

**ESSAYS  
ON  
TRIBES AND CASTES  
OF  
ASSAM**

**PART - II**

**DR. G. C. SHARMA THAKUR**

**Essays on Tribes and Castes of Assam (Part-II) : Written by  
Dr. G. C. Sarma Thakur, published by the Directorate of Assam  
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**DEDICATED TO**

*My wife late Ganga Devi Sharma,  
without whose ungrudging assistance  
this book would not have seen the  
light of the day.*

## PREFACE

The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati under the aegis of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, have been providing grants-in-aid to authors for publication of books written on different aspects of tribals and scheduled castes. The scheme is known as 'Grants-in-Aids for Literary Works for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.' The scheme receives very good response from different authors. In fact, it is difficult to accommodate all the authors under the scheme. As a part of this popular scheme, the book on ***Essays on Tribes and Castes of Assam (Part-II)*** by ***Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur*** has been sponsored by the Institute for publication. It is expected that the readers will receive the book with pleasure. We look forward to comments and suggestions from the readers.

I am grateful to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, and Welfare of Plains Tribes and Backward Classes Department, Government of Assam for providing financial assistance for implementation of the scheme.

I also offer my thanks to the officers and staff of this Directorate for their help and cooperation.

Finally, I like to thank M/s. Bohniman Printers, Guwahati for their help and cooperation in bringing out the book:



**Director**  
Assam Institute of Research for  
Tribals and Scheduled Castes.  
Guwahati-22

## INTRODUCTION

The present book is in continuation of the earlier book entitled 'Selected Essays on Tribes and Castes of Assam, Part I, Published by the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati in December 2007. Unlike the former publication the book deals with profiles and problems of the scheduled castes of Assam putting thrust on the problems of scheduled caste development based on empirical research on the changing traditional occupations. Many research works have been done on the scheduled tribes of Assam but not much research study is available on the scheduled castes. There may be occupational seminars on the problems of scheduled castes and sketchy reflection here and there but the real ground situation and inherent problems of sixteen scheduled castes are hardly focussed. On this backdrop the socio-cultural dynamics of scheduled caste development vis-a-vis antipoverty measures have been extensively dealt in six major articles.

There are lesser known small non scheduled athenic groups in Assam like the Tai Phakes, Tai Aitonias, Tai Turungs, Tai Khamyangs, Banais etc. about whom not much study has been made. Exhaustive articles on life and culture of the said communities have been incorporated in the present edition. Besides, empirical research based articles on tribal forest villages, status of plains tribal women, rehabilitation of the Jhumias (shifting cultivators) of the hills, constraints of tribal development in the plains districts of Assam, land alienation and indebtedness among plains tribes, socio-economic change of the Mising villages, translation of the traditional legal system of the tai phakes are incorporated in the present edition.

The articles presented in this book had already been published long back in books, journals, bulletins, magazines, news papers and the same have been presented here in a book form.

The demographic data of some articles required updating and the updated date as per 2001 census have been incorporated in the appendix.

The author is indebted not only to the publications listed in the references and bibliography but to some more books and authors. It may happen that views of some authors whose names are not mentioned unintentionally may find a place in some articles and I am indebted to those authors as well.

I have this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Pramod Chandra Bhattacharyya, who took keen interest in the articles and encouraged me to publish the research papers, printed articles in a presentable book form. I am grateful to Sri George Basumatary, A.C.S., Director Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati for arranging financial assistance for the publication. Thanks are due to Shri Ganesh Chandra Kakati, Joint Director, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati for his assistance and co-operation as a younger brother, in bringing out this publication, I will be failing my duty I do not express my love and affections to Shri Manish Chakrabarty, Stenographer, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati who performed the difficult task of proof reading of this publication. The proprietor Bohmiman Printers, Guwahati deserves my thanks for meticulous printing of the book.

My efforts in compiling this small volume will be amply rewarded if the articles can provide a glimpse of the unexplored culture of the scheduled tribes and Scheduled castes of Assam and prove to be useful and informative to the inquisitive scholars, academicians and general readers.

