the past,

one must make oneself as familiar as possible with the results. Useful background information can also be gleaned from histories and guidebooks. Reading should be of course include general theory and practice” (Macdonald in Dorson 1972 : 407-408). I followed the prescription. For desk-work, a number of libraries, both public and personal, had been used. Different books, journals and other documents had been consulted to acquire the theoretical concept of culture change and also the ethnography of the tribes under study as well as of other tribes of the region..

For collecting field-data, the following methods had been used depending on their applicability and expediency: Interview methods and observation method. In support of these two methods, we had also taken the help of case study and genealogical methods. For general guidance in the matter of research methodology, I mostly depended on the famous work of P.V. Young (Young 1984).

We are now giving some details regarding the methods used by us.

The interview method had been used throughout the study. In most of the cases, open interview method had been adopted, where the interviewer and the informant both are free to talk irrespective of time and topic. This method was found to be most useful. Through this method, while collecting information on any area, much further relevant information belonging to other areas of interest could also be obtained. On the other hand, for collecting in-depth data over a particular topic or area, the focus-interview method had been used.

Observation is another important method that has been used. Though the non-participant observation method had been used most of the time, in a small number of cases we had also taken recourse to the participant observation method, particularly in the cases of festivals, ceremonies and rituals.

Apart from these two methods, which we had used constantly, genealogical and case-study methods were also used in a limited number of cases. For example, to establish particular pieces of information, case studies became very useful. Changes in many aspects could be visualized with the help of case-studies involving different age-groups. Similarly, by drawing genealogical charts, changes in different aspects of life through a number of generations could be visualized.

At least ten villages were chosen from each of the five selected communities on the basis of the following criteria:

- a) Representation of different divisions within the same community
- b) Accessibility and availability of contact-persons and reliable informants
- c) A minimum acquaintance with the prevailing situation acquired through pre-field preparation

Visual Documentation: I used to carry a camera with me during my field visits. Most of the photographs incorporated in the thesis were taken by me. I have also taken the help of maps for locating selected villages.

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CHAPTER – 2

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE TRIBES OF THE REGION

I. India's North-East and Its Tribes:

Though the term North-East India refers to a geographic location, it has got a unique cultural distinction which can not be found elsewhere in India. Mention had been made in the introductory chapter about the uniqueness of north-east India and its culture. Though there are considerable diversities within the region, there remains a basic unity characterizing the seven units making up North-East India – Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Mizoram.

The socio-cultural milieu of this region holds up in the present day, as it has done in the past, a picture that somehow distinguishes it from the rest of India. The socio-cultural pattern of the north-eastern region should be studied in a frame of reference which is specific for this region and which, although not being in full conformity with the all-India frame of reference, need not be considered non-Indian or even less-Indian than the other one. There is so much here that is obviously of all-India affiliation and perhaps somewhat more that is peculiarly North-East Indian.(Datta et al 1994).

The geographical area of North-East India is 255,083 sq.km., and mountains, hills and plateaus cover 70% of the region. There are more

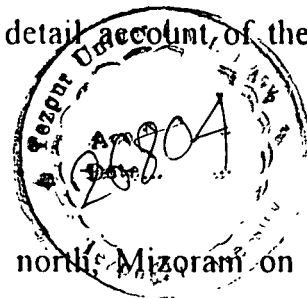
than 80 main tribes with numerous subdivisions who often claim separate identity. Racially the tribes of N.E. India belong to the Indo-Mongoloid stock and with the exception of the Austric-speaking Khasi-Jaintia tribes, speak Sino-Tibetan languages of Tibeto-Burman and Siamese-Chinese branches. Tibeto-Burman speaking people belong to Boro, Garo, Naga, Kuki-Chin and North-Assam groups, whereas a small Tai-speaking group belongs to Siamese-Chinese branch. Tribal populations vary from a few hundreds to one hundred thousand, except in the case of six tribes, each with more than a quarter million population. Percentages of tribal populations in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are around 80% or more; in Manipur and Tripura around 30%, and in Assam between 10%, and 15%. On the basis of linguistic, ethnographic and administrative considerations, these tribes are divided into generic groups such as Bodo, Naga, Kuki, Mizo, Khasi-Jaintia, etc. Bodo tribes mainly live in Assam and Tripura; Naga tribes in Nagaland, Manipur and Assam; Kuki tribes in Manipur, Mizoram and Assam; Mizo tribes in Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura; and matrilineal Khasi-Jaintia and Garo tribes in Meghalaya and Assam.

We are giving below the state-wise distribution of different tribes except in Assam (as we have given detail account of the tribes of Assam in the later part of this chapter).

Manipur:

Bounded by Nagaland on the north, Mizoram on the south, Assam on the west and Burma on the east, the state has a land surface of 22, 327 sq. km.

Manipur has a population of 1,826,714 (1991 Census) of which two-thirds live in the valley and the rest in the hills. The valley is inhabited



almost entirely by the Meities, the non-tribals, while the hills are the abode of as many as 29 tribes, mostly of Naga and Kuki stocks. Some of tribes shift their alignments with the broader groups. Some prefer to identify themselves separately. The major tribes are – Thadou, Tangkhul, Kabui, Mao and Paite. The language of this valley is *Meitei-lol*, which belongs to the Kuki-Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman family. This language also serves the tribal groups of the state who speak different languages. The Naga tribes of Manipur are the following – the Tangkhul, the Rongmei (Kabui), the Mao, the Kacha Naga (Liangmai), the Lamgang, the Maring, the Anal, the Monsong, the Moyou, the Zemi, the Thangal, the Angami and the Sema Naga. The main communities of non-Naga groups are Aimol, the Chothe, the Paite, the Ralte and any other Mizo-Lushai groups.

Tripura:

The geographic location of the state is as follows – Bangladesh on the north, west and south-west, Assam and Mizoram on the east. A narrow strip through Assam (Barak Valley) and Mizoram links it with the rest of India. Covering an area of 10,486 square k.m. Tripura can be geographically divided into three broad zones – the hill region, the flat plains, and the river basin. The population figure in the 1991 census is 2,744,827.

The original inhabitants of Tripura have been tribal groups like the Tipras, the Rheangs and the Hrangkhols, most of whom belong to the Bodo group of Indo-Mongoloid family. Of the indigenous population, the Tipras or Tripuris constitute the most prominent group. They are supposed to be the oldest inhabitants having links with some of the Bodo groups of Assam.

Arunachal Pradesh :

Bounded by Tibet in the north, Assam and Nagaland in the south and south-west Burma in the east and Bhutan in the west, Arunachal Pradesh, formerly known as North East Frontier Agencies or NEFA, covers an area of 83,743 sq.km. and thus has the largest territory among the seven units of the North-East.

The population of Arunachal Pradesh, 858,392 according to the 1991 census, is made up of over 82 tribes and sub-tribes of Indo-Mongoloid origin. All these groups have their distinctive social and cultural identities, speaking different languages and dialects of Tibeto-Burman family and following different beliefs and customs. The territory can be conveniently divided into three main cultural zones – the first zone belongs to the Buddhist or near-Buddhist groups of the westernmost parts, other small tribes along the northern frontier and the Khamtis and the Singhphos in the foothills of the eastern parts. These Buddhist and near-Buddhist groups have elements of civilization considerably influenced by Tibet and Burma. The Monpas and the Sherdukpens are followers of Tibetan Buddhism while the Khamptis and Singhphos, who are Buddhist of Burmese affiliation, have migrated from the Irrawady valley in relatively recent times and lived in close proximity to the plains of Assam. The Buguns (Khowas) the Hrussos (Akas) and the Dhammeis (Mijis), though not Buddhist themselves, have imbibed many cultural elements from their Buddhistic neighbours.

In the great central area live a large number of tribal groups who have been divided by the difficulty of communications and by the state of war in which they lived before they were brought under a common administration. The chief groups among these are the Adis (divided into

several groups), the Nishis (Daflas, Bangris), the Apatanis, the Hill Miris, the Tagins and the three groups of Mishmis.

The third area comprising the south eastern parts of the territory bordering on Burma, is inhabited chiefly by the Wanchos, the Noctes (who had adopted Assam Vaishnavism) and various small groups collectively known as Tangsa, and a small population of Singhphos and Khamptis.

Although all these groups have many traits in common, particularly in the three cultural zones, there are also certain others that distinguish them from one another.

Again, there have been contacts with the plains of Assam at various levels and a kind of patois of the Assamese language – sometimes designated as Nefamese – has served as lingua franca for communication among different groups.

Meghalaya:

It covers an area of 22,429 sq. km. And has Assam on its east and north, and Bangladesh on its west and south. The population of the state according to the 1991 census is 1,760,626.

The bulk of the inhabitants belong to three major tribal groups – the Garos, the Khasis and the Syntengs or Pnars who are more popularly known as Jaintias. While another section of the population is made up of such other tribal groups as the Rabhas, the Hajongs, the Tiwas and the Koches, there is also a sizable number of non-tribals scattered in different parts of the state.

The societies of the Khasis, the Jaintias and to a great extent of the Garos, are matrilineal in character, which distinguishes them from

other societies of the region. While the language of the Garos, who call themselves Achik, belong to the Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman family, the Khasis and the Jaintias speak languages that belong to the Monkhmer family of Austric affiliation.

Christianity has made considerable impact on the major tribes of Meghalaya, particularly among the Garos and the Khasis. However, there are some sections among them who still follow the traditional religions. The non-Christian Garos call themselves "Sangsarik". The Jaintias had once come very close to Hinduism, particularly the Sakti cult.

Nagaland:

It is a land of rugged hills with small plains tracts, the total area being 16,579 sq.km. The state is bounded by Assam in the north and North-West, Manipur in the south, Arunachal Pradesh in the north-east and Burma in the east. The population according to 1991 census is 1,215,573.

The bulk of the inhabitants of Nagaland are known as Nagas who are believed to be among the earliest migrants from south-east Asia to North-East India across the Assam plains.

There are more than twenty Naga tribes and sub-tribes, the more well-known among them being the Angamis, the Aos, the Semas, the Lothas, the Konyaks, the Chakesangs, the Sangtams, the Changs, the Yimchangers, the Zeliangs and the Rengmas. All of them speak different dialects unintelligible to one another. For mutual communication they use a kind of pidgin Assamese, which has been named as Nagamese – i.e., Assamese as adopted by the Nagas. Incidentally, contacts with the people of the plains have been regular and abiding.

Sturdy and virile, the Nagas have been inveterate lovers of freedom. Inter-clan and inter-village feuds have been very common in the past and head-hunting was once very much a part of the Naga way of life. Much of the Naga character of independence and alertness had been built up through the institution of the morungs or bachelor's dormitories.

Today, the majority of the Nagas have adopted Christianity. Along with it, rapid spread of western education and the impact of modern western standards have made deep inroads into traditional Naga beliefs and customs. However, the Nagas are a tradition-loving people, and a more or less distinctive Naga way of life is still being maintained.

Mizoram:

With an area of 21,081 sq kms Mizoram has a population of 686,217 according to the 1991 census.

The term Mizo, which means highlanders, refers to a composite group of allied tribes. These tribes started moving into their present abode in India from Chin hill tracts of Burma towards the beginning of the 18th century. The Lushai migration comprised the Hmars, the Pawis, the Raltes, the Paites, and the Thadous etc. The Lakhers came somewhat later, and the Chakmas were the last to enter from the Chittagong tract. Initially each tribe or clan was eager to maintain its distinctive identity in respect of dialect, religious beliefs and social customs. But subsequently a process of integration and assimilation came in to play, and there has now developed among them a common identity as Mizos. Although some of the major sub-tribes have retained their separate dialects within themselves, the minor ones have given up theirs in favour of the Lushai dialect called Dujlien. The Lushai hegemony has been accepted in other socio-cultural fronts as well.

The Mizos are a sturdy people. Certain distinctive features have characterized their traditional society and culture –

- a) There was little distinction between high and low. Although the chief had full political authority over his subjects, in social life he was as such a commoner as others. The land belonged to the community, not to individuals; the crops have to be shared.
- b) There was an elaborate code of chivalry called *plawanghmaina*, according to which one's conduct was to be led by consideration for others and the spirit of mutual help.
- c) *Zawlbuk* or bachelors' dormitory constituted a most vital institution in the society. In the *zawlbuks* adolescent boys not only slept but also got trained in discipline and service to the community.
- d) An inherent spirit of self-help was nurtured. Wide spread acceptance of Christianity and a high percentage of literacy have caused the Mizo society to move pretty fast along the path of modernity. But there are many indications to show that they are also not in favour of fully giving up traditional ways.

II. About the Tribes of Assam (Other Than the Five Selected Tribes):

In Assam the tribal population is found both in the hills and the plains. There are two hill districts Karbi Anglong and North Cachar. The major among the hill tribes are the Dimasa Kacharis, the Hill Karbis, and the Hill Tiwas. Some other tribes are the Zemi Nagas, the Rengma Nagas, the Kukis, Hmars and the few others. On the other hand, the major plains tribes are the Bodos, the Misings, the Deuris, the Plains Karbis, the Plains Tiwas, the Rabhas, the Sonowals and some other tribes like the Hajongs,

the Garos, the Jaintias, the Khasis, the Barmans, and a number of Buddhistic tribes etc. Majority of these tribes are racially Indo-Mongoloid and linguistically Tibeto-Burman speakers.

In the introductory chapter mention had been made of different tribal groups of the Assam plains and their characteristic features in brief. Now we propose to elaborate our discussion of the tribes of hills and plains of Assam. Of course the five tribes under study –about whom we will discuss in detail in the later part of this chapter - are not included in this section.

In this context it would be important to keep in mind the following points –

- a) Some of the tribes mentioned in the above list have their major populations in the contiguous hill states of this region; for example, the Garos, the Khasi and Jaintias are basically tribes of Meghalaya. Similarly the Singhphos and the Tangsas of Arunachal Pradesh and although small Naga settlements are found in the plains of Assam they are basically Nagaland tribes.
- b) Two of the major tribes viz. the Tiwas and the Karbis are found in substantial numbers ⁱⁿ both Hills and the plains having distinct cultural features. Although originally they might have shared a common culture, in the course of time their respective populations living in the hills and the plains developed distinctive cultural patterns.
- c) We have taken up for some detailed description, here each of the tribes (except the tribes under special focus of the study) while in the case of the others only a brief introduction has been

incorporated.

The Bodos:

The Bodos or the Bodo-Kacharis of Assam is a branch of the great Bodo group of the Indo-Mongoloid family falling within the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. The Bodos are the earliest known settlers of Assam. From time immemorial they had been maintaining their sovereignty till their last king died in the year 1845 A.D. Remnants of their political and cultural domination may still be found throughout the length and breadth of Assam. The Bodo-Kocharis who belong to the Indo-Chinese race of the Mongoloid stock originally inhabited the land somewhere between the Yangtse-kiang and the Hoang-Ho. It is believed that they gradually immigrated in successive waves and settled over a considerable portion of the Brahmaputra valley. They entered into Assam through a land-locked area of Tibet which in ancient times was known as "Bod". According to the famous scholar S.K. Chatterji, the Bodo-Kacharis, as a Mongoloid tribe, appear to have formed at one time a solid block of a Mongoloid people throughout the whole of North Bihar, North Bengal, East Bengal and the Brahmaputra valley, with extensions in the Cachar Hills, the Garo Hills and in the Tripura Hills. In his Kirata-jana Krti he calls them as the Indo-Mongloids (Kirata).

The Bodo-Kacharis live in compact villages, putting barriers all around the homestead. Their house is a simple two roofed one erected on the ground with scanty or no ventilation. Even the smallest unit should consist of a main dwelling house, a cowshed and a granary built on raised platform. Each dwelling house consists of two rooms, small and low in size. The domestic birds they keep in a cubby-hole type projection attached to

their main dwelling house. The verandahs are generally missed to 2 to 3 feet high. The family looms are generally placed on the back-yard facing the orchards. A Kachari house is seldom distinguishable from other Assamese houses. Of course, the distinctive feature of a Bodo household is to plant a *siju* tree on the north-east corner of their main inner courtyard.

Agriculture is the mainstay of these people. They practice both *ahu*(broadcasting) and *sali* (transplanting) paddy and very prone to adoption of improved techniques in production processes. Their indigenous levies for preserving seeds and digging canals are widely acclaimed. They are especially skillful in the construction of irrigation canals and embankments for diverting water to fields. Apart from agriculture, the womenfolk supplement their economy by fishing, rearing pigs and fowls, and also silk worms, weaving etc. They also help in the fields besides their household chores.

During the early part of the 20th century the social life of the Bodo-Kachari tribe was blessed by such virtues like honesty, truthfulness, straight-forwardness and a general trustworthiness. But with the passage of time, things have somewhat changed bringing new complexities unknown or unheard before. To meet these changing situations of life, necessity has arisen to frame some local laws on the basis of customs and traditions as prevailing in the society. Thus the locally codified customary usages of practices of the Bodo societies came to be followed after approval from the zonal council composed of adjacent villages. These local laws are known as *pandulipi*' as they are in manuscript and hardly printed. Such laws differ in context and application from area to area.

According to these customary laws the line of descent is traced through the father who is the head of the family. The eldest male member assumes the charge of the household on the death of the father and discharges his responsibilities consultation with his mother. Usually he gets a preferential share of the family property in view of his assumption of family liability and other social responsibility.

The Bodo society prescribes atonement proceedings for purification of misdeeds. The deuri, an assistant to the village priest oja, usually conducts the atonement proceedings. He is elected on the general consensus of all the villagers on the basis of his character and ability to guide socio-religious rites. The deuri and the gaonbura the village headman have a distinct place of honour in the estimation of the Bodo-Kachari people. The clan is known as ari. There are as many as 23 aris, such as Basumatary, Doimari, Narzari and so on.

The religious philosophy of the Bodo-Kachari tribe centers round the super power of Bathou Barai or Khoria Barai Maharaja which is analogous to Siva of the Hindu Trinity. The siju plant is regarded as representing the Bathou – The supreme deity of adoration. Next to Bathou, Mainao is worshipped as the goddess of wealth. Besides these two primary deities, the Bodo-Kacharis worship many other gods and goddesses comprising Agrang, Khoila Khaji, Rajkhaudra, Rajputhur, Bura Ali, Asu Mainao, Sali Mainao, Bagraja and so on. Some of these deities are believed to be benevolent and others malevolent. The malevolent deities are regarded as the originator of all ills including natural calamities and for their propitiation sacrifices and offering of rice beer are invariably necessary. The propitiation

to benevolent deities like *asu mainao* and *sali mainao* is done for higher yields of crops as well as endowment of prosperity.

A section of the Bodo-Kachari population practice Vedic rites like other Hindus and don't resort to appeasement of gods and goddesses by sacrificing pigs and fowls and also by offering rice-beer. They are known as "Brahmas" and performs hom-yojna before the sacred fire in all socio-religious rituals. However, culturally both the sections do not differ from each other.

The rites of passages have great significance in the life of the Bod-Kacharis. In regard to birth, there are no elaborate celebrations or rites and rituals to perform. However, the family makes an offering to the household deities by sacrificing a cock or hen on the occasion. It is also a prevailing custom among the Bodo-Kacharis to entertain midwives in a feast within a reasonable time who attended the mother during her confinement.

In case of marriage different types are found. The usual practice of conducting a marriage is by negotiation (*hathachuni*). But marriages by servitude (*chawdong-tagarnay*) and widow remarriage (*dhoka*) do often take place. Another type of marriage is found which is known as kharchanai marriage. The Bodo-Kachari society is primarily monogamous. However, junior levirate and junior sororate are allowed in this society. Unlike most of the tribes Bodos do not allow cross-cousin marriage. But the practice of parallel cousin marriage is not obsolete altogether.

Now-a-days the idea of procuring a bride either by servitude or by elopement has come to be regarded as contemptuous. Therefore, negotiation marriage (*hathachuni*) has become the normal social custom. The

system of demanding bride-price is still prevalent but in the higher echelon of the society, it is practically non-existent.

For the disposal of death the Bodo-Kacharis practice both cremation and burial. The cremation has come to be the normal practice in these days.

It is customary for the members attending funeral procession to take bath on their return home and drink *santijal* followed by mastication of a little amount of *sokota* (a bitter tasting dried leafy substance) ostensibly to carry the idea that from that day onwards the relationship with the dead is finally severed. This is followed by rice-beer drinking in honour of the dead. On the tenth day from the day on which the death occurs, the first phase of the funeral rites begins, which is termed as *dasa* or *dahar*. The final *shraddha* ceremony is held either on the 12th or 13th day.

Apart from these rites of passage, there are other occasions of merry-making in the social life of the Bodo-Kacharis. They celebrate three *Bihus* like other Assamese people. However, *Baisagu* (or the *Bohag Bihu*) is celebrated with great enthusiasm. Community worshipping, singing and dancing and merry making continues for seven days.

Kherai is the other important community festival of the Bodo-Kacharis when the entire atmosphere is agog with much enthusiasm. It is intended to propitiate *Bathou* or *Sibrai* – the chief deity of adoration of the Bodo-Kacharis is along with *Mainao* (the goddess of harvest). The propitiatory rituals begin with different dance rituals along with singing of ballads in tune with the traditional musical instruments like *kham* (drum) *siphung* (flute) etc.

Dimasa Kachari:

The Dimasa Kacharis belong to the Bodo group of people of Assam. Linguistically the Dimasas belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. The original homeland of the Dimasas was in the Western China who migrated in subsequent waves and entered the Brahmaputra valley as well as in the remote hills adjacent to these valleys. The present abode of the Dimasa-Kacharis is confined mainly into the North Cachar Hills District. They are, however, found in small scattered groups in the Karbi Anglong and Cachar districts also. Although the Bodo-Kacharis and the Dimasa-Kacharis refer to the same stock of people there are much differences in their language and customs.

The Dimasas follow the patriarchal system of family structure and as such the father is the head of the family. A Dimasa family generally consists of the head of the family, his wife, unmarried sons and daughters and also his unmarried brothers and sisters. Thus a Dimasa family is unitary in character.

The most outstanding characteristics of the Dimasa social life is the existence of female clans almost parallel to male clans. They have forty male clans and forty two female clans, called *sengphong* and *zuluk* respectively. Both the clans are exogamous. Secondly one can marry in his or her father's clan or mother's clan. While the son belongs to the father's clan, the daughter belongs to the mother's clan.

Marriage by negotiation is the prevailing practice although marriage by capture is also found to be prevalent. The bride price is called *kalti*. Now-a-days this custom is disfavoured by the literate sections of the

Dimasa society. Monogamy is the prevailing practice among the Dimasas. Divorce can be obtained if the *kunang*, the village headman, approves the dissolution of marriage. Widow remarriage is allowed. Levirate and sororate are practiced according to the needs of the occasion.

The birth of a child is an occasion of rejoice. The mother and the baby are segregated from the family member an other villagers till the naval chord of the new born falls off. Two elderly women help the woman at the time of delivery. The purifying ceremony of the women takes place on the day of falling off the navel chord. On this day the two midwives are to be entertained with feasts and other presents.

Death in the family is an occasion of mourning for the family members and the relatives. The Dimasas believe in life hereafter and as such, the performance of the death ceremony for the eternal bliss of the deceased is a must.. The dead body is cremated on the bank of a river or stream. During the performance of the death ceremony, the villagers and the relatives are to be entertained with a grand feast.

The existence of parallel male and female clans in the Dimasa society has great impact on the law of inheritance. The sons inherit the paternal property, which generally consists of real estates, weapons, cash money and the cattle. The daughters inherit the maternal property, which consists of jewellery, clothes and looms with their accessories need by the mother, only. The sons and daughters share the common property of the household, which consists of cooking utensils, bras metal dishes and bowls and other household equipments, equally.

The daughters have no right to inherit the paternal property even if there is no son in the family and similarly maternal property even if there

is no daughter in the family. In such cases the maternal property is inherited by the nearest female relative belonging to the same clan. In the same way, the paternal property is inherited by nearest male relative of the head of the family belonging to the same clan.

The village system is called *nablai* by the Dimasas, which means a cluster of houses. The entire village with its population is called *paji*. As the Dimasas have a tendency to live on the banks of the river and streams, thus almost all the Dimasa villages are found to be situated on the hill slope with river or a stream running by.

The houses have timber superstructure, mud plastered bamboo walls and thatched roofs. The houses are built on ground. In order to protect houses from constantly blowing strong winds, protective bamboo walls, usually almost equal to the heights of the roof tops are erected all round the houses. Erection of protective fencing all round the village boundary with two gates – one at the top and the other at the bottom is a common practice.

Kunang, the traditional headman of the Dimasa village, still wields considerable authority in the village affairs though his authority is threatened by the *Gaobura*, the village headman appointed by the Government. In the discharge of his duties Kunang is assisted by an assistant headman called Dilo. The Kunang assisted by Dilo and the other village elders settles disputes and quarrels, tries cases of thefts, incest's, elopements, etc. and the judgments delivered are binding on the concerned parties. Inter village disputes are settled by the Kunangs and village elders of several villages. When women are involved, the elderly women of the village are also invited to participate in the trial. It may also be mentioned that no community

function in the village can be performed without the approval of the Kunang.

The Dimasas have bachelor's dormitory for unmarried young boys and it is called *nodrang*. The *nodrang* is constructed generally in an accessible place of the village. It is rather a big hall without any partition.

The unmarried young boys sleep inside the *nodrang* at night. Protection of the village from outside attack and also from the attack of wild animals, learning of dance and music, accommodation of guests not belonging to the Dimasa community, learning of traditional arts and crafts are the primary purposes of the institution of *nodrang*. But the functional aspects of *nodrang* have almost lost their significance as the institution itself is at a dying stage.

The religion, at present followed by the Dimasa Kacharis, is rather a mixture of their traditional religion and Hinduism. Six benevolent ancestral gods, namely, Sibrai, Doo Rajo, Naikhu Raja, Waa Raja, Ganying Braiyung and Hamiadao, who are called *madai*, are still worshipped by the Dimasas with great reverence. Of course, Sibrai (Hindu Siva) occupies the highest place and His name is to be uttered first in every worship. They believe that their disease, calamities and sufferings are caused by evil spirits. Before opening up of new *jhum* sites, the evil spirits are to be worshipped so that they might not create any troubles in future by way of scanty rainfall, pest-infection etc. and allow the people to reap a good harvest.

Formerly the entire Dimasa Kingdom was divided into 12 divisions on the basis of the abodes of gods and deities. Each division was called *daikho* and there is still a Dimasa priest called *zonthai* in each *daikho*.

The *kunang*, traditional headman, also plays a very important role in the religious life of Dimasas. He is to worship the clan deity of

the village, which is the ancestral god of the semphong (male clan) who had first established the village. The clan deity is to be propitiated with worship every year without fail.

The Dimasa king Krishna Chandra and his brother Gobinda Chandra formally accepted Hinduism in the year 1790 at Khashpur. But the process of Hinduisation had taken place much earlier. This is evident from the numerous temples and archaeological remains found in their former capitals at Dimapur and Maibong. Anyway, the Dimasas, by and large, had adopted Hinduism. Nevertheless, the Hindu Dimasas still maintain their old religious beliefs and practices and perform the traditional religious rites till to day.

Agriculture is the principal occupation and main source of livelihood of the Dimasa Kacharis. The Dimasas living in the North Cachar Hills practice shifting cultivation commonly known as *jhum*. They also practice wet-land cultivation subject to availability of low lying land. Those living in the plains practice wet cultivation only.

Jhum sites are selected by different families during the months of October and November. Jungles at the jhum sites are felled early in the month of February. The jungles thus felled are burnt to ashes after about a month when they dry up completely. Just before the onset of the monsoon seeds are broadcast on the ashes. In the jhum men and women work equally from the morning till sunset. After raising crops for two to three years, plots are left for growth of vegetation and new plots are again chosen and prepared for jhum.

They raise mixed crops in their *jhums*. Besides paddy, which is the principal item, they cultivate maize, sesame, cotton, chilli; pumpkins,

gourd, ginger, brinjal, castor etc. They also cultivate mustard to a limited extent. Many Dimasa families cultivate pineapple and oranges by terracing the gentle hill slopes.

However, changes have come to the cultivation, method and concept of agriculture due to various recent developments. The frequent demonstrations organized by the Development Block officials and officials from the Agriculture Department have greatly helped the Dimasas to adopt new and improved methods of cultivation.

The Dimasas are in the habit of rearing buffaloes, pigs, goats, fowls and ducks and not cows. Each family is in the possession of 5 to 12 buffaloes and majority of them are she-buffaloes. The buffaloes are reared only for business purpose in the sense that young calves are sold to the traders hailing from the Cachar District. Pigs, goats and birds are reared mainly for domestic consumption and for sacrificing to the deities.

Weaving is an important cottage industry among the Dimasas. In fact every Dimasa girl and woman an expert weaver. A girl without the know-how of weaving can hardly be given in marriage.

Most of the domestic requirement of clothes are met from the family looms. The cloths woven by them are of high artistic design. Rearing of *endi* is another important cottage industry. *Endi* silk is spun and worn at home. Cloths fund surplus to the requirement of family are sold locally.

Manufacturing of bamboo and cane goods is also one of the major cottage industries of the Dimasas. Although in the past the Dimasas had carpenters, blacksmiths and goldsmiths among themselves, now-a-days except carpentry artisans practicing the other trades are practically nil among the Dimasas.

The Dimasas have a very interesting economic institution called *hangsao* based on the principles of co-operation and mutual help. The membership is confined to the youths of the villages. The members of *hangsao* help the villagers in the *jhum* field, in harvesting and many other occasions.

Dimasa economy which is primarily dependent on agriculture is at the subsistence level only and the economic conditions of the people are far from satisfactory the percentage of literacy is very low. Lack of entrepreneurship for self-supporting and self-generating economy has slowed down the pace of economic development.

The Dimasa Kacharis are a culturally rich tribe and they can be rightly proud of their cultural heritage. The remains and relics of the palatial buildings, gateways, ramparts, pillars and numerous temples at Dimapur, Maibang, and Khaspur and also at Kasamari Pathar show clearly the state of cultural development of the Dimasa Kacharis when they were a ruling tribe.

The Dimasa Kacharis are a gay and colourful tribe. Dance and music play an important role in their day-to-day life. They have only five indigenous musical instruments, namely, *khram* (drum), *muri*, *muri wathisa* and *suphin*. They have numerous items of oral folklores and folktales. The songs are generally not sung during dances.

The youths, both boys and girls, perform dances in the accompaniment of *Khram* and *Muni* playing from might fall only to welcome distinguished visitors to their village. This is done to pay their respect to the honoured guests. Dances are performed during the celebration of community festivals *Busu*, *Rajini Gabra* and *Hami Gabra*. The celebration

of the socio-religious festivals Rajini Gabra and Harni Gabra is held once annually before the starting of new cultivation. The former is celebrated during day time only. The kunang, the traditional headman, propitiates his family deity by closing the village gate on the day of the performance of Rajini Gabra. In the same night the function called Harni Gabra is also celebrated. Here the deity Harni is worshipped for the protection and welfare of the people during the coming year. But the celebration of Busu is the gayest and most important of all. Prior to celebration of Busu a specially decorated and artistically designed gate called fangsla is erected at the main entrance to the village.

The Dimasa Kacharis have their traditional dresses and ornaments. For day-to-day use a Dimasa man uses *Pisa* which is generally of deep green colour and about a metre in breadth. Besides a shirt, he also uses an artistically designed scarf called *rinsao*. When he goes out of the village he uses a cotton or *endi* silk turban which is about 19 metres in length. Now-a-days, except rings, a Dimasa man does not wear any ornaments. In the past, of course, they put on silver earrings called *kharch* and silver armlets called *youcher*.

A Dimasa woman puts on a skirt called *rigu* made of cotton or *endi*-silk. It may be white or coloured. An artistically designed scarf called *rijamphai* is used by them to cover the upper part of the body. Another kind of very highly decorative scarf called *rikhaosa* is used by the young girls in dancing.

The Dimasa women are very fond of ornaments. Among the important ornaments they use are necklaces, made of silver pieces and costly sea-shells, earrings made of gold, necklaces made of silver, necklaces made

of silver coins, heavy silver bracelets, nose ring made of silver earrings made of silver and necklaces made of different kinds of beads.

Rice is the staple food of the Dimasas. Rice from the *bora* paddy (a kind of sticky rice) is used for tiffin purpose. Vegetables grown in the jhums as well as in the Kitchen gardens and very often wild roots and leaves are produced from the nearby forest to supplement their food. Rice with vegetables, chilies and occasionally with fish and meat are taken thrice daily in the morning, at noon and in the evening. They drink tea without milk.

The Dimasas hunt wild animals in the forests for different occasions. Deer's meat is a delicacy for them. They eat fowls, pigs, ducks, goats and sometimes buffaloes meat. They take fresh water fish but dried fish is another delicacy of the Dimasas.

The most favourite beverage of the Dimasas is rice beer which they call *zou*. *Zou* is a must for the celebration of all community and religious festivals. Sufficient quantity of *zou* is required for daily domestic consumption of the family members and also to entertain guests.

Sonowal Kacharis:

Demographically the Sonowal Kacharis form the third largest plains tribal group of Assam. They are chiefly found in the district of Dibrugarh. A few Sonowal Kachair villages are found in Lakhimpur, Sibsagar and Jorhat districts also. They belong to the great Bodo group and they trace their close relationship with the Barmans of Cachar district, Boro Kacharis of Lower Assam districts and Dimasas of North Cachar Hills district. In fact it is difficult to draw exclusive ethnic line between the Boro Kacharis and Sonowal Kacharis as both these sections originally came from the same

stock. It is believed that the prefix Sonowal in the name of the tribe came to be used during the reign of the Ahom kings when the Kacharis of Upper Assam took to the trade of gold washers and collectors of gold particles.

The origin of the Kacharis and for that matter the Sonowal Kacharis is shrouded in uncertainties. Even Endle, who spent some years with the Kacharis and published a monograph entitled *The Kacharis* as early as 1911, could not give an exact information in this regard. Opinions differ regarding the origin of the term Sonowal. Some authors opine that the Kacharis who worked with gold (*son*) were known as Sonowals. Sonowals were experts in collecting gold particles from the sands of the river Suwansiri. According to the Reports on the Administration of Assam 1892-93 and 1901-1902, the rivers of Assam which yielded gold were those of the old Darrang and Lakhimpur districts. Gold washing was done by a guild known as Sonowal khel.

There are many myths and legends regarding the conversion of the Kacharis into Sarania. As a result today very few tribal traits are noticed in the community. Dalton's description of the Kacharis (Saranias) fit well with that of the Sonowal Kacharis.

By and large, the social structure of the Sonowal Kacharis has marked similarities with that of any other non-tribal communities of the neighbouring villages. The Goanbura or the village headman is the keyman of the village who is entrusted with the day to day village administration. Besides the Gaonbura there are other office bearers, namely Barik, Pathek, Asirbadia bura, Gitghai, Medhi, Tamuli and Randhani. There is specific assignment for each office bearer. The Bayan is a special instructor who imparts training to others in the art of religious dance sequences. The

namghar is also the center of solving disputes of the villagers. Complaints regarding anything social or religious are brought before the village elders who deliver judgment and punish the offenders. Ex-communication is considered to be the severest form of punishment the village elders can inflict upon any villager for a serious crime.

Agriculture is the sole means of their livelihood. They are wet cultivators and *sali* and *ahu* paddy are grown in their fields. Besides paddy, they grow mustard, potatoes, sweet potatoes, different kinds of pulses and vegetables mainly for local consumption.

Rice is the staple food of the Sonowals. They take all kinds of vegetables and pulses. Their great delicacies are fish, mutton and chicken. They do not take pork nor they rear pigs. Rice beer is locally prepared by a few families and the people take it occasionally now-a-days, however, the consumption of rice beer is restricted and educated sections prefer tea to rice beer. They use special variety of rices called *komal chaol* and *bora chaol* as snacks (which are used by other non tribal people also).

The dresses of the Sonowal Kacharis of both male and female are similar to those worn by other non-tribal caste-Hindu Assamese men and women. Almost every house possesses a loom.

A typical Sonowal Kachari house has much similarity with that of the non-tribal house in rural areas of Assam. They construct separate shades for cattle, ducks and poultries. The granary is constructed toward eastern direction and in a corner in front of the house. Every household must possess a spacious courtyard for thrashing and processing paddy and the campus is neatly maintained. Almost all the families have their *basti* lands. The houses have apartments and the first room is used as a drawing room to which outsiders have easy access.

Co-operation is the salient feature of their social life. Whether harvesting paddy or constructing or renovating a house of an individual family, all the villagers co-operate. Both male and female are very laborious. Just as men folk are experts not only in agriculture but also in other household chores like house building, gardening etc., similarly the womenfolk are also experts in their own fields. The womenfolk help their men in the fields, weave clothes and prepare meals for all the members of the family. Unity is scrupulously maintained and inter family dispute are amicably settled in the village. The youths play active role in the smooth running of the individual or community festive or religious occasions. Though women don't take active part in the village council or *mel*, she doesn't hesitate in making her voice heard or her opinion felt.

A Sonowal Kachari family consist of a nucleus of father and mother with their children. Both nuclear and joint family systems are prevalent. The eldest male member of a family runs the house. He is highly regarded and his orders are not violated. The division of labour between the sexes is scrupulously observed and both the man and woman accept the traditional pattern without any question.

The system of inheritance is matrilineal. The land belongs to the family and the head of the family is the owner of the lands. After the death of the father the land is divided equally among the sons. The house is considered as immovable property and after the death of the father generally the eldest son becomes the owner of the house.

The Sonowal Kacharis are divided into seven exogamous clans (Bangshas) viz – Bali Khitiari, Chiri Puiya, Amarabamiya, Dhulial, Ujani Kuchiya, Namani Kuchiya and Tipamilya. These clans are again subdivided

into fourteen sub-clans or *khels*. Except on marriage occasions, reference to clans is hardly made.

The Sonowal Kacharis feel that an unmarried man is socially incomplete and therefore marriage is considered as indispensable for the adult boys and girls. Marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited. Monogamy is the general rule and the second wife is taken only after the death of the first wife. Having more than one wife is accepted by the society if one can afford to maintain a big family. Polyandry is quite unknown although divorce, widow remarriage can be made effective if the parties so desire.

The Sonowal Kacharis, have four distinct forms of marriage viz. (a) *nowa dhowa or bor biya* (ii) *hom biya* (iii) *gandharba biya* and (iv) *churchuria or rabha sarakai diya*. The widely prevalent form of marriage is Gandharba Biya where the couple concerned takes the initiative. Bride price was present in all the types of marriage in the past. But now-a-days it is charged only in the gandharba form of marriage. There is no fixed rate for the bride price.

The Sonowal Kacharis are devout followers of 'Mahapurushiya Baisnav Dharma' (Vaishnavism of the Mahapurushiya sect). All the Sonowals are the disciples of Aunianti Satra with the only exception of a few Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur district who owe allegiance to the Sesa Satra. Among the tribe there are mainly two religious divisions – Saraniya and Bhajania.

Although Vaisnavism has taken its roots deep into the heart of the Sonowal Kacharis, yet the people maintain much of their traditional religious beliefs and practices. Like other Kacharis, the Sonowals, also worship Lord Shiva in the form of bathou. Bathou puja is observed in the month of *Phagun* or *Chot*. A kind of religious song called haidang is sung

during the puja which contains historical significance about the Sonowal Kachari community. They also worship household deities such as Bura Poha, Saragdeo puja, Pir Diya, Morak Diya and Lakhimi Diya.

The village *namghar* (prayer hall) is the place for observing various kinds of religious ceremonies like Janmastami, *tithis* of Sri Sankaradeva and Sri Madhavadeva, Lakhimi Sabah, Norasiga Sabah etc. The womenfolk observe Ai Sabah, Apeswara Sabah at the *namghar* to appease the female deities.

The most important festival of the Sonowal Kacharis is the Rongali Bihu which starts on the *sankranti* of the month of *Chot* and continues for a fortnight. It is considered as the traditional community festival. Singing and dancing of the young boys and girls in separate groups and merry making is the essence of this festival.

Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu, the two other bihus, are also observed by the Sonowal Kacharis.

• **The Barmans of Cachar:**

The Barmans are one of the plains tribes of Assam inhabiting the Barak Valley. Regarding the origin of the Barmans there are different views. However the widely accepted view is that the Barmans are originally Dimasas. In all probability when the Dimasas, who on shifting the capital from Maibong in the N.C. Hills migrated to the plains of Cachar, had come into contact with the Hindu people and the Brahminical priests. This ultimately led to accept Hinduism and to declare themselves to be Khatriyas. At this stage perhaps, the Dimasas started calling themselves Barmans to distinguish them from other section of the Cachar is living in the hills and following their traditional religion. Though they had the same origin at

present from the point of view of their material culture and religion, the Barmans have much differences with the Dimasas of N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong. Linguistically thus the Barmans of Cachar belong to the Tibeto-Burman group.

The Barmans of Cachar follow the patriarchal system of family structure. The father is the head of the family and the line of descent is traced through the father only. Barmans of Cachar, on the other hand prefer the joint family structure. Like Dimasas, the Barmans also have 40 male clans called Semphong and 42 female clan called Julu. These clans, both male and female, are exogamous.

Marriage by negotiation is the prevailing practice although marriage by capture is not totally absent. But such marriages have to be regularized at a sooner or later period.

The Barmans barring one or two customs have completely given up the traditional Dimasa system of marriage and have accepted the Brahminical Hindu system. They follow monogamy. Divorce is rather rare. Another important thing that is observed in case of the Barmans of Cachar is the absence of widow remarriage, while it is possible among the Dimasas.

The birth of a child, be it a male or female is an occasion of joy for the family. The mother and the baby are separated from the other family members till the naval chord falls and the purification ceremony is performed.

The Barmans cremate the dead, bodies who die without arriving at the teething age, are only buried. The Barmans believe in life hereafter and rebirth of the deceased in the same family. Among them the death rituals must be performed on the 13th day from the date of death in the Hindu way

where the services of the Brahmin priest are required. Again at the end of the year the annual sradha ceremony is to be performed.

The customary law of inheritance of the Barmans is somewhat peculiar in nature because of the existence of two parallel clans – i.e., the male and female clans. Thus they have two types of properties – father's property – inherited only by the sons and mothers property inherited only by the daughters. If a person leaves no male or female issues behind, the property will be inherited by the nearest male or female member of the clan respectively.

The village system of a community depends to a considerable extent on the ecology and environment, which also include the habitat of the neighbouring people. The habitats of the Barmans are just like the habitat of the neighbouring Bengali people. Their houses are quite big and spacious and the front side of each house is found either towards east or towards the south. Every family has a kitchen garden also. The wells to do families have ponds also for drinking water purpose.

The houses are built with timber posts and thatch is used for roofing. The main houses have three to four chambers with provisions for kitchen. Granaries for storing paddy, cowsheds, goat sheds and duck sheds are constructed separately.

The traditional village leadership headed by Kunang (headman) and assisted by Diko has now been replaced by modern leaders. The Barmans don't have the bachelor's dormitory system.

The Barmans of Cachar are Hindus. All the gods and goddesses of the Sakta sect that are worshipped by the other Hindus are also worshipped by them. The services of the Brahmins are indispensable. But at the same

time, it is also hardly possible on the part of a people who had been following their traditional religion from time immemorial to give up completely some of the traditional religions rituals and beliefs in ghosts, evil spirits, etc. Moreover Lord Siva or Sibrai who is their principal deity in the traditional religion still plays an important role in their religious life.

The primary occupation of the Barmans of Cachar is agriculture. Since they have been living in the plains area, they are settled cultivators. Besides vice they also cultivate crops like cotton, mustard, sugarcane, sweet potatoes and vegetables.

Among the subsidiary occupations mention may be made of employment in government offices, schools, both primary and secondary, in police and defense services, weaving, sericulture, poultry farming, animal husbandry, manufacturing of cane and bamboo mats and other articles. Rearing *endi* is a common sight among the Barmans and it is rather one of the major sources of income.

The Barmans brew rice beer for domestic consumption. They also brew distilled liquor for sale and is one of the major sources of their income.

Like the Dimasas of N.C. Hills, the Barmans of Cachar also have a very interesting system of mutual help and co-operation which is called *hedari* or *biba*. When a particular family finds it difficult to cultivate its land, transplant paddy seedlings or to harvest paddy in the field in time due to some unavoidable reasons, the head of the family concerned approaches the village headman for help to be extended through the youths of the village to do the job. The concerned family, of course, has to entertain the youths with food and drink.

Although the mother-tongue of the Barmans is Dimasa, nevertheless, due to the influence of the Bengali people, the present language spoken by them is Dimasa with frequent inclusion of Bengali words.

The Barmans of Cachar have almost given up their traditional dance and music. In the case of dresses and ornaments the Barmans uses the traditional one. Rice is the staple food. Fish constitutes an important food item.

The Tai-Buddhistic Tribal Groups of Assam:

There are five Tai-Buddhistic tribal communities living in small pockets scattered in various upper Assam districts and some contiguous areas of Karbi Anglong. They are – the Tai Khamtis (the majority of them live in Arunachal Pradesh), the Tai-Khamyangs, the Tai-Phakes, the Tai Turungs and the Tai Aitons. Although they are late comers in the sense they came here much after the Ahoms, they have become an integral part of the socio-cultural make-up of the state. Most of them still speak the Tai language among themselves while, some have adapted Assamese as their mother tongue. Even the Tai speakers are bi-lingual, they not only speak fluent Assamese but also received their education through the Assamese medium. They practice the Hinayana sect of Buddhism and still have links with the religious centers of that faith situated in Myanmar. They practice wet rice cultivation and are good at weaving and other crafts. They live in houses with raised platforms resting on bamboo or wooden piles. Their social life is very much guided by their religion which has given them a distinctive kind of refinement. Each village has a *vihara* (locally called *bapusang*) to which every family and individual is attached while images of the Buddha are placed on the main altar, the walls and posts of the *vihara* structure are adorned with various

hangings, festoons etc. Buddhistic manuscripts, written in the Pali and Tai languages (some of them with paintings and illustrations) are preserved in *vihara* premises. Various festivals and ceremonies connected with the faith are observed throughout the year. Although they are literate in the sense that they have their own script only a trained section know how to read and write. They have a rich body of verbal folklore much of which is influenced by the moral teachings of the Jatakas and other Buddhistic holy books.

The Naga Tribal Groups:

Rengma Nagas: Though originally migrated from Nagaland, the Rengmas of Assam has now settled in the Karbi Anglong of Assam. J.P. Mills classified Rengma Nagas into three different groups – (1) the southern section of the western Rengmas, (2) the northern section of the western Rengmas and (3) the eastern Rengmas. These three groups speak three different dialects. According to the experts the Rengmas of Karbi Anglong belonged to the southern section of the western Rengmas because of their dialectical similarity.

According to J.P. Mill's view, formerly there were severe type of feuds among the different Naga tribes. There were frequent raids, head-hunting etc. The Rengma Nagas, being a smaller groups, probably were subjected to all sorts of harassment. This might induce the Rengma chiefs to migrate into Karbi Anglong along chiefs to migrate into Karbi Anglong along with their friends and followers.

The Rengma Nagas of Karbi Anglong are divided into eight exogamous clans as follows: Kenpuvnyu, Kanrjnyu, Resobinyu, Tisenbinyu, Sabinyu, Nyenthinyu, Nangdunyu and Henbunyu. These eight clans are exogamous.

Although marriage by capture was a more or less common practice, at present it is practically obsolete. At present almost all marriages are performed through negotiations. As soon the marriage is settled, the youth has to serve in the farms of the would be parents-in-laws for one year. But if he happens to belong to a rich family, he can avoid this free physical labour to his would be parents-in-law by offering animals like pigs, fowls and cows as bride-price to them. Earlier mithuns used to play a great role in the fixing of bride-price.

The Rengma Nagas of Karbi Anglong follow monogamy. Of course there is no bar to polygamy in their society. Divorce, although permissible under the customary rules, is very rare. Widow remarriage is allowed provided they pursue the rule of exogamy in fact. At the death of the elder brother, the younger brother can marry the widowed sister-in-law. But under no circumstances the widow of the younger brother can be married by the elder brother.

Another significant thing of the Rengma Nagas is the absence of cross-cousin marriage, which is very much preferred by many tribal societies of this region.

A Rengma Naga family consists of the husband and wife their unmarried sons and daughters unmarried brothers and sisters of the head of the family also generally live in the same house and regarded as the members of the same family. After marriage, the male members whether a brother or son starts living in a separate house.

The Rengma Nagas follow the patriarchal system of residence and their line of descent is traced through the male line. The father is the head of the family. Next to him in terms of authority comes the eldest son.

According to the law of inheritance, the eldest son inherits the paternal property at the death of his father and has to share the property equally among all his brothers. If the deceased leaves no male issue his property is inherited by the nearest male relative of his clan.

After the birth of a child the parents of the new-born have to observe *genna* for nine days continuously. During this period they are completely segregated from the whole community. On the tenth day a small feast has to be offered to the villagers and relatives. If the baby is male, a cock is sacrificed, and in case of female a hen is sacrificed and the people pray for the health and prosperity of the child.

Like birth, in case of death also nine days *genna* has to observe by the family members. The body is buried at the burial place of the village by digging a grave led by the oldest man of the clan to which the deceased belonged. During the nine days of *genna*, the deceased has to be offered the due share of the principal food and every day his share has to keep in a bundle wrapped with plantain leaf. On the tenth day these bundles have to be offered to the deceased at his/her grave. After this offering a number of stone slabs will be laid over the grave. On this day, a feast has to be offered to the villagers and who attended the burial ceremony. The offering feast marks the closing of death ceremony.

The Rengma Nagas of Assam who reside within the jurisdiction of Kari Anglong have embraced Christianity. Before conversion they believed in a number of gods and goddesses. Among them *Terunyu* was the highest god and worshipped once in a year by sacrificing pigs, fowls and oxen. Among the household gods and goddesses, *Nichagyu* (god of wealth) and *Nichagyi* (goddess of wealth) were worshipped by each family. The Rengma Nagas

don't have any priest among them. The observance of *genna* is a very important factor in the religious life of the Rengma Nagas.

Like many other tribes, the Rangma Nagas of Karbi Anglong also have their bachelors' dormitory. In Rengma dialect it is called *rensi*.

Here the boys are trained and taught their duties for future life. The senior most and most experienced boy is the leader of the *rensi*. It is his duty to impart training on the junior ones. The juniors have to serve him by fetching water, making his bed etc. Besides rendering joint labour they also organize feasts, picnics, fishing and hunting expeditions etc. There is no such dormitory for the young unmarried girls of the Rengmas of Karbi Anglong.

Agriculture is the main-stay. Like all other hill, tribes they also practice jhumming. In their *jhum* fields they produce rice, maize, cotton, chilies, ginger, castor, gourds, pumpkins etc. They are good horticulturists also.

The women are expert spinners and weavers. The family loom serves most of the domestic requirements of cloths. Women also share strenuous jobs with their males.

The Rengma Nagas of Karbi Anglong perform a number of ceremonies that are connected with their cultivation. Those are –

- (1) *Nyada* – celebrated to mark the end of the agricultural year.
- (2) *Pipe* – to perform to get rid of all the evils of the preceding year.
- (3) *Lotsung Nga* – it is connected with the clearing of burnt woods from jhum land.
- (4) *Khong Kepang Kennyu* – to mark the first harvesting of paddy.

The elderly people still use *nzanyan* – the loin cloth, a head gear called *pihu* and a scarf called *phehong* (used by the young people) and *tadu* (used by the elderly people). Women put on *ginhu* and *pherhe* just like skirts. To cover the upper part of the body the women put on decorated *phehong*. Of course now-a-days both men women use modern dresses.

Various ornaments made of cane, silver, sea shells, various kinds of beads, zinc, brass etc. are used by the Rengma Nagas.

