

THE LALUNGS

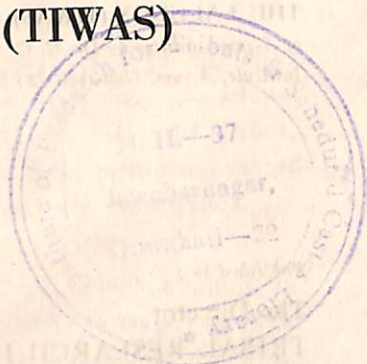
(TIWAS)



Dr. G. C. Sarma Thakur

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THE LALUNGS (TIWAS) : A monograph on one of the major plains tribes of Assam—written by Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur, Joint Director, Tribal Research Institute, Assam, Guwahati-781 003.

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FOREWORD

The Tiwas otherwise known as the Lalungs are one of the major ethnic groups in Assam. Although they have been enlisted as a scheduled tribe in the plains of Assam, nevertheless, a sizeable number of them are found to inhabit the hill area also specially in the Hamren Subdivision of the Karbi Anglong District.

So far no systematic study of this tribal community on a scientific basis has been made and as such very little is known about the people of this community. Of course, there are references about them in the old census reports, ethnographic notes and other writings. But all these give only a partial picture of the people.

Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur, Joint Director, Tribal Research Institute, Assam, has made an attempt to study the people systematically on a scientific basis covering their various aspects of life, culture, economy, etc. and to present the same in a book form with a view to introducing them to the outside world and his attempt is really praiseworthy.

The book is expected to help the administrators, planners and the officers of the development departments to understand socio-cultural fabrics of the Tiwas and to understand their problems with sympathy. The general readers with an inquisitive mind will also find good reading materials in this book.

Comments and suggestions from the readers on this book will surely enable us to improve our future publications.

This is the fifth publication of the Tribal Research Institute, Assam. Such monographs on other tribal communities are also proposed to be published by us in a phased manner.

Dated Guwahati
the 31st August 1985.

B. N. Bordoloi,
Director,
Tribal Research Institute, Assam.
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PREFACE

The Tiwas, popularly known as Lalungs are a lesser known plains tribe of Assam whose concentrations are located mainly in the Nagaon district and the foot hill areas of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. We do not get sufficient scientific information about the Tiwas in the writings of the pre-Independence authors, although a good number of accounts, reports, ethnographies on the Assam tribes were written by them. Even after Independence no systematic study was undertaken on the life and culture of the Tiwas living in both plains and hills of Assam. Barring one or two publications in book form and a few articles in souvenirs and monthlies in Assamese language, no scientific study has been made catering to the academic needs of anthropologists, researchers, administrators and general readers.

The author, while collecting data about the Tiwas, visited the far flung Tiwa villages of Nagaon district who are living in abject poverty far from the madding crowd. To collect data about the Rajas, frequent contacts had to be made with the Gobha Raja. The Tiwas and for that matter most of the tribes of Assam are indifferent to propaganda and because of lack of publicity, they are not known outside Assam. Even in Assam, most of the people do not know the life and culture of the Tiwas. At best they know that there is a community known as Lalungs in the Nagaon district which is conspicuous by its backwardness.

In this background, the Tribal Research Institute, Assam had entrusted me with the task of writing a monograph on the Lalungs. Although the data for the present book

were collected a few years back, updating of the same was done by undertaking recent visits to the Lalung villages during last two years. As mentioned earlier, the aim of the publication is to focus the life and culture of the Tiwas specially outside Assam. The emphasis has been given more on traditional monographic style leaving other aspects like changing pattern, occupational mobility etc. for future study.

The author extends his heartfelt thanks to Shri Dharmaram Bordoloi of Jagiroad, Sri Ganesh Chandra Senapati, Shri Balai Ram Senapati of Barapujia, Shri Rameswar Konwar of Jagi Bhakatgaon for their co-operation and assistance during the collection of data from the Lalung villages of Nagaon district. The villagers of Bakarigaon offered all help ungrudgingly and the author extends his gratitude to them.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Shri U. C. Sarania, I.A.S., Special Secretary, Welfare of plains Tribes and Backward Classes Department, Government of Assam, but for whose assistance the present book would not have seen the light of the day.

Shri Samir Choudhury of Gauhati deserves thanks for supplying a few photographs of the Lalungs which are incorporated in this publication.

Last but not least I express my sincere thanks to Shri Balabhadra Baishya and Srimati Utpala Roy of Tribal Research Institute, Assam for their meticulous typing of the manuscript.

Guwahati

Dr. Ganesh Chandra Sharma Thakur

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CHAPTER-I

A Glimpse Into The Past

Legendary Origin :

Although the Tibet region is known to be the original abode of the Lalungs, yet their migration to the plains is shrouded in mystery. Opinions differ regarding their abode on the banks of the river Jamuna near Allahabad in the hoary past. But a few Lalung octogenerians believe that they were pushed out by the Aryans from their original habitat near Allahabad and came towards east following the Himalayan passes. After a long sojourn they reached Pragjyotisha where they established a principality and ruled for several years. In the old scriptures they have been mentioned as Kiratas, where as the people called themselves as 'Tifras'. King Narakasur pushed them further towards east and the Lalungs came to the Kapili valley where they ruled for several generations. They established a principality in the valley known as 'Tribeg' in the year 1900 B.C. (R.M. Nath). It is reported that the name of the first ruler of the Lalungs in the Kapili valley was Pratyardan. The exact location of Tribeg could not be ascertained, but in all probability this principality was somewhere near Kasua Gaon lying on the confluence of Borpani, Jamuna and Kapili. Traditionally the Lalungs are worshippers of Lord Mahadeo. The existence of the 'Basundhari Than' on a hillock on the western part of Borpani, where the Lalungs worship Lord Mahadeo even today, testifies to their possession of the area since time immemorial. The worship is conducted

1. Nath, R.M.—The Background of Assamese Culture.

by the villagers as well as the 'Rājā' of Sahari, who are Lalungs. It is believed that the 'Tifras' or the Lalungs ruled in 'Tribeg' for about sixteen generations (R. M. Nath)². R. M. Nath in his Background of Assamese culture mentions that Chidrarath, the 12th king of the 'Tifras' participated in a 'Jagnya' held by the eldest Pandava of Hastinapur. The 15th king Tripur was inefficient and during his rule the subjects were very unhappy. The king could not do anything to provide relief to the famine stricken people. Most of the people fled away to distant places. The king was murdered. His son Trilochan ascended the throne as the 16th ruler of 'Tribeg' and due to his efficient handling of the situation peace prevailed in the principality. In order to maintain a friendly relation with the Kacharis, he married a Kachari princess. Out of the wedlock two sons were born named Drikpati and Dakshin. The Kachari king was issueless and Drikpati became the king after the death of the Kachari king. Dakshin ascended the throne of 'Tifra' after his father's death. Being the eldest, Drikpati claimed the throne of 'Tifra'. Dakshin objected and there was severe fighting between Drikpati and Dakshin in which the latter was defeated. Accompanied by the loyal subjects Dakshin proceeded towards southern direction and after crossing the Barail range established a principality. Kholongmā was the seat of administration. In course of time Dakshin's descendants established a kingdom what is known as 'Tippara' or Tripura.

The 'Tifras' who did not accompany Dakshin hid themselves in the hilly areas and their descendants were later known as Lalungs. Besides, a large section of the 'Tifras' fled away to the nearby Jayantia kingdom. In the Jayantia kingdom the 'Tifras' lost their identity and ungrudgingly accepted the culture of the Jayantias. Till the accession of the Jayantia kingdom to the British empire, these 'Tifras' lived in the Jayantia kingdom extending a period of about 3000 years.

2. Ibid

The 'Tifras' living within the jurisdiction of the Kachari king had to obey all the orders of the king. After the defeat of the Kacharis by the Ahoms, the Jayantias extended their kingdom to the Kalang and Kapili on the northeastern side of Nagaon district. The Jayantia king established the chiefs of the Lalungs in this area as Tributary Chiefs. Among these chiefs Gobha became prominent who ruled from Marjong. Other titular chiefs were Nelli, Sahari and Khalā. The Lalungs of the plains areas of the Brahmaputra valley generally mention about 'Dāntir Chāribhāi'. Under the Jayantia king Ramsingha, four brothers were ruling in Gobhā Nelli, Khalā, and Sahari as tributary heads. There is a popular belief among the Lalungs that these four brothers visited Jayantia king through four different passes extending from Gobha on the west and Amsoi on the east. Even to this day the great grandsons of these four 'kings' maintain cordial relation with the Jayantias. The Jayantias too reciprocate by attending annual religious festivals. The great grandsons of these 'Rājās' are preserving their traditional 'King's dress and ornaments, wooden and stone images of gods and goddesses, swords, shields and javelins etc.

The folk tradition of the Lalungs contains interesting details about the origin of the Gobha 'Rājā'. As a result of the battle between Drikpati and Dakshin, the Lalungs were deprived of their king. The depressed Lalungs prayed to Lord 'Māhādeo' for a king. Lord 'Māhādeo' and His consort Parvati flew to earth but the Lord was so much excited to see the natural beauty below that he could not check the sexual desire. He made a small packet of his semen and threw it down which fell on a beel near the Lalung habitations. A 'Mali' fish swallowed those semen and in course of time a human baby was born from the womb of that fish. The Lalungs took care of the baby and in course of time made him their king as he possessed certain kingly features. As the king was born out of a 'Mali' fish, his descendants took the clan name of 'Māloiāli'.

There is yet another legend about the origin of the first 'Rājā' of the Lalungs. According to this legend the forefather of Gobha 'Rājā' was born out of a stone at 'Thin Māklang'. This 'Thin or Tin Māklang' was a beel in the Mikir Hills where from the river killing came out. According to Lalung folk tradition Gobha 'Rājā', Joyta 'Rājā' and Khairam 'Rājā' were originated from the same stone at 'Thin Māklang'.

According to some aged Lalungs, the Lalungs originally lived in the hilly areas of 'Kashi' (Benaras). In their discussions they refer to 'Harison' who appears to be the great legendary Hindu king Harischandra. It is customary among the Lalungs to present the dead with cloths. Generally the near relatives offer these cloths as token of love. The cloths are placed over the dead bodies and if the number of cloths increases, these extra cloths are kept near the head of the dead body. At the cremation ground ('Mākor') the cloths over the body of the dead are burnt while those kept near the head of the dead body are brought home by the 'Giyātis'. It is believed that if 'Harison' gets some cloth in the cremation ground, the dead person will be deprived of good clothes in the other world. It is further believed that king Harischandra, while staying in a 'Chandal's' (untouchable) house at 'Kashi', (Benaras) collected cloths from the cremation ground and shared those with his master. In Lalung villages of Nagaon district this belief still gains currency. The elderly women refer to 'Harison' out of anger when certain clothes are not easily traceable. 'Mākarat Diyā Khanak Kon Harison Rajāi Lai Gol' i.e. who is that 'Harison' who has taken the clothes meant for cremation ?

The folk songs sung during harvesting and purification ceremonies after child birth reveal that Lalungs once lived in the 'Hillāli' kingdom, the boundaries of which extended the whole of present Nagaon and eastern Darrang districts. At first they were residing on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra but later on their habitations spread to the other

bank also. As time passed the people preferred to call themselves as subjects of 'Lāli', an abbreviated form of 'Hillāli'. On the northern side of Nagaon district there is a dead branch of the river called 'Lāli'. Probably the capital of the 'Hillāli' Kingdom was on the north western side of present Nagaon district.

Due to the invasions of Kamrup and Kamata kings, the people of 'Hillāli' fled away to the southern hilly tracts. They established villages near the foothills extending upto Kandali, Bamuni and Kathiatali. Thus Laopani, Jokkata, Amsi, Singimari, Sahari lying on both sides of the Kapili were the original traditional Lalung villages. A section of the Lalungs proceeded towards Rangkhoi, Langkoi, Amsi, Marjong lying on the boundary of the Jayantia hills. During Kachari rule these Lalungs were compelled to leave their villages. They proceeded towards Gobha, Dimaria, Khapleng khunchi of Jayantia hills and Nelli, Khola, Ouguri, Sonaikuchi and Bali-kuchi under Nagaon district. Later on they came back to the foothills of western Nagaon district extending upto Laopani and Jokkata. As the Lalungs preferred to live in the secluded foothill areas, the contemporary Ahom officials called them as 'Dāntiyolia'.

There is no definite clue as to the migration of the Lalungs from 'Joytā Khairām' or Jayantia hills. As mentioned in the previous para, a large section of the Lalungs took refuge under the Jayantia king and in this way they had to obey the orders of the Jayantia king. The History of Assam is replete with innumerable battles between the Jayantias and the Ahoms. During the reign of the Ahom king Rudra Singha, Ram Singh, the valient Jayantia king, was defeated by the Ahom general. King Rudra Singha passed an order in 1708 to produce the two captives viz Tamradhwaj (Kachari king) and Ram Singh (Jayantia king) before him. "Ram Singh succumbed to an

attack of dysentery. His son who was also a captive gave two of his sisters in marriage to the Ahom king³”. Rudra Singha prepared for an attack of the Mohammedans and proceeded in person to Gauhati. “The Kachari and Jayantia ‘Rājās’ joined his army with 14,000 and 10,000 followers⁴”.

The reference to Rudra Singha’s invasion of Jayantia kingdom and the proposed attack on the Mohammedans is drawn here to show that the Lalungs did not leave the Jayantia kingdom till 1714 A.D. The elderly Lalungs tell us that their forefathers were fleeing out of the Jayantia kingdom because the Jayantia king was utilising the Lalungs as soldiers for the Ahom army and it is on record that the Jayantia king had supplied king Rudra Singha with 14,000 soldiers (E.A. Gait) in his proposed attack on the Mohammedans. The Lalungs thus arrived plains bordering Gobha. After arriving on the plains they sacrificed one water gourd (‘Komorā’) symbolising their cutting off the relation with the Jayantias for all time to come. Since then the place came to be known as ‘Komorākātā’. It is within the jurisdiction of the Jayantias. Even today the members of a particular clan among the Lalungs do not eat this vegetable.

Another legend describes them as originally inhabiting the Jayantia hills who moved into the plains of Nagaon district (Khagarijan) because they disliked matriarchal and matrilineal systems and the human sacrifice of the Jayantias. The Lalungs were forced to offer one person every year for the sacrifice before the goddess. Many Lalung families left the Jayantia kingdom out of fear of losing the only son. When the annual puja approached many Lalung families moved out of Jayantia. Oftentimes a lonely traveller inside a jungle path was encountered by the king’s men who enquired

3. Gait, E.A.—A history of Assam, 1963 P. 185.

4. Ibid P. 185.

whether he was ‘Bangkuā’ (alone) or ‘Sikiā’ (with company). The king’s men did not spare a ‘Bangkuā.’

As regards acceptance of matriliney and Jayantia social system, the Lalungs were divided in their opinions. The two sections under the leadership of Tangara and Hura began to fight with this issue. Hura was defeated and Tangara, along with his followers fled away to the Ahom territory through Jagi. The Ahom officer Jagial Gohain sent them to Rahial Barua who established them in different areas of Nagaon. In this way five principalities (‘Paacho Rājya’) were established namely Topakuchia, Barapujia, Mikir Gōnya, Phulaguria and Khaigoria under the Raha Administrative Circle. Later on another seven principalities (‘Sāto Rājya’) were established under the Jagi Administrative Circle. They were Kumoi, Tarani, Baghara, Tetelia, Kacharigonya, Suknaggiya and Ghagua. The chiefs of these principalities were designated as ‘Powāli Rāja’ (mini kings). In return for the privilege these ‘Powāli Rājās’ paid taxes to the Ahom king which included bamboo shoots, Kite, ‘Kanua’, Sāl fish sheeds of the month of Fagun etc. They also assisted the Ahom king with soldiers at the time of war.

Gobha :

Although there is no clear cut date about the migration of the Lalungs to the plains of Assam yet it can be assumed that they had migrated to the plains sometime in the middle of seventeenth century A.D. “In 1658 Promota Rai rebelled against his grandfather Jasa Manta Rai, ‘Rājā’ of Jayantia and called on the tributary chief of Gobha to help him. The latter refused and Promata Rai thereupon destroyed four of his villages. He appealed for help to the Kacharis who were preparing to come to his assistance when the local Ahom officials intervened and said that, as the Ahoms were the paramount power, it was they whose protection should be sought. The Gobha chief accordingly went with seven hundred men to Jayadhvaj Singha and begged for help. Orders were issued to

the Borphukan to establish him in Khagarijan corresponding more or less to modern Nagaon and this was accordingly done.;

The process of migration thus started along with this incident and later on batches after batches of Lalungs began to enter the plains of Assam due to various socio-religious as well as political reasons.

Grierson, also did not mention about the date of migration of the Lalungs to Nagaon. "How the Lalungs came to their present site or when is not known. They are not mentioned by the Ahom Historians nor in the accounts of the Koch kingdom. In Nowgong they are said to have a tradition that they came from the Jayantia Hills while some of the Lalungs in the latter district say that their ancestors immigrated thither in the reign of the Jayantia Raja U Mon Gohain. Another account, however, says that the Lalungs claim to be the autochthones of the Jayantia Hills".

Lyall, mentions that Lalungs were living in the contiguous areas of the Mikirs. "Side by side with the Mikirs dwell in the Mikir Hills, the Rengma Nagas, (who are recent immigrants from the eastern side of the Dhansiri) in the Jamuna and Diyaung valleys, the Dimasa or Kacharis in the Jayantia Hills and along the Nowgong and Kamrup borders the Lalungs and a few settlements of Khasis".

Origin of the word Lalung :

The Karbis called those people as Lalungs who were living on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. 'Lā' means water and 'Lung' means rescued. The river Brahmaputra

5. Gait, E.A.—A History of Assam, P. 129, Reprint 1963.
6. Grierson, G.A.—Linguistic Survey of India, P. Reprint, 1967.
7. Lyall, C.J.—The Mikirs, P. 3, 1908.

rescued or gave shelter to the Bohemian people, hence they were known as Lalungs. It is said that there was a branch of the river Daiyang in the Karbi Anglong called 'Nilālung'. During the reign of the Kamata kings, the Lalungs had to leave their original habitat and established villages on the bank of the river 'Nilālung'. In course of time the people living on the banks of the river were known as Lalungs.

According to the Lalung dialect 'Libing' or 'Libung' means man. In course of time this 'Libing' or 'Libung' changed its form to Lalung.

Mythical Origin :

It is believed that Lord Siva created a god whose name was 'Lunglā Māhādeo'. 'Lung' means a stream of juice arising out of Lord Siva and 'Lā' means the formation of a living being out of that juice. The union of Lord Lunglā and Joyanti Devi (Goddess Durga) produced three daughters. From the eldest the Karbis were created while Boro Kacharis and Lalungs had their origins from the second and the youngest daughters respectively.

Another popular legend behind the word Lalung is that originally the Lalungs were ruled by the Demon king Bali who was a faithful devotee of Lord Vishnu. The king wanted that all his subjects should adhere to the royal religion. A section of the Lalungs refused to accept that religion and as a result the king's fury fell heavily upon them. As a punishment they had to bear a red imprint '(Lāl)' on their forehead and were turned out of the country. Later on those bearers of red mark on their forehead came to be known as Lalungs.

There is another mythological story behind the origin of the word Lalung. Once Lord Mahadeo was heavily intoxicated with rice beer and while He was lying unconscious in a road, a stream of saliva ('lāl') came out from the mouth of

Lord Mahadeo. The Lord created two human beings out of His saliva and they came to be known as Lalungs. (human beings created out of Lord's 'Lāl').

A similar story with some slight variation is also prevalent among the Lalungs. Once upon a time Lord Mahadeo and His consort Parvati were enjoying the scenic beauty of the Manassarowar lake. The soothing beauty of the lake area enchanted the Lord so much that He soon fell asleep on the bank of the lake. As He woke up He saw five drops of saliva at the place where He was resting. The Lord created five human beings out of the five drops of saliva. As these five human beings were created out of the divine saliva, they came to be known as Lalungs. These five original Lalungs had the unique privilege of seeing the creator in the form of human being and therefore the Lalungs call Lord Mahadeo as 'Manus Mahadeo'.

Origin of the word 'Tiwā' :

The Lalungs prefer to call themselves as 'Tiwā'. The name Lalung, they opine, was given by non Lalungs. 'Ti' means water and 'Wā' means superior. As the Lalungs landed on the plains following the course of the river Brahmaputra, they introduced themselves as 'Tiwā' to the inquisitive non 'Tiwās'.

A legend prevalent among certain section of the Lalungs of Nagaon reveals a different meaning of 'Tiwā'. According to the legend 'Ti' means water and 'Wā' means pig. The Lalungs believe that originally the earth was lying under a vast sheet of water. Then God appeared in the form of a pig and lifted the earth from that expanse of water. The Lalungs believe themselves to be descendants of pig in the shape of almighty God. But the general opinion among the Lalungs is that this legendary origin has no basis as they kill pigs and eat pork in their socio-religious ceremonies.

Probably 'Tiwā' derives its origin to the term 'Tibbatīā' meaning people hailing from Tibet. In course of time this

'Tibbatīā' might have changed into 'Tiwā'. It is believed that in ancient times the three great divisions of the Bodos namely 'Tifrā', 'Tiwā', and 'Dimāsā' lived along the banks of a lake near Tibet. In course of time they entered Assam through the north east passes. The local people could not pronounce 'Tifrā' and thus in their tongue 'Tifrā' became 'Tipperā'. 'Tiwās' introduced themselves as 'Tiwā Libing' or 'Tiwā, Libung'. In their case the prefix 'Tiwā' was eliminated and in place of 'Libing' or 'Libung', 'Lalung' came to be used. The Dimāsā got suffix to its original name and it came to be known as Dimasa Kachari. Traditionally 'Tipperās', Lalungs and Dimāsā Kacharis have close affinities. The 'Tipperās' use 'Ti' for water and 'Frā' for father. The Lalungs too use 'Frā' for father. The Lalungs of Nagaon district address their lord as 'Fā Māhādeo'. Again both the Lalungs and the Kacharis worship Lord Siva as their supreme god. The synonyms for rice and water in their respective languages are 'Māi' and 'Di' or 'Ti'.

The Lalungs belong to the great Bodo race into which tribes like Boro Kachari, Chutia, Deori, Rabha, Mech, Tipperā, 'Tifrā', Garo etc. are included. "The Kacharis are believed to be very closely allied to the Koches and also so far at least as language is concerned to the Chutias, Lalungs, Morans of the Brahmaputra valley and to the Garos and Tipperas of the southern hills". Endle in his ethnography on 'The Kacharis' has claimed the following tribes of Assam within the fold of the great Bodo race. They are Rabha, Mech, Dimal, Koch, Solanimiyas, Mahaliyas, Phulgurias, Saranias, Dimasas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos and Hajongs.

They are medium statured, strong built and generally white complexioned people which are the characteristic features of the Mongoloids. They have flat nose, straight hair, wide faces with scanty beards and moustaches.

8. Bhuyan, S. K.—Kachari Buranji, P XVI, 1951, Gauhati.

CHAPTER-II

Land And The People

Setting :

Lalung concentrations are mainly found in the district of Nagaon in Central Assam. They are spread in Kapili, Mayang, Bhurbandha, Kathiatali and Kampur Development Block areas of Nagaon district and the Nartiang 'Elaka' of Jowai Sub-Division of Jaintia district of Meghalaya. Besides, there are a few Lalung villages in Dhemaji areas of Dhemaji Sub-Division of Lakhimpur district, Titabar areas of Jorhat Sub-Division of Sibsagar district, Sonapur areas of Guwahati Sub-Division of Kamrup district. While the Lalung villages of Nagaon, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts are established in the plains areas, the Lalung villages of Nartiang 'Elaka' (now within Mikir Hills) are situated either in the hilly areas or in the foothills. Thus we find Lalung villages in Mukodo, Archon, Silaguri, Kromkhunji, Khumraikhura, Khrai-khokhunji, Khuntuba, Palikhunji, Deori (Rankhadeori), Tharakhunji, Komnasal, Bormani, Amnisa, Chamaguri, Milan-khare, Khork, Muro, Suraimsai, Khonkhanglangkhunji, Chitem-khare, Sopengkhonekha, Umlartap, Hadao, Umbarman, Khonemkha, Mobai, Sunkum, Umkasi, Pongrakhunji, Kamhaguri, Kathalaikhunji, Mukaguri, Uthangkhunji, Singlangkhunji, Khianbat, Amboda, Ronkhoisa, Punbakhunji, Nartalsa, Morjikhunji, Daborgat and in Kaoliya.

It is to be noted that the topography and ecology of the plains and hills have influenced the Lalungs considerably, so much so that certain aspects of socio-cultural life of the

hill Lalungs became distinct from that of the plains Lalungs. Thus food habits, dress, pattern of houses, agricultural pattern of the hill Lalungs are different from those of plains Lalungs.

The Lalung villages of Nagaon and other plains districts are not exclusive areas. They are interspersed with non-Lalung villages. These can be approached easily by a well organised road communication. In Nagaon district most of the Lalung Villages are connected by P.W.D. roads. Buses ply over these roads from the District Head quarters of Nagaon and Sub-Divisional Head quarter of Marigaon. But there are Lalung villages which are far away from the bus point. The people of these villages depend upon bicycles and bullock-carts. Bullock-carts are used not only for carrying cowdung, seedlings etc. to the paddy fields, but are used occasionally as means of transport in the rural areas.