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## Core Problems Vis-A-Vis Socio Cultural Factors Of Scheduled Caste Development in Assam

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Spread over entire rural and urban areas of Assam, the sixteen groups of the scheduled castes of Assam account for 16,59,412 persons as per 1991 Census constituting 7.40 percent of Assam's total population of 224,14,322. The bulk of the scheduled caste population live in rural areas, the percentage being 86.18. The percentage of urban scheduled castes is 13.82 which is higher than the state's 11.10 percent urban population. This urban status, however, does not indicate a high socio economic standard of living. There are sizable influx of rural scheduled caste people to towns in search of employment and small petty avocations like fish selling, thela pulling, rickshaw plying, opening panshops in street corners, doing menial jobs in hotels and in private residences etc. Besides, there are sizable urban based scheduled castes like the Bansphors, Dhobis, Dholis, Maharas, Lalbegis, Mehtars, Muchis etc. who perform all low and unclean jobs having a miserable socio-economic condition.

Unlike the scheduled tribes, the scheduled castes of Assam do not have a distinct traditional material culture. However, most of them have been able to maintain much of their socio religious beliefs and practices. The living pattern of the urban scheduled castes who have migrated to the state in the nineteenth century and who live mostly in the urban areas, is different from that of the rural scheduled castes and naturally core problems of these two groups differ.

The economic base of these scheduled castes who are mostly concentrated in rural areas is agriculture and fishing. As per 1991 census, 47.22% scheduled caste people are engaged in agricultural activities as against 50.90% of the state's total. The percentage of agricultural labourers is more i.e.

13.44% among the scheduled castes against 12.09% for the state's total population. Unlike most other rural agricultural people, the scheduled castes are not self sufficient with agricultural products as cultivable lands are insufficient.

The Scheduled castes are originally not agricultural people and the past generations of the scheduled castes people did not care to occupy land. The people were happy in those days with their limited possessions. Their needs were also limited. Due to lack of sound agricultural base, the scope of economic development has been hindered and the present generation is feeling the pinch of acute hardship.

About 50% of the scheduled caste people are in a perpetual state of indebtedness which can be attributed to the age old deficit economy accelerated recently by lack of employment opportunity and other disabilities like shyness. The Assam Indebtedness Relief Act, 1975 is still to make visible impact in this regard.

Next to agriculture, the rural scheduled caste people have had to depend upon fishing, particularly the Kaibartas, Namasudras and Jalkeots. Pottery and goldsmithy are the important occupations of the Hiras and the Banias respectively. But of late, occupational mobility has been observed among these groups as agricultural activities are at the optimum level so far land man ratio is concerned. The 1991 Census figures indicate a tilt towards trade and commerce (10.01%). But till 1971, the second position was occupied by livestock, forestry and fishing. This indicates an urban mobility under compelling circumstances thereby effecting the core of their culture. The core problem of the scheduled castes may be studied in this perspective also as the traditional occupations of non agricultural communities like the Bansphors, Muchis, Mehtars, Maharas, Lalbegis, have to switch over to other professions where they have no expertise or necessary resources. They have to face stiff competition from the non scheduled caste traders and professionals. The educated young boys and girls are searching employment and they hardly get any job because of their low efficiency. No doubt, there is

provision for 7% reservation in jobs for the scheduled castes, but most of the quotas are filled up from the job seekers of well established scheduled caste groups.

In Assam, fish catching and fish selling was exclusively done by the Kaibartas and Namasudras. But today, it is not so. The fishermen from other states have taken over this age old trade from the Kaibartas and the local Mahajans, who are also Kaibartas, began to patronise. A study conducted by the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, reveals this disheartening situation. Even those poor Kaibartas who are clinging to this traditional business inspite of the odds are suffering from the 60:40 syndrome i.e. a sizable share of the catch has to be given to the Mahajans who provide the capital. The Mahajans lend money to the fishermen on condition that for small catches, the fishermen have to pay 40% to the Mahajans and for bigger catches their percentage is 60. The poor fishermen have no alternative but to agree to the terms of the Mahajans. Besides, the age old indebtedness has played a big role in this regard. The Government chalked out a plan to rescue the poor fishermen from this awkward situation by forming fishery co-operatives but vested interests did not allow these co-operatives to function smoothly. For this again, the age old indebtedness is largely responsible. The fishing sources like rivers, beel etc. are not accessible to the poor fishermen as the same are auctioned to the big traders or Mahajans who generally prefer the Bihari fishermen to the local ones. Consequent upon degradation of the traditional income sources and non availability of fresh avenues, the economic backwardness has been further aggravated.