In Rengma dialect *phen* means a village and *kalo* means a house. The houses are built on raised platforms. The houses in a Rengma village are constructed in the rows facing each other. A village may have number of houses. The village headman is called *Songpegyu*. *Songpegyu* and *Peninyu* (medicine-man) are the most important and respected persons of the village. The law and order in the village rests with these two persons.

The Rengma villages of the Karbi Anglong district are situated more or less in isolated pockets. Now-a-days they are linked with motorable roads.

The Zeme Nagas:

The villages inhabited by Zeme Nagas in the North Cachar hills district in the Barail ranges starting from the boundaries of Nagaland and Manipur to Maibong and the river Kapili. Sometimes the Zemes are equated with the term Zeliangrong which is only partially true Zeliangrong is rather a common term which is used to denote three kinds of tribes viz., Zeme or Zomei, Lvangmei and Rongmei.

The migration of a section of the Zemes to the North Cachar Hills is not so old. In the 18th century, they migrated to the North Cachar

Hills via Manipur and settled down in the North-eastern part, the present North Cachar Hills district. The Zemes inhabiting the N.C. Hills district has a peculiar system of migration, which can be regarded as cycle migration. Perhaps topography of the Barail range is itself responsible for it. Land suitable for jhumming is found in scattered patches only. When in course of time a stretch becomes exhausted, the entire village or a part of the village is shifted to one of its pre-selected sites.

The Zemes of N.C. Hills follow the patriarchal system of family structure. As such father is the head of the family and the line of descent is traced through the male line only. They have the nuclear type of family. However, the joint family system is also not totally absent. In a Zeme family, next to the father, the eldest son exercises his power.

The Zemes of the N.C. Hills have six clans of equal status. They are Npame, Nkuame, Heneume, Nriame, Sogame and Panme. These clans are exogamous.

Marriage by negotiation is the prevailing practice among the Zeme Nagas. The parents of the boys are required to take initiative in case of negotiated marriage. Payment of bride price is a must. It may, however, be paid either in cash or in kind or in both.

On the day of marriage the bridegroom takes an oath before the village priest and the other villagers present to the effect that he would keep the bride as his wife during his life in this world. Divorce called *kalak sakbe* is permissible with the approval of the village council presided over by the village headman. Cross-cousin marriage is a preferential one.

At the time of delivery, the elderly and experienced women of the village help the mother. On the sixth day the baby is taken out of

the four walls of the house and shown to the sun. Shaving of head is also done on this day. The purification ceremony of the mother and the newborn baby takes place on the 11th day by sacrificing a cock in case of a male child and a hen in case of a female child in presence of the village elders. It is expected that such a sacrifice would ensure a better life of the child in this world.

In the Zeme society death is regarded as a natural process from which none can escape. They believe in life hereafter. The dead body is bathed and new cloths are put and offer food and drink – and then buried in a grave in front of the house along with the articles used by the deceased while he/she was alive. A flat stone slab with some marking is then placed on the grave as a symbol of identification of the grave of the deceased. The death ceremony is performed with the help of the village priest at the completion of one year by offer in a feast to the villagers.

The Zeme Nagas have the patriarchal system of family structure. According to the customary law prevailing among the Zemes, only the eldest son inherits the father's property and in return has to look after his younger brothers and sisters till they come of age and get themselves married.

The Zeme Naga villages are found to be located in the breezy hilltops. Due to frequent village raids by other Naga groups, the villages situated at the hilltops provided a better defence strategy. The houses are constructed on the ground with timbers and bamboo with thatched roofs in two rows keeping sufficient open space between the rows. While constructing their houses, the direction in which the wind blows constantly is always taken into account. The technology used in the construction of the Zeme houses is simply marvelous.

The each Zeme village within the jurisdiction of the N.C. Hills, there is a village council which is entrusted with various important works like the maintenance of law and order, trial of cases and disputes observance of community and village festivals, selection of jhum sites and son on. The village council is headed by the village headman called *matai*.

The *morung* or youth dormitory of the Zeme Nagas of the N.C. Hills by itself is unique in nature and perhaps it is the outstanding aspect of their social life. In Zeme dialect the boys' dormitory is called *hangseukia* and the girls' dormitory is called *leosenki*. Each Zeme village in the N.C. Hills district has two or three *morungs* for the boys and girls respectively. As soon as a child is born it becomes a member of one of the *morung* depending on the sex and the acceptance of an egg offered by the parents by the members of one of the *morungs*.

The boys *morungs* present a very spectacular sight and they are the most beautiful and gorgeous buildings in the village.

There is an owner-cum- care-taker for each of the boys *morungs* who lives with his family at end of the *morung* in a spacious room, must be an experienced and capable man who can command the members of a *hangseuki* on all occasions. This ownership is hereditary and the youngest son succeeds the father. He has a high social status and is held in high esteem by the entire people of the village.

The *leosenkis*, or girls' dormitories are not constructed like the boys' ones. The girls may select any house of any person for this purpose. The girls work in their respective fields during the day time and use the dormitory for sleeping at night. The owner of the house and his wife act as their guardians at night only. The girls' *morung* is also a training ground for singing, dancing, spinning and weaving.

As a corporate body the morung of the boys serve many public work. Thus as a traditional tribal institution, the morung system of the Zeme Nagas of the N.C. Hills district is unique in character.

The Zeme Nagas believe in one supreme God whom they call tingwang. It is this God who guides the other deities benevolent as well as malevolent. Therefore, tingwang is worshipped in order to protect them selves from all kinds of epidemics and evil spirits. They also worship suhprai the god of crops. On the day of full moon the Zeme Nagas following traditional religion observe genna. A section of the Zeme Nagas of N.C. Hills has already embraced Christianity.

Agriculture, based on shifting cultivation is the livelihood of the Zeme Nagas of the N.C. Hills. Besides paddy, they raise maize, millets, ginger, brinjals, sweet gourds, oil seeds and vegetables also. Cotton is also grown by them in the hill slopes. The Zemes of N.C. Hills have three types of land, the land owned by the kadepeo, the land-lord, land owned by the six clans and land owned by the community.

Weaving in loin looms with yarns from home grown cotton is a very important cottage industry, among the Zeme Nagas. Their cloths are ful of intricate designs and are very beautiful. The Zemes rear mithuns, cows, pigs, goats and birds. These are reared mostly for the purpose of meeting requirements for domestic consumption.

The Zeme Nagas of the N.C. Hills observe a number of community festivals which are more or less connected with their primary occupation of agriculture. Two of the important festivals celebrated by them are – meleibambe and siami. Singing and dancing are a part and parcel of the Zeme life. They have only a few musical instruments of their own.

Kuki and Hmar:

Kukis and Hmar who are now found in the two hill districts of Assam are comparatively recent settlers. Their concentration is to be found in Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. In respect of social organization, religious beliefs and practices, language and folklore, dresses and performances they have much in common with the Mizo group of tribes. At one time they were treated as integrally related to the Lushais who are today known as Mizos. For instance the famous Monograph of T. Shakespear published in 1912 bears the title *The Lushia Kuki Clans*. However, both the Kukis and the Hmars to day claim to be separate and distinct ethnic groups.

Hajongs:

An Indo Mongoloid tribe belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family, the Hajongs have lost much of their original tribal characteristics in terms of religion language and other aspects of social and cultural life. They have been deeply influenced by Chatanya Vaishnavism and speak a language that is basically Indo-Aryan and is akin to the west Goalpara dialect of Assamese.

Tribes Basically Belonging to Neighbouring Hill States:

As indicated earlier tribal people basically belonging to adjoining hill states of Arunachal and Meghalaya are found in pockets along the borders of Assam with the concerned states. We are giving below certain basic information in respect of them.

The Khasi-Jaintias:

The Khasi-Jaintias were formerly treated as one single community. But over the years the Jaintias have established an identity distinct from that of the Khasis. Known also as sintengs, they now identify

themselves as pners. Indo Mongoloid in physical features both of them speak a language of the Austric affiliation of the Mon-Khmer family, both the societies are Matrilineal, inheritance passing through the female line. However, in respect religious beliefs and practices there are clear differences between the two communities. The pners or Jaintias have been influenced by Hinduism to a considerable extent while among the Khasis, although some evidences of contact with Hinduism are discernable, Christianity has been a more potent force.

Their traditional houses are bamboo, timber and thatch structure with raised platform. They are good craftsman in bamboo and wood. However, the art of weaving is hardly practiced. Both of the groups have a rich bodies of folklore material. The biggest festival of the Khasis is nongkhrem while in the case of the pners it is behdiemkhlam. Agriculture is the mainstay and jhumming is practiced by both of them.

The Garos:

The Garos have their concentration in the Garo hills area of Meghalaya but there are some Garo villages in the foothill areas within Assam. They belong to the great Bodo family and speak a Tibeto-Burman language akin to Bodo and Rabha. They also depend on jhumming for the production of rice and other crops including pineapple, maize, cotton, some oil seeds etc. They follow a matrilineal system of social structure and inheritance. Although a sizeable proportion of the Garos have been Christised traditional religious believes and practices are still followed by a large section. The traditional Garo houses are normally of the platform type. The institution of youth dormitory known as nokphante has an important position in the society. Garo folklore is considerably rich particularly in epic lore.

Wangala is the biggest Garo festival which comes after the harvest.

Some tribal populations in small numbers basically belonging to Arunachal Pradesh are also found in some of the bordering districts of Assam. Such as the Tangsas, Singphous and the Nishis are found within the territory of Assam.

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Note: The works from which the information given in this chapter has been collected are listed below:

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CHAPTER - 3

THE FIVE TRIBES UNDER STUDY

The five selected tribes which, we have studied are the Misings, the Deuris, the Tiwas, the Karbis and the Rabhas. We are now giving below the general account of each of the tribes.

The Mising (Miri):

The Mising is one of the major tribes in Assam. They are spread over a number of districts, especially in upper and central Assam. The districts with considerable Mising concentration are Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh and Sonitpur. Inhabiting the riverine tracts along the banks of the rivers Subansiri, Siyang, Dihing, Dibong, Dhansiri, Bhoroli and Buroi as well as the mighty Brahmaputra. Integration and assimilation of the Misings have been consistently at work in the making of composite Assamese culture.

The Misings, who are popularly known as Miri, until recent times were listed as a plains tribe of the state. There are controversies regarding their name and origin. Tracing back into antiquity, no mention of a land or people singularly known as 'Miri' or 'Mising' could be identified. The word *Miri* had its first appearance in all probability in the devotional writings of Sri Shankardeva and Sri Madhavadeva - the two great Neo-Vaishnavite savants of the 15th-16th century Assam. For example:

"*Kirata, Kachari, Khasi, Garo, Miri*

Yavana, Kanka Gowala". (Sankardava, *Bhagavata*, Canto II).

Although the original home of the Misings is not definitely known, yet it is agreed by all that the Misings had been inhabitants of the hills prior to their migration to the plains. As with their original habitat, there is much controversy about the name of the tribe itself, i.e., Miri as well as Mising. Some of the much known interpretations are as follows :

- (a) According to one interpretation the Misings introduce themselves as *miri* which means "We are good people, (mi = human being, yasing = fair/good) and non-Misings as Mipak meaning bad people (kipag = bad/not good like us). (Kagyung 1970).
- (b) Another view suggests that the term Miri has come from Miru or Miri meaning priest who played a significant role in their society (Pegu, 1981).
- (c) The word *mirgo* (a hunt) was suggested as the origin of the term Miri. There is no doubt that they were good hunters and used to supplement their diet with rich games of hunt. But the assumption that the term Miri derived from Mirgo appears to be an imagination stretched too far and hence it received little attention.
- (d) E.A. Gait, the noted British historian, suggests that Miri means 'go-between'. He seems to evolve the idea from A. Mackenzie.
- (e) Apart from these, C.V. Furer Haimendorf also gave his views regarding the origin of the term Mising as well as their original habitat, from his field data. In his *Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh* he wrote, "According to R.C.R. Cumming, there are

within the Minyong tribe two social classes known as Mishings and Mipak. The origin and nature of these classes is not at all clear and neither my own field notes nor the account of other observers provide any real clue. A myth which I recorded in the village of Roting and which describes the two divisions runs as follows:

When the Minyongs first came out of the earth they strangled a huge mithan called Khosung. After they had cut up the mithan they sat down in a circle, each clan in its own place and shared out the meat. All clan received shares, except the clans of Dupak, Gao and Messar, for whom no meat was left. Therefore, these clans were called mipak. In the old times Misings and Mipak did not inter-marry, for if a Mising consorted with a Mipak he (or she) as well as any children from the union became Mipak."

Ethnically the Misings belong to the same stock as the Adis, the Nishis, the Apatanis and Hill Miris of Siyang and Subansiri regions of Arunachal Pradesh and must have once lived in close proximity to these groups. All of them are collectively referred to as the Tani group of communities. There is a persistent and widely prevalent tradition among the Misings, which proves that they were once hill-men. Quite a number of legends and folklore material current among them are concerned with why and how they had come down to the plains at different times in successive hordes.

The language of the Misings is identical to that of the Adis of the Siyang valley of Arunachal. According to the *Linguistic Survey of India*, the Mising-Adi languages belong in general to the North Assam group

of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. The Misings and the Adis have no alphabet to their own. A story is told about their loss of alphabet. God gave alphabets to mankind in the beginning of the world and the Mising had their alphabet written on a deer skin. As time passed, due to frequent internecine feud and change of habitation, their ancestors became worried about the safety of the alphabet and they decided to consume it in order to protect it. Later on they realized and repented for the deed.

The Mising-Adi language has the characteristics of some special vowels sounds. Another interesting feature of Mising-Adi language is the dropping of the first syllable in forming compound word from two words having two syllables. Though the Mising-Adi language has no script of their own, it abounds in oral literature. They have a special kind of oral tradition called *abang*; - it has come down from generation to generation to tell the history of their remote past.

The Misings have several sub-groups, which are apparently indistinguishable, like Pagro, Delu, Shyang, Dambuk, Oyan, Moying, Samuguria, Tamar, Somua and Bihia. Of all these, the Pagro forms the largest single group, the Moying probably coming next to them. The Bankual and Tirang do not truly constitute groups by themselves, as they are very small in numbers.

The social structure of the Misings in many respect resemble that of the Adis of Arunachal Pradesh. The *Kebang*, a committee of village elders, generally with one member from each family was the supreme body within their social structure and played a significant role in their traditional set up. Complaint regarding anything, social or otherwise, were brought to the notice of the village *Kebang*. The *Kebang* delivered judgment and punish

the offenders depending upon the nature of the offences. The punishments ranged from simple reprimand, imposition of fine in cash or kind to bodily thrashing and excommunication. If controversy arose between two villages, the matter was brought to the notice of the Kebang of several villages that took part in deliberations, but the final judgment was delivered always by a jury consisting of several elders selected for the purpose. The meetings of the Kebang were held in the public hall called *murong*. Traditionally each village has got a *murong* which is primarily the youth dormitory and is also used as public meeting place.

Another important institution of Mising society is Meimber-Yame, a committee of the young men and women. It is primarily an organization of the unmarried girls after attaining puberty and young men-married or otherwise within the age group of 15 to 25 years. For proper running of the institution some members are selected as leaders - they are called-Bora, Dekabora, Tiribora etc. the Bora or the Chief is selected from among the able and smart young men or otherwise having a good parentage. The Meimber Yame renders help to the villagers through various services in constructing a house, weeding out paddy fields, clearing jungle or harvesting.

As in all other societies, among the Misings also family is the smallest social unit. The family consists of, as a rule, the husband and the wife, their children and the old dependent parents. They have patrilocal residence and practice patrilineal descent and inheritance. The properties inherited are managed by the father, or the eldest son in the absence of his father, as long as all the brothers remain in a joint family. The property as a rule is divided into equal shares for all the brothers. Usually the parents

reside with the youngest son and therefore he gets an extra share which is meant for the parents.

The kinship terms of reference and terms of address of various relatives give a clear picture of their kinship system. As for instance, the term *Kakiu* is used to denote mother's brother, father's sisters husband, and father of both husband and wife. This reflects that cross-cousin marriage is a preferential type among the Misings. Similarly, the kinship system gives the idea about their consideration regarding various kinsmen, For instances those whom they consider as close kin or for how many generations they consider their relatives as close kins.

In the Mising kinship system, *Aprin* or *Apin* plays a very important and significant role. The term 'clan'; which is used to designate the Hindu Gotra system can be considered as equivalent to *Apin* or *Aprin*. Of course, the exact English or Assamese equivalent of the term *Apin* is yet to be determined. Although a large section of the Mising population have adopted Hinduism, however, they have retained their traditional clan system. Like Hindu Gotra, where the name of the *Gotra* is associated with the name of Rishi or hermit, among the Misings also the *Aprin* is named after a deity of their traditional lore and all the members of a particular *Aprin* believe that they are descendents of that deity and therefore they are related by blood and like brothers and sisters.

The Misings believe that there is one creator of the whole universe and therefore in calculating the *Aprin* they try to trace from the creator of the universe upto their *Aprin*. In the long past they traces several generations within one's own *Aprin* but now-a-days they can trace at least fourteenth generation as it is compulsory for various rituals especially at the time of observing death rites of the parents.

There are some sub-groups also within an apron. Sometimes difference between an Aprin (clan), a sub clan, a lineage get mixed up and give a confusing picture. Therefore exogamy is the only reliable parameter to determine a aprin or clan as well as sub-clan. Clan exogamy is especially maintained through marriage. A boy of a particular clan cannot marry a girl of the same clan bearing a similar surname. However, they tend to be endogamous as regards to groups. A boy of a particular group generally limits his selection of bride amongst a marriageable clans belonging to his own group, though marriage between clans of different groups are not prohibited. As we have mentioned earlier cross-cousin marriage is prevalent among the Misings and it is prescribed by the society. As a rule, the Misings are monogamous, but polygamy or having more than one wife is not treated as sacrilege and branch of social law provided that he could afford the luxury of such big family.

Men having two wives are not uncommon, but having more than two wives is rare.

The Misings can get married in three different ways, but only the ceremonial wedding is credited as Midang. The other two forms are referred to as - (i) Dugla-lanam or marriage by elopement, (ii) Kumna-Sola-Lanam or marriage by informal negotiation. Divorce is not so common among the Misings. Instances of junior levirate and sororate are found and accepted by the society.

As we have already mentioned, it is needless to say that the culture and the beliefs of the Misings are closely related to that of the Adis of Siyang valley most fundamentals of their beliefs are identical and can be traced back to the early day of human evolution. To understand and

appreciate the religious attitude of the Misings, it is found profitable to go for their myths of creation.

According to one of their myths, Sedi-Babu (Father Sedi) and Melo Nane (Mother Melo) were the creator of all animate and inanimate objects of the world. Sedi and Melo are conceived by the Misings as the earliest worldly beings representing male and female principles.

Keyum is considered to be the prime mover of creation. S. Roy summarizes Keyum as a curious mixture of paradoxical concepts of existence and non-existence as approximation of nothingness.

To some Donyi and Polo, the twin sons of Pedong, are those to whom the luminous eyes of Irmymbote were grafted. But the Misings believe that Donyi and Polo sprang directly from Sedi and Melo along with Doying-Babu and remained aloof as the custodian of law and truth and traditions respectively.

Misings refer to Donyi as Ane-Donyi, a female cosmic principle and Polo as Abu Polo- a male cosmic principle in the scheme of the universe. As the custodian of law and truth and blessings of Donyi and Polo is invoked in the beginning of all Kebangs and other solemn functions. The Misings take pride in introducing themselves as the descendants in the line of Donyi and Polo and believe that nothing can be concealed from the luminous eyes of Donyi and Polo and he who ever tries to do so will sure to meet his doom.

Tani or Abotani (Father Tani) is conceived as the first 'man' by them. A Abotaro (Father Taro) was his brother. The Misings and the Adis called themselves as Tani meaning 'man'.

Apart from principal dual deities like Sedi-Melo, Donyi Polo, the other deities like Mukling - Taleng (thunder and lightning), among (earth), Asi (water), Meruk or Emi (fire), Esar (air) are considered to be peopled with number of spiritual being possessing power much greater than man. However, they are benevolent to human being, protect their farms and families from damages and diseases. And as such, they have to be kept appeased by occasional offerings called - Taleng Ui, Rokpudone etc.

Dobur Ui is one of the important ritual functions marked by its peculiar principle carried out with much rigidity.

Ancestor worship is a common feature of their annual function usually after the harvest. Departed forefathers Urom-Posum are also held responsible for health and happiness of the family and incurring displeasure to them may result in an accident or some uncommon occurrence.

The festivals of the Misings can be divided into social and religious groups. Of social festivals most important is the Ali ai-ligang and Porang. The derivated meaning of the Ali-ai-ligang is sowing of roots and fruits. Whether jhuming or ploughing was employed, *Ahu* paddy was their principal product, and as such the oncoming of *Ahu* season is marked with the celebration of Ali-ai-ligang. This is a festival of prayers, dance and drinks when the ceremonial implementation of a handful *Ahu* seed into womb of mother earth is performed. The first Wednesday of the Assamese month of Phagun (February-March) is considered the auspicious day for the purpose and simultaneously celebrated with much enthusiasm and marry making. The closing of the harvest is marked by another celebration called Po-rag. It is a festival of prayers and feast and executed with elaborate programme spread over 3 days. The Meimber Yame or the organization of the young adult take

the responsibility of organizing the festival. Because of its expensive elaborate arrangements the Po-rag is celebrated after an interval of 2 to 5 years

There is a saying: "Mising girls can dance before the, can walk and can weave before the weavers wear any apparels". The Misings are well known for their colourful, attractive dresses. The traditional male attire consist of a *galuk* or *miboo galuk* - a shirt with open front and short sleeve with stripes of coloured design over the back and waist, *ugon*-a long white piece of cloth used like a dhoti to cover up the lower part of the body from waist downward; *dumer* - a piece of narrow cloth with designs on both ends used as a head gear; and *tongali* or *tanrek* - is a piece of cloth akin to *dumer* but little longer and wider.

Dress of an unmarried girl differs with that of a married one. The very young ones use only an *ege* to cover the lower part of the body from waist downwards. A piece of cloth sufficient to cover the front of chest and back (*kupop*) is added during adolescence. After attaining puberty, the *kupop* is replaced by *ribi*. *Ribi* and *gaseng* are hand woven cloths with preponderance of red and black stripes over white drops about 6/7 ft. in length and worn by unmarried girls wrapped round the body while *ege* covers the lower part of the body. These *ribi* and *gaseng* are replaced by *gero potali* or *sekrek*.

Misings use both gold and silver ornaments along with beads of different colours. *Golpata*, *madoli*, *sondrong* are some of the commonly used necklaces and are usually made of gold and beads. Mising women wear earrings of various sizes and designs. *Konge*, *gamkharu* etc. made of silver are common bracelets.

The Misings belong to agrarian economy. After migrating from the hills and settling in the fertile land of Brahmaputra valley, they concentrated on the *ahu* cultivation, which occupies a very significant place in their socio-cultural life.

Jhuming was the main stay in the past, which tells about their hill background. Today, though ploughing is the principal means of cultivation, however, jhuming was extensively practised when there was abundant wasteland. Originally *Aahu*, mustard seeds, different kinds of *taro*, sweet potato, yam, ginger, pulse, cotton were the main items of cultivation. But now-a-days more emphasis is given in the cultivation of *sali* crop, which yields relatively greater return.

The staple diet of the Misings is rice along with different kinds of roots and taros, potatoes, leafy vegetables and hales. Fish and meat are also common food which are consumed either fresh or smoked. An important item of their food habit pattern is *apong* - their traditional beverage. The *apong* is of two varieties differing in taste, colour and the method of preparation - *nogin apong* and *poro apong*.

The Misings are pile dwellers. The villages are usually found in the bank of the rivers. A typical Mising village *dolong* consists of some 20 to 30 houses built on bamboo platform raised about 5 ft. above the ground supported by rows of wooden posts. A typical Mising house has no complete inner partition but with several fireplace or *meram* separated only by half partitions. The spacious verandah in front is called *tungeng* where the alien guests are entertained. A small verandah in the backyard is left for exclusive use of the house wives. There are two main doors *yabgo*, one in the front and the other in the back *yapkur* with only one or two outlets in the sides.

The given description provides us with a brief ethnographic profile which can be considered as more or less the 'ideal form' of the Mising culture. But it cannot be said that the Mising way of life as it obtains today conform to this 'ideal form'. Changes have taken place in almost every sphere which demands adaptation. Thus a series of changes are found in different aspects like the economic, socio-cultural life, religious beliefs and practices, language and literary and other art forms, festivals and ceremonies etc. We will like to cite few illustrations in support of the above statement.

Originally, the Misings were jhum cultivators and produced horticultural products mainly. But to-day they are mainly wet cultivators and rice is the most common item of production. This change has a series of implications in various aspects; like in the food habit pattern, rice is considered now-a-days as their staple food while yam and different kinds of taros served the purpose in the earlier set up.

Similarly changes have touched the other fields which are either directly or indirectly involved with the economic life. Same is the case with the dress pattern, house type and many other items of material culture.

An important change has come in their religious life also. Due to contact with the neighbouring caste Assamese Hindu society, the Misings have been greatly influenced by Assam Vaishnavism with its *Satra* system. This influence of Vaishnavism as well as contact with the Hindu fold as a whole has its impact on their various rituals, ceremonies and festivals.

Again in the case of language and literature also the influence of Assamese language and literature have played a dominant role. Now-a-days Misings are bilingual. They use Assamese almost as a second mother

tongue. In fact, some Mising groups have given up the Mising language and adapted Assamese for all purposes.

In this way a number of changes are clearly discernable in today's Mising society as a whole.

The Deuris:

The Deuris are a branch of the Chutiyas, which belong to the Bodo race. They speak the Chutiya language which also belongs to the Bodo group. W.B. Brown in his *An outline Grammar of the Deuri Chutiya Language* said that the Chutiya language belongs to the Bodo group; and not only the Deuris even the Chutiyas belongs to the Bodo race.

The Deuris are one of the four divisions of the Chutiyas who reigned eastern Assam prior to the advent of the Ahoms. The Deuris were the priests of the Chutiyas though at present the Chutiya and its four divisions have acquired self identifying features. The four divisions of Chutiya of which Deuri is one, are as follows - (1) Hindu Chutiyas, (2) Ahom Chutiyas, (3) Deuri Chutiyas (the priest clan), (4) Borahi Chutiyas. But the Deuris themselves think that they were an independent community and never a part of the Chutiya community. The Chutiya rulers who established their kingdom in the areas inhabited by the Deuris appointed some of the latter as the priest, of the former. Thus the Deuris came to be known as Deuri-Chutiyas. In fact, the term "Deuri" refers to a person who is good enough in performing the role of a priest.

The original abode of the Deuris was on the banks of the river Dibong, Tengapani and Patarsal which now fall within the jurisdiction of Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and Chepakhoa sub-division of Tinisukia district. Their present habitations are spread in the riverine areas of

Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Tinisukia, Jorhat and Sonitpur districts of Assam. Deuris are one of the Scheduled Tribes (Plains) communities of Assam.

The Deuris are divided into four groups, such as the Dibongiya, the Tengapaniya, the Borgoya and Patarganya. The last one is no longer traceable. The families of this group believed to have merged with the Dibongiyas. Each of this division has its own set of clans. The Deuris have their own language with its grammar and phonetic characteristics. With regard to their language, S. Endle stated that in all likelihood the language of the Deuris-Chutiyas, gave the purest and most archaic form of the Bodo speech, and that there could be little doubt that in earlier times the same had been the dominant language of eastern Assam. But except the Dibongia group, the other groups have given up their language and adopted Assamese as their mother tongue. Of course the Dibongia are bi-lingual and speak both Assamese and their own language. Deuris are peace-loving people. They are amiable and maintain cordial relation with the non-tribal people of surrounding villages. The Deuris are very laborious. Both men and women are hardworking and self-reliant people. Extend co-operation and help among them is a conspicuous characteristic of Deuri social life.

Each of the divisions or khels of the Deuris is composed of a number of exogamous clans called Bangshas (Takus). Thus the Bangshas of Dibongia are Sundariya (Bordeuri), Patriya (Saru Deuri), Airio (Bharali), Sariyo (Bora), Chitikayo (Bhog Randhani), Komtayo; Lagachyo, Kaliyachukoyo etc. There are altogether 14 number of Takus among the Dibongias. The Bangshas of Tengapania are Machiatika (Bor Deuri) Bikramiyatika. (Saru Deuri), Khutiayotika (Bharali) Sakacharutika, Pagimegeratika, Phapariyayolika,

Chemabarujatika, etc. The *Borgonya* division too has clans viz. Ikucharu (Bardeuri), Chimucharu (Saru Deuri), Hizaru (Bharali), Barsaru (Baliokatia), Lafaru (Bora) and Gosaru. It may be noted that members of the last clan though find mention in old records, are no longer traceable. Each clan is exogamous. Thus marriage with the clan is not permissible.

As the Deuris are patrilineal in descent they count their relationship through the male line. Children take the clan of the father. After the death of a father, his sons become the rightful owner of his properties, which are equally divided among his sons.

The Deuris generally practice monogamy. But there is no bar against marrying a second wife after the death of the first one. Widow remarriage is permissible. The Deuri marriage is based on the principle of Patriarchy, as such, the bride goes to the bride groom's family and starts living there as a member of her husbands Parents' family. The children take the clan name of their father. Neither levirate nor sororate is practiced by the Deuris. Deuris have broadly three different forms of marriage. Such as *bor biya*, *maju biya*, *bhakat rupiya* or *soru biya*. Marriage which is arranged by the parents and performed in grand ceremonious manner for three days is called '*Bor-biya*, *maju-biya* is also arranged by the parents but performed with less pomp and show. The third type is performed and completed in a day and expenditure is restricted to minimum. In addition to these types, marriage by elopement is also widely prevalent among the Deuris.

The essential items of a Deuri marriage constitute dried fish, pork Suze and betel leaves and nuts. The Pathoria or a mediator plays important role in a Deuri marriage. Both the families, i.e., families of bride and groom appoint Pathorias. On the wedding day he wears a special dress

and helps in the settlement of bride price and other details in a marriage. He must have good command over local folklore and other marriage formalities.

The system of bride price is prevalent among the Deuris. They also give dowry as a token of love, money-value of which may be many times higher than the bride price. Dowry includes mainly bell-metal and wooden utensils and boxes, garments and ornaments, betel nuts and leaves, etc.

The Deuris have the long tradition of living in joint family. It is a matter of disgrace for young couples to live separately from parents' family immediately after marriage; rather they prefer to live together with their parents, and other members in the same household as a well knit of family.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Deuris. The staple food is rice and traditional common beverage is rice-beer. Thus, they cultivate primarily rice. They also grow mustard seeds, black pulses and potatoes as cash crops. The Deuris also rear chicken, ducks, pigs, goats and cattle for domestic use as well as for earning cash income. Some of the families keep elephants and buffaloes for the same purpose. They are wet cultivators. They relish *ahu* rice and therefore *ahu* paddy is widely grown.

The Deuri villages are generally found in the riverine areas having fertile arable land. Usually the village consists of thirty or more households. The houses are built on a bamboo platform raised about five feet above the ground. The length of the house varies according to the size of the family. A typical Deuri house can accommodate more than 40 members. The floor of the house is made of flattened bamboos or timbers

and is raised from the ground on wooden posts. The Deuris have partitions in the house. The houses are constructed length-wise from east to west and the doors always open to the east. The front portion of the house is called *misso* which is kept open on three sides and visitors are entertained here. This portion of the house is also used as a sleeping apartment for the unmarried youths.

A fireplace situated in the first room of the house serves for ordinary cooking. This is also the place where relatives and respectable persons are entertained. The fire place kept at the rear room of the house is considered as sacred and outsiders and visitors are not allowed to enter this place.

All the divisions of Deuris are still maintaining their traditional beliefs and practices. The common place of worship among the Borgonya and Tengaponia sections is known as *than* while the Dibangias call it *midiku*. They identify their chief deities with Lord Siva and Parvati. The Dibangias call their supreme deities as Kundi Mama. Other names of this chief deity are Gira-Girasi, Pisa Dema or Bolia Baba and Pisasi Dema or Kesakhati. The son and daughter of Gira-Girasi are two other important deities of the Deuris. They also worship, Gailurung Kundi as Ganesh and *Kunwar Kund* as Kartik. The puja paraphernalia include flower, sacrificial chopper or *dao*, piece of sandal wood, copper utensils, bell, trident, conch, basket made of brass, copper utensils, canopy, etc. Each Deuri village has a *than*, a house of worship which is erected at a distance of a few metre away from the site of the village. Religious functions are performed for the welfare of the village community are held at the *than*. Goats, ducks, fowls and pigeons of same colour are sacrificed in such religious functions. The Deuris have

their own priests and functionaries for conducting their religious function. The chief functionary is called the Bor-Deuri (the priest), Bor Bharali (chief store keeper), Saru Bharali (junior store keeper) and other functionaries, like Kelua Bora, Barik and Randhani or Ladani. These office bearers are essential in all the *than* pujas and their offices are hereditary.

Wednesday is the most auspicious day for the Deuris. All kinds of community rituals are performed on Wednesday. Annual socio-religious festivals are started by performing rituals at the *than ghar* on Wednesday only. Therefore, Deuri annual festivals invariably commence on Wednesday, irrespective of the actual day of such festivals.

Besides the major deities, the Deuris worship a number of household deities. Some of the household deities are Bakanmak, Muruchi, Dua chitere, Bura Dangaria etc. These deities are regularly worshipped, as they are believed to be responsible for welfare as well as destruction of life and property. Sacrifices are offered to these deities also.

The Deuris observe two major annual festivals such as Bohagiya Bisu (Bohag Bihu) and Mangiya Bisu (Magh Bihu) which are also observed by other Assamese communities. The Bohaguja is observed for a week or so and the Magiya Bisu for two days. But unlike the other Assamese communities the Deuris start these festivals only on the first Wednesday of the month of Bohag or Magh.

The *Bohagiya Bihu* is observed by bathing cows and buffaloes in ponds or rivers on the first day and by performing *husaris* - a kind of group dancing and singing by young boys and girls in front of each and every household. The elderly persons visit the households of the village as gesture of good wishes and enjoy drinking rice-beer as a part of the celebration.

These performances and merry makings are preceded by some ritualistic performances at the village than. In the fore-noon of the first Wednesday of the month of Bohag i.e. the month of April, the head of each household offers prayers before the household deities for the welfare of the family members. In the afternoon all the villagers irrespective of age and sex gather at the *than* where the Bor Deuri the chief priest and his assistants perform rituals for well-being of the entire village community. As soon as the performance of ritual is over the villagers gathering at the *than* get themselves purified by the sacred water prepared by the office bearer of the *than* in a copper container. After the function of purification the male-folk partake the offerings towards the deities including rice, vegetables and meat. Women are not allowed to take part in such priest. After the end of the religious ceremony at the *than*, *husari* parties consisting of young boys and girls visit and entertain each and every household by dancing and singing and also to bless for welfare of the household for the New year. After completing its visit to each and every house which takes almost a week, a feast is arranged to conclude the celebration. The Deodhani dance forms an essential part of *Bihu* celebration.

On the occasion of the Magiya Bisu a grand feast is arranged on the first Wednesday of the month of Magh (January) in a big open house attached to the Than. The Bor-Deuri offers sacrifices and prayers to their traditional deities, On the next day the elderly persons visit the household of each other and enjoys drinking rice bear.

The Deuris have two types of village administrative system-secular and religious. In the former category the Goanbura reigns supreme who is the head in all socio-political activities. He, with the assistance of

the village elders settles disputes or gives judgment to other problems. On the other hand for the smooth functioning of their religious activities the nine office bearers have been assigned to specific duties.

The Deuris generally cremate their dead bodies. But in the case of children, pregnant women and epidemic cases they are buried. The traditional custom of laying layers of wood in pyres for a man or woman was seven layers and five layers respectively. The dead bodies are bathed with water and new clothes are wrapped over the bodies. In the case of priests the layers of wood are raised to nine, cooked food, rice bear and fire are carried to the cremation ground. After returning from the cremation ground all are purified in the courtyard of the household of the deceased. A ceremony is held on the fourth day. Chicken curry is prepared and selected elderly members offer rice bear and chicken curry and request the soul of the deceased to give up all connections with the inmate of the deceased.

The final purificatory ceremony may be held at any time of the year. As it is an expensive affair the villagers observe this ceremony when they can afford. Generally it is held after a year. This occasion is shared not only by the consanguinal and affinal kins but by all the villagers, irrespective of age and sex.

The Karbis (Mikirs) :

The Karbis are said to be one of the few most ancient races of Assam. Racially they belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. As there is no written documents and other evidences like archaeological remains etc. it is very difficult to trace back the history of early settlement of Karbis. According to Lyall and Stack, the original abode of the Karbis was the eastern portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills bordering on the Kopili river.

Studying their folklore some scholars are of the opinion that during the long past the Karbis used to live on the banks of the rivers the Kalang and the Kapili and the entire Kaziranga, the famous National Park of Assam, was within their habitation. During the reigns of Kachari kings they were driven to the hills and some of them entered into Jaintiapur. While a section of the Karbis remained in the Jaintia Kingdom, others moved towards north-east by crossing the river Barapani, a tributary of the Kapili and entered into the Rongkhong Ranges. There they established their capital at a place called Socheng. The Karbis later on had shifted their capital to Niz Pongkhong from Socheng. Niz Rongkhong is situated about 16 k.m. south of Hamren in the Karbi Anglong hill district which is the present set of the traditional Karbi king called Linglokpo. The Lingdokpo or Recho is democratically elected and still exercises his traditional authority in respect of socio-religious matters.

From the point of view of habitation, the Karbis can be divided equally between the Plains and the Hill areas of Assam. Again a number of divisions are made following the area of concentration like Chinthong, Ronghang and Amri. Those who live in the plains are called Dumrali. In this connection it may be said that the Hill Karbis inhabit the two Autonomous Hill Districts viz. Karbi Anglong (large concentration) and N.C. Hills only. However those who live in the plains are not treated as belonging to a Scheduled Tribe.

Broadly speaking, the Karbis practice two types of agriculture - one is shifting cultivation or jhuming and the other is wet cultivation or settled agriculture. Shifting cultivation is prevalent among the hill Karbis, particularly those who inhabit the hilly terrain of Karbi Anglong, North

Cachar, East Khasi Hills, and Jaintia Hills districts. It is also practised to a limited extent in lower hill slopes in the Digaru, Sonapur and Dimoria areas.

Jhum cultivation begins from the middle of February or the beginning of March by cutting down jungles of the hills followed by burning of dry leaves and trees. After that a complete clearing of the area as well as preparation of the soil are done with the help of hoe. Then seeds of cereals are broadcast. This is done during April-May when the monsoon starts. The staple item of production is rice along with other jhum crops like maize, cotton, taro, a number of pulses are also grown in the same field. When the seedling attain some height the process of weeding is done. Crops are nurtured and protected from wild animals. Paddy is harvested generally during the period of September-October and the other crops at different times.

Some cash crops such as sesame is also grown which has great demand in the plains.

Paddy cultivation with the help of plough is also extensively carried out along the narrow and isolated foothill plains bordering the hills of Nilip Rong Khang, Duar Amla, Dimoria, Sonapur-Digaru, Panbari-Chandrapur, eastern Guwahati, etc. A large number of Karbis inhabit these pockets, and the narrow foothill plains provide ideal paddy fields for them. Some of these plains dwellers raise paddy crops even three seasons a year.

Horticulture occupies a very important position under the permanent system of agriculture.

Orange orchards have been raised by the plains Karbis of Dimoria - Sonapur area. In the hills also horticultural productions are gaining popularity. Most of the Karbi families are found to have reared bufaloes.

Handloom industry is very much common among all the Karbi families. All Karbi women are expert weavers and most of the clothes for domestic use are produced in their family looms. Rearing of Endi is an important cottage industry of the Karbis.

The Karbis have five clans called *kur*. These are Terang, Teron, Englee, Ingti and Timung. Each of the five clans has a number of sub-clans. Terang and Teron have six sub-clans each, Englee and Timung have thirty sub-clans each, and the remaining clan Ingti has only four sub-clans. These clans are completely exogamous. Although all the five clans are socially equal in status. Ingti being a priestly clan was supposed to have a higher status in former times.

Marriage between sub-clans falling under the same principal clan is not allowed. But they can marry any one from any sub-clan belonging to the rest four principal clans.

Cross-cousin marriage i.e. marrying one's mother's brother's daughter is the most preferred one. Window marriage is prevalent among the Karbis. A man also can marry the widow of his elder brother, but not that of his younger brother.

Monogamy is the common type of marriage. Although polygamy is allowed socially, however it is of very rare occurrence. There is no bar in marrying a girl from other community or religion, but in such a case the girl has to be formally converted into Karbi fold after performing a ritual. She will be adopted as daughter by an elderly couple usually the maternal uncle of the boy and she is formally accepted by the society as one of its members.

After marriage, the wife continues to use the surname of her father, but the children assume the title of their father.

Marriage rules and regulations are almost the same among the Karbis of plains. Divorce is rather rare in the Karbi society.

The Karbis follow the patriarchal system of family structure and as such the father is the head of the family and his authority as such is undisputed. The line of descent is traced through the male members only. Usually the head of the family, his wife, their children, the unmarried brothers and sisters constitute the family. Joint family system is still prevalent to a very limited extent.

At the death of the father, his sons inherit the moveable as well as immovable properties and not by his daughters.

The traditional administrative system among the Karbis to-day, exists only in a few areas. The Karbis of Rongkhang, Chinthong and Amri areas still follow their own traditional systems of administration. In the plains only the Dimoria-Sonapur area is known to have its administrative system which is a bit different from that existent in the hills.

The Karbis follow a crude form of democracy believed to have been founded by their king Sot Pecho in long ago. It is not known what system of administration or government they followed prior to him. The king, ministers and all officers are selected by taking majority verbal opinion of support of the representatives of the people. There is, however, no definite tenure of their offices. When a functionary, the king for instance is dead or removed from the post, the person who will be selected to hold that post must be unanimously chosen by all other representatives. Lingdokpo or the king holds the highest post in the hierarchy of administrators. According

to the custom, he must belong to the Ronghang clan. Kathar Bura the royal priest, occupies the second position. Other important posts are - Dili, Bor-Pator, Bor-Miji, Rongphu, Pheranke and Rongling-Pherangke, Himtok Rongpi teron Dongpi, Timung Dangpiar etc. All the people have to pay revenue in kind to the king after the harvest.

The plains Karbis, particularly the Karbis of Dimoria area, had their administrative system. Their administrative system is not similar to that of Rongkhang, nor is very clearly known. The entire area is broadly divided into part under Barua, who is like governor under the king, presently seated near Sonapur in south-eastern Kamrup district. The village headmen who are under the king are called Bangthai Riso Bangthai is the assistant and in charge of the youth activities.

Bisarpo is another officer who has to look after the property and smoothness of the social and public activities that are performed in the village. Karkoon is the officer who has to arrange and supply articles that may be needed for any social function. Kathar is the priest, a religious man who performs the rights and rituals in public worship. 'Deuri' is the assistant, but sometimes 'Kathar' is also called as Deuri.

From the point of view of religion the Karbis can be regarded as animists. 'Arnarn Sansar Recho' or God Almighty is considered to be the creator of this universe. Among the innumerable deities some are considered to be benevolent and some malevolent. Each disease is associated with a providing deity. Hemphu and Mukrang are two benevolent household gods. The Karbis observe many religious rituals throughout the year where the sacrifice of pigs and birds and use of rice beer are indispensable.

On the basis of the purpose of worship the Karbi gods can be divided into the following group.

1. *Hem Angtar* (household god)
2. *Rongker* (village god) and *Dengja* (regional god)
3. *Thengpi-Thengse* (ailment recovery god).

Of course all these gods and goddesses are not worshipped in all the localities and some known by different names in different areas. For example, Arnam who is considered and identified with Lord Siva in the hills is known as Burha Gosain in the plains.

In the hills there are a few types of Rongker or community worship all meant for the welfare of a village or a group of villagers. They are Pirda Rongkher, Ajo Rongkher, Vophong Rongkher and Dengja Rongher. These are performed every three or four years.

In the plains similarly, there are certain community worships such as Dehal Puja, Mal Puja.

The bachelor's dormitory which is known as well as 'Jirkedam' is one of the most important social organization of Hill Karbis. Such dormitories are not found in the plains but youth club or 'Risomar' serves more or less the same purpose although the functionaries are different.

The Karbis of hills, particularly inhabiting the Karbi Anglong district, has a very interesting traditional institution i.e., a grain bank (Kerung Amci) based on fellow feeling and mutual co-operation.

Among the festivals observed by the Karbis, mention may be made of the Rangker and Hacha. While the former is a socio-religious one, the latter is a social one.

Rongker is performed at the beginning of the New Year by propitiating the different gods and goddesses for the well being of the entire village.

The Karbis perform another festival called 'Hacha' after the harvest. The Karbis have their traditional dresses artistically designed. The male dress consists of a beautifully designed shirt, a loincloth and a turban is called Poho. The women folk use a piece of cloth tied around the waist (usually in black), a piece of artistic cloth to cover the upper part of their body, and a waist band.

The plains Karbi people use dress like the neighbouring caste Assamese people, keeping distinctiveness in the patterns used.

As with all other tribes of Assam, the staple food of the Karbis is rice. Different kinds of vegetables grown in jhum fields roots and tubers, herbs, edible leaves collected from the forests are taken with rice. Dry fish, pork and chicken are favourite delicacy. Rice-beer is the favourite beverage, which is required in all kinds of socio-religious rituals.

The typical Karbi house is a raised one. It is built on a bamboo platform using timber post. The house is divided into two lengthwise - the front part with the hearth at the center is called 'kam' or guest room and the inner part is 'kut' i.e. the living room for the family members. A wooden or bamboo ladder is used as an approach to the front veranda.

In the plains, they have completely abandoned the traditional housetype and construct mud-plinth houses like the caste-Assamese or other non-Karbi neighbours.

The birth of a child is always an occasion of joy in the family because they believe in rebirth of the dead person in the same family.

Death in the family, on the other hand, is considered to be the most tragic incident in the family. The Karbis perform a funeral ceremony at the time of the cremation of the deceased. Nevertheless, for the eternal peace of the deceased, they perform a death ceremony called 'Chomangkān' at a later date. It is the most elaborate and expensive socio-religious ceremony of the Karbis that continues for four days and nights.

The Tiwa (Lalung):

Formerly the term Lalung was commonly used by all. But not the Lalungs prefer to call themselves as Tiwa. According to the Tiwa (Lalung) language *ti* means water and *wa* means superior. The name Lalung according to them was given by the non-Lalungs. Although Tibet region is believed to be the original homeland, yet their details of migration to the plains is not properly known. After coming to the plains following the course of the river Brahmaputra, they introduced themselves as Tiwa.

The Tiwas are mainly a plains tribe of Assam. Tiwa concentrations are mainly found in the district of Nagaon and Morigaon districts of Assam. They are spread in Kapili, Mayong, Dhurbandha, Kathiatali and Kampur areas of Nagaon and Morigaon districts, Khetri -Sonapur area of Kamrup district of Assam and Nartiang Elaka of Jaintia district of Meghalaya. Besides, there are small population in the Titabor area of Jorhat and Dhemaji areas of Dhemaji District. Again the Tiwa villages of Karbi Anglong district are situated either in the hilly areas or in the foothills.

Although there is no clear cut date about the migration of the Tiwas to the plains of Assam, yet it can be assumed that they had migrated to the plains sometime in the middle of 17th century A.D.

On linguistic evidence, the Lalungs have been classified with the Bodos on the Kacharis of Assam. The language of the Tiwas is more closely connected with the Dimasa branch of the Bodo people. According to Dr. Grierson in his "Linguistic Survey of India" in 1891, there were forty thousand Tiwa speakers in Nagaon, Kamrup and Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In Nagaon they have a tradition that their ancestors came from the Jaintia hills, in the reign of Jaintia Raja U-Mon Gohain. Another account also says that the Tiwas were the autochthones of the Jaintia Hills (Grierson 1903:49 as quoted in Shyamchowdhury and Das, 1973).

Lyall mentions that the Tiwas were living in the contiguous areas of the Mikirs.

The Tiwas belong to the great Bodo race into which tribes like Boro-Kaschari, Chutiya, Rabha, Deori, Mech, Tippera, Tipra, Garo etc. belong.

They have the characteristic features of the Mongoloids. As Tiwas are found both in the plains and the hills topography and ecology, the topography and ecology of both the areas have influenced the Tiwas considerably. Some aspects of socio-cultural life of the Hill Tiwas became distinct from that of the plains Tiwas.

The tribals of North-Eastern Region, particularly those living in the hills practise jhum system of cultivation. As mentioned earlier, the Tiwas were living in the Jaintia hills for a considerable period of time and they adopted shifting cultivation while staying in the hills. But coming down to the plain they practised wet paddy cultivation. Today *sali* paddy is the major crop among the plains Tiwas which they cultivate. *Ahu* and *bao* paddies are also grown in a limited scale. Apart from paddy, they also grow some

sesame, mustard, pulses, arum, turmeric, ginger, chilies etc. Thus in the villages situated in foot hills a kind of mixed cultivation is practiced. In the plains, the Tiwas share the common economy of settled cultivation with the non-tribal community. Certain religious ceremonies like *Dhanar Muthi Lowa* is observed by the Tiwas in connection with starting of agricultural operations. The Barghar (place of traditional worship) is the venue for such ceremony and the Gharbura (the religious head) presides over the function. Similarly certain socio-religious ceremonies are observed in connection with harvesting of paddy.

Hunting and fishing were integral part of the Tiwa life. Although fishing is still prevalent, hunting is fast disappearing, particularly the community hunting. Fishing is much more popular and very frequently practised in the winter season. People go out for fishing either in groups or individually.

Rice is the staple food of the Lalungs. Their two major meals consist of rice and vegetables. Meat, fish and eggs are relished by the Tiwas, fowl and pork are their delicacies. As pork and chicken are essential items in their socio-religious ceremonies, pigs and fowls are reared by almost all the Tiwas. Rice beer is an essential item of most of religious ceremonies as well as social life. Along with rice, boiled vegetables and roots and creepers are also taken.

The plains Tiwas construct houses on plinth. The Hill Tiwas construct their houses in traditional pattern on plinths. Thatch is used for roofing. Walls are made of reeds and bamboos. Generally bamboo posts are used in their houses but the well to -do sections use wooden posts. The plinth of the cooking house Barghar is raised about 2/3 feet above the ground

in order to distinguish it from other apartments or cottages. Choraghar, an out house, is constructed a few yards away from the main house where guests are entertained and unmarried young boys sleep at night. In between Charagahar and Barghar there is a Majghar which is used for sleeping purposes. The Majghar may have two or three rooms. The Barghar also has two rooms - one meant for the household deity and the other for cooking purposes. Generally the room towards west is used for the household deity. Certain rules are to be maintained while constructing the Barghar. The main post of the Barghar is erected after completion of the construction of the house. Except priestly officials such as Gharbura, Zela and Hari Kunwari, others are not allowed to go near the Thunakhuta. People belonging to Mikir, Kachari and Koch only are allowed to enter the Borghar.

The granary is constructed towards east. Those who do not possess granaries a corner of the living room or Choraghar is used for this purpose. There is a courtyard in front of a Tiwa house. It is used for drying paddies, threshing, and such other activities.

Every clan has its Barghar (place of community worship). It is a hall type room constructed in the Campus of a respectable clan member. Besides the Barghar which is related to particular clan or family there are *than* or shrines for the entire community.

The Tiwas had a proud tradition of well managed youth dormitory called *Chamadi* This institution acts as the training ground of various arts and crafts and music of the traditional lore. It is also the venue for various village administrative gatherings. It is a big hall without wall on the sides. There is a big fireplace in the center of the hall with logs of wood all around for sitting purposes. The main post and the beam towards

entrance are decorated with motifs. Musical instruments of the community are kept inside the *Chamadi*.