Market :

Marketing facilities are available in the local hats. These hats are connected with the P.W.D. roads and thus traders from nearby towns visit these hats. Those who grow paddy and other crops in larger quantities, sell their products to the non Lalung middlemen inside the village itself, although the villagers know that the lion's share of the profits has been taken by these traders. Small growers carry their produce either on shoulder loads or on bicycles to the market.

Shops :

There are village shops in almost all the Lalung villages. Articles of day to day use like kerosine oil, salt, match box, soap, bidi, gur, cheaper variety cigarettes, slate pencils, lead pencils etc. are kept in these shops. Besides, the Gaon Panchayat Samabai Samities serve the villages with controlled cloths, levy sugar, salt etc. at subsidised rates. Generally these shops are owned by the local Lalung villagers.

Schools :

Almost every Lalung village has L.P. School, where the medium of education is Assamese. Students aspiring for high school education have to go to the nearest H.E. Schools which are situated within easy reach of the villagers. Colleges are established at district or sub divisional headquarters and willing students have to read in these institutions by staying in hostels or in messes.

Health :

Dispensaries or health centres are situated at the growth centres. Sometimes the distance between the dispensaries and the Lalung villages is more than 8 Kms. But there are dispensaries (Example, Barapujia State Dispensary) which are situated in the heart of the Lalung villages. Dependence on M.B.B.S. doctors is increasing particularly in the case of deliveries.

Post Office :

There are sub post offices in or near the Lalung villages. Generally these post offices are located in the growth centres or near the weekly hat. These are mostly manned by the local educated young men.

Drinking Water :

The Lalungs are not riverine people and they have to depend upon cutcha wells for their water supply. Almost every household possesses a cutcha well. The Gaon Panchayat authorities and the Development Blocks have dug a few pucca wells. Tube wells were also sanctioned but due to absence of follow up action, most of the tube wells were lying useless. The hill Lalungs get good water from the springs.

Paddy Fields :

Paddy fields are located on the outskirts of the village. Sometimes the village is surrounded by paddy fields. There

are arecanut and coconut trees inside the campus of many households. Forests worth the name are not seen in many villages. But most of the households possess bamboos which are essential items for the construction of their houses.

'Thānghar', Nāmghar, 'Barghar' :

The 'Thānghar' is situated on the jungles. But there are Nāmghars in most of the villages which are situated in a central place of the village. Every traditional Lalung village possesses a 'Barghar' which is also constructed near the residential houses.

Population, Literacy :

As per 1961 census the total Lalung population was 61315. The figure rose to 95609 in 1971 census. Thus the decennial growth rate among the Lalungs during 1961-71 is 36% against the all Assam scheduled tribes growth rate of 40.98%. The total tribal population of Nagaon district as per 1961 census was 87538 and out of that Lalungs alone constituted 63%. Similarly in the census of 1971 out of a total tribal population of 125115 in the Nagaon district 95609 ie. 76.4% returned as Lalung. Their percentage to total scheduled tribes population of Assam is 7.11. Thus it is seen that bulk of the Lalungs concentrate in the Nagaon district. In 1891, Dr. Grierson (Linguistic Survey of India) found 40,000 Lalung language speakers in Assam but the figure came down to 10576 in 1961 census. Again the figure further came down to 9954 as per 1971 census. The All India figure is 10,650.

The reason for this variation in the decades is probably conversion of Lalungs into Koch. Further the assimilative process accelerated the acceptance of Assamese Language by the women folk. It may be mentioned here that while maintaining their distinctive tribal culture the Lalungs are trying to assimilate with the Assamese language and culture.

The percentage of literacy among the tribals of Assam as per 1971 census is 26.03 (male 34.62% and female 17.16%) against the all India figure of 17.63% for male tribal and 4.85% for female tribals. The percentage of literacy among the Lalungs as per 1971 census is 21.5 (male 31.5% & female 11.26%.)

Daily Life :

The Lalungs have got an action packed routine of work. During the agricultural season none, with the exception of very old persons, invalids and children remain idle in their houses. All men leave bed before sunrise and start for the fields after finishing the morning work. Ploughing the fields till midday (around 10 or 11 a.m.) they release the bullocks and return home. After taking bath they take meals and remaining part of the day they engage themselves in other jobs related to agriculture. Very few persons go to the fields.

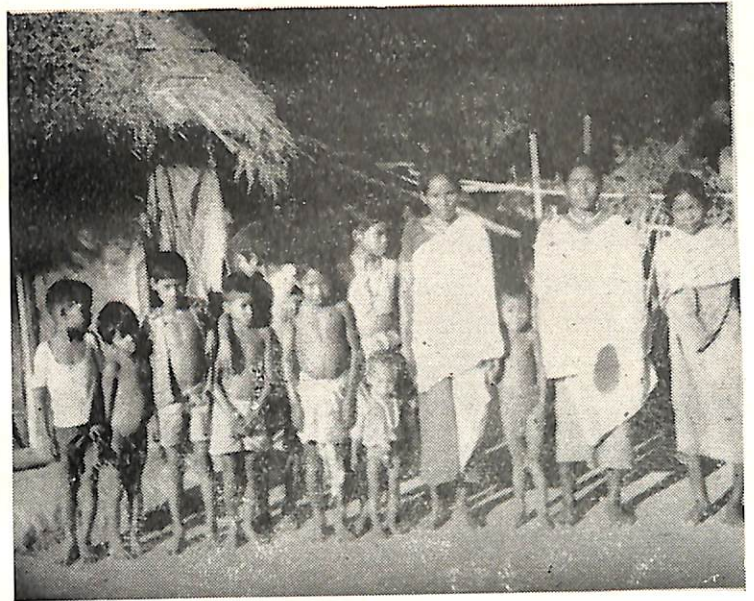
The women also leave their beds before sunrise. They clean their face and serve the members of the household with tea or ricebeer (Now a days ricebeer is rarely taken as substitute of tea). The cooking of meals is completed before noon. Children and School going boys and girls take their shares earlier and the women wait for their men to return from the fields. In the meantime they do other household activities. Sometimes, particularly during summer season, they take their bath early in the morning but generally they do it after finishing their daily morning duties. The women take meals only after serving the menfolk. After taking meals, they clean the utensils and bring water for evening meal. Now they have some leisure which they utilise by weaving clothes. Sometimes they engage themselves in dehusking paddies and collecting firewood, roots and creepers from the forest. On weekly market days the menfolk go to the weekly market for purchasing the weekly requirements like gur, kerosine oil, salt, yarn, cheaper varieties of dress materials etc. Some



Tiwa girl in her traditional dress.



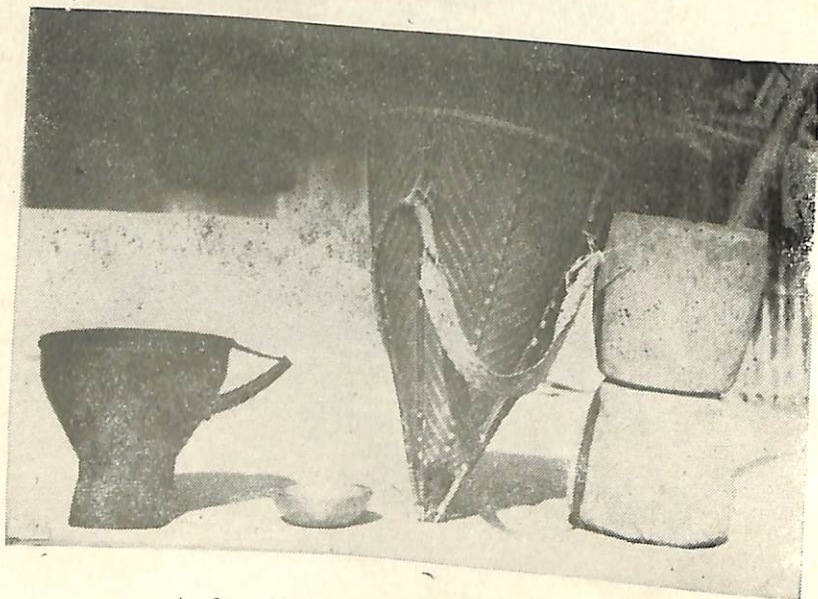
An old Tiwa woman.



Poverty writ large on the Tiwa children and women.



The 'Sāma:di' (a youth dormitory).



A few items of household articles.

people carry the local products such as bananas, pumpkin, arecanut, coconut, fowls and pigeons to the market. Very few women visit the weekly hats.

In the evening the women members of each family prepare the evening meals and serve the same to the members. Previously they cooked meals in the afternoon and the members of a family took their night meals before dusk. This was done in order to save kerosine oil. But today except the very poor ones, majority of the Lalungs take evening meals after sunset. Sometimes finishing their supper some elderly neighbours gather in an old man's house for some discussions. Such discussions often continue till the depth of the night. The discussions are generally held in the winter season when the people have no work in the fields and when they can spare much time at night.

During the harvesting season both men and women go to the fields after finishing their morning meals. The women start earlier than the men. The little children are kept in the house under the supervision of the old men and women. Reaping is done by the women folk and males carry the bundles of paddy to their houses. Threshing is done by the males.

After the completion of the harvesting operation and allied activities like threshing and storing, the people feel great relief. Now they have enough leisure at their disposal. It is the time for holding most of their socio-religious ceremonies. Some people pay visit to their distant relatives while others remain busy in repairing their houses or carrying cowdung to the fields. Marriages are contracted and solemnised during this off season period.

The children below the age of 5 stay with their grand father or grandmother while their parents go to the fields. Children above the age of 5 upto 10 years look after their younger brothers and sisters till the time of their going to school. On sundays and holidays they play with their younger

brothers and sisters. Sometimes they read their lessons in the morning and then the grand parents look after the small children. During ploughing and transplanting season i.e. June to August, children carry the tiffin and tea for their fathers or brothers who are working in the fields since dawn.

There is not much activities in the daily life of the old persons above the age of 60. Besides taking care of the children below 5 years, they do some minor works like repairing a basket, slicing a cane, cutting firewood which are stacked in the courtyard, or scaring away the birds from the paddies which are kept in the sunrays for drying. At noon they take bath and after finishing the lunch take rest till afternoon. In the afternoon they visit their neighbour's house and spend the time in gossiping. The old women do not go to the fields. In the morning after taking light tiffin they do some minor works in the kitchen garden. Sometimes they weave clothes and at other times go to the forests to collect firewood, creepers etc. Generally they stay at home for the remaining period of the day helping their daughter-in-law in the preparation of meals or making necessary arrangement for the evening meals.

There is no specific routine activities for the religious heads or office bearers. Their daily routine does not vary from that of other fellow villagers.

Sanitation :

Formerly there was no special place earmarked for sanitary purposes. But of late pit latrine system is in vogue among the Lalungs. But there are some people who respond to the calls of nature in the jungles or in uncultivated lands. It is observed that the Lalungs have the reasonable sense of hygiene. Sufficient stress is given on cleanliness of the surroundings of the house as well as body and clothings.

Greetings :

No greeting is extended when a villager meets a co-villager. Old men and men of status are generally respected and whenever they pay visit to a co-villager's house, the host shows respect by standing from his seat. The traditional king (Rājā) gets no special honour in the daily walk of life. He cannot be distinguished from any other villager. But in occasions like 'Jon Bilā Melā' the 'Rājā' gets due honour. Only in such occasions the 'Rājā' wears his traditional 'King's dress and ornaments.

The Lalungs are very polite to their own people as well as to the strangers. Whoever visits a Lalung village he is received with all humility. They are never curt and the inquiries of all are attended with interest. The people possess high sense of decorum and decency. The womenfolk do not wear or discard off clothes in the presence of male persons. The elderly women keep the portion between the neck and breast bare while at house but when any stranger appears they cover the portion either with a 'Gāmosha' (Assamese towel) or a chadar.

In the socio-religious ceremonies a high standard of decency is maintained, in the sense that there is no noise and haphazard arrangements. Rice beer is consumed in such occasions, yet outsiders will be impressed at their behaviour. They maintain the serene atmosphere befitting a religious function.

The Lalungs have a good sense of etiquette. If any guest comes at mealtime he is requested to share the hospitality by accepting food. The non Lalung guests are also offered food. There is no separate house for the guest.

Training of Children :

There is no institutional training of the children regarding their social behaviour. In fact segregation of the sexes affects

the early training of children. Girls follow their mothers, sisters and other female relatives and boys their fathers, brothers and other male relatives. But inspite of this natural arrangement of training, no water tight compartment is made between the sexes. Both boys and girls, men and women and children of all ages participate in economic, religious and other ceremonial activities without any separatist feeling between the sexes.

Generally the children receive necessary guidance from their parents in respect of food and bodily habits. The children are taught about do's and don'ts. When the children grow up they are given the training in the occupation and traditions of the society. It may be noted that these trainings do not imply any formal training. In their day to day life the children naturally follow the activities of their parents. Now-a-days L. P. Schools have been established in almost all the Lalung villages and formal education is imparted to the children. Before Independence, however, there were very few L. P. Schools and the Lalungs did not have much of formal education. In those days the 'Sāmādis' (bachelors' dormitory) played the role of training institutions. Today, however, there are 'Sāmādis' in a few Lalung villages but no stress on training of the youths is given.

CHAPTER III

Material Culture

"Culture stands for a total way of life which secures for an individual the satisfaction of his bio-psychic drives and the fulfilment of other wants and cravings and ultimately invests him with freedom." Some scholars use 'Kristi' or 'Sanskriti' as synonym of culture. But this is a partial approach to the study of culture of a particular community what is commonly known as culture trait or pattern study. Because whenever we use the term culture in the context of a certain community, we generally forget about the totality. Therefore like the functionalists we are inclined to take a holistic view of culture. "Culture is a total way of life and the instruments mental social and material of which this way is constituted."¹⁰ A society's culture may be studied in its entirety. Tylor therefore, defines culture as a social heritage. "Culture stands for the beliefs, ideas, customs, laws, morals, arts and other capabilities and skills acquired by man as a member of society."¹¹

In this chapter material culture of the Lalungs as found today is described. While dealing with their material culture my attention is concentrated on their food and agriculture, house, dress and ornaments, industry, art and skill etc..

9. Malinowski, B.—A Scientific Theory of Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 1944, Chapter—IV.
10. Majumder, D. N. & Madan, T. N.—An Introduction to Social Anthropology, Lucknow University, 1956, Chapter—II.
11. Tylor, E.B.—Primitive Culture, London, Vol.—II, 1913.

Food :

Rice is the staple food of the Lalungs. Their two major meals consist of rice and vegetables. Meat, fish and eggs are included in their menu. Dal is rarely taken. Fowl and pork are their delicacies. Guests are entertained with chicken or duck's flesh. As pork and chicken are essential items in their socio religious ceremonies, pigs and fowls are reared by almost all the Lalungs. Milk is not considered as an item of food. This is because milk and rice beer ('Zu') do not go together. The Lalungs take locally brewed rice beer in their day to day life. But of late rice beer habit is fast disappearing among the plains Lalungs mainly due to economic reason. But rice beer is an essential item in certain religious ceremonies. The educated section of the Lalungs discourage the rice beer consumption and they take tea as beverage. Now a days guests are not entertained with 'Zu' rather betel leaves and nuts and a cup of tea are the first items of reception of casual guests. Previously, at least till the fifties of this century, a visitor to a Lalung village had to taste 'Zu' (rice beer) as the refusal of 'Zu' was considered as disrespect to the host and the community.

Along with rice, boiled vegetables are taken. But Lalungs are not very keen to produce vegetables of various kinds.

They use variety of articles for preparation, consumption and storing of food. Big earthen pots are used for carrying and storing of water. Earthen pots are also used for the preparation of 'Zu'. Bell-metal utensils are used for taking meals and 'Zu'.

The food habit of the converted Lalungs is different in the sense that they do not take 'Zu' and 'pork'.

The hill Lalungs have their own delicacies. 'Kharisā' (a mixture prepared out of bamboo shoots) and dried fish are the favourite items of food. They use 'Kharisā' in any kind of preparation. 'Zu' is freely taken by them. The older

generation cooked food in bamboo pipes and they relished such food most.

Agriculture :

Many scholars opine that the ancestors of the Austric people introduced paddy cultivation in Assam. The Kirata influence is noticed in the entire agricultural operations of the plains including the methods of agriculture. It is well known that the tribals on the north eastern region particularly those living in the hills practised 'Jhum' system of cultivation. Even today 'Jhum' cultivation is practised by the tribals living in the hilly areas. As mentioned earlier the Lalungs were living in the Jayantia kingdom for a considerable period of time and they adopted the 'Jhum' system while staying in the hills. But coming down to the plains they practised the 'Sali' paddy cultivation. 'Hā' in Bodo and Tiwa means land and 'Li' means wide. Thus, paddy grown in wide land is known as 'Hāli'. Thus 'Hāli' became 'Sali' in due course of time and today Sali paddy is the major crop among the plains Lalungs which they cultivate with all earnestness. The method adopted is settled plough cultivation. 'Ahu' and 'Bao' paddies are also grown in a limited scale. Along with 'Sali', 'Ahu' and 'Bao' paddy the Lalungs grow some quantities of sesame, matikalai, mustard, arum, turmeric, ginger, bringel and chillies etc.

There are certain beliefs in respect of paddy cultivation. The spreading of seeds should start on Monday and harvesting on Wednesday. A ceremony is observed in connection with the starting operation of Ahu paddy cultivation. On the stipulated date the head of the family invites the neighbours with their ploughs. Thus with the assistance of the neighbourers, spreading operation is completed on the auspicious date. That day the family must take special curries prepared out of gourd, plum, chicken and banana shoots (Pachalā). 'Zu' forms an essential item on this occasion.

'Dhānar Muthi Lowā' :

The families among whom the 'Barghar' of the 'Bangsha' is established, have to observe certain customary rules regarding sowing and harvesting operation. They observe one festival at the time of sowing what is known as 'Dhānar Muthi Lowā'. The 'Gharburā' and the 'Hāri Kunwari' cleans the house early in the morning. Some rice powder and leaves of 'Banmalā' tree are soaked in a bowl near the 'Thunā Khutā' of the 'Barghar'. Then the 'Gharbura' takes a small chicken and prays to Lord. The bird is sacrificed over the mixture of rice powder, 'Banmalā' and water. The blood is smeared in the 'Thunā Khutā.' The 'Gharbura' takes the seeds kept near the 'Thunā Khutā' and proceeds to the field where he spreads those in the field at first with left hand and then with right hand. The other villagers are also invited to the field who plough the fields.

It may be mentioned that this ceremony is used to designate one as 'Borzela'. A few elderly persons wrap some balls of earth in a cloth and hang it on the shoulders of the prospective 'Bor Zela'. His hands are tied on the back and he is required to proceed to the house that has arranged the ceremony. He comes to the 'Barghar' and sits on the eaves till the members of the family receive him with due honour. He is honoured with a chicken and a pot of 'Zu'. At noon a feast is arranged. At the time of eating mixture of 'Banmalā' leaves, water and rice powder is sprinkled over the persons. It is believed that the mixture is the boon given by Goddess 'Lakshmi'.

'Narā Sigā Khowā' :

On the last day of harvesting the relatives and neighbours also assist the individual households. On the very day or after one month (according to the convenience) a feast is arranged where the villagers, who took part in the harvesting, are invited. 'Zu' is also arranged. This is called 'Narā Sigā Khowā'. People possessing more than 15 bighas of agricultural

land seek the assistance of 'Hauri' (a traditional cooperative organisation).

The Lalungs begin their agricultural operation in the month of April when the preliminary ploughing is done. Before that they apply manure in the fields in the months of February and March. It may be noted that majority of the Lalungs depend upon local cowdung manure and there are very few persons who apply chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Thus the Lalungs have their own indigenous method of manuring their land. This manure is composed of cowdung stored in a pit near the cowshed which is carried to the fields in bullock carts or in shoulder load baskets. In the field the manure is kept in small heaps. The early monsoon in April/May distributes this manure throughout the field.

The first ploughing makes the furrows in the fields. This is essential because unless the earth is furrowed and the roots of the last year's harvested paddy are turned up before the onset of summer, the earth becomes very hard for subsequent ploughing. The second ploughing is done in the later part of the month of May. In the meantime a site is selected for the seedbed. By that time rainy season has already started. Side by side with the second ploughing of the fields the seedbed is made ready for sowing. Generally sowing is done in the month of June. For sowing, an auspicious date is selected in consultation with astrological book. Before that date the seeds are taken out from the store house and processed in water. The seeds are carried to the seedbed on the auspicious date by the head man of the family and are distributed. A scarecrow is fixed in the centre of the seedbed in order to scare away the birds.

Ploughing of the plots are continued for the months of June and July. Thus regular plots are ploughed thrice with interval of 10/20 days between each ploughing. The plots are ready to receive the seedlings and transplanting starts in the later part of July and continues till September.

The crops begin to ripe between the months of November and December and the villagers are busy in harvesting the paddy during these months. Harvesting is done by both the sexes. The operation is started on an auspicious date and the first bundle is carried home on the same day. The first crop i.e. 'Lakhimi' is welcome in the home with a song called 'Ahoi Lāwā'. The paddy stalks are cut with sickles and bunches are made which are left in the fields for several days to dry in the sun. A few days later the menfolk make big bundles out of these bundles and carry those to their granaries on shoulders or on bullock carts.

'Hāuri', 'Māi Rāwā', Māi Misāwā'

By the middle of December the harvested paddy is collected. Those families which possess more than 20 bighas (about 7 acres) of agricultural land seek the help of the entire village community, a system known as 'Hāuri'. The villagers cut the stalks of paddy along with the rhythmical songs. This is called 'Māi Rāwā'. The community harvesting is always associated with dance and merriment. The young people carry the paddy bundles by singing 'Māi Misāwā' songs.

Separation of the grains from the stalks is performed by two methods. The one and the most popular method is with the help of bullocks. Some big bundles of paddies are spread in the courtyard and two or four bullocks are allowed to make rounds over it. When the bullocks make hundreds of rounds extending over two or three hours, the grains are separated from the stalks. The menfolk remove the stalks and gather the grains, while the womenfolk remove the chaff with the help of winnowing fan.

'Māi Pathalā'

The second method is easier which is generally performed by the young people. A group of young men dance over

the paddies spread in the courtyard with the rhythmical tunes of 'Khram' and songs. This is called 'Māi Pathalā'. The storing operation continues till February.

Agricultural Implements :

The plough ('Nāngāl') is the most widely used agricultural implement of the Lalungs. It consists of a beam, a yoke and the body. The Yoke rests on the necks of the two bullocks. The outerend of the beam is fixed into the middle portion of the body. It is fixed there with the help of small pieces of wood. An iron share is fixed in the anterior end of the body.

They use a harrow ('Juwali') in their fields which looks like a ladder. The length of the 'Juwali' is about 1.5 metre and the breadth is about 30 centimeters. A beam is tied to its centre and the other end of the beam is tied to the centre of the yoke. The man behind the plough stands on the ladder which is pulled by the bullocks.

Other agricultural implements are spade ('kor'), 'Fāl', 'Moi', 'Jot Jari', 'Salmāri', 'Dilabāri', 'Jabakā', 'Dalimāri', 'Kānchi', 'Biriya (Bānkā) etc.

For dehusking paddy they use the 'Dheki' which is commonly used by all the rural Assamese people.

Hunting and Fishing :

Among the Lalungs the community-hunting is fast disappearing. It was reported that sometimes certain individuals indulge in secret hunting. Bow and arrow, dao and fire-arms are used for individual hunting.

Fish catching is much more popular and very frequently expedited in the winter season. The people go out for fishing individually or in groups. In group fishing the Lalungs adopt the following methods :

Bare hand method :

The villagers adopt bare hand method conveniently in the winter season when the water level of beels and drains recedes. In small pools of water they effectively apply the free hand method and grasp the fish in water blind folded. This method requires alertness and practice.

By Fishing Implements :

In winter season the beels and streams have scanty water. Groups of people go to a beel or stream and construct artificial barrier with mud. After that the entire group of people suddenly jump over the barricaded water and catch the fish with the help of fishing implements like 'Pala', and 'Juluki'.

During Summer season fishing nets are used for individual fish catching in the rivers. Bamboo traps are also used in the paddy fields to catch the stray fishes that emerge just after the first heavy showers. During flood season the daring Lalung youths cut fish with dao at night when the fishes are stupified with flames of torches. Fishing traps like 'chepā', 'Dingorā', 'cek', 'Dalangā', 'Pachā' are used.

Smoking :

Smoking habit among the Lalungs, particularly among the youths is gradually disappearing. The villagers smoke bidis and low priced cigarettes. Now a days young people are not seen smoking before the elders. It is learnt that the hill Lalungs were addicted to opium eating but the habit is no longer followed with traditional seriousness. "A good number of them are opium eaters and the indifference and idleness caused by that drug combined with a heavy expenditure incurred on its purchase, tend to keep them poor. The story of Phulaguri riot, when cultivation of opium was prohibited

in 1861, is very famous'¹². That the Lalungs were addicted to opium was testified in the report of the Census of India, 1961. "The great vice of the Lalungs is opium eating in which they are addicted more than any tribe in the province except perhaps the Mikirs. It was this tribe that rioted at Phulaguri in Nowgong less than thirty years ago when the home cultivation of opium was put a stop to and killed the Assistant Commissioner Lieutenant Singer who had been sent out to disperse them"¹³.