As mentioned earlier the individual scheduled caste groups have their own problems and the family oriented income generating schemes should have quota for each group of scheduled caste people based on population. Besides there are economically most vulnerable families from a certain group in a cluster and these entire families should be brought under the scheme of cluster development. Very often, members of smaller scheduled caste communities register complaint of negligence

by the Chairman of a Board who happen to belong to a particular scheduled caste community. But if definite quota and earmarked amount is there in the document, there will be no scope for dissatisfaction and equal justice will be ensured for all the groups.

Due mainly to the universalisation of elementary education there is an improvement of literacy among the scheduled castes and as per 1991 Census the percentage of literacy among the scheduled castes of Assam stands at 53.94 as against 52.89 percent for the entire state. Two decades back, the literacy percentage was 25.8 as against 28.8 for the entire state. Here again, the high percentage of literacy is not applicable for each of the scheduled caste groups. As per 1971 census (1991 census figures for each group are not available), the Baniyas with 38.95% of literacy came first, followed by the Kaibartas with 34%, Patnis 31.3%, Hiras 27.4% and Sutradhars 26%. There were groups like Bansphors which had a percentage of literacy much below the state percentage i.e. 15.16%. Similarly, the Duglas or Dhulis had 14.98%, Jhalo Malo had 15.25%, Mehtar 14.49%, Mahar 13.62%, Muchi 12.7% of literacy. Thus these groups always remain backward as they are shadowed by the average. A special drive is necessary for bringing these sections to the level of other fellow scheduled castes as ours is an egalitarian society.

As mentioned earlier, a good number of scheduled caste groups are changing their traditional occupations under various compulsions and the literates and semi literates are seeking employment. The scheduled caste Component Plan offers ample opportunities for self employment. But many job seekers particularly from the groups of lower educational status, are not aware of the facilities. It is not uncommon to find roster vacancies reserved for scheduled castes unfilled for years due to non availability of suitable educated and experienced candidate. It is observed that news-papers carrying advertisement for filling up posts by scheduled caste candidates are not easily available in the scheduled caste inhabited areas and by the time the job seekers get the information, the last date expires. Naturally, the

facilities are generally enjoyed by the town dwellers who have easy access to the newspapers and who perhaps do not require special treatment. Unless the chronic socio economic backwardness is removed, the scheduled caste economy will always remain at a considerable distance from the take off point. There is no dearth of well meaning schemes for the development of the scheduled castes communities and over the years due thrust has also been given to remove the drawbacks experienced in the implementation stage of the Scheduled Caste Component Plan. Sizable proportionate amount spread over twenty five relevant sectors of development has been spent since 1976-77. Besides, the quantified amount of the State Plan, the Scheduled Castes Component Plan (SCP) also incorporates centrally sponsored schemes funded by the Ministry of Welfare, Government of India and the State Government. The SCP also includes Direct Benefit Schemes like Family Oriented Income Generating Schemes for promotion of self employment of the Scheduled Castes. Necessary funds for such schemes are also available through Special Central Assistance and Bank loans. The flow of funds to SCP generally commensurates with the percentage of scheduled castes population of the state. The flow to SCP during 1990-91 was Rs. 42.12 crores (6.72%) out of a total allocation of Rs. 627.10 crores under the State Plan general areas; Rs 48.21 crores (6.49%) out of a total allocation of Rs. 744.00 crores under the State Plan in 1991-92; Rs. 57.85 crores (6.48%) out of a total allocation of Rs. 892.80 crores in general areas in 1992-93; Rs. 63.84 crores (6.86%) out of a total allocation of Rs. 956.16 crores in State Plan General areas in 1993-94. During the year 1994-95, Rs. 73.33 crores (7.49%) have been earmarked for SCP out of a total State Plan allocation of Rs. 978.83 crores.