The Plains Tiwa women wear dresses similar to those worn by other rural Assamese women. The dress constitutes one *mekhela* one *chadar* and one *riha*. On various festive occasions, they wear *singkhap mekhela*, *sondiakapor*, *thenas (chadar)*, *seleng*, *froke* (blouse). Tiwa women are expert weavers. They weave *mankapor* and *borkapor* for special occasion besides weaving all the cloths for family requirement. The dresses of the menfolk are similar to those of other Assamese menfolk. However the dress of the Hill Tiwas are different from those of the plains. They put a narrow strip of cloth called *lengti*. The male Tiwas wear a shirt prepared locally. Turbans are worn by the elderly men. The womenfolk of hills use *mekhela* over the breasts, which extend a few inches below the knees, a 'chadar' is also used over the body.

The Tiwa kings (chiefs) have their traditional dresses which they wear on special occasions. The dress of the Raja constitutes a *muga dhoti*, a *muga sola*, one *muga phaguri*, one cotton *chadar*, one silver necklace, two *gamkharu* (bracelets) and two earrings.

The Tiwa express their artistic talents in their textile designs. They are also experts in bamboo and cane works. They make canoes, spinning wheel by cutting wood pieces. During various festivals the people use varieties of masks made of bamboo slices and clothes. Carvings of animals and birds are seen in the entrance beam of the *chamadi*. In the past, the Tiwas might have excelled in smithery of iron. In a village near Jagiroad, Cannons and swords were made for the Rajas.

They love music and dance. There are varieties of drums locally called *karams*, *khrambar*, *pisukhnam* etc. Flutes made of bamboos are used along with drums. *kali* (pipe), *thandrang* (indigenous violin), *thogani* (a string instrument) are other musical instruments.

A Tiwa family usually consists of father, mother and their unmarried children. Of course joint families are also found in the Tiwa society. The Tiwas are divided into a number of exogamous clans. It is found that in the past the Tiwa clans were divided territorially. They are divided into five divisions in the hills viz. Mukro, Rongkhoi, Amsi, Marjon and Amsuoi. In each division, there are a number of clans which are usually not concentrated in any particular village. These divisions have come to be known by the name of the principal or the dominant village in their territory. In the plains, such groupings of clans into bigger territorial divisions are not found but they are clustered into groups. Two kinds of clan clusterings are found among the Tiwas. One of them is based on the belief of a common descent from an original mother. The other divisions are organized on territorial groupings under the leadership of chiefs or dolois of big villages. In the territorial divisions, there are clans which are grouped into smaller clusters of consanguinous clans.

Originally they had only twelve clans but later on these main clans have been sub-divided into a number of sub-clans.

Clan	Sub-clan
1. <i>Macharang</i>	<i>Machereng, Magor</i>
2. <i>Madur</i>	<i>Ladur, Puru, Sagara</i>
3. <i>Maloi</i>	<i>Fangsong, Pumbe (Puma)</i>
4. <i>Dafor</i>	<i>Mithi, Lomfoi</i>

5. <i>Sukai</i>	<i>Kharai</i>
6. <i>Amfli</i>	<i>Aagara, Chanchara</i>
7. <i>Lasa</i>	<i>Mithi</i>
8. <i>Chalang</i>	<i>Muni, Melang</i>
9. <i>Amsong</i>	<i>Amsi</i>
10. <i>Kakhor</i>	<i>Aagari</i>
11. <i>Darnong</i>	<i>Damlong, Kholre</i>
12. <i>Lorom</i>	

They have a *khuta* system of social grouping which can also be called extension of a family. Following the genealogy, each family of a certain clan forms a social grouping called *bangsha* or *khuta*. A *khel* (clan) consists of several such *khutas*. Every family in a village must itself be affiliated to a *khuta*. Whether solemnizing a marriage ceremony or observing a death rite, the *khuta* plays an important role in the family.

A Tiwa *khel* selects a *giyati* (priest) to preside over the socio-religious occasions like '*karam* and allied ceremonies. The *zela* (an expert in the tribal folklore and religion) plays a major role in a Lalung village and he must be selected by a *khel*.

They also maintain a clan superiority but it does not create any social imbalance or vertical mobility among the people of various clans. Some Lalung clans are totemic while others trace their origin to certain characteristics of ancestors or natural objects.

To indicate social hierarchy in earlier days they used a number of titles -such as Deo Raja, Deka Raja, Pator, Senapati, Konwar, Bordoloi, Doloi-Kakati, Manta, Deori, Bharali etc.

For the administrative and socio-religious purposes the Lalung society is stratified into various categories. The lowest administrative unit is a *buni* constituting more than one village. For the smooth running of the *bunis* there are different office bearers namely Lorok, Forongai, Changmaji, Koroimaji, Deori, Hatari and Randhani. In fact the social organization of the Lalungs can be divided into two categories - one is secular that is headed by the Gaonbura and assisted by an official called Barika. To run the administration of *chamadi*, there are four categories of officers namely Changdoloi, Changmaji, Hurnma and Khuramol. There may be two persons each in the later two categories. The non-secular organization or religious organization is run by three-office bearers viz. Gharbura, Zela and Harikunwari. Besides, there is a Deuri to preside over the worship at *than*.

Broadly the Tiwas have four forms of marriage - they are *borbiya*, *gobhia rakha*, *joron biya* and *poluai ana*. Boys usually marry between the ages of 20 to 25 and girls between 16 to 22. Clan exogamy is strictly observed. Monogamy is the socially recognized type of marriage although cases of polygamy cannot be ruled out. Preferential marriage including cross-cousin marriage are found. Levirate is not practised while sororate is socially approved. Widow remarriage is permitted. Cases of divorce are rare. *Borbiya* is preferred by the well to do families because it entails huge expenditure and long drawn formalities. In this type of marriage which continues for three days the guardians take the initiative and the *zela's* play an important role. *Gobhia Rakha* marriage can be called as marriage by service. At present the Lalungs particularly of the plains, are patriarchal people but a very thin link of old matriarchal system is traced which is reflected in the *gobhia rakha* system of marriage. Not much ritual

formalities are observed in this type of marriage. *Joron biya* is also an arranged marriage without the details of a *bor biya*. *Poluai ana biya* or marriage by elopement is widely prevalent among the Lalungs. However some formalities are observed to recognize this type of union by the society. Bride price is present among the Tiwas though it is very nominal.

The Tiwa religion is like that of the Bodo-Kacharis. They too follow the cult of polydomonism. Their principal God is Pha which means father. They believe and interpret this Pha to be none but Lord Siva. As Lord Siva or Pha Mahadeo is their supreme God, all worships begin with a prayer to Him. The officials entrusted to perform religions ceremonies are Loro, Deuri and Changmaji. The *ghanbura* not only presides over the pujas held in Barghars he also offers oblations to the ancestors of a *khuta*.

Than or Thanghar and Barghar and more recently Namghars are the places of community worship. Pujas are held in the Barghars where Gharbura and Harikunwari play major roles.

The Lalung deities should be regularly propitiated by offerings and sacrifices. Mahadeo, Ganesh, Parmeswar, Badarmaji, Baolakong, and Kuber are their benevolent male deities while Aai Gosani', Lakhimi, Padumi, Kalika, Kamakhya, Saru Aai, Bor Aai, Aakari, Jogatjiri, Kani Andheli are the important female deities.

Thans are established for each village or a group of villages. Again the villagers of a particular area may affiliate themselves with *thans* of different areas. There may be separate *Thans* for different deities. Thus *Thans* are found in the names of Mahadeo, Kesaikhati, Bhagawati, Seni, Malthakur, etc.

Now-a-days influence of Mahapurushia Vaisnava cult is gaining ground among a certain section of the plains Lalungs. Thus in some cases there are two broad religious divisions viz. the traditionalists and the Vaisnavites.

Besides the above mentioned pujas, the Lalungs observe Deo sewa, Kalika puja, Bhakat sewa, Ai Bhagawati, Tangkang Puja, Hogora Puja, Mal Puja, Pati Sewa, Maral Puja etc. during a year.

The Tiwas have elaborate festivals, which are closely linked with worship of different deities. Important festivals are the Bihu or Bisu, Barat, Sagra Misawa, Wansua or Wanzua, etc.

During the birth of a child, they generally grant the child a bow; in case of a male child the archer's bow and in the case of a female, a bow for teasing cotton.

For disposal of dead both cremation and burial are practised. Previously dead bodies of wealthy and respectable persons only were cremated but now-a-days cremation is the general rule. However, the dead bodies of majors, accident cases etc. are buried. The Hill Tiwa prefer burial which they call *Sepat Thowa*.

During the period of bereavement the family of the deceased has to observe certain taboos. The *khel* directs the members of the bereaved family about the use of *kharmas* (non-veg meal). On the 3rd or 7th day a small feast is arranged where 'Zelas' are invited. This is the first part of purificatory, ceremony. The final death ceremony i.e., *karam* is solemnized jointly by a Bangsha and this may be kept pending for five or six years as it is an expensive affair.

The Rabha:

The Rabha is the one of the Scheduled Tribes of Assam. Different views have been expressed by different scholars regarding the origin and affinity with other tribes. Major Playfair had tried to trace the origin of the Rabhas in the Tibetan region and said that the migration had taken place in the Garo Hills area (now in Meghalaya) and then distributed in Assam plains. He had also found linguistic and cultural similarities between the Rabhas and the Garos. Some other scholars like Hodson are of the opinion that the Rabhas constitute a major segment of the Bodo linguistic group. Similarly according to Lt. Col. Waddel - the Rabhas were a branch of the Kacharis and had become almost Hinduised. Another scholars Dr. Grierson held his view that the Rabha was a Hindu name of the Kacharis and many of the Rabhas were actually Kacharis. E.A. Gait found them as a distinct tribe. Prof. B.M. Das studied that tribe scientifically and established that Rabhas were more closely allied to the Garos rather than any other tribe of the Bodo group. According to his view, the Mongoloid people who came in successive waves from the North and North-eastern region, have partly or wholly absorbed the autochthonous Austroloid and later on formed various tribes like the Rabha, the Garo, etc. (Das, :1960).

The Rabhas are widely scattered. But the most concentrated area of Rabhas is the undivided districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. Beyond Assam, their distribution is also found in Meghalaya, Bangladesh, Nepal, West Bengal, and Manipur.

The Rabhas are divided into several groups having individual language and customs. These divisions are Pati, Rongdani, Maitori, Kocha, Bitoliya, Dahuri, Totla, Chonga, Hana etc. However, the Rabha society mainly

consists of the first three divisions i.e., Pati, Rongdani and Maitori. According to the scholars like Prof. B.M. Das except the Rangdaniya, Maitori and Pati, the other divisions of the Rabhas have almost lost their identities.

The Pati section is now completely Hinduised and acculturated. They are found in large numbers in the southern bank stretching from Guwahati to Dudhnoi, Numerically the Rangdanis are well represented in Western Goalpara. The Maitoris are having relatively lesser number in Assam than the Rangdanis. Some other lesser represented sub groups of the tribe are - Dahuri and Totla in Assam plains. The Dahuri is to be found in north Goalpara and the Totlas in north Kamrup area and in the northern belt of Darrang district.

The Rabha villages are generally situated in the plains and are basically similar to the non-tribal villages of Assam. The villages are neat and clean and each household occupies a big compound and as such a village covers a large area. Formerly, there were some factors guiding the Rabha people in selecting the village site. For example, nearness to a river or lake providing a dependable supply of drinking water, washing and fishing; secondly a secured location from natural disasters, and availability of the suitable cultivable land, etc. However, today, due to population increase such factors are no longer considered. The houses have mud plinth, thatched roof, and mud plastered walls. They are in general rectangular in shape. Each household contains a broad courtyard for various domestic and socio-religious activities. Each house consists of several rooms such as separate bedrooms and five places for the sons and daughter in-laws, as well as parents, sleeping room for the adult children, store room for keeping rice, store room for keeping the rice-beer soaked, kitchen, store room for firewood, room

for poultry, room for pigs, goats etc. and finally a room for the worship of household deity. A room is also kept empty for the guests. For domestic use various utensils made of different materials are used, for instance bamboo utensils, earthen utensils, gourd utensils as well as metal utensils.

The Rabha female dress consist of Riphan or Ruphan, Patani or Lenphotar, Kambung or Kambang and Khadabang or Khakha. The Ruphan is tied around the waist and hangs down to the knees. It is like the Assamese mekhela without stitching. Patani is tied around the breast. Kambeng is a scarf type cloth wrapped to cover the breast.

The male dress consists of *pajal* or *gamsa*, *khachne* or *khapang* and *buk-chil* or *buk chali*. *Pajal* is like a dhoti, the size varies according to the age of the person. Some of the common dresses used by both male and female are *pachar* or *pachra* i.e., *endi*, wrapper used in winter season, *chenka-nen* or *phali* a kind of waist belt decorated with floral designs.

The Rabha women are very fond of ornaments. They prefer gold and silver ornaments although use of brass and copper ornaments are also common.

Rice is the staple food of the Rabhas. Vegetables, fish, meat are taken normally. But during festivals and ceremonies special items are prepared such as pork, mutton, chicken duck meat and special vegetables along with flat rice, curds etc. Dry fish is one of the most favourite articles of food for the Rabhas. They prepare a special dish called *sidal* from the dry fish. Preparation of bamboo shoots is also a delicacy of the Rabhas.

The rice-beer called *chako* is their main drink. A good quantity of rice-beer is consumed during the social activities.

As in all other communities family consisting of parents and their children is the basic unit of the Rabha society. A Rabha family centers round the father through whom descent is traced and who exercises supreme authority in the family. Formerly a married son used to live with these parents for sometime, but now-a-days in most of the cases, after the marriage, a son builds a separate house for himself. Both the parents have authority over their children. A father's first duty is to provide them with food, clothing, etc. He has the right and duty of disciplining his children. The father gives training to his sons in different subsistence activities and the mother generally trains her daughters in domestic duties.

After the death of the father his property is generally inherited in equal shares by the sons. Though the daughters have no right over the paternal property, the maternal property is inherited in equal shares by the daughters.

Each of the Rabha groups has several clans called Baray or Husuk. The 'baray' is matrilineal. Children take their 'baray' name after the mother. Marriage within a baray is strictly prohibited. Husuks are sub-divided into sub-Husuks among the kocha group. Marriage within these sub-Husuks is also prohibited. Baray system is found among the Rangdani, Maitaor and Dahuri groups. The Pati group has almost lost its Baray system. But they have a vague notion that they had some barays in the past. Similarly, these are not found among the Bitalia, Totla and Hana groups.

There are some Barays which consider some other Barays as their kin or friends. This system is called *huri* or *suru*.

Each Baray or Huri has some magico-religious association.

Again the Rabhas have some customs associated with Baray-Mahari. 'Mahari' means the female line of some baray or husuk. It has some matrilineal rights in the society. If a widower intends to marry again after his wife's death he must take legal permission from the Baray-Mahari of his deceased wife. This legal permission taking process is called Khum. If the wife of a man lies without issue, then all the movable and immovable property of the deceased wife has to be handed over to the Baray Muhari. Even, when the wife is alive and the husband physically torture her or in an intoxicated mood breaks her weaving implements etc. then the Baray-Mahari can control him.

The customary laws of the Rabhas are an institution which enforces faithful observance of the rules of conduct approved by the society. Some of these laws are meant for maintenance of social order and harmony. These customs can be divided as matrimonial custom. Divorce laws, laws for widow and widower, Birth customs, Death customs, socio-religious customs, adoption, village council: its formation and laws, social offences, miscellaneous offences. Child birth is considered as an occasion for joy. Immediately, after the birth of the baby, a string is tied round the umbilical cord in two places and then the chord is cut with a sharp bamboo strip.

Usually the purificatory ceremony is of two types-provisional and final in the case of Pati and Bitalia group. The provisional continued for 4/5 days and the final purificatory is to be observed after a month. Similarly the Hana and Totla groups observe the purificatory ceremony three times. The first ceremony is observed after five days, second is observed after sixteen days and the third one is solemnized after a month, the Dahuri group observe on the data of birth and finally after a month. Rangdani and

Maitori do not observe such purificatory ceremonies but now-a-days under influence of Hinduism and of other groups of the neighbourhood some people of these groups have also started observing purificatory rites.

In the Rabha society generally parents select the bride for marriage of a boy. The marital age of the boys varies from twenty to twenty-five and that of the girls from sixteen to twenty. The Rabhas follow the patrilocal rule of residence after marriage. But, the matrilocal rule of residence is also followed in cases where the son-in-law decides to move into the household of the bride. The groups follow different types of marriage and marriage rules and customs. Some of the important of types of marriages that have been practised in different groups are marriage by negotiation, *saja biya*, *gharjai biya*, *dhup-chaul biya*, *nok dhangkay* marriage, *kay-bikay* marriage, *tangaydhangkay* marriage, *kransi* marriage, *bani chekay* marriage etc.

The basic customary rules governing the marital relationship amongst the Rabhas are as follows:

1. No marriage can take place between the same 'Baray'.
2. A younger brother can marry the widow of his elder brother but the reverse cannot happen. Similarly one can marry the younger sister of one's wife but not the elder one.
3. Cross-cousin marriage is permissible, but it is limited only to marrying the daughter of one's maternal uncle.
4. The system of parallel cousin marriage is totally absent.

Since Pati Rabhas are the most predominant among all other groups, reference here will only be made to the marital rites and ceremonies

as practised by them. An important aspect of a Pati Rabha marriage is that in comparison with the Rangdanis and the Maitoris, it is solemnized in a very simple way though it requires to pass through several preliminary stages before the actual marriage rites are performed.

The first stage is called Pan-Tamul Kala i.e. a few ladies of the village set out to the house of the prospective bride with the intention of conveying the choice for the girl. The general acceptance of the proposal is marked by the occasion called *gota-tamul khuowa* and it is the most significant part of the entire proceeding. The next step is called *pan-cheni* (joron). On this day a sufficiently large groom party accompanied by drummers and musicians arrive at the bride's house with bags of pounded rice and banana. The stage appears to be now ready for the marriage except formal payment of the bride-price and this is done on an appointed date - the day being known as Malancha. The actual marriage takes place on an auspicious day ascertained on the verdict of the village priest or as per dictum of the Assamese calendar. The usual practice on this day is to fetch the bride to the groom's house for holding the marriage rites; the groom's party accompanied by singers and drummers take large amount of betel-nuts and leaves, pounded rice and banana. As soon as the bride arrives, she is made to stand just beneath the entrance. Sarakoya is performed. Then she is led to the Borghar and finally to the Mandap or alter. Here again a series of rites are performed. The tying knot of bride-groom i.e., Lagna-ganthi is followed by Dhup-Chaul-Chatioya, Usanga, Pasa. Finally the bride-groom bow before the assembly and the entire assembly blesses the couple with 'Haridhani'. Marriage rituals being over the couple is led to the Barghar and who bows down in reverence first to the Ghor-gosani and then to the

individual family members who command respects by virtue of age or relationship. Finally, all the members present in the occasion are entertained in a big feast.

Now-a-days a tendency has been growing among the enlightened section of the community to perform marriage according to Hindu customs, including 'Hom yajna' before the sacred fire. However, it is to be noted that whatever be the form of marriage, it is customary to propitiate 'Písi-Sore' - the deity of family welfare by sacrificing a cock and a hen before the formal union of the groom and the bride.

Though not very common, divorce is recognized by the Rabha society. A party desiring divorce is to take approval of the village council. If the council is satisfied with the grounds of divorce may order the action of formal separation by tearing betel leaf, the system known as 'Pan chira'.

Cremation and burial are the general rule of the Rabha society for those who die of natural causes. But in the case of a person died of some epidemic or unnatural death like suicide, the dead body of the deceased person is buried and not burnt. It is customary for the whole village not to take any food till the dead body is removed to the cremation ground. The members attaining the cremation are required to take bath before entering the house of the dead and inhale the smoke which comes out of the ritually burnt cotton-strand, leaves, etc.

The final death rites usually performed on the seventh day. It is customary not to take fish and meat till the completion of all the death rites. The offerings are made in the name of the deceased.

The funeral ceremony of the Pati Rabhas is marked by recitation from the Mahabharata and Ramayana and other sacred scriptures

of the Hindus. Death ceremonies of Pati Rabhas is less expensive and shorter when compared with Rangdonis and Maitoris.

Like all other tribal communities, the Rabhas live on agriculture. So it is the main occupation. The Rabhas practice wet cultivation. However, practice of jhum cultivation in the long past can also be traced.

Rice is the staple item. Apart from rice; sugarcane, tobacco, jute, chilies, pulses, sesame, mustard, ginger, turmeric, and potato are also cultivated. The other horticultural products viz., pine-apple, lemon, orange, jack-fruit, mango, litchi, jujube, tamarind, betel nut, coconut, banana, papaya, guava, beans and various kinds of gourds are also raised by them. Sometimes they produce on commercial basis.

Fishing and hunting are common practices of the Rahas. Pigs, goats, cattle, dogs, cats, buffaloes are the major domestic animals. Earlier these were reared for fulfilling domestic needs and consumption. But now-a-days poultry farms, piggery are established on commercial basis.

Weaving is a part of life of the Rabha women. Now most of the Rabha women weave their essential cloths in fly shuttle looms, but still women living in the interior places weave with *kaum-shimprang* (a loin loom) fitting on their waist. Thus the loom is an essential female property of their matrilineal clans. They know, spinning of *endi*, *muga* and cotton. They fulfill the family requirements for clothing.

The basic religious philosophy of the Rabhas is based on animism. The influence of Hinduism among Pati Rabhas have led to a considerable assimilation of that society. They have identified their traditional deities with Lord Siva and Mother Goddess. From this point of view, this section of the tribe may be described as the followers of both Saktism and

Saivism over and above their adherence to the traditional faith in animism. In recent years the influence of neo-vaishnava sect has made great impact on the Rabha socio-religious life.

Yet another development in the field of religion is the adoption of Christianity by a section of the tribe.

All the groups of the Rabha community perform different rituals, pujas and rites at different times of the year. Some of the important celebrations are as follows:

The Rangdani and Maitori groups celebrate Baikho or Khoksi Puja festival with the intention of propitiating Baikho the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. It is celebrated in the month of Bohag (mid April to mid May). Another important celebration of the Rangdanis is the 'Hachang puja'.

The Langa Puja of the Pati Rabhas is another important occasion. As they identify Langa their primary deity, with Lord Siva, thus it is the propitiation of Muhadeva. Besides Langa Dhan-kuber, Thakurani, Dudhkumar-Ohul and Goddess Baikho or Khoksi are also worshipped. Generally this puja is observed in the month of Bohag (mid April to mid May) either in a forest area or on the bank of a nearby river. Linga is propitiated with two fold objects - to have profuse yield of crop as well as to get rid of all the evil influences.

Along with Pati Rabhas, the 'Langapriya' is observed by the Rangdanis also.

Another religious festival of the tribe is connected with the propitiation of 'kechai'khaiti'- the deity presumed to be the protector of all humanity. This puja is held simultaneously with the 'Langpuja'. This puja is also known as 'Dingapuja' as a 'Dinga' (boat) is prepared out of the trunk

of plantain tree to place the offerings along with a duck or a goat and is allowed to float as a symbol of sacrifice.

The Pati Rabhas of south-east Goalpara and south-west Kamrup perform Marepuja, or Marraipuja to propitiate Goddess Monasa or Bishahari (the goddess of serpents). It is regarded as the most important occasion from both socio-religious and socio-cultural point of view. The propitiation is done through the performance of Deodhani and Ojapali dances accompanied by traditional folk songs based on the legend of Goddess Monasa and Chando-Sadagar. Maraipuja is observed primarily seeking blessings against fall and fatal diseases, natural calamities and also to allay fears from serpents during the year ahead. Though it is a community festival, it is sometimes observed privately for fulfilment of any particular desire or wish. Besides Goddess Monasa two other deities are also worshipped in this puja, they are - Sitala and Dharma Devota. In this puja a special type of structure made of pith is erected. It is known as *maju* where the story of Behula-Lakhinder is depicted through painting.

Note:

The ethnographic information in respect of the five selected tribes incorporated in this chapter has been called from the books and monographs listed below. Whenever possible, such information has been varified during fieldwork.

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CHAPTER – 4

CULTURE CHANGE – THE CONCEPT AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

I. Culture Change:

a) The Concept :

From the anthropological point of view, the concept of culture change has been formulated by many in various ways. First of all, let us consider the view as spelt out in the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*. According to it, culture change is the conceptual formulation that refers to the many ways in which societies change their pattern of culture. The basic issues are how and why there are shifts in rate and type of change rather than on the question of static versus changing culture. Again, according to the *Dictionary of Sociology*, culture change may be defined “as any change in any aspect (material or nonmaterial) of a culture, whether by addition, subtraction, or modification of culture traits or complexes. Culture changes come from many sources, but most often it occurs through contact with other cultures, inventions and the internal adjustments of a culture”. (Scott: 1988). Herskovits says that universal cultural phenomenon, and the process of change over a period of time constitute the dynamics of culture. Culture change cannot be studied as an isolated phenomenon, for change, by and of itself, is meaningless, until it is projected against a baseline of human behaviours.

b) The Factors for Culture Change:

The available data on culture change do not yet permit any easy generalization concerning the relative primacy of various factors that may generate significant shifts in rates and types of culture change. Some anthropologists who favour Marxist and neo-Marxist interpretation give emphasis on their theory such factors as the amount of energy harnessed percapita per year. Some put emphasis upon ecology and stress on the process of adaptation as if the primary factor. Other scholars like Weber, Opler, Herskovits and Greetz emphasize the importance of religions ideology; cultural themes and cultural focus or point to inherent congruities and tensions in social and cultural systems that generate constant pressure for change still many others have developed more specialized theories, according to whom social organization is a semi-independent system comparable in many respects to language and similarly characterized by an internal dynamics of its own, or stress the psychological aspects of culture change.

Whatever special emphasis may characterize a theory, it is useful to isolate three general factors that can influence change in a given culture.

i) Any change in the ecological niche occupied by a people influences culture change. Again such changes occur due to various reasons – (a) natural environmental changes (b) the migration of a people from one ecological niche to another. New cultural adaptations are always required for survival in the case of such shifts in ecological niche. (c) Any evolutionary change occurring within a society is obviously a factor of critical importance.

ii) Any contact between two societies with different cultural patterns influences change in both societies. The diffusion or borrowing of cultural elements that occurs has made these exchanges important in culture change throughout history. More profound and sustained cultural contact usually called “acculturation” generates even more significant shifts in the rates and types of change in the two cultures.

However, another term “transculturation” – although less commonly used than the term acculturation – is preferred by some anthropologist. The term first appeared in 1940. In his book *Cuban Counterpart* published in 1947 the Cuban scholar F. Ortiz gives the following reasons for this preference. “I am of the opinion that the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which would be called neoculturation.” (Quoted in Herskovits: 1974: pp. 475.)

c) The Processes:

The study of the process of culture change refers to the actual social mechanism by which the change takes place. Scholars like Bennett take the position that the basis of all culture change is located in changes in the attitudes and behaviour of individual members of a society. Other scholars like White Kroeber, and Murdock take the view that although individuals are the carriers of a culture, there are processes of change in

social and cultural systems which have dynamic properties of their own that can be isolated and studied.(See Sills 1968)

According to Ralph Linton, the content of culture can be divided into three categories. First, there are those ideas, habits and conditioned responses which are common to all same adult members of the society. He calls these the “universals”, second, we have those elements of culture which are not shared by the total population – which are called “specialties”. Under this head came the patterns for all those varied but mutually interdependent activities which have been assigned to various section of the society in the course of its division of labour. Third, there are in every culture a considerable number of traits which are shared by certain individuals but which are not common to all the members of the society or even to all the members of any one of the socially recognized categories, which is called alternatives.

Beyond the limits of culture there lies still a fourth category of habits, ideas and conditioned emotional responses, and of individual peculiarities. Of course, individual peculiarities cannot be classed as a part of culture since they may not be shared by any other member of a society.

Thus culture is essentially a socio-psychological reality. It is carried in the minds of individuals and can find expression only through the medium of individuals. Culture can be transferred from one society to another only through medium of its overt expressions. And culture is learnt, not biologically inherited and it is only through the medium of behaviour that it can be externalized and made avoidable to the new individuals for learning. Culture is completely external to the individual at birth, but in the courses of this development it becomes an integral part. Most of it sinks

into the personally so deeply and becomes so completely incorporated with the other elements that it lies below the level of consciousness. Here comes the relevance of Kroeber's contention that culture is both super individual and super organic. In his words, "culture is both super organic and super individual in that although carried, participated in, and produced by organic individuals, it is acquired; and it is acquired by learning. What is learnt is the existent culture" (Kroeber 1948: 249).

The difference between culture and individual personality can be easily explained by the difference in the foundations upon which each rest. The personality is dependent upon the brain and nervous system of the individuals. Culture, on the other hand, rests on the combined brains of all the individuals who compose a society. While these brains individually develop, stabilize and die, new brains constantly come forward to their places. Because of this constant presence of personalities, which are still in the formative period, cultures have an almost unlimited capacity for change. They can be rebuilt bit by bit by adding new elements working these over to fit the vest of the culture, and dropping elements, which have become poorly adapted to existing conditions. In a time a culture may, without breaking the continuity, achieve a form and content totally different from that with which it began. It is a continuum extending from the beginning of human existence to the present. As a whole, it represents the social heredity. Throughout the length of the cultural continuum, therefore traits are constantly being added and lost. However, difficulty doesn't end there. The adoption of a trait is always followed by a series of modifications both in it and in other pre-existing traits. Thus it can be stated that every culture is not only a continuum but a continuum in a constant state of change. There is a popular belief that

the cultures of “primitive” people are static. This seems to have arisen partly through the thinking of some early anthropologists. But in reality, the rate of change varies enormously from culture to culture at different periods in its history, but it is improbable that there has ever been a culture which was completely static at any time.

Herskovits had paid a good deal of attention to the study of culture a change. In fact his famous book on acculturation is concerned with the study of culture change. Out of the three paradoxes associated with the concept of culture. Herskovits prints out –“Culture is stable, yet is also dynamic, and manifests continuous and constant change”. (Herskovits, 1974:306).

Thus change is a universal phenomenon, and the processes of change over a period of time constitute the dynamics of culture. Culture change cannot be studied as an isolated phenomenon, for change, by and of itself is meaningless, until it is projected against a baseline of human behaviour as for a given time and nature. Above all, it must be contrasted to the phenomenon that is always opposed to it, the phenomenon of cultural stability, which in its psychological aspects, is called conservatism.

The evidence for cultural change is overwhelming. Archaeological findings have demonstrated how change consistently marks the remains left by peoples who have inhabited the same site over ages. The materials from lower and earlier strata are invariably found to differ from those in the upper and more recent levels. Another kind of evidence for the universality of change in culture can be drawn from the differing attitudes the members of ascending generations show toward the accepted ways of behaviour of their society.

A recent work called *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* [Levison & Enuber (1996)] deals with the idea of culture change in a comprehensive manner under the entry "Culture Change". The contents of the entry can be summarized in the following manner –

Theories of culture change depend on the concepts of culture embedded in them. For example, if one conceives of culture as a list of social and material traits, then the loss or replacement of an older trait by a newer one constitutes change. If, however, a culture is not the sum of its traits but rather the unconscious pattern that governs their arrangements, then change must be understood in a different way as argued by anthropologists like Edward Sapir to Claude Lévi-Strauss. Cultural evolutionism, especially in the works of E.B. Tylor and L.H. Morgan, was concerned with the stages through which human societies had passed that inevitably led from one stage to the next. The Victorian doctrine of progress assumed a uniform transitional pattern from a primitive or savage stage, through a more complex era often labeled barbarism, toward the highly evolved civilization of the present. The specific stages recognized by different theorists varied, but within a given stage, technological developments were linked with intellectual attainment and consequent growth in the overall scheme of social organizations. Either technology or intellect might be thought to lead the way upward, that is some theories stressed the impact of improved tools and techniques on social and intellectual life, while others emphasized the role of increasing rationality, as man put aside primitive notions of magic and witchcraft in favour of logical scientific understanding of the world. More recent advocates of an evolutionary approach to culture have tended to favour new technology as the basic cause of other changes. For example, Leslie White & Elman R. Service viewed

increasing control over energy resources as fundamental to the growth of culture and social organizations.

Historicism, an approach to culture that rejected grand evolutionary theories in favour of more detailed, regional studies of culture and its processes of change stands on a different point of view. Leaders of this approach included Franz Boas and A.K. Kroeber, who despite their many differences, insisted on the rigorous description and comparison of cultural traits within limited geographical areas. The goal was not to establish general stages of cultural development but rather to chart the distribution of social and material traits in order to understand the processes of invention, borrowing, rejection, adaptation and syncretism that led to their presence or absence and thus to reconstruct their history Edward Sapir and Ruth Benedict and Kroeber later emphasized the distinctive pattern that integrated traits from diverse sources into coherent psychologically satisfying wholes in given societies.

Functionalism, another British approach to culture insisted on the intensive study of individual societies as they worked in the present. Earlier the functionalists were simply uninterested in change, preferring synchronic approach to description and analysis. In their later works, however, the pioneers of functional analysis concerned themselves with the wide range of issues. B. Malinowski wrote on the dynamics of culture-change, A.R. Redcliff Brown on social structure, and E.E. Evans Pritchard insisted on the mutual relevance of history and anthropology.

In a significant functional study that attempted to translate the synchronic into diachronic, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (1941), Robert Redfield described four communities lying along the 'folk-urban' continuum

suggesting the ways in which small, relatively homogenous, isolated villages are transformed and incorporated into large, relatively diverse and open societies proposing processes such as individualization and cultural disorganization as necessary correlates. Homer, G. Bennett, also deserves mention for his study of innovation and its role in culture change. He analyzed the processes that gave rise to new cultural items and suggested some reasons for the acceptance or rejection of innovations within and between societies.

Philip K. Bock later pointed out the similarities between cultural innovations and the processes of linguistic change and of genetic mutation. Again, G.P. Murdock tried to establish correlations between residence and sexual taboos, a step toward understanding processes of social change. Processes he phrased in terms of behavioural theory. He thus unpacked a historical sequence from synchronic correlations, and his hypothesis has been supported by a number of long-term studies of change.

Virtually all materialist approaches in anthropology stem from the theoretical formulations of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engles, and most of these center on the notion of modes of production, whether or not they accept the doctrine of the inevitable progression from one mode to another. According to this view, the dynamics of any society stands to reflect unequal control of the means of production. This produces tension between the haves and haves not as well as generating characteristic social factors that set off a chain of other changes, evolutionary or revolutionary.

Another important approach is the cultural ecology in the form of specific studies of societal adaptations continues to be important. In the views of Julian Steward the adaptation of people to an environment that determines the make up of cultural core, those customs and institutions that

are compatible with ecological requirement. Scholars like Rappaport Marshal D. Sahlins argued that such specific evolutionary trends hypothesize by white and by Steward that is, while cultural change always involves responses to local conditions, viewed over the long term in a given region or world wide is to greater size and complexity with accumulation of technological innovations.

Marvin Harris is the contemporary inheritor of this tradition whose research strategy draws heavily on Marx and Steward. Harris persuasively presents a causal theory in which the material base “probabilistically determines” social structure, which in turn determines the super structure. The causes of social change are, thus always be sought in the materially determined “modes of production and reproduction” although Harris allows a degree of independence to the ideological structure.

Harris presents ingenious materialistic solutions to cultural puzzles, such as Hindu “cowlore” and Jewish “pignatred” as well as a sweeping account of evolution of human society from small hunting bands to complex, modern civilizations including the contemporary United States. He also systematically criticize cognitive, symbolic or structural approaches in anthropology, but these theories still fascinates researchers concerned with the details of cultural change. Just as materialistic theories continue the emphasis of early evolutionists on technology. Cognitive studies deal with changes in modes of thinking, although most abandon the simplistic growth of rationality.

Focusing on cognitive categories, anthropologists have demonstrated systematic changes in ways of thinking about plant or animal world or about the human body. James Farnandezx studies changes over a

century. Perhaps the best known anthropological study of cognitive evolution is the work of Brent Berlin and Paul Kay. While collecting and comparing the terminology used in hundreds of languages for classifying colours, Berlin and Kay discovered a pattern that correlated with levels of social complexity and other behavioural and environmental features. What began as an investigation into the cultural relativity of cognitive categories became a universal theory of cultural linguistic change and stimulated study of its physiological roots.

Linguistics has provided a model for other anthropologists in their investigations of culture change and cultural stability, which it is now recognized, requires explanations as much as change. Levi Strauss has drawn on concepts of structural linguistics; such as opposition and transformation to show how kinship systems and myths change overtime and among neighbouring groups. He is one of those anthropologists who seeks universal structures at a very deep and unconscious level of the human mind.

II. Culture Change in the Context of the Indian Society with Special Reference to North-East India and Assam:

Since the present study is concerned with the culture change in the tribal communities, it will naturally be appropriate to shed light on the term tribal and the conception and perception associated with it in the first place.

Etymologically the term “tribe” is traced back to the Latin term *tribus* which meant the three divisions of the Romans and to which was attached a political connotation. In European communities the term was used to denote families or groups having common super names. Sometimes it meant a division or a territory inhabited by a particular family or community.

According to Oxford Dictionary “a race of people in primitive or barbarians condition, under a headman or chief.

These series of meanings which are clearly race-based and not a little judgment oriented is too sweeping to be generally applicable to the vast masses of Indian population who go by the name of tribals but who live at different levels of equation with Indian Civilization. A Great body of them are neither primitive nor barbarous. Infact, the history of the tribals and non-tribals in India has not been of one mutual exclusiveness.. On the contrary much of India’s social and cultural history consists of the story of the progressive integration of the tribal groups known as *janas* into the *jati* system of the Aryan-Hindu society. (Singh 1972: See Introductory Address by N.R.Ray).

The study of social and cultural change had started in the Indian context quite early. For example a UNESCO sponsored seminar was held at Calcutta University in the Dept of Anthropology in early 1956. The proceedings of the seminar were published in book form in 1957 under the title *Study of Changes in Traditional Culture* (Chottopadhyay 1957). Scholars like K.P. Chottopadhyay, S.K. Chatterjee, N.K. Bose and many others showed their concern with the changes that had occurred due to the impact of modern industrial civilization. In India this impact has come in the last century in the tribal areas, although some indirect effects of it had reached earlier through effective extension of British rule in these areas. Apart from the large changes that had occurred among the tribal folk due to the impact of modern industrial civilization, a steady change had been in progress over a long period due to contact with the neighbouring people of “advanced culture” who are mainly Hindus.

Later on other scholars took up the study of social and culture change in India and such, thoughts and discussions are gradually developed by different scholars. On a more concrete form M.N. Srinivas presented his views with the help of the concepts like "Sanskritization" vis-à-vis "Westernization". He pinpointed the various areas concern with the different aspects of changes taking place in the contemporary Indian society both tribal and non-tribal. According to him introduction of Western technology, improvement in the communication system, industrialization were the factors associated with Westernization. On the other hand he coined the term Sanskritization to designate a process through which the low caste adopt the Brahminic way of life, though it is theoretically forbidden. Thus the caste system he showed, is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movements has always been possible, and especially so in the middle region of the hierarchy. Later on Srinivas expanded his views to include the adoption of Brahminic modes by the tribal people.

Another important landmark in the study of change of Indian society and culture particularly in the tribal world is represented by the book *Tribal Satuation in India* (Singh, 1972) which is the outcome of a seminar held in the late sixties. The book contains the contributions made by scholars like Nihararanjan Ray, S.C. Dube, M.N. Srinivas and many others. The views expressed by some of them are as follows:

According to Ray, the Tribals of India are the indigenous autochthonous people of the land. They had been long settled in different parts of the country before the Aryan speaking people penetrated India to settle down first in the Indus Valley, and then within a millennium and a

half, to spread out large parts of the country along the plains and river valleys. By the time the Aryan speaking people were settling down in the Indus and upper Ganga-Yamuna Valleys, they were fast becoming rural and agricultural and hence a settled people, with a highly developed language capable of articulating very subtle and abstract ideas and thoughts. Secondly, they had by that time mastered the technology of agriculture, animal husbandry, evolved varieties of crafts. Thirdly, they had also evolved relatively developed local administration and finally developed a well-thought out and organized social and religions system and were able to build into these socio-religions system Brahminical Hinduism, an economic structure based essentially on a production system managed and controlled on hereditary principles of group formation which has come to be known as the caste system.

The linguistic and archaeological evidences suggest that these non-Aryan indigenous people or jana were settled originally on the plains and river valleys. But they were not all in the same stage of development. On the question of the relationship between the *janas* of indigenous origin and their Indo-Aryan speaking neighbours, Ray says that those *janas* who were made economically and socially subservient. They were eventually incorporated into the caste system; they were given a place at the lowest rung.

To quote Ray, "Then there were those who lived on the periphery of the Indo-Aryan speaking Hindu-Brahmanical peoples, or were surrounded by the later. These peoples were able to maintain somewhat their socio-religious, economic and cultural identity. But because of their close locational proximity and the steady pressure of the larger and techno-economically more organized communities, they were obliged to enter into

social and more importantly, economic contacts, communication and exchanges with their neighbours who were socially, culturally and economically more dominant. Through this process, initiated and controlled mainly by the latter, the non-*jati janas* were slowly but eventually obliged to give up their identity and succumb to the pressure".(Introductory Address in Singh, 1972).

According to Ray, those communities or groups who had not yet merged within the caste fold had been for centuries living away from the mainstream in the relatively isolated and inaccessible and less fertile and less agriculturally productive regions of forests, hills and mountains. It is these unassimilated communities that came to be identified as 'tribal' communities. It must also be kept in mind that the Aryan speaking newcomers were not the only people who developed a organized civilization based on advanced agricultural technology, when the nomadic Aryans reached Indus Valley, they found the land occupied by indigenous agriculturists.

According to S.C. Dube, changes have come in the life of these communities after the British rule. Though the British ruled with a stern posture even in tribal areas, their attitude to the tribes otherwise was paternalistic and protective. The policy of exclusion or partial exclusion of tribal areas reduced economic competition between the tribals and the non-tribals, and thus minimized the principal cause of conflict between them. Indirectly it also helped the tribes to persevere their distinctive life ways relatively undisturbed by powerful currents of change having alien origin. Their insulation from the main currents of Indian life helped the tribes in preserving their traditions, but at the same time it also hindered the growth of competence in them to face growing competition in a wider society and

to meet some of the challenges of the contemporary world, changes did come about, but in dribbles.

Free India has continued to offer a measure of special protection to the tribes, but in the rapidly changing contexts of national life they have been catapulted from their relative isolation into the vortex of competitive politics. An articulate and effective political elite has emerged in several tribal areas. Where such elite does not exist, political parties – national regional or local come to field the vacuum. Tribal problems are being politicized increasingly. A sizeable part of the current manifestation of tribal unrest in India undoubtedly the product of manipulative politics.

On the one hand tribal solidarity is being forged, and on the other, the tribes as a category are being alienated from the rest of the country's population. Perhaps in no other period of India's history there had emerged such a distinct and strong tribal image. Tribalness is now a powerful political factor, and to exploit its full potential tribal groups at different techno-economic level and representing different cultural ethos and patterns are being linked politically.

Another important book *Applied Anthropology in India* (Vidyarthi, 1968) came out in the year 1968 in which some very pertinent issues related to socio-cultural changes in the context of tribal areas particularly in the wake of various welfare and development activities have been dealt with by eminent academics and field experts.

These new developments have brought into focus the relevance of the concept of ethnicity in the Indian context. Scholars like A.K. Danda studied the situation and the problems of Indian ethnicity giving particular attention on the tribal societies. Prof. Danda's *Ethnicity in India* is a notable

contribution in this field (Danda, 1991). In this book he systematically discusses the basic conceptual issues and builds up a theoretical model into which he fits empirical inputs, room for a wider multicultural perspective.

He holds that instead of assuming ethnicity as a system of categorization comprehending it as a dynamic model having its roots in the feeling of deprivation could perhaps be relatively more practical and analytically rewarding. Ethnicity stands for the ethnic quality or affiliation of a group bearing different meanings in varied situational context. In fact, an individual or a group can possess several identities, latent or manifest simultaneously and project one that according to the self-assessment of individuals or groups may appear appropriate in specific context.

Yogendra Singh in his book *Modernization of Indian Tradition* dealt with social and cultural changes in a broad general framework has recently updated his ideas in his latest book *Culture Change in India, Identity Globalization* which takes account of the importance of ethnicity on the one hand and the all pervading impact of globalization on the other.

In the previous chapter we had mentioned about the distinctive character of socio-cultural pattern of the N.E. Region. There is a qualitative difference between the tribal situation prevailing in the North-East and along the Himalayan borders on the one hand and that prevailing elsewhere in the country, on the other.

In the first place which remained relatively isolated, the features that stand out are – a preponderant tribal population, an officially enforced isolation, a self sufficient economy, and a relative absence of agrarian issues. There are no aliens. There are however contacts between

Assamese tribals and non-tribals and between other groups of the region. The Brahmaputra was the artery of trade and the channel of communication and cultural penetration. Since independence new developments flow from the impact of an intensive administration and new forces of communication and contact released by the construction of defiance and the movement of the army. These new activities have entailed a certain rise in standards of life of some people, and the growth of a 'now rich' made up of local tribal contractors, businessmen and military suppliers. For reasons of history and geo-politics the northeast shows a much higher range of politicization. The focus of historical processes of change, which worked in the tribal areas elsewhere in the country in 19th and early 20th century, has now shifted to the North-East. Village communities are disintegrating, and a new individualism taking shape.

However, the North-Eastern region presents a picture of almost bewildering cultural variety and diversity, particularly in regard to its tribal population. Apart from the fact that the large number of different tribal communities live in the hills and plains of the region, what is striking is that we have here the tribal and non-tribal, the acculturated and assimilated, the Sanskritized and no-Sanskritized the highly 'refined' and the seemingly "primitive", all co-existing in a remarkable state of juxtaposition. While such a situation is perhaps true of some other parts of India although in a much lesser degree – what stands out in this region is not only the predominance of the tribal element in terms of the number of such communities and their overall ratio in the total indigenous population of the region, but also in terms of the dominant presence of markedly tribal racial and cultural stands in the socio-cultural fabrics of the 'non-tribal' societies.

Particularly in Assam, the process of assimilation and absorption of various tribal populations into the Hindu-Assamese fold a process which has practically stopped working in other parts of India since quite some time past – has been in operation in this region till comparatively recent times and can not be said to have completely stopped working in other parts of India since quite some time past – has been in operation in this region the comparatively recent times and cannot be said to have completely stopped working even today. Thus, particularly in Assamese society the line between the tribal and the non-tribal remained thin. It was difficult to say where tribal ended and the non-tribal began. This situation can be described as one of tribe caste hiatus. Eminent Anthropologist Hutton who had an intimate knowledge of the ground realities of the situation prevailing in this region devotes much attention to this flexible nature of the Assamese caste system vis-a vis the local tribal communities.

Like Hinduism, other major religions have also contributed their shares towards the processes of assimilation at different periods and in different ways. The role of Buddhism in this regard has been more or less akin to that of Hinduism with the difference that the drawl of the tribal groups into the Buddhistic fold did not involve the process of absorption into the *jati* system.

Many of the tribal groups of Assam as well as N.E., India are either affiliated to Buddhism or others which have been influenced by the Buddhistic ways through contact with the former. The groups like Monpas and Sherdukpens belong to the Samaistic Buddhism of the Tibetan order and those like the Khamtis, the Phakes, the Khamyangs, the Aitons are follows of Hinayana Buddhistic faith having links with Burnese Theravada order.

Islam's role in this respect is not much different from that of the all-India pattern. But, one noteworthy fact is that one of the earliest converts to Islam in these parts was a Bodo by the name of Ali Mech. Again the origin of one of the major divisions of the Garo tribe viz. the Momin, is ascribed to a Muslim gentleman of priestly status.

But the North East has experienced a remarkable transformation in the tribal population through Christianity. While the bulk of the tribal communities in Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya have embraced Christianity, more and more sections of the tribal populations in Assam and Manipur have been coming under its influence. Christianity has brought a new way of life and attitudes of these groups and new equations are being sought at different levels.

The most notable changes in the North-East have been the beginning a settled agriculture, development of marketable surpluses, monetization of tribal economy, and the rise of new consciousness. The situation has many dimensions. As a result of the rising consciousness a separatist tendency has been viewed as an attempt of the tribal folk to define their socio cultural identity vis-à-vis others.

This consciousness led to various kinds of recent developments. There have been feelings that (i) The tribals have been neglected and deprived of their due rights and privileges (ii) The large scale presence of outsiders in the economic and even administrative fronts, have been causing a threat to the future of these communities. Unabated influx of illegal immigrants has disturbed the balance of the demographic pattern in such a manner that the communities are facing the prospects of being reduced to minorities even in their own homelands.

Various combinations of these factors worked in different communities. Unabated influx of immigrants has disturbed the balance of the demographic pattern in such a manner that the communities are facing the prospects of being reduced to minorities even in their own homelands.

Various combinations of these factors worked in different communities. As a result, resentment and frustration particularly among the youth have found expression in intolerance, leading to extremism and even militancy. Infact, the number of militant outfits is growing day by day and their activities have increasingly been assuming international ramifications.

Another recent dimension of the ethnic consciousness is the tendency towards retribalization. The political privileges for the tribals especially those come under the scheduled Tribe category has given rise to this phenomenon. Formerly, those groups trying to entre into the caste fold for up graduation of their social status by dropping their tribal identity are now trying to revive their tribalness as individuals as well as groups.

Some of these recent trends developing in N.E. region have been taken up for more detailed treatment in Chapter 10 under the title 'Regional Trends'.

III. Overview of Literature on Culture Change in the North-East:

The study of different ethnic groups has been started by the British administrators and military officials and the Christian missionaries. In their monographs and various ethnographic accounts mention of the aspects of change are to be found. That way it can be said that the phenomenon of culture change had been noticed as early as late 19th century and early 20th century. In our present study various such accounts has helped us to get a general view of the tribal population of this region.

Apart from the famous *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* by E.T. Dalton (1872) some of the early monographs are given below: A short Account of the Susha-ikuki Tribes of the North east Frontier (Sopitt: 1884), A historical & Descriptive Account of the Kachari Tribes in the North Cachar Hills, (Sopitt: 1885), A short Account of the Kocha Naga Tribes (Sopitt: 1885), Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley (Waddell: 1900), *The Meiteis of Manipur* (Hodson:1908), *The Mikirs* (Lyall & Stack: 1908), *The Garos* (Playfair: 1909), *The Kacharis* (Endle: 1911), *The Rabhas* (Friend Pereira: 1911), *The Naga Tribes of Manipur* (Hodson: 1912), *Lushai-Kuki Clans* (Shakespear: 1912), *The Angami Nagas* (Hutton:1921), *The Ao Nagas* (Mills:1922), *The Lotha Nagas* (Mills: 1923, *The Sema Nagas* (Hutton: 1931), *The Rengma Nagas* (Hills: 1937),.

At a later period different scholars, both foreign and Indian, studied different populations from the anthropological point of view and some of them tried to study the changing situation of these communities due to various factors especially contacts with the outside world. In this context mention could be made of the important works like – *A Himalayan Tribe: From Cattle to Cash* by Haimendorf and *A Philosophy for Nefa* by Elwin.