House :

The pattern of house of the Lalungs is almost similar to that of the Boro Kacharis. They construct their houses 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 two feet above the ground in order to distinguish it from other apartments or cottages. 'Chorāghar', an outhouse is constructed a few yards away from the main house where the guests are entertained and the unmarried young boys sleep at night. Now-a-days in most of the Lalung villages the 'chorāghar' is replaced by a portico or an additional house near the main house. In between 'Chorāghar' and 'Barghar' there is a 'Mājghar' which is used for sleeping purposes. The 'Mājghar' has 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. It may be mentioned that the main post of the 'Barghar' ('Thunākhutā') is planted after completion of the construction of the house. This post does not touch the beam.

12. Sinha, A.P.—The Lalung, Banyajati, Reprint, Vol.-VII, 1959.
13. Census of India, 1961, Vol.—III, Assam, Part VA, P.—61-62.

Except 'Gāmāri' wood no other variety can be used for 'Thunākhtā'. If such wood is not available, bamboo may be used. Except 'Gharburā' 'Zelā' and 'Hāri 'Kunwāri' no body should go near the 'Thunākhtā'. People belonging to Mikir (Karbi), Kachari and Koch only are allowed to enter the 'Barghar'.

The granary is constructed towards east. Those who do not possess granaries, a corner of the living room or 'Chorāghar' is used for this purpose. There may be a cowshed near the granary. The hill Lalungs prefer to store their paddies in 'Kerehi' (a big container made of barks of trees). Certain taboos are observed in connection with the granary. One must not enter the granary in the month of 'Magh' (January/February)

There is a courtyard in front of a Lalung house. It is encircled by houses with a passage on the eastern or southern direction. In small families the courtyard is in front of the house. It is used for drying paddies, threshing and such other activities.

There is no provision for windows in a traditional Lalung house. There are wooden or bamboo doors in each apartment. A verandah is constructed attached to the 'Chorāghar' or 'Mājghar' which is used for sitting purposes. The hearth inside the house is considered as sacred and entrance to this place is restricted—

Houses are constructed facing east and south. Richer persons fence their compounds with bamboo fencing. House building materials are collected from the neighbouring forests. Many families in each village possess bamboo groves.

It may be mentioned that whether it is construction of a house or harvesting the paddies, the Lalungs co-operate with one another. Thus if a villager wants to construct a house, he formally invites the youths of 'Sāmādi' to construct the house. The youths of 'Sāmādi' complete the construction in a day or two. In lieu of their service the owner of the house has to entertain the youths with 'Zu' or other tiffin.

Every clan has its 'Barghar' (place of community worship) for the clan or 'Bangsha' members. It is a hall constructed in the campus of a respectable clan member. The rules and procedure of the clan 'Barghar' is same as those prescribed for family 'Barghars'. In the 'Barghar' there is no room for the altar. Besides the 'Barghar', there is the 'Thān' which, however, is not a family or 'Bangsha' affair. The 'Thān' is constructed in an out of the way place, and there is no daily worship in all the 'Thāns'. A 'Thān' may be for the entire community e.g. Mahādeosal or Deosal. Generally C.I. sheets and wooden posts are used in the 'Thans'.

Of late 'Namghar' (public congregational hall) becomes popular among the Lalungs particularly among the converted Lalungs. There may be a 'Namghar' for a clan or for two or more clans.

Dress :

The plains Lalung women wear dresses similar to those worn by other rural Assamese women. The typical dress constitutes one 'Mekhelā', one 'chādar' and one 'Rihā'. In various festive occasions they wear 'Singkhāp Mekhelā', 'Rihā', 'Sondia Kāpor', 'Thenus' (Chadar), 'Seleng', 'Sakathiā' and 'Farke' (blouse). It may be noted that Lalung women are expert weavers and they weave all the clothes for both male and female. They also weave 'Mānkāpor' and 'Borkāpor' for special occasions. In festive occasions the ladies wear 'Thongāli' (a waist band) while doing their day to day activities. The Lalung women do not wear the 'Mekhelā' on the waist, rather the same is worn at the breast extending a few inches below the knees. It serves two purposes. There is no need of wearing a blouse to cover the breasts and at the same time the body is also covered, The school going girls and young women, however, wear blouses. The elderly women wear blouses when they visit distant places. The 'Rihā' is not regularly used while the 'chādar' is used by grown up girls and

young women. The educated womenfolk of today like to wear modern dress items like petticoat, brassiers etc. Bazar made frocks, ribbons, hair clips and cosmetics are also used by the young girls.

There are two sets of dresses namely general dress for everyday use and special dress for particular occasions.

The dresses of the menfolk are similar to those of other rural Assamese menfolk. In the past dhoties woven by the womenfolk were the major items of dresses. Now-a-days only the elderly men wear dhoties. 'Nimāi Solā' and 'Thaglā' were the shirts for the menfolk but today these are not invogue among the plains Lalungs. The young men and boys wear trousers, bush shirts, ganjies etc.

The dresses of the hill Lalungs, however, are different from those of their plains counterpart. A hill Lalung puts on a narrow strip of cloth called 'Lengti' about a half a cubit in breadth and six or seven feet in length. Some embroidery works are done with red threads about three inches in breadth, on both ends of the 'Tangāli'. The men of status keep both ends of the 'Tangāli' longer. Tangālis are woven by their womenfolk in their looms. It may be noted that wearing of 'Lengti' does not indicate the economic status of the wearer. 'Lengti' is worn as a piece of traditional dress. The male Lalungs wear a shirt prepared locally. In the lower end of the shirt there are specially designed threads called 'Dahi'. The elderly Lalungs wear turbans. Their womenfolk use a 'Mekhelā' over the breasts which extends a few inches below the knees. A 'chādar' is also used over the body.

For their warm clothes the people depend upon the market products like coat, sweater, scarf, shawl etc.. Formerly 'Khaniā kāpor' 'Bor Kāpor' were used in lieu of warm clothes, but now a days use of such clothes is very rare.

In their daily walk of life the office bearers do not wear any special dress. The 'Rājās' have their traditional dresses

which they wear on specific occasions. The dress of the 'Rājā' constitutes a 'Mugādhoti', a 'Mugā Solā' (shirt), one 'Mugā Phāguri' (turban), one cotton 'chādar', one silver necklace, two 'Gāmkhāru' (bracelets) and two ear rings ('sihā'). Besides these the 'Rājā's' dress during festivals includes two 'Lāngkoi' (sword), one Aaron, one 'Bisani', one 'Rupar Pātra', one 'Thonā' and one 'Nisān'. It was reported that in the past the headman, officers of the 'Rājā' and the 'Rājā' himself used to wear gold ear-rings. Turban was a part of dress for the 'Rājā' and the officers. On special occasions like annual festival, they wore silk and muga dresses.

Ornaments :

Scanty ornaments are used by the Lalung women more as a sign of femininity than for enhancing the effectiveness of the personal appearance of the wearer. Some elderly women wear silver, bead or stone necklaces and ear-rings. Formerly the womenfolk wore 'Gāmkhāru' (silver/gold bracelet) 'Sipatmani' (necklace), 'Gotākhāru' (bracelet) 'Senpatiā Āngathi' (a specially designed ring), but today these are not used by the womenfolk. The menfolk used to wear 'sihā' (ear-ring) made of gold and silver. The school going girls wear factory made ear-rings and bracelets which are cheap. Decoration which signifies tatooing and marks on the body, is however, conspicuous by its absence among the Lalungs.

The Lalung women wear their hair long and men crop their hair short. Married women must not keep their hair in a disorderly fashion.

Weaving :

The womenfolk are experts in weaving and almost every household possesses one loom. Knowledge of weaving is considered as a qualification for the bride and the women feel ashamed of if they donot know the art of weaving. They also know the methods and ingredients of indigenous

dyeing. 'Dhotis,' 'phāle' (towel used as head dress), 'Pāni Gāmoshā' (ordinary towel for day to day use), 'Rihās', 'Mekhelās', 'Chādars' etc. are woven by the ladies in their looms. In order to get superfine threads the ladies use the tooth of 'Barāli' fish in the wheel ('Jatar').

Arts and Crafts :

The Lalungs can express their artistic tendencies in their textile designs, which the womenfolk themselves weave. Both floral and geometrical designs are popular among them. They are also experts in bamboo and cane works. Cane baskets of various designs are widely used by the womenfolk. Therefore while making baskets and such other items, emphasis is laid more on durability than on delicacy and art. Bamboo and cane products like 'Japā' (a suitcase), 'Perā' (a big suitcase), 'Petāri' (a small suitcase), 'Sarāi', 'batā' (wooden plates with stand) are the specialities of the menfolk. They also make canoes, spinning wheel out of wood pieces. In 'Barat' and 'Sagrā Misāwā' festivals the people use varieties of masks made of bamboo slices and cloths. Carvings of animals and birds are seen in the entrance beam of the 'Sāmādi'. Besides they carve beautiful elephant designs in combs which are used in 'Sagrā Misāwā' festival. 'Kākoī phani' (a comb) is carved out of wood or bamboo pieces.

Wood carving is not done as a profession nor there is a set of people called wood carvers.

Weapons :

In the olden days the Lalungs might have excelled in blacksmithy. There are enough traces of Lalung blacksmithy in Kamarkuchi, a village near Jagiroad. Cannons and swords were made in this village for the 'Rājās'. While collecting museum specimen for the Assam Tribal Research Institute,

museum, I myself had seen several cannons in the Namghar of Gobha 'Rājā'. The Rājā showed me traditional pieces of guns and swords which are worshipped regularly. Shri Sarbananda Rajkumar informs that there are three cannons, four guns and two swords in the custody of the princess of Kamarkuchi.¹⁴

Stone and Metal works :

The Lalung specimens of stone and metal works which are displayed in various places inside the Lalung villages reveal their past glorious skill. Sonaikuchi, as the name indicates is the village where gold ornaments were made. The stone ladder and 'Sita's loom at Sita Jakhala about 2 kms. north of Gobha, the Silpukhuri (Stone tank), lying at one mile west of Sita Jakhala, stone idols of gods and goddesses at Gobha 'Rājā's' residence, the stone idol of 'Bāola Konwar' at Amsoi provide ample proof of Lalung's proud heritage.

Musical Instruments :

The Lalungs are lovers of music and dance. They observe innumerable religious ceremonies throughout the year and musical instruments are essential in these ceremonies. Musical instruments which are used for religious occasions are kept in the 'Sāmādi'. There are three varieties of 'Khrāms' (drum) viz., 'Khrāmbār, (big drum), 'Pisukhrām' (small drum) and 'Khrām' of general size. Flutes made of bamboos are used along with drums which are also kept at the 'Sāmādi'. 'Kāli' (pipe) 'Tandrang' (violin) 'Thogāri' (string instrument) are other musical instruments.

14. Rajkumar, Sarbananda—Lalung—Ringchang, Vol-I, 1972.

CHAPTER-IV

Individual Life Cycle

The chapter deals with the major events of the life of a Lalung. Beginning from birth till death a person has to cross through multifarious socio-religious occasions which have far reaching implications in his total way of life. The chapter begins with birth and the name giving ceremony. Under the sub head marriage, details have been incorporated in respect of formal and informal marriage and the change over from matrilocal to patrilocal system. Widow remarriage and bride price have also been dealt with. The last part of the chapter deals with the causes of death and disposal of the dead bodies and the purification ceremonies.

Birth :

When the expectant mother expresses her labour pain, the husband of the woman invites two or three female helpers from the village. In the plains areas the expert midwife is called as 'Ojāni' while in the hills she is called 'Giyāti'. After the birth the 'Ojāni' or 'Giyāti' cuts the umbilical cord with a very thin bamboo slice. Generally such bamboo slice is taken from the bamboo post in which the mother of the new born baby takes refuge. If, however, there is no bamboo post the slice may be taken from any bamboo. But iron blades or knives are never used for this purpose. After the birth the mother takes rest in a bed made of dry paddy stalks known as 'Suti'. There are certain

taboos which the mother of the new born baby must adhere to. For example if she rises placing her weight on hand over the earth she is supposed to suffer from abdominal disorder which the plains Lalungs call 'Adālā' Kāmora'. If the mother falls on the earth while delivering the baby, she may suffer from diseases known as 'Prosuti Rog' (women's disease). If the baby is senseless then in order to regain senses, bellmetal plate or bowl is beaten. The new born baby is laid in a banana leaf and mother washes him or her with tepid water.

The umbilical cord is placed in a deep pit dug at a considerable distance from the house where the delivery took place. It is believed that if the umbilical cord is placed at a considerable distance, then the mother's child bearing capacity increases.

If the mother suffers from any serious post natal problems, the husband or any close relative may enter the room where the delivery takes place. Except these specified persons, others should not enter this room. The attending midwives ('Ojāni'/'Giyāti') donot come out unless a ceremony at the threshold is performed. The 'Zelā' takes Tulsi Leaves, 'Dubari' and rice in a pair of banana leaves and offers prayers to God and sacrifices a chicken or an egg. Only after this small ceremony the midwives come out from the room. Now-a-days this ceremony is not performed in many Lalung villages.

In order to enable the mother to recoup quickly a special curry made of chicken and arum leaves (black variety) mixed with spices is given to the mother just after the childbirth. A drop of this mixture is also placed in the mouth of the baby.

There are some taboos in respect of childbirth. Till the falling of the naval cord the mother must not sleep putting her back to the child. The 'Ojāni' or 'Giyāti' can forecast

the future health of the child by looking to the cord of the child. In order to expedite the fall of the cord the mother of the child gives the water oozing out of her hair after the bath. It is believed that mixture of earth taken from 'Udhān' (earthen conical tripod used for cooking meals) and juice of Tulsi plant expedites the fall of naval cord. If the cut mark is not dried easily then a mixture of powder taken out of the bamboo slice of a post and thatch of the roof is poured on the cut mark. The cord is preserved till the child is three or four years old. If the child suffers from stomach pain, the cord of the child is kept in some water which is given to the child. In order to avert the danger of evil spirits, a magical herb is inserted in the shell of an Endi cocoon which is placed around the neck of the child with the help of red and white threads.

'Aus Gārā' or Manshwa :

The name giving ceremony is generally observed on the following day just after the fall of the naval cord of the child. Another allied ceremony is also observed within a year along with the 'Nabānna' (offering of first boiled rice) festival.

When it is known that the naval cord the child fell, then the 'Hāri Kunwari' (please see chapter on Religion) places an altar near the threshold of the room where the mother and child take shelter. The 'Zelā' (please refer to chapter on Religion) worships the deity and sacrifices a cock. Among the hill Lalungs the number of birds sacrificed on this occasion varies. After the Puja the hair of the child is shaved. Generally this is done by the father of the child. In his absence a close relative may perform the job. In the meantime the 'Hāri Kunwari' places on altar in the courtyard where the 'Zelā' offers another prayer. The mother takes seven arrows and a bow in her hand and shoots six arrows towards six directions.

The seventh arrow is fixed in the bow and after making some fake attempts the bow is placed in the hand of the child. If the child is female, then cotton, cotton processing device known as 'Dhunā—' and a sickle are placed in her hand. Bow and arrow symbolises heroism while cotton and sickle signify efficiency in weaving and agricultural activities.

The 'Hāri Kunwari' digs out earth about four inches deep from the place where the altar is made. Near the altar she places a fold of banana leaves and draws seven vertical lines on the earth. With her middle finger she takes some earth from the middle line and with that gives 'Tilak' in the forehead, chest, both the ears, right and left shoulders of the child. This is called 'Mitikā Māti Diyā'. The 'Gharburā' then utters the following prayer :

'Aa Rām Iswar Prabhu, Kāk Tuti Karo, Ghar Jyoti, Ghar Gosāni, Aaponār Asirbādat, Suā sidra Gusāo Buli Esha Purusārtha Karilo, Sanaisware Sanigrām, Manchamān, Madāmān, Uttoralime Dakhina lime, Hātidangālime Ghorā-dangālime, Māne Kolājurāi Fāne Kolājurāi, Hāte Āboran Kari Rākhiba Lāge, Kon Rākhise Bāghrajā Rākhise Buli Nām Roba Jashroba.'

The impurity arising out of birth is known as 'Kechā Suā'. The period extends from the date of birth till the date of 'Aaus Gārā' ceremony. During this period the clan members observe certain taboos. They donot take out paddies from the granary. No ceremony can be observed during this period nor any member of the clan can enter the 'Barghar' of another clan.

Among the Hill Lalungs the name giving ceremony must be performed in the presence of the 'Zelās' of different clans. The 'Zelā' of the 'Barghar' sacrifices twelve pairs of cock in the case of a male child and six pairs of cock in the case of a female child, in the altar of the courtyard containing twenty one sheets of banana leaves. After the

sacrifice, sacrificial water (mixture of rice, Tulsi plant, Durba grass and water) is spread in the household paraphernalias. The invitees are entertained with the flesh of the sacrificed cocks. A special curry is prepared with arum leaves or banana shoots. There are atleast two 'Giyātis' from the 'Khel' who chew some peppers and taking the baby in their hands advice him to obey the parents. Then comes the name giving part. While cajoling the baby seven times a name is uttered. If the baby does not cry then that name is given to the child. If, however, the baby cries while uttering the name, then the seven times cajoling process should be repeated. At the end the participants dance along with the rhythm of 'Lāli and Hillālī'.

Among the plains Lalungs the name giving ceremony is observed after one year or so. In fact the birth ceremony is held twice i.e. after seven days as described above and after one year or so when there are one or more new born babies in the clan. This second ceremony is a community affair which is held in 'Borghar'. In plains this community purification ceremony after birth is called as 'Manshwa'. This 'Manshwa' can be observed 'Khutā' wise. Members of the same clan may have separate 'Khutās' i.e. a few households can establish a separate 'Borghar' and the families are termed as 'Khutā'. The 'Khutā' requests the clan for a 'Sajāti' (please refer to chapter on Religion) who represents the clan and manages the 'Manshwa' on behalf of the 'Khuta'.

In the early morning of the 'Manshwa' day, the 'Zelā' of the 'Borghar' offers a cock to the god on the threshold of the 'Borghar'. The 'Hāri Kunwari' cleans the courtyard of the 'Borghar' where the Zelā and 'Hātāri' (Please see chapter on Religion) prepare an altar. The families desiring to observe 'Manshwa' come with a cock. If the baby is male one then a cock is given but if the baby is female then a hen is offered. The 'Zelā' sacrifices the birds in the name of god. It

is customary in such occasions to forecast the future of the babies by observing the manner of death of the sacrificed birds. If a bird dies facing north east then it is considered as ominous.

After the sacrifice, a curry is prepared with the flesh of the birds and leaves of arum. Strong spices are used in such curries. 'Zelās' of various clans are invited for the occasion. They are entertained with 'Zu' and curry. After that the 'Manshwa' babies are taken before the altar of the 'Borghar'. The 'Hāri Kunwari' smears mustard oil over the bodies of the babies. The male child takes an embroidered 'Gāmoshā' and the female child wraps a new cloth over the body and bow before the altar. The 'Zelā' prays to God for the welfare of the children. After that the boys use the towel as turban while the girls wrap the new cloth in the neck and dance before the altar along with the rhythm of 'Lāli Hillālī'. Before that the mothers chew peppers and bless the children. The children are allowed to dance for about an hour and after that they are taken outside before the elderly people who are sitting in the courtyard. The children bow before the elders who bless them.

Then the name giving ceremony starts. The old person who made the first child dancing, is eligible to give a name to the child. The parents of the child bow before him by offering a pair of betelleaves and nuts. In this way names are given to the children. While this name giving is going on some one sings the 'Lāli Hillālī' and the children start dancing. After some time the 'Zelās' depart. The 'Sajāti' is duly honoured for his role in the ceremony.

'Tukhutiā' :

In some places a purification ceremony called 'Tukhutiā' is observed on the following day after 'Manshwa'. A mixture of rice powder and water is sprinkled over the granaries

with Banmalā leaves and with this the 'Manshwa' ceremony comes to an end.

'Marriage' :

Among the Lalungs marriage is the accepted form of union between a man and a woman. Illegal unions especially incestuous relations are very much hated and in no circumstances social recognition is given to such unions. Marriages are solemnised after the attainment of puberty. Boys usually marry between the ages of 20 to 25 and girls between 16 to 22.

Clan exogamy is strictly adhered to. Monogamy is the socially and legally recognised type of marriage although cases of polygyny cannot be ruled out. Preferential marriage including cross cousin marriage are not in vogue. Whenever any illegal union is discussed the villagers immediately refer to the 'Momāi Bhāgin Silā' lying close to each other on the bank of the China river near the Basundhari 'Thān'. They remind the people about the accursed Solā Sing and his niece who entered into illegal sexual relation. The villagers of Sahari compelled the couple to leave the village. The couple came to Basundhari 'Thān' but the goddess Basundhari also cursed them to remain as stones for their sin.

Levirate is not practised while sororate is popular. There is no bar for a widow to enter into marriage if she gets a widower. Cases of divorce between husband and wife are few and far between.

Broadly the Lalungs have four forms of marriage. They are :-

- (1) 'Borbiyā'
- (2) 'Gobhiā Rakhā'
- (3) 'Joron Biyā'
- (4) 'Paluāi Anā'

'Borbiyā' :

The well to do and educated Lalungs prefer this form of marriage which entails huge expenditure and long drawn formalities. In this type the guardians of the prospective couple take the initiative. 'Zelās' or go betweens, who are experts in the historical and legendary background of the Lalungs play important roles in such marriages. If the father of the boy comes to know about the positive attitude of the girl's parents, then on a stipulated date he, accompanied by a few elderly relatives or co-villagers, proceeds to the girl's house.

'Batā Bhagā' :

The party carries one shoulder load ('Bhār') which contains one ricebeer pot (about 5 litres) betel leaves and nuts (for seven 'Bhunis', seven 'Bats', for nine 'Bhunis', nine 'Batās'. 'Batā is a traditional plate with stand which may be of either cane, or bamboo) and one basketful of rice cakes ('Pithā'). Acceptance of this 'Bhār' by the girl's father indicates his readiness to give his daughter in marriage to the proposed groom. The girl's father asks the party to send the boy in order to see whether he is a match for his daughter.

'Soā Sui' :

On the fixed day the boy, accompanied by his friend comes to the girl's house. He brings some presents for the girl, generally a gold ring is brought. The girl appears before the boy, bows and presents him a 'Seleng Chādar' :

'Khārumani, Pindhuā Bhār' :

Now the stage is set for the formalities of a formal marriage. The father of the boy informs the girl's father about his intention to bring the 'Khāru Mani Pindhuā Bhār' on a stipulated date and if the girl's father agrees to

the proposal, then the father of the boy, accompanied by a party of oldmen and women and few young boys and girls, proceeds to the girl's house. The 'Bhār' contains one pair of 'Batā' full of betel leaves and nuts, one pot of rice beer, one shoulder load (two big baskets) of rice and two small gourds. The father of the boy carries a gold ring for the girl. The girl's father invites his co-villagers who are entertained with rice beer. The girl comes out and bows before the elders who bless them. Then her would be father-in-law gives her the ring which the girl wears in the presence of all the invitees. The boy's party leaves the place after reception.

'Bor Bhār' :

Just two or three weeks before the marriage, the boy's father visits the girl's house with a 'Bhār'. He is accompanied by a party consisting of 8/10 members. The 'Bhār' contains 5 fowls, one big basket of 'Aangulipithā' (finger shaped rice cakes), one pot of 'Zu', some betel leaves and nuts, two small gourds, two pairs of clothes, ornaments and one 'Saru Daiyā jāpi' (traditional head dress of the Assamese people.) The girl's parents invite a few villagers and entertain all the guests in a big feast. Items of the feast must include flesh of the five fowls brought from the boy's house. On this day the date for 'Khatirā Bhār' is fixed. After the feast the boy's party leaves the place.

'Khatirā Bhār' :

On this day the date of marriage is fixed, hence this 'Bhār' has much significance. A party from the proposed groom's house consisting of elderly relatives, along with the 'Zelā' proceeds to the girl's house. The party carries a big 'Bhār' consisting of one big jar of rice beer, one big basketful of rice cakes, two small gourds and some betel leaves and nuts. On this day the 'Zelā' of the girl's

village is also invited. Discussions take place between the 'Zelās' regarding the details of the marriage. At last a consensus is arrived at and a date is fixed for solemnising the marriage. Question of bride price is also discussed. Bride price ranging from Rs. 60·00 to Rs. 100·00 is also fixed on this date. It may be mentioned that the educated Lalungs donot favour the bride price system and in many cases only nominal bride price (Rs. 7·00 or Rs. 9·00) is charged. Out of the amount Rs. 1·00 is given to the village fund and the rest is given to the father of the bride.

'Biyā' :

Among the plains Lalungs the 'Biyā' continues for three days. Two days before the marriage the groom and the bride are ceremonially bathed in their respective houses. Water for this purpose is ceremonially collected from rivers or tanks. If the family belongs to the seven 'Bhuni', then water has to be collected from seven different sources. The ceremonial bathing is done on the day of marriage. 'Purna Daan' (offering of eatables to the ancestors) is performed.