The above figures amply suggest a reasonable financial situation for bringing the backward scheduled caste communities into the level of development of other communities. But main lacuna lies in the implementation of those schemes. The working group on the development of the scheduled castes constituted during seventh Five Year Plan observed. "The Special Component



Plans already prepared by the State Governments have not only to be improved quantitatively and qualitatively, but should also be implemented satisfactorily. For this purpose, it is particularly important to take note of the developmental needs of the scheduled castes in each occupational category, identify the available opportunities suitable for them, formulate appropriate developmental programmes in the light of the above and build these programmes and corresponding outlays into the Special Component Plan". (Report of the Working Group of the Development of Scheduled Castes, during the Seventh Five Year Plan, 1985-90, Chapter 2,p.2)

The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes conducted an evaluation study on individual beneficiary schemes sponsored and executed by the Assam State Development Corporation for Scheduled Castes Ltd. in Nagaon district and the findings are disheartening. The Corporation executed two types of schemes namely Margin Money Scheme (1979) and Direct Loan Scheme (1981). There were forty five trades under the former and thirty four trades in the latter scheme. The Corporation spent 25 per cent of total involvement and the rest was provided through local banks.

In case of Margin Money Scheme, out of thirty nine beneficiaries, as many as eleven beneficiaries did not make any repayment of the loan 'Intentionally'. They did so because of the alleged harassment meted out to them at the time of payment. They had to go several times to get the loan. Thirteen beneficiaries were not in a position to repay the loan because of poor economic condition. Four beneficiaries reported that they were not approached by the authorities. There was no follow up measures from the Corporation and two beneficiaries did not repay the loan on that spacious ground. Besides, seven beneficiaries were not receiving the sanctioned loan due to procedural lacunae. It was also reported that loan was sanctioned to a student who naturally became a defaulter. Only one beneficiary repaid the loan regularly.

Similarly, out of sixty one beneficiaries of the Direct Loan

Scheme, twenty eight loanees did not repay on the ground of poverty condition. Twenty beneficiaries did not repay intentionally as they had to collect the loan with much difficulty and they were reportedly harassed. Nine beneficiaries avoided repayment because they were not pressurised by the officers of the Corporation. Four beneficiaries reported that their units died before giving them any benefit, hence repayment was not made.

The above is a sample case and it is clear that much remains to be done in implementing the schemes. The core problems of the scheduled castes had already been identified and necessary measures for removing the age old backwardness have also been taken under the statutory provisions of 'Protective Discrimination' in the form of a separate Sub Plan. Now, it is time to take some harsh decisions in the greater interest of the welfare of scheduled castes.

#### SUGGESTIONS :

1. *In the 'Cluster Approach' problems of individual scheduled caste groups should be studied in depth and seperate funds should be earmarked for their development so far family oriented income generating schemes and pre-matric and post matric schemes are concerned.*

2. *Appointments under the Reservation Act should be implemented in such a manner so that representation of various caste groups is ensured.*

3. *The Bench Mark Survey for the scheduled castes should be prepared without delay as the same will be a guideline for individual caste-wise reflection in the SCP and in various Scheduled Caste Development Boards.*

4. *Concurrent evaluation of the schemes should be done by a team of researchers exclusively appointed for the purpose. The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, should be the right choice.*



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\* Paper presented in the Seminar, organised by the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, 5-7 October, 1994.

## Constraints Of S.C. Development

### A Case Study of Four Kaibarta Villages of Kamrup District

#### *Introduction :*

Out of the sixteen scheduled caste communities of Assam namely (1) Bansphor (2) Bhuimali-Mali (3) Brittil Bania (4) Dhupi-Dhobi (5) Dugla-Dholi (6) Hira (7) Jalkeot (8) Jhalo Malo-Jhalo Malo (9) Kaibarata-Jaliya (10) Lalbegi (11) Mahara (12) Mehtar Bhangi (13) Muchi-Rishi (14) Namasudra (15) Patni and (16) Sutradhar, the Kaibartas occupy the second largest position having a total population of 2,94,809 as per 1971 census, constituting 32.4% of the total scheduled caste population of Assam. The projected scheduled caste population of Assam in 1986 is 13,77,961 and the Kaibarta population during the said reference period is 4,45,162 constituting 32.3% of the total scheduled caste population (1981 Census was not held in Assam).