In comparatively recent times, especially after independence various publications containing valuable ethnographic information are regularly coming out. Some of them are modest efforts to provide sundry information. Some of such works useful for our study are as follows: In English – *The Miri or Mistings of the Brahmaputra Valley* (Pegu: 1956), *The Lalungs* (Sharma Thakur: 1985), *The Lalung Society* (Das & Shyamchoudhury: 1973),

The Hill Lalungs (Gohain: 1993), *The Lulungs (Tiwas)* (Raruah: 1989), *The Karbis of the Hills* (Baruah: 1990), *The Dimasa Kacharis of the North Cachar Hill District of Assam* (Bordoloi : 1976), *Tai of North East India* (Gogoi : 1996), *The Lushai-Kuki Clans (Part-I)* (Shakespeare: 1975), *Aspects of Padam-Mimiyolug Culture* (Ray: 1960), *The Thadon Kukis – A Brief Account of History and Culture* (Kipgen: 1982), *Some Cultural & Linguistic Aspects of the Garos* (Choudhury: 1958), *Tribes of Assam Part I* (Bordoloi et al: 1987) *Tribes of Assam Part-II* (Bordoloi, et al: 1988), *Tribes of Assam Part III* (Bordoloi: 1991), *Plain Tribes of Assam* (Doley & Das : 1995), *The Land of Seven Sisters* (Saikia, ed : 1974).

In Assamese:

Deuri Sanskriti (Deuri, 1964), *Rabha Sanskritir Dhara* (Rabha: nd), *Rabha Janajati* (Rabha, 1974), *Mising Sanskritir Alekhya* (Kagyung, 1970), *Asamor Janajati* (Bhattacharya: 1962). *Mising Sanskriti* (Kuli, J 2003), *Rabha Sanskritir Chamu Itihash* (Rabha 1998).

Apart from these, there are several other recent publications regarding the changing situation of the different tribes of this region, some of such publications are as follows: - *A study of change in Two Garo Villages* (Majumdar: 1980), *Culture Change Among the Garos* (Bose: 1985), *Changes in Mikir Society –A Case Study of Kanther Terang Village, Mikir Hills, Assam* (Saikia: 1968), *The Misings (Miris) of Assam : Development of a New Life Style* (Mipun: 1993), *Continuity and Change in Tribal Society* (Miri, ed. : 1993), *Constraints of Tribal Development in N.E. India* (Bordoloi: 1990), *Tribal Situation in North-East India* (Sengupta, 1994).

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CHAPTER – 5

THE MISING (MIRI) CASE

1.1 Background Note:

As we have mentioned in the ethnographic account of the Misings (Chapter-III), the concentration of the Mising population is found in the upper Assam districts. However the culture of the Misings of the Jonai area of Dhemaji district is considered as the most undisturbed and authentic by all sections of the community.

On the other hand the Mising population in Sonitpur district of central Assam is small and confined to few pockets along the banks of the rivers Jiyabharoli, Dikorai and Buroi. However because of their greater presence in the Jiyabharoli riparian areas Sontipur, Misings are referred to as “Bhoroliporia” Misings. The “Bhoroliporia” Misings have a distinctive way of life, which is somewhat different from that of the Misings of upper Assam. In this work also we have often used the term “Bhoroliporia Misings”.

We have made an attempt to make an in-depth study of the Bhoroliporia Misings since most of the academic works so far done on the Misings have concentrated their attention on the upper Assam Misings and the “Bhoroliporias” have been more or less left out.

For my fieldwork I have selected a few villages in the Jonai area of Dhemaji district for the following two reasons –

- a) The Mising culture of Jonai area is regarded as the most representative.
- b) Most of the important developments in the socio-cultural and socio-political fields have originated in this region; particularly the Misings of this area have given the lead in the ethnicity-related moves of the community.

For this study the following villages were covered for fieldwork:

In the Sonitpur Area: Bokagaon (Miri), Baligaon (Miri), Rangajan (Miri), Toubhanga, Tinighoria, Kekokoli, Sarudikorai, Bamunipam, Sikombasti.

In the Dhemaji Area : Gali-mesaki, Gali-nabang, and Lai-mekuri .

The villages under Sonitpur district were familiar to me from my post-graduation days. I have done field work for my post-graduation dissertation in these villages – particularly Baligaon (Miri) and Bokagaon (Miri). As I had a good rapport with these villages it became naturally very easy for me to carry out field work for my present study. That background has helped me a lot in gathering information and better understanding of the field situation. Although I have visited all these villages and collected data, the intensive field work had been done in Baligaon, Bokagaon and Rangajan. Similarly in Dhemaji district also as I stayed at the village Gali Mesaki and developed a good rapport relatively more intensive field work has been done in that village mainly.

II. Trends of Change:

Now we are presenting below the data according to the set parameters mentioned earlier-

(i) In the Field of Socio-Economic Life:

In Sonitpur area we would like to concentrate on the trends of change regarding the economy and its related aspects.

As agriculture is the mainstay of the people of the villages under study, so the economy of the people mainly centered round agricultural activities. While agriculture has been the prime source of livelihood since long past, the nature of agricultural operations have changed particularly during the last 50 years.

As we have mentioned earlier, the Misings, who had once been hill-dwellers, practised jhum cultivation which they continued even after coming down to the plains. In the past, more precisely till 60 to 50 years back, jhuming was the only mode of production in these villages – e.g., Baligaon, Bokagaon, Rangajan. Their jhum fields were on the hill slopes of the nearby hills and hillocks as well as on the plains. At that time more stress was given on the production of horticultural items rather than paddy. Rice was produced, but only the *ahu* variety in a much smaller amount while yam, potatoes, different kinds of vegetables were produced in large quantities. Gradually they shifted their fields to the plains and by clearing jungles, they prepared fields for cultivation. At the initial state of cultivation in the plain area, jhuming was the sole method of production. It was about 40 to 50 years back that they gradually learnt the skill of settled cultivation from their non-tribal Assamese neighbours. Even after the adoption of this new method, they simultaneously practised both jhuming and settled cultivation. Thereby jhuming had lost its importance. Now, apart from occasional practice, jhuming has been almost completely abandoned by the people of these villages.

This shifting of fields from hill slopes to the plains as well as adoption of settled cultivation in place of jhum has brought successive changes in a number of agriculture-bound activities, for example, in methods of production, agricultural implements, cropping pattern, food habits, transportation and commercial transaction, etc. In fact, the changes and adoptions in these aspects are either directly or indirectly involved with the economic life of the people.

One major change is distinctly found in the case of agricultural implements. For jhuming, the digging stick and the chopper had been the main implements. Jhuming involves cutting and felling of trees followed by burning, and thereby preparing the soil for cultivation. For cutting purposes the chopper called *okto* or *yoktung* was in use. For preparing the soil after burning of trees, an iron hoe called *kuriyan* or *pakur* was used by them. The digging stick locally known as *tulngkun* or *tooyun* was used for digging, sowing the seeds as well as planting. However, adoption of settled cultivation has been followed by the adoption of implements used for the latter kind of operation. The terms used for implements of wet cultivation are loan-words from Assamese and this is sufficient evidence that the villagers have acquired the skill from their non-tribal Assamese neighbours. The implements which are used for the cultivation are *nangal*, *moi*, *joboka*, *bindha*, *kasi* etc.

Formerly, i.e., about 40 to 50 years back the buffalo (*minjek* in Mising) was the only breed cattle reared by the villagers, which was also used for ploughing. Buffalo rearing is a very old practice of the Misings, which must have been a continuation of their hill past. But gradually they began to rear more cows than buffalos. It is also another example of change

under the circumstances. As the cow has come to their economy much later, especially after close contact with the Assamese farmers who mostly use the cow for ploughing, the term used for the cow is also a loan word from Assamese i.e. *goru*. Now-a-days although the cow is used by most people, there are a few families having buffaloes although in limited numbers.

The latest change and at the same time adaptation in this field is provided by the coming of the power-tiller and the water-pump. The Mising villagers are using power tillers to till the soil as well as water pumps for irrigating the fields. These are the latest additions to their agricultural technology.¹ Although only a few wealthy families have modern agricultural machineries like power-tiller, pump set etc., the facilities are shared by the villagers through mutual agreement. Like the changes in the case of implements involved in production, the other implements related with agricultural activities have also undergone similar changes for example, in the processing of crops. Now-a-days, the huller machine is used for husking paddy instead of the traditional boat-shaped mortar and pestle or the husking pedal (*dhenki*) – itself an adaptation from non-tribal Assamese neighbours. There are a few families having puller machines and the others get their paddy husked on payment at a reasonable rate.

Thus a series of changes have come about over the period of time in the field of implements related with agricultural activities right from the digging stick to the power tiller. Here the striking fact is that the villagers have learnt to cope up with the changes in the process blending the old and the new.

Changes have taken place in another sphere of their economy

i.e. the cropping pattern. At the time when jhuming was the only means of production, yam, different kinds of taros, and potatoes were the staple items along with a small amount of *ahu* rice, pulses and vegetables. In addition to these items, cotton was also produced in a fairly large quantity. But as they gradually gave up jhuming and began to cultivate extensively in the plains and on the river bank by clearing the jungles, some changes occurred in their crop items. New items were introduced, i.e. new varieties of rice other than *ahu*, mustard seeds, sesame, sugar cane, jute etc.

In the past they produced only for consumption and the economy was purely at the subsistence level. Production was not at all market oriented and the barter system was prevalent. But since about 50 to 40 years back, things began to change: the concept of money and market economy became much stronger and they started playing significant roles. This development also led to the concept of market oriented surplus. The cumulative effect of these factors finally led to the increase in the production of rice. Formerly rice was produced once in a year. Gradually with the stronger market pull, land has come to be cultivated more than once, often twice and sometimes even more. Now-a-days they produce other crops wherever rice is not grown. In addition, *bao* rice is cultivated in the low lying areas. However, still a small amount of *ahu* variety is produced mainly for socio-religious reasons. As *ahu* was the original variety of rice produced by the villagers, even today they try to identify their traditional rituals and practices with this variety of rice. Along with rice, the production of mustard seeds has also increased. In comparison to earlier times, due to the rising tendency in the market value, jute is gaining importance among the wealthy industrious farmers of the villages.

In the case of vegetables also new items have been introduced. When a new variety proves successful, it gradually gets incorporated in their agricultural set up. Carrots, cabbages, cauliflower, tomatoes, different varieties of beans, beet, peas, papaya etc. are such additions. A few industrious cultivators are now experimenting with different hybrid varieties of crops and vegetables.

As with implements, cropping pattern, and crop items, in the case of fertilizers and pesticides also a lot of changes have taken place. Cowdung along with the ashes of burnt trees and leaves have been the fertilizers used by the villagers from remote past. Even about 20 years back they didn't have much knowledge about the modern chemical fertilizers and pesticides. But gradually through the government promotional programmes, they have come to know about such facilities. Some industrious farmers have successfully utilized such fertilizers and pesticides and got good results. Another recent addition in this field is the plantation of trees yielding green manure. This is definitely due to contact with the neighbouring tea gardens where such trees are exhaustively grown for shade and manure. From the remote past the villagers have been using certain locally available tree called *gunori*, and a kind of sour fruit (*rabab tenga*) as pesticide. Erection of small bamboo sticks or small branches of trees at regular intervals in the entire field was also in practice keeping in mind that such sticks or branches will provide perches for numerous birds who will eat up the harmful insects. Although the use of chemical pesticides has become popular now-a-days, the villagers are still using their traditional manure and pest-control devices.

Regarding adaptation in various fields like technique of production, implements, cropping pattern and so on we are giving below two

case studies for having a clear picture of the actual situation through a comparative analysis:

Case-1

Name : Mr. Mukunda Mili

Sex : Male

Age : 75 years

Marital Status: Married

Educational Qualification : Nil

Place : Baligaon (Miri)

Date : 20-10-99.

Mr. Mukunda Mili 75 years old with a paralyzed left side recalled his earlier days when he was an active farmer. When he was a young man in his twenties, they used to cultivate in the plains by clearing the jungles. They used both jhuming and wet method of cultivation. Buffaloes were reared in large numbers and used for ploughing. Cowdung was the prime manure item and also the ashes of the burnt trees and leaves. They used certain locally available leaves and fruits as pesticides. Yam, taro, potatoes, vegetables and cotton were produced in their jhum fields while rice, pulses, mustard, sesame were produced with the help of ploughing. At that time the only variety of rice was *ahu* and that of pulse was *matimah*. Mustard was produced mainly for selling purposes. They hardly had direct contact with the market. The sell of products especially mustard and jute took place through middle man who came to the village or at the mahajan's place. These businesses then were normally of Marwari community locally known as Kenya.

Egg plant, pumpkin, gourd, chillis, black pepper, garlic, ginger, varieties of banana, various kinds of herbs were the common products. The

production was at a subsistence level but they worked very hard. Gradually things began to change and the cropping pattern also changed a lot. They have almost given up jhuming and adopted wet cultivation as the principal basis of production. From about 25 to 20 years back production of rice has increased tremendously, especially the *sali* variety.

Case - 2

Name : Mr. Komison Mili

Sex : Male

Age : 40 years

Marital Status: Unmarried

Educational Qualification : Graduate

Place : Baligaon (Miri)

Date : 21-10-99.

Mr. Komison Mili, a second cousin of Mr. Mukunda Mili, is an industrious young farmer. He has about 150 bighas of land and according to him this time out of almost 150 bighas, the area under jute plantation is about 70 bighas because he has speculated that this time the prices of jute will go up. The rest of the land is divided into a number of divisions for production of other items, especially rice followed by mustard and vegetables. Komison, a well known person of the area, has a good link with the outside world. He has brought fast growing, high yielding varieties of rice, pulses and well as various vegetables and fruits like papaya, coconut, mango, tomato, carrots, cabbages, cauliflower etc. He has employed about 40 workers from their neighbouring Nepali and tea workers community. The land is tilled with power tiller. He uses chemical fertilizers along with cow-

dung, the traditional manure. For increasing the nitrogen content and productivity of the soil, particularly for the vegetables, he has planted certain fast growing trees which the villagers call *aar gos* (manure tree) commonly used in the tea gardens for this purpose as well as for providing shade. He too has used chemical pesticides along with their traditional devices of pest control.

* * *

Besides these adaptations, there is a recent important development in the economic field, that is the plantation of valuable trees for multiple purposes. Such plantations are completely profit oriented. Till now they use wood for cooking. One important object of this plantation of fast growing trees like *kadam*, mango, etc. is to get firewood. From the remote past fire wood was collected from the nearby jungles. But gradually the forests were declared as reserved forests and protected from human habitation. Therefore, the supply of fuel has become limited and in recent years it has created problems to some extent. Of course the villagers get a substantial supply of fuel from drift wood during rainy season from the Jiya Bhoroli river. But as alternative the villagers now have started plantation of fast growing trees consciously for the supply firewood. Similarly plantation of such trees as *sal*, *segun*, *sisu*, *gamari* etc. are done for two purposes i.e. for using as timber both for home consumption and for sell.

Again, a few wealthy enthusiastic villagers have launched a new venture by planting *agar* trees that fetch a good price from exporters. However, this experiment is yet to be proved profitable as it is still in its initial stage.

Such new developments have made a great impact on a number of aspects of social life. For example, till recent times use of wooden furniture was unknown to the villagers. But now almost every household possesses some items of such furniture as chairs, bench, bed, table, etc. However, the most sticking feature is that some well to do families are now having luxurious furniture of latest design which are in fashion.

The new developments – the changes and the adaptations, have been helped by improved communication, transport and the forces of market economy. As we have mentioned earlier, about 50 years ago barter was the popular medium for exchange of goods and commodities at a given rate fixed by mutual understanding. However at that time the villagers were not totally unaware about the monetary transaction. Of course, the use of money by them was occasional and negligible. But gradually the money oriented market economy had influenced their transaction system especially with the outside world. The economic interaction with the outside world through the neighbouring market centers or towns has made their production system market oriented and at the same time it has opened up avenues of diverse earning sources for them. The increase in the production of rice, changing cropping pattern regarding various items, plantation of trees for multiple purposes are directly involved and influenced by the market oriented production system.

Such exposures followed by numerous adaptations have direct as well as indirect implications on their socio-cultural life. A significant shift of attitude, a more or less pan-Indian phenomenon i.e., the young generations are now heading towards a money-based society and it is definitely fueled by the communication boom through various mass media

and growing consumerism. The young fellows are now interested in getting easy money through business, contracts etc. rather than agricultural activities even though they are skilled in and capable of doing so.

Another subtle but significant implication to which the villagers have adapted themselves is their food habit. Traditionally their staple diet was yam along with varieties of taro and potatoes. In addition to these, rice constituted a major food item with large amount of leafy vegetables, fish and meat – both boiled and smoked. Pork was popular and common, although chicken was also eaten. Use of oil was practically unknown in the past and even about 30 to 20 years back, the people seldom used oil. But now they use oil like their non-tribal neighbours. However, boiled preparations are still taken in large quantities and relished by them. Increase in the production of rice has brought a change in their staple diet i.e., a shift has occurred from yam to rice. Rice is now-a-days considered as the major food item by the villagers. The changes in their food habits can be visualized with the help of a case study.

Name : Mrs. Giyoni Mili

Sex : Female

Age : 70 years

Marital Status: Married

Educational Qualification : Nil

Place : Baligaon (Miri)

Date : 19-10-99.

Mrs. Giyoni Mili a seventy-years-old lady told me a lot of things about their food habits, their delicacies as well as the changed and the changing trends. According to Mrs. Mili, so far as she can remember,

in her childhood days a lot of yam, different kinds of taros and potatoes constituted their major food items. Boiled preparations were extensively used along with smoked fish and meat. Use of oil was occasional, Boiled yam was used as snacks as well as a substantial food, apart from rice. Mrs. Mili recalled some of the favourite recipes of her childhood. Of course, such preparations are still done but with a modified version. According to her, *poptoani* is one of her favourites. It is a preparation of chicken plus rice paste – simply by boiling with salt. However, now-a-days the same preparation is done with oil and spice by little bit of frying. Another favourite recipe of hers is a dish of smoked fish with pumpkin. Like the other one this preparation was also done by boiling; but now-a-days it is done with oil an spice. Today rice is consumed in a much larger quantity than in earlier days. Bread, biscuits, various other market - based items have become very common. Such items are often used for entertainment of casual visitors.

According to Mrs. Mili, *apo* or *apong* (a home made rice beer) is their traditional beverage. It was used for all kinds of purposes – as a part of their food habit, offering in the rituals and ceremonies for consumption and worshipping, for strengthening and nourishing the body, for offering to the guests, etc. However, gradually tea is taking the place of rice beer. Today tea is the common drink consumed by the villagers. It is also offered to the guests. Due to the awareness about the bad effects of the consumption of liquor, the villagers particularly the young generation, have restricted the preparation and consumption of *apo* or *apong* to a large extent. However, the preparation and consumption of *apo* is essential for ritualistic and for festive occasions. Of course, rice beer is still consumed particularly by the older generation.

The above represents an attempt to give a picture of the trends of change in the socio-economic life of the Mising people of central Sonitpur area.

The Misings of Jonai:

We now turn to the Misings of Jonai area of Dhemaji district. Jonai is a subdivision of the district of Dhemaji. It is situated on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Jonai is also known as Murkagselek.

The economy of the Misings of Jonai solely depended on agriculture until about 25 to 30 years back. Though now-a-days other occupations are being taken up by a substantial section of the people, agriculture still remains the mainstay. As observed earlier, the Misings were originally hill-dwellers they practised shifting cultivation. After coming down to the plains they continued to practice it for a long time. But gradually they have adopted the wet cultivation in order to adapt themselves with the changed environment. Now they have almost given up shifting cultivation.

Different varieties of taro, yam, potatoes, a number of varieties of rice, sesame, cotton vegetables were the main items of production. Now-a-days rice is the major item.

The youth organizations especially students' organizations like *All Assam Mising Student's Union* have started motivating the people to produce crops which have either high market value or which are used as a raw material of certain high-priced finished products. Such commodities are both economically significant or in some cases in addition to their market value, they have got some cultural value as well. A few examples will help us in understanding the situation.

1. A special variety of crop locally called as *phaphar* (a kind of pulse) is introduced as a cash crop because of its high yield and high market price. Usually they sell it to the traders from outside, particularly to the Marwari businessman. It is a very recent development.
2. Traditionally the Misings used to cultivate cotton. Cotton was used mainly for preparing yam for cloths. Again the Misings have a special kind of hand-woven blankets popularly known as *mirijim* which is made of raw cotton – in the similar manner a special type of male jacket is also made.

After the coming of ready-made cotton yam in the market, which started about 30-40 years back, use of yam prepared by spinning cotton gradually became less. As a result, the quantity of production with such yam has become insignificant. Again, because of the limited supply of cotton and lack of eagerness to learn the craftsmanship of *mirijim* and similar other hand-woven items that craft is presently on the verge of extinction. But of late in the modern world people are showing ever increasing interest towards ethnic artifacts due to their aesthetic value. This has naturally generated demand for this kind of products and *mirijim* is one of them. But the craftsmanship associated with *mirijim* production is not in wide practice and the supply is not adequate. To capitalize on this possibility, the young Misings are now trying to grow cotton in large scale on commercial basis and to revive the craftsmanship.

The notion of regaining identity currently having strong hold among the indigenous communities from socio-political point of view has also acted as catalyst in this phenomenon.

3. A part from agricultural practices the youth organization have also encouraged people to take up dairy production. The most significant and interesting thing in this connection is that traditionally the Misings did not use milk for consumption. Though cows, buffaloes had been reared by them since a long past, the concept of milk production as a source of income was not, there among them. Actually, earlier they didn't consider it for commercial purpose.. But the situation has radically changed: now the Misings of Jonai supply about 7,000 litres of milk per day to Dibrugarh.

It may be added here, as we have already mentioned, that milk consumption was not present among the Misings since long past but now-a-days their attitude towards milk and milk products has changed. Especially the modern educated parents have started giving milk as health drink to their children.

4. Another recent development is in the field of pig rearing. Pig rearing is a traditional practice of the Misings. Selling and buying of pigs are common among them as pig plays a very important role in the socio-religious life of the people. That kind of transaction was limited only within the village or neighbouring villages. However, being aware of the high demand of pork in the market of neighbouring areas, the youths have planned to promote pig rearing on commercial basis.

(ii) In the Field of Social Institutions:

The term 'social life' encompasses a vast field and it will be difficult for us to cover every aspect of it in detail. Thus we have decided

to concentrate on certain major aspects of social life i.e. kinship, family, marriage along with the clan system that are mutually interlinked with one another. Through these we will be able to grasp the trends of change in the social life of the villagers.

As family is the smallest social unit, from anthropological point of view it is also considered the base of social structure and relationship. The study of family structure reveals many dimensions of social life. From our investigation in the villages we found that formerly i.e., until about twenty five to thirty years back, the joint family was the prevailing structure. As practice of patrilineal descent being the traditional Mising system, all the sons and unmarried daughters lived together with their parents. The married daughters used to live in their in-laws houses. But gradually the joint family system became weak and the family started splitting – which is more or less a pan-Indian phenomenon. Today there are only a few joint families in the proper sense in these villages under study. Usually a common hearth is considered as the criterion of the joint family. Now-a-days the practice of common hearth is gradually giving way and brothers are establishing separate hearths after marriage. This change of family structure from joint to nuclear type has implications in various fields of life. One important aspect covers property and inheritance. In the earlier times as in most of the other tribes the concept of individual property was not very clear. At one point of time anyone could build a house or cultivate any plot of land under the jurisdiction of their village and farm lands. With the increase of population and non-availability of adequate cultivable land (creation of reserve forest by the government being one of the factors), the concept of individual ownership has become prominent among the village people and with the

splitting of joint families, it grew much stronger even within the family itself.

In their traditional set up they have certain rules of inheritance, according to which each son gets an equal share of his parents' property. The youngest son has to take the responsibility of the aged parents and therefore gets an extra share i.e., of their parents. However, in the joint family system such rules were not strictly followed because all the brothers lived and worked together with their parents and the property was considered as common. Now after the marriage of one or two sons usually the joint system splits into a number of nuclear units. From earlier days till now such division of property used to be made with the consent of the elderly members of the family as well as the village and the parties concerned. However, now-a-days such division of property doesn't take place so amicably and it is often accompanied by bitterness. Sometimes strained relations replace the cordiality between brothers and between parents and children, which in turn shatters the very base of relationship of the smallest social unit i.e., the family. As a result, another pan-Indian phenomenon i.e., lonely parents feeling insecure in the family has reached the tribal villages.

These are some direct consequences while there are some indirect impacts also, the cumulative effects of which have ultimately changed the fabric social life of the people concerned. One such important impact is the loosening of kinship ties. Secondly people have become relatively more individualistic.

Apart from the socio-psychological consequences, the splitting of the joint family has affected their material culture e.g., in the case of house type. (This aspect receives attention in the material culture section).

New developments have taken place also in the field of kinship terms and their implications. Consideration of kinship terminology, both terms of reference and terms of address, along with their views about kinship relations (i.e. whom they consider as close kins and distant ones, upto how many generations they identify their kins etc.) had provided a more or less clear picture of their kinship system. Changes in their attitude regarding kinship relationship has led to a number of adaptations caused by different factors. For example,

i) formerly they had certain definite ideas about close and distant kins.

ii) there were definite rules about preferred marriages, M.B.D. being the most preferred one. These were reflected in the kinship terms as shown below:

Relationship	Terms of reference	Terms of address
Father	Abu	Babu/Ba
Mother	Ane	Nan
Brother (younger)	Anga	Matsunga/Masunga
Brother(elder)	Bura	Ai/Aiya
Sister (younger)	Anga	Oiyas
Husband	Milo	Father of the child/children
Wife	Mima	Mother of the child/children
Father-in-law	Kake	Kake
Maternal uncle	-do-	-do-

Father's sister's husband	-do-	-do-
Uncle (outside one's own clan)	-do-	-do-
Mother-in-law	Yanyi	Yanyi
Wife of maternal uncle	-do-	-do-
Aunt (outside one's own clan)	-do-	-do-
Grand father (both Maternal & paternal)	Tato	Tato
Grand mother (both Maternal and paternal)	Yayo	Yayo
Father's brother	Apa	Pai/Paya
Brother-in-law	Bhindeu	Bhindeu
Sister-in-law	Mamo	Mamo
Mother's sister	Mamo	Mamo
Boys of contemporary age (outside one's own clan)	Yago	Yago
Girls of contemporary age (outside one's own clan)	Yigne	Yigne
Daughter-in-law	Yana	by name
Son-in-law	Makhbo	Bhagin
Brother's son	Ao	by name
Brother's daughter	Onna	by name
Grandson	Nati	by name
Granddaughter	Natini	by name

The terms used for address as well as for reference of kins show the relationship between them. The same term being used for mother's brother, father's sister's husband, father-in-law, uncle (outside one's own

clan) implies that M.B.D. type of cross-cousin marriage was prevalent in this society. Similarly the terms of address for son-in-law was the same as the term of reference for sister's son i.e., *bhagin* (the term *bhagin* itself is a loan word from Assamese which refers to sister's son). Thus marriage between mother's brother's daughter and father's sister's son was prescribed by their society. Although the terms have remained the same the relationships have changed and cross-cousin marriage is no longer practiced, by the people. Now-a-days the young generation has started to consider their earlier probable mates as their cousins which is the usual practice of their caste Assamese neighbours. This change of attitude has occurred during the last thirty years or so. Formerly due to cross-cousin marriage, the relationship between the families of probable mates was very close and firm. Maternal uncle had enjoyed a very important and significant position in their traditional set up. Now-a-days these things are losing significance and therefore the relations have become loose.

Another minor change was observed during my investigation. Formerly the husband and the wife used to address each other not by name. The practice was to use the indirect terms, so-n-so's father and so-n-so's mother. But now-a-days the young couples usually address each other by the first name. This reflects a very modern trend.

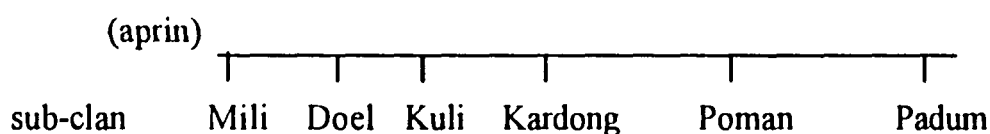
As a consequence of the changing and changed attitude of the new generations towards kinship ties, both of the former and present generations, there has also been a conspicuous change in the ability to trace back their ancestry and to connect their kinsman of the present generation. While the older people could recall the names of their ancestors sometimes upto fourteen generations, the younger people can hardly remember upto

three or four generations. Similarly, in comparison with the older people the younger people have very limited knowledge of their kins outside the village.

As for organizations which roughly correspond to the concepts of clan, sub-clan and phratry, the people of the village count two 'aprin' and 'gumin'. These organizations still play vital role in their social life including family, kinship and marriage. While the first one *aprin* represents a cluster of lineages bound by blood descent the second one *gumin* represents clusters of families owing allegiance to particular gods including totems.

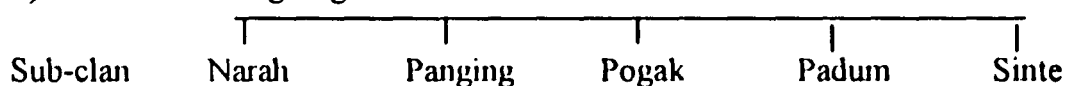
As we have mentioned earlier in Chapter-5 while giving brief ethnographic profile of the Misings in general, the community has numerous clans and sub-clans. But all of them are not present in each Mising locality. Some are dominant in some regions while others are in other areas. Among the Bhoroliporia Misings we did not find all of them. The clans and sub-clans which are found in this area have been recorded as follows:

i) Clan – Boomi

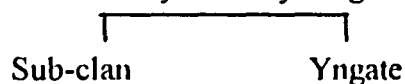


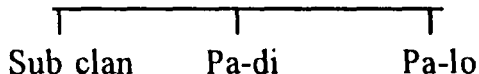
(gumin)

ii) Clan – Lingreng



iii) Clan – Miyo-Panoykong-Miyong



iv) Clan – Bokhi

 A horizontal line with three vertical tick marks below it. The tick marks are positioned under the words 'Sub clan', 'Pa-di', and 'Pa-lo' respectively.

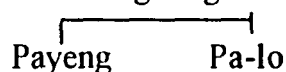
v) Clan – Koder Gudang

Sub-clan Pegu

vi) Clan - Loing

Sub Clan Pao

vii) Clan - Pangkong


 A horizontal line with two vertical tick marks below it. The tick marks are positioned under the words 'Payeng' and 'Pa-lo' respectively.

Formerly in respect of marriage two kinds of prohibitions were in operation: (i) inter-marriage within the sub-clan was not possible; (ii) inter-marriage between two sub-clans of the same clan was also prohibited. But now the position has changed to a certain extent. Inter-marriage within the sub-clan still continues to be a taboo. However, the taboo in the case of marriage between two sub-clans of the same clan is mostly relaxed.

If such marriages take place, which has not occur very often, the society has come to give its tacit approval. The operation of their clan rule in respect of marriage can be illustrated with an example – a member of Boomin clan cannot marry a kuli or dole. But he or she can marry a member from the sub-clan like Narah or pa-lop who are from fingreng and Bokhi clan respectively. It is needles to mention that marriage between the same sub-clan is impossible e.g. between two Milis.

There are some sub-clans which are found under more than one clan e.g., the sub-clan Pa-lo is found under both Pangkong as well as Bokhi clans. Therefore, in such cases both the clans become exogamous to one another.

Although most of the clans are believed to be band on human ancestry, there are a few clans and sub-clans members of whom consider themselves as being emerged from totem objects like animals, e g , Bokhi clan is believed to be descended from the tiger.

One interesting change in the field of clan system of the village Baligaon (Miri) is the addition of two families from the Ahom community which are in the process of being adopted into the Mising clan system. These two families have been residing in the village since long past. They have completely adopted the Mising way of life and have established marital relation, with the Mili Gumin. Thus according to the Mising clan rules, once they have established relations with the sub-clan Mili, which is under the Boomi clan, they cannot be members of this particular sub-clan as well as the clan. According to a number of traditional priests and elderly persons, though these two Ahom families are yet to be completely identified with their clan structure, they hope within a very short span of time particularly after the marriage of the present young generation they will automatically become members of one or the other sub-clan as well as clan or they will form a new sub-clan or *gumin*.

This is a very significant adaptation in their social structure. We will now move to the field related to marriage.

The most common marriage type in the past, more precisely upto about forty to fifty years back was marriage by service. As we have already come to know, MBD type of cross-cousin marriage was the prescribed type of marriage; the would-be-groom had to render his services in his maternal uncle's house for a certain period. When the uncle and his wife i.e., the would-be- parents-in-law were satisfied with his work, they

arranged for his marriage with their daughter. A case can be cited in this connection:

Name : Mr. Litikai Mili
Sex : Male
Age : 75 yrs.
Marital Status: Widower
Educational qualification : Nil
Place : Baligaon(Miri)
Date : 25.10.99.

Mr. Litikai Mili a man in seventies recalled his memories of young age and told us that he himself married by rendering services in the house of his maternal uncle. To marry Lupati, his uncle's daughter, he had to work for three years. The service included various agricultural works like ploughing, sowing, reaping and so on, collection of fire wood, house construction, etc. He got married about fifty years back. Unfortunately his wife Lupati Mili is no more. She died about fifteen years back.

Today this kind of marriage is not at all practised by the villagers. As marriage by service was inter-related with the MBD type of cross-cousin marriage, the discontinuance of MBD had led to the discontinuance of marriage by service. The discontinuance of this distinctive type of marriage system is definitely due to contact with non-tribal Assamese neighbours and to some extent exposure to the outside world through education and other kinds of communication.

Apart from marriage by service, marriage by elopement has been the most common since long past till now. One of the major causes

for elopement is to get rid of the huge expenses of an arranged marriage. Although elopement is the common practice, actually it is not the prescribed type of marriage like the cross-cousin type in their society. The society considers it to be a guilt or fault. However, the formalities for social acceptance are not very strict. A fine in cash along with a public apology in front of the village crowd followed by a simple feast are considered to be enough to settle the matter. Of course, if the couple caught while absconding by the relatives or other members of the village, they will be showered with public beating. In the past the couple used to be severely beaten by the villagers. However, beating is reported to be lighter now. This type of marriage is locally known as *dauglalanam*.

Although marriage by elopement is an old practice of the village, till fifteen to twenty years back it was confined within the Mising community. But incidence of elopement with non-Mising are gradually taking place. Formerly marriage with non-Mising was not accepted by their society. Therefore the couple had to reside outside the village. But gradually the village community has started accepting this kind of elopements with observance of certain formalities, which are followed in the usual cases of elopement. Of course, in such cases if a Mising boy marries a non-Mising girl, the girl has to be adopted by a Mising family within or outside the village, a clan that has marriage possibilities with the boy's family. Here is a case of such a marriage:

Name : Mr. Rabiram Yngate
Age : 65 years.
Sex : Male
Marital Status : Married

Educational Qualification : Read upto Class IV

Place : Bokagaon (Miri)

Date : 25.10.99

About ten years back Mr. Rabiram Yngates son Mr. Dlip Yngate came home with Bina – a Nepali girl from the neighbouring Chiloni (Nepali) gaon and disclosed about their affairs and marriage. At first they were not allowed to enter into the house, particularly the *chang* (platt-form house). Then Mr. Yngate summoned the village elders, discussed with them and decided to accept the couple after the girl was adopted by some one within their community. Mr. Omidhar Payeng of neighbouring Toubhanga village adopted Bina as his daughter and after performing the other formalities – a public apology along with fine followed by a feast, they were accepted by the family as well as the village. Of course, in addition to these formalities, they also had to perform a purificatory ritual, which took place in front of the hearth.

Marriage by negotiation is locally known as *kumna-sola-lanam*. Wealthy as well as families with good repute mostly prefer this kind of marriage. It requires a lot of money, arrangement as well as time. The first step of this type of marriage is to send a proposal for the girl by the boy's family. The parents' of the boy come and negotiate with the girl's parents. Such visits are accompanied by lots of exchange of gifts like *apo*, betel nut and leaves, cakes made of rice paste, etc. After the final talk, the bride's parents come and fix the date and the occasion is called *Saki konam*.

On the day of marriage the bride takes her bath early in the morning and offer prayer to the sun and the moon (Donyi Polo). The elderly persons of the village assemble and sing congregational song. The Medhi

– representative of Auniati Satra (Vaishnava monastery) performs puja with rice. During the puja performance the bride wears new *gapa* and *ribi* with ornaments. When the puja is over she may wear *muga* or *pat* silk. The guests start arriving from the morning onwards. There are arrangements for serving both tea and rice. At dusk the groom and his party arrive at bride's place. The groom is welcomed by the would-be mother-in-law. A young girl of bride's side washes the feet of the groom and presents a hand woven towel (*gamocha*). After arrival the bride and the groom sit together and perform a puja in the name of Donyi Polo under the supervision of the Medhi. Then the couple bows down to the assembly and the family elders and in return get blessings from all. After that the groom's party is entertained with a feast. Then the party set out for the groom's place along with the newly married bride. At the time when the bride is being escorted to the Chang of the groom's house the parents-in-law sprinkle a jar of holy water on the staircase of the *chang* and say such and such has become our daughter-in-law from to-day. Then she enters the Chang and had to touch the rice container. In the meantime the elderly persons of the family and relatives come up on the Chang. The newly married couple sit in front of the hearth and the assembly pray to Donyi-Polo and ask blessings for the couple. After that the hearth is washed with water. In the next morning the groom's family gives a feast to their relatives and neighbours. The bride serves foot to the guests.

On the day of marriage no ritual is performed at the groom's place. The guests come from the morning and are entertained with rice and tea. The groom takes lunch with the best man who should be an unmarried person having parents.

After one week of marriage, the groom's parents come to bride's place with two pitchers of rice beer.

Though the marriage ceremony has been performed since long past in this fashion, some subtle changes and adaptations have taken place in tis respect. In the past there was no standardized rule regarding gifts and essential objects that were to accompany the bride. Whatever one could afford was given to the girl and such objects included primarily garments, ornaments, and utensils. Even if the parents did not have the capacity to give anything with the girl it was not a matter of guilt or fault. But now-a-days gift-giving has become almost compulsory and incapability to offer gifts is considered as shameful. Formerly there was no demand from the groom's side. But now such demands have become quite common. The wealthy families give lots of things including furniture. Such things influence others and provoke to do the same. This is definitely due to outside influence.

Again in the case of food items of the feast and tea some changes have taken place. Instead of curd (*doi*) and flattened rice (*chira*), puri with vegetables constitutes the menu. Of course, feast with pork is still consumed with relish.

Polygamy has been practised by the villagers since long past. Of course the incidences of polygamy is decreasing now-a-days. In the past, the status of a man was enhanced if he had more than two wives. But gradually monogamy has become the standard norm. Of course, a few cases of polygamy especially among the older generation had been found.

Although junior levirate is permitted by the society, the incidence of such marriage is very rare in the villages. In the past sororate

was a common practice among the villagers, especially after the death of the wife. Even to day such practice is found prevalent among the villagers.

Besides these kin based institutions like family, marriage, kinship etc. the Bhoroliporia Misings have certain other important social institutions which link the entire village as a community like the *Kebang* (the village council), *Miyumyame* (the youth group), etc.

These institutions play significant role in public matters e.g., in the case of settling disputes, in festivals and ceremonies, in the case of public works while services are required. However, the changes have taken place in these institutions in their forms and pattern of work. Formerly *Kebang* was the council of male elders, the young did not take part in the decision-making or could not be members of the council. But gradually young people are asserting themselves. In some cases women also take active parts in village matters. However, in recent times such organizations as the village Panchayat, the Mahila Samiti, the Youth Club are becoming more and more prominent. Miyamyame, which used to be a strong institution earlier, is today a spent up force.

Formerly, even about thirty to forty years back Miyamyame played a very significant role in social life of the village. It had strong grip over the entire youth of the village. Dekabora, Tiri Bora, Mukhiyal, Tekela were the officials of this institution. It served as a public working group. The group helped the villagers in the field, in constructing houses; sometimes they raise funds for families who were in distress. The services were rendered to the village community not for money but as a part of social duty. Now-a-days the families have to pay for any service rendered. Miyamyame was also given heavy responsibility during the celebration of public ceremonies

and rituals. Each and every member of it had to participate without failure on the occasions like Bohag or Rongali Bihu, Norasinga Bihu or Porag, Ali-Ai-Ligang etc. Protection of village girls was also vested with this institution. The members had to follow strict rules, violation of which led to severe punishment. Gradually the group solidarity of the institution had become loose. Now-a-days it has been transformed into a club house where people meet on special occasions of religious and social importance.

So far as the social institutions are concerned, the same pattern has been observed in the Jonai area also. Moreover, from the information available from the various sources, it is seen that practically the same set of norms including the changes referred to are common to the Mising community as a whole.

(iii) In The Field of Socio-Religious Life:

The most striking and interesting situation of change and at the same time of adaptations, is found in the field of religious life, because it shows a mixture of diverse elements. The present scenario of religious life of the people gives the picture of the co-existence of mainly three types of belief-system – the traditional Mising faith, the Assamese neo-Vishnava order, and sundry beliefs and practices of Hinduism in general.² We have already given a general over view of traditional Mising religious beliefs and practices while detailing the ethnographic profile of the Misings. Here we will deal with the ritual and performances specific to the Bhoroliporia Misings focusing on the specified villages while discussing their traditional belief system.

Like the Mising community as a whole, the Bhoroliporia Misings also worship *Donyi-Polo*, *Karsing-kartang*, *Sedi Melo* as the supreme powers of the universe. They believe in numerous gods and deities called *Ui* whom they perform worship in various rituals and ceremonies. In addition to these belief in the force of the soul (*yalo* in Mising) is also very prominent among the people of the village. The traditional priest known as Mibu conducts the rituals either publicly or in individual households. The ritual which is performed by the villagers of this area together every year in the month of June or July in the name of the river Jiyaboroli. The ritual is performed on the bank of the river itself. The main objective of the ritual is to get rid of the evil by public expulsion. The paraphernalia required for the ritual include chipped areca nut and betel leaves, pulses, banana and a black fowl. A raft of plantain bark is prepared and all the paraphernalia are placed there. The fowl is tied at the top of the plantain bark raft. The Mibu conducts the ritual. If any member of the family particularly the young children falls ill a simple ritual is performed at the individual households in the name of the river Bhoroli and offerings are kept carefully in bundles in the household. At the time of the public ritual this bundle is placed at the puja site and forms a part of the puja paraphernalia. This practice is called *obakhomsa*. All the villagers perform this ritual together for the welfare of the society as well as the respective villages.

Similarly at the time of Porag festival the villagers assemble and commonly worship the supreme powers like *Donyi-Polo*, *Sedi-Melo*, *Karsing-Kartang* and others. At that time also Mibu conducts the ritual which require sacrifice of pigs and fowls along with rice beer (*apo*).

Apart from these rituals which are performed commonly, there are numerous rituals which are observed at the individual households or by a cluster of households and not by the entire village.

One such important ritual is the worship of Taleng Dabur (the god of thunder). Sometimes this ritual is done yearly in the Assamese month of *ahar* as a precaution and for the welfare of the family. However, usually after heavy shower accompanied by thunder and lightening during the Assamese months of *Jeth*, *Ahar*, *Saon*, this ritual is performed. The usual place for such ritual is the backyard. The family members of the household concerned do not participate except the heads of the family. The Mibu officiates with five or seven assistants from neighbouring households. The paraphernalia include a black female pig, salt, chilli, areca nut and betel leaves, branches of a special kind of locally available fern called *piro*, thread of cotton. The families who are considered as impure due to birth or death of any member are not allowed to participate. Before going to the backyard the assembly first performs a ritual at the front yard. At first the pig is washed with water and rice mixed with *saimad* or *poro apong* (a special kind of rice beer prepared for offerings and consumption in the rituals and ceremonies) are sprinkled at the pig by chanting their traditional hymns, in the name of Donyi-Polo, Karsing-karatang. After that the head of the household has to lift the pig in the direction of the sun and express the purpose of the performance and then drop it on the floor. After that the assembly moves to the backyard and under a tree erect six/seven *piro* branches which are tied with cotton thread. Then the pig is placed within the *piros* and chopped into pieces and the blood is poured at the root of the *piro* branches. After that the pork is boiled and consumed by the assembly.

There are a number of rituals involving the belief of soul (locally called *yalo*). The most common among them is the *yalolaluknama*. If an individual shows fear for water it is believed by the villagers that the *yalo* or the soul of the person has left the body and gone to the river. Thus to fetch the soul back to the person this ritual is performed. In addition to the family members, near kin's and neighbours also participate in the ritual. The required paraphernalia include a long thread of cotton yarn, a bundle of locally available special kind of fern, called *piro*, betel leaves and areca nuts. At first a *piro* is erected at the courtyard and the thread is tied and similarly after a definite interval a *piro* is erected and the thread is also stretched upto the river. Then four *piros* are erected at the river itself in front of which a pair of areca nut and betel leaves are offered. After that the maternal aunt of the individual of lost soul performs a ceremonial fishing with a fishing net made of bamboo. Whatever comes in the net is carried to the household. In the meantime, the afflicted person takes bath and dressed in fresh new cloths (traditional dress) sits along with some family members in front of the hearth in the *chang*. People who do the fishing operation keep asking whether the soul had returned from the river, the answer from inside should be yes. Then the returning party comes up to the *chang* and whatever has come in the net when fishing is tied at the head of the person after wrapping it with cotton. The person has to keep it in place for five days. Purring these five days the person has to follow certain taboo – he/she should not go out of the household, should not talk with outsiders, etc. After the formalities the assembly takes lunch with pork and rice beer.

Another such ritual is performed for the same purpose but in

the jungle and with certain alterations. This time the maternal aunt accompanies with the party but has no special duty to perform. The offerings include an egg along with areca nut and betel leaves. And the lunch is taken with chicken instead of pork as in the case of earlier ritual. In addition to the rituals connected with the *yalo* (soul), they also perform numerous rituals in the name of various deities and spirits. They believe that these deities and spirits whom they call Ramseng Dangaria, Dotar Dangaria, Atun Dangaria, Dangaria Ui and so on cause various diseases and upheavals to individuals, families and the society as a whole.

An important ritual is performed in the Assamese month of Kati to avoid pests in the field in the name of Ramseng Dangaria. At that time usually the sheaves of paddy become heavy with grains and the ritual is observed by individual families in their respective fields. The paraphernalia include rice, black gram (*matimah*), areca nut and betel leaves, a pair of fowl, plantain leaves, bamboo, rice beer, *mibu* conducts the ritual with the assistance of the family members. When the ritual is over, the family members along with the *mibu* and neighbours and some relatives have their lunch in the field itself. A similar type of ritual is performed in the name of Dotar Dangaria in the jungle. For the relief of back pain, chest pain etc. a ritual is observed in the name of Atun Dangaria, which requires only a pair of red fowl. The ritual is performed in the jungle individually. Another similar type of ritual is observed for the relief from gout. It is known as *pajabdoni*. A *mibu* is invited to perform it. The paraphernalia include a duck, a small bamboo basket or plantain bark sheets, a small quantity of rice, charcoal, and chilli. The duck is sacrificed, roasted and cooked. Then either in the basket or in the plantain bark the other offerings are placed and carried

to a road crossing and kept there in a corner. The cooked preparation is served as a special food to the ailing patient.

These are some of the traditional practices which have been observed and performed by the villagers since long past with great importance and enthusiasm. However this is one aspect of the religious belief and practices of the villagers. While talking about the religious life the influence of Assam Vaishnavism cannot be denied and it plays a very significant role. As we have already mentioned the Misings have come under the influence of Assam Vaishnavism through the agencies of various *Satras*. In the case of the Misings of Baligaon (Miri), Bokagnon (Miri), Raᅅgajan (Miri) villages, the concerned Satras are Auniati Jamuguri branch) and *Sesa* (local branch). The villagers are disciples of these *Satras*. Although the Vaishnava influence has already got a strong hold in the religious life of the people, the process has started only about thirty to forty years back. Today almost all the villagers claim themselves as followers of Vaishnava tradition.

Medhi and Satola (Atola in Mising pronunciation) are the two representatives of the two Satras Auniati and Sesa respectively. They are selected by the Satra authority in consultation with the elderly members of the village to officiate various rituals and especially the purificatory rites which is very much apart from Vaishnava tradition.

The Hinduized way of the concept of purity and pollution as well as the performance of purificatory rite is one of the most important and significant influence of Vaishnavism on their religious life. The purificatory rite which is called *parachit* in the Vaishnava tradition locally known as *yamnam*, has occupied such a significant place in their belief system that sometimes it has well-merged with their traditional type of purificatory rite.

For example since long past non Mising or the Mipak are not allowed to enter the *chang* and if such a thing happens in a household, they have to perform a purificatory rite according to their traditional way. As the Mising consider the hearth as sacred, the ritual is performed on the hearth itself. Originally the traditional priest conducted the purificatory rites but with the increasing influence of the Vaishnavism, now-a-days the *Medhi* or the *Satola* the representatives of two Satras conduct the ritual. However, the striking factor is that the person who is the representative of Satra also conducts the traditional Mising rituals. The same person, when he conducts the traditional ritual, is called Mibu and when he performs a Vaishnava ritual he is called *Medhi* or *Satola*. In this way the same person plays a dual role in the religious life of the people. Thus it is an example of admixture of two belief systems.

Among the Vaishnavas of the village, the processes of initiation in the Vaishnava fold plays a very significant role. For the initiation they have to go to the Satras of Jamuguri and Sesa. The initiation ceremony is called *saran* in the Vaishnava tradition and the individuals who are initiated at the same time address each other as *haribhakat*. However these two terms are incorporated in the Mising vocabulary and pronounced as *aran* and *aribhakat* respectively. The Vaishnava elements are found in various rituals and ceremonies which are otherwise observed in the traditional way. For example, the *parachit* or purificatory rites in the case of birth rituals, marriage by elopement, entering of non-Mising in the *chang* are performed in the Vaishnava way. The paraphernalia requires water, *tulasi* leaves, *dubari*, cowdung, incense stick, earthen lamps, etc. The mantras are chanted in Assamese by *Medhi*. The entire process is locally called *yamnam*.

Apart from these beliefs and practices associated with the Assam neo. Vaishnava order certain other rites and practices of socio-religious nature traditionally followed in the caste Hindu Assamese society have also found their way into the social life of the Misings of the village. For example, in the case of birth ritual in earlier times there were very few rituals observed by the family, only the dropping of umbilical cord was marked by a cleaning operation of the household. The concept of impurity of the household due to the birth of a child was not there. But gradually with the increasing connection with the caste Assamese neighbours the concept of purity and pollution are becoming important. Now-a-days a series of rituals are performed in connection with the birth of a child. The first five or six days i.e., before the dropping of the umbilical cord is the first purificatory rite. It is called *yalen-chunam* by them. The day is marked by a thorough cleaning operation of the entire household by the mother. Before the cleaning both the mother and the child have to take a ceremonial bath of water mixed with the ashes obtained by burning a quantity of thatch from the family haystack

The final purificatory ritual is performed after one month but sometimes it may be one and a half months as the time depends on the appearance of the moon (Polo) in the sky. The ritual is called *mobinchunam*. The occasion is marked by shaving of hair of the baby, a ceremonial bath of the mother and the child, followed by a cleaning operation of the entire household and performance of a purificatory rite. From that day the state of impurity ends.

However, the story is significantly different in the case of death

ritual. It is still performed in the traditional way with some adoption of certain elements from the non-tribal neighbours. The first purificatory rite after the death of a person is performed on the third day. Traditionally the Mishings bury the dead. The most striking feature is that the Vaishnava group which includes the majority of the villagers and who identify themselves with Hinduism also practice burial. The grave is usually dug in the backyard of the household, although there is a public graveyard within the village. The grave should be a long and a horizontal one. After that the grave is purified with fire three times and it is known as *magi*. Then the body is placed and covered with earth. All rites connected with the death of a person are performed by the left hand. At the top of the grave low bamboo fencing is put up and it is also covered with a thatch roof constructing a more or less houselike structure. The materials which were used by the deceased person are placed there, i.e. the garments, utensils, smoking pipes, in the case of females ornaments etc. From the day of the death five times a full dish is offered in the name of the deceased on the grave. Thus on the third day of the death the first purificatory rite is performed. It is known as *ampan pannam*. The family members along with neighbours and relatives come to the backyard with a prepared dish and fire. Two male members prepare a houselike structure which is considered as granary beside the grave. After that the offerings are placed there and the assembly leaves the place.