Marriage ceremony is solemnised at the house of the bride at night. During the day sumptuous feasts are arranged for the villagers in both the households. 'Zu' and pork form essential items in their marriage feast.

In the evening the groom, along with his friends and the 'Zelā' proceeds to the girl's house. Formerly the groom wore a specially prepared dress which included a big 'Powāl Mani' (an indigenous bead) and 'Gām Khāru' Now-a-days no special dress is worn by the groom.

The marriage procession is preceded by a 'Garakhiā Bhār'. This 'Bhār' contains one stalk of banana (Bhim kal), one pot of milk, three pots of rice (special variety, fit for tiffin) and some betel leaves and nuts. This 'Bhār', however is not meant for the bride's parents. The young

boys accompanying the groom make a fun of it and share the contents among themselves on the way. Of course a separate 'Bhār' for the bride's family is taken, which contains one pot of milk, one pot of water and two baskets of rice. Rupees seven must be placed in this 'Bhār' which are given to the 'Khel'.

As soon as the marriage party reaches the bride's house the groom is welcome at the gate by the bride's mother. After that the groom exchanges greetings with the bride's elder brother. Then the groom is taken to a specified place inside the pandal. The elderly villagers of the bride's village sit around the groom. The bride is brought in and the bride and the groom bow down before the elders who bless them to remain as true and faithful husband and wife ('Ek Swāmi Ek Patni') for the rest of their lives. The elderly villagers of the bride's village are entertained with 'Tu Sāzu' (a specially brewed rice beer). The couple bows before them who advice them regarding the do's and don'ts of conjugal life. They also ceremonially disconnect the 'Kul', (Bangsha') of the bride which is called 'Kulsingā'. From the day the girl loses all connection with the household deity of her parents. She also forfeits her right on the parental 'Hāthām' (cremation ground meant for the members of a certain clan only). On the other hand she gets a new status in her husband's house where she is considered as a member. She gets the right of 'Hāthām' at her husband's clan. The couple is taken inside where the bride's mother entertains them with 'Pāyas' (rice cooked with milk). Some young boys and girls proceed to the groom's house along with the presents offered by the parents of the girl which includes clothes, utensils, furnitures etc. Some young girls block the way of the party. They can be pacified with rupee one and betel leaves and nuts offered in a 'Sarāi'.

Towards dawn the couple returns to the groom's house. The parents of the groom receive the couple at the entrance

of the house. In the meantime the elderly villagers gather at the house of the groom as per invitation of the father of the groom. The couple bows before them and the village elders bless them in return. The bride distributes 'Zu' to the invitees and with this the formal marriage comes to an end.

'Gobhiā Rakhā' :

At present the Lalungs particularly of the plains, are patriarchal people but a very thin link of old matriarchal system is traced in the 'Gobhiā' system of marriage which is prevalent in the society. Generally parents having a lone daughter without any male issue prefer to have a 'Gobhiā'. In this type of marriage there is not much formalities. Except the entertainment of the villagers of the girl's side with a small feast no other ceremony is necessary for such marriage. A day is announced by the girl's father and the elderly villagers are invited for a feast. After the feast the couple is taken inside the 'Borghar' of the bride's clan. The couple bows before the altar and the elderly villagers bless them to remain as 'Ek Swāmi Ek Patni' (merge their separate identities). In such marriages 'Kulsingā' may not be performed. A 'Gobhiā' can be cremated in the 'Hāthām' of his original parents if the elderly people of his parent's village so agree.

'Joron Biyā' :

For all practical purposes this is an arranged marriage minus the details of a 'Bor Biyā'. Generally persons of low income group take resort to this type of marriage. The father or the guardian of the prospective groom meets the father or guardian of the prospective bride and discusses about the marriage. When both the parties agree, a date is fixed for the 'Joron' ceremony. On the appointed date the boy's party consisting of the elderly relatives proceeds

to the girl's house. The party carries gold ornaments, and dresses for the girl along with three 'Bhārs' (two 'Borbhārs' and one 'Garakhii' bhār). 'Sāndah' (a special item of tiffin prepared out of fried rice powder), 'Anguli pithā' (finger shaped rice cakes), pots of 'Zu', curd, gur, betel leaves and nuts are the main items which must be carried in these 'Bhārs'. The boy's party offers the dresses and ornaments to the girl's father. The bride is taken out to the place where the elderly villagers are sitting. The father of the girl gives her the dresses and ornaments and asks her to accept those in presence of all as acceptance of the clothes and ornaments amounts to consent to the marriage. The girl bows before the elders who bless her. After that the girl's father entertains the villagers with rice beer. The boy's party leaves the girl's house along with the bride. With this the 'Joron Biya' comes to an end.

'Poluāi Anā Biya' :

Majority of the Lalung marriages are solemnised according to this type of marriage. There may be two reasons for such marriage. Traditionally Lalung marriages are held under this system and there is no social stigma. Besides some families try to avoid the irksome procedure of a formal marriage although they have the eagerness to solemnise formal marriages. Another reason may be the less expenditure involved in the 'Paluāi Anā' marriage. Besides love at first sight is one of the major causes for holding such marriage. The boy and the girl decide this course as they are not sure whether their parents will agree to the marriage.

The socio-religious occasions which are innumerable among them provide ample scope to the young boys and girls to develop love at first sight. If the boy finds it impossible to get his sweet heart through a formal wedding, then one night he takes away his beloved to his residence with the help of his friends. Next day two or three relatives



A Tiwa group dance.



Dancing and cultivation go together.



A traditional Tiwa dance.



A harvesting dance.



High School students with Tiwa graduate teachers.



Mask dance is popular among the Tiwas.



Tiwas are lovers of music.



Musical instruments are at display.

of the boy proceed to the girl's house to inform the girl's father about the matter. The parents of the girl generally donot come in the way of the union if this is within the acceptable social norm.

'Sajāti Dekhuā' :

On the seventh day after the incident, a small ceremony is observed in the 'Barghar' of the boy's clan. Elderly male relatives and co-villagers are invited and 'Zu' is arranged. A party from the boy's house consisting of two relatives of the boy and the 'Zelā' proceeds to the girl's house. The party holds discussion with the parents of the girl and finalises a date for the couple's visit to the girl's house. The girl's father lists his demands which must be fulfilled by the groom's parents.

On the stipulated date, which generally falls after one week, the couple along with some friends proceeds to the girl's house. A big 'Bhār' containing one big rice beer pot, one basketful of 'Pithā' (rice cakes), one big bunch of nuts, five 'Gusi' betels (one 'Gusi' equals to 20 pieces) is carried by the boy's party. The parents of the girl invite the fellow villagers who are entertained with the rice beer brought from the boy's house. Towards afternoon the boy's party returns to its village. Before that the 'Zelā' gets a date from the girl's parents for the 'Bhār Singā' ceremony.

'Bhār Singā' :

After six months or one year the couple along with a few friends of the boy proceeds to the girl's house. This time two 'Bhārs' are to be carried to the girl's house. One 'Bhār' which contains one big basketful of rice and one big pot of 'Zu' is called 'Jurani Bhār'. The other 'Bhār' which is called 'Jengā Singā Bhār' contains one big basketful of 'Ānguli Pithā', and one big pot of rice beer. In addition to these 'Bhārs', the party must also carry two cocks, three

hens and sufficient quantity of betel leaves and nuts. Both the 'Bhārs' are taken to the 'Barghar' where elderly villagers gather for the occasion. The couple bows before the altar by offering betel leaves and nuts in a 'Sarāi'. A cock is sacrificed to mark the occasion. The girl's father arranges a big feast and all the invitees partake of the feast. Rice beer forms an essential item in this feast.

Bride Price :

After this the couple bows before the elders who bless them to lead a happy conjugal life. From this day the girl is formally affiliated to the clan of the husband. The groom pays Rs. 7-00 or Rs. 9-00 as token bride price. Formerly the bride price in such marriages ranged from Rs. 107 to Rs. 707-00. The educated youths of the Lalungs made sincere efforts to abolish this bride price system. "But it would be wrong to minimise the economic aspect of the proceedings. The bride's kindred are losing a valuable labourer hence her mother wails—'who will henceforth fetch water and kindle the fire, who will relieve me of the burden of grass.'"

In the afternoon the couple returns to the boy's house.

'Gharsinā Bhār' :

After two or three days the couple again proceeds to the girl's house with one or two friends of the boy. They bring a rice beer pot and a basketful of tiffin ('Sāndah'). This 'Bhār' is meant for the parents of the girl only. The party is entertained by the girl's parents. Presents in the form of utensils, furnitures, clothes etc. are given to the girl by the parents as well as by the relatives. Towards evening the party returns to its village. The ceremonial aspects of the marriage are concluded along with the

ceremonial 'Bhār' and the couple is recognised as husband and wife by the parents of the girl.

'Jan Sajā' :

Formerly 'Kulsingā' part of the marriage was performed just after the marriage. This was done to facilitate the uncle (mother's brother) to adopt the sister's son as soon as the son grows up. The adopted nephew gets the 'Kul' and 'Hāthām' of his uncle. The nephew also gets the heritable rights of the uncle's property. This is known as 'Jan Sajā' or 'Jan Tanā' system. This is, however, not in vogue among the present day Lalungs.

Among the hill Lalungs 'Gobhiā' is the most popular form of marriage. In the religious festivals young boys and girls from different hillocks gather and mix with each other. Willing young boys select their mates and live in the houses of their beloved. Later on the couples are formally recognised as married couples in the feasts offered by the girls' parents. It may be noted that the rule of clan exogamy is strictly followed even in this type of marriage.

Death and Disposal of the Dead :

Dying inside the house is not considered as ominous, rather the Lalungs prefer death inside a house. 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. The dead bodies of minors, accident cases, pregnant women, drowned persons, epidemic cases etc. are buried. Except the dead bodies of suicide and epidemic cases all the above mentioned categories of dead bodies can be buried in a corner of the 'Hāthām' by purchasing a plot. This is called 'Kāshlatit Thowā' (keeping in a secluded corner).

After the death the four corners of the bamboo mat where the dead body lies, are broken. The body is covered

with a new white cloth. In the meantime the news is circulated among the various clan members of different villages. The villagers cancel all activities and run to the house where death occurs. They carry with them some rice and a piece of new cloth, which they place over the dead body. The 'Giyāti', both male and female, belonging to different clans arrive, who have to perform important role in the death ceremonies. Formerly all the dead bodies were washed but now-a-days only the dead bodies of respectable persons are washed. After the wash new clothes are wrapped over the body. The body is placed in a new mat ('Dhāri') and the relatives put the new clothes near the dead body. Rupee one is placed on the chest which is removed before placing the dead body on the pyre. In the meantime the female 'Giyāti' cooks a meal for the dead which constitutes rice, egg and bringal. The hill Lalungs donot use bringal. A portion of the cooked food is put in the mouth of the dead and the remaining portion is kept in a bamboo plate. This last offering to the dead can be made by all the members. Before offering the food the cooking vessel should be destroyed in a public place.

The male 'Giyāti' goes to the cremation ground ('Māngkhor' or 'Mākor') to select the site. It may be noted that there are exclusive areas ('Hāthām') in the 'Māngkhor' for different clans and members of a clan may use the same place for burning the dead bodies. If, however, a new place is to be selected, then the 'Giyāti' performs a ritual in the 'Māngkhor'. The 'Giyāti' throws an egg in the cremation ground uttering the name of a particular clan. The place where the egg breaks is considered as the permanent place for that particular clan. Thus 'Hāthām' has great sentimental value for the Lalungs because they believe that the 'Hāthām' unites the dead with the ancestors.

The elderly persons of various clans arrange a 'Mel' in the courtyard of the deceased. This is called 'Giyāti Mel'!

If any member of the family of the deceased had committed any offence then he has to make necessary atonement in presence of the elders of the 'Giyāti Mel'. In the past the 'Giyāti Mel' was held in a central place of the village or in the entrance of the house. Generally punishment for minor offences is betel leaves and nuts offered in a 'Batā'.

The 'Giyāti' takes all the responsibility of the cremation rites. Every 'Khutā selects one 'Giyāti' for performing the cremation rites and at the time of need he has to be formally invited. The 'Giyāti Mel' entrusts the 'Giyāti' to perform the rites in connection with the death. The 'Zelā' of each 'Khutā' directs one or two members of each 'Khutā' to proceed to the cremation ground with bamboos and firewood. The 'Giyāti' too lights a 'Horputi' (a thatch torch) and proceeds to the 'Māngkhor' to make necessary arrangement. For the members belonging to 'Māloi', 'Masarang', 'Masereng' and 'Muni' nine layers of wood are necessary. Rest of the 'Kuls' use seven layers of wood. Some people make the 'Sāngi' (improvised bamboo bed for carrying the dead body to the cremation ground). Here again tradition has to be strictly maintained. The figures seven and nine are to be scrupulously maintained while cutting the bamboo pieces.

As soon as the construction of the pyre is completed the 'Giyāti' informs the villagers to bring the dead body to the 'Māngkhor'. The dead body is kept inside till the completion of the pyre. While taking out the dead body or carrying it to the cremation ground, the legs should be on the front and the head on the rear. The body should be tied with the 'Sāng'. In some villages the body is not tied with the 'Sāng'. When the 'Sāng' is taken to the shoulder of the four clansmen, an egg is broken just below the 'Sāng' symbolising the end of life. In the plains before taking the dead body on the shoulders seven or nine times backward and forward movement of the 'Sāng' is made. This is called 'Lusiwā'. In the foothill areas the same is done near

the door while taking out the dead body from inside. They call it 'Nunsiyoy'. While the backward and forward movement is in progress, one of the on lookers utters the following—
 'Mānuhe Mārileo Mārile, Dewe Mārileo Mārile, Lorā Āse, Nāti Āse, Kheti Āse, Bāti Āse, Ājir Parā Āru Hes Nakaribi, Thel Nakaribi, Duār Khukuriāi Nethākibi, Lāugārā Khukuriāi Nethākibi, Ājir Parā Aru Ghar Bāri Erili, Fāmāri Hoi Āhi Āmani Kari Āsuti Kari Nethākibi.'

Meaning—Whoever might be responsible for your death, you are nomore with us. You have left your sons, grand sons, bullocks and cows, agricultural lands and every thing you possessed during life time. Do not disturb them by appearing as evil spirits.

After this all the villagers, who are present in the courtyard, pay their last regards to the dead by bowing down their heads.

The female 'Giyāti' carries the remaining portion of the cooked food along with the uncooked rice presented by the co-villagers and relatives. She also takes some white threads and while going ahead of the dead body wraps the threads on the grass. It is believed that by walking over the threads the soul of the head will be able to cross the dangerous rivers on way to the other world. In some villages the female 'Giyāti' spreads some fried rice (Aakhoi) on the way to the cremation ground with the belief that the soul of the dead will get all pomp and pleasures in the next life if it walks over fried rice.

Before placing the dead body over the pyre, the body is moved forward and backward ('Lusiyāy) for seven or nine times depending upon the affiliation of the dead into the 'Bhuni'. In some other areas, the dead body is taken around the pyre for seven or nine times. The 'Giyāti' first applies fire over the face of the dead body. The faces of male dead bodies should be kept upwards while those of

female, downwards. After 'Giyāti', others may apply fire in the face of the dead body. When the burning of the dead is completed, a human shape is made out of the ashes. Two small reeds are placed in the two nasal holes. The cooked food and rice carried by the 'Giyāti' along with the clothes presented by the relatives, are placed over the symbol. The 'Giyāti' utters the following words : 'Mānuse Mārileo Nejāno, Dewe Mārileo Nejāno ; Mānuse Mārise Jadi Sihatar Kāndhe Uthibi, Āmani Karibi, Āsuti Karibi ; Jadi Dewe Mārise Tenehole Dewatār Goi Tutiba, Fān Tutiba Yār parā Āmār Āru Kaba Lagā Nāi ; Ājir Parā Āmār Lagat Samandha sesh Haise ; Fāmāri Hoi Gharar Lerelā sepetā Nāduni Ponāk Bhoi Nukhuwābi ; Nijar Dharam Nije Rākhibi.'

Meaning—We donot know whether you have been killed by a man or a deity. If you are killed by men then disturb them always ; if however, a deity kills you, then the deity will be deprived of his puja. We donot want to say anything more. From today you have cut all connections with us. Do not disturb the little children by taking shape of an evil spirit. Maintain your own principles.

The hill Lalungs prefer burial which they call 'Sepāt Thowā'. A spacious hole (about seven or nine feet long and five feet deep and two to three feet wide) is dug where some leaves and grasses are placed. The dead body is placed in this hole keeping the head in the north east direction. Except the cloth meant for covering the secret part, no other clothes are placed with the dead body. The hole is filled up with stones and earth.

The people believe in the existence of evil spirits and therefore take precautions particularly when they return from cremation ground. On the way back home the participants arrange a fire on the road and jump it over. While returning from the cremation they donot look back. Purification is done by persons arranged by the 'Khel'. Thus the 'Khel' entrusts a

'Khutā' for such duty and in lieu of the services the 'Khutā' is relieved of the duties of 'Giyāti' in a cremation ground. The 'Khutā' pays ceremonial respect to the 'Khel' in the 'Barghar' every year in the month of December or January. This is called 'Sahā Diyā'.

A few elderly members of that 'Khutā' prepare a mixture of water, Tulsi leaf, 'Durbā grass' and cowdung in a pot and sprinkle the mixture over the persons. A fire is arranged in the entrance of the village and the participants jump over it. It is believed that evil spirits cannot come by jumping over the fire. They take bath and before entering their respective homes they again purify themselves by touching purified water.

After sometime the 'Giyāti' and all other persons who attend the cremation gather at the courtyard of the family of the deceased. The 'Borzela' and 'Zelā' of the 'Khel' must also come. The female 'Giyāti' sits inside. The heir of the deceased keeps one pot of 'Syusā' or 'Pahan Mad' (rice beer prepared exclusively for this occasion), some salt, one bunch of nuts, five packets of betels, some cloths and ornaments and other articles in a banana leaf. Then some discussions take place and after that the articles are distributed among the persons who gather in the house of the deceased. 'Pahan Mad' is offered to all. Special dresses like 'Seleng Kāpor' and 'Mekhelā' are presented to the male and female 'Giyāti' respectively. Sometimes valuable presents like gold ornaments, utensils, cattle etc. are also presented.

The 'Khel' directs the members of the bereaved family about the use of 'Khārmās' (non vegetarian meal). Normally non vegetarian meals are taken after three or seven days. In the intervening period, only fruits and other light meals are taken. On the 3rd or 7th day the 'Zelās' are invited and a small feast is arranged. Along with this non vegetarian feast the first part of the purificatory ceremony after

death comes to an end. The main death ceremony or 'Karam' is solemnised jointly by a 'Bangsha' and this may be kept pending for five or six years as it is an expensive affair.

'Karam'

'Karam' is a community purification ceremony after death in which the pending death ceremonies of a few families of a 'Bangsha' are solemnised jointly in the 'Barghar'. When the decision is taken to hold the ceremony, all the members of the clan as well as members of other clans are informed at least ten or fifteen days in advance. All the families of a 'Bangsha' have to contribute to the common fund of the 'Karam'. Formerly 'Karam' was a sevendays' function but now-a-days it is one day or three days' affair. Formerly five pigs were essential for this ceremony but today due to economic hardship 'Karam' is observed with one pig and five fowls only. Every 'Bangsha' has to bring one 'Bhār' which contains one basketful of rice, one pot of 'Zu', one bunch of nuts and five bundles of betels.

The 'Giyātis' both male and female, play very important roles in the 'Karam'. The 'Giyātis' are appointed by the 'Khel' on the request of the 'Bangsha' who take charge at least three days ahead of the ceremony. During these days the female 'Giyāti' cooks meals for all the members.

On the day of 'Karam', the 'Giyāti' shaves the heads of the sons of the deceased. Now-a-days the 'Giyāti' nominally cuts the hair. The non Lalung hair dressers complete the shaving. After that the 'Giyātis' are ceremonially bathed. Ceremonial killing of pig is an unavoidable part of the 'Karam' ceremony. For this the, 'Gharburā' of the 'Bangsha' takes out the 'Zelā' (arrow placed on the altar of the 'Barghar') from the 'Borghar' and plants it in the courtyard. While taking the 'Zelā' out of the 'Barghar' the 'Hāri Kunwari' sprinkles purified water (water

mixed with Tulsi leaf, Durbā grass, copper etc.) on the ground. The pig is bathed and placed over a bundle of banana leaves. Some rice and 'Durbā grasses are placed on its back. The families on whose behalf the 'Karam' is held, bowdown before the elders and the pig. The 'Gharburā' takes the 'Zelā' in his hand and bows to six directions before piercing the pig. If his first attempt bears no fruit, he shall have to take permission from the elderly persons for a second attempt by showing due respect to them. The 'Zelā' must not be removed until the pig dies. As soon as the pig dies the 'Gharburā' pulls out the 'Zelā' and after washing it proceeds to keep it in the altar of the 'Barghar'. Some persons block the way of 'Gharburā' and the latter has to explain the reason of removal of the 'Zelā'. This is done probably as a comical interlude as the killing of the pig creates much pathos in the minds of the onlookers. The pig is cut into pieces and one portion is taken inside the 'Barghar' where the female 'Giyāti' cooks it for the dead persons. The 'Giyāti' also prepares rice and alkaline curry to be offered to the dead. The 'Rāndhani' and the 'Deori' prepare a general feast in the courtyard where pork forms a special item.

The female 'Giyāti' collects the cooked food and other items in a banana leaf near the 'Thunākhutā' and offers 'Pinda (cooked food, meat etc.) in the names of the dead persons on whose behalf the 'Karam' is held. After that the sons and other relatives of the deceased offer 'Pinda'. When all the relatives complete their offering of '(Pinda', the 'Giyāti' takes the 'Pindas' to the 'Mākar' and leaves those under a tree. Then all the villagers partake of the feast. The 'Giyātis' are duly honoured for their services. Both cash and kind containing towels, chadars, utensils etc. are presented to them. The festival comes to an end with the 'Sumsirā Pānsirā' ceremony. Each of the elderly members is given a piece of nut and one leaf of betel on a

banana leaf. The betel is torn into pieces and the nut is discarded. It is believed that the dead persons donot disturb the members of the family if this is gone through. On this day or the following day one hind leg of the pig and one pot of 'Zu' are sent to the house of the male 'Giyāti' who shares these with the Co-villagers.

Magico Religious Beliefs in 'Respect of Death :

The Lalungs believe that death is delayed due to illegal or unjust activities during the past years. It is also believed that one suffers at the time of death because of his participation in crimes although he might not have committed the offence himself. If a person dies with all his desires unfulfilled, his soul soon gets rebirth. If rebirth does not take place soon, then his soul disburbs the people in the form of evil spirits (Famāri). The owl's hooting near the house of a sick person is considered as ominous. The hill Lalungs can tell the cause of death by observing ashes. When the dead body is removed a heap of ashes is made in the place where the dead lay before carrying it to the cremation ground. The ashes are refined with the help of a sieve and the sieve is left over the ashes. After returning from 'Mākar' the heap of ashes is observed. If there is any footprint of human being then it is believed that the person died because of the magic applied by man (Hārā Diyā). If, however, there is a footprint of animal then it is believed that the cause of death is natural.

Bursting of the bamboos of the pyre is considered as ominous for the members of the household of the deceased. Similarly bursting of the eyes while burning indicates that the soul will not be free from rebirth. The faces of the jealous, liar and sinner is not burnt easily. Also if anybody dies with a desire to see someone, then his face is not burnt. Someone has to place a firewood in the pyre in the name of that person. A belief which gets circulation

among the Lalungs is that the face of the singers of 'Bhuyān Geet' or 'Bārakulia Geet' does not burn unless some one sings such song in the cremation ground.

Dying on Tuesday or Saturday is not considered auspicious for the family. After seven days of the death, the elderly members of the family go to the cremation ground and observe the cooked food and rice that are kept at the pyre at the close of the cremation. If the cooked and unboiled rice remains untouched then it is believed that some near relative may die or natural calamities may occur in the village.

A man may be killed by applying 'Lākām' (a poisonous herb). This 'Lākām' is mixed with betel leaves and nuts or with rice beer and the intended victim dies after some months. Death may be due to natural causes or due to magic. They consult 'Giyāni' (magician) to ascertain the cause of death. The 'Giyāni' prescribes means by consulting the 'Dhāl Bidhāl' (a dice of magician).

It is taboo to enter the granary or the 'Barghar' during the unclean ('Suā') period. This period ends on the third or seventh day when the 'Tāmol Batā Phuruā' (offering prayers to ancestors) is observed at the 'Barghar'.

The soul of a person other than that of a suicide case, visits the house by taking the shape of dove. A piece of banana stem is placed by the side of the dead body of an unmarried person while carrying the body to the cremation ground.

Death of 'Rājā' and Respectable Person :

If a 'Rājā' dies, his dead body cannot be carried to the cremation ground until a successor is selected. The proposed successor, takes nine betel leaves and nuts in a 'Batā' and prays before the dead for the seat. After this

the dead body is carried to the cremation ground. The successor must not see the dead body of his predecessor.