There are about 760 Kaibarta villages of Assam which are in the Plains areas of the Brahmaputra Valley interspersed with other non scheduled caste people. No compact area of the Kaibartas is located and they are found both in urban and rural areas.

The present paper has been prepared on the basis of the 'Study of the socio-economic conditions of the Kaibartas of Assam', conducted by the Tribal Research Institute, Assam. For the study, data of 76 villages spread over fourteen plains districts of Assam, based on 10% sampling of the total households, were collected. In Kamrup district 4 Nos of Kaibarta villages were selected viz. Maina Sundari Kaibarta Suba, Umananda (Kerpa Vitha), Narenga (Bajrapara) and Hajo Kaibarta Tola (TABLE-I). Dimension of poverty among the Kaibartas of these villages have been focussed which, I suppose will give a general picture

of the prevailing socio-economic backwardness of the Kaibartas of Assam.

**TABLE - I**

Showing names of the four Kaibarta villages of Kamrup district with sample households and Nos of family.

Sl. No.	Name of the village	No. of households surveyed	Nos to family members
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	22	147
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	11	65
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	3	17
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	3	23

The occupational pattern of the Kaibartas indicates that out of 252 members in 39 households 28 Nos (11.1%) are engaged in fishing as a primary occupation, 10 Nos (4%) earn their livelihood from agricultural activities and 8 Nos (3.2%) are engaged in service. The number of members engaged in business is only 10 (4%). Majority of the members i.e. 189 (75%) are engaged in other category which includes students. There are 4 (1.5%) wage earners in these villages. Numbers engaged in net making and weaving are 1 (0.3%) and 2 (0.7%) respectively. In secondary occupation 14 (5.5%) persons are engaged in net making while fishing as a secondary occupation is accepted by only 2 (0.7%) persons. Only 6 (2.3%) persons have agriculture as secondary occupation while in business there is only 1 (0.3%) person. The position is shown in a tabular form below.

**TABLE - 2**  
Persons engaged in primary occupation

Sl. No.	Name of the Village	Agriculture	Service	Fishing	Business	Daily wage earner	Net making	Weaving	Others
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	Nil	4	20	10	1	1	2	109
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	4	nil	8	nil	1	nil	nil	53
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	nil	3	nil	nil	1	nil	nil	13
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	6	1	nil	nil	1	nil	nil	14
Total :		10	8	28	10	4	1	2	189
		4%	3.2%	11.1%	4%	1.5%	0.3%	0.7%	75%

**TABLE - 3**

Persons engaged in Secondary Occupation

Sl. No.	Name of the Village	Agriculture	Service	Fishing	Business	Daily wage earner	Net making	Weaving	Others
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	Nil	Nil	1	1	Nil	14	2	2
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	6	nil	nil	nil	1	nil	nil	nil
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	nil	nil	1	nil	nil	nil	2	nil
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	nil	nil	nil	nil	1	nil	3	nil
Total :		6	—	2	1	2	14	7	2
		1.3%		0.7%	0.3%	0.7%	5.5%	2.7%	0.7%

From the Table 2 it is seen that although fishing has been considered as a traditional occupation of the Kaibartas, yet today only 11.2% are engaged in this occupation. Fishing is no longer considered as a lucrative proposition by the Kaibartas as the sources of fish are not easily accessible to them. The people purchase fish from Mahaldars at 60:40 ratio i. e. the fishermen get 60 paise per rupee while the Mahaldar gets 40 paise. The Mahaldars possess the fisheries through auction and in most cases they prefer non locals. Besides fish is not available althroughout the year.

In case of the persons engaged in agriculture as a primary occupation the position is no better as the Kaibartas donot posses sufficient agricultural lands. Further discussion in this respect will be done while dealing with land.