There is no fixed time for the performance of the final purificatory rite. It involves a lot of expenses. That is why it requires much time. Some wealthy families can afford within one or two months but for the poor families, it is not possible to arrange immediately. Sometimes it may take one or two years.

The final death rite is called *Kaj*, which is definitely a loan word from Assamese. The final death ritual is performed together for several deceased members. Not only of the family, sometimes deceased clan members are also included. In the early morning the female folk take bath and prepare *poro apo* (the rice beer specially prepared for ceremonial offerings and consumption). At first they prepare two bundles and keep separately for offering in the name of the deceased members then they again prepare twenty four bundles for the guests. In the name of the deceased members a pig has to be sacrificed.

All the relatives both near and distant within or outside the village are invited along with the entire village people. The ritual is performed in the morning. The offerings are placed in the courtyard. As a part of the ritual the first three batches of invitios are served the lunch in the *chang*. Lunch for each guest is presented with one or more coins in the name of the deceased. Then the head of the household spread a hand woven towel (*gamocha*) in the staircase of the *chang* and the guests have to pass by stepping on the towel.

Again there are some rituals which are definitely later development in the religious life of the people for example, the worshipping of Goddess Ai (the deity of measles, pox) is an adaptation due to contact with the caste Hindu Assamese neighbours. The ritual is performed in the individual household where a family member is suffering from the disease. It is conducted by an elderly lady who is called *punjali*. The ritual is known as *abhabhangise*. The paraphernalia requires rice paste, pulses (*bootmah*), comb, vermilion, amulet (*maduli*). The *punjali* chants mantras in Assamese. The *punjali* is assisted by nine ladies who are called *gopini*. The elderly

male members also come to attend the ritual. All the paraphernalia are offered in the name of the deity and after the end of the ritual, are thrown into the river. No sacrifice is required to perform this ritual which is a non-tribal characteristic of worshipping. Same is the case with Kati Bihu. It is observed in the same way as the non tribal Assamese observe it.

There are certain rituals and ceremonies which have been observed by the villagers since long past but due to contact with the non-tribal Assamese neighbours who also practice similar kind of ceremonies and ritual especially connected with agriculture, these performances are now-a-days often identified with the non tribal Assamese ones. Though as a result of contact with the non-tribal neighbours some elements may have been introduced, these have got themselves integrated into the traditional belief system. Some such celebration of Amgona Nanum, Lakhomi, etc. They identify Amgona Nunum with the non tribal Assamese custom of *na-una* and *na-khowa*. Similar is the case with *Lakhomi* which is identified with the custom like Lakhimi Adora, etc. However, the ritual is performed in the traditional way. The Lakhomi is performed after harvesting in the Assamese month of Puh at the granary. It requires a pair of fowl, a kind of pulse (*matimah*), rice paste, a handful of rice, rice beer (*poro-apong*) used for rituals and ceremonies, a kind of fern locally known as *piro*, cotton, and an earthen lamp. *Mibu*, the traditional priest, conducts the ritual. The pair of fowl is sacrificed in the granary and the rice paste, rice, rice beer are sprinkled into the granary by chanting hymns. The *piro* are erected around the granary wrapped with cotton. In front of the granary door two *piros* are erected and a fire is lit up with the paddy husk. An earthen lamp is also lit up in the front of the granary. The rice beer is prepared in the courtyard

itself for offerings as well as for consumption. When the ritual is over, the sacrificed birds are cooked in the courtyard and the family members have their lunch with the *mibu*.

Similarly *angona nanum* is observed to mark the occasion of the first reaping of the crop as well as eating of the new rice. In the case of *ahu* variety, a bundle of crop is brought to the household for three consecutive days and after drying and grinding these are kept in three separate bundles. In the case of *sali* variety, the reaping is done twice only.

This process is locally called as *amgopinam* and it is followed by *nabhatdonam* i.e., the consumption of rice of the new crop. But before the celebration of the consumption of new crop, another occasion is observed which is known as *dokedonam*. *Dokedonam* is an occasion in which young children of the neighbourhood are invited and are given lunch prepared with the new crop. On the day of *nabhat donam* the neighbours are also invited. After cooking, the head of the family offers the preparation along with rice beer to the hearth (locally known as *keera*, which is considered as sacred. The custom is called *losuk keera punam*. After consumption, the remaining food is offered along with rice beer in the name of the deceased family members in the backyard.

In addition to Vaishnava influence the influence of Hinduism in general have also gradually become part of the religious belief system of the people. Mainly two factors are involved here. Firstly all the non-tribal Assamese neighbours, even the believers of Vaishnavism, as a result of the influence of what can be called as the greater Assamese Hindu religion, observe certain *pijas* and rituals. The observation may be in indirect way e.g., the Durga Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Dewali, etc. which are performed in the

urban and semi urban centers like Balipara, Khonamukh and even in Tezpur. On such occasions they may not participate in the ritual itself but a festive atmosphere spreads over the area and the ritual is celebrated with the entertainment only. These are occasions for public merriment. Thus the implications are more socio-cultural in nature than religious.

Secondly, the influence of the neighbouring Hindu Bengalis and Biharis and to some extent Nepalis also led to certain new additions in their religious life e.g. the performance of *graha puja* which I witnessed during my stay in the field. The following case study will highlight some details.

Name : Mr. Amidhay Payeng

Age : 45 years.

Sex : Male

Matital Stultus: Married

Educational qualification : Matriculate

Place: Courtyard of the house

Date : 22.10.99.

A *graha puja* was performed in the household of Mr. Amidhay Payeng to ensure an auspicious start of his newly purchased power tiller. A Bihari priest from Khonamukh was invited to conduct the puja. The puja was performed in the name of the planet saturn i.e., *Sani*. Offerings were made in front of an earthen pot called *ghat* painted with vermilion placed on an earthen dish filled with paddy. The *ghat* was surrounded by four plantain plants. The required paraphernalia included *tulasi* leaves, *dubari*, fruits and pulses (*bootmah*), earthen lamps, incense stick wood, apple wood, mango leaves, seven bundles of salt, a piece of black cloth, unstitched cotton thread, etc. The leaves of mango were placed on the *ghat*. Again the black cloth

and the thread placed just above these leaves. The priest chanted Sanskrit mantras. The relatives and neighbours were invited and all participate in the puja. I was told that once it is over, Mr. Payeng would introduce his power tiller in the field.

This is a completely a new development. Such practices have been introduced only within the last couple of years. The striking aspect of this ritual is that neither the power tiller nor the Grahapuja were part of the life of the people of the village till recently. But today they are already accepted and incorporated into their economic and socio-religious life in such a way that it would be difficult to sort out such later additions from the original one in years to come.

Though Durga puja, Lakshmi Puja etc. are not performed within the village but the villagers participate just for the entertainment. Similarly lighting of earthen lamps and the busting of crackers of Dewali is a recent development. Similar is the case with Lakshmi Puja. After the establishment of the village primary and M.E. School, gradually the celebration of Saraswati puja has become an important event for the villagers especially the younger section.

The Misings of Jonai:

The Mising of Jonai consider themselves and their way of life as the most authentic representative so far as the Mising culture is concerned. It has been more or less accepted by the Misings of other areas also. Thus till recent time the way the different religious activities are performed and observed by them are considered as the original form of the Mising socio-religious life. The socio-religious activities and rituals performed by the

Misings of other areas are often considered as deviated from the original form, for example, the Bharoliporia Mising (Misings inhabiting the bank of the Bharoli of Sonitpur district). The way they celebrate Ali-Ai-Lrigang is quite different from that of Jonai celebration. However, gradually the things are changing. Changes have come about due to various factors. Even the Misings of Jonai themselves admit that now-a-days most often they loose originality and gradually they are recognizing the distinctive style of the Misings of other areas. Still they are trying for the survival of their traditional rituals and customs.

Several forces have been working on the socio-religious aspect since a long time – more precisely after their coming down to the plains. The main forces along with their recent trends can be laid down as follows:

- (i) After coming down to the plains – the exact date or period of which is very difficult to trace back, approximately 150-100 years back, the Misings came into contact with the plains people – a majority of whom constituted of the Assamese Hindu population:

Again Assamese Hinduism has been greatly influenced by the neo-Vaishnava reform movement pioneered by the 15th century Assamese Saints Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva. The neo-Vaishnavism because of its liberal attitude have played a very significant role in the social formation of the present Assamese society. It embraced different sections of people, even the so called lower castes the tribals (which are considered as out of the Hindu fold) into it's religious area and has given a respectable status by considering all of them as equal.

As a result, the process of tribe caste continuum which has been continuing since a long past got a push to accelerate. It worked as

a natural process of assimilation of the greater Assamese society till recent times. But that natural process has got a jolt and it has been diverted to other directions by certain recent social phenomena.

Thus in the socio-religious life of the Misings in general the Assamese Vaishnavism has played a very significant role. In a way it has acquainted the Misings with the Hindu way of life.

The picture that emerges from the above is clearly a mixed up one and the diverse elements that have gone into it's making seem to hve engrained themselves into it.

(iv) In The Field of Socio-Political Life:

It may be pointed out here that the outstanding feature of the changes in the field of socio-political life has so far been basically attitudinal. The psychological orientation has been infused with a new kind of consciousness but so far there has not been much evidence of being institutionalized along claries. However, there has been a new development, which has significance in this context. The traditional village administrative system in which the *kebang* (village council) had a dominant role has lost its old function and power. In it's place the new government-instituted panchayat system has come to operate.

As has been hinted earlier in the background note, it is the Misings of Jonai area that have been at the forefront of the socio-political activities concerned with the promotion of the interest of the community. Most of the organizations that have taken the lead in self assertive and revivalist movements (including the Bharoliporia Misings) have received stimuli from the Jonai-based forerunners and accepted their leadership.

Before Independence, the literacy rate was very low among the Misings in general and in the Jonai area it was almost nil. But after Independence the scenario has changed a little bit – schools were established in different parts of the Mising concentrated area. Gradually the young people have come out with new socio-political consciousness. The concepts like Scheduled Tribes, tribal belt, tribal sub-plan etc. have given new dimensions to their thought process. They have become conscious about their identity, legal and political rights and so on.

As a result a revivalist tendency has developed in recent time and the reflection of such attitude is visible in different spheres of life.

As socio-political scenario of the Misings in general has been marked by the formation of various organizations working at different levels. In 1971, Murkongseleck Mising Area Students' Union, now known as All Mising Students' Union was established. It has played a major role in developing political awareness of the tribal folk. They established it as a forum of the Mising people to express their views, ideas and perception regarding their own community as well as people around them. Gradually the people have become conscious about their ethnic identity, legal and political rights – various constitutional safeguards, such as – Scheduled Tribe status, tribal belt and Block, tribal sub-plan, etc. Initially it was almost like a public awareness programme but slowly it has taken the shape of self-assertion movement with a revivalist attitude.

Two other organizations actively involved in this process were established in the late 80's. Those are – a) Mising Mimang Kabang 1987 (Mising National Struggle Council) (b) Pakem Mising Mime Kabang 1989 (All Mising Women's Organization).

Though these three organizations work for the entire Mising community, their functioning is mainly conducted from Jonai itself. Murkong selek Mising Kristi Kabang at Jonai a cultural organization for promotion of Mising culture – is also playing an active role in this process.

Apart from these, the Mising Autonomous Council Demand Committee was established in 1987 to strive for gaining the power of self-administration in the Mising majority areas. It appears that this goal is almost at the point of attainment – but not without giving rise to various complications.

Apart from their demand for autonomy, these organizations are involved in various kinds of social activities also. Particularly the youth organizations are trying to motivate people in the economic sector. They are heading workshops for training and teaching various technical skills including in the field of agriculture.

Another development may be noted here as a pointer to the growing solidarity movement the celebration of Ali-Ai-Ligang was done on the month of Phagun and there was no fixed date. But as a result of the revivalist attitude, they have considered their socio-religious and cultural elements and celebrations as ethnicity marker. Because of that, the date of celebration of Ali-Ai-Ligang has been fixed i.e., on the first Wednesday in the month of *fagun*. This decision was taken by the Mising Bane Kabang.

Though the socio-political developments including the ethnic assertive moves are prominent in the Jonai area, the Bhoroliporia Misings also have developed in their own way a socio-political consciousness among their people. A number of voluntary organizations have been working for the upliftment of the Misings of Sonitpur area both economically and socio-

culturally. The organizations are – Bhoroli Bakeng Kebang, Bhoroli Bangke Agom Kebang, Bhoroliporia Mising Kalyan Sangha, Baligaon Gaon Unnayan Samiti, Baligaon Mising Jubok Sangha, Baligaon Udayani Mising Mohila Samiti, Swahid Komala Miri Jubok Sangha (Bokagaon Miri). Bokagaon Mahila Samit, Rangajan Miri Jubok Sangha, Rangajan Miri Mahila Samiti, Dharikati Miri Jubok Sangha, Dikorai Miri Jubok Sangha, Bamunipam Miri Jubok Sangha, Bamunipam Mahila Samiti, Bhoriliporia Mising Pabon Kebang, Toubhanga Mising Jubok Sangha, Tezpur Nagar Mising Banke Kebang, Tezpur Nagar BanmkleKebang, Kekokoli Mising Mahila Sangha, Kekokoli Mising Jubok Sangha, Gudamghat Mising Jubok Sangha, Tinighoria Mising Jubok Sangha.

During field visit I had learnt about the felt needs of the Bhoroliporia Misings from Mr. Komison Mili – a leading personality in the socio-political life of the village Baligaon (Miri) as well as in the entire area. Those felt needs can be laid down as follows:

1. Most of the people of this area are landless. And those who own land don't have proper titles. As such it becomes difficult for them to get loans from the bank and other financial agencies. Steps should be taken in this regard by the government.
2. At least one teacher, who is a native speaker of Mising, should be appointed in each primary school of the area and local people should be given the preference.
3. The educational institutions of the Mising inhabited in this area should receive due government recognition and grants.
4. The Misings students from this area should be given scholarship.

5. The unemployed youths should be given loan from bank or other financial agencies for self-employment.
6. Medical facilities, drinking water, electricity, developed transport system, should be provided in the Mising concentrated area.
7. Each village of this area should be included under the tribal sub-plan.
8. Measures should be taken to control erosion of river Jiyaboroli and Dikorai.
9. Irrigation facilities should be developed and the Mising farmers of this area should be provided with modern agricultural implements free of cost.
10. News in Mising language should be broadcast and telecast.

The present socio-political situation gives a somewhat complex picture. But unlike many other tribes, the Misings have not gone for extremist activities. According to one of the leaders of The Mising Students' Union they want their demands to be fulfilled in a peaceful manner. He said they donot want any separatist movement. They strongly believe that they are part of the greater Assamese society and in that way they are part of the Indian society.

(v) In The Field of Material Culture and Language:

a) Material Culture:

Material culture represents tangible expression of the way of life of a community. It encompasses such items as house type, food habits, dress and ornaments, various implements of production, means of transport and communication, etc. Significant changes have taken place in those fields during the past several decades. Given below are some noteworthy examples.

House type:

Three different kinds of houses represent the successive modes of adaptation. Almost every household has a raised platform house made of bamboo wood and thatch –which is the traditional type of house, of the Mising community as a whole. The platform is about 5 ft. above the ground supported by rows of wooden posts. About thirty years back a single house often contains a family of thirty to forty persons living commonly in a long rectangular hill. All the sons and daughter-in-laws and their children lived together with their parents. Usually no partition was found in their houses. Specific space was allotted for each married son and his family which was demarcated by a hearth. Now-a-days as joint families have become rare, instead of long raised houses they construct small to medium sized ones. Not only in the size but also in the raw material used changes have taken place. While the original material used for such houses were bamboo and wood with a thatched roof, now-a-days some raised platformed houses are constructed with mud-plastered walls, wood, and tin roofs. This represents an interesting blending of the traditional and newly adapted items in the use of raw materials. One important factor in the change is the non-availability of traditional used raw materials. Bamboo, wood were plenty in the natural habitat about twenty to thirty years back but these raw materials have become somewhat less available at the present time. This has a more or less direct impact on the changed mode of construction.

The other two types of houses found in the village are the mud plinth thatched houses as well as mud plastered or cemented, thatched roof or tin roofed Assam type house and R.C.C. construction. Building of mud plinth thatched roofed houses are obviously the consequences of changes

in the habitat accompanied by the contact with the neighbouring plains non tribal majority community. Same is the case of the houses with cemented walls, generally mud- floored, occasionally cemented, tin-roofed; which is a modified structure of the mud plastered thatched houses.

In the case of R.C.C. construction, it can be said that it is not necessarily due to contact with neighbouring communities, but it reflects the general tendency towards modernization of life style which has swept over all communities, tribals and non-tribals. This has also got something to do with the relatively better economic status as well as the desire to raise the social status. Of course, only a few wealthy families have R.C.C. houses in the village.

Although they have constructed different types of houses other than their traditional ones i.e., raised platformed *cang ghar* alone and not with the other two types. The hearth is always in the *chang* and it is considered by them as sacred. Since the hearth is on the *chang*, cooking takes place there but the hearth is much more than a cooking place. It is a sacred center. Certain religious and purificatory rites also take place centering round the hearth. Thus, special kind of sanctity is attached to the whole *chang ghar*. That is why outsiders, especially the beef eaters, are not allowed entry the *chang*. Outsiders i.e., the non-Mising guests are entertained in the other types of houses. The fact that every household retains a *chang ghar* points to the people's attachment to the traditional religious belief in spite of the Hindu Vaishnva influence on them which is evident in some other fields. It is an interesting case of adaptation which combines the two tendencies of retention of the traditional one and on the one hand and its relaxation on the other.

Custumes and Textiles:

In the case of weaving and dress patterns, an obvious change and adaptation is clearly visible. Loin loom is the traditional type of loom of the people of Baligaon (Miri). Locally the loin loom is called *ege comdung*. The traditional attire of males and females are produced on such looms. The speciality of the Bhoroliporia Mising women lies in their distinctive dress. Unlike the Mising women of the other parts of Assam the Bhoroliporia Mising women do not use sewn piece of cloth (*mekhela*) to cover the lower part of the body. Instead they use an unsewn piece of cloth known as *gapa*. It is usually of pinkish red colour with beautiful intricate designs in the middle. The unmarried girls wear *chadar gaya* while the married women wear *gabon*, a breast cloth wrap below the armpit to cover the upper part of the body. They use *ribi* (a special kind of *chadar*) for special occasions. Red, black, green, yellow and dark blue are the colours commonly sused by them. The traditional attire of the males consist of *ugan* (*dhoti*) a piece of cloth to cover the lower part of the body usually of white colour. *Galuk* (sleeveless shirt) commonly in black, but other colours are also used and *dumal* (turban) and *tangali* (a kind of belt, a piece of cloth are tied round the waist). The elderly people use the traditional *dhoti* but very few of them use *galuk* except on ceremonial occasions. The younger generations have completely taken up the modern western type of dress.

The women folk of the village are expert weavers and lack of this skill is considered as shameful for girls. In addition to the extensive use of their loin loom, they also use the common Assamese loom with throw shuttle as well as the fly shuttle. This is definitely due to contact with the neighbouring Assamese populations. They have learnt the skill of these looms

only about fifteen to twenty years back and also have adapted to their set up within a very short span of time. One obvious proof is that the terms used for denoting different parts of the loin looms are Mising while in the case of the other kinds of looms such terms are loan words from Assamese.

The different parts of the in loom are *tagul*, *gatak*, *sumoa*, *paba*, and *lobakati*, *narbalo* and that of the throw shuttle loom are *tuluta*, *durpati*, *ras*, *bokati*, *nasani*, *jakala*, *make*, *mahura*, *putal*, *goroka*, etc. Similarly the spinning items are also known in their Assamese names – *jotar*, *sereki*, *ugha* etc.

Thus the simultaneous use of three looms is a striking example of adaptation. Like the looms the changing trend of dress pattern also has taken place within a few years. They use their traditional dresses in their day to-day life as well as on the special occasions of their own. Young girls use saris and *mekhela chadars* of latest designs when they go to the places outside the village. The teen agers wear *salowar kurta*, skirt, blouse, frock, etc. This is of course a completely new development and can be considered as an influence of some pan- Indian phenomenon spreading everywhere, thanks to the influence of the mass media and market economy. Some innovations are formed for example from various woven materials with their traditional designs. They prepare *salowar kurta*, which is a significant mode of adaptation from the material point of view.

Some industrious young girls have taken weaving as a means of earning money. With the help of financial aid from some government and semi-government agencies, they have set up small weaving factories and these not only provide self employment but also employment opportunities for a few other girls. They work on contract basis and take orders from

individuals as well as business farms. Here we can have a clear picture with the help of a concrete case study.

Name : Ms. Guneswari Mili

Age : 30 years.

Sex : Female

Marital Status : Unmarried

Educational qualification : Studied upto class X.

Place : Baligaon (Miri)

Date : 30.10.99.

Guneswari Mili is an industrious young lady with a progressive attitude. She studied upto Class X. Her brother Mr. Imol Mili is a councilor of Gaon Panchayat and her cousin Mr. Komison Mili is a prominent personality of the village. They have links with various organizations and institutions. With the help of their initiative, Guneswari went to different exhibitions and training camps within and outside Assam. Such experiences have developed her confidence and courage and also opened up avenues for self employment. Last year she applied for a loan from NIRD to establish a weaving factory and she got it. Now she has started her factory, employed a number of girls who assist her and at the same time get further training. Her factory is now in it's initial stage and it is within the compound of their house but she told me that she has plan to make it in a large scale. She has got orders from different neighbouring areas like, Tezpur and a few from Guwahati. She has got a contract from a Delhi based firm for weaving the materials for handloom bags which look ethnic and are now in fashion. During my stay in the field she was busy in weaving those materials. Guneswari's experiments have now encouraged a number of young ladies and

they are also coming up with such types of plans and programmes.

Thus this business oriented weaving which is a completely new trend in this village reveals another dimension of adaptation. They have changed from need-based production to money-earning production. The change in the agricultural pattern necessitated the changes in the agricultural implements, in the cropping pattern, the item of production, in food habits, in the transaction system and so on. Details regarding these features have already been discussed in sub-section II of this chapter.

Transport and Communication:

Rapid expansion of communication through various media has got a tremendous impact on the socio-cultural as well as economic picture of Baligaon (Miri). First of all the improvement of transport facilities have influenced various aspects and more particularly the economic system making easy access to the markets of the nearby towns and weekly markets. (Details will be discussed in the section on socio-economic life).

Some forty to fifty years ago, bullock cart was the only means of communication with distant places. And for nearby places, they used to go on foot or by boat. Then the bicycle came which is still being extensively used by the villagers. For communication with distant places gradually the bus services were introduced, Railway was introduced some time ago Jiyabhorili railway station is within the village boundary. Now-a-days frequent bus services are there to nearby townships like Balipara, Rangapara and Tezpur.

Apart from transport, they have postal and telephone facilities for communicating with the outside world. A few families subscribe to news

papers. But in recent times, the electronic medias like the radio and the television have come in a big way, particularly the later. About ten families have television sets and several families have radios. Younger generation hungrily lap up the latest popular T.V. productions.

Lanugage:

As in other aspects of life, Mising language also tells a similar story of culture change. Belonging to the family of languages spoken by the Tani group of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Mising language has incorporated many features of the Assamese language, especially in the matter of vocabulary, e.g., most of the Mising words connected with settled cultivation are loan words from Assamese.

Moreover, there are other dimensions of the linguistic acculturation of the Misings. First, although Mising is their mother tongue, they speak Assamese almost like the second mother tongue. In that way they are bilingual. Secondly, certain groups of Misings, (viz. Tamar, Samuguria, Bankawal and Bebejiya) have adopted Assamese as their mother tongue in place of Mising.

Again in the case of formal education also the medium of instruction is Assamese. So naturally the educated Misings use the Assamese language not only for conversation but also for formal discourse including writing.

The Mising children have received formal education through the medium of Assamese. They also learnt Assamese language and literature at various levels of schooling. But in recent times, growing ethnic consciousness has given rise to the demand for teaching of the Mising language in schools of Mising majority areas. The state govt. has taken steps

for the introduction of Mising language at the primary level. However, the Mising is being taught only as a language and Assamese is still continued to be the medium of instruction.

Mising Agom Kebang has produced text books for teaching the language. Although earlier the Assamese script was being used to write down Mising material, the Roman script has now been adopted for the purpose. This seems to have created some confusion.

This general picture in respect of changes in the Mising language is applicable in the cases of both Sonitpur and Jonai area also.³

Notes:

1. I happened to witness a Sanipuja ceremony connected with the purchase of a new power tiller during my field investigation. The ceremony has been described in detail in the section on socio-religious life.
2. As a result of recent socio-political developments, Assamese Vaishnavism has lost its earlier relevance as well as significance. But some other newly-developed pan-Indian religious cults have made their entry into sections of the Mising community; such as, cults of Sai Baba, Anukul Thakur, etc.

Unlike in some other tribal communities, Christianity has not made much inroad in the Mising community. However, a small section has been converted to Christianity in the Jonai area and Jengraimukh area of Majuli river island.

There have been just a few isolated cases of conversion into Islam too.

3. As the trends involving the other selected tribes have been found to be more or less similar, we have often referred to the Mising case in order to avoid repetition.

THE MISING CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE MISING CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE MISING CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE MISING CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE MISING CASE : PHOTOGRAPHS

1. View of the Jia Bhoroli river from Baligaon Mising village
2. General view of a Bhoralipariya Mising village
3. General view of a Mising village in Jonai area
4. House-building with community participation
5. Pounding rice in a typical Mising mortar
6. Drinking and smoking inside a traditional Mising house
7. Two elderly women gossiping in the courtyard
8. A Mising death ritual in progress
9. A woman carrying a baby in front of her house
10. Cooking for a community feast in a Mising village
11. Weaving on a loom: Mising style
12. Winnowing in a courtyard with brick houses under construction
13. A 'new style' *morung* structure
14. A Sani Puja being performed for trouble-free operation of a new tractor
15. A sari-clad Mising maiden out on business
16. Mising village girls in modern dress
17. Researcher with the family of Komison Mili (contact person) in his modern house
18. A highway Dhaba owned by a Mising youth
19. Ali-ai-ligang ritual led by the priest (*mibu*)
20. Ritual dancing in Ali-ai-ligang celebration
21. Organised celebration of Ali-ai-ligang with gate, flag and pandal
22. Researcher with others resting during a pause in Ali-ai-ligang programme
23. Dance performance on the specially put up stage
24. A 'symbolic' modern *morung* structure

CHAPTER – 6

THE DEURI CASE

L A Background Note:

Earlier it was believed that the Deuris formed a division (the priestly class) of the Chutiyas and while referring to them the composite term “Deuri-Chutiya” was used to designate the community and the language.¹ But it has since been established that the Deuris constitute an independent tribal community and it is now more common to refer to the community and the language by the single term “Deuri”. However, the ethnonym now being used by the community is “Jimochya”.

It can be mentioned in passing that whether or not the Deuris constituted a division of the Chutiyas, all historical evidences confirm that earlier they had close association with the Chutiyas and later on with the Ahoms.

It should be pointed out here that in early ethnographic accounts, books and documents the spelling of the name of the tribe was given as Deori. But nowadays most of the scholars use the spelling ‘Deuri’ as it comes closer to the local pronunciation. Here we have also used the spelling ‘Deuri’ to refer to the tribe.

As we have mentioned earlier, the Deuris are riverine people, they are found mostly along a few rivers of the Brahmaputra Valley. They are scattered in upper Assam and the contiguous areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

For this present study we have covered the following villages.

Bordeuri Gaon	}	Lakhimpur district (Dibongia)
Kinapathar		
Majar Sapari		
Madhupur Deuri	-	Dibrugarh District (Tengaporia)
Upor Deuri Gaon	}	Jorhat District
Name Deuri Gaon		(Dibongia)
Mahadevepur No. I	}	{Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh (Tengaporia)}
Mahadevepur No. II		
Mahadevepur No. III		

The various divisions of the Deuris – Dibongias, Borgayas and Tengaporias are found scattered in different far-flung areas. As such, although the changes have occurred in more or less similar way in all the villages, the nature and degree of change in different aspects have not been the same everywhere. For example, the Dibongias who are mostly found in the Lakhimpur district have retained their language while others have given up their tribal mother tongue in favour of Assamese. Similarly, traditionally Deuris have been worshipping the Mother Goddess and her consort (which can be considered as a form of Saktism). But as a recent addition, the neo-Vaishnava influence also has made its entry in some areas, particularly among the Tengaponias in different degrees.

It may be possible that due to physical distances between the different divisions of the Deuri community as a whole (unlike many of the tribal groups) the Deuris seem to have become conscious about their distinctive common identity rather slowly, and in their case the process of ethnic assertion seems to be not very well-articulated.

II. Trends of Change:

i) In the Field of Socio-Economic Life:

Nowadays the Deuris are found to be settled cultivators and till the recent past no distinctly visible proofs of practicing jhum cultivation in the hill slopes have been found. But many of the elderly people belonging to different division and areas of the Deuri community had expressed the view during our fieldwork that in the past they also practiced jhuming in the sense of shifting cultivation in the plains itself. They rightly emphasized that the jhuming is technique not necessarily related to hill farming.

There was a discussion about the practice of jhum (in our presence) in which the participants were a number of villagers about the age of eighty. In reply to my queries they gave me their views, which we have summarized above. However it was found that they were referring to the given information only in respect of *ahu* (broadcasting) rice cultivation which does not depend on water retention as much as *sali* (transplanting cultivation).

The traditional *ahu* rice varieties found in almost all the villages under study are *kulagoni* and *letagoni*. Similarly the traditional *sali* varieties are – *borsali*, *naria*, *maghuri*, *boliamusora*, *bodumoli*, *bora*, *joha*, *tulpania*, *xulpora* etc. They have been using these varieties for the last 40 to 50 years. In more recent times of course some new varieties have been introduced. In some areas particularly in Upor Deuri and Nam Deuri villages of Jorhat district and Madhupur Deuri village of Dibrugarh district, the new high yielding varieties of rice have been gaining popularity. Apart from rice the other crops include pulses particularly *matimah*, mustard, potatoes etc. Productions of some of the crops earlier have been completely given up

nowadays – such as, millet, sesame, cotton, different varieties of yam and taro, etc.

Earlier, that is, about 30 to 40 years back, the vegetable products included pumpkin, different varieties of gourds, egg plant, sweet potatoes, chillies, different varieties of herbs, etc. But in recent times the range of vegetable products has undergone remarkable changes in variety, quality and quantity. In the case of agricultural implements changes have come in a similar manner. In place of traditional implements, the modern advanced technologies such as power tiller, huller machine etc. are gaining popularity in many of the areas under study. Of course in the villages of Lakhimpur district we have found that only traditional implements are still in use.

Formerly the concept of surplus and the market economy was unknown to them. The economy operated purely at the subsistence level. Although they didnot always have much surplus, yet they had enough crops for their own use. Gradually they began to adapt themselves to the market-oriented economy and started production for surplus. In more recent times, specifically within the last 15 to 20 years, many of them have oriented themselves for production on commercial basis. This has led to extra income and also increased consumption of goods meant for comfort and luxury. This is reflected in their dress, food intake, entertainment gadgets, furniture, and so on.

Another important aspect that comes with the changes in the agricultural production, particularly the crop items, is the food habit of the people. The elderly people still remember the days when different kinds of yams and taros constituted a substantial portion of their food. Locally available varieties of herbs, roots, shoots, vegetables and fruits constituted

their delicacies. Gradually these items are losing importance as a large number of new varieties of vegetables and fruits have become popular. Even fruits like apples, grapes, pears etc. which are transported from outside are easily available in the market and also freely consumed.

The non-vegetarian items include large quantities of fish, various types of meat and eggs, chicken, pork, duck, mutton etc. Earlier, when the sacrifice of buffalo was common, the Deuris used to take the meat of the buffalo also. Taking of beef is, however, strictly prohibited. Use of oil was almost absent earlier. Items were mostly boiled, smoked, and sometimes roasted. But nowadays the use of oil is very common, which is definitely the influence of non-tribal Assamese neighbours. Similarly, the traditional cakes and snacks mostly prepared from *bora* rice, although still popular, are slowly giving way to modern factory-produced items. While the traditionally made rice beer *suze* is still the most popular beverage for all age groups, tea drinking has become popular, particularly with the young generation. Milk as food, not popular earlier, is being increasingly accepted with the passage of time. Smoking with the traditional pipe has gradually yielded place to *bidis* and cigarettes.

We are producing below a few reports based on field investigation in different Deuri villages focusing on different aspects of change in the economic field.

Lakhimpur Villages –

- a) It appeared to me from my general observation that in comparison to other areas under study, the Lakhimpur villages are less well-to-do economically. In spite of the general lack of prosperity a number of individuals receiving higher education

in different disciplines have become both economically and socially well- established. The general tendencies among such persons are to move to urban centers and adopt the modern life style.

Jorhat and Dibrugarh Villages:

- a) They have taken up cultivation of vegetables on commercial basis and have been using modern technologies and facilities wherever possible. They have started growing the new items of vegetables – traditionally not found - like cabbage, cauliflower, hybrid varieties of egg plant, tomato, different varieties of peas, squash, potato etc.
- b) They supply a good quantity of vegetables to the nearest urban centers, for example Jorhat and Dibrugarh.
- c) Though a considerable number of villagers are service-holders, yet they have not given up cultivation. In many cases educated youth have come up to take farming on scientific basis for their livelihood.

Mahadevpur Villages:

- a) Use of the horse in ploughing and transport (by riding or by cart pulling) is quite common. Of course horses are used by the Misings of Jonai area also on a limited scale.
- b) Use of the elephant for ploughing and cart-pulling was common till the recent past. The practise is gradually going out of use.
- c) Some well to-do persons are owners of elephants, which they rent out for drawing of logs by timber contractors in the

Arunachal hills. However, because of the recent restriction imposed by the Supreme Court on the felling of trees, this business has suffered a setback and some elephant owners have sold out their animals.

- d) The fact that some villagers are owners of elephants and have big incomes – reflects the presence of disparity in the society. However such disparity does not stand in the way of social communication.

ii) In the Field of Social Institutions:

As in the case of the Misings, under the parameter social institutions we have mainly focused our attention on family, kinship, marriage and clan system.

Family the smallest social unit is found to be joint in nature in most of the cases among the Deuris. In fact, Deuris still prefer joint family system. Though this system is fast loosing its ground, still we have found quite a considerable number of joint families functioning smoothly during our field investigation in different villages under study. The Dibongias called the joint family as *jakarua jupa*. The number of member of some of the joint families goes upto as many as one hundred. To accommodate so many members, the joint families construct long houses with compartments for individual families. Now-a-days the size of the family has come down to between 10 to 20, and thus very long houses are rare.

The Deuris have a rather elaborate clan structure. The different divisions or *khels* have separate clan systems. The clans that we have found in the villages under study are as follows:-

The Dibongias (the Lakhimpur and Jorhat villages) have ten clans called *jaku* or *bangsha*: Airo, Kumota, Chukrang, Chario, Sitikao, Lagasu, Patri, Sudario, or Boderi, Bihia and Sakusa. Among these divisions Kumota, Airo, Chario and Boderi are considered as the priestly clans because all the priests, their assistants and office-bearers belong to these four clans.

Again the Dibongias have a moiety system and Airo, Kumota, Murang, Chukrang form one moiety and the rest of the clans belong to the second one. Thus they maintain clan exogamy according to the moiety rule.

The Tengaponias (Dibrugarh and Arunachal Villages) have seven clans called Tika-Khutio, Masio-Nasiya, Pakimegera *or* Phakimenganya, Bigomia *or* Bikumia, Phaphoria *or* Phapohia, Senaboria *or* Senabarja, Sakusa *or* Sakusaya. Here also the priestly class belongs to Bikumia, Khutio, Masiyo, Phaphoriya clans.

It should be noted that till now clan exogamy is being maintained by the Deuris and there is a tendency towards retaining that tradition. Of course stray incidences of violating such rules are also found. In such cases the concerned couple has to face a heavy load of punishment and even excommunication.

Apart from the clan divisions, in the case of selection of the priest, their assistants and other office bearers, a kind of social hierarchy is found to be operating very strongly. For example, the Bordeuri, who command the highest prestige from the villagers, must be selected from the Sundariya *or* Machio clan. Similarly the other post holders must be selected from specific clans only.

In the case of kinship relationship, the Deuris of the villages under study have still retained certain traditional norms. For example, for a married woman, avoidance with husband's elder brother is very strong even today within the village. She cannot directly address him, give him anything, and her normal movements within the household are used to be restricted in front of him. Of course nowadays such restrictions have been relaxed to some extent and people coming out of the village set-up have put it to a minimum level. The relationship of avoidance is maintained also with the wife's elder sister. But here the strictness is not so strong as in the case of the former.

On the other hand, the husband's younger brother enjoys a joking relationship with his sister-in-law. Similarly, the wife's younger sister also enjoys a joking relationship with her brother-in-law, and grand-parents enjoy such relations with their grandchildren. The Lakhimpur Dibongias, who have retained their language, use the traditional kinship terms. But the Dibongias of Jorhat and the Tengaporias who have given up their language in favour of Assamese have also retained many of the kinship terms. For example, the following are some of the terms of address used by all the villagers under study.

<i>Eyong</i>	- Mother
<i>Bang</i>	- Father
<i>Ajai</i>	- Grand father
<i>Aboi</i>	- Grand mother
<i>Phayung</i>	- Fathers elder brother
<i>Mayung</i>	- Father's elder brother's wife
<i>Apu</i>	- Elder sister of either father or mother and so on.

Again, many of the kinship terms of reference and address have been adopted from Assamese, even among language speaking Dibongias – a change definitely occurring due to close proximity with the non-tribal Assamese neighbours.

Though the formalities are still maintained, the kinship relationship and significance have been losing day by day. For example, as in the case of Mising, here also cross-cousin marriage, which was formerly considered as a preferential one, has lost its importance as the young generation has abandoned the prescribed norm. Similarly, due to the diminishing trend of joint family, certain relationships which were much close once, have been losing that intensity in the present-day context.

Marriage is another important aspect of social institution which has gone through a number of changes.

As mentioned in the ethnographic account in Chapter-5, the Deuris have mainly three types of marriage – *borbiya*, *majubiya* and *sorubiya* of which the first two types have lost popularity because of high expenditure and elaborate and time-consuming rituals. So *sorubiya* is the widely prevalent type of marriage of the present day. However, another form of popular marriage is the marriage by elopement. This type of marriage is found to be very common in the villages under study. In such cases, when the groom's family accepts the marriage, the couple formally goes to bride's place with bride price which includes areca nut and betel leaf, rice beer, dry fish, a fixed amount of money along with a token bundle (containing a kind of taro, black pepper, ginger, dry fish) for the bride's mother with the belief that it would compensate for her labour pain. Also a feast with pig meat is given to the neighbourhood.

The *pathoria* or middleman appointed by both bride and groom's family plays an important role by settling bride-price and other details of the marriage. As a token of love a family gives many items with the bride, which includes mainly bell-metal utensils, wooden or steel boxes, garments, areca nuts and betel leaves etc.

Formerly marriages with non-Deuris was not common and were not accepted by the society. But gradually the attitude has changed. Nowadays in all the villages, cases of marriages with non-Deuris, both tribal and non-tribal, have taken place and they are being duly accepted by the society. In such cases the concerned couple has to pay fine (*danda*) and perform a purificatory ritual. A few cases are listed below:

1) A Karbi girl from Sonapur area of Kamrup district got married to a Deuri boy of Madhupur Deuri villge of Dibrugarh district. The Deuri family has accepted the girl as their daughter-in-law by performing the formalities including a purificatory rite. She is the daughter-in-law of my informant Shri Nandeswar Bharali of Madhupur Deuri village. The marriage took place about 8 years ago.

2) A girl, herself a chemical engineer from Upor Deuri village, got married to a boy of caste Assamese (Koch) community. It is in the family of Shri Kripa Deuri, the village head man of Upor Deuri village. Both the families have accepted the union.

The marriage rules in general have become much flexible with the passage of time.

(iii) In the Field of Socio-Religions Life:

As we have pointed out earlier the Deuris traditionally worship the Mother Goddess and her consort. It can be considered as a form of

Saktism. However, the different divisions or *khels* of the Deuri community worship these deities by different names.

Now we are going to describe the socio-religious rituals and celebrations specific to the villages under study and their changing trends wherever we have noticed.

Among the Dibongias of Lakhimpur and Jorhat district we have found the following :

The Bohagio Bisu (Bohag Bihu) celebration is accompanied by a puja at the *midiku* (the shrine) in the name of Gira-Girasi. The celebration starts from the first Wednesday of the month of Bohag. The preparation starts a week ahead nowadays, which was earlier a month-long business. Each of the families has to contribute rice, *mah prasad*, chicken and vegetables for the puja and the community feast. Bora and Kelua-Bora (traditional functionaries) collect the materials from each household. One or two families are given the responsibility for the preparation of rice-beer for the feast. On the previous Tuesday of the celebration, one of the priests collects a bunch of bananas from the village itself to be utilized as *prasad* on the Bihu day. An office-bearer of the priestly class (*tiriduboa* or *tirimuneya*) conducts this activity.

The puja starts in the morning at the *midiku* or *kundiku* (the shrine). The four priests, their assistants and other office bearer must be present in performing the whole ritual.

The four priests perform the puja; the Dupia (assistant) and Randhani or Ladani (cook) help them in conducting the puja. The puja is offered in the name of Gira –Girasi, whom they identify with Lord Siva

and Parvati of the Hindu pantheon. Bolia Baba (Pisa dema) and Tamreswari (Pisasidema) son and daughter of Lord Siva and Parvati, are also offered puja. The sacrifices of goats and fowls are made. The puja continues upto mid-day. When the puja comes to an end, the priests give a *kimaru* leaf (which is considered as a symbol of purity) to each person. The *prasad* is given in the form of a bundle (*ayuxtopola*) to each family. Keluabora distributes the *prasad*. Puja over, the Randhani, assisted by four persons appointed by the villagers, cooks the food items for the feast. The womenfolk, though not allowed to join the community feast, comes to the puja ground to attend the puja and help in different chores including cutting of vegetables etc. After having *prasad*, the congregation comes to the *morong* (community hall) to enjoy the feast. The cook and his four assistants serve the food. Singing and dancing starts from the evening.

The next day, each family individually makes offerings in the name of the forefathers. The offerings consist of cooked chicken and fried *bora* rice. The offerings were earlier placed on *koupat* (a special variety of leaf) but nowadays they use the plantain leaves.

Before this community puja, each and every family has to perform a purificatory rite called *saksiklabiba*. Any one of the priest comes to perform the rite. A number of persons from other clans have to be invited. Guests are entertained with a modest feast which includes a special dish known as *kaji*.

Usually an unmarried girl prepares the food. Before the preparation, she bows down before the household deity with a copper pitcher called *garo* and with *kimaro* leaf she sprinkles the holy water in the entire

household. She also prepares the rice-bear. It is believed that this ritual frees them from all kinds of omissions and commissions.

Merry-making by singing and dancing continues for seven days and a puja is performed on the Wednesday. On the next Thursday it is the end of the Bihu celebration, called *bihu urua* or *bisudabeba*. In the evening they ceremonially give farewell to Bihu by singing Bihu songs and go to the river bank to perform some rituals. On their way back, mock-fighting, and wrestling are performed.

After one week they perform another Bihu known as Rajkebang or Pituakhowa Bihu or Pehababisu or Midideruruba. Within this week any kind of performance of ritual, either individually or community-wise, is prohibited.

In Rajkebang all the deities worshipped by the Deuris as a whole are offered puja. Four pigs are required for sacrifice. It is performed for the welfare of the village and its people.

Another important ritual performed by them is Maghio Bisu, which is also performed at the *midiku* like the Bohagio Bisu. A puja is performed on the first Wednesday of the month of Magh by the priests assisted by different post holders. In addition to the Bihagio Bisu puja paraphernalia, here cakes made of *bora* rice are also offered to the deities worshipped.

Kati Bihu is also celebrated by the Deuris. Earlier the celebration of Kati Bihu was very important but nowadays it has lost its older significance.

The other important community and individual pujas performed and observed by the villagers are Chiba Bochu, Goal Gorokhia sakam (*Mosomeirakia Midi*), Lakhi Sakam (*Minosiridi muma*) etc. The Chiba Bochu is held at the Deoshal Than on any Wednesday in the month of Saon. The priests and their assistants perform the puja. Fowls, pigeons, goats are sacrificed in the name of all highest gods and goddesses. The people outside the community can also offer sacrifices according to their wish. The Goal Gorokhia Sakam is performed either at the Morang or in the river bank. The puja is performed in the name of villagers normally on in the month of Phagun or Chot. The four priests and elderly persons perform the ritual. Earlier, sacrifice of deer was common. Now-a-days the purpose is served with pig or tortoise or fish. However, this celebration is loosing its ground day by day.

Lakhi Sakam is performed at the granary of individual household. At least one of the priests must be present. It is held in the month of Magh or Phagun or Aghon. Two pairs of earthen lamps are lighted and a pair of white fowl is required. Kimaro leaves are required for the puja along with four pairs of *koupat*. Bamboo sticks are placed at the puja site. The priest sprinkle water with the Kimaro leaf. The near kins are invited.

Ai Sabah is another community festival performed mainly by the women folk. Offerings consisting of fruits, *mah-prasad* betel nut and leaves etc. are made, and after the performance of the rites they float the offering in the water.

Other rituals of limited scope performed either at individual households by the near kins are *saksisk yatema* and *nakhowa* or *chiba haba*.

Saksik is the annual purificatory ritual to be performed by each household. The four priests come to perform the ritual. Close kins and neighbours may come, but guests from other clans must be invited. A girl from outside the clan must cook for the guests.

Nakhowa is the taking of new crop for the first time. It is also accompanied by offerings that are made in the name of pests and insects and other creatures that might have been killed during ploughing or harvesting or such other activities. At the same time, offerings are also made in the name of the forefathers of the family.

Apart from these a number of rituals related to the rites of passages are performed.

In the case of the Tengaponias the supreme deity is the Balia Baba. They regard Baliya Baba as being the protector of the villagers and they offer homage to the deity at the shrine from time to time. The rituals that are performed by the Tengaponias under our study are more or less the same as those found among the Dibongias. The rituals are as follows: Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu, Na-khowa, Patdangar Puja, Ghordoo Puja, Bura Dangoria Puja, Aimatri Puja etc. The performance of rituals are more or less same with some special features. For example, here the Burha Dangoria Puja is performed in the name of Burha Dangoria believed to be a ghost, in the jungle by offering chicken.

Again the Patdangar Puja is performed to mark the starting of *ahu* cultivation.

From the above description we can note some significant points relevant for our study.

1. There has been a steady tendency towards identifying the tribal gods and goddess with Hindu gods and goddesses, more particularly of the Sakta order.
2. Again, some rituals of Vaishnava affiliation have been adopted.
3. The Assamese festival complex of three Bihus – Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu – have been accepted by them as their own festival and been suitably adapted into their traditional socio-religious framework.

While dealing with the socio-religious beliefs and practices of the Deuris, the issue of human sacrifice has to be taken up for special consideration. From all past records and reports it is evident that the practice of human sacrifice to propitiate Mother Goddess was prevalent among the Deuris. The famous Tamreswari temple is believed to have been an important center where human sacrifice was performed. The Mother Goddess was known by the appellation 'Kesai Khaiti' (eater of the raw flesh) because of this. Although stories about such human sacrifices still continue to circulate, the practice is known to have ceased quite some time ago. No such sacrifice has been reported in the recent past. But the idea still lingers in the group-psyche of the people and manifests itself even in the present time in rather strange ways. We are citing an example of such a manifestation which was reported to us in the Major Deuri village during one of our field visits.

In the year 2000, in the Deuri village of Bahgarha in Lakhimpur district, a young girl in a state of trance received the message from Burha (equated with Lord Shiva) that a human sacrifice was to be offered. The village community under the leadership of the priest discussed the matter

seriously and decided that although a regular human sacrifice was not be possible, the god's command had to be respected. It was decided to offer a number of goats in place of a human being. The news spread to other Deuri villages, and contribution of goat came from these villages with which a grand sacrificial ritual was performed. The Upor Deuri villagers contributed six goats.

iv) In the Field of Socio-Political Life:

Traditionally the Deuris had their own village self-government. Each village had a village council constituted by the village elders of which the village chief was the head. All local cases of disputes and breach of rules were heard and settled by this council. The guilty party was punished by the imposition of a fine, excommunication, and in some cases, physical laceration. In some villages this council was known as *salisnama*.

Gradually, the villagers started taking serious cases to the government agencies like the police department and the judicial court. The government appointed Gaon-bura continues to be the village headman and he enjoys a special status as the agent of the government in the village. In some areas it was noticed that the village head mans of a cluster of neighbouring villages had formed a common organization under the name and style of "Santi Committee Gaonbura Sora" (the Village Headman's Forum for Peace).

As indicated in the Background Note, the sense of group solidarity among the Deuris has been rather slow to come. One of the reasons is that the Deuri villages are scattered in different parts of a large area and as such, there was not much of mutual contact among them. Again, until

about four to five decades back, the Deuris had more or less accepted the prevailing view that they constituted the priestly class of the Chutiyas. There was no visible objection to the hyphenated nomenclature Deuri-Chutiya (or Deori-Chutiya). The separate and independent status of the Deuris has come to be asserted gradually since that time. The first organization meant for the welfare of all the Deuris of Assam was the Sadau Asom Deuri Sanmilan (All Assam Deuri Conference). But his organization was not very effective and has since become non-functioning.²

In fact, ethnic consciousness and ethnic assertion of an aggressive type has never been a visible feature of the Deuri solidarity movement. In spite of that, the Deuris have in the mean time taken a leaf out of the recent history of politico-ethnic movements of other tribal groups of the region. They have formed ethnic organizations following the models set by other tribal groups. Some such organizations are set by other tribal groups Deuri Sahitya Sabha (Deuri Chu-Chebancengcha), Deori-Chutiya Sahitya Sabha (Deori, Chutiya Chu-biba Magana), Deuri Students Union etc. These organizations have been demanding introduction of the Deuri language for Deuri students at the primary level. In very recent times, influenced by the autonomy movements persistently carried on with various degrees of success by some other plains tribal groups like the Bodos, the Rabhas, the Tiwas and the Misings, some enthusiastic sections among the Deuris have also been airing claims for similar autonomy for them. But these have not taken concrete shape. It appears, there have been no well-thought out schemes in this regard.

v) In the Field of Material Culture and Language:

a) Material Culture:

In the case of material culture of the Deuris the changes that have taken place are more or less in the same line as we have found in the case of the Misings. We are pointing out below some outstanding features under specific heads :

House-type:

Like the Misings, the Deurits also have the traditional *chang* (raised platform houses) houses made of bamboo, timber and thatch. As the first stage of change some modifications are made with the *chang*, such as, giving wooden flooring, mud plastered walls and timber posts. Side by side the more well-to-do families had gone for bungalow pattern wooden raised platform houses keeping the traditional structure of the house intact. (These types of houses were favoured by the British administration. In Assam this type of houses is called *chang bangala*). Again, at the same time people have adopted the typical Assamese rural house pattern with bamboo posts, mud plinth, mud plastered walls and thatch roof. A modification of this type has timber posts, timber battens and tin roof supported by wooden structure. Next, the use of cement became popular and a more advanced version with cement flooring and full or half brick walls came to be preferred by all those who could afford, whether tribal or non tribal. And the latest trend is to go for R.C.C. constructions of the latest design.