If a respectable person dies then the 'Bor Dhuliā' of the clan beats the 'khrām bār'. Before carrying the dead body to the 'Hāthām', sandal paste is smeared on the body., Incense sticks are lighted and flowers are sprinkled over the body. The funeral procession is led by drum beaters and 'Kāli' players.

Ancestor Worship :

In the month of 'Āghon' (December) the Lalungs observe the annual ancestral worship. A meal is prepared for the ancestors and one portion is kept at the 'Borghar' for the ancestors. In the evening these are thrown in an out of the way place.

Concept of Soul :

The Lalungs believe that the soul embodies the heart and at the time of death it exits through the eyes. The soul continues to exist even after death. They believe in a land of the dead which can be reached by a difficult path often guarded by some spirits of the other world who examine the soul's identity before admitting it. They also believe in the immortality of the soul. The body is the repository of the immortal soul and when the soul leaves the body, it perishes.

Concept of Spirit :

There are places like the cremation ground, place not frequented by people etc., which are believed to be the abode of the evil spirits. If a person falls ill after visiting the above mentioned places, it is believed that he is influenced by the evil spirit. Thus spirit is considered as cause of death. If timely action is not taken the affected person

dies. "The most characteristic features of the Assam Tribes are, a very detailed picture of the land of the dead which is provided by the Shamans, who visit it in trance or dream and the belief in a soul of the psycho type which can leave the material body already in a man's life time and if straying to the land of the Dead, can be recovered by the Shaman₂₈".

28. Haimendorf. C. Von, F-The Afterlife in Indian Belief-
Journal of the Royal 'Anthropological Institute, Vol-III, 1953.

CHAPTER-V

Social Institutions

In this chapter social institutions as well as social organisations of the Lalungs have been dealt with. Among the social institutions the foremost i.e. the family is dealt here at the outset followed by property and inheritance, clan and kinship.

Family :

Family as a functional unit grows out of biological needs. Family can be regarded as one of the universal and permanent institutions of mankind. The origin of the family can be traced as a reproductive and biological association. The expectant mother or the invalid child needed support of other members. It helped in the economic pursuit. The family as an institution offered facilities for the individual's satisfaction of sex urge, what Lowie calls 'socially approved form of sex relation'₂₉. Majumdar₃₀ calls it 'biological matrix'. Thus in course of time this institution became the prominent social institution of mankind. "The family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain socially approved

29. Lowie, Robert, H-Social Organisation, 1966

30. Majumdar, D. N. & Madan, T. N. An Introduction to
Social Anthropology, 1956, P-55

sexual relationship and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually co-habiting adults³¹.

A Lalung family usually consists of father, mother and their unmarried children. In other words they have a nuclear or primary type of family which is, by and large, a universal human social grouping. "It does not matter whether marital relations are permanent or temporary, whether there is polygamy or polyandry or sexual licence—the one fact that stands out beyond all others that everywhere the husband, wife and immature children constitute a unit from the remainder of community."³² The Lalung elementary family has a variable where a further generation of old father, old mother of the existing head of the family live together. In such families the son's wife ungrudgingly carry out the orders of her husband's mother. This is called lineal joint family. In such families the unmarried brothers and sisters of the head of the family i.e. family of orientation also live together.

After the death of the father the unmarried brother gets his share of the landed property (in the plains) which he cultivates jointly with his brothers. So his married brother ungrudgingly supports him. The brother has also a duty to support his unmarried sister till her marriage. After the death of the father one of the sons looks after the widow mother. The physical separation does not weaken the emotional and inter family social bond. The partitioned families maintain good relationship among themselves. The younger ones continue paying their respect to their elders as before. The elders, too, maintain the same affection for the younger ones. The attitude towards the father, father's father and father's brother is one of respect and usually father is considered as authoritative head having an effective voice in all matters that concern the family.

31. Murdock, George Peter—Social Structure, 1965, P-1.

32. Lowie, Robert, H.—Primitive Society, 1920, P-66-67.

The tribal way of life is characterised by a spirit of co-operation and mutual understanding. Within the family economic co-operation in the day to day life is maintained by all members. If the husband is busy in the fields the wife does the house hold works like cooking, weaving and even collecting firewood. The aged old father and old mother have their assigned lighter duties like repairing a basket and looking after the young ones. The younger boys and girls study their lessons as well as help their parents.

The interrelationship among the family members of the hill Lalungs, however, is different in view of the matriarchal system.

Property and Inheritance :

The properties of the Lalungs can be divided broadly into two—movable and immovable. The former includes agricultural implements, musical instruments, utensils, dress and ornaments, livestock etc. The immovable property includes the land, both agricultural and basti and these belong to the family. After the death of the father or even before his death the land is divided equally among his sons. The father may keep one share for his use, which after his death goes to that son who lives with him and takes care of him till his death. The house goes to that son who lives with his father till his death.

Among the plains Lalungs daughters do not inherit property. But reverse is the case among the matrilineal hill Lalungs. The hill Lalungs allow the daughters to inherit property from the mothers.

Clan Organisation :

Among the primitive groups unilateral groupings i.e. lineage consisting of blood relations of one side exclusively, was a characteristic feature. Later on this type of blood

related grouping was extended to form a clan which embraced all those believed to be related through common descent. Thus clan consists of blood relations of one side only who are grouped together into an exogamous entity. It is based explicitly on a unilinear rule of descent which unites its central core of members. Lowie¹⁹ does not include the common possession of a totem or habitation of a common territory in the list of prerequisites of a clan. According to him the exogamous character of a clan makes it a distinctive group. Murdock²⁰ opines that residential unity is essential to form a clan.

The Lalungs are divided into a number of exogamous clans ('Wāli' or 'Kul') namely 'Macharang. Māchereng, Māgor, Mādur, Lādur, Puru, Sāgāra, Māloi, Fāngsong, Pumā, Dāfoi, Mithi, Lamfoi, Sukāi, Khoroi, Āgārā, Chānchārā, Kāsā, Cholong, Muni, Melāng, Kākhōr, Dārfoṅ, Fārpāṅ, Dāmlong, Ānsong, Āmchi, khālār and Lorom. Originally they had only twelve clans but later on these main clans have been subdivided into a number of subclans called 'Dhan Bangah'. These sub clans are :

Clan	Sub clan
1. Macharang.	Māchereng, Māgor,
2. Mādur,	Lādur, Puru, Sāgarā.
3. Māloi	Fāngsong, Pumbe, (Pumā)
4. Dāfor,	Mithi, Lomfoi
5. Sukāi.	Khārāi.
6. Āmfli.	Aāgārā, Chānchārā.
7. Lāsā.	Mithi.
8. Chalang.	Muni, Melāng.
9. Āmchong.	Āmchi.
10. Kākhōr.	Aāgārī.
11. Dārṅong.	Dāmlong, Kholre
12. Lorom.	—

19. Lowie, Robert, H. — Social Organisation, 1966.

20. Murdock, George Peter — Social Structure, 1965.

It may be noted that the figure twelve has certain socio-political significance. Thus we find Bārapujia, 'Bārābhuni' etc. "It seems to have been the practice in this part of India for kings to appoint twelve advisers or Governors. Naranarayan had twelve ministers of State. Twelve chiefs or Dolois administered the hilly portion of the Raja of Jayantia's dominions and there were twelve state councillors in Nepal. The number may thus have connected in the minds of the people with all dignitaries ranking next to a 'Raja' and so have come to be used in a purely conventional sense²¹. Probably keeping this in view the Lalungs had their 'Sāto Rajya' and 'Pācho Rājya'.

They have a 'Kautā' 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 'Khutā'. A 'Khel' (clan) consists of several such 'Khutās'. Generally a single Khutā does not form a 'Khel'. In a single village there may be one or more than one clan. It may be noted that no family in a village can thrive without affiliating itself to a 'Khutā'. Whether solemnising a marriage ceremony or observing a 'Karam' the 'Khutā' plays an important role for the family.

A Lalung 'khel' selects a 'Giyāti' (priest) to preside over the socio-religious occasions like 'Karam' and allied ceremonies. The 'Zelā' (an expert in the tribal folklore and religion) plays a major role in a Lalung village and he must be selected by a 'Khel'. It may be noted that the 'Giyāti' and 'Zelā' must not belong to the 'Khutā' in which the ceremonies are observed.

They also maintain a clan superiority. Thus 'Bāra Bhuni', 'Na Bhuni', 'Sāt Bhuni' divisions are noticed in the society. Inter 'Bhuni' marriages are allowed. The 'Bāra Bhuni' clans are mostly found among the Karbis while the

21. Gait, E. A. — History of Assam, 1963.

Lalungs have 'Na Bhuni' and 'Sat Bhuni'. The clans belonging to 'Na Bhuni' are considered as superior clans. It may, however, be noted that this clan superiority does not create any social imbalance or vertical mobility among the people of various clans. The members belonging to 'Na Bhuni' clan have to adhere to figure nine whenever any question of figure arises in their socio-religious ceremonies. Same practice is followed by clan members belonging to 'Sat Bhuni' or 'Panch Bhuni'.

Titles :

The Lalungs use a number of titles which in earlier days indicated social hierarchy. The titles commonly found among them are 'Deo Rājā, Dekā Rājā, Pātor, Senapati, Konwar, Bordoloi, Doloi, Kākati, Māntā, Deori, Bharālī' etc. The people belonging to 'Masarang' clan write 'Deo Rājā' titles. 'Dekā Rājā' title is used by clan members of 'Māsereng' clan. 'Senapati', 'Das' and 'Deori' titles are used by members belonging to 'Sukāi' clans. The clan members of 'Kas' write 'Senapati' title. There are three sections of 'Sukāi'. The 'Sukāi' Rongkhāngs' worship 'Bāghrajā' (tiger), the 'Sukāi' Tugedangs' worship pigsty, while the members of 'Sukāi' Suāsātā' worship a kind of basket made out of slices of an immature bamboo.

The members of 'Āmsi' clan use 'Āmsi' and 'Pātor' titles. The 'Bordoloi' (head of a 'Thān') belong to the 'Laram' and 'Pāngsang' clan. Similarly 'Konwar' and 'Bordoloi' titles are used by people belonging to 'Māloi' clan. 'Deori' is used by people of 'Pumālakar' and 'Munilakar'. 'Pumālakar' and 'Munilakar' are sub clans of 'Māloi' and 'Salang' clans respectively. 'Konwar' title is used by persons of 'Melāng' sub clan. 'Lora' is used by clan members of 'Dāmūlakar' and 'Dāmlong' clans. 'Pator', 'Gāonkhoa', 'Dekādoloi' titles are mostly found among 'Mādur' clan.

Generally members belonging to 'Māgar Lādur, Puru, Sāgāra, Māloi, Fāngsong, Dāfor, Lamfoi, Mithi, Sarailok,

Āmfli, Aagārā, Sancha, Kōs, Salāng, Āmsong, Kāsor, Āgāri, Dārfong, Kholār etc. are found among the hill Lalungs. Some Lalung clans are totemic while others trace their origin to certain characteristics of ancestors or natural objects. Every clan has its own deity which is a benevolent one and who showers blessings upon those who worship him with devotion. Thus 'Sukāi' clan worships, 'Bagh Rājā'. The members belonging to 'Sukāi' clan do not kill tiger. Even if they hear the killing of a tiger, they observe fast.

Kinship :

It is a universal phenomenon that people are bound together in groups by various kinds of bonds and out of these bonds the most basic is the bond based on reproduction. This urge for reproduction creates two kinds of bonds viz. bond between spouses and their relations on either side what is commonly known as affinal kinship and the bond between parents and their children and that between sibling known as consanguinous kinship.

Kinship forms the basis of social relationship in the homogeneous societies. It plays an important role both in the regulation of behaviour between persons and in the formation of social and political groups. "The study of kinship helps to measure the social relationship of a particular community. It is the rod on which one leans throughout life".²² Lowie calls it "veritable institution in most simple societies, for it is the regulator of behaviour in innumerable situations."²³ The kinship system of the society lays down as to what should be the criterion of his dealings with his relatives both paternal and maternal. In traditional societies social relations of the individuals are primarily regulated by

22. Firth, Raymond — We the Tikopias, 1936, P-92

23. Lowie, Robert, H. — Social Organisation, 1966, P.59.

kinship bond. Radcliffe Brown²⁴ therefore says that kinship is an arrangement which enables persons to live together and co-operate with one another in an orderly social life.

Kinship Terminology :

The terms of address and terms of reference prevalent among the Lalungs reveal that the terms of reference are more distinctly applied than the terms of address. Fa, Mo, (e) Br, (e) Si are addressed and referred to by distinct kinship terms while So, Da, (y) Br, (y) Si are addressed by their personal names. Separate kinship terms are applied for referring them. Uttering of husband's name is taboo. The husband also does not utter the name of wife. They, however, address each other technonymically.

The social behaviour in respect of paternal and maternal relatives does not differ very much. Both the relatives command respect. Although Mo, Br is a distant relative yet he takes much interest in the welfare of his sister's children.

The kinship terminology prevalent among the Lalungs, particularly of the plains, may be termed as descriptive. But the use of certain classificatory kinship terminology cannot be overlooked. Thus 'Māgārā Āyung' is used to address father's elder sister as well as mother's elder sister. Similarly 'Mā-Āa-Ayung' denotes the father's elder brother as well as mother's elder sister's husband. So also 'Āsi' is used for mother's younger sister as well as for younger brother's wife.

It was observed that Lalung terms of reference are more in number than the terms of address. The villagers do not confine their kinship terms within the limit of actual kin members, rather they are extended to outsiders also

24. Radcliffe Brown, A. R. and Forde, Daryll—African System of Kinship and Marriage, 1950.

who may not belong to the community. Sometimes Assamese equivalent terms are applied to make the terminology more effective.

Their kinship system gives extensive recognition to age, what Lowie calls Bifurcate Collateral system, Elder siblings are terminologically differentiated from younger siblings. Persons of older generations are always regarded and denoted by distinct kin terms while the younger ones are addressed by personal names. Sex differentiation is also maintained. Different terms are used to denote kins of different sexes who are related in the same way.

Some of the Lalung kinship terminologies are shown below :

TABLE

Terms of Address.	English Equivalent	Denotative terms	Relative Denotes	Classificatory terms	Relative Classed.
Āja	Grand father	Āja	Fa	Fa	
Buri, Abi	Grand Mother	Abi, Buri	Fa	Mo	
Pāng, Fā	Father	Pāng, Fā	Fa		
Āyāng.	Mother	Āyāng	Mo.		
Khāi,	Elder	Khāi,	(e) Br.		
Kākā.	Brother	Kākā			
Mā Aa	Father's elder brother.			MāAa	Fa(e) Br,
Āyang				Āyang	Mo(e) Si Hu
Gajal	Younger Brother	Gajal	(y) Br.		
Dādāi	Father's younger brother.	Dādāi	Fa (y) Br.		

Bai	Elder sister	Bāi	(e) Si.		
Nānāo	Younger sister	Nānāo	(y) Si.		
Māgārā	Father's elder sister.			Māgārā	Fa(e) Si, Mo (e)Si.
Āyung				Āyung	
Āni	Father's younger sister			Āni	Fa (y) Si, Fa (y) Br Wi.
Bāuji	Elder brother's wife	Bāuji	(e) Br Wi		
Māmāi	Uncle			Māmāi	Mo Br, Fa Si Hu
Āsi	Younger brother's wife			Āsi	(y)Br Wi, Mo (y) Si, Mo Br Wi
Bunchi	Elder Sister's husband.	Bunchi	(e) Si Hu		
Sā	Son	Sā	So		
Sāja	Daughter	Sāja	Da		
Su	Grand son			Su	SoSo, DaSo
Bāgen	Nephew			Bāgen	Fa Si So, Hu Si So
Pāgrāi	Niece			Pāgrāi	Fa Si Da, Hu Si Da,
Soi	Husband	Soi	Hu		
Si	Wife	Si	Wi		
Jāwāi	Son-in-law	Jāwāi	Da Hu		
Bahāri	Daughter-in-law.	Bahāri	So Wi		
Sāli	Brother-in-law.			Sāli	Wi Y(Br), Wi(y) Si, Hu(y)Br.

Zelā	Brother-in-Law	Zelā	Wi(e) Br
Jathāli	Husband's elder brother.	Hu(e) Br.	
Ma Aa Su.	Father-in-law	Ma Aa Su	Hu Fa, Wi Fa
Māgārā Su	Mother-in-law	Māgārā Su	Hu Mo, Wi Mo

Joking and Avoidance :

There are joking relationships in all the societies. Among the Lalungs the joking and avoidance rule varies among different sets of relationship. In some relations avoidance means just to avoid the persons out of respect and not to joke. Again in some other relations this means a prohibition to utter personal names, while in a certain relation a person is completely avoided. Behind all these avoidance practices there is the underlying idea of showing respect. Complete avoidance is maintained between Hu(e)Br. and (y)Br Wi. They should avoid uttering each other's personal names. At meal times they do not take their meals face to face. Avoidance is also practised between (y)Si Hu and Wi(e)Si.

Joking relationship exists between a man and his wife's younger sister.

Social Stratification :

The Lalung society is a stratified society and there are different office bearers in a village having different socio-religious assignments. But except in socio-religious occasions, the structural difference is hardly noticed.

Among the Lalungs a single village does not form the lowest administrative unit. 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, Chāngmāji, Karaimāji, Deori, Hātāri and Rāndhani.'

The social organisation of the Lalungs is split into two categories. The first category may be called as secular village organisation which is headed by the Gaonbura and assisted by an official called 'Bārikā'. To run the affairs of a 'Sāmādi' there are four categories of officers namely 'Chāngdoloī', 'Chāngmāji', 'Hurumā', 'Khurāmul'. There may be two persons each in the later two categories. The non secular organisation or religious organisation is run by the three office bearers namely 'Ghar Burā', 'Zelā' and 'Hāri Kunwari'. Besides there is a Deori to preside over the worship at 'Thān'.

Gaon Burā :

The Gaonburā is the head of the village. He is selected by the villagers for his capabilities. He must be a man of integrity. He decides petty cases, in a 'mel' of the village elders and inflicts punishment upon offenders. He is assisted by a 'Bārikā' who maintains liaison between the Gaonburā and the villagers.

Ghar Burā :

The 'Gharbura' or 'Bor Zelā' is the religious head of a 'Bangsha' or 'Khutā'. He is addressed as 'Zelāgābi' also. His post is hereditary. After the death of a 'Gharburā' his son becomes the 'Gharburā'. If there is no son, the post goes for the brother of the 'Gharburā'. He is formally accepted by the village elders in the courtyard of the 'Borghar'. The 'Gharburā' is a married person and he must be proficient in the traditional rituals. He has certain restrictions in his diet and movement. Eel and crab are prohibited items for him. He can go to the cremation ground but cannot play active role in the cremation.

There is one 'Saruburā' to assist the 'Gharburā'.

Hāri Kunwari :

The 'Gharburā', 'Zelā' and 'Hāri Kunwari' are the three religious heads without whom there cannot be any religious ceremony at the 'Borghar' or 'Bangsha'. The 'Hāri Kunwari' may be married or unmarried. A girl from the age of 8/9 can become a 'Hāri Kunwari'. There are certain restrictions in her functioning as 'Hāri Kunwari'. She must remain in the 'Bangsha' even after the marriage. In other words her husband must be a 'Gobhiā'.

There is no special dress or insignia for these office bearers.

Before the advent of the British the Lalungs had their own independent 'Rājās' whom they called 'Deo Raja'. One of the important principalities was Gobha. There were twelve small 'Rājās' called 'Powāli Rāja' and there were several 'Bunis' under the administrative control of a certain 'Rājā'. The 'Rājā' is helped by a number of office bearers viz. 'Bordoloī, Konwār, Pātra, Barbaruā, Dhuliā, Dāliā, Kāliā and Pāik'. All these ranks were hereditary.

Today changes in the village structure have taken place in some Lalung villages in Nāgaon area. In these villages besides the 'Gaonbura' there are 'Pāthek,' 'Medhi,' 'Gāyon' and 'Bharāli' who play different roles in the socio religious ceremonies. These office bearers are found in almost all the Vaisnavite Assamese villages and the converted Lalungs have introduced the same in their village structure.

Politically the villages are administered under the Panchayati Raj system.

CHAPTER : VI

Religious Beliefs and Practices

In this chapter while discussing religion, festivals, of the Lalungs are also discussed because most of the Lalung festivals are closely connected with certain pujas.

The religion of the Lalungs is based on a belief in some deities. Their religion can be considered as one of the branches of the Hindu religion. They are Saktas (except the Vaisnava converts) but their images and puja paraphernalias are not same as those used by other non-Lalung Saktas. The hill Lalungs worship stone images of deities while their plains counterpart do not instal any image in the altar. Of course the 'Zelā' or 'Tripod' is found in their altars which is a symbol of Lord Siva. The officials entrusted to perform religious ceremonies are 'Loro', 'Deori', and 'Chāngmāji'. The 'Gharburā' not only presides over the pujas held in 'Borghars', he also offers oblations to the ancestors of a 'Khutā'.

Lord Mahadeo is their supreme god. He is a benevolent god who showers blessings upon those who worship Him with devotion. All worships begin with a prayer to Lord Mahadeo. The prayer which is prevalent among the Lalungs is presented below. It may be noted that the wordings are mostly Assamese but there are a few words, the meaning of which is difficult to trace either in Assamese or in Lalung.

'Fā Māhādeo Zelāguru, Ārambhanire Sristini Garāki, Bhumini Garāki, Srajantā, Pālantā, Rākhontā, Dekhontā Guru, Nala-Nila, Uran-Buran, Sāri Muthi Jivar Garāki, Nāli, Rākhontā, Puli-Rākhontā, Go Rākhontā Po Rākhontā, Khāwon, Dātā, Bhogdātā, Byādhi Byāpār Duri kartā'. Free translation-'Oh Lord Mahadeo, you created this universe, you are the lord of this earth, you have created and maintained. Oh Lord, you are looking after us, you are the master of all living beings, you are looking after the cows, the human beings, you are providing us with best food and it is you who are protecting us from all diseases.

'Kailāsh' is considered as the holy place for the Lalungs as it is the abode of their Lord Mahadeo. At the time of performing any religious ceremony they pray to god to bring the ancestors to Kailash-'Kailāsh Māname'.

They worship many deities and 'Borghar' 'Thānghar' and 'Nāmgihar' are the places, of worship. Every 'Khutā' or 'Bangsha' has a 'Borghar'. The Borghar has two altars, one for the main deity and the other for ancestors. Near the altars 'Rongdoswari' and 'Māidoswori' are placed. 'Rongdo' means rice and Māido' means paddy. Every year newly harvested rice is kept in a pot near the altar and that is called 'Rongdoswori'. Similarly newly harvested paddies are kept in a pot near the altar and that is called 'Māidoswori'.

Pujas are held in the 'Borghars' where 'Gharburā' and 'Hāri Kunwari' play the major roles. On the day of puja the 'Hāri Kunwari' cleans the house, while the 'Gharburā' wraps 'Batās' full of betel leaves and nuts with banana leaves and places those in three different places. Prayer may be performed either by facing towards east or south depending upon the construction of the house. If the 'Borghar' is constructed in east-west direction then the prayer should be held facing towards east, but if the same is constructed in north-south direction then the prayer should be performed facing towards south.

The 'Borghar' is considered as a very sacred place by the Lalungs. If any member of a 'Khuta' proceeds to a distant place, he offers prayers before the altar of the 'Borghar'. Unlike 'Namghar', the 'Borghar' cannot be used for holding any 'Mel' or discussion.

In their prayers the 'Gharburā' utters 'Mantras' which differ from clan to clan. The 'Mantras' are unwritten and the 'Gharburā' learns, those from his predecessors. The Lalungs call the 'Mantras' as 'Bedāng'. Below some specimens of 'mantras' of various clans are presented.

'Mantras of Mikthikul' :

'Aa Rām Iswar Prabhu, Sāga Namakāra Idang, Bāolā-kongar Badarmaji,, Manus Mahadeo Guru, Nā Bene Tutiridang Prārthanāridang Nāma Thākime Jen Jah Thākime, Munuhan Manakāra ridang Itiyāba Go Gāi Nāli Puli Parbate Thākime Pāhāre Thākime, Hāje phure, Maidhāle Phure, Be Sakalag Aaguri Sāmari Thirāi Jirāi 'Rakshāne Garāki, Rakshāne Nāng Prabhu Ei Iswar Itiyāba, Khetiriu, Krishiriu, Egunā Nāng Sahasra Gunā Hangme Ei Iswar Gilā Prabhu'.

Second 'Mantra' :

'Aa Ram Iswar Prabhu Sāga Namkār Ridang, Run-duswari, Madheswari, Lakhimi, Padumi, Bāredeo, Bāregosāin Itiyāba, Goi Tharāi, Pān tharāi Tutiridang prārthanāridang Go Gāi Nāli Puli Parbate Thākime, Pāhāre Thākime, Pāme Thākime, Khāte Thākime, Sāje Phure, Madhyāne Phure, Be Sakalog Bighinī Khoy Kari Kalāne Sākla Bakāne Sābkā Thirāi, Jirāi Rakshāne Garāki, Rakshāne Nāng Ei Iswar Gilā Prabhu, Itiyāba, Khetiriu, Krishiriu Enguā Nāng Sahastra Gunā Hangme Prabhu'.