There are 21 (53.8%) Nos of families having only one earner each. Families having two earners each are limited to 10 (25.64%) while 7 (18.7%). Nos of families have 3 earning members each. Nine (23.07%) families have one earning dependent each. There are 4 (10.25%). Nos of families having 2 earning dependents and only 3 (7.6%) Nos of families posses 3 earning dependents each. It may be noted that these earning dependents are in most cases not full time earners and their earnings can hardly contribute anything tangible for the development of the family economy.

Among the Kaibartas, except the small children below 6 years and aged and infirm ones, all persons are required to perform certain assigned duties. The poor families send their children to serve as helpers in the rich men's families at Guwahati. Many are required to look after the young ones while their parents are out in the fields or beels. The school going boys and girls help their parents in agriculture, fishing, weaving etc. TABLES 4, 5 and 6 show the position of earners, earning dependents and non earning dependents in the four Kaibarta villages.

**TABLE - 4**

No of earners in the four Kaibarta villages - Family basis

Sl. No.	Name of the village	One earner	Two earners	Three earners	Total	Percentage
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	13	2	6		
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	5	6	nil		
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	2.	1	nil		
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	1	2	1		
Total :		21	11	7	39	
		(53.8%)	(28.2%)	(18%)		100%

**TABLE - 5**

Earning dependents in the four Kaibarta villages - Family Basis

Sl. No.	Name of the villages	One earning dependent	Two earning dependent	Three earning dependent
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	3	4	2
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	4	nil	nil
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	1	nil	nil
4.	Umananda (Kerpa. Vitha)	1	nil	1
Total :		9	4	3
		(23%)	(10.2%)	(7.6%)

**TABLE - 6**

No. of non-earning dependents in the four Kaibarta villages - Family Basis

Sl. No.	Name of the village	One non-earning dependent	Two non-earning dependent	Three non-earning dependent	Total
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	1	2	19	22
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	nil	nil	11	11
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	nil	1	2	3
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	nil	nil	3	3
		1 (2.6%)	3 (7.6%)	35 (89.8%)	39

The land holding pattern indicates the poverty stricken condition of the Kaibartas. From our survey of 76 Nos of Kaibarta villages in Assam a picture has emerged where it is seen that most of the Kaibarta villages have switched over to agriculture from fishing as the sources of fishing have been depleted due to various factors like Government take over of the beels, middlemen's role in the fishing business, apathy of the educated and half educated young boys towards fishing business etc. Traditionally the main occupation of the Kaibartas was fishing and the past generations did not think much to possess land as the income from fish business was sufficient to maintain a family in those days. Thus today very few families possess sufficient agricultural lands. Tables 7 & 8 below show the land holding pattern and land under cultivation of the four Kaibarta villages.

**TABLE - 7**  
Land holding pattern of the four Kaibarta villages - Family Basis

Sl. No.	Name of the village	Land less	Less than 1 Bigha	1 to 5 Bigha	5 to 10 Bigha	10 to 15 Bigha	15 to 20 Bigha	20 bigha and above
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	3	16	3	nil	nil	nil	nil
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	nil	1	7	2	1	nil	nil
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	nil	2	1	nil	nil	nil	nil
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	nil	nil	3	nil	nil	nil	nil
	Total : 39 households	3 (7.8%)	19 (48.7%)	14 (35.9%)	2 (4.1%)	1 (2.5%)		

**TABLE - 8**  
Land under cultivation in the four Kaibarta villages - Family Basis

Sl. No.	Name of the village	Land less	Less than 1 Bigha	1 to 5 Bigha	5 to 10 Bigha	10 to 15 Bigha	15 to 20 Bigha	20 bigha and above
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	21	nil	1	nil	nil	nil	nil
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	3	nil	6	1	nil	nil	nil
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	2	nil	2	nil	nil	nil	nil
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	1	nil	2	nil	nil	nil	nil
Total : 39 households		27		11	1			
		(69.2%)		(28.3%)	(2.5%)			

It is seen from table No. 7 that there are 3 (13.6%) land less families in Hajo Kaibarta Tola village and majority of the households, 16 Nos (41%) in all have lands less than 1 Bigha each. As this land includes homestead land, fisheries and fallow lands also, there remains practically nothing for cultivation. In the range of 5 to 10 bighas and 10 to 20 bighas there are only 2 and 1 households respectively. The picture is most disheartening as we peep further to table No. 8 which shows that as many as 27 (69.2%) households possess no land under cultivation and only 11 (28.3%) families have agricultural lands within the range of 1 to 5 bighas. Again within the range 5 to 10 bighas we find only 1 family.