With the changes in the house patterns and materials used, many of the social practices connected with older system had to be modified. For example, according to their death ritual the portion of bamboo platform

where the body of deceased was kept used to be burnt and later repaired. Nowadays in the new house patterns the area of the floor is sanctified. Again, the significance of the hearth (*tiphai*) and related customs has undergone modifications with changed house types. Modern bath-rooms, modern toilets, modern cooking range and entertainment gadgets have become common.

During our field investigation we have found the co-existence of all these types of houses almost in all the villages under study.

Textile:

In the field of textile changes are distinctly visible in many areas. For example, the Deuris have completely given up the loin loom and adopted the common Assamese throw-shuttle loom, and now the fly-shuttle loom.

The female attire consists of *mekhela*, *paoga/baiga*, *kakal bandha* and *takaria*. The female garment differs at different stages of life. From the infant stage to puberty, a small *mekhela*, usually in black or in white, is used to cover the lower portion of the body. In the next stage, a special *chadar* woven by the girl's mother is given before puberty in the presence of some of her friends. After attaining puberty, there comes the stage *igopichagem* when a proper *mekhela* is given to her. The final stage is *jokasiba*, when the girl herself prepares her dress and it is considered to be the symbol of eligibility for marriage. The married woman covers, the head with a hand woven towel called *taka rin*.

Similarly the traditional male attire consists of dhoti (*iku*), a chadar (*aba*), and a turban.

Other than the costumes, *borkapor*, *khania kapor* etc. are important textile items. *Eri* and *muga* were produced on a large scale earlier. Nowadays it is produced on a much reduced scale. Weaving with synthetic yarn and wool are becoming more and more popular.

Modern dresses and fashions have also made their entry among the Deuris. The young generation, both male and female, have been using factory produced garments of the latest designs. Of course, traditional dresses are still very much popular at the time of rituals and celebrations among the new generation too.

The Deuris not only produce traditional garments but also materials for many new items, such as bed-sheets, cushion covers, pyjamas, shirts, and so on.

Formerly the male-folk used to keep long hair and wear ear rings, mostly made of bamboo. That was about 70/80 years back as reported by a person of late nineties at Bordeuri village. Female-folk used to wear ornaments made of silver, brass, different kinds of beads and occasionally gold. Blackening of teeth by the females was very common among the Deuris, which is completely absent today.

Implements:

We did not find during our field work the use of digging stick, hoe etc. related to shifting cultivation. Most of the implements now used are the same as those used by the non-tribal cultivators. Again, the latest trend of change has been leading to another new phase : adoption of modern technological aids like power tiller, water pump set, huller machine, etc.

In the case of weaving implements the changes have been mentioned already.

Transport and Communication:

The changes have come in a big way to the transport and communication scenario. Developed roads and public conveyance system, railways, postal service, telecommunication, electronic media like television etc. have brought in revolutionary changes to their life style.

We are citing a case here-

During our stay at Mahadevpur (No.3) village in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, it was arranged that our hosts would take us to Mahadevpur (No. 1) village about 4/5 km. away. The message was sent over the telephone and when we reached that village, everything was set for our visit. This has been become almost a part of the daily life of the people there.

b) Language :

We have already seen that of the three major divisions of the Deuris, only the Dibongias have retained the Deuri language for communication among themselves. But for outside communication they also freely use the Assamese language and are thus bilingual. Their children also receive education through the Assamese medium. Even in the Deuri language as spoken by them, more and more Assamese loan-words are being incorporated. As for the other two groups, i.e., the Tengaponias and the Borgoyas, Assamese has been adopted as the mother tongue in place of Deuri. But their link with the language has not been completely snapped. For example, many of the ritualistic chants and incantations chanted by the priests are in the Deuri

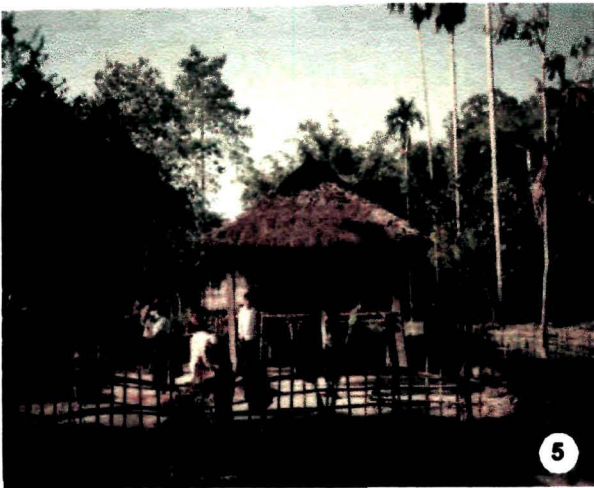
language. Most of the rituals, ceremonies and festivals as well as many of the social institutions have Deuri nomenclatures. Similar is the case with many of the kinship terminologies, which we have mentioned in the section on social institutions. But in recent times the Assamese -speaking Deuris are also showing consciousness about the desirability of knowing their 'own' language. Thus the Deuri Sahitya Sabha and similar other Deuri organizations have been pressing for Deuri being taught as a language in the primary schools of Deuri majority areas. They have also been publishing books and magazines with materials in the Deuri language. Although because of the peculiarity of the Deuri phonetic system, they have been finding it rather difficult to transliterate the Deuri language materials through the Assamese script, the Deuris have been sticking to the Assamese script. The Deuris living within Arunachal Pradesh are facing a different kind of problem. Although they are Assamese speakers, their children do not have the opportunity of learning Assamese at school because there is no provision for teaching the language at any level in Arunachal Pradesh.

It may be mentioned here that though the Dibongias have so long retained their language, there has been some gradual erosion in their case also. For example, in the Upor Deori and Nam Deori villages near Jorhat inhabited by people of the Dibongia section, because of various factors, some people, particularly among the younger generation, have virtually stopped using the language and have become more and more dependent on Assamese.

NOTES:

1. In this connection the following work may be cited : Brown, W.B.1895
An Outline Grammar of the Deori Chutiya Language.
2. It appears that the inspiration behind the formation of the organization came from late Bhimbor Deuri who was a very energetic and forward-looking Deuri leader. He was one of the chief architects of the “Tribal League” which was meant to serve as a common forum for the all plains tribal people of Assam.

THE DEURI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



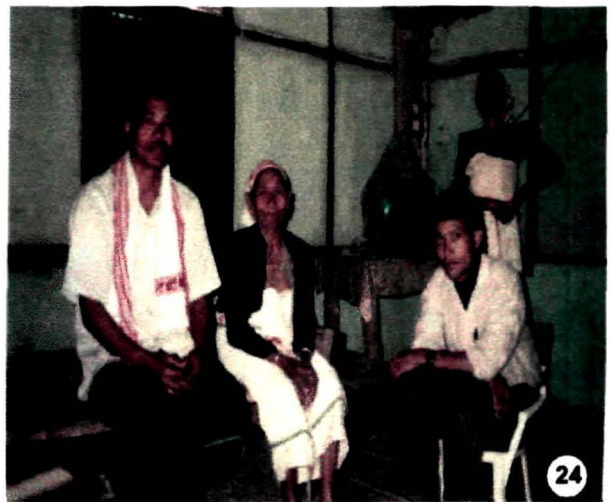
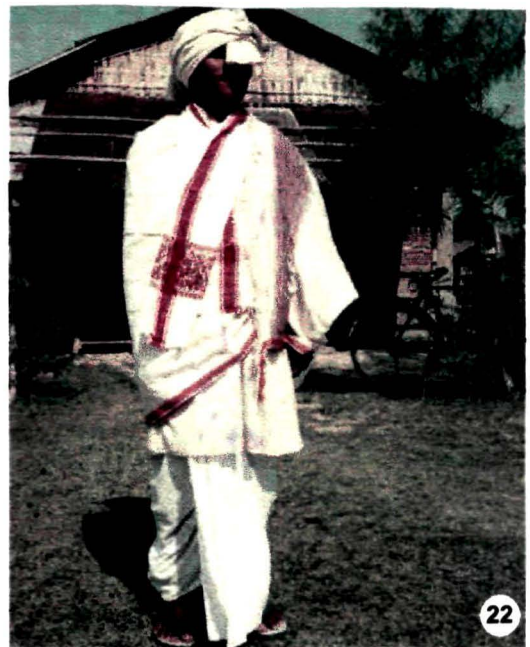
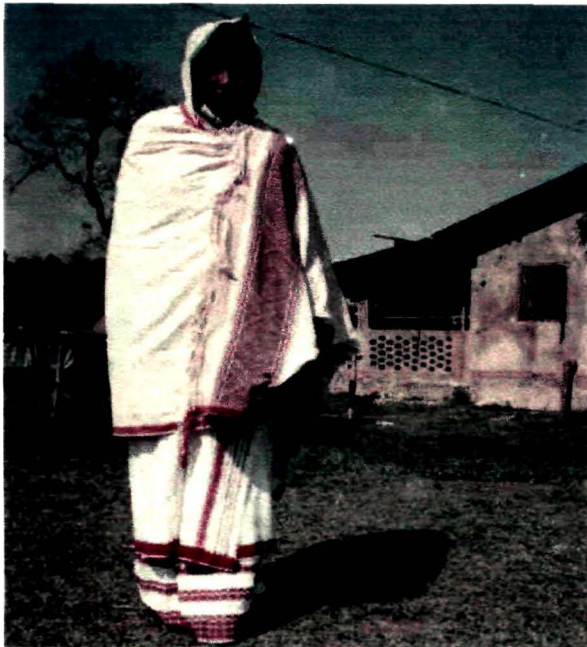
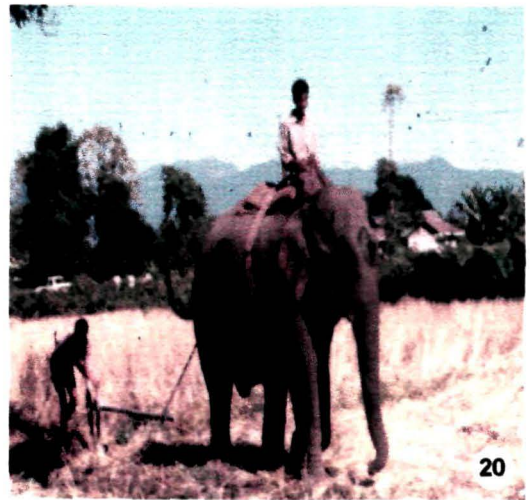
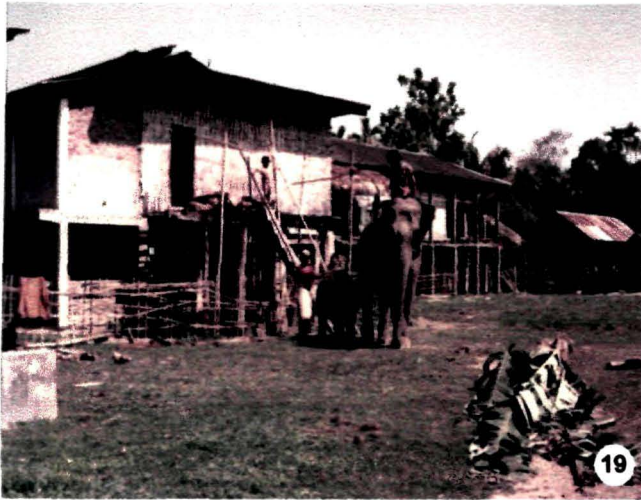
THE DEURI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE DEURI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE DEURI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE DEURI CASE :PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Deuri mother with her children with Deuri houses in the background
2. A traditional house with a modern solar power device in front
3. View of a Deuri homestead
4. A group of Deuri women in Traditional Dress
5. A typical Deuri raised platform house (*Chang Ghar*)
6. Deuri women pounding and sifting rice
7. General view of Deuri temple complex in a Lakhimpur village
8. Inside the temple complex with two priests
9. General view of another Deuri temple site in Lakhimpur district
10. General view of the temple site in Mahadevpur area in Arunachal Pradesh
11. The community prayer hall within the temple complex in a Lakhimpur village
12. The sanctum atop a tower in the above temple complex
13. A Deuri death ritual in progress in the courtyard of the family of the deceased in a Lakhimpur village
14. Mixed group of men and women in the death ritual
15. A Deuri patriach relaxing in the company of younger relatives. Note the hookah and the modern garments
16. The researcher with a Deuri family on the front veranda of a traditional house
17. Around the *tiphai* of a Deuri house in the presence of a non-Deuri guest
18. The researcher (in Deuri dress with a Deuri family in Mahadevpur (Arunachal Pradesh) with modified houses in the background
19. Elephants with members of the owner's family in Arunachal Pradesh. Note the typical architecture of the house
20. Ploughing with an elephant in a Deuri village in Arunachal Pradesh
21. A Deuri girl 'made up' in traditional brides attire
22. A Deuri boy 'made up' in traditional bride-groom's attire.
23. A modern Deuri *chang ghar*
24. A Deuri family in a room with a TV set

CHAPTER – 7

THE KARBI (MIKIR) CASE

L. A Background Note:

As mentioned in the ethnographic account in Chapter-3, the Karbis are found both in the hills and the plains. The life and culture of the plains Karbis are substantially distinct from those of the hill Karbis. The changes that have taken place among the plains Karbis have several dimensions, which we will analyse in this chapter.

Karbi is the ethnonym of the group who also use the term *Arleng* to identify themselves. Earlier the group was known by the name *Mikir*. The term was used not only by non-Karbhis but even by Karbis themselves. Many of them even used the term as their surname.¹

As in the case of some other tribal groups, the changes among the plains Karbi people have passed through mainly two phases. Firstly, there took place change of habitat due to coming down from the hills. It has had a direct impact on their socio-economic life and material culture. On the other hand, changes have occurred in many aspects of life due to contact with the plains people, mostly the dominant Assamese-Hindu population, and in certain cases, with other tribal communities. The influence of Assamese Hindu culture has been particularly conspicuous.

Formerly the changes involving acculturation took place in a smooth manner and it was almost accepted as natural and desirable by both

the Karbi people and their non-tribal neighbours. But recent developments in the socio-political sphere involving ethnic consciousness and assertion have led to certain moves in the reverse direction. It should, however, be pointed out here that unlike in the hills where the self assertion movements of the Karbis have often taken aggressive forms, the plains Karbi people have so far tried to take a more balanced position.

The plains Karbis are found mostly in the Kamrup district. For our study we have taken up villages mostly from the Dimoria area. The villages covered in this area are – Belguri, Nakuchi, Borbitoli, Topatoli, Bhodaikuchi, Polasong, Nihang Diksak, Niz Hahara; another village from Digaru area called Niz Panbari and the village Narakasur, which has now turned into a suburb of Guwahati, have been covered to get a fuller picture of the trends of change in the plains Karbi society. As villages of Dimoria are adjacent to each other we have taken Belguri as representative of the Dimoria area. Again, Narakasur represents the picture of change due mainly to urbanization. This development has been particularly prominent in the context of change involving the Karbi people because they have been deeply effected by the precedented rapid process of urbanization of the city of Guwahati.

II. Trends of Socio-Economic Change:

(i) In the Field of Socio-Economic Life:

First of all we are focusing our attention on the Dimoria area taking Belguri as the representative of the situation. As agriculture is the mainstay of the plains Karbi people, their economy is mainly dependent on agricultural activities. However, the nature of agricultural pattern, and operations have changed, particularly during the last 50 years or so, as is

evident from the field data. The major changes that have taken place are in the mode of cultivation.

Formerly they were completely dependent on jhum cultivation. It is learnt from their oral tradition that earlier they were hill dwellers and they continued to practice jhum even after coming down to the plains. In the past, more precisely till 50 to 60 years back, jhuming was the only means of production in the villages. Their jhum fields are on the slopes of the nearby hills and hillocks as well as on the plains. It was only 40 to 50 years back that gradually they have shifted towards settled cultivation by learning the skill from their caste Hindu Assamese neighbours. Even after the adoption of this method, they simultaneously practiced both shifting and settled cultivation. But since the last 20 to 30 years, more stress has been given to settled cultivation and it is seen that gradually they are giving up the former shifting mode of cultivation. Several factors are responsible for this kind of change. Firstly, shifting cultivation is very laborious and it needs lot of man power and time. Secondly, land has become limited now-a-days due to various reasons like increase of population, land alienation through different agencies, etc. Thirdly, the productivity of settled cultivation is higher than in jhuming and the marginal farmer is also benefited from the change over. In this way, many factors have come in to contribute in the gradual abandonment of jhuming. However, it should be pointed out here that till now a large number of villagers have jhum fields on the hill slopes and practise jhuming on a limited scale.

As in the case of some other tribal communities, here also one major change is distinctly found in respect of agricultural implements. For jhuming, the hoe, the digging stick and the chopper had been the main

implements. Jhuming, which is also known as slash-and-burn technique, involves cutting and felling of trees followed by burning, and thereby preparing the soil for cultivation. For cutting purpose the chopper (locally called *nokpa*) is used. For preparing soil after burning the trees the iron hoe was used which is called *ko* by them. The adoption of settled cultivation is followed by the adoption of implements used for this technique. As in the case of many other tribes, the terms used for implements of settled cultivation are loan-words from Assamese. The implements which are used for wet cultivation are *nangal*, *moi*, *joboka*, *bindha* and *kachi*, etc. With the adoption of settled cultivation, rearing of cattle got prominence. But the community depends on cattle mainly for two purposes – ploughing and thrashing, and less importantly for milk (which has come to be a food item only recently).

Similar changes are noticeable in the implements used in the processing of the crops. For example, formerly, i.e., about forty to fifty years back, the villagers used mortar and pestle for husking paddy. But gradually they began to husk with the help of the husking pedal *dheki* – itself an adaptation from their non-tribal neighbours.

Changes have taken place in another sphere of their economy i.e., the cropping pattern. At the time when jhuming was the only means of production yarn, different kinds of toros, potatoes and a few varieties of paddy like *ahu* (nowadays known as *pahar ahu*), *bora*, *boka*, *bordhan*, *chobok*, *pahar joha* were the staple items along with a small amount of pulses, sesame, millet, sugarcane and vegetables. In addition to these items, cotton was also produced in a fairly large quantity. The vegetables included brinjal, chillies, garlic, ginger, pepper, pumpkin, different kinds of gourds, different varieties of leafy vegetables and herbs.

After the adoption of wet cultivation the traditional local plains varieties like *bordhana*, *rongaguchi*, *betgutia*, *petuamaguri*, *malguti* were introduced along with some other crops like mustard, a kind of pulse (*matimah*) etc. Forty to fifty years back, these varieties of paddy had been produced by the villagers. That represented one phase of change regarding the cropping pattern. However, after introduction of different high-yielding hybrid varieties throughout the country, the second phase of change took place. As a result, the new high yielding hybrid varieties like *aijong*, *parimal* etc. were adopted by the villagers. Of course, cultivation of some traditional varieties like *boka*, *bora*, *joha* etc. are also going on simultaneously but in reduced quantities. Recently seeds of certain new varieties like TTP are being introduced and distributed by the Agricultural Department of Assam, and according to some villagers, the yield has been good.

With the change of the mode of cultivation, i.e., from jhuming to settled farming, the villagers have given up production of a number of items like cotton, sesame, sugarcane, millet etc. in large quantities. Nowadays only a limited number of families produce such items on a reduced scale. Of course, the villagers have stopped producing cotton completely. Similarly in recent times the production of mustard, a special variety of pulse (*matimah*) and a number of items have been almost given up though a limited number of families are producing these items in small quantities.

In the case of vegetables also, new items have been introduced. When a new variety proves successful it gets incorporated in their agricultural set up. Carrots, cabbages, cauliflowers, tomatoes different varieties of beans including French beans, beets, peas, papaya etc. are some such additions.

Case Study

In support of above description of the changes in the cropping pattern of the plains Karbis of Dimoria area, we are giving below a case study –

Name : Shami Teron

Age : 65 years.

Sex : Male

Educational Qualification : Nil

Place : Belguri

Date of collection of data : 5.12.99

According to Shri Teron, about 40 years back, jhuming was the only means of production for him. *Bora, chobok, pahar jaha, pahar ahu, bordhana* were the popular varieties of rice grown in the jhum fields. Other items included millet, sesame, different kinds of taro, brinjal, chilli, black pepper, pumpkin, ginger and also cotton. However, gradually he has given up jhuming in the hill slopes and has learned to cultivate in the plains. Simultaneously, changes have come in the crop items also; for example, rice varieties like *maiguti, rongaguchi, betgutia, bokadhan, joha, petuamaguri* etc. became popular. In more recent times the newly introduced varieties like *aijong, TTP ranjeet, bahadur* etc. have also been included in this list. The other items he has adopted are mainly *matimah* (a kind of pulse) and mustard seeds. However, he has still retained a small portion of jhum field for certain crop items and vegetables. Cultivation of sesame and cotton have been completely given up by him.

Regarding the use of fertilizers and pesticides, a slight change has been reflected. Formerly in the jhum fields the ashes of the burnt trees

acted as natural fertilizers. At the initial stage of the introduction of wet cultivation, no manure was needed as the land was almost untouched. But with the gradual reduction of the fertility of the soil the villagers have started using cowdung as manure. Till now they have not used any chemical fertilizers. From the remote past the villagers have been using certain locally available leaves and fruits and certain devices to ward off pests, e.g., and they have not yet used chemical pesticides.

Another subtle but significant change and its implication to which the villagers have adapted themselves is their food habit. Traditionally their staple diet was rice along with a substantial amounts of yarm, taro, tapioca, different varieties of edible roots. In addition, large amount of leafy vegetables, fish and meat and eggs used to constitute major food items. The dishes were mainly boiled and smoked and sun dried. Pork was the popular and common meat although chicken and pigeon meat were also consumed. Use of oil was practically unknown in the past and even about 40 to 30 years back the use of oil was very scanty. But now they use oil like their non-tribal neighbours. Of course, boiled, smoked and dried preparations are still taken in large amount and relished by them. The traditional dishes are still favourites. *Khar* (prepared with alkali) is also one of their favourites. *Tenga* or sour preparations are often taken. Like most of the tribal communities, preparations with bamboo shoots are very common and popular among the Karbi people.

Due to close contact with the non-tribal Hindu Assamese neighbours, various food items have been introduced among the Plains Karbis of the area under study. For example, cakes made of sticky rice powder (*til pitha*), and steamed *bora* rice are such example of adaptation of food. And

in more recent times people go for various ready-made foods easily available in the market.

Har (a home made rice beer) is their traditional beverage. It was used for all kinds of purposes – as a part of their food habit, offering in the rituals and ceremonies, for strengthening and nourishing the body, for offering to the guests, etc. However, due to the awareness about the bad affects of the consumption of liquor, the villagers, particularly the young generation, have checked the preparation and consumption of *har* to a large extent. Of course the preparation and consumption is essential for ritualistic purposes and for festive occasions. Rice beer is still consumed particularly by the older generation on regular basis. Among other drinks often taken is tea liquer, which is usually salted. Nowadays tea mixed with milk is becoming more poplar among the Karbis of the plains. Like most of the tribal communities, Karbis did not take milk originally. But nowadays the young generation consumes milk without any prejudice.

As in all other tribal communities, earlier the economy was purely at the subsistence level. Villagers were self sufficient with their productions. Production was not at all market oriented and barter was the only means for exchange of goods. But since about 60 to 50 years back, things began to change and the concept of money and market economy became much stronger and it started playing a significant role as we have found in the case of other tribal communities. It has also led to the concept of market-oriented surplus.

Though Belguri gives us a picture showing different phases of shift regarding the economic life of the people, however, it still has a tendency to retain the old stet up. By practicing *jhuming* till today, though

in a very reduced scale, the villagers have proved their longing for the indigenous practices.

On the other hand, the village Narakasur which is a suburb of Guwahati shows a different picture. The basic difference is in the location of both the villages. Belguri presents the scene of the changing trends in a completely rural set-up. The changes that have taken place have been gradual and not abrupt. Apart from the changes that are unique to the plains Karbi population, the other gradual changes as well as their adaptations more or less tally with the general rural scenario of Assam.

But in Narakasur the situation is completely different as it is situated within the limits of the city of Guwahati. Because of the location, Narakasur provides a picture of fast changing trends (particularly in recent times) towards urbanization. However, the uniqueness is the fact that in spite of its peculiar location, Narakasur has still retained its identity featuring the ingredients of a plains Karbi village.

Though agriculture had been the mainstay of the villagers earlier that is, about 20 to 30 years back, nowadays the economy is not dependent on agriculture alone and there has been a distinct tendency towards diversification. The people of Narakasur have got full exposure of the alternative sources of income. The impact of education had played a vital role in his respect. Land alienation through different agencies, either directly or indirectly, has accelerated the process of shift in the economic pattern of the villagers.

Like the villages of Dimoria area, more precisely Belguri and other adjacent villages, Narakasur had also come across several phases of change in the case of economic life. But it is found that here certain changes

had come much earlier than in the Dimoria area. For example, jhuming was also practiced in Narakasur but the process of change over to settled cultivation started much earlier, about 60 to 70 years back, and nowadays it has been completely abandoned by the villagers. Only a few elderly persons can trace back their memories regarding the jhum cultivation.

According to those persons several varieties of paddy including a substantial amount of *ahu* rice along with different crop items like sesame, sugarcane, cotton and different varieties of vegetables were produced in the jhum fields. As in Belguri and the adjacent villages, here also change in the mode of cultivation is followed by subsequent changes in related aspects. For example, with the adoption of wet cultivation which started much earlier (elderly persons above 80, couldn't trace back clearly) the implements also changed. But in Narakasur the latest trend of change and its adaptation in this field is provided by the coming of the power tillers, the thrashing machine and the water pumps. These are the recent additions in their application of new technology. The families who are still practicing agriculture as one of the major sources of income have these modern pieces of agricultural machinery. Like the adaptations in the case of implements involved in production, the other implements related with agricultural activities also have undergone subsequent changes and adaptations. For example, nowadays they have their grains husked in nearby mills.

Another sphere of their economy i.e., the cropping pattern shows similar kind of trend as it is seen in the case of Belguri and the adjacent villages. Instead of the traditional varieties like *bora*, *joha*, *boka*, *tingrai*, *suagmoni*, *moinagiri*, *kanaimalu*, *batiajhora*, *tingingi*, *garomoina* – both *sali* and *ahu* - crop, they have taken up the new varieties like *aijong*,

parimal, T.T.P. etc. Latest addition in this field is the inclusion of certain high yielding varieties like *ranjit, bahadur* etc. that are being introduced by the Agricultural Department of Assam. Though a substantial amount of traditional varieties like *bora, boka, joha, tingrai, moinagiri* etc. are still being produced, the new varieties have gradually gained popularity and have shown the tendency to replace the traditional local varieties.

Case Study

Name : Joydhan Tumung

Sex : Male

Age : 70 years.

Educational qualification : Nil

Place : Narakasur

Date of collection of data : 18.1.2000

When Shri Joydhan Tumung started to cultivate his father's land about 50 years back, the mode of production was settled cultivation. The popular varieties of rice were –*garomoina, tingrai, moinagiri, joha, bora, boka* etc. Other crop items include *matimah* (a kind of pulse), sesame, mustard, cotton and jute. Gradually the new rice varieties like *aijong, parimol* etc. came to the scene and most of the older varieties have lost ground. Recently again, the new high-yielding varieties have made their entry. In recent times he has given up raising sesame, mustard etc. and has turned to the raising of such vegetables as cabbage, cauliflower, tomato, carrot, beet, different varieties of beans etc. Earlier traders from Fancy Bazar (the big business hub of the city of Guwahati) used to come to purchase the surplus rice, mustard and pulses. Nowadays traders from nearby markets purchase these.

Similarly in the case of other crop items like mustard, a kind of pulse (*matimah*) sesame, cotton, sugarcane, jute etc., the production has been almost completely abandoned except that an occasional production of *matimah* in a very small quantity still continues. Again, here also a change is seen in the field of food habit which is much more prominent than in the villages of Dimoria area. However, the changes have taken place along similar lines.

As in Belguri and other villages of Dimoria, in Narakasur also earlier the production was at the subsistence level and not at all market-oriented. But with the changing scenario, the concept of production, consumption as well as distribution have undergone substantial changes. Again, the present economy of the village Narakasur is not centred round agriculture alone. In fact agriculture is practiced as a major source of income by only a few families. Of course, this trend has started some 20 to 25 years back. The cumulative effect of several factors have contributed in this field. One of the major factors in the exposure to urban economy and different types of income-generating sources other than agriculture, for example, selling of land to non-Karbi people. As the village is within the limits of the city of Guwahati, there is a demand for the land. So land has become a commodity of great demand. Thus its importance as a money-earning commodity has greatly increased. Thus, somehow the importance of land as a factor of agricultural production has received a set-back as people are going for the ready money by selling their land.

Another reason for selling land is the uneconomic land holding. For example, a number of villagers have sold their farm lands because of uneconomic size and insufficient yield. With the help of the money received

by selling the land they have built shop-sheds and houses which they have rented out for commercial purposes.

Very often the throwing of garbage and unwelcome materials by the new settler on the adjacent paddy fields has also compelled some villagers to sell the land.

Apart from these, the impact of education has played a very significant role in their economy. Because of its location in the proximity of the city and awareness about the benefits of education, more precisely of formal schooling, educational institutions were set-up about almost 50 to 60 years back. Gradually the people have become more and more aware and the enrolment has increased progressively. Formerly the children used to go to the Gopal Bodo Higher Secondary School (then High School). But in 1980 the villagers themselves established a school and it is has now been taken up by the Government. As a result the percentage of young boys and girls passing the H.S.L.C. examination has gone up. Many of them have received higher education both in the general line and in various professional lines. This explains the fact that a large number of people are service holders in government and semi-government offices. The village has produced three doctors, one pharmacist, one officer in the forest department of Assam and some other office-holders and professionals.

Trading with the merchants of Fancy Bazar was prevalent on a limited scale among the villagers since a long time past. However, nowadays trade and business has gained new popularity because of new opportunities and scope at different levels.

At the same time, there are some striking exceptions also. A few industrious young educated youth having adequate land have started

cultivation as their prime mode of livelihood. They have acquired adequate knowledge and skill regarding cultivation. Because of their educated background, they are also aware of the modern technological advances as well as facilities provided in the field of agriculture by different agencies either government or non-government. This represents a healthy new trend in the young generation. They have utilized the indigenous infrastructure as well as made modifications whenever necessary and adopted the new facilities and opportunities provided by different agencies.

Thus in comparison with Dimoria area, Narakasur offers a picture of a wider range of change in the economic life both in terms of diversity and intensity due to nearness to a big urban centre.

ii) In the Field of Social Institutions:

Now we are going to devote ourselves to the study of the trends of change in respect of social institutions. Within the scope of social institutions we have taken up some major aspects of social life, e.g., kinship, family, marriage and the clan system.

As exposure to modern education has played a substantial role in bringing about change in social life, we shall try to highlight that aspect also. The trend of change that have taken place in the field of social institutions are almost in the same line in the three areas – Dimoria, Digaru and Narakasur, except for a few specific details. While we will discuss the changes of social institutions of the villages under study together, special mention will be made of the situations peculiar to each village.

As we have mentioned earlier, family is the smallest social unit. From the anthropological point of view it is also considered the base of social structure and relationship. Thus study of the family structure

reveals many dimensions of social life. As in other communities under study, here also until about twenty-five to thirty years back, the joint family was the prevailing structure. In the case of Narakasur the time-frame is slightly different from that of the rest of the villages.

Practice of patrilineal descent being the traditional Karbi system, all the sons, both married and unmarried, and daughters lived together with their parents. The married daughters used to live in their in-laws' house. As in the case of other communities, here also gradually the joint family system has become weaker and it has started splitting. Today there are only a few joint families in the proper sense in these villages.

Usually a common hearth is considered as the criterion of the joint family. Nowadays, the practice of common hearth has been gradually given up and as we have found in other communities, the married brothers go for establishing separate hearths. This change of family structure from the joint to the nuclear type has implications in various fields of life.

One important aspect covers property and inheritance. In earlier times, as in the case of most of the other tribes, the concept of individual property was not very clear among them, and any plot of land (under the jurisdiction of the village and farm land) could be used for cultivation or other purposes. With the increase of population and non-availability of fresh cultivable land, the concept of individual ownership became prominent among the village people and with the splitting of joint families it grew much stronger even within the family itself.

From earlier days till now, the division of property is made with the consent of elderly members of the family as well as the parties concerned. As we have mentioned in the earlier chapters on the tribes under

study, nowadays such division of property does not take place always so amicably and it is often accompanied by bitterness. Sometimes this gives rise to strained relations between brothers and between parents and children which shatters the very base of relationship of the smallest social unit i.e., the family. As a result a pan Indian phenomenon, that is, aged parents feeling insecure in the family, has touched these tribal villages too even in the remote ones like Belguri.

These are some direct consequences, while there are some indirect impacts also the cumulative effects of which have ultimately changed the social life of the people concerned. One such important impact is the loosening of kinship ties. Secondly, people have become more individualistic.

New developments have taken place also in the field of kinship terms and their implications. Consideration of kinship terminology and observation of both terms of reference and terms of address, along with their own view about kinship relations, provides a more or less clear picture of changes in the kinship system –

- i) Formerly they had certain definite ideas about close and distant kins.
- ii) There was definite rules about preferred marriages, MBD (mother's brother's daughter) being the most preferred one. These were reflected in the kinship terms. For example, the same term was used for mother's brother, father's sister's husband, father-in-law, uncle (outside one's own clan). This implies that MBD type of cross-cousin marriage was prevalent in this society. Similarly, the terms of address for son-in-law was the same as the term of reference for sister's son. Thus marriage between mother's

brother's daughter and father's sister's son was prescribed by the society. But though the terms have remained the same, the relationship has changed and cross – causing marriage is no longer practiced. Nowadays, the young generation has started to consider their earlier probable mates as their 'cousin-sisters' which is the usual practice of their caste Hindu Assamese neighbours in the case of both Belguri and Narakasur. These changes of attitude has occurred during the last thirty to forty years in Narakasur while in the case of Belguri, during the last 20 years or so.

Formerly, due to the prevalence of cross-cousin marriage, the relationship between the families of probable mates was very close and firm. Maternal uncle had enjoyed a very important and significant position in their traditional set up. Day by day these things are vanishing and therefore, the relations have lost the older significance.

Another minor change, which is also common in other communities, was observed during our investigation. Formerly the husband and the wife used to address each other not by name. The practice was to use the indirect terms like So-and-so's father and So-and-so's mother. But nowadays the young couples usually address each other by the first names. This reflects a very modern trend.

As a consequence of the changing and changed attitude, the new generation has almost lost the ability to trace back their ancestry and to connect their present kinsmen. While the older people could recall the names of their ancestors, sometimes upto nine/ten generations, the young people can hardly remember upto three or four generations. Similarly, in comparison to the older people, the younger people have very limited knowledge of their kins outside the village.

As for institutions which more or less correspond to the concept of clan, sub-clan and phatry, the people of both the villages use one single designation *kul* to all of them. These institutions still play vital role in their social life including family, kinship and marriage. The plains Karbi people have a large number of clans. But all of them are not present in each plains Karbi area. Some are dominant in some regions while others are in other regions. In the villages under study we didn't find all the clans and the villagers themselves even do not know about all of them. The clans to which the families in these villages belong are – Teron, Rohang, Terang, Bonjang, Rongson, Rande, Taro, Rongpe, Ingti, Kro, Be, Tumung, Phangcho.

Each of them is considered as a exogamous social unit, again some social clusters made of a number of clans are also considered as exogamous units. The clans and sub-clans that are found among the plains Karbis of these area are as follows:-

- Englee – It has thirty sub-clans. However, we have found only two sub-clans present in the villages under study. These two are Rongpi and Ronghang.
- Ingti - It has five sub-clans. Out of these five, here we have found two – Ingti Kathar and Taro.
- Teron - It has six sub-clans. Almost all of them are found in this locality.
- Terang - It has also six sub-clans. Out of six two are found here i.e., Kro and Bey.
- Timung - It has again thirty sub-clans. Out of the thirty only two are found here – Timung and Phangcho.

In respect of marriage two kinds of prohibitions operate –

- i) Inter-marriage within the same sub-clan is not possible.
- ii) Inter-marriage between the two sub-clans within the same clans was also similarly prohibited.

Though nowadays some relaxations are found to be allowed in certain rules, but they are very much strict about the maintenance of clan exogamy in all the villages of the entire area.

Although marriage by elopement is an old practice of the village, till fifteen to twenty years back it was confined within the Karbi community only. But cases of elopement with non-Karbi partners are gradually taking place. Formerly marriage with non-Karbi was not accepted by the society. However, since Tiwa, Rabha, and some other tribal communities are considered more or less equal in status, marriages involving such non-Karbi partners are accepted with a simple formality. But gradually the villagers have started accepting elopements with non-tribals also with similar but more elaborate formalities. Of course marriages with members of the Muslim or Christian community is not easily accepted. It involves elaborate formalities including the approval of nine village heads of the locality and strict purificatory rituals.

In some cases a simple device is resorted to : the prospective non-Karbi bride is adopted by a Karbi family (within or outside the village) belonging to such a clan that has marriage possibilities with the groom's family. With the passage of time, modifications as well as relaxations regarding the rules and regulation have been introduced. For example, formerly in the case of marriage by elopement, the acceptance ceremony started with a purificatory ritual and was followed by a feast for which two

pigs were to be contributed as fine. But nowadays people prefer cash as fine. Several factors have operated here – (i) two pigs involve a lot of money, but the cash that is paid is nominal in comparison. (ii) Pigs are no more reared by the villagers in large numbers except by a few families. In Narakasur it has been completely abandoned. (iii) The money is preferred as it is donated to the village council as a symbol of acceptance by the entire community.

Given below is a description of an adoption function which we had the privilege of witnessing at village Nihang Diksak. A Bodo person from a distant Bodo village had married a Karbi girl of this village. The marriage had not been accepted by the family of the Bodo person. So he decided to stay here at Nihang Diksak. But the Karbis decided to allow him to stay in the village only if he came to the Karbi fold. On that day (3 February, 2001), when we were also present, the village council was held to formally accept the groom in the Karbi fold. Both the parties were present and representatives of the neighbouring villages were there. The decision was taken to adopt him into the Karbi-fold. The proceedings were written down and recorded for future reference. It was duly signed by both the parties.

Besides these kin-based institutions like family, marriage, kinship etc. the people of the village have certain other important social institutions which link the entire village as a community, such as, the village council, usually called *mel*, the Youth Club, Mahila Samiti etc. These institutions play significant roles in public matters; for example, in public works where community services are required. However, changes have taken place in these institutions in their forms and pattern of work. Formerly *mel* was the council of male elders, the young did not take part in the decision-

making. The women could not be members of the council. But gradually young people are asserting themselves. In some cases women also take active parts in village matters. In more recent times such organizations as the Village Panchayat, the Mahila Samiti and the Youth Club are becoming more and more prominent.

Though functions and significances have undergone a lot of change, the traditional structure of the village organizations, which are very much interlinked with one another, is still maintained by the villages under study (of Dimoria area and even the Narakasur village).

The villages have a Bangthai (the head of the council), a Riso Bangthari (the leader of the youth as well as assistant of the Bangthai), Bisar Po (the judge) Kathar (the priest who performs purificatory ceremonies), Deuri and Deurigendha (the priests who performs the community rituals and his assistant respectively). The role and significance of the traditional organization and its office-bearer have suffered a greater decline in Narakasur than in the other villages of this area.

Unlike in the Hill Karbis, the Plains Karbi people – especially those of the villages under study – didn't have any structured youth dormitories since long past. Instead, under the leadership of the Risobanghai the youth used to play a very significant role in the social life of the people, especially in matter of common concern. But in recent times, this once vibrant force of the youth has lost its former importance as well as direction, and has been channelised in the direction of an ordinary youth club.

During our fieldwork we found that there were a few structures in a number of villages which are called Terang Ahom (if it has a platform

floor) and Soira Ahom (if it has a mud plinth). But they are no longer the centers of traditional youth organizations. They are simply meeting halls for community organizations of the villages concerned.

One of the most potent factors in bringing about the above changes has been the impact of modern education with its non-traditional moonings. The effect is more clearly visible in Narakasur than in the villages of the remote areas. Because of the easy access to educational institutions, alongwith the exposure to the 'modern' world, the people of Narakasur are found to be in a more advantageous position than those of Belguri. For example, the people of Narakasur take pride in the fact that the village has produced three doctors, one government officer, a large number of petty service holders in various government and semi-government offices. Some graduate young people have started private concerns and a few educated youths have started systematic agriculture backed by modern technology as the prime mode of livelihood. The changes that have taken place in the case of education has been very fast and abrupt. Female education is being equally encouraged and the girls have become successful in keeping pace with the outside world. But in Belguri the situation is somewhat different in respect of education. Though people have awareness about the formal type of education, because of its location the facilities at different levels are limited. In comparison to Narakasur, here the new generation is not making similar progress in this field. Only a few boys have gone to college. Girls are lagging behind in this area.

iii) In the Field of Socio-Religious Life:

As in the other communities, a striking and interesting situation of change as well as adaptations have been found in the field of socio-

religious life of the plains Karbis. It shows a mixture of diverse elements. The present scenario of religious life of the villages under study gives the picture of the co-existence of mainly four types of belief systems (a) the Plains Karbi traditional belief system, (b) Hinduism in general (c) Assamese Saktism, especially worship of Mother Goddess Kamakhya and (d) some aspects of Assamese Neo-Vaishnavism in certain cases.

As in the case of social institutions, the changing pattern in religious life is also almost in the same line in all the villages under study. Of course, there are certain cases which are peculiar to each of them. So we are going to discuss the situations separately.

First we will consider the situation in the Dimoria, Digaru area concentrating mainly on Belguri and Panbari villages. The major religious rituals and ceremonies which have been practiced traditionally since long past in the Dimoria area are Dehal Puja, Silmodar Puja, Padamjal Puja, Bolia Puja etc. These are performed by the community as a whole. Dehal Puja is the most important and significant ritual. It is held on the first Tuesday of the Assamese month of Phagun. The puja is offered in the name of Mahadeo (Lord Siva) which is a clear indication of Sanskritization. The traditional tribal gods and goddesses had been identified with the Hindu gods and goddesses. This process of change must have started quite early. It is difficult to find out the earlier forms within this limited time frame, which we have taken into consideration for this brief study. But from the present description of rituals and their interpretations, the results of Sanskritization can be easily traced. These rituals show a mixture of tribal practices as well as the Hindu way of worshipping. For example, though Dehal Puja is an indigenous Plains Karbi ritual the term puja itself is an incorporation from

Hindu terms, even the term *dehal* is a derivation from the term *dseosal*, meaning place of the divinity. Similarly, Mahadeo (Lord Siva), the Hindu god to whom the puja is offered is now very much a part of the Plains Karbi pantheon.

On the other hand, the paraphernalia required for the puja as well as the offering and chanting of hymns represent the 'tribal link', for example, one pig, one goat, and a pair of fowl from each family are sacrificed. Rice beer (*har*) specially prepared for the puja is offered, along with rice paste. Again, the paraphernalia also include earthen lamps, incense sticks, flower and *tulsi* leaves, and so on. Some of them are borrowed from Hinduism. Even the chants represent a mixture of traditional Karbi and Hindu-Assamese elements.

On the eve of Dehal Puja a community purification ceremony locally called *gachiknowa* has to perform and it is conducted by the Kathar, the priest who performs purificatory ceremonies. The other rituals are performed by the priest called Deuri and his assistant Durigaondhai. On the puja day the villagers gather at the shrine called Borthan. Make shift arrangements are made at the puja site with bamboo and plantain leaves. The Deuri conducts the entire puja with the help of Deurigendhai. Sacrifices are made after the chanting of hymns. The rituals are performed throughout the day. The next day a community feast is held where all the villagers take part.

Traditionally the Dehal Puja is held every year on the Assamese month of Phagun. But a slight change has occurred regarding the holding of the puja. Because of the large of expenses involved in the puja, the villagers have decided to hold it every two years or so.

Another development regarding Dehal Puja had started about five years back. As an exercise of the assertion of ethnic identity and solidarity of the Plains Karbi population as a whole, they have started organizing Dehal Puja every year centrally in a particular village selected and agreed upon by the entire community. Representatives from each village come to participate.

Other important rituals collectively performed by the Dimoria people are Silmodar Puja, Bolia Puja and Padamjal Puja.

Silmodar Puja is also offered in the name of Mahadeo (Lord Siva). It is held on the next Saturday after Dehal Puja. Fowls and rice beer are offered.

The Bolia Puja is performed to get rid of elephant menace. This puja is performed in the Assamese month of Ahar or Jeth. As it is related with the elephant so this has been identified with worshipping of Ganesh – the elephant-headed god. Banana, special varieties of pulses (*boot mug*), rice beer and hemp are offered. The other paraphernalia includes earthen lamps, incense sticks, vermilion etc. The venue of this puja is the paddy field.

Again Padamjal Puja is also performed in the month of either Jeth or Ahar at the Padamjal Than (Shrine). The puja is offered in the name of Goddess Ai. Different types of fruits like banana, mango, jackfruit, two kinds of pulses are also offered in the name of the Goddess. The other paraphernalia include earthen lamps, incense sticks, vermilion etc. If any member of the family, particularly a young child falls ill, a simple ritual is performed in the individual household in the name of the Goddess Ai

and the offerings are kept carefully in bundles in the household. At the time of Padamjal Puja these bundles are placed at the puja site and forms a part of the puja paraphernalia. Beating of *nagara* (kettle drum) is a recent addition in this ritual along with congregational songs and hymns. Such performances are confined to only one or two hamlets of some of the villages for example, the Namakuchi hamlet of Belguri village. It is possible that this development rituals connected with the worship of the popular Assamese pox goddess (Ai) has taken place due to the influence of a Koch woman who has been married to a man of this village.

Apart from these, various rituals are performed at individual level. For example, before bringing home the first two branches of the crops, simple ritual is performed at the paddy field by the individual families.

According to the Deuri, Shri Kabutu Teron of Belguri, there are a number of families who perform special rituals at their individual households. Each of these families has a sacred chopper in the name of a particular gods, and goddess. These choppers are named Ranachandis Dakhar (chopper), Salmar Dakhar, Tomulong Gosai Dakhar, Ancheron Gosai Dakhar etc. Yearly rituals of these individual 'deities' are performed on the respective households.

Another ritual, not related with the chopper, is performed in one particular household. The family of the Risobangthai of the village performs a kind of esoteric practice of Vaishnavism called Bhakat Sewa or Rati Sewa.

The people of Belguri and Borbitori, are frequent visitors of the Kamakhya Shrine at Khetri. They have been worshipping Goddess

Kamakhya since a long past. Sometimes they also come to visit the Kamakhya temple of Guwahati.

Apart from these rituals connected with offerings in the name of gods and goddesses, the villagers practice a purificatory rituals called *gackiknowa* in different occasions. This ritual is conducted by the Kathar, the priest who conducts only rites of passages and the purificatory rites. Certain rules and regulations regarding the birth and death rituals have changed or some relaxations or modifications have been made. A recent addition of the religious practices is the celebration of Biswakarma Puja by one or two individual households owning some machine or gadget.

Another significant development in recent times regarding the religious life in Belguri and the adjacent villages is the conversion of several families of neighbouring villages to Christianity. It has created an undercurrent of tension between different groups. Since conversion to Christianity has to a great extent alienated the Karbi converts from their traditional way of life, the non converts have become doubly conscious about the preservation of their Karbiness. This has resulted in a kind of revivalism. It may be mentioned here that these developments have also direct or indirect socio political implications.

Rituals and religious celebrations that are performed in the Digaru area are described below –

The important rituals are Deoshal Puja, Habi Puja, Bat Puja, Ganesh Puja, Bhagabati Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Janmasthami, Saraswati Puja etc.

Like the Dehal Puja of Dimoria area, the people of Niz Panbari also perform Deoshal Puja which should be conducted by the Deuri belonging

to the traditional priestly clan. The puja is held at a shrine called Deoshal Than. It is an annual celebration and can be held on any date. Though this puja has an important place among the annual celebration, the Ganesh Puja particularly which is held along with the celebration of Bogha Bihu is the most important and significant celebration for the Digaru people.

The people of Niz Panbari observe the Bohag Bihu in a special manner in which Ganesh Puja has a prominent place. Bohag Bihu and Ganesh Puja are inextricably related to each other. The Bohag Bihu is celebrated by observing Goru Bihu, (cattle rites and care) Manuh Bihu (the Assamese new year) with various rituals, singing, dancing and merry making etc. This continues for five days. On the sixth day of the month of Bohag, the Ganesh Puja is observed by the entire village irrespective of their community. Besides the Karbi people, the Bodo-Kacharis and the Koch (Rajbongshi) also celebrate the festival and all the communities share different responsibilities amongst them for a smooth celebration. A Hindu priest from outside the village is invited to perform the puja according to the Hindu system. On the very day of the puja the priest performs a part of the rites at Mahadeu Than which is in the Rajakuchi hamlet. The stone image of Lord Ganesh of the shrine is decorated with fresh new clothes and garland. The Koch people of the village take the responsibility of collecting money and all kinds of materials required for the puja. In the afternoon the Karbi people join at Mahadeu Than by performing their traditional songs and dances. The traditional head of the village leads the procession. After their arrival, the Koch people bring out the image of Ganesh from inside the shrine (*than*) escorted by the Karbi people. Singing and dancing with shields and swords, the image of Ganesh is carried to another shrine called Charai Than about

half a kilometer from Mahadeu Than on an wooden litter like seat. The main puja is performed at Charai Than by a Brahmin priest.

As the puja is over, *prasad* is given to all. As they bow down before the deity, the priest offers blessing to them. After that they set out for the return journey. In the meantime, a group of people block the entrance of the Mahadeu Than with three wooden logs. This is called *garh bandhun*. When the returning party arrives at the spot, the party which had put the fortress tries to prevent the entry of the former. A mock fight ensues. The party belonging to the deity breaks loose the three logs one after another, each time giving three rounds of the shrine. Finally the party makes its entry and reinstalls the image of the deity in its original place after giving it a ritual bath.

At last in the evening on their way back, a group of Karbi people take the instruments connected with their celebration to the respective houses, where these are customarily kept. With this the celebration come to an end. A special attraction of Charai Than is the one day fair called Chaybihur Mela held as an adjunct to the rituals of Ganesh Puja. People of the neighbouring villages of the Digaru area come and join the fair.

Another important ritual performed by the Digaru people is Habi Puja. The name itself signifies that this puja is a ceremony associated with the jungle or forest. The main purpose of the puja is to satisfy nature through the medium of various local gods and goddesses for the good of the people, cattle and harvest of the village throughout the year. This puja signifies a kind of man-nature relationship. The puja is held at a definite place, which is shady and far away from the homestead of the village in

the bank of the river Digaru in the Assamese month of Jeth (May-June).

The puja starts in the morning. Two persons are selected from among the villagers to organize the puja – others also help them. A person of priestly clan performed the puja. Almost one hundred deities are worshipped – they arrange a low raised platform called *patoli* in the name of each deity – a piece of plantain leaf is placed on that where offerings are given which include fruits, pulses and rice. The important deities worshipped are constituted by various benevolent and malevolent deities including – Maurdebota, Aisokal, Ganesh *or* Bamun Goshai, Mahadeu, Parbati, Lakhi, Saraswati, Kartik, Sat Poali of the Digaru river, *Tamulong*, *Dighalthengia*, *Kharikatia*, *Dowani-Samani* etc. Besides these deities various neighbouring hills, big rocks and rivers, natural lakes are also worshipped; chicken and pigeons are offered to them. Puja over, the members of the assembly cook the offerings and have a feast.