Third 'Mantra' :

'Aa Ram Iswar Prabhu, Sāga Namkāra Idang, Barāi Saruāi, Ākari Ābari, Sākuli, Mārāli, Madhyekuri, Jagatjuri,

Kāni Ādheli Āi, Itiyāba, Tutiridang Prārthanāridang Ga Gāi Nāli Puli Parbate Thākime, Pāhāre Thākime, Hāje Phure, Madhyāne Phure Be Sakalag Bhoi Dekhāme Nā, Dar Dekhāme Nā, Sāp, Sarap, Bāgh Bhāluk Be Sakalog Durāgat Kari, Sāklā Bakāne Sā Bakā, Thirāi Jirāi Rakshāne Garāki, Rakshāne Nāng Ei Iswar Gilā Prabhu.

'Mantras' of 'Mādur' 'Kul' :

In-side the 'Borghar' the 'Gharburā' of 'Mādur Kul' offers prayers to five deities with fifteen 'Batās' of betel leaves and nuts wrapped in banana leaves. Earthen lamps are lighted for these deities. The 'mantras' are :—

1. 'Aa Rām Iswar Prabhu, Sāga Tutiridang ghar Jyoti, Ghar Gosāni, Zelā Gorhā, Mārāli Gorhā, Son Balā, Hājon Balā, pāo Balā, Pachim Balā tungrā Balā, Tukrā Balā, Māo Kesāikhāti, Lokho Konwar, Pākhi Konwar, Thān Bali Māhā Bali Devi Mātri Kālikhā Bali Nilagar Dhou Bajār Nilage Ātar Kari Sakaloke ThiYāi Jiyāi Rākhiba Lāge'.

2. 'Aa Rām Iswar Prabhu, Pitri Pārā, Pitām Pārā Āja Lagar Āja Hangda, Deor Lagar Deor Hangda Tutiridang Bhakti ridang Sabātutula Santusta Ingegāre Etiyāo Ajāne Kāl, Dukhāne Jiyā, Sunāotā Nāi, Dekhāotā Nāi Kijāni Āgehe Pās, Pāsehe Aag, Aag Pās Hangegāre Atia Jen Nilagar Dhou Bajār Nilagate Dur kari Eko Pralay Nohovākoi Sakaloke Rākhiba Lāge.'

3. 'Aa Rām Iswar Prabhu, Āru Tutiridang Bhaktiridang Bārīne Kal Khoā Kāmāikhowā Bājeba Thāo Bhitareba Thāo, Lānine Garāki, Puline Garāki, Ga Ne Garāki Pa Ne Garāki, Etiyāo Tutiridang Bhaktiridang.'

4. 'Aa Rām Iswar Prabhu, Bor Āi Saru Āi Ākari, Ābari Bengi Bhābori, Sākali Mārāli, Etiyāo Sāt Bhani Āi Sāte Namaskar, Mukhe Tutil, Etiyāo Ajān Burā, Ajān Hāri, Āagehe Pās Haise Pāsehe Aag Haise, Ei Sakalobor Dosh Kshoma Kari Sakaloke ThiYāi Jiyāi Rākhiba Lāge.'

5. 'Aa Rām Iswar Prabhu, Rantu Siri, Māido Siri, Khāri Gāri Majia Dipar, Thirāi Thāok, Jirāi thāok Bharāl Bharāi, Thāok, Āru Lāine Garāki, Puline Garāki, Ga Ne Garāki, Pa Ne Garāki, Etiyāo Tutiridang Bhaktiridang, Sabātutil Santusta Ingegāre, Etiyā Ajāne Kāl, Dukhāne Jiyā, Aagehe Pās, Pāsehe Aag, Sunāotā Nāi, Dekhāotā Nāi, Etiā Bārotā Māhor Dhau Bajār Durate Duranta Kari Krisnai Kripā Kari Rākhiba Lāge.'

Prayers of 'Sukāi' 'Kul' :

1. 'Aa Ram Iswar Prabhu, Ghar Jyoti Ghar Gosāni Zelā Gorhā Mārāli Gorhā Āru Tutiridang Bhaktiridang, Aponār Asirbāde Kintu Agosti Pariyāle Āru Ipine kintu Jiyari Parā Bowāri Parā, Pāme Thakā Pathāre Thakā Hāte Ābarani Kari Rākhisē, Kon Rākhisē Bāgh Rājā Rākhisē Buli Aponār Nām Roba Jash Roba.'

2. 'Aa Ram Iswar Prabhu, Kāk Tutikaro, Dāngar Dāngar Devotā, Lākhi Konwar Pākhi Konwar, Bordeo Māhadeo Thān Bali Māhā Bali, Devi Kāmākhyābali, Āru Etiyāo Aponāk Ki Di Santusta Karim, Kerkutā Khoā Guā Makaraj Sātā Pān Take Di Bhajabān Di Pariso, Kon Rākhisē Dangar Dāngar Devotāi Rākhisē Buli Aponār Nām Roba Jash Roba. Ifāle Kāk Tuti Karo, Bor Āi Saru Āi, Ākari Abari, Tutiridang, Bhaktiridang, Sulī Sigi Kātor Karo Agosti Pariyāl Hāte Ābarani Kari Rākhisē, Kon Rākhisē Āi Mātri Rākhisē Buli Nām Roba Jash Roba.'

From the specimen Mantras of 'Mikthi', 'Madur' and 'Sukāi' clans it is seen that every clan has its own deities although Lord Mahadev, is the Supreme God of all the clans. In the 'Mikthi' prayer the 'Bāolākangar' 'Badar māji and 'Manus Mahadev' are benign deities. In the second 'Mantra' female deities like 'Runduswari, Madheswari, 'Lakhimi', 'Padumi', are worshipped along with twelve male deities ('Bāre deo, Bāregosāin'). Again in the third 'Mantra' there are different deities like 'Bor Āi', 'Saru Āi',

'Ākari', 'Ābari' Jagatjuri, 'Kani Adhelietceto'. It is observed that in the three 'Mantras' the deities are prayed to mitigate three kinds of sufferings. Thus sufferings are attributed to various deities.

In the 'Mādur Kul's 'Mantra' the name of Lord Krishna appears. It seems the Lalungs have introduced the name of Krishna due to the influence of the Vaisnava Koches, who are living around the Lalung villages. Besides a good number of Lalungs have embraced Vaisnavism by upgrading themselves as 'Saru Koch'.

Although the 'Mantras' are chanted in Assamese, yet there are Lalung words in the 'Mantras' which along with the tune provide a tribal character to the 'Mantras'. Thus 'Rantu Siri', 'Māido Siri', 'Mājia Dipar', Thirāi Thāok, 'Lāine', 'Khariā Gāri', Tungrā Balā, Tukrā Balā et. are not Assamese words.

The Lalung deities should be regularly propitiated by offerings and sacrifices. Besides 'Mahadeo', 'Ganesh', 'Parameswar', 'Badarmāji', and 'Bāolākong', 'Kuber' are their benevolent male deities while 'Āi Gosāni' 'Lakhimi', 'Padumi', 'Kālikā', 'Kāmākhyā' 'Saru Āi', 'Bor Āi', 'Aakari', 'Jagatjuri', 'Kāni Adheli', are the important benevolent goddesses.

As mentioned earlier, the place of worship for each 'Bangsha' is called 'Borghar'. Generally it is constructed in a central place of a village. Near the main post towards east there is the post of god ('Mindaīne Thunā). An altar is made in front of this 'Thunā' where one auspicious arrow (Zelā) and one sacrificial dao ('Lāngkhur') are placed. The Zelā is considered as a very sacred object which is prepared locally. There are customary rules in respect of preparation and formal installation of the 'Zelā' in the 'Borghar'. The villagers of Kamarkuchi near Jagiroad are entrusted with the preparation of 'Zelā' and other iron articles for the entire community. The person who makes the 'Zelā' has

to observe fast. While placing order for a 'Zelā' due honour should be shown to the maker by offering rice powder and betel leaves and nuts. Similar honour should be shown while bringing the 'Zelā' to the 'Borghar'.

'Thāns' (public worshipping place) are established for each village or a group of villages. Again the villagers of a particular area may affiliate themselves with 'Thāns' of different areas. Thus the Lalungs of Barapujia near Raha were the worshippers of twelve 'Thāns'. Hence they are known as 'Bara' (Twelve) 'Pujā'. A 'Thān' is a big hall erected generally in an out of the way place near the forest. Public worships are performed in these 'Thāns' occasionally where the Deori presides over. There may be separate 'Thans', for different gods and goddesses. Thus 'Thans', are found in the names of 'Māhādeo', 'Kesāikhāiti', 'Bhagawati', 'Sani', 'Māthakur', etc., Formerly 'Jangkang' (god of agriculture) was also worshipped in the 'Thans'. But now-a-days this puja is not performed in all the Lalung villages. Sacrifices formed essential part of the puja. Thus a tortoise was sacrificed before the goddess 'Kālikā', a buffalo or a black goat before 'Kesāikhāiti', a duck for 'Jaleswar' a white fowl for 'Kuber' and a pair of pigeons for 'Bhagawati'. Today considerable changes have taken place in the mode of 'Thān' worship. Sacrifices are rarely resorted to. 'Māh' Prasād' (mug, gram, banana etc) is offered as 'Naibedyā' before the gods and goddesses, particularly Ganesh and Lakshmi. This is happening due to the influence of the Mahapurushia Vaisnav religion which is gaining some ground among a certain section of the Lalungs. The converted Lalungs do not maintain a 'Borghar' nor they take rice beer or pork. They observe the Caste Hindu religious ceremonies in their 'Namghars'. In short many of their pujas have been abandoned. Instead of worshipping 'Māldakā' and 'Sanidakā' by offering sacrifices, the Lalungs prefer to propitiate these deities by reading 'Sanisarit' in the 'Namghar'. Although there is no reference to a 'Namghar' in the

Lalung traditional belief system, the institution of 'Nāmghar' occupies an important place in the religious system of the present day Lalungs.

The change towards Vaisnavism may be due to the expensive and perhaps irksome procedure of the traditional worships. The educated sections, by and large, do not play active roles in the traditional worships. Thus today there are two broad religious divisions among the Lalungs—the traditionalists and the Vaisnavites. The latter section has organised themselves under the All Nagaon District Tribal Sarania Sangha. Some of the Saranias are propagating 'Bhagawatiā' system of worship under the guidance of an All Assam Vaisnava Organisation. They do not adhere to 'Hom Jagnya' and a Brahmin priest is not employed in their religious ceremonies. They are also known as 'Nām Kirtaniā' or 'Haridhwaniā'. It may be noted that in spite of the three broad religious divisions, a non Lalung visiting the Lalung villages will hardly be able to locate any rift in their day to day life.

A 'Bangsha' observes the following public worships in a year.

'Deo-Sewā' :

'Deo Sewā' is normally observed in 'Kati-Āghon' (October-November) when new arecanuts are ready for offering to the deities. In some villages, this 'Sewā' is observed in the month of 'Bhāda' (August-September). On the day of the puja the 'Borghar' is cleaned by the 'Hāri Kuwari'. The 'Gharburā' takes out the last year's basket (Khāng) made of bamboo or reeds which was hung in a corner of the 'Borghar'. The basket contained the paraphernalias of last year's puja which included betel leaves and nuts, seven packets of rice, seven small bundles of reeds, seven bundles of Dimaru leaves, bamboo pipes

for keeping water and five bundles of thatch. A new basket is made and new puja paraphernalias (equal to last year's amount) are kept inside the container which the 'Gharburā' keeps in a corner of the 'Barghar'. The last year's basket is thrown away in an out of the way place. This puja is observed in order to make the villagers self-sufficient with the bare necessities for the year.

'Kālikā' Puja :

'Kālikā' is worshipped in order to get an increased yield of the crop as well as to improve the health of the people. The puja is observed in the month of 'Kāti' (October / November) to propitiate goddess Kamakhya. Two tortoises are essential for this puja. A corner of the 'Borghar' is selected for the puja where an altar is made towards east. In front of the altar, 'Nibut' (Mug, banana etc.) is placed on a bundle of seven pieces of banana leaves. An earthen lamp is ignited in the altar. Towards north of the altar another altar is made where a white fowl and an earthen lamp is placed in the name of 'Māhādeo'. The tortoises are placed on a root of a banana in front of the altar. The 'Gharburā' utters 'mantra's and sacrifices the tortoises and the white fowl. A prayer is held and after the prayer the participants partake of the 'Nibut'.

'Bhakat Sewa' :

Every 'Khutā' observes 'Bhakat Sewā' in the month of 'Āghon' (December / January). Early in the morning the 'Gharburā' offers prayers to the presiding deities of the 'Bangsha' with betel leaves and nuts. After the puja the elderly persons of a clan sit in the courtyard of the 'Barghar' facing towards western direction. The 'Gharburā' of the 'Bangsha' and other members sit in front of them. Plates, (Batā) of betel leaves and nuts and a pot of 'Zu' are placed before the elderly persons of the clan. Then the

'Bhakats' or the elderly persons of the clan pray to god and to the ancestors to bless the villagers with peace and plenty for the year. At the close of the ceremony the 'Bhakats' are entertained with 'Zu'.

'Āi Bhāgawati' :

The Pachorajia Lalungs worship 'Āi Bhāgawati' with great reverence. It is believed that 'Āi Bhāgawati' brings peace and progress for the villagers, therefore she is worshipped by the womenfolk every year in the month of 'Jeth' (May-June). A raft is made with banana stems and offerings containing 'Mah Prasad' (gram, banana etc) are placed on it. After the prayer the raft is placed in the downstream of a river towards west. As the raft is disposed of on the down stream, this is also known as 'Bhatiyani', meaning flowing down stream. Formerly 'Deodhani' (dancing in trance) was part and parcel of this puja. Now-a-days 'Deodhani' is rarely seen.

'Thān' Worship :

Besides the 'Bangsha' or 'Khutā' worships, the entire village community observes certain pujas during a year. Sometimes one or more villages participate in such pujas. Such community pujas are observed in the 'Thāns' which may be established in a village or in a cluster of villages. There may be a separate 'Thān' for individual god or goddess. Among these, the 'Thāns' of 'Māhādeo', 'Kālikā', 'Kesāikhāiti', 'Bhāgawati', 'Sani', 'Mālthkur' are prominent. During puja, sacrifice must be offered to these deities. But now-a-days in many villages sacrifice is not offered in the 'Thān' puja. Instead of sacrifice 'Nibut' or 'Naibedyā' is offered which contains gram, banana, betel leaves and nuts etc. Thus 'Baisnava' influence is noticed in their traditional puja system.

‘Māhādeośāl’ ‘Thān’, ‘Basundhari Thān’, ‘Deosāl Thān’, ‘Kumoi Thān’ :

The Lalungs consider the ‘Māhādeośāl Thān’ and ‘Basundhari Thān’ of Sahari Mauza of Nagaon district as ‘Sanctum Sanctorum’. Annual pujas are held in these ‘Thāns’ as per direction and guidance of Sahari ‘Rājā’. Goddess Durga is worshipped in these ‘Thāns’. The ‘Deosāl Thān’ of Gobha Mouza and the ‘Kumoi Thān’ of Manaha Mauza are the important centres of Sakti worship. Lord Mahadeo which is considered as the supreme god, is worshipped in these ‘Thāns’. In ‘Deosāl Thān’, Siva Ratri puja is performed with great mirth and merriment. The non Lalungs of various castes and creeds gather at the ‘Thān’ and offer prayers to Lord Siva. The puja at ‘Deosāl’ starts on Tuesday. The ‘Pithāgurikhundā’ dance commences on Wednesday. The puja and dance are concluded on Thursday. To mark the closing ceremony a grand feast is arranged on Friday in which all the villagers of different villages take part. The hill Lalungs of the foothills of Karbi Anglong and Jayantia also take part in this community worship.

Besides the above pujas the Lalungs perform various other community pujas such as ‘Jangkang puja’, ‘Sani puja’, ‘Khāplāng’ Rāwāne puja, ‘Hogorā puja’ ‘Langkhunpuja’, ‘Wāri Sāvāne Puja’ etc.

The presiding deities differ from area to area but in all the Lalung villages ‘Māhādeo’ is considered as supreme god.

Area	Presiding deity
Amsoi area	— ‘Bāolakangar’, and ‘Nāchuni’
Marzong	— ‘Tāliā Takariā’, ‘Silkāmāi’, ‘Borkhāmāi’ ‘Badalmāji’.
Bor Amni	— ‘Burā Rāmsā’, ‘Jakar Burā’, ‘Bakalā Burā’.

Bor Rongkai — ‘Famtā Parui’, ‘Dimāpuri’, ‘Hājon Bāolā’, ‘Khonā Bāolā’, ‘Nāchuni’, ‘Silikangar’.

Lomkoi — ‘Mahan Pātor’, ‘Athār Bāolā’, ‘Nāchuni’, ‘Bagani’.

Sonākuchi — ‘Khorādorā’, ‘Khātboroi’.

Gobhā — ‘Sāribhāi’, ‘Māhādeo’, ‘Badalmāji’

Jagiroād — ‘Sāribhāi’.

Deosāl — ‘Māhādeo Pārvati’.

‘Jangkang Puja’ :

The ‘Jangkang puja’ is now observed mainly by the hill Lalungs. It is an annual puja where goddess Lakshmi is worshipped. Formerly it was observed at Barapuja also. There is a place known as ‘Jangkang hāli’ in between Barakhat and Amaraguri Pukhuri. The hill Lalungs observe this puja with great fun and feast. The young boys and girls dance merrily with the tune of ‘Thurāng’ (small drums). The occasion is used by the young boys and girls to select their sweet hearts.

‘Sani Puja’ :

‘Sani Puja’ is observed in the month of ‘Jeth’ (May-June). Generally this puja is held in an out of the way place. Eggs are essential for this puja which are sacrificed before the deity. After the prayer the participants retreat towards west uttering ‘Koi, Koi’ i. e. come, come. When they arrive at the entrance of the village another puja is held on the roadside. This is done mainly to scare away the evil spirits (‘Sani Dakoā’).

‘Hogorā Puja’ :

‘Hogorā Puja’, also called ‘Bāsanti Puja’ is observed mainly by the Lalungs living in the foothill areas such as

Kathiatali, Kandali, Dgosal, Manpur as an annual religious festival. This puja is observed in the 'Sāmādi'. It may be noted that 'Sāmādis' are fast disappearing from among the plains Lalungs and thus 'Hogorā Puja' is also disappearing in the plains. The puja is observed for flourishing crops and the same is concluded by planting trees. If a dance is arranged at 'Sāmādi', a puja has to be performed to appease 'Sāribhāi' namely 'Lāmkā Rājā', 'Gurubar', 'Rajeniri' and 'Daseniri'.

Besides these the Lalungs perform 'Lāng Thun Puja' (for construction of a house), 'Wāsi Sawāne Puja' (cutting of thatches) in different occasions throughout the year.

We have already mentioned about four important 'Thāns' which are considered as major places of pilgrimage by the Lalungs. There are few other 'Thāns' which also deserve mention. These are—

1. 'Sāribhāir Thān' near Na khola (Jagiroad) under Gobha Mauza. (2) 'Burhā Gosāin Thān' on the road from Nelli to Karbi Anglong. In this 'Thān' there is no temple but only an altar inside the forest about half a kilometer south of the road. In the altar there is one stone pillar about 2' / 2½' high. During Magh Bihu the place is illuminated with earthen lamps. (3) 'Uttar Kholā 'Thān' is situated on a hillock towards south of the Nellikhazar. The four faced image of this 'Thān' was said to be brought from a 'Thān' situated at a distance of about five kilometers from the present 'Thān'. The Nelli 'Rājā' himself offers prayers before this deity. It is believed that if the deity is not propitiated properly, it disappears and the 'Rājā' has to bring it again by offering a puja. Except Nelli 'Rājā' nobody can bring the image back.

In Barapujia Mauza there are three 'thāns' namely 'Kesāikhāiti Thān' 'Lakhimi Thān' and 'Devi Thān'. In Silpukhuri mauza there are 'Ganehar Thān' and 'Kālikā Thān' which were believed to be worshipped by the Mikir 'Rājā'.

In course of time the 'Thān' came under possession of 'Koches' and Lalungs jointly. The Lalungs occupied the southern portion of the 'Thān' but their hold over the 'Thān' did not last and the Koches became the sole owner of the 'Thān'.

'Kālikajari'

The elderly Lalungs believe that on the western boundary of the Mikir Bhefā Mauza there was a 'Thān' where goddess 'Kālī' was worshipped. A folk story reveals that one Sri Runu Bordoloi was able to win confidence of the Ahom King by capturing a garlanded white elephant of the king. To commemorate the valour of Runu Bordoloi the king caused to dig one tank in the name of Runu Bordoloi. Even today one traces a tank called Runu Pukhuri in between Bhomoraguri and Longāmukh. Incidentally it may be mentioned that the Lalungs have a proud tradition of capturing wild elephants.

'Māl Puja'

Till some years back the Lalungs used to perform a puja known as 'Māl Puja'. This puja is not much in vogue at present. Generally 'Jeth and Ahār (June-July) are considered as auspicious months to solemnise this puja. The puja starts on Tuesday and the four 'Burās' namely 'Loro', 'Forongāi', 'Koroimāji' and 'Gaonburā' remain in-charge. At first it was observed once in two or three years.

A place is selected for the puja which is called 'Mālsasā'. The elderly persons of a village busy themselves in cleaning and designing the 'Māls'. 'Māl' means bamboo and wooden posts designed specially for this occasion. There are two kinds of 'Māls' viz. 'Bor Māl' and 'Saru Māl'. 'Bor Māl' is made of bamboo while stems of small trees are used for 'Saru Māl'. The young boys decorate the upper portion of the 'Bor Māl' with cuttings of flower designs. The 'Saru

Māl' on the otherhand is decorated in the bottom. Four lines about six to eight centimeters long are made in the bottom of the 'Māls' which are coloured with turmeric juice or charcoal. Two or three circular designs are carved in the extreme end of the 'Māls' which are also decorated with black or yellow colours.

As soon as the puja ends the elderly villagers select a few persons to carry the 'Māls'. Generally persons between 40 and 50 years of age are selected for carrying the 'Bor Māls' and young men below 30 years are allowed to carry the 'Saru Māls'. 'Bor Māl' carriers have much responsibility because they must pay utmost attention to the flower designs in the 'Māls'. While beating the roofs of the houses, the flowers of 'Māls' must not fall down.

The selected persons proceed to the place where 'Māls' are placed in rows. They make a 'Hoi Hoi Ou' sound while the drummers beat the 'Khrāmbār'. The place where 'Māls' are kept is called 'Māl Potā'. Small groups are formed and each group carries one pair of 'Bor Māl' and five or six numbers of 'Saru Māl'. The groups proceed to different directions of the village carrying 'Māls' on the shoulders. They make a 'Hoi Hoi Ou' sound constantly and beat the roofs of the houses. 'Bor Māls' go ahead of other 'Māls'. The families pay due regard to the 'Māls' by offering eatables and 'Zu'. In the evening all the groups gather in the outskirts of the village and plant the 'Māls' under a tree. After that they return to their respective homes.

On the following day all the villagers gather in the 'Māl Sasā' and conclude the ceremony with a feast.

'Māl Puja' is observed to relieve the people from epidemics and such other calamities.

'Rāti Sewā'

Some Lalung villages have 'Sasang Ghar' where the aged villagers perform the 'Rāti Sewā' ceremony. The 'Sasang

Ghar' has much socio-religious significance. Offerings are made to the 'Dhwajā' of 'Sasang Ghar' during the three Bihu festivals. It is customary among them to swear in the name of 'Sasang Ghar' and the liability or god's debt can be redeemed only by offering a pair of chicken and a pot of 'Zu'. Besides, the person who swears in the name of 'Sasang' has to pay a penalty of Rs. 5.00 (Rs. 1.00 goes to the 'Bhakats' and Rs. 4.00 returned to the person) along with a 'Bata' (plate) of betel leaves and nuts. This is called 'Kriya' Bhangā'. Some families offer prayers at 'Sasang Ghar' wherever any disease occurs in the family. The 'Sasang Ghar' has no relation with the 'Borghar' or 'Than'.

'Rāti Sewā' is observed half yearly or annually for the general welfare of the villagers. But as per demands of individual households 'Rāti Sewā' may be observed several times. The deities worshipped in the 'Sasanghar' are not definitely known but references are made to 'Purna Sankar Guru', 'Kālmātri', 'Thālmātri', 'Amayāmātri' etc. Recitations are made in the name of 'Rāmdēo' also. There is no image of any deity in the altar. One earthen lamp in the altar is the symbol of the deity. The lamp is placed in a stand called 'Gosā'.

According to the nature of offerings 'Rātisewā' may be divided into two parts, viz. 'Bor Sewā' and 'Aaroiyā Sewā'. If pig and fowls are sacrificed then it is called 'Bor Sewā'. If on the otherhand, only a fowl is offered then it is known as 'Aaroiyā Sewā'. Dried rice powder, 'Sāndah', boiled rice, curries prepared out of banana sprouts ('Kalful' or 'Kaldil'), flesh of pig or fowl, are offered in 'Rātisewā'. 'Zu' forms the most essential item of 'Rātisewā'.