Even in the case of homestead land we have a dismal picture in as much as out of 39 households surveyed, 4 (10.2%) Nos of households do not possess homestead land. These families are living in the grace lands given to them by the fellow villagers. Eight (20.5%) Nos of households have less than 1 Katha of homestead land each. Only 4 (10.2%) Nos of households possess homestead land 2 bighas and above each. The position is shown in a tabular form below.

The Kaibartas of the four villages under study have fishing as the major profession but ironically they do not have any private or common fishery. Out of 22 Nos of households surveyed in Hajo Kaibarta Tola, all the households do not possess any private fishery. Again out of the 39 households in 4 Nos of villages, only 1 (2.5%) family possesses a tank having an area of 1 bigha of land. There is scope for digging community tanks in each village enabling the Kaibartas to earn their livelihood. As individual fallow lands are extremely limited (as only 1 family of Narenga Bajrapara possesses fallow land within the range of 1-5 bighas) Government can dig big tank fisheries in the Government waste lands.

As regards cultivation of crops only 6 (15.4%) Nos of households grow Ahu crops in their fields, while 9(23.9%) Nos of families produce Sali paddy. Mustard seeds are grown by 1 (2.5%) family only. Other crops mostly winter vegetables are grown by 8 (20.5%) Nos of families. Out of 19 Nos of families of four villages possessing total land within the range of less than one bigha, only one household has fully utilised the land for cultivation. There are five families out of a total of 14 Nos within the land range of 1 to 5 bighas who have utilised the land for cultivation. Similarly out of 39 Nos of households 2 Nos within the land range of 5 to 10 bighas have utilised the land for cultivation. There is only one household in the land range of 10 to 15 bighas which has fully utilised the land.

It may be noted that the lands of the Kaibartas and for that matter of all the scheduled castes are mostly unsuitable for cultivation. As mentioned earlier the fore-fathers of the present generation of the Kaibartas did not care to possess lands for cultivation as they entirely depended upon fish trade for their sustenance. Later on they realised that income from fish business was totally insufficient for maintaining their families and they switched over to agriculture with their limited resources. They purchased inferior quality lands at cheaper prices where yield per acre was very low. Thus today only 2 Nos of households get less than 10 mounds of paddy each per year from their lands

Area under homestead in the four Kaibarta Villages

Sl. No.	Name of the village	Less than 1 katha	1 katha to 2½ kathas	2 kathas to 1 bigha	1 bigha to 2 bighas	2 bighas & above
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	3	8	6	3	1
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	1	nil	nil	3	5
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	nil	nil	2	nil	1
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	nil	nil	nil	2	1
Total : 39 household		4	8	8	6	2
		(10.2%)	(20.5%)	(20.5%)	(15.4%)	(23.2%)
						(10.2%)

TABLE - 9

while six households get 10-20 mounds each from their lands per year.

Only two households of Narenga (Bajrapara) village are in a position to engage agricultural labourer. It has been observed that persons engaged in Government service or private undertaking only are able to employ agricultural labourer. The labourers are paid Rs. 8.00 to 9.00 per day without one meal or Rs. 7.00 per day with one meal. This minimum wage has been fixed by Government of Assam. Of late the wage rate has gone up and a labourer gets Rs. 12.00 per day with one meal.

The land holding pattern of the Kaibartas is such that there is no scope for keeping tenants and in our present study of 39 households in 4 villages there was no tenant under any Kaibarta family.

There is hardly any scope for share cropping as the neighbouring villagers who are non Kaibartas do not possess enough land to employ the Kaibartas as