A similar kind of important annual celebration is Bat Puja. 'Bat' literally means road. So this can be described as an worship of the roads. Actually through the worship of the road evil spirits and natural calamities from outside the village are sought to be prevented. It is performed at a meeting point of three or four roads. The entire celebration is arranged and managed by the womenfolk. Though it is observed collectively, it is not celebrated by the entire village on a common basis. Instead, each hamlet or a number of hamlets together celebrate in their own vicinity. In the Bat Puja special offering is made in the name of Bat (road) Special offering are also made in the name of Mother Goddess Bhagabat and different deities representing her, like Mahamaya, Kalika, Bar Ai, Maju Ai, Saru Ai, Rajpari etc. A kind of evil spirit *daim* is also worshipped. In the name of Mahamaya

a boat of plantain bark (*dinga*) is made and offerings are placed there. After singing congregational prayer through hymns (*nam*) addressed to various deities, the offerings are placed in the plantain bark boat and are floated in the river. Looking back at the floated articles is taboo.

Other major religions performances are Bhagabati Puja, Janmasthanami, Ai Puja, Lakhi Puja, Saraswati Puja etc.

Bhagabati Puja, is held at a shrine called Bhagabati Than and performed by a Brahmin priest out side the village. Mainly menfolk participate in this ceremony. There is no image of any deity in the shrine. A chopper found in the shrine is worshipped as the Goddess Bhagabati. The puja is held on the Assamese month of Ahar-Saun. The priest performs a *hom* (fire ritual). Offerings like a sari, a mirror, a comb, hair oil, vermilion and cosmetic articles are made to the goddess.

Like the neighbouring Assamese Hindu villages, Janmasthanami is observed with great enthusiasm by the Plains Karbi people of the village Niz Panbari, particularly by the womenfolk. Vegetarian offerings are given and womenfolk sing congregational prayer and also read sacred books.

Like Janmasthanami, Lakhi Puja, and Saraswati Puja are new additions in the socio-religious life of the people of Digaru area.

As indicated earlier, the ceremonies and rituals described above represents syncretism of different faiths, cults and practices.

In Narakasur also a more or less similar kind of religious practices are observed with certain distinctions. Here also both Karbi traditional rituals and rituals of Sanskritic affiliations are held, and in many cases there has been syncretism of the two.

As in Belguri and the adjacent villages, the villagers of Narakasur also perform Dehal Puja as one of the important celebrations. Another important ritual which is special to only Narakasur is Johong Puja. It is held in the month of Bohag. These two rituals are mainly celebrated by the entire community of the village. Of course, several rituals are performed at individual households on various occasions. Like the Belguri people the Plains Karbis of Narakasur also visit and worship the mother Goddess Kamakhya at Nilachal. This tradition has been continuing since long past. Even about 30 to 40 years ago they went by foot to visit the temple. Pigeons and goats were offered. They had good relationship with the *pandas* of the temple. As they came for the whole day the *pandas* made the arrangements for their lunch. A visit during Durga Puja was the usual practice. Nowadays due to the great rush of pilgrims, the *pandas* have asked them to come before or after the puja days so that they do not get lost in the crowd.

Though Durga Puja is not performed within the village, the villagers visit the Puja pandals of the locality. Similarly, some other pujas like Lakshmi Puja, Saraswati Puja, Biswakarma Puja etc. are indirectly observed and participated. Though they don't practise such rituals within the household, some purificatory rituals like the cleansing of the entire household, washing of cloths are done.

Recently the members of the Mahila Samiti of Narakasur have started learning *nam* (congregational hymn singing) from neighbouring caste Assamese ladies.

In all the villages under study, three Bihus – Magh, Bohag and Kati - are observed, especially Magh Bihu and Bohag Bihu they are locally

called as Domahi. Domahi is very much of a local Karbi festival with its own rituals – complete with the singing of special songs called *domahi aloon*, signifying the influence of non-tribal Assamese culture.

It appears that different kinds of changes have taken place in the socio-religious life of the people at different points of time but changes have come so naturally that they have been integrated into their life style without visible signs of conflict. As there is blending of so many elements, it is not easy to sort out those elements individually and identify the original forms and the changes followed by adaptations.

(iv) In the Field of Socio-Political Life:

One of the major changes that has been observed regarding the socio-political life is in the attitude of the people. After Independence, particularly after the incorporation of special provisions for scheduled tribes in the Constitution, the tribals became conscious about their status and rights. These groups started asserting themselves both in the socio-cultural and the political arenas. In some cases there has been a tendency towards revivalism. As a result of such trends among the tribal populations of Assam, the concern with ethnic identity had gradually developed into ethnic assertion and eventually to demand for political autonomy. The Karbi Anglong District Autonomous Council is the result of such developments. Although Karbis of the plains do not enjoy hill tribe status, this socio-political consciousness of the hills has touched them. Formerly, the trend of change of the plains tribal people was toward assimilation through acculturation with the local practices of the dominant culture of the Hindu-Assamese society. But the recent trend is to trace back the old forms and re-establish the 'original' identity wherever possible.

Though apparently it is not so distinct, the under-current of this attitudinal change is also very much present in all the villages under study.

We will get a subtle but clear picture with the help of certain examples, which are applicable in all the villages. At first we can consider the dress pattern. Like many other elements, the dress pattern of the villagers has undergone a lot of changes. But the recent trend is to revive the old forms of their garments and textile designs – at least for ceremonial use on special occasions, specially to attend those functions which are related with their indigenous life and culture.

Secondly, another subtle but very significant development has been observed in the case of language. In all the villages under study, Assamese is used as a second mother tongue. So they are definitely bilingual. As reported in Belguri and neighbouring villages, there are villages in the Khetri area where their own tribal language has been completely abandoned in favour of Assamese as a consequence of the assimilation process. However, as a conscious effort backed by the revivalist ideology, the people of those particular villages have decided to marry girls from such villages where the Plains Karbi language is used as the mother tongue. The idea behind the strategy is that with its help the children of the next generation will learn the 'lost' language and re-establish it as their mother tongue.

Again, in the field of religious life, the performances of indigenous rituals has been given a special meaning and significance apart from their ritualistic importance. As we have mentioned earlier, religion gives a picture of fusion of several elements. The trend in the past, more precisely until 20 to 30 years back, was toward assimilation with the local Hindu fold

by identification of indigenous gods and goddesses, rituals and performances with those of the Hindu system. But the new trend is to give recognition of the indigenous beliefs and practices as a separate identity. For example, the Dehal Puja which can be regarded as one of the most important rituals of the Plains Karbis had been performed and observed by each village since long past. But recently the Plains Karbis have started celebrating Dehal Puja every year centrally at a selected village. All the villages are expected to attend the puja - at least by sending representatives. Apart from the performance of rituals, it also offers a meeting place for the people which they utilize as a rallying point for the promotion of group consciousness and group solidarity. The term puja, which is definitely an adaptation from the local Hindu practice, is now replaced by the Karbi term *kasirdam*. The implication is obvious. It might be remembered that this is not an isolated case. Similar tendencies have been noticed in all parts of North East India and also in other parts of India. Although in some cases there have been even the rise of extremist and militant tendencies, Plains Karbis have so far been by and large free from them.

The growing influence of Christianity among the Plains Karbis is another aspect of change which has brought into focus new socio-political equations. Rightly or wrongly some analysts believe that Christianity has encouraged a movement away from the smooth process of integration that had been going on over the ages. In the Dimoria area more than one Christian missions have been active and the people coming to the Christian fold through them have abruptly developed the tendency to dissociate themselves from the traditional Karbi way of life, leading to tension between the followers of the traditional ways and the new converts.

v) In the Field of Material Culture & Language:

a) Material Culture:

The reflection of change is distinctly visible in the various aspects of material culture also. As we have mentioned earlier, the plains Karbis had earlier experienced one phase of shift in their material culture followed by the shift of the ecological niche i.e., from hills to the plains. However, that phase of change practically not come within the time frame of our study. After settling down in the plains they have had continuous contact with the non-tribal neighbours, especially the Hindu Assamese community, which had led them to a series of changes in various aspects of life including material culture. Of course the trends of changes in the field of material culture is more or less similar to those found in the case of other communities under study though with some distinctive features.

In the case of house type, the Plains Karbis no longer go for the raised platform houses. They adopted long ago the mud-plinth thatched houses of the common Assamese pattern. The people who could afford gradually started building “Assam type” houses. Originally these were houses framed in timber posts and battons with thatch roof and mud-plastered walls and plinths. Later on came tin roofs and cement flooring. In recent times people are going for “semi-Assam type” houses with R.R.C. posts and cement plastered brick walls and tin roofs.

Similarly the dress pattern of the plains Karbis has undergone a remarkable change. Instead of the traditional Karbi costume they have adopted (both men and women) the non-tribal Assamese dress. The dress of the Plains Karbi women resemble that of the other plains tribal women

like Rabha, Tiwa etc. with distinctive colour schemes and designs. The traditional Karbi designs and patterns got mixed up with the local ones and it had lost its earlier significance and distinctiveness. The female attire of the Plains Karbi people includes the *mekhela* – a loin cloth, *phali* – a piece of cloth used to cover the upper part of the body, *chola* – a blouse. The male dress consists of a *pongho* – either used to put on the waist or on the head as turban (*chobang*), a jacket and the *gamocha*, the loincloth.

But the recent trends of revivalism have made them conscious about their identity, and the dress pattern has been taken up as one of the identity- markers. They are trying to revive the old designs and patterns. For example, as black and deep blue were common colours used in their traditional dresses, so they are trying to popularize these colours and their distinctive patterns and designs. Of course those are especially meant for ceremonial purposes.

However, the latest trend is to wear *mekhela chadar*, *sari* and *salowar kurta* of the latest fashion. Similarly, trousers, shirts, T-shirts etc. are the common dresses of the new generation male-folk.

The food habits also have changed to a large extent,. (Details have already been discussed in the section on socio-economic life).

Similarly, various agricultural and weaving implements have changed considerably. For example, as the plains Karbi people have taken up settled cultivation from their non-tribal neighbours, the related implements also have come along with the technique. Similar is the case with weaving implements. As they have completely given up the traditional loin loom and opted for the commonly found throw shuttle loom of the plains, they

have adopted the related weaving implements also. The recent additions of modern technological advances have also been carried to these tribal villages. In Dimoria and Digaru area, a number of families have power-tillers, water pumps, huller machines, etc. In the case of Narakasur, the use of the latest technology is on a much larger scale.

Another significant change has been found in the sphere of transport and communication. About 50 years back, bullock cart was the only means of transport for all the villages under study – both within or outside the village. Nowadays in Dimoria and Digaru areas almost all the households have bicycles. Many of them have scooters or motorbikes etc. In the case of Narakasur, almost all the households have some kinds of vehicles. There are also improved roads and public transport facilities which people can easily avail of.

Similarly other advances in communication system like telephone and postal services have also contributed towards the change along with the electronics media like the television. While the transistor radio and the tape recorder have become very common, the V.C.P. player and C.D. player have also made their entry.

b) Language:

The language, which is used by the plains, Karbis are substantially different from that of the hills. While there are evidences of some borrowing from Assamese in the hill Karbi language, the influence of Assamese on the Plains Karbi language is not only strong but also distinctly visible. Interestingly, there are many oral folklore items of the Plains Karbis which are composed in Assamese. Again, there are many other Assamese items

which are actively shared by all communities of the area, tribal and non-tribal.

As we have indicated earlier, while most of the tribal groups in the Brahmaputra valley have retained their tribal languages, they also use Assamese for all outside communications. The majority of the Plains Karbis have also retained their tribal language but at the same time they use Assamese as the second mother tongue. However, some of the villages of Dimoria and Digaru area have taken up Assamese as their mother tongue in place of Karbi. It was accepted as something natural and there were no qualms about it. But in recent times the ethnic assertion movement has affected their attitude towards language, and the people are deliberately trying to re-establish their tribal language.

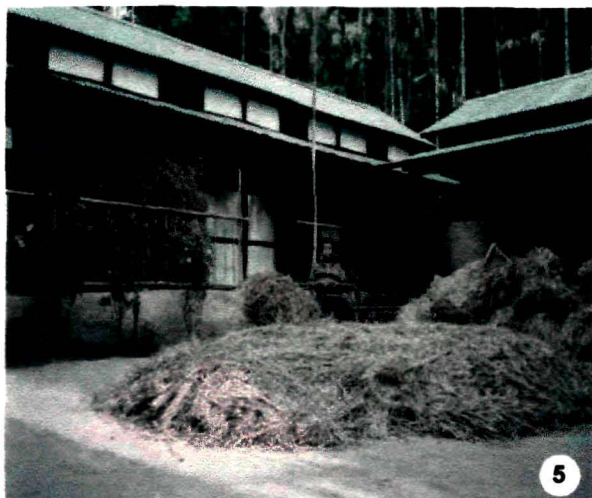
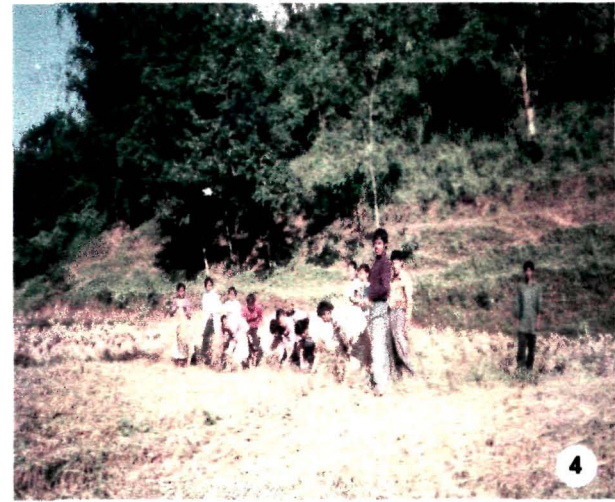
As we have pointed out in the section on socio-political life, some of the villages where Karbi is not spoken a decision has been taken to marry girls only from Karbi knowing groups so that the next generation can learn the language in a natural way.

The Plains Karbis used to get education through Assamese. So long there was no practice of writing in Karbi language. But recently the practice has started, initially by using the Assamese script. However, since the Hill Karbis have been using the Roman script for quite some time, some Plains Karbi people are also following their example. It appears that this has something to do with ethnic assertion, directly or indirectly.

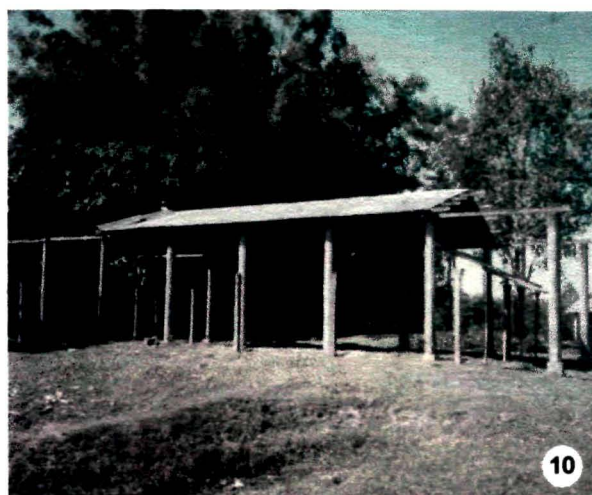
Notes:

1. The term 'Mikir' is found in all old ethnographic accounts, and official documents, etc. The hill ranges where the population of this tribe is in the majority was also known as the 'Mikir Hills'. But since about 50 years back, the term Karbi has been officially accepted and is used for all formal purposes. The hill range concerned is now designated as the Karbi hills and the district concerned as the Karbi Anglong district.

THE KARBI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE KARBI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE KARBI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE KABRI CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS

1. The resting shed in the *jhum* field
2. *Jhum* field with harvested crop
3. Gathering for harvest in a rice field
4. Harvesting in progress
5. Harvested crop brought home
6. From the village to the urban market
7. A village shrine without any structure
8. A Karbi priest: storehouse of traditional knowledge
9. A *bura gosai* (Siva) shrine near a Karbi village
10. A Karbi temple structure under construction
11. Karbi women engaged in household chores
12. An elderly Karbi couple on the veranda of their house
13. -Researcher during fieldwork in a Karbi village
14. Karbi woman out for fishing
15. Karbi woman working in the shed with the loom
16. Karbi woman busy at the loom.
17. A power tiller in a courtyard of its owner
18. Modern drawing-room of an urbanised Karbi family

CHAPTER – 8

THE TIWA (LALUNG) CASE

L A BACKGROUND NOTE:

In the previous chapter, while dealing with culture change among the Karbis we have noted that one of the most prominent aspects of the change is their shift of habitat from the hills to the plains. Basically the Karbis have been hill people and even when a section of them came down and settling in the plains, vestiges their hill past continued to constitute an important factor of their original habitat.

But in the case of the Tiwas, though their original habitat had been in the hills and a section of them still live in the hills and follow a hill-oriented pattern of life, the majority of the Tiwas are found spread over a wide plains area down below. In fact, as of today, the Tiwas are to be taken more as plains people than as hill people.

In the case of the bulk of the Tiwas of the plains, the processes of acculturation, integration and, in certain fields, assimilation *vis-a-vis* the dominant non-tribal Assamese Hindu society have been very prominent.

A few significant indexes of the working of the processes are as follows:

- a) The religious beliefs and practices of these people have undergone drastic change and there have been various adaptations from Assamese Hindu modes and mores.

- b) The language shift from Tiwa to Assamese has been almost complete (with limited exceptions).
- c) Large sections of Tiwas have entered the Assamese caste fold and become 'Koch'- providing a living example of tribe-caste continuum in the context of the Assamese Hindu society.

However, some isolated villages or village clusters in the plains have remained to a large extent free from the processes described above. For example:

- a) They have retained the Tiwa language (although they speak Assamese with ease, and are thus bilingual).
- b) Their shift from jhum cultivation to settled cultivation has been more recent and there are evidences of resorting to 'interim' techniques.
- c) The youth dormitory, which has been abandoned by the other section almost completely, continues to function in their villages.

As a recent trend in the field of socio-cultural life, the concern for the re-establishment of tribal identity as well as of ethnic assertion are very much in evidence. Even the acculturated and integrated sections are trying to go back to the roots and a revivalist tendency is at work.

The villages that we have covered for our study are as follows
Lakhigog, Bahtola, Noagaon, Senabor, Bherakuchi of Kamrup district; Marjong, Sohori, Burharoja of Nagaon district; Dahali and Barapujia of Morigaon district.

II. Trends of Change:

i) In The Field of Socio-Economic Life:

It can be noted that the changes that have occurred in this field of the Tiwas are more or less similar to those of the Karbis of the plains and also of the Misings. Although a section of them still retain their jhuming tradition at a reduced scale, particularly those inhabiting the foot hill areas, the majority of the Tiwas in the plains have completely adopted the settled cultivation. Formerly, more specifically about 40 to 50 years back, large varieties of crops were produced in the jhum fields in addition to the *ahu* varieties of rice like *makhane*, *tadase*, *boradhan* etc. Cotton, sesame, millet, varieties of vegetables and fruits like egg plant, guord, ginger, turmeric, chillies, varieties of melons, taros etc. were common items. But at present farming by jhuming has come down and many of the older varieties of items have been given up.

However, as indicated above, the plains Tiwas have gone for settled cultivation and more importance is given to the *sali* varieties (wet cultivation). The traditional *sali* rice varieties common among the Tiwas are *moinagiri*, *batiasara*, *koinasali*, *praadd bhog*, *joha*, *bora*, *suagmoni*, *dhusuro* etc. Some quantities of mustard, pulses, occasionally jute, sugarcane etc. are also grown. As in the case of other communities, new varieties have become popular during the last 15 to 20 years, in place of the older varieties. These new varieties are *aijong*, *parimol* etc. and recent high yielding varieties like *ranjeet*, *bahadur*, T.T.P. etc.

In low-lying areas of Morigaon district *baa* variety is very popular- especially the *torabao*. *Bora* rice is also another popular variety

of this locality. Changes have occurred in the case of other crop items also. For example, sesame, and mustard are still produced but on a reduced scale. New varieties of vegetables have been introduced such as, cabbage, cauliflower, carrot, hybrid varieties of egg plant, tomato etc.

A speciality of the Tiwa farmers of Sonapur-Khetri area is the growing up of horticultural products, particularly oranges. They have been doing it for quite sometime, at least for 50 years. The new generation has been trying to improve production by using better techniques.

Apart from these, many of the families have plantation of betel leaf and areca nut. Rubber plantation has been introduced by the concerned government agencies and some local families have started to try it out.

The story of change in the field of agricultural implements is the same as in the case of the Karbis and the Misings. First, a shift from the jhuming technique to the settled one, which they have learned from the neighbouring non-tribal communities. Formerly the buffalo was mainly used for ploughing. Use of the cow is a comparatively later development. In some areas it came only 25 to 30 years back. (A case study is being presented in this connection at the end of the section). Cowdung had been the main fertilizer until the recent past. Some locally popular herbs have been used to control pests, etc. Crabs and jackfruits are still in use as traditional pesticide by some.

Secondly, a more recent phase of change is the use of modern technological aids and facilities- like power tiller, pump set, huller machine, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, etc.

Like all other aspects in the case of food habits also the Tiwas have undergone similar kinds of change as seen in the case of the Karbis.

Rice is the staple item. Earlier use of oil was almost absent and boiled, smoaked and roasted items were the most common. Different varieties of locally available vegetables, roots, taros, shoots including bamboo shoots constitute a major portion of their food preparations. Pig and chicken are the most common items of meat along with large quantities of fish, eggs etc. Chicken baked inside a bamboo tube is a delicacy of the Tiwas. Other items are also prepared in the same process. Dry fish is another favourite food item. Nowadays the use of oil is very common. Changes have come in the cooking pattern and also food items; for example, the vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, carrots etc. are new additions.

Various preparations from *bora* rice were mostly used as snacks – including *pithas* mostly roasted and boiled (not fried). Though they are still popular items of food, various market items have been gaining popularity day by day.

Zu, the home made rice-beer, is the popular beverage irrespective of age and sex. *Zu* also constitutes an indispensable item in the traditional rituals of the Tiwas. In recent years the consciousness about the bad effects of the consumption of liquor especially among the young generation has popularized tea as a substitute.

Earlier the production system was not related to the market economy as we have found in the case of other communities also. Barter was the prevalent mode of exchange of goods and commodities. A unique and living example of barter system is the Jonbil Mela held annually at Jonbil near Jagiroad at Magh Bihu. It is the meeting place of the hills and plains people, also of the tribals and the non-tribals, where they exchange not only commodities but also goodwill. However, Jonbil Mela now stands only for

a symbol. Market economy has completely gripped all sections. The Tiwa Rajas symbolically attend the Mela organized by a Committee.

A Case Study

We came across a very interesting case of an intermediate technique in connection with cultivation which is as follows:

During our stay at the Marjong village of Nagaon district, my local guide and host Shri Maheswar Pator gave me the following information.

When the Tiwas of this area, who did jhuming earlier, were yet to master the technique of ploughing, they used to make patches of flat land soft enough for cultivation by making it muddy and driving buffaloes vigorously all over the patch. Sometimes even groups of young men trod vigorously over the mud to make the land soft enough. Shri Pator's paternal uncle was the first person to introduce cow for ploughing in their village about thirty years back and he was not at all appreciated by the co-villagers, and was even criticized.

ii) In The Field of Social Institution:

Changes that are noticeable in the social institution of the Tiwas are comparable to those found among the plains Karbis.

The family is nowadays usually found in its nuclear form rather than joint form. Ofcourse instances of joint families are still present. The Khuta and Borghar system plays a very important role in regulating clusters of cognate families within the clan.

All the clans of the Tiwas are not found among the villages under study. Some of the clans found commonly are Puma, Phamjong, Mathrong, etc. The significant points that we have noticed regarding clan during our field visits involving changes are as follows:

- a) Originally the clans were matrilineal and descent used to be traced through the mother's line. Since at 30 years from now they have been adopting features of the patrilineal system while retaining the earlier system in a limited degree. For example, one of the three most important offices wielding authority in socio-religious matters is a female called *Harikuwari* who has to officiate in *pindadan* ritual..

Secondly, the right to inheritance of property, once fully belonging to the females, continues to be enjoyed by them even now, although the present tendency is moving towards giving weightage to the male members.

Although we did not have the opportunity to verify whether the Tiwas once followed the matriarchal system, the *gobhia rakha* system of marriage, of which we found several cases, seems to be a pointer to that fact.

- b) Clan exogamy is still maintained but with some relaxation.

So far as marriage is concerned, the significant changes that are visible can be listed as follows –

- i) The popular types of marriages we found during our field visits in different villages happened to be *paluai ana biya* (marriage by elopement), *joron biya* (marriage by formal offering of presents) and *gobhia rakha* (marriage by service). The *borbiya*, which is still considered to be the most prestigious form of marriage, is avoided by most people because of the huge expenses involved.

ii) Although we found many families with the history of *gobhia* marriages we also noticed that very few recent *gobhia* marriages have taken place in recent years. The main reasons for this change seem to be three first, in the changed economic system marriage by service (*gobhia rakha*) has lost its former utility; secondly, the young men of today consider it below their dignity to serve the bride's family by physical labour; thirdly, because of the growing importance of the patriarchal system, the need for retaining the female property by bringing in the son-in-law no longer exists.

c) M.B.D cross-cousin marriage, which was formerly the most favoured, is no longer preferred by the younger people. However, the system of clan exogamy is still adhered to.

d) In older days marriage between Tiwas and non-Tiwas rarely took place and such marriages were frowned upon. But having had other groups as their close neighbours, such inhibitions have been completely shed. Marriages of Tiwas with Bodos and Karbis not only take place freely but is now considered as normal. Even marriages with non-tirbals are not uncommon today. While marriages with the caste Hindu population is accepted without much hesitation, it is not so in the case of Muslims or Christians. Such marriages are considered as offences and may be accepted only after the imposition of penalty like payment of fine and prescription of purificatory rites.

While doing our fieldwork in Senabor village of Kamrup district we got the following information regarding such a prohibited marriage that had taken place only a few years back in the Dimoria area. A boy married a Muslim girl by elopement. First of all they were not allowed to enter the village. Then the village elders of several villages were invited for the trial and finally they gave their judgment to accept the couple by payment of a heavy sum to the village council, a grand feast and an elaborate purificatory ritual.

iii) In the Field of Socio-Religious Life:

The socio-religious life of the Tiwas presents a picture which is more or less similar to that of the Misings, the Deuris and the Karbis with some specificities. Here also we find a mixture of a number of elements of socio-religious life such as – a) the traditional Tiwa religious beliefs and practices, (b) elements of Hindu beliefs and customs coming through integration and acculturation with the neighbouring non tribal Hindu Assamese section, (c) An overall influence of neo-Vaishnavism.

The religion of the acculturated section of the Tiwas who constitute the majority is found to be akin to a kind of Saktism. Pha Mahadeo, the supreme deity is identified with Lord Siva of Hindu pantheon. Similarly many other deities are also identified and related with the Hindu religious system. The other important deities worshipped by them are Ganesh, -Maji, Porameswar, Garo-Garoni, Baghraj, Kuber, Ai Gosani, Lakhimi, Padumi, Kalika, Kamakhya, Jagatjuri, Kani-Andheri etc. Though the form of Tiwa religion is considered as an extension of the Hindu religion, their images and puja paraphernalia are not the same as those used by other non-Tiwa Saktas. The priestly classes who are entrusted to conduct the religious

ceremonies are Loro, Deuri and Changmaji. However, all of them are not found equally active in all the areas. For example, in Dimoria area the Deuri enjoys a more prominent role. In some villages the Tela or Katharguru conducts the common village rituals. The individual household rituals related to Borghar have to be performed by the *tela* and the *hari* (or *harikuwari*).

Almost each of the villages or a cluster of villages has a shrine called *than* more recently Namghars where pujas or any kind of public worship are performed. Some of the rituals performed by the villagers under study, particularly of Dimoria area are as follows:-

The Senabor villagers perform an annual puja at three shrines with whom they affiliate themselves. Those are Mahadeo Than, Nowa goshai Than and Bamun Than. A Koch priest preside over the ritual called Pujari. Chicken, pig, rice beer are offered in the puja except at the Bamun Than.

Another annual ritual of this area performed by almost all the villages is Dinga Puja or Bhel Utua – i.e., the public expulsion of evil. In this puja both Bam Kathar (who is a Tiwa priest) and the Pani Kathar (who is a Karbi priest) conduct the proceedings.

A few other important rituals performed by them are Sanipuja, Malthakurpuja, Aisakam, Bhagabatipuja etc.

The above descriptions clearly exemplify the admixture of both Tiwa and Hindu elements in the rituals as well as the accommodation of other neighbouring tribal and caste Hindu agents in their performance.

As pointed out in Chapter – 4, the influence of neo-Vaishnava movement had not only touched but also transformed the tribal populations of the Brahmaputra valley by bringing integrating them into the wider Assamese society. This had happened also in the case of the Tiwas at different

times and in different ways. One of these ways was to embrace the tribals on equal terms and to bring them into the Hindu caste fold by a step by step process of purification and elevation. The tribals themselves including the Tiwas responded with enthusiasm as it was considered that it gave them a higher status. This had resulted in a situation which has been described as the situation of tribe-caste continuum in the Assamese Hindu society.

The assimilation of tribal elements into the Assamese Hindu society has worked through a process of 'purification' and 'elevation' where the Vaishnava spiritual superior acts as the agent of initiation (*saran*). This process of imitation involves rather elaborate rules of purification and elevation into the caste fold.¹ At the end of the process the tribals are admitted into the Assamese Koch caste. Most of the Koch population of the area under study are in fact of Tiwa origin assimilated through the above process.

An important feature of the religious belief and practices of the Tiwas found to be common, has been the institution of Bhakat Sewa also known by many other alternative names (Ratisewa, Rati khowa, Burhadangaria Sewa etc.) which is practically an esoteric form of Vaishnavism. The significance of this institution is that without formal initiation and without entry into the caste fold, Vaishnavism had entered into their lives.

Sometime ago an interesting development took place. Groups of Tiwas came forward to accept the neo-Vaishnavism as propounded by Shankardeva while remaining Tiwa tribals – not becoming Koch through initiation. But the latest tendency seems to be disfavour that trend also. However, during our field visits we found that ordinary Tiwa villages still continue to have veneration for the teachings of Shankardeva and other

Vaishnava Saints. At the same time some of them are turning for spiritual solace towards such cults as Sai Baba, Anukul Thakur and Prajapita Brahmakumari.

Formerly Christianity did not have significant influence on the Tiwas but in recent years more and more Tiwas have been accepting Christianity. At least two Christian Missions have been active in the Tiwa majority areas – One is the Baptist Mission located at Dahali Village, which have links with Nagaland. The other is a Catholic Mission located a few kins away near Silsang. It has an imposing Church building and also a high school called Christojyoti within its compound. Mainly because of the social service activities of the Missions more and more are being attracted towards Christianity. As in the case of the Karbis, the conversion process has led to clearance in the concerned villages of Tiwas and have given rise to tension between Christian and non Christians. Clearly this development also has important socio-political implications.

(iv) In The Field of Socio-Political Life:

Some relevant information on the traditional Tiwa system of social administration, both at the level of the village and that of an area, have been given in Chapter 3. We are now dealing with the changes in the scenario that has taken place in the socio-political field--taking the Tiwa community in a broader perspective.

The processes of acculturation, integration and assimilation of the Tiwas of the plains to the wider Assamese socio-cultural framework had been so smooth and natural that there was hardly any serious concern with the question of a separate and independent Tiwa identity until about 50 years back. After Independence, particularly with the incorporation of special

provisions for tribals in the Indian constitution, the consciousness about the enjoyment of the special privileges involved started gaining ground. To give concrete shape to this consciousness Tiwas took steps towards organizing themselves as a distinctive group. This resulted in the formation of the first common Tiwa-organization-- Soudou Asom Tiwa Sanmilan--about 30 years back. It provided a common platform on which the Tiwas discussed ways and means to identify the distinctive features of Tiwa culture and to encourage Tiwas to assert their Tiwaness. Gradually, the concern with Tiwa ethnicity became more and more insistent. With a view to canalizing the newly rising ethnic favour the Tiwa Sahitya Sabha was formed around 1980 on the model of Asam Sahitya Sabha which has been the biggest and most popular “national organization” in Assam. However, as with Asam Sahitya Sabha, programmes of Tiwa Sahitya Sabha have been by and large non political in character. But, very soon new generation Tiwas were inspired by the autonomy movements launched by many other tribal groups. New organization spearheaded mainly by students and youths came up with demands for autonomy for the Tiwas. With a rapid developments of events, these demands became more and more vocal and even violent at times, and because of the new policy adopted by the state government, such demands have been conceded. Thus, the Tiwa Autonomous Council has already come into existence.

Some significant developments taking place parallely are worth noting:

- a) The attitude now is not to be ashamed of ‘tribalness’ as in the past, but to accept it with a sense of dignity and pride.

- b) The tendency towards assimilation from the tribal fold into the non-tribal fold is now resented and a further shift in that direction is not favoured.

An important reason for this is that such shifts may lead to the losing of the special privileges enjoyed by the tribals.

- c) The fact that the acculturated Tiwas have lost their language has been a cause of resentment and embarrassment for the newly conscious section. As such the reinstatement of the Tiwa language has acquired a kind of heightened urgency. Interestingly, most of the leading Tiwa personalities who have been at the forefront of this ethnic assertion movement belong to the acculturated section are not Tiwa speakers. We shall have occasion to discuss some more details in the section covering change in the field of language.

(v) In The Field of Material Culture and Language:

(a) Material Culture :

The visible changes in the case of material culture that we have noticed during our field study are more or less similar to those found in the other communities. These can be summarized as follows:

House-type:

The traditional Tiwa house pattern is more or less similar to that of several other communities of the plains of Assam -- with mud plinth, bamboo posts and rafters, mud-plastered walls and thatch roof. In the chapter on ethnographic note about the five tribes under study we have described

the traditional house pattern of the Tiwas and its significance to Tiwa life. Such types of houses having *borghar*, *charaghar* and *pak ghar* is still the popular pattern with some modifications. However, changes have come gradually. As a first step the common Assam type pattern had been adopted by them and in more recent times the people who can afford go for R.C.C. constructions of the latest design. Such changes have significant impact on the *khuta* system of the Tiwa socio-religious life.

Textiles:

The traditional female attire consists of *kachong* (*mekhela*) - a loin cloth having long stripes at the back; *phaskai*- a wrapper to cover the upper portion of the body. In addition to that, for ceremonial purposes they use a decorated shawl (called *nona*). Usually the *kachong* is either in deep blue or maroon and the *phaskai* is in yellow or white with designs of different colours.

The ornaments include *chhablo* – a waist belt made of silver, *krenglo* – a kind of cross-belt made of silver used by both male and female, *manlo* – a metal necklace, *lothar* – a necklace made of beads. The male attire consists of *tagla* (jacket) originally in black only. Nowadays there is no hard and fast rule regarding colours; a *dhoti* usually in white or green; *phaga* – a yellow scarf and *tongali* – waist-band usually in yellow or in green.

Thenas is used by both male and female, which consists of two pieces of cloth crossing through the upper portion of the body. It must be in white base with designs in gray colour.

However, most of the acculturated Tiwas of the plains both men and women have adopted, the non-tribal Assamese dresses, in certain cases

with some unique patterns of designs. But, as in the case of the Karbis, here also the waves of revivalism have made them conscious about their traditional dresses, especially for ceremonial purposes. And the latest trend is to wear all the modern dresses. The new generation girls today wear *sari*, *salowar kurta*, skirts etc. and the boys have adopted trousers, shirts etc.

Implements:

So far as changes in the agricultural and weaving implements are concerned, it is the same story as in the case of the Plains Karbis. They have taken up the settled cultivation from the non-tribal Assamese neighbours along with the implements used by the latter. Similarly, the weaving implements are also the same as that of the non-tribal Assamese neighbour as they have opted for the common throw-shuttle loom and also the fly-shuttle one.

And the latest trends of change due to the technological advances have touched the Tiwa villages also and many of them are of coming forward to go for the modern technological facilities.

In the case of transport and communication, a sea change has occurred in many of these villages because of the development of road conditions, public conveyance system, telecommunication facilities and electronic media. Electrification in the rural areas has become a strong facilitator for these developments.

(b) Language:

As we have mentioned in the section on socio-political life, most of the Tiwas of the plains today are Assamese-speaking. A small section of them, however, still have retained their own language, especially those living in the foothill regions. Of course they are also bilingual. Interestingly,

there are other Tiwa villages in close proximity where the language has been completely lost.

Until recently, the Tiwa students received education through the Assamese medium right from the primary level. Educated Tiwas with a literary flare always write in Assamese. Of course, small groups of people have started writing in the Tiwa language also.

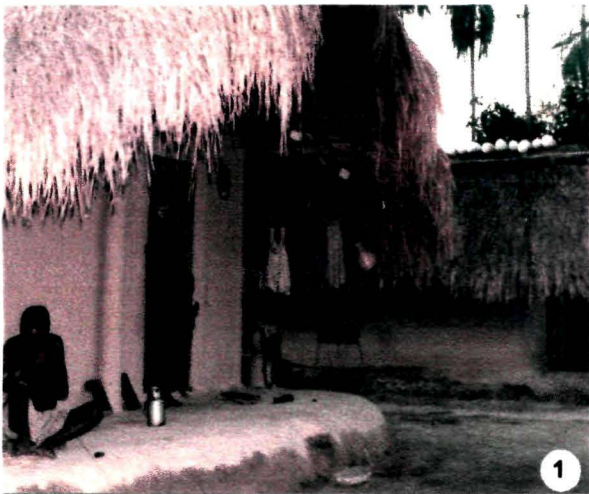
But of late there has been a significant change in the linguistic situation.

As we have already noted, the acculturated Tiwas, as a result of the growing ethnic consciousness, seem to have developed a sense of shame and resentment about having lost the language. They have come to identify the language as an ethnicity marker.

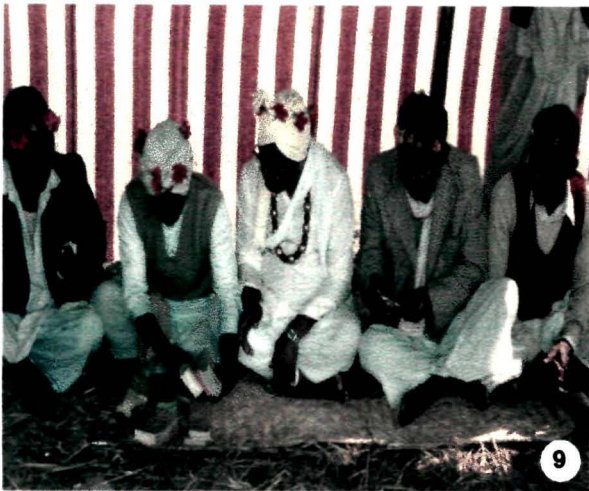
The Tiwa organizations still use Assamese on all formal occasions to conduct the proceedings but incorporate as many Tiwa terms as they can manage to add a touch of “authentic Tiwaness”.

One of the major demands of the various Tiwa organizations is the recognition of the Tiwa language and its introduction as a language subject at the primary level. In fact, this demand has been already conceded by the state government. However, it appears that while preparing the textbooks the question of the choice of the script has thrown up certain knotty problems. So long the plains Tiwas had been in favour of using the Assamese script for writing in Tiwa. But in the Tiwa inhabited areas of the hill falling within Meghalaya, the teaching of Tiwa in primary schools through the Roman script has already made some headway. The Tiwas of the plains are facing a dilemma. If they have Tiwa textbooks in the Assamese script, Tiwa children of the hills and the plains will be learning the language through two different scripts – a peculiarly anomalous situation.

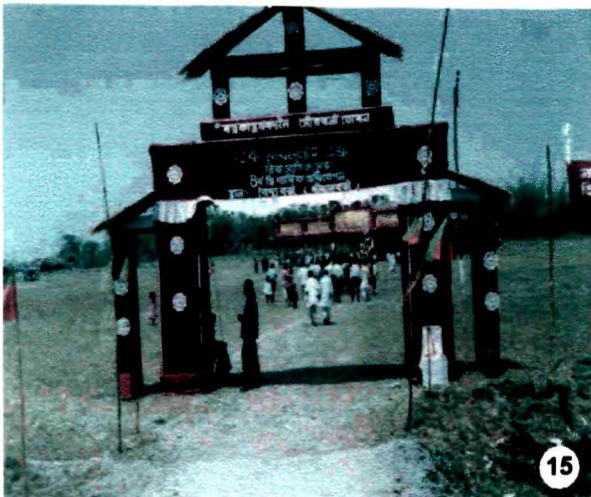
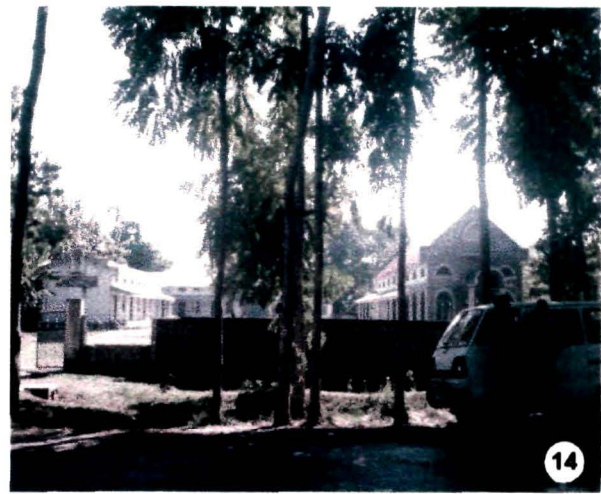
THE TIWA CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE TIWA CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE TIWA CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE TIWA CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE TIWA CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS

1. A Tiwa household
2. A Tiwa Borghar
3. General view of a Tiwa Deoshal with modern structures
4. Concrete entrance gate of the Deoshal
5. A traditional Tiwa *samadi* (youth dormitory)
6. A Tiwa *samadi* with a modified structure
7. Community fishing during Jonbil Mela
8. Another view of community fishing
9. Tiwa Rajas at the Jonbil Mela
10. Tiwa Rajas with visitors from outside
11. Barat Puja dance with Siva mask.
12. Barat Puja dance with Garuda mask
13. Baptist Mission in Tiwa area
14. Catholic Mission in Tiwa area with church and school
15. Tiwa Sahitya Sabha session: the main gate
16. The researcher in Tiwa dress at the Tiwa Sahitya Sabha session
17. Shri Maheswar Patar's family at his house: Mrs Patar in traditional dress
18. Tiwa youth and maiden wearing traditional dress for a ceremonial occasion
19. Tiwa maiden in dance costume
20. Tiwa youths in dance costume
21. Tiwa youth in dance costume playing the drum
22. Tiwa dancer with the *sarai lau* instrument
23. Dancers ready to start performance
24. Dancers in action

CHAPTER - 9

THE RABHA CASE

I. A Background Note:

The Rabhas are divided into a number of groups with separate identities although all the groups except the Rangdanis and the Maitoris have veered away from their tribal moorings and adopted the modes and mores of their non-tribal neighbours in various degrees. The Pati Rabhas who represent the most acculturated section are numerically the strongest among the various groups. It is almost impossible to find out when this process of acculturation had started but from all accounts it can be guessed that it must be at least a hundred years old. There is also no record of any large-scale proselytization among the Rabhas. But whatever the factor or factors might have been, the process of change has effected almost all the Rabha groups except the Rangdanis, the Maitoris, the Dahuris and the Koches, who still retain the language and also the older beliefs and customs-

As the Pati Rabha division is numerically very strong, so naturally in most of the public issues they represent the Rabha community as a whole. For this reason the other divisions have also been greatly influenced by the Pati Rabhas. The acculturated nature of the Rabha community as a whole has been visible in many aspects of their life including economy, religion, material culture, social norms, language and so on.

It may be pointed out that the areas with Rabha concentration in the erstwhile Goalpara district were under the zamindari system and as such, the Rabhas there had been effected by the revenue and administrative systems associated with zamindari. Some Rabhas held offices under the zamindars and enjoyed prestige and power attached to such offices. They also used surnames indicating the offices held by them, such as Sarkar and Patgiri. This is a feature of the life of the Rabhas not present in any other tribal community taken up for our study.

Again the zamindars of the Goalpara region had imbibed various elements of Bengali culture, including language and life style, which was followed by other sections of the land owning gentry. This had influenced the ryots - including the Rabhas – to a considerable extent. As such, traces of such influence are still discernible among the Rabhas of the older generation. However, the new generation has overcome that tendency and it aligns itself with Assamese language and culture.

The Rabha villages that we have covered for our field study are as follows:-

Dappara, Beldengpara, Rongpathara, Sarakpara, Siluk Bhakrapara, Kamarbari, Khara Halgiripara, (all from South Goalpara district); Hahara, Bhakatpara, Satpara, Dakuapara and Dakhilipara (of South Kamrup district); Uttar Saoni of North Kamrup district.

Of the villages in South Kamrup covered by us, only one belongs to the Hana Rabha group while the inhabitants of all the others are Pati Rabhas.

The village in North Kamrup in the Goreswar area has a concentration of Totla Rabhas.

The villages of South Goalpara are inhabited by Rabhas of the Pati, Rongdani, Dahuri and Bitolia groups.

II. Trends of Change:

i) In the Field of Socio-Economic Life:

As in the case of all the other communities under study, the socio-economic life of the Rabhas also centers round agriculture and related activities. Though we have not seen any visible shift in the technique of production during our study, it was reported in many places by elderly persons that jhuming was practiced much earlier when they had a hill background.

Anyway, at present the Rabhas are completely settled cultivators like their non-tribal neighbours. Different varieties of *ahu* and *sali* paddy are produced along with other crops and horticultural products. The traditional varieties that the Rabhas have been growing are *bordhana*, *parochouka*, *silguti*, *kehor*, *bora*, *sikra bora*, *bakeng bora*, *pinto bora*, *guwahati bora*, *malbhog bora*, *ghuguri bhog*, *tulsi bhog*, *petphakri*, *hatibandha*, *hatumal*, *porma*, *lal porma*, *hurki*, etc. Apart from paddy, the other crop items include mustard, sugarcane, sesame, cotton, etc. Horticultural products like pineapple, lemon, orange, jack-fruit, mango, litchi, betel nut, coconut, banana, papaya, guava and various kinds of vegetables are also grown.

In recent time various new high yielding varieties of rice as well as other crops and vegetables have been introduced. Again, the cultivation of some of the items with low yield like pulses, cotton etc. have been slowly given up. Although till recently they had been using natural fertilizers and pesticides, the new generation has become eager to use chemical fertilizers and pesticides for better yield. They are even trying to introduce new crops like sunflower.

As the Rabhas had adopted the settled cultivation from their non tribal Hindu Assamese neighbours, so the implements connected with the technique had also followed. Again, the new technological advances like power tiller, pump sets etc. have made their entry.

With the changes in the cropping pattern and the availability of different items, the food habit also has undergone a considerable changes. In the past different kinds of taros, tapioca, arum, tuber roots and shoots constituted a major portion of their daily meal along with rice. However, nowadays rice is the major staple item. Traditionally, the use of oil was very limited while no-a-days it is the commonly used for cooking. Dry fish pounded with a number spices and kept in a bamboo tube is a favourite delicacy of the Rabhas. Dishes prepared with tender bamboo shoots is another favourite item. Pork, mutton, chicken, duck are the favourite meat commonly taken by the Rabhas. But those who have come into the caste fold or have become *sarania* avoid these meats.

Various preparations especially made of *bara* rice are popular snacks items. However, gradually the factory made varieties of food are also gaining popularity.

Like all other tribal communities, the rice beer (*chako, mad*) constitutes an indispensable food item of the Rabhas. However, due to the consciousness of the bad effects of alcohol and for economic reasons slowly they have been giving up regular consumption of rice beer. Of course it still has an important place in the society and is used on a large scale during social ceremonies and religious activities. Tea is gradually taking the place of rice beer in normal day to day life.

Even though the economy of the villages under study is based mainly on agriculture, quite a good number of persons are service holders. Many of them have moved to urban centers. Rabha women excel in the art of weaving and it provides a source of income to many of those who produce handloom articles on commercial basis.

Earlier the villages were by and large economically self-sufficient and whatever trading there was operated at the local level. Now the forces of market economy have gradually penetrated into the village life.

(ii) In the Field of Social Institution:

So far as the social institutions are concerned, changes have taken place in many aspects. First of all, family, the smallest social unit, has undergone a number of changes, particularly in respect of size and type. Earlier the joint family was the common type, and therefore, the size of the family varied from large to medium. But nowadays the picture is quite different, as the nuclear family with a limited number of members has become the common pattern found in almost all sections of the Rabha community. The descent is traced through the father's line and property is usually inherited in equal shares by the sons. The maternal property is inherited in equal shares by the daughters. However, nowadays, the paternal property is often divided between sons and daughters.

As we have mentioned in the ethnographic account, the Rabhas have several clans termed *baray* or *husuk* which are matrilineal in nature. A number of clans have been found in the villages under study, the most common among them being Pam, Hato, Juro and Rungdung etc. As in all other tribal communities clan exogamy is strictly maintained by the Rabhas also. Though the *huri* system is still functioning, the kinship ties associated

with the system is losing importance day by day. The *baray* system plays a very important role in the regulating marriages of the Rabha society. Although the clan system harks back to a past when matriarchy might have been the norm, there has been a definite shift towards patriarchy.

Changes are also visible in the kinship terminologies and relationships. For example, except the Maitori, Rangdani and Koch divisions, the other divisions use the Assamese kinship terms. In fact, in most of the villages under study (other than Pati Rabha villages) the local variety of Assamese is used almost like the mother tongue although they continue to use Rabha words and expressions. Again certain Rabha terms are still used for either reference or address like *jejoi* and *jiji* for *jetha* and *jethi* respectively.

So far as kinship relations are concerned, some changes have been found in some of the major relationships. For example, formerly though the relationship between the husband and wife had been based on mutual love and respect, the wife obeyed the husband in all circumstances because he upholds the authority of the patriarchal family. But now such attitude has changed though the husband still enjoys greater authority within the family.

Again, formerly because of the prevalence of the system of cross-cousin marriages the relationships between father's sister and mother's brother with their spouses formed a separate group and relationship. However, nowadays due to non-practice, such relationship has lost its older significance. Some of the important types of marriages found commonly in the villages under study are *saja biya* marriage by negotiation, *gharjai biya*, (marriage by elopement) and more commonly, love marriages.

Like many other tribal communities, cross-cousin marriage was once very popular but nowadays it has been losing its popularity. Similarly, the *gharjai biya* in which the son-in-law resides in the bride's parental residence was more or less common. But it has also lost its older popularity as the attitude of the people has changed. However, in the case of settlement of marriage, and negotiations, the bride's family still enjoys a very high status in all sections of the Rabha society.

Marriages outside the community have been taking place in large numbers nowadays. Though it was not formerly accepted easily, it has become quite common in the Rabha society. Marriages with caste Assamese members (except Hari, Dom & Hira), and Bodo-Kacharis etc. are accepted almost readily and without much formalities. On the other hand, though marriages with the Garos are often taking place (because of close proximity), it is not considered desirable by the Rabhas especially the Pati Rabha. However, ultimately such marriages are also accepted by the society.

Nowadays, the *pandulipi* – the codified written laws of different social rules and customs of the Rabhas - plays an important role in marriage regulations and other social customs and practices.

A significant feature connected with marriage, particularly among the Pati Rabhas, is the performance of Mare or Bishahari Puja i.e., the worship of Goddess Manasa of the Hindu pantheon. (Some more details about the prevalence of Manasa Puja among the Rabhas have been incorporated in section on socio-religious life).

(iii) In the Field of Socio-Religious Life:

The religious life of the Rabhas, like most of the other tribal communities under study, gives the picture of a mixture of different elements.

The different elements present here can be identified as (i) the traditional Rabha religious beliefs and practices, (ii) the Hindu belief system as practised in the respective locality and (iii) the neo-Vaishnava influence of both Assamese and Bengali affiliation.

The deities that are traditionally worshipped and pujas that are performed by different groups of the Rabhas at different places and times are Langa Puja, Baikho Puja, Risi Puja, Hasong Puja, Khoksi Puja, Hanaghora Puja and so on.