There are separate office bearers for 'Sasang Ghar' such as 'Burā Bhakat', 'Sākari', 'Sājoni' and 'Pāsoni'. The 'Bura Bhakat' and five or six old persons constitute the 'Pārisad' who remain in charge of prayer. The 'Sākari' cooks rice and meat etc., the 'Sājoni' assists the 'Sākari' in cooking

while 'Pāsoni' assists all the three office bearers. These posts are hereditary and they do not belong to a particular 'Bangsha' or 'Khutā'. Except the Bhakats, no other person can participate in 'Rāti Sewā' functions.

Generally 'Bor Sewā' is held in the month of 'Jeth' (May-June) and 'Aaroiyā Sewā' in 'Kāti' (October-November). A day is fixed for 'Borsewā' in consultation with the elderly peoples and subscriptions from each household are collected. Out of the money thus received one pig and nine fowls are purchased. The 'Pāsoni' also collects one bowl of rice from each household and prepares 'Zu' for the occasion. The formal installation of 'Dhwaj' and igniting of earthen lamp are considered as most auspicious occasion. There are songs befitting the occasion the subject matter of which varies. The period also varies from 'Dwapor' to 'Kaliyug' For example :—

'Satya Dwāpore Nupungsak Dhvajā Hoi
Kintu Hoi Kumārar Sāki,
Kaline Yugate Sariyaha Tele
Ase Dharamake Rākhi.

The recitation refers to Sankar and Madhav, the two great Vaisnava reformers of Assam of the 15 th. century :

'Sankar Hol Salitā Madhav Hol Kanikā
Āi Mātri Sihāte Jale'

Again-

'Aagat Sankar Guru Gurit Madhav Deve,

Dujane Bhaila Khandali

Madhyat Basiyā Nārad Mahārishi

Ronge Bolāi Jānta Hari.

Sri Sankar Guru Sonar Manidhāri

Luite Mārile Bhāti

Ghosā Ratnāwali Sloke Bhatimāi

Puhāi Pelāle Rāti'.

The paraphernalias used in 'Bor Sewā', however, go against the Vaisnava philosophy. The 'slokas' of Borsewa

incorporate names of scriptures and persons of Vaisnava philosophy. It is probable that the Lalungs might have come into contact with the disciples of Sessa, Budhbari, Chaliha and Katanipar Satras who also observe 'Borsewā'.

There is emphatic reference to 'Purna Sankar Guru' in the 'Borsewā' slokas who is nothing but Lord Siva. For example :

'Sāl Hoi Nerākhe Bar Hoi Nerākhe
Nerākhe Tridasar Dev,
Purna Sankar Guru Nerākhe Māne
Rākhontā Nāikiā Keo.'

There are three sections of Rātisewā followers, viz. 'Digambariā' 'Rangāsaraniā' and 'Nunmatiā'. The 'Digambariās' do not wear clothes, rather they wrap some banana leaves in their bodies during the 'sewā'. Their prayer must include the pork ('Pahu'). The 'Rangāsaraniās' also discard clothes but do not offer pork and cooked rice to the deities. The 'Nunmātiā' section offers pork etc. but they do not discard their clothes.

It is not understood why this ceremony is observed in closed door atmosphere. Probably this is done in order to create a fear psychosis among the common villagers. When there is any serious illness in a family, the head of the household reserves one pig or fowl in the name of 'Sasang'.

During my visit to Barapujia I had the occasion to get some details about the Barapujia 'Sasang Ghar', the 'Bhakats' of which follow the 'Nunmātiā' system of worship. The Barapujia 'Sasang Ghar' is a thatched house with two small rooms. A door in the middle wall connects these two rooms. One room is used for cooking rice, pork, etc., and the other is used for sitting and dining purposes. A 'Bhakat' sits near the door and he is called 'Duariā Bhakat'. In front of the 'Dhwaj' (for male ancestors) other 'Bhakats' take their

seats. In the line of 'Burā-Bhakat', the 'Khutiputiā Bhakat', 'Guākatīā Bhakat' and other senior 'Bhakats' take seats. The inside room which is meant for cooking is used by 'Sākari', 'Sājani' and 'Pāsoni'. 'Zu' is kept in this room. There is a detailed procedure to be followed while preparing the 'Zu' for 'Rāti Sewā' which is called 'Sāj Marā'. The 'Burā Bhakat' prepares the 'Sāj' with the help of 'Pārisad', 'Sākari', 'Sājani' and 'Pāsoni'. Only earthen plates should be used in the preparation of 'Sāj'.

The main ceremony of 'Bor Sewā' is held after six or seven days of 'Sāj Marā'. On the preceding day of 'Bor Sewā', a pig ('Pahu') is formally selected. The 'Bhakats' gather in the 'Sasang Ghar' and bow before the 'Dhwajā'. After that they proceed to collect the 'Pahu' (pig) which should be without any blemish.

Next day at about 8 or 9 A.M. the 'Bhakats' gather at the 'Sasang Ghar'. Rice powder, packets of banana leaves, vegetables firewood, etc. are brought to the 'Sasang ghar'. The 'Pārisads' prepare the rice cakes and at about 5 P.M. all the preparations are completed. One big bunch of ripe bananas, two basket fulls of fried rice powder and vegetables, one basket of rice cakes, some packets of fried rice and sweetened rice, fried pulses are brought near the altar. There are three 'Batās' (plates) of betel leaves and nuts along with three packets of salt. In one corner near the altar there are packets of rice powder, Jaha rice, mug, one pair of eggs, some vermilion in a banana leaf, cotton for the earthen lamps and some sweetened rice balls.

When everything is ready by about 8 or 9 p.m., the 'Bhakats' come to the 'Sasang'. The pig and fowls are brought in and after prayers to Lord Siva, the 'Jiwa Uruwā' is performed. The 'Bhakats' recite slokas invoking god to kill the pig and fowl. While recitation of slokas is in progress, the Bhakats who are in charge of the pig and fowl keep close

watch on the dying pig and fowl. A specimen of 'Jiwa Uruwā' sloka is presented here.

'Jenehe Hoise

Jiuare Egoti

Jivak Māri Jātonā Bhunjāi,

Bhāgar Jiwa Bhāge Jāi

Sthānar Jiwa Sthāne Jāi

Muthir Jiwa Muthite Lukāi'

(Free translation—There is no certainty about the lives of living beings. The soul substance leaves for its destined place. The lives (of pig and fowl) are disappearing in the hands of the 'Bhakats.' When the Bhakats in charge of pig and fowl declare that the 'Pahu' and 'Sarāi' are dead, then these are brought outside for processing. The hind legs of pig and fowls are given to the 'Sājani', 'Pāsoni' who cook those for the deities. All this time the Bhakats continue the recitations. When 'Sājani' and 'Pāchani' inform that everything is ready then the formal 'Borsewā' starts.

Four plantain bark containers ('Donā') are essential for 'Bor Sewā'. These are filled with nine pieces of betel leaves and nuts and nine portions of 'mug' rice, banana, and rice balls each. Two of the 'Donās' contain two eggs which are smeared with vermilion. The Cooked meat and food are placed in other two 'Donās'. Two processed fowls are placed on these two 'Donās'. Four incense sticks are placed in four corners near the 'Dhwajā'. After the prayer these four 'Donās' are taken out and kept in an out of the way place. Then the 'Bhakats' partake of the meat and other eatables. Before that the 'Burā Bhakat' formally accepts the 'Sāj' and the other 'Bhakats' share the same after him. Recitation continues after the entertainment also and at the close of the ceremony the 'Bhakats' utter the following prayer.

'He Swāmi Joy Nāme Bighini Kshoy Houk, Ei Bākya Satya Hoba Lāge' (O, Lord, let the very utterance of your name destroy the evil. This truth must prevail.)

After that the Bhakats return to their homes.

Individual Household Worship :

Besides the community worships, the Lalungs observe certain individual household worships like 'Bāro Janiyā Bhakat Sewā' Na Janiyā Bhakat Sewā', and 'Sāt Janiyā Bhakat Sewā'. For these 'Sewās' 'Bhakats' of other clans are invited who are entertained with a sumptuous feast. The 'Bārajaniā Bhakat Sewā' is a costly affair as in this Sewā twelve 'Bhakats' of different clans are to be invited and a feast with pork has to be arranged.

In 'Na Janiyā Bhakat Sewā' number of Bhakats are limited to nine. The food items have certain specifications. Only white fish ('Barāli') and white vegetables (white water gourd) and red fish ('Rohu') and red vegetables (Pumpkin) are used on this occasion. 'Sāt Janiyā Bhakat Sewā' is arranged with black fish ('Sol', Māgur, Kānwai) and black vegetables (Sesame or banana sprouts). The 'Bhakat Sewas' are arranged for the general welfare of the family members. Besides these, the individual households perform other rituals to appease the evil spirits. 'Sanidakā is observed in some families to appease the 'Saturn'.

Moral Puja :

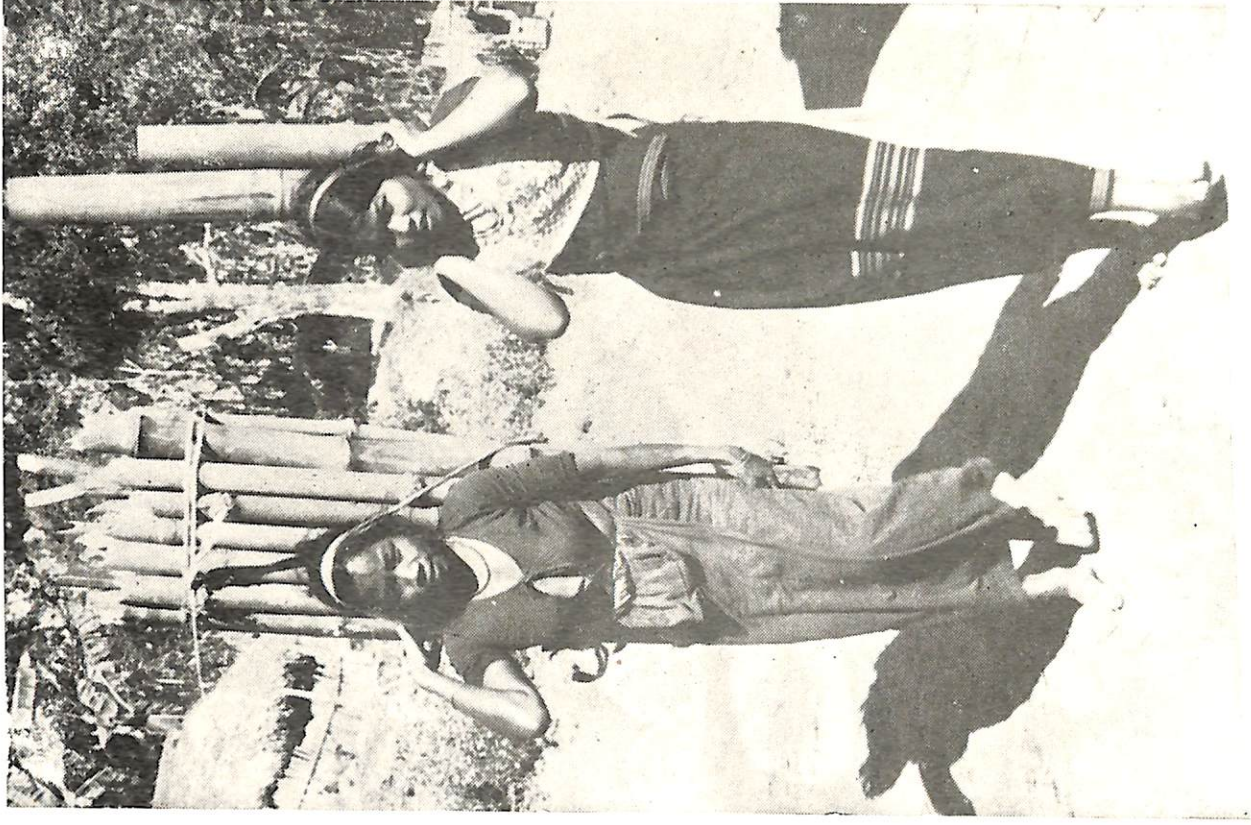
Some families observe 'Moral Puja' in the rear courtyard of the house. The courtyard is cleaned nicely and seven circles are made with charcoal powder, turmeric and rice powder. In the centre of the circle an egg is placed. Betel leaves and nuts are placed in the lines of the circle and in between the lines earthen lamps are placed. The entire circles appear to represent nine 'Grahas' (Planetary system) with sun in the centre. The Deori chants mantras and breaks the egg in the centre of the circles. If the colour of the yolk is black then it is considered as ominous. The 'Maral' Puja is observed when a member of the family suffers from chronic illness. At the end of the puja, the circles are rubbed and the effected person is bathed on the place with magical water.



Gathering of firewood is a routine work of the aged women.



A Tiwa girl with her traditional ornaments.



On way home after collecting firewood and water

CHAPTER-VII

Festivals

The Lalungs have elaborate festivals which are closely linked with worship of different deities. Songs and dance along with rhythmical tunes of 'Khrāmbār', 'Kiringādhōl' and 'Gomonā' form important part of their festivals. The important festivals are the three 'Bihus' (Bisu), 'Barat', 'Sagrā Misāwā'; 'Wānsuā' or 'Wānzūā', 'Jon Bilā Mela' etc. 'Lo Ho Lā Hāi' and 'Lāli Hillālī' are the two songs sung in different socio-religious occasions. The former is sung mainly during name giving ceremony, wedding and harvesting occasions etc, while the latter is sung during marriage, 'Karam' and such other festivals.

A few specimens of 'Lo Ho Lā Hāi' are presented below :-

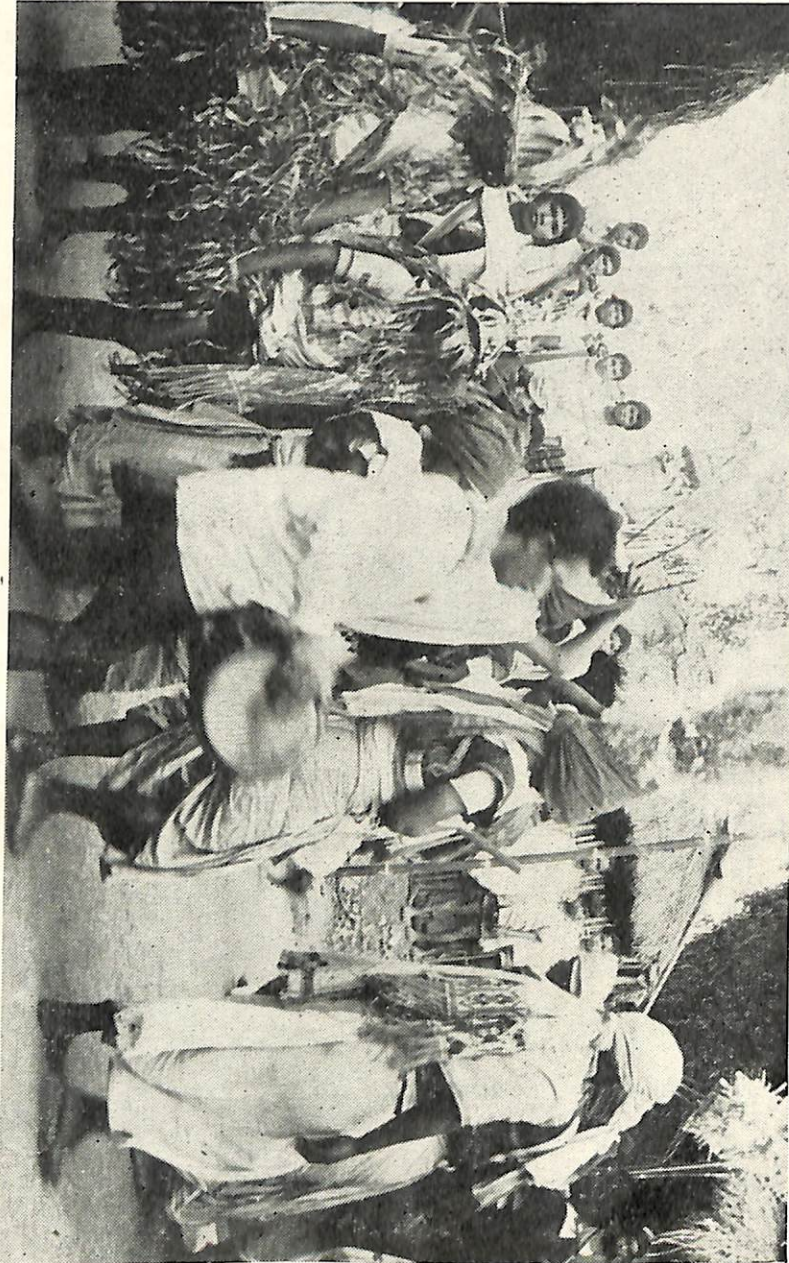
'Lo Ho Lā Hāi, Lo Ho Lā Hāi
Lo Lā Heloyā Lāi,
Bhāi Oi, Lā Lā Heloyā Lāi.'

The expert (Ojhā) leads the songs while the 'Pālis' (assistant) repeat it after him.

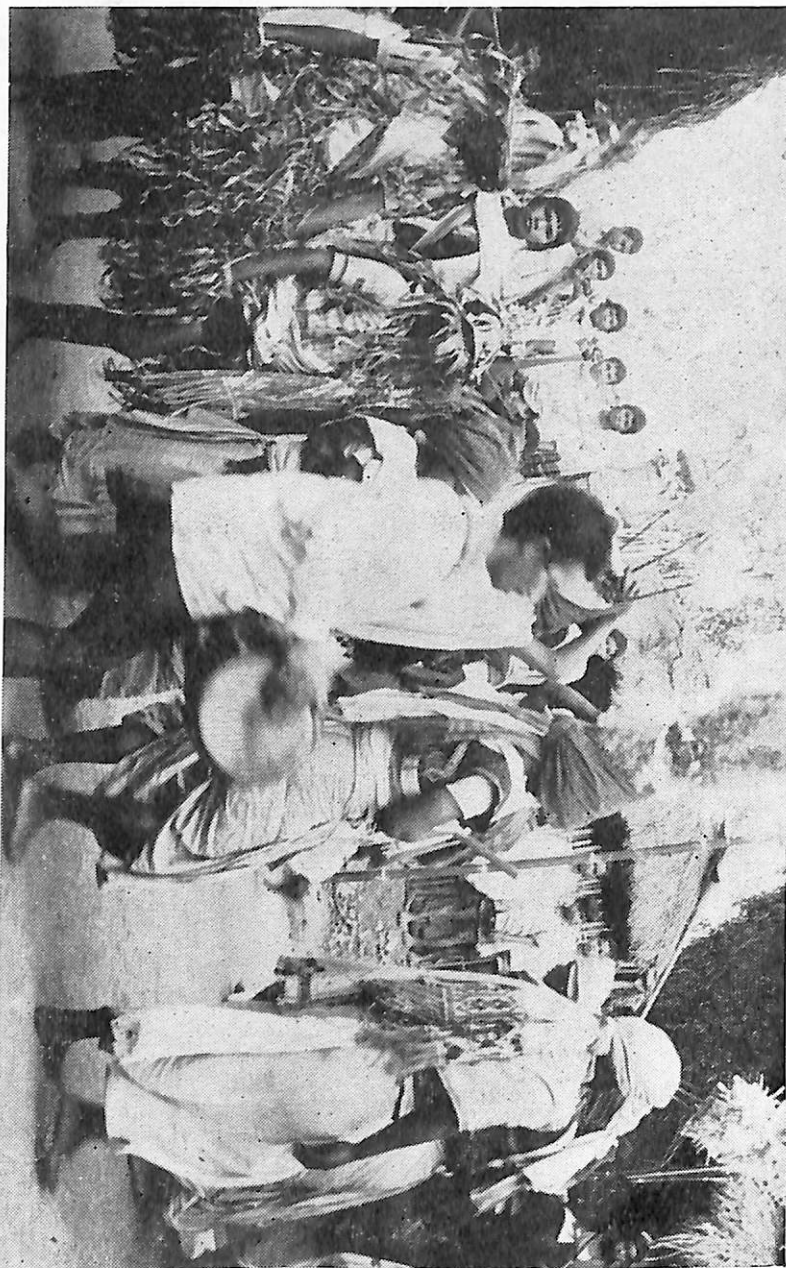
'Ojhā' :- 'Kino Mās Mārība Sole Mor Bopāi Oi
Kino Mās Mārība Sol, Bhāi Oi
Lā Lā Heloyā Lāi.'

'Pāli' :- 'Lo Ho Lā Hāi
Lo Ho Lā Hāi.'

'Ojhā' :- 'Abujan Bhāiyeke Bujābo Nowāre
Dhonde di Saraki Gol
Bhāi Oi, Lā Lā Heloyā Lai.'



A Sagrā Misāwā dance



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'Pāli' :-'Lo Ho Lā Hāi
Lo Ho Lā Hāi.'

'Ojhā' :-'Abujan Bhāiyeke Bujābo Nowāre
Dhonde di Saraki Gol
Bhāi Oi, Lā Lā Heloyā Lai.'

Pāli :-'Lo ho Lā Hāi
Lo ho Lā Hāi.'

Ojhā :-'Kino Mās Māriiba Nādi Mor Bopāi Oi,
Kino Mās Māriiba Nādi, Bhāi oi,
Lā lā Holoyā Lāi'

Pali :-'Lo ho Lā Hāi
Lo ho lā Hāi.'

Ojhā :-'Āye Nāi Ekiyā, Bhaiye Nāi Ekiyā
Akale Maribi, Kāndi, Bhai Oi,
Lā Lā Heloyā Lāi'.

'Lo ho' means rhythm or tune, 'Lā' means slowly and 'Hāi' means loudly, 'Heloyā' means, carefree and 'Lāi' means proceeding while dancing.

Another important song of the Lalungs is 'Lāli Hillāli.' 'Lāli' means a line having no end and 'Hillāli' means waves or variation of tones. Thus 'Lāli Hillāli' means series of songs having no end like waves of sea which come one after another ceaselessly. Generally these songs are sung between two persons, male and female, in question answer type series. While singing these songs the leader and his followers are intoxicated with ricebeer and unless rice beer is supplied, 'Lāli Hillāli' and 'Lo Ho Lā Hāi' songs cannot be sung in the true spirit. Thus today except in socio-religious occasions consumption of locally brewed ricebeer is very much restricted and as a consequence some tribal indigenous songs and dances are fast disappearing.

Songs and dances are not only performed in important religious occasions, these are also observed in various other occasions such as 'Mindāi Khronā' (prayer song), 'Sāmādi Loa' (construction of Sāmādi) 'Khrom Nāngā' (community ploughing), 'Māi Rāwā' (harvesting of paddy), 'Māi Pathālā (community threshing), 'Māi Misāwā' (bringing paddy bundles to the granary), 'Wān Sonā' (grinding of rice), 'Khel Jāwā' (dancing while grinding rice), 'Ahoi Lāwā' (Welcoming the

goddess of wealth), 'Fang Sokā' (cutting trees), 'Pān thāi Pioā' (returning of youth from forest, paddy fields), 'Dakhrā Palā' (dancing with two long pieces of bamboos), 'Tomere Kowā' (circle dance), 'Rongkhāng' (Dhanesh bird dance), 'Pere' (Crab dance), 'Mothāl' (squirrel dance), 'Pirā Nriya' (dance with a wooden stool with very low legs), 'Hākhel' (Plough dance), 'Kāthār Kāsowā' (preparing the land for transplantation of paddy), 'Pān thāikhel' (dance during cutting of bamboos, fixing fencing in a compound of a house or cutting thatches).

From the above list of dances which, however, is not exhaustive, an idea can be formed about the Lalungs' artistic way of life. They feel that "life is real, life is earnest and the death is not its goal." Life should be enjoyed. This attitude is visible in their gay abundance during the Bihu or 'Bisu' festival.

The Bihu or 'Bisu' :

The three Bihus i. e. Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu, which are the proud cultural heritage of Assam are observed by the Lalungs with great mirth and merriment. The Lalungs call the Bihu as 'Bisu'. They observe the 'Baisāk Bisu' as a major spring dance festival. Unlike other fellow Assamese, all the Lalungs do not observe the 'Baisāk Bisu' on the Chaitra Sangkranti day (last day of the month of Chaitra). The date of observance varies from area to area. Formerly the Lalungs of 'Pāchorājya' observed 'Baisāk Bisu' on Wednesday and 'Magh Bihu' on Tuesday of the months of 'Bohag' (April-May) and 'Magh' (January-February) respectively. But since the conversion of the 'Pāchorājya' into the Hindu religion they are observing the Bihus on the 'Sankranti' days. In Barapujia area the Bihus are observed on the 'Sankranti' days. The 'Sātorajia' Lalungs also observe the Bihus on the 'Sankranti' days.

The Lalungs living in the foothills, particularly in Kholā-area (Silsang) observe the Bihus on Tuesday and

Wednesday. The Lalungs of Gobha and Nelli observe Bihus on Saturday and Sunday of 'Magh' and 'Bohag' respectively.

In Sahari area 'Magh Bihu' is observed on Tuesday and Wednesday and Bohag Bihu on Saturday and Sunday.

Since 1974 the Lalungs of Sahari also are observing the Bihus on 'Sankranti' days. It may be noted that Bihus among the Lalungs are not strictly secular festivals. Pujas must be performed before undertaking the merrymaking aspects of the Bihus.