Risi is the supreme household deity in the traditional Rabha religion and is represented either by a pitcher on a bamboo platform on the main post of the house. It is also known by different names such as Rantak or Runkuk, Ghardeo or Ghargohani etc. The puja paraphernalia includes vermilion, cotton, rice powder mixed with water, rice beer, pigs, fowls, white and red pieces of cloth. Performance of this puja is essential before holding any kind of social and religious ceremonies, such as marriage.

Generally, Pati, Rongdani and Bitalia groups practice Langa Puja at Langamara Thans or in the jungle or on the bank of the river in the month of Bohag or Jeth (April-May). Langa is identified with Lord Siva. Along with Langa, several other deities – Dhan Kuber, Phul Kumar, Dudhkumar, Khoksi are also worshipped. Offerings include sacrifices of pigs, goats, pigeons, fowl, rice beer along with various kinds of fruits and pulses. Puja over, the chief priest who performs the puja pays homage to the deities on behalf of all so that all the people and the domestic animals and birds of the village may live a healthy and prosperous life and the community can get a good harvest. The Rongdanis also perform Langa Puja in a slightly different way.

Khoksi Puja is practised in many of the villages. Sacrifice of pig is compulsory. She is considered as a malevolent deity and puja is performed for her appeasement.

Hasong Puja, mainly performed by the Rangdanis, is the worship of Hasong which is a combination of thirteen deities. Out of the thirteen Darmang is the chief deity. The preparation of the puja starts with the cleaning operation of the site of the puja and also clothing, cooking materials and so on in individual households, along with a purificatory ritual. Puja is performed by the chief priest (Oja) with the help of his assistants. Fowls, pigs and goats along with rice beer are offered to the deities. At the end of the puja performance and community feast, merry making starts with singing and dancing.

The influence of neo-Vaishnavism has also been a strong force in bringing about a leaning towards Hinduism. Here the speciality is that the Chaitanya Vaishnavism of Bengal origin had somehow been more active than the Assamese neo-Vaishnavism. This has led to the performance of Vaishnava hymn-singing in place of some original tribal rituals. Some section of the Rabhas have formally come into the caste fold by initiation (*saran*) through certain Satras or Vaishnava Gurus, but some section of the Rabha population, particularly the Pati Rabhas, without any formal entry have adopted the Hindu ways of life of the local variety.

Traditionally a death ceremony called Pharkanti (also known by other names like Toronga) used to play a most important role in the socio-religious life of the Rabhas. The highly elaborate ceremony incorporates various aspects of Rabha culture – philosophy connected with the soul, communion with the supernatural powers, songs and dances expressive of

the belief system, etc. However, because of various kinds of factors – including the economic one the performance of Pharkanti has gradually lost its former significance. The performance of songs and dances associated with Pharkanti is receiving greater attention as representative of Rabha performing arts. Nowadays former Pharkanti rituals are being replaced by *kirtan*-singing.

In the evolution of the Rabha religious life, there has been a remarkable blending of traditional tribal elements with local Hindu elements. The transition has been so smooth and natural that for all intents and purposes the Pati Rabhas have moved into the caste Hindu Assamese fold except for the fact that they continue to rear pigs and eat pork and that rice beer continues to be a part of social and religious life.

In fact, many of the shrines in the Rabha inhabited areas represent the process of the “universalization” of local tribal deities or that of “parchiolisation” of some well recognized divinities of the Hindu pantheon. A few good examples are provided by various Mother Goddess shrines, Siva temples and holy places associated with Vaishnavism, like – Tiamari, Gosani Than, Madan Mohan Mutiphuta Devalaya, Banavasi Than, Ram Chandra Than etc., where Rabhas play a dominant role.

(iv) In the field of Socio-Political Life:

The Rabhas have always been participating in all mainstream events of Assam considering themselves as part and parcel of the great Assamese society. In the 1920's under the leadership of Gobardhan Sarkar and Dwarika Nath Rabha, an effort was made to reform and revitalize the Rabha society. As a result of this effort the first conference of the newly constituted Assam Rabha Sanmilan was held in Goalpara in 1926. Thus a

formal beginning was made to establish the separate identity of the community.

During the 50 years period from 1926, the name of the Assam Rabha Sammilan was changed several times, extending its scope and functions. It was renamed as All Assam Rabha Sangha in 1949, All Assam Rabha Sammilan in 1965, Rabha Jatiya Parishad in 1971 and finally Nikhil Rabha Jatiya Parishad in 1976.

As a fall-out of the Assam Agitation spearheaded by the All Assam Students' Union the Rabha students initiated a new organization namely Nikhil Bharat Rabha Chatra Santha. Later the name was changed to Nikhil Rabha Chatra Santha or All Assam Rabha Students' Union. The Rabha Students lost no time worked out a plan to raise the demand for tribal autonomy under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and Accordingly submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister on 31st August, 1982. This is for the first time that the autonomy issue was raised formally from the side of Rabhas.

The Rabha students decided to reactivate the demands for autonomy. There were similar demands from the part of All Assam Tribal Students Union (AATSU) for constitution of Zilla Parishads for the plains tribes of Assam under the Sixth Schedule. The Rabha students started their organizational activities to create awareness among Rabha people about self-rule. They held meetings and conferences at village and town levels, and succeeded in motivating the people.

In 1992, a national conference was convened in Krishnai appealing to all Rabha organizations and intellectuals and citizens to participate. It is in this convention that the demands for a Rabha Hasong

covering 3161 square km. from Jayramkushi of Goalpara to Rani of Kamrup district and a Zilla Parishad and an Anchalik Parishad in the North Bank of Brahmaputra were raised. The Rabha Hasong Demand Committee was formed and entrusted with the responsibility of leading the agitation along with the ARSU for realizing the demands raised. The agitation was conducted in different phases but it did not take the leaders and for the matter the Rabha people for long to hear the government decision about granting of autonomy. On 16th march 1993, the then Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia declared in the floor of the Assembly about the Government decision. Finally on 10th March 1995 the Rabha Accord was signed. Accordingly, the first interim Rabha Hasong Council was constituted.

The Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 was passed in the year 1995. The Act in the preamble clearly states that the legislation was enacted with a view to providing maximum autonomy within the constitutional framework for social, economic educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Rabha community.

(v) In the Field of Material Culture and Language:

a) Material Culture:

More or less similar kind of developments in regard to change have occurred in the field of material culture of the Rabhas as we have found in other communities.

House-type:

At present the Rabhas do not have the raised platform houses. Of course, the possibility of having such type of *chang* houses in the past, when they might have a hill background, can not be ruled out. Now they

do not have any distinctive house pattern. It is more or less the same as that of the non-tribal Assamese neighbours. It is the common mud plinth, bamboo and wooden structured mud plastered, thatched roof house. Of course the plinth is in certain cases very high. The modified varieties are the common Assam type houses available in the villages under study. Again the more recent changes are the shift towards R.R.C. constructions of latest designs.

Textile :

The Rabha women are famous for their weaving skill. They not only produce various items for their own requirements but also for commercial purposes. They have adopted the common Assamese loom the throw shuttle loom and later on the fly shuttle one. The traditional female attire consists of a *ruphan* – the loin cloth, *Patani* – (a piece of cloth tied around the breast, hanging down to the knees), *kambung* – (a scarf) and *khakha* – (a veil used to cover the head).

The traditional male attire consists of a loin cloth called *pajal* or *gamosa*, a turban called *khachne* and a short-sleeved jacket called *bakchali*.

Phali (head-band) is used by both men and women. However, nowadays almost all the sections of Rabha people use the common Assamese dress in their day to day life. Again, in more recent years the young generation has started wearing all kinds of mill-made garments of the latest fashion.

Transport and Communication:

Similar changes, as visible in other communities, in transport and communication have occurred here also. The changes have been

particularly remarkable some villages because of the easy accessibility of good roads and public conveyance system, telecommunications, and electronic media. Connectivity with electricity has been a potent factor.

(b) Language:

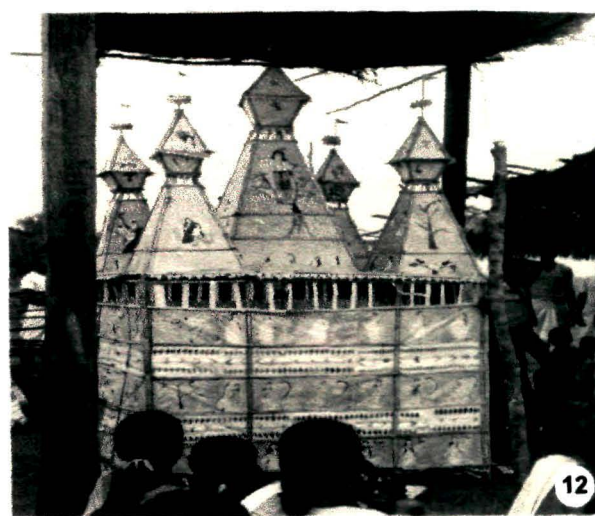
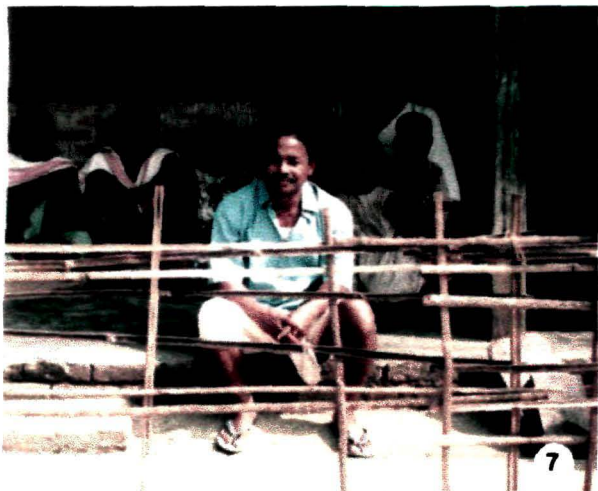
Except Rongdani and Maitori, the other groups of the Rabhas have practically given up their tribal language in favour of Assamese. The Pati Rabhas have and a few other groups have completely lost the tribal language and taken up Assamese of the local variety as their mother tongue. Even the Rongdani and Maitori, who have retained their language, are more or less bilingual and speak the local Assamese with ease. However, the Assamese they speak has a distinct Rabha flavour. A recognized Rabha scholar has termed it as “Rabhamese.”

As for the status Rabha language, the position is similar to the ones relating to the Deuris and the Tiwas. All Rabha groups have been receiving education through the Assamese medium. The educated Rabhas also do their writing through Assamese. But as in the case of the Deuris and Tiwas, there has been a demand for introduction of Rabha as a language at the primary schools of Rabha dominated areas. The demand has already been fulfilled. Rabha text-books for the purpose have been produced. A small number of books in the Rabha language have also been published and there is a new tendency to use Rabha terms for Rabha public organizations.

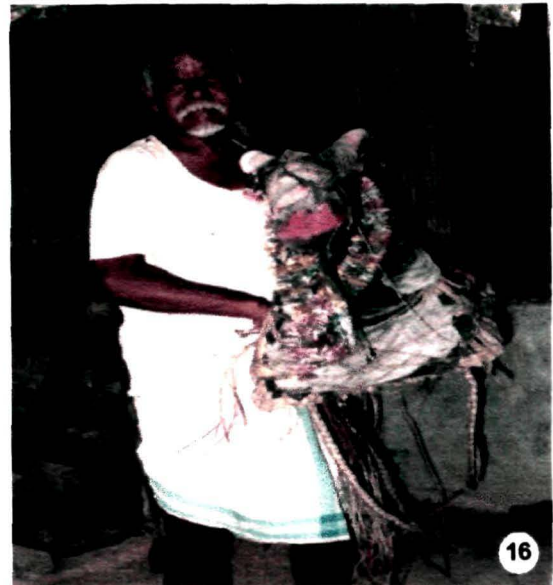
THE RABHA CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE RABHA CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE RABHA CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS



THE RABHA CASE: PHOTOGRAPHS

1. The researcher with the family of a local guide and host
2. The researcher with two local guides and an elderly Rabha householder
3. A Bodo family in a Rabha area
4. A Rabha household with paddy drying in the courtyard
5. Food items being prepared for a Rabha marriage ceremony
6. Rabha women busy in the courtyard. Note the loom and accessories on the veranda
7. A group on the veranda of a Rabha house
8. The researcher with local guide and informants
9. Members of a Rabha family in the courtyard of their house
10. A Rabha *langamara* shrine.
11. A decorated *maju* at a Marai/Mare (Manasa) Puja site
12. Another *maju* with people around it
13. Carvings and paintings on wooden door of a Mother Goddess shrine (*gosani than*)
14. Elaborately designed scarf woven by Rabha woman
15. Hana Ghora dance
16. Performer with the Hana Ghora mask
17. A group performing Pharkanti dance
18. Another dance scene

CHAPTER – 10

THE REGIONAL TREND

I. General Observations:

It stands to reason that the issues related to culture change should not and cannot be studied in isolation but should be viewed against the backdrop of the whole of north-eastern region. As such we take up here for a general survey the situation prevailing in respect of the tribal communities of the different parts of the North-eastern region. It can be added that the general pattern of culture change involving the tribals in the broader Indian perspective can be said to be theoretically tenable for all the tribal groups, although empirically there are various specificities.

It is felt that the incorporation of a resume of the description of the recent developments given in the Chapter-4 would be of great value here. This will help as the spring board for further elaboration of the relevant points with the help of specific illustrations.

As we have mentioned earlier, the north-eastern region represents a picture of diversity, particularly in respect of tribal communities. Apart from the fact that the largest number of different tribal communities live in the hills and plains of the region, here we have a situation in which the tribal and the non-tribal, the acculturated and integrated, the sanskritized and non-sanskritized, the highly refined and the patently primitive – all co-exist in a remarkable state of juxtaposition. What is equally remarkable is

the presence of markedly tribal racial and cultural strands in the physical and cultural fabrics of the non-tribal societies. Particularly in Assam, the process of assimilation of various tribal groups into the non-tribal Assamese-Hindu fold is continuing even today. For example, a substantial number of the major Assamese caste Koch or Rajbangshi is made up of descendants of assimilated tribals, a large section of such tribal groups such as the Rabha, the Sonowal have moved close to the Assamese-Hindu society. They are hardly distinguishable as tribals. Because of this living process of transformation, it is often very difficult to draw the line of distinction between the tribal and the non-tribal in respect of the Assamese Hindu society.

Apart from this, there are a number of tribal communities in the region which are either directly affiliated to Buddhism and others which have been influenced by the Buddhistic ways through contact with the former. The Monpas and the Sherlukupens of Arunachal Pradesh belong to the Lamaistic Buddhism of the Tibetan order and those like the Khamtis, the Phake, the Khamyang and the Aiton etc. of Assam are followers of Hinayana Buddhism of Burmese order. Many of these groups, particularly those living in the plains of Assam or in the adjoining foothills have been conditioned in various degrees by their contact with the Assamese-Hindu society.

In respect of the role of Islam the picture is almost like that of the all India pattern. However, one noteworthy fact is that one of the earliest converts to Islam in these parts was a Bodo tribal by the name of Ali Mech and at least two deities of the present day Bodo pantheon viz, Nabab Badshah and Pir Deu are of definite Islamic links. Momin is believed to be originated from Muslim gentleman of priestly status.

But Christianity came in a big way to the tribal population of the North-eastern region which resulted into spectacular transformation in these communities, while the bulk of the tribal communities in Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya have embraced Christianity, more and more sections of the tribal populations in Assam and Manipur have been coming under its influence. Christianity has brought in a new kind of orientation in the way and attitudes of the concerned groups, and new equations are being sought at different levels, national, state and local, and at various fronts – religions, socio-cultural and political.

Finally, there is now the most powerful and visible impact of modernization. Development for whatever it is worth – has been bringing in various doses of urbanization, industrialization improved transport and communications, better educational facilities and so on to the tribal areas. But the invasion of consumerist market economy and western culture has resulted into such changes that not only in tribal life styles but also in the tribal ethos underwent major metamorphosis. Such changes have of course, made the heaviest dent on the Christian sections, but others have by no means been left untouched, at least in the matter of the ‘desired’ life style.

The most prominent change in the North-East has been the new consciousness and ethnic assertion. This situation has manifested itself in a tendency that has been taking shape in various kinds developments. There have been feelings that the tribals have been neglected and deprived of their due rights and privileges and that the large scale presence of ‘outsiders’ in the economic and even in administrative fronts have been causing a threat to the future of these communities. In a number of cases heaving influx of illegal immigrants has disturbed the balance the demographic pattern in

such a manner that the indigenous communities are facing the prospects of being reduced to minorities even in their own homeland.

Thus various combinations of these factors played important roles in different communities. The growing sense of resentment and frustration among the youth has found expression in a kind of intolerance – often leading to extremism and even militancy and terrorism.

We are highlighting below some major developments involving the tribal communities – both in the hills and on the plains – of different states of North-East India with particular focus on the ethnic movements.

II. Focus on Individual State

Assam:

The Assam Movement based on the issue of the expulsion of illegal immigrants, which started in the late 70's in the form of a students' movement had touched initially both the tribals and the non-tribals. But, later on due to various circumstances some of the tribal groups dissociated themselves from the Assam movement. At one point of time the Assam movement lost its sense of direction and many enthusiastic young men and women actively involved in the movement got dissolution and joined the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), a militant outfit with its goal of 'liberating' Assam from the 'colonial' Indian rule and establishing an independent Assam.

However, keeping the Assam movement in mind as the model, a number of tribal groups, later started their own movements along ethnic lines. Now the famous Bodo Movement offers the most outstanding example of this new trend of development started in the form of a protest against the administration of Assam and the dominant section of the population i.e.

the caste Hindu Assamese population regarding various issues. Initially it was a socio-cultural movement with implications for economic development and preservation of cultural identity. Aiming for the redressal of their grievances, they formed an organization called The Plains Tribal Council of Assam in 1968 and demanded a separate homeland to be named (PTCA). Then the demands were limited – facilities in education, health and economic development was their first priority. With the establishment of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the movement took a new turn as the people registered a demand for introduction of Bodo language as an optional subject along with Sanskrit and Pali in the schools of Assam followed by the demand for the use of Bodo language as a medium of instruction in the schools of Bodo dominated areas. The issue of adoption of a script for the Bodo language also added fuel to the fire. In course of time, the demand took two different forms – one, more autonomy for the Bodo majority areas within the existing constitutional framework, and other self determined groups through militancy. Here also the student front called ABSU was at the forefront in the beginning. In 1986 an organization called Bodo Security Force (BSF) was formed. They promised to ensure the protection and promotion of the Bodo People. In doing so they caused terror to the non-tribal communities living in the Bodo dominated area. They came out as a ruthless and inexorable force formed for their cause. Later, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) another Bodoland outfit has been formed. The large-scale settlements of immigrant Muslims and also of Adibasis in the Bodo areas has also been a potent factor.

Through a long series of talks between the movement leaders and the central and state governments a kind of settlement has been hammered

out with the prospects of the creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council (with some necessary modifications in the Constitution). However, some of the militant outfits were not ready to accept such compromised position.

Side by side, the non-Bodo communities have combined to oppose the grant of such authority to the Bodos fearing that their interests would be in jeopardy.

Finally, in line with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the issue has been more or less amicably settled and an accord has been signed. As a result the Bodoland Autonomous Council has been created.

Significantly, some other tribal groups of the plains of Assam have also been influenced by the Bodo movement and are becoming more and more restive and demanding not only economic and cultural protection but also autonomy in various degrees. For example, the Rabhas, the Misings, the Tiwas etc.

The cases of the tribals of the hill districts of Assam have some extra dimensions. Like the Bodos, the hill people also felt that the Assamese leadership had not been giving due attention to the causes of the hill tribal people and were rather ignoring them. An anti-Assamese feeling grew among these people when other hills people of Assam got separated from the mainstream during late sixties and early seventies. The Karbi Students Association started expressing their grievances in a separatist line from time to time.

A committee called Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee (KANCHSDCOM) was formed during early seventies to demand a separate autonomous state for the hills people. It was

a central committee for both the districts. Similarly, Karbi Anglong Autonomous State Demand Committee was formed in the Karbi interest. Again in 1986 a separate organization named Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) was formed and went under the influence of leftist party CPI(ML). The Karbi Student Association and Women group of ASDC became their constituent force. They pressurized the non-ASDC people to follow their agenda. Thus a beginning of unrest brewed up in the hill district. In the process, a parallel outfit took shape under the name and style of Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) and it took to arms. They stirred the people and brought a sense of fear among them.

Another group called Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) grew up in later period and took to arms. For the rising of several armed groups the non-Karbi people and the divided groups of Karbi people themselves fell in the ditch of trouble. In the meantime, KNV and UPDA got united in Sept. 1999 and they formed a new party called Karbi People Force (KPF). The activists of this group is causing unrest in the district. Killings have been frequent there. The Karbi People causes constraint to the non-Karbi people. Therefore, the situation is reeling on unrest at present, centering round the demand for autonomous state.

Similarly, Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee(DRDC) and Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) have been formed during mid-nineties to demand a separate Dimasa State comprising of Dimasa inhabited areas of Karbi Anglong, N.C. Hills and Nagaland.

Thus it is found that various interests have been working at cross-purposes and have given rise to a most complex situation, which almost defies rational analysis.

Meghalaya:

A kind of Khasi nationalism of consciousness about the preservation of Khasi religions and cultural identity had started much in the later part of the 19th century as a protest against the invasion of Christianity. This was known as Seng Khasi movement.

During the last few decades of the British rule in India, demand for an autonomous hill state grew with British support. After Independence, following the setting up of commission for the state reorganization in 1953, the hill leaders belonging to different tribes and denominations came together to form Eastern India Tribal Union. This Union later gave birth to All Party Hill Leader's Conference (APHLC). They demanded a separate state where English would be the official language as well as the medium of instruction. In 1968 APHLC organized a nonviolent Satyagraha and as a result the Autonomous State of Meghalaya within Assam comprising Khasi and Jaintia Hill district and Garo Hill district was created. But within a short time the demand for full statehood became strong, particularly after the creation of Nagaland as a separate state. Gradually the pressure became very much intensified. Thus in 1972 Meghalaya got full statehood and since then APHLC assumed the status of a regional political party.

At the time of the creation of separate state of Meghalaya, the entire tribal populations i.e. the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo – had extended their support. During recent decades, the youths have tried to reorganize that spirit for achieving various socio-political goals. But it seems that the device has failed to bring in the desired results. The resentment and frustration among the common people remained simmering and particularly the younger generation soon grew disillusioned. They became more and more restive and

rallied together to register their discontent. A few years ago a joint body of Khasis and Garos called Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC) was formed. Later on, the Garo section of the body dissociated itself from this HALC because of internal strife and a separate body for the Achik National Volunteer Force was formed. Both these bodies have gradually assumed more and more militant postures and have virtually turned into terrorist outfits.

Nagaland:

In case of Nagaland a common wave Naga-Nationalism came into being after the introduction of Christianity. Embracing Christianity the different Naga groups who had their distinct identity got a platform to unite themselves as fellow believers and as a result a kind of Pan-Naga identity emerged.

The Naga elites who were educated in the institutions run by the Christian Missionaries established Naga Club at Kohima and Mokokchung in 1918. It can be considered as the first conscious attempt to promote inter-tribal solidarity. Later on in 1923 Lotha Council and in 1928 Ao Council were formed which re-established socio-culturally distinctive identity of the Naga people that gradually led to the Naga solidarity movement. In 1945, Naga Hills District Tribal Council was formed which had given a twist to the Naga solidarity movement.

In 1946, it was renamed being influenced by the idea of Pan-naga nationhood as Naga National Council. It was followed by a series of developments. The Naga elite declared their demand for formation of independent Naga land on 14th August of 1947. Then continuous political and social disturbances lasted for a decade. Ultimately the Naga Peace

Organizing Committee and the Church authorities came forward to settle the unrest. As a result, successive Naga People's Convention and negotiation with the Govt. of India followed, ultimately culminating into the creation of Nagaland as a separate state in 1963. But even after independence, the disturbances continued under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo, the leader of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Though it splintered into two groups, the movement is still continuing unchecked. Some negotiations are going on with these groups. But the stumbling block has been the demand for inclusion of all Naga inhabited areas of neighbouring states that have hanging fire and is likely to do so in the foreseeable future.

Manipur:

Manipur was a native state before independence with a monarch, assisted by a Durbar (Council of Advisers). According to an agreement between the king and the British Government in 1907, a political Agent of the Governor of Assam would preside over the Durbar. After the Second World War, the people of Manipur demanded a 'responsible government'. The Govt. of Manipur Act of 1947 envisaged the setting up of a legislature and a Ministry of six elected members, headed by a nominee of the Maharaja.

After Independence of India, the state was taken over by the Govt. of India on 15th October 1948 and with the coming into force of India's Constitution, Manipur became a part "C" state. The principles enunciated in relation to the Part 'C' states originally were that they should be merged with a neighbouring Part 'A' state, but the State Reorganization Commission recommended that Manipur should remain separate existence. The reasons were – firstly, that it was a border state, secondly, it was an independent territory at least since the British rule; and thirdly, it would be a burden

on Assam if Manipur (along with Tripura) was amalgamated with it. Manipur was, therefore, constituted into a centrally administered territory and under provisions of the Territorial Councils Act of 1956, was given a substantial measure of local self-government – though not the power to legislate. Obviously the people of Manipur were not satisfied with this arrangement and made repeated representations to New Delhi, demanding greater measure of a responsible government. The full statehood was announced for Manipur in September 1970. Ultimately Manipur became a full-fledged state on January 1972 with six district councils in its hill areas. The state of Manipur has two major physiographic regions, the Manipur River valley and a large surrounding tract of mountains. Hills constitute almost 90 percent of Manipur's total area.

About two thirds of the people are the Meithei, who occupy the Manipur Valley and are largely Hindu. Indigenous hill tribes, such as the Nagas in the north and the Kukis in the south, make up the rest of the population of the state. There are numerous clans and sections of tribal population who speak the language of Tibeto-Burman family. Manipuri, alongwith English is the official language of the state.

The history of insurgency had its roots in the 19th century in Manipur in the form of various wars and movements. In 1886 Bara Chouba Singh rebelled against Churachand Singh, but it was suppressed. Several other uprisings were there but he successfully overcame all of them.

In the British period the Thadous declared war against the British administration. Because of certain rules and systems including tax system that were introduced by the British administration against the interest of the Thadous, they started resentment. Finally the burnt down of villages

and granaries by the Vice-President of Durbar infuriated the tribe and they resorted to insurgency. The uprising of Thadon insurgency was the most tremendous one, which the British had to face for one generation.

The intra-tribal conflict among the Kabui Naga groups facilitated their subjugation by the British. Later they realized that the discussion among them was responsible for their political slavery. They were against many oppressive laws and practically became rival to the British.

In 1938, Hijam Irawat Singh founded a leftist movement by establishing Praja Mandlas, Kishan Sabhas, Mahila Sanmilan and Chatra Sammitis. Though a Marxist, he was essentially a nationalist and opposed to the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union. He desired that Manipur should be independent with membership in the U.N. Several other also argued that Manipur has for all practical purposes, become a colony of the Indian Capitalists. The 1960's witnessed the growth of insurgency of different kinds. Meitei State Committee followed by United Liberation Front, Peoples Liberation Army (PLA). The economic unrest among the Meitei youth was one important reason which gave rise to terrorism in Manipur alongwith ethnic movement.

After gaining full statehood, the Meities still continued their terrorist activities. The underground Meitei concentrated their operations in the valley region but the Tangkul, Kuki, Mao, Hmar and Haokip tribes took deep root in the hilly areas of Manipur. T. Muivah, being a Tungkhul Naga and the leader of NSCN faction, used Ukhrul district as a base for the NSCN. The terrorist organizations are well spread out in Manipur and were very strong. In fact, terrorism has been taken as a means of income by a large number of youths of the state. Moreover, political, social, economic and

ethnic factors together have added interest to indulge in terrorism in Manipur.

Tripura:

Tripura, which derived its name either from a deity known as Tripureswari, or from a tribal word *tuipra* – meaning water, or from the Tipra tribe, enjoyed a special status among the princely states because it had no treaty obligations to the British Raj. Though Tripura was conquered by the British in 1761, no political agent was posted in the state until 1871. Tripura's accession to India after Independence was also voluntary because the last Maharaja, who died in 1947, had expressed his intention to merge his kingdom with India after Independence. It was designated a Union Territory in 1956 and it acquired full status as a state in 1972.

There are 19 hill tribes – mostly Hindu or Hinduized, 2 Buddhist tribes – Chakma and Magh and a scattering of 6 tea garden tribes. There are some Mizos, Kukis, Garos and miscellaneous groups. The Raang are classed as a 'primitive' tribe. The major tribes belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and the Tripuris who are the dominant group belongs to the Bodo-stock.

Tripura has become a trouble-prone state for the last few decades. The trouble of Tripura grew intense for the ill feeling that persisted among the tribals of the state against the non-tribals coming from the erstwhile East Pakistan. Because of the continuous influx of Bengali people from the other side of the border, the demographic balance was disturbed which led the majority population of the tribal background to fall down to a state of minority in their own state. This change had caused serious fear and doubt in the psyche of the tribal people of Tripura.

The indigenous people noticed that they had been gradually deprived of their land and identity. The Bengali language also gradually spread in the state and it has become the medium of instruction in schools. Changes in the existing society together generated new impulses and a mixed expectations with much discontent.

This discontentment of the tribal people had led them to agitational activities. The first manifestation of counter-action against the immigrant population was the forming of 'Sengkrak', a militant organization of tribals in the year 1947. This organization was later out-looked and gradually new organizations came up, such as, Paharia Union, Adivasi Samiti under Chakma influence and Tripura Rajya Adivasi Sangha. Later all these merged together to work under the name and style Adivasi Sansad. During the late sixties, the educated tribal elite formed the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS). The activities of the Samiti put pressure on the Government for restoration of their land taken by non-tribal immigrants. They also demanded reservation of seats in the legislative council.

On the other hand, to uphold the Bengali interest, a Bengali militant group was formed as Amra Bangali. This group took to under-ground activities and committed a number of violent acts during late seventies.

After the uprising of Assam movement for expulsion of foreigners, similar kind of sentiment also developed among the indigenous people of Tripura. The TUJS resolved that the foreigners who had entered Tripura after October 15, 1947 be expelled from the state. The underground activities committed frequent terrorist attacks during the period between 1981 to 1988. After a gap, All Tripura Tribal Force again emerged – under the leadership of Bijoy Harangkhrawal. He led a strong secessionist

movement for a tribal homeland. Finally it ended with the Rajiv Bijoy Accord of 1988. Of course, still now various extremist organization have been operating in the state. The basic discontentment among the tribal people of Tripura is actually internal and basically socio-economic and ethnic revivalist in nature and not separatist.

Mizoram:

The inhabitants of Mizoram are now known by the generic name of Mizo or Mizou which literally means people (*mi*) (of the hills *zo*). There are a number of separate tribes under the general ethnic broad group called Mizo. Historically, there has been considerable admixture of different tribes in this area, ultimately leading to three main sub-groups – Lushais, Pawis and Lakhers.

The generic term Mizo or Mizou was already in use when the British came to this land. The Mizos included the following tribes – Ralte, Paite, Dulien, Poi, Sukte, Pankhup, Jahao, Tanai, Molbem, Taute, Lakher, Dalang, Mar, Khuangli, Falam, Leillul and Tangur. Although a number of languages were spoken in the Lushai Hills, the main language was Lushai. Other languages of the Kuki-Chin groups spoken by the different tribes were Zahao, Lakher, Hmar, Paite, Lai and Ralte.

In the traditional Mizo social structure the position of the Chief (called Lal) was considered highly important. The chief had the exclusive territory and unrestricted powers. The chief was at times a despot, but he had to rule according to custom; otherwise the subjects would leave the arbitrary chief and move over to another chief. Although theoretically the chiefs were all-powerful, in practical exercises of their authority, they were assisted, aided and advised by a group of elders (*Upas*).

During the Lushai expedition in 1888-89 and the Chin-Lushai expedition in 1889-90 the British administrative norms for the Lushia Hills were formulated and a decision was taken to post a civil administrator. The Lushai Hills territory was divided into two parts – the North Lushai Hills and the South Lushai Hills. North Lushai Hills was placed under the Govt. of Assam while South Lushai hills became a district under the Chittagong Division of the Bengal Province. The Lushai Hills were formally included in British India under proclamations by the Foreign Department in 1895. Sometime later the two districts were combined into one and placed under the chief commission of Assam.

The British Government, through the introduction of an intermediate tier of Chief's Council indirectly tried to weaken the authority of the chiefs. It was not accepted by the people and some of the chiefs were rebellious. However, the intervention of the Christian Missionaries in the religious and cultural front had helped the British rulers to achieve their goals. Rv. William Williams, a young Presbyterian who had been working in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, was the first Christian Missionary to visit Lushai Hills. By proselytisation and a persuasion movement, the spread of Christianity was extra-ordinarily rapid in the Mizo Hills. In 1901 there were only 26 Christians in the entire Mizo Hills. Now about all the Mizos are Christians. Spread of Christianity and spread of education in Mizoram were complementary to each other. The educational system sponsored by the missionaries created a privileged classes- a neo elite in the Mizo society.

The first impact of Christianity was on the religious beliefs, customs and usages of the Mizos. The transformation is now virtually complete. Only through revivalist movements of selected elements Mizo

culture, like traditional music, dances and drum beats, have come to be incorporated in the accepted code of religious behaviour in the Mizo Christian society. In other aspects also, now there is a tendency towards mixture of both traditional and new ways of life.

According to the Government of India Act., 1935, the Lushai Hills along with the other hill districts of Assam became Excluded Area. This had two effects. First, the Mizos were kept out of the national life. The political developments in the rest of the country did not touch the Excluded Areas. Secondly, the funding for such areas being from the provincial budget there were very limited resources available for these areas. In 1924, a group of Mizos demanded that representation of the Lushai Hills to the Assam Legislature should be allowed. The World Wars brought the Mizos into the wider arena of the country and the world. After the Second World War the issue of independence of India from British rule loomed large. The wave of political processes also reached the Lushai Hills.

The first political party in the Lushai Hills came into existence when the political future of the country was being decided. It was widely felt by the common people that the British administration was trying to adopt a policy of isolated independence for the Lushai Hills working through the chiefs. An anti-chief movement was building up. The people resented and demanded that in the District Conference be named Mizo Common Peoples Union and commoners should get more seats than the chiefs. A political party was born in 1946 with these demands. To enlist the support of the elite and the enlightened chiefs, the name of the party was later changed to Mizo Union. In their first general Assembly held in Aizawl, Mizo Union demanded that a chief should rule the village not through the *Upas* appointed at his discretion, but elected by the people.

The Mizo Union in its memorandum submitted to the Bordoloi Sub-committee demanded the following –

- (1) The Mizo inhabited areas of the neighbouring districts should be included in the Lushai Hills districts.
- (2) Lushais should be called Mizos.
- (3) Internal administration should be left to the Mizos.
- (4) Liberal financial assistance should be given.

As independence was drawing near, there were sharp differences of popular opinion regarding the future of the Lushai Hills. The Mizo Union was in favour of staying with India, but a secessionist group came up in the party favouring Lushai Hills joining Burma. Ultimately the group, supported by the chiefs, formed a new party called United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO). After Independence an Advisory Council was elected in the Lushai Hills to advise the Superintendent. Six autonomous districts with District Councils came up in Assam – the Lushai Hills being one such district. In 1953 the UMFO passed a resolution for the formation of a hill state consisting of Manipur, Tripura, the autonomous districts of Assam and North-Eastern Frontier Agency. When in 1954 the States Reorganization Commission visited Assam, the Mizo Union and UMFO pleaded for and demanded a separate hill state for the Mizos. However, the Commission recommended continuation of the hill districts in Assam and a review of the working of the District Councils. As a result, resentment started among the people and a number of political parties and organizations were formed e.g., - Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU), Mizo National Front (MNF). Later MNF became an armed outfit and insurgency started. In 1966 March MNF declared independence for Mizoram. The declaration was signed by Laldenga, the MNF supreme, and sixty others.

A provisional Government of the Mizo National Front started operating from East Pakistan and directing subversive activities in Mizo and Cachar districts. As a measure of anti insurgency operation, Protected and progressive villages (PPV) were constituted in the Mizo District. The entire Mizo District was declared disturbed area. While insurgency was going on in Mizo Hills, political process was continuing for finding a way to meet the aspiration the hill people of Assam..

In the Mizo District Council which was being run by the United Mizo parliamentary Party consisting of the Mizo Union and the Mizoram Congress; a resolution was passed stressing the need for peace and tranquility in the area and for formation of Mizoram as a state in 1971. In July 1971 the Government of India offered the status of Union Territory to Mizoram. However, MNF continued their militant activities. The rebels concentrated in Aizwal and Lunglei towns. The situation in Mizoram was very fluid and life was becoming insecure not only for the non-Mizos but also for a large number of loyal Mizos. The MNF also started a campaign to reform the Mizo society. In 1975 Laldenga expressed his desire to come to a settlement with the Government of India, which would ensure religious and cultural safeguards for the Mizos. But such talks did not prove to be fruitful. These process continued – for a decade. Finally in 1986 Laldenga amended the constitution of MNF making it a political party and the Mizoram accord was signed and got full statehood.

Practically there is no militancy in Mizoram today and it happens to be the most peaceful state of the N.E. region. Even the present Chief Minister sometimes volunteers to act as a mediator between the Government of India and the militant outfits of other N.E. States. This is a remarkable situation. However some points cannot be lost sight of –

1. The Mizos are still rather suspicious about the motives of the non- Mizos, particularly those residing or operating in Mizoram. Often there are flare-ups and quite Mizoram notices on non-Mizos.
2. The Mizos are rather intolerant about the presence of such groups., as Ranghols and particularly Chakmas who are also permanently settled in Mizoram. Sometime ago a great number of Rangkhoh had to seek refuge in neighbouring Tripura. The Chakmas who originally came over from the Chittagong tract of present Bangladesh are still not accepted by the Mizos as legitimate residents of Mizoram. They have to face various social and administrative hurdles.

Arunachal Pradesh:

Arunachal Pradesh, which is the present name of the former North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), was never before a politically compact area until the area was reorganized in October 1951 and christened, acronymically, as NEFA. The term, "North-East Frontier Agency" had actually been coined and attached to the hilly, north-eastern tribal areas following, ultimately, an expedition in the Adi (Siang) territory in 1911-12. Even after that, far from bringing the whole area into a consolidated one, the British did not spread their administration into the interiors of any of the territories either.

The Simla Convention of 1914, which in the process of delimitation of the Indo-Tibetan frontier, gave the then NEFA region north of Darrang and both north and east of Lakhimpur districts a shape-though notional yet.

After Independence, it was in 1951 that the plains portions of the Sela sub-Agency, Subansiri Area, Abor Hills district, Mishmi Hills district and Tirap Frontier Tract were transferred to the administrative jurisdiction of the State Government of Assam, Keeping the remaining areas – including the Tuensang Frontier Tract – within the jurisdiction of NEFA, administered by the Governor of Assam, as representative of the Govt. of India, through an Adviser. The whole region was divided into six Frontier divisions – Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit, Tirap and Tuensang (which was later amalgamated with the Naga Hills).

After Chinese incursion in 1962, it became necessary to bring in a change in the pattern of administration in NEFA. Indeed, the administrative machinery was immediately restructured. The Governor with the help of a committee consider the expansion and development of local self government in the territory. The committee recommended a three-tier Panchayat system- Gram Panchayat, Anchal Samity and Zila Parishad besides an Advisory Council' at the central level of the territory. They also recommended that the administration of NEFA should be a concern of the Home Ministry instead of the Ministry of External Affairs.

NEFA became a Union Territory under the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971 and renamed as Arunachal Pradesh. And ultimately in 1987 it was given full statehood.

In the case of Arunachal Pradesh, development along ethnic lines was rather difficult. There are as many as 82 tribes and sub-tribes with different linguistic, religious and cultural affiliations with little commonness and cohesion among themselves. However, after the administrative measures of the government as well as conscious efforts of committed social

organizations and individuals, a notion of Arunachali identity has been steadily emerging. The introduction of the uniform government agencies and institutions as well as spread of modern education has brought in a relatively greater-consciousness about the viability and the effectiveness of this Arunachali identity. With the help of an example of Donyi-poloism we can give a clear picture of the situation.

Among the Tani group of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh comprising Adis, the Nishis, the Apatanis and a few others, Donyi (Sun) and Polo (Moon) happen to be two highly venerated and often dreaded divine figures. They are believed to be the searching pair of eyes, the tangible manifestations of some superior power 'unknown and unknowable'. However, there was hardly any organized or cohesive formulation of a theological nature. In the early seventies a determined move was started to give it a concrete shape of the cult of Donyi-Polo and a relentless campaign was conducted almost single handedly by an Adi gentleman. There were of course, oppositions from certain quarters. However, the Donyi-Polo movement gradually gathered momentum and finally received popular and official support.

The religious aspirations of the Adi tribes seems to have been fulfilled. Today Donyi-Poloism has not only been accepted as a powerful cult but is also being vigorously projected as an organized religion with its own philosophy, code of rituals and such attendant paraphernalia as temple and image. At the same time a thriving Donyi-Polo Mission, with active government support behind it, a part from cementing the religious bond of the Tani group of tribes, the further aim at Donyi-Poloism as the rallying point for the unit of all the different ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh, thus to consolidate the newly emergent Arunachali identity seeking wider recognition.

At the same time each individual tribe is highlighting its own cultural heritage with the active support of the administration. But so far no insurgency movement having its origin within Arunachal Pradesh itself have been observed. Yet atleast two developments deserve serious notice:

(1) The whole of Arunachal Pradesh is a restricted territory and any non-resident of Arunachal Pradesh needs a special permit even to entire it's territory. There are various restrictions on 'outsiders'; so far as employment, carrying out of business and possession of land and property are concerned. The tacit operating principle seems to be "Arunachal for Arunachalis". Some decades ago groups of Chakma and Hajong refugees were settled in some parts of Arunachal Pradesh by the Govt. of India. Ever since this has been a cause for resentment of the Arunachali tribals although Chakmas and Hajongs also happen to be tribes. There has been a consistent demand that these settlers from outside are a potential threat to the interest of the indigenous Arunchalese and that they should be removed from their territory. At the time of the last Lok Sabha election there was a hue and cry about the inclusion of their names in the electoral rolls.

(2) As mentioned earlier, no insurgency movement is known to have originated independently in any local tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. But since about a decade or so back, the NSCN (Muivah?) has been active in the Tirap and Changlang districts among such tribes as the Noktes, the Wanchus and the Tangsas whose habitat is contiguous to the Naga territory and whom the NSCN outfit claims to be the Nagas. These groups have not only been systematically brain washed but have been forced to join hands with the Naga insurgents. The impact seems to have been considerably effective and thus it can be said that the seeds of insurgency have been sown within Arunachal also.

Another fact that can be mentioned in this connection is that the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) frequently take shelter in the hilly terrains of Arunachal Pradesh and take strategic position to strike on their targets in the Assam plains.

From the above discussion it is evident that there are certain common patterns discernible in the process of culture-change that have been going on in the various parts of North East India, particularly in the field of ethnic movements. At the same time, the effects have not been uniform everywhere and there are many elements of local specificity.

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CHAPTER – 11

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

I. Summary:

In the preceding chapters an attempt has been made to throw some light on the trends of culture change among the tribal populations of the Brahmaputra valley for which five tribal groups had been selected for detail investigation. The study was undertaken against a broader perspective covering not only other tribal groups of the hills and plains of North-east India but also keeping in view the all-India scenario. At the same time, a theoretical framework was taken up for putting the different issues in relevant conceptual slots.

Chapter-I, entitled 'Introduction', is made up of two sections as detailed below:

- a. Section-I deals with the scope of the study which covers an account of the relevant geographical area, the demographic picture the area with particular focus on the tribal populations, and also the outstanding features of the tribal-non-tribal relationship with special reference to the Assamese society. This section also contains the background against which the particular topic has been selected for study.

- b. Section-II describes and explains the methodology adopted for the conduct of the study including deskwork, library work, and various field techniques such as observation and interview methods as well as visual documentation.

As the title of the second chapter itself clearly indicates, it contains a general survey of the ethnographic pattern of each of the seven North-eastern states with a special focus on the tribes of Assam (excluding the five tribes taken for detailed study in this work).

In the third chapter detailed ethnographic accounts of the five tribes chosen for study have been incorporated in order that they can serve as the springboards for the case studies based on fieldwork in villages inhabited by the respective tribal communities.

“Culture Change – The Concept And Its Implication for the Present Study”, the title of Chapter- 4, clearly spells out the nature of its contents. The various sections of this chapter deal with such points as the concept of culture change, factor for culture change, processes of culture change, culture change in the context of the Indian society with special reference to North-Eastern India and Assam, and a overview of literature on culture change in the North-east.

The importance of this chapter for this work lies in the fact that it serves as the vital link between the general empirical data preceding this chapter and the specific field-based data following this chapter facilitating a logical cohesiveness of the study.

The next five chapters, Chapter -5 to Chapter -9, are case studies involving the five tribal communities under study viz., the Misings,

the Deuris, the Karbis, the Tiwas and the Rabhas - in that order. The field data in each case has been arranged as per the parameters adopted for this purpose – in the field of socio-economic life, in the field of social institution, in the field of socio-religious life, in the field of socio-political life, in the field of material culture and language. Each of these chapters starts with a background note and is followed by some relevant photographs by way of illustration of the concerned field data.

Chapter-X, which is entitled “Regional Trend”, represents an attempt to put the contents of the previous five chapters against the backdrop of the major patterns of change observed in the North-eastern region as a whole with particular emphasis on the recent trends involving ethnicity, revivalism, militancy and terrorism. This chapter has been rounded up by identifying those specific areas of change that are by and large applicable in the cases of the five communities under study – thus paving the way for giving shape to the points formulated by way of conclusion.

II. Conclusion:

In this study we have made an attempt to observe the changes that have taken place among the selected tribal communities with a presumption that such changes have by and large a uniform pattern in spite of specificities. Again, the assumption was that this pattern extends beyond the boundaries of these communities to encompass similar other communities both within the North-East India and even beyond.

As we have mentioned in Chapter-4, which deals with the conceptual framework of culture change, a number of factors are involved in the process. Various internal and external stimuli are always at work in bringing about changes in different aspects of life and culture. While such

internal stimuli as change of habitation, invention and innovation have contributed their shares, the major processes instrumental in bringing about change of these communities have in the past been acculturation, integration and assimilation vis-à-vis the dominant “non-tribal” society – in this case, the Assamese Hindu community.

The more recent factors responsible for culture change among these tribal communities have been the impact of modernization with all its technological, economic and cultural implications on the one hand, and the powerful waves of ethnic movements involving various manifestations in the form of search for roots, revivalism, assertive tendencies, and even militancy and terrorism.

In our study we have seen that the tribal communities inhabiting the rather isolated remote north-eastern corner of India have by no means remained untouched by even the latest developments – thanks to irresistible onslaught of the forces of globalization.

It may be pointed out here that of the various types of change that we have observed, some share a more or less common pattern while some others are characterized by individual peculiarities.

At this point it would perhaps be advisable to pause and ponder over the connotations of such terms as ‘tribal’ and ‘non-tribal’. It appears that these terms are being used as a matter of convention and they have not stood for clearly formulated concepts with academic justification. We are quoting below extracts from a recent article by a leading social scientist of India:

“The word *tribal* in the Indian context, as most of us would admit, seems to be a misnomer. It has political and racial

connotations. In a poor country like India, every layman and woman is a tribal in the sense that he or she is living in social conditions which can be termed preindustrial. However, if ethnic origins or affiliations are any criteria for this classification, the non-tribal population settled in the mainland of the country has more of it (caste and other systems for instance) than the so-called tribal peoples. The tribal and non-tribal dichotomy, therefore, needs to be viewed in terms of its relation to basic resources (economic and other) and their management. In other words, rather than treating this problem as an economic problem, and a problem of sharing resources and technology, it has been, because of the borrowed colonial ideas treated as a problem of ethnicity and racism by scholars.” (Handoo 2002).

In fact in recent times scholars of various disciplines have been seriously considering the acceptance of some other term (s) to replace the term tribe and its derivations.

However, until some universally acceptable term(s) can be agreed upon, *tribal* and *non-tribal* will continue to have their use. While it is true that the tribals still retain traces of colonial hangover, these terms now stand for classificatory categories for identification of the *privileged* and *non-privileged* sections of the Indian society for apportioning rights and privileges – social, economic and political – in the interest of distributive justice. The term tribe appears in the Constitution of India and various central and state laws with this specific function in view.

We undertook our study by formulating a theoretical framework and identifying a number of relevant parameters with the help of which we tested on basic assumptions through field investigation. After analyzing the data collected from the field against the backdrop of a wider canvas, we have come to feel that our basic assumptions stand verified. Accordingly, we are in a position to draw conclusions along the following lines:

- a. The changes that have been noticed in the five selected tribal communities are identical in nature and as such conform to a common pattern.
- b. Such commonness is not confined to the five communities concerned but encompasses similar other communities not only in the region but also beyond.
- c. Going a step further, it can also be said that similar trends of culture change have been visible in all tradition-bound non- Western societies, whether tribal or non-tribal.

Parallely, we can also point out some specific features characterizing the trends of change during the period covered by our study.

- a) Change has been an ever-present phenomenon in cultures of all societies at all times. But earlier they had been slow and mostly imperceptible. In contrast changes in the recent past have been very rapid and often glaring.
- b) Changes in the past had come as a natural process without the awareness of the society concerned. But now the societies are aware of the changes. Sometimes they are welcomed and sometimes resented.

- c) The newly emerging ethnic consciousness has been a potent factor of change. Changes are now often brought in through calculated and deliberate efforts.
- d) The ethnic movements which have been noticed in the communities under study (and also in other such communities) in most cases involve a tendency towards revivalism and search for roots. This tendency is almost always accompanied by the glorification of selected items from the oral tradition.

Coming to the specific area of integration and assimilation of the various tribal groups into the broader Assamese fold, it has been observed by some modern scholars that a hegemonic element has been present in the process. The tribal groups they feel, have not been given a fair deal. This is a common tendency in a multi-ethnic society with a dominant group. A scholar of the above persuasion has put his view in the following manner –

“The quest for a greater Assamese nationality by accommodating various tribal and ethnic groups has obviously failed despite the best of intentions. This has failed because assimilation was attempted on Assamese terms instead of a mutual reaching out.”(Sharma 2002).

While there is no doubt considerable substance in the above line of thinking, the factor of Assamese hegemony vis-à-vis the plains tribes of Assam can not be held responsible for all the developments involving ethnic consciousness and ethnic conflict. First, the processes of integration and assimilation had been welcomed by the tribal groups themselves until

a few decades back and it was not considered by the concerned group as an imposition. Secondly, ethnicity - related assertion movements have been launched by such tribal groups of this region in which the Assamese hegemony factor had no role to play. Thirdly, even though in the past “Assamese domination attempts” – real or imaginary - had been the flogging horse of the tribal movement leaderships, lately there has taken place some curious turns of events: various other non-tribal groups have been made the targets of hatred and attack, and more significantly, various tribal groups have themselves been fighting with one another on various grounds and pretexts.

The situation today is extremely complicated and it needs to be studied in depth by social scientists and handled with utmost care by the powers that be.

From the foregoing discussion it appears that a basic dichotomy is associated with the phenomenon of culture-change. While a more or less uniform pattern is discernible in the trends of change involving not only the communities under study but also others, both within and outside this region, there are also areas of specificity in respect of particular communities. If the various instances of change that have been listed are carefully observed, a plausible explanation of the basic dichotomy referred to above seems to suggest itself: uniformity is found in the case of the spontaneous changes coming from within; but when it comes to changes induced by extraneous forces, variations are clearly visible.

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