There is close connection between the three Bihus and the agricultural operations. Thus Magh Bihu is observed as harvesting festival and Bohag Bihu as festival of merrymaking and dance after the agricultural operations are over. The Kati Bihu on the other hand is observed in a very austere manner as stocks of paddy is exhausted. Out of these three Bihus the Lalungs observe the 'Baisak Bisu' with much pomp and fanfare.

'Baisāk Bisu' :

On the onset of rain in April the nature gets a new lease of life. The green leaves of trees, appearance of cuckoo with its melodious tunes, the fragrance of flowers make the people moody. In tune with the nature the Lalungs make necessary preparations to welcome nature. Pujas are offered at the 'Thāns' before observing the Bihus and for this the villagers make necessary arrangement from the first week of 'Sot' (March-April). Now-a-days 'Bihu' Pujas are solemnised at Nelli, Kholā, Gobha and Sahari areas where various deities are worshipped during the occasion. The deities worshipped during this occasion are :- 'Māhādeo', 'Māhāmāi', 'Jangkong', 'Bhāgawati', 'Kālikā', 'Kesāikhāiti', 'Ranchāli', 'Burha Rāmsā', 'Sāri Bhāi', 'Farimahar' (sun), 'Basundhari', 'Ganesh', 'Kartick', etc. In Kholā area the 'Rājī and the 'Senāpati' worship 'Hojāideo' and Māhādeo respectively in their households.

On the eve of the 'Boisak Bisu' all the fruit bearing trees are wrapped with ropes of paddy stalks. In some areas this is done on the Bihuday itself. It is believed that such action increases the fruit bearing capacity of the trees. Formerly on this day five fowls were sacrificed on the gateway of the 'Barghariā' family in the name of five deities viz. 'Māo Kesaikhāiti', 'Lukori Kangar', 'Pākari Kangar ; 'Bordeo' and 'Māhādeo'

On the day of the Bihu, early in the morning all the villagers gather at the 'Barghar' and cut the vegetables like gourd, brinjal, cucumber and 'Thekera' into pieces to be thrown over the cows and bullocks. These are arranged in bamboo slices. The "Gharburā arranges a puja in the 'Barghar' or in the 'Kholā' in front of the 'Barghar' where a fowl is sacrificed. Unless this sacrifice is made the villagers cannot take out their cattle next day for bathing. This sacrifice is not performed now-a-days in most of the Lalung villages.

Puja is offered to the almighty god praying for plentiful crops and wellbeing of the people for the year. In some villages 'Bāgh Rajā' is worshipped for welfare of the cattle. 'Kuber' is worshipped inside the campus of the house for 'Wealth'. In all this pujas sacrifice of fowl must be performed. From the manner of death of the bird the elderly villagers foretell the future of the village during the year. If the bird dies facing the sky then dry weather will prevail. The weather will be favourable if the bird dies keeping the face towards earth. During the Puja a mixture of rice powder and water is sprinkled in the granary, cowshed, cooking place and in looms. After the puja another mixture of mustard oil and charcoal is prepared and with it imprints are marked on the bodies of the cattle. The cattle are taken to a river or a beel and bathed. The cut pieces of vegetables prepared earlier are thrown over the cattle invoking annual increase and luxurious growth year after year.

Exchange of ropes which are used to tie the cattle in the cowshed takes place among the villagers. After that javelin throw competition takes place. The elderly villagers gather at the 'Barghar' where they are entertained with a chicken or dryfish curry along with 'Zu'

'Jorātolā :

The 'Baisāk Bisu' occasion is used for 'Jorātolā' ceremony. The 'Jorā' is a packet of rice, 'Tulsi' leaf and 'Durba' grass wrapped in 'Kau' leaves which is kept in the 'Barghar'. This ceremony symbolises welcoming of new agricultural year. A neat 'Jorā tolā' ceremony is also performed at the house of the 'Rājā' also.

The 'Bisu' occasions particularly 'Magh Bihu' and 'Bohāg Bihu' are used for offering prayer to the ancestors. At midday all the elderly members of a 'Bangsha' gather at 'Barghar' with betel leaves and nuts, ricecakes, curd and gur etc. and offer prayers before the altar. The eatables are presented in a bundle of banana leaves in the names of the ancestors.

In the evening the cattle are honoured with rice cakes and new ropes. The ladies illuminate the campus of the house with earthen lamps. Agricultural implements are taken out to the courtyard and a puja is performed in the name of 'Biswakarmā' and 'Kuber'. A white fowl is sacrificed by the villagers along with 'Zu'. The agricultural implements are purified with a mixture of rice powder and water. Assamese towel known as 'Bihuwān' are offered to the elderly persons. The womenfolk prepare a special curry of fowl and arum leaves. Leaves of 'Pasatiā', 'Tulsi' 'Bihlangani,' 'Mongāmāri' are also used in the curry. Today most of the leaves and herbs are becoming scarce and people sometimes forego this curry.

Besides this special curry, the people take an indigenous medicine prepared out of immature jackfruit, 'Nilukath' and

other herbs. It is believed that this medicine prevents attack of serpents during the year. From this day merrymaking and dancing start which continue for seven days.

Among the Lalungs of Gobha, Nelli, Kholā and Sohāri the 'Bisu' is concluded with a ceremony known as 'Bheti Karhā' The common villagers carry shoulder loads of locally produced items such as rice cakes, cotton, turmeric, brinjal chillies, lac, raw and dried fish and bamboo shoots to the 'Rājā' These items are distributed among the 'Rājā', 'Princess', 'Senapati' and others ladies. Along with the main 'Bhār', small 'Bhārs' with tiny pieces of the above mentioned articles are also carried. Pieces of banana shoots are included in these 'Bhārs'. Two batches of young boys make a mockfight with these 'Bhārs'. In the evening a feast is arranged with the articles of these 'Bhārs'.

'Bokā Nās' :

The hill Lalungs conclude their 'Bisu' festival with a dance over mud, what is known as 'Bokā Nās'. On the following day of the 'Bisu' the youths of a village gather in a place and seek formal permission from the village elders to perform the 'Bokā Nās'. Necessary preparations are completed before noon. The drummers and pipers are formally invited. The young boys and girls take their weekly requirement of dress and start singing from one end of the village. The families welcome them in the courtyards with betel leaves and nuts and some rupees. Singing and dancing continues for seven days. i. e. Wednesday to Tuesday. On the Wednesday some young boys go out in search of a pig. In the meantime the girls make other arrangements for a grand feast.

On the following Wednesday the young boys and girls gather near a beel. An ankle deep muddy place is made and near this place the elderly villagers offer a short prayer. The young boys and girls sing and dance over this muddy

area for about an hour or so. After that they clean themselves in fresh water and return to the place. Again a prayer is held. The pig is formally sacrificed and a feast is arranged and with this the festival comes to an end.

'Gosāin Uliwā Utsav' :

Among the plains Lalungs the 'Gosainuliwā Utsav' culminates the 'Bihu festival. On the Bihu day the elderly villagers decide the date of the festival and necessary arrangements are made from this day. An open field is selected so that large numbers of people both Lalungs and non Lalungs can be accommodated. Two big pandals are constructed, one for the 'Rājā' and the four officers and the other for keeping the image of the Lord. The first is constructed in east-west direction while the second is in north-south direction.

On the stipulated date 'Nām Kirtan' is held inside the 'Namghar' while 'khrāmbār' is played outside. The young boys carry shields and swords in their hands and dance along with the rhythmical tunes of 'Khrāmbār'. The 'Gayon Bāyon' comes out from the 'Nāmghar' reciting songs followed by the image carriers, the 'Rājā' and the four officers. The Medhi garlands, the 'Rājā' and the officers including the 'Gājon Bāiyon'. The image is carried seven times around the 'Nāmghar' followed by all the people including the players of the musical instruments.

Then the image is brought to the pandal. 'Nām Kirtan' is held before the image while the dancers display their skills before the 'Rājā' and the officers. In the evening the 'Khātmurti' i. e. the image of Lord Bishnu is brought to the 'Namghar'. With this the festival comes to an end.

'Māgh Bihu' :

The 'Māgh Bihu', which is one of the three major 'Bihus' of Assam, is also observed by the Lalungs with

traditional gaiety. Construction of 'Meji' (heap of firewood) and 'Bhelāghar' (improvised shed of paddy stalks or dry banana leaves) is completed two to three weeks ahead. Generally teenaged cowherds construct these structures. Among the hill Lalungs the person who remains in charge of 'Meji' and 'Bhelāghar' is called 'Mohāl'. The hill Lalungs construct separate 'Mejis' for 'Rājā' 'Kunwari' and 'Senapati'. The Lalungs of Gobha, Nelli, Khola and Sahari also construct separate 'Mejis' for the office bearers. But in the plains of Nagaon such practice is no longer in vogue.

On the eve of the Bihu the young boys spend the night at 'Bhelā ghar' by lighting bonfire and singing and dancing. At dawn they welcome the 'Rājā' and 'Senapati' for igniting the 'Mejis' constructed for them. The boys take bath in the tanks, beel or rivulets taking a torch of paddy stalk in their hand. When the 'Mejis' are fully burnt the 'Rājā' and the 'Senapati' retire to the 'Pātsarā' (Place where the Rājā and other officers change dress). The villagers pay due respect to the 'Rājā' and return home.

In some villages of Barapujia the young boys burn wooden 'Meji' at night. They sing and dance along with beating of the drums (Pisukhrām) and buffalo pipe. Formerly 'Kānhi Nās' (dancing with two bellmetal plates in two hands) was arranged on this occasion, but now-a-days this dance is not in vogue. In some villages while arranging the 'Meji', bundles of paddy stalks are placed upside down and at the time of igniting these 'Mejis', 'zu' is offered to the elderly villagers. Till few years back 'Bihu hāt' was arranged on the day of the Bihu where drummers, pipers, and singers of Bihu song had to compete one another in an open field.

In this 'Bihu' the people worship their deity at 'Barghar' with rice cakes, 'Zu' and other food items. Special offerings are made to the ancestors also. In some villages offerings are made at 'Sasangghar' also. During the day the villagers

Free translation :

The young boys and girls are tired of waiting for 'Barat' festival. Whenever they learn that a Barat festival is organised they become impatient. Various arrangements have to be made such as cutting pieces of 'Satiyan' and 'Modar' trees for the doll (Oldman and woman). In the 'Barat' festival they will display the dolls while enjoying feast with fowls.

Masks are used during the 'Barat' dance and the dancers take rice beer profusely. Torches are carried by the dancers and sometimes these torches are thrown to the audience. It is believed that these torches do not harm the audience as all are participating in a Puja.

'Pirājuj' :

The most interesting part of the 'Barat' festival is the 'Pirājuj' (fighting with a Pirā i. e. a wooden stool with small legs). The fight continues among four damsels and the 'Pirā'.

For this the girls have to maintain fasting althroughout the day. At night all the villagers including the 'Rājā' gather in an improvised 'Rabhā' (Pandal). The 'pirā' is placed in the centre of the 'Rabhā' and all the people make a circle around it. The girls take their seats near the four corners of the 'Pirā' keeping their hands over the 'pirā' one above the other while the elderly people sing the religious songs. At one stage the 'Pirā' rises up but the four girls try to pull it down. This tug of war continues for sometime. After some time the 'Pirā' automatically comes down. A prayer is held after that and with that the festival comes to an end.

The above description of 'Barat' is given here as narrated by Shri Dharmaram Bordoloi of Jagiroad. It is reported that now-a-days the 'Pirājuj' part of the festival is not observed.

'Sagrā Misāwā'

The 'Sagrā Misāwā' is a spring dance festival of the Lalungs which is held in the month of Fāgun, (February/Mārch). The 'Sāmādi' or the bachelors' dormitory forms the nucleus for this dance sequence. Rehearsal of 'Sagrā' song and dance takes place early in October and continues till the time of inauguration of the festival in February or March. Before the formal dance starts the people perform the 'Lāngkhun' and 'Māhādeo' puja. Besides fowls, one pair of pigeons, one duck and one goat are sacrificed before these deities. In Mindaimari areas only fowls are sacrificed.

'Sākhā Lāngkhun Phujā'

The 'Langkhun' puja has two parts i. e. 'Sākhā Lāngkhun Phujā' and 'Tārā Lāngkhun Phujā'. The former is observed in the month of Kāti (October/November). The puja is performed at night and 'Loro' and 'Doloi' preside over the ceremonies. In some Lalung villages 'Shāngdoloi' and 'Sāngmāji' perform the puja. An altar is made where six folds of 'Thārā-lāi' (leaves of Tarā) five pieces of 'Wārāng' (ends of kaka bamboo) and five pieces of 'Khumtā' are tied with threads. Black goat, duck and pigeons are sacrificed before the deity.

'Tārā Lāngkhun Phujā'

After one week of Sākhā Lāngkhun, 'Tārā Lāngkhun Phujā' is observed. The puja paraphernalias are the same with those of 'Sākhā Lāngkhun'. In this puja the rehearsal of 'Sagrā' starts. 'Khrām' (kept in the 'Sāmādi') is taken outside for use during 'Sagra' dance. 'Sagrā' songs are also sung on this occasion.

In certain areas of Nagaon district 'Māhādeo' is worshipped after 'Tārā Langkhun' where a white goat is sacrificed. Only after these pujas, formal 'Sagra' song and dance start.

'Khrām', 'Thorāng' and 'Bangshi' are essential musical instruments of 'Sagrā Phujā'. 'Thumbāng' or 'Tumbāng' (short drum) can also be used.

Masks are used by the 'Sagrā' dancers who are called 'Nartak'. The important 'Nartaks' are two 'Umudis' and one 'Dāngariā'. The 'Burā' and 'Mas' (deer) come only after these three dancers. The 'Mas' wears a deer mask which is made of bamboo slice and cloth. 'Umudi', 'Dāngariā' and 'Burā' use a 'Phāgā' (Turban) each. One end of this 'Phāgā' is extended to lie on the back. 'Umudis' and 'Dāngariā' use another piece of cloth over the Phāgā which extends upto the ankle. Above this turban, a 'Purālāo' (crown) made of the kernel of 'Khāing dong fā' tree is used. An embroidered 'Tāglā' (shirt) is worn in the body. Above the 'Tāglā' an embroidered Muga or cotton chadar is used, the ends of which lie on the back. When both the ends of this chadar are spread on both the shoulders the front view appears like the sign of multiply. An embroidered waistband, having a length of about eight feet is used.

The 'Nartaks' wear embroidered Mugā or cotton 'Dhotis' length of which is about sixteen to eighteen feet. A special comb having designs of elephants is used for hair dressing. The length of the comb may vary from six inches to one feet.

Dancing continues for the whole day and after dancing in three households the party takes rest for the night in that household where the evening sets in. The party is entertained with 'Zulāosā' (gourdful of 'Zu') and 'Koi' Bandha 'Sā' (betel leaves and nuts). In this way the party completes 'Sāgrā' dance in the households of twelve respectable persons extending a period of three days and three nights. On the third day the party returns to the 'Sāmādi' to return the musical instruments. Festival dresses are removed. For seven days these dresses are kept in the 'Sāmādi' and the village youths keep a vigil althroughout. On the completion of the seventh day the youths wear the festival dresses and walk again. On that day the 'Sanipujā' is observed in the 'Dāngariā Thān'. As soon as they arrive at the 'Thān', the masks are removed and placed on the branches of a tree. At the end of the puja the youths return to the 'Sāmādi'.

Next day a big community feast is held in which all the villagers take part.

It may be mentioned that the songs of 'Sagrā Misāwā' are sex provoking and the entire scene is pervaded with mirth and laughter. The young boys and girls express their love during this festival— 'Mārjonge Sagrao Ānge Oi', Noā Khartā Kisā, Ninā Nithāwe Minise Sume Sume Riu', (meaning— This is the girl whom I met at the 'Sagrā' festival at Marjong. She is very beautiful to look at. She is about to smile when she looks at me)

At present this 'Sagrā Misāwā' festival is in vogue in Mindaimari, Amri, Kathiatali, Nelli, Ampanai, Umswang, Bormarjong of Nagaon and Karbi Anglong districts.

CHAPTER : VIII

Summary And Conclusion

The Lalungs trace their original abode in the Tibet region but their migration to the plains is shrouded in mystery. Some Lalungs are of the opinion that they came to Assam from their abode on the banks of the river Jamuna near Allahabad. After residing in several north Indian places they ultimately arrived at Pragjyotisha where they ruled for several years establishing a principality. Later on they moved towards Kapili valley where they established a principality in the valley known as 'Tribeg'. The exact location of Tribeg could not be ascertained but in all probability this principality was somewhere near the confluence of Borpani, Jamuna and Kapili. It is believed, the Lalungs ruled in Tribeg for about sixteen generations. During the war between Drikpati and Dakshin the 'Tiffras' or Lalungs took shelter in the hilly areas. Large section of the 'Tiffras' fled away to the nearby Jayantia Kingdom where they had lost their separate identity as they had to accept the Jayantia life and culture. Till the accession of the Jayantia Kingdom to the British empire these 'Tiffras' lived in the Jayantia kingdom extending a period of about 3000 years.

After the defeat of the Kacharis by the Ahoms, the Jayantias extended their Kingdom to the 'Kalang and Kapili' of Nagaon district. The Jayantia King had established the chiefs of the Lalungs in this area as tributary chiefs.

There are legends prevalent among the Lalungs which tell us that the Lalungs once lived in the 'Hillali' kingdom, the boundaries of which extended the whole of present Nagaon and Darrang districts. Due to the invasions of Kamrup and Kamata Kings, the people of 'Hillali' fled away to the southern hilly tracts. They established villages near the foot hills extending upto Kandali, Bamuni and Kathiatali. As the Lalungs preferred to live in the secluded foot hill areas, the contemporary Ahom officials called them as 'Dāntiyoliā'

Another legend describes the Lalungs as originally inhabiting the Jayantia hills who moved into the plains of Nagaon district because they disliked the matriarchal and matrilineal systems of the Jayantias. Although there is no clear cut date about their migration to the plains of Assam, yet it can be assumed that they had migrated to the plains sometime in the middle of the 17th century A.D.

The Lalungs prefer to call themselves as 'Tiwās'. The name 'Lalung' they say, was given by non Lalungs. In their dialect 'Ti' means water and 'Wā' means superior. As the Lalungs landed on the plains following the course of the river Brahmaputra, they introduced themselves as 'Tiwā' to the inquisitive non 'Tiwās'. Probably 'Tiwa' derives its origin to the term 'Tibbatia' meaning people hailing from Tibet. In course of time this 'Tibbatia' might have changed into Tiwā'.

They belong to the great Bodo race into which tribes like Boro Kachari, Chutia, Deori, Rabha, Mech, Tippera or Tifra, Garo etc. are included. Their concentrations are mainly found in the district of Nagaon in Central Assam. They are spread in Kapili, Mayang, Bhurabandha, Kathiatali and Kampur Development Block areas of Nagaon district and the Nartiang Elaka of Jowai Sub-Division of Jayantia district of Meghalaya. Besides, there are a few Lalung villages in Dhemaji areas of Dhemaji Sub-Division

Previously dead bodies of wealthy and respectable persons only were cremated but now a days cremation is the general rule. The dead bodies of minors, pregnant women, epidemic cases etc. are buried. A purificatory ceremony is held on the day of death. Another two ceremonies are observed on the 3rd. and 7th. day. The main purificatory ceremony i. e. 'Karam' is solemnised jointly by a 'Bangsha'. 'Karam' may be kept pending for 5/6 years as it is an expensive affair. Beliefs in respect of death and disposal of the dead are in vogue among them.

Ancestor worship is made in their various religious occasions. But an exclusive worship is observed in the month of 'Aghon' (December). They believe in the existence of soul and spirits.

Both individual and joint families are found. Formerly the Lalungs were matriarchal and matrilineal but to-day the plains Lalungs are patrilineal and patrilineal where as the hill Lalungs still adhere to the old system. The society is divided into several clans and sub clans. They have a 'Khutā' system of social grouping which can also be called extension of a family. Following the genealogy each family of a certain clan forms social grouping called 'Bangsha' or 'Khutā'. A 'khel' (clan) consists of several such 'Khutās'. They also maintain a clan superiority. Thus 'Bāro Bhuni' 'Na Bhuni', 'Sāt Bhuni' divisions are noticed.

The kinship terminology prevalent among the Lalungs, particularly of the plains may be termed as descriptive. But the use of certain classificatory kinship terminology cannot be ruled out. It is observed that Lalung terms of reference are more in number than the terms of address.

The Lalung society is a stratified society and there are different office bearers in village having different socio-religious assignments. The social organisation is split into two categories. The first category may be called as secular village organisation which is headed by the Gaonbura and assisted

by an official called 'Bārikā'. The non secular organisation is run by the three office bearers namely 'Gharburā', 'Zelā' and 'Hāri' Kunwari'. Politically the villages are administered under Panchayati Raj system.

The religion of the Lalungs is based on a belief in some deities. Their religion can be considered as one of the branches of the Hindu religion. Lord 'Māhādeo' is their supreme god. Besides Lord Māhādeo, they worship 'Ganesh', 'Parameswar', 'Badarmāji', 'Bāolakong', 'Kuber', 'Āigosāni', 'Lakhimi', 'Padumi', 'Kālikā', 'Kāmākhyā', 'Saru Āi', 'Bor Āi, Āakari', 'Jagatjuri', 'Kāni Andheli', etc.

Every 'Bangsha' has a 'Borghar'. Besides, there are 'Namghars' for the converted Lalungs. 'Thāns' are established for each village or a group of villages. There may be separate 'Thāns' for different gods and goddesses. There are two broad religious divisions among the Lalungs viz. 'Saktas' and 'Vaisnavas' But majority of the Lalungs follow the 'Sakta' religion. They perform various pujas, both community and individual, on various occasions during a year. Their festivals are closely interlinked with the pujas. Besides the three Bihus, they observe several other festivals throughout the year. Songs and dance form inevitable items in their festivals.

CONCLUSION

The data presented in the preceding chapters pin point some of the salient characteristics of Lalung society and culture as it is at present. On scrutiny of the data it is seen that majority of the Lalungs are maintaining the traditional distinctiveness notwithstanding a few tangible changes in the socio-cultural fabric. The plains Lalungs have lost most of the traditional traits of their culture while their hill counterparts are keeping those in tact. There is close interaction between these two divisions. A growing consciousness about their past heritage is noticed among the plains Lalungs.

Economically they are very much depressed and this economic backwardness is perhaps the root cause of the loss of most of the traditional characteristics (particularly of the plains Lalungs). Educationally also they are very backward as their percentage of literacy as per 1971 Census is 21.5 against the All Assam tribal percentage of 26.03. The people want progress without losing their separate identity.

While making efforts to remove the age old backwardness a self motivated effort to minimise avoidable expenditure, specially on innumerable religious festivals, should be made. The special schemes drawn under Integrated Tribal Development Projects will go a long way towards removing the age old backwardness of the Lalungs.

APPENDIX

Language And Literature

The Lalung is a member of the famous Bodo group of languages and forms a link between the Bodo or the Kachari spoken in the submontane tracts of the Kamrup and Darrang districts and the Dimasa spoken in the N. C. Hills district. Majority of the Lalungs living in the plains of Assam, particularly the younger section, cannot speak their language. For education as well as for day to day exchange of thoughts they use Assamese language. The Lalungs residing in the hilly regions, however, are maintaining their language in tact.

Dr. Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India (1903) has mentioned about 40,000 Lalung speakers in 1891. But the figure came down to 10,576 according to 1961 Census (Census of India 1961, Vol.—I) and 9954 in 1971. Assimilation of the Lalungs into the broad Assamese life and culture is the major cause of this downward trend. Besides during these decades large number of Lalungs were converted into Koch (Saru Koch).

Except Reverend M. Balwan's work which was written in Roman script, no Lalung grammar written in Assamese script has yet been published. No effort has been made to study the language in a systematic manner. Shri Mahiram Bordoloi, a Lalung gentleman is preparing a Tiwa Grammar in Assamese script which will go a long way in fulfilling the long felt need of the Lalungs. The under mentioned

specimens amply demonstrate certain characteristics of the Lalung language.

There are definite words to indicate singular and plural numbers. Thus they use :

Singular.

Ang (I)

Nā (You)

Be (He)

Plural.

Ching (We)

Nagedā (You)

Begeđā (They)

Similarly application of tenses is noticed. In the present tense there are specific words for three persons. Thus :

Ist person. Aang Mā Sāng (I take rice)

2nd person Nā Māi Sā (You take rice)

3rd person. Be Māisāo (He takes rice)

Above is a specimen of the tenses used in the Lalung speeches. In the past and future tenses also the language has distinct expressions.

Use of suffix is common in the language. Some specimens are :—

Li+Wā=Liwā [to go]

Ri+Wā=Riwā [to do]

Fai+Wā=Fiwā [to come]

Tha+Wā=Thawā [to sleep]

Chā+Wā=Chāwā [to eat]

Nung+Āa=Nungā [to drink]

Mān+Āa=Mānā [to get]

Chā+E=Chāi [eating]

Tha+E=Thoi [sleeping]

Chei+Ngothe=Chaingthe [when eating]

Ri+Ngothe=Ringthe [when doing]

Khonā+Gaid=Khonā Gaid [if heard]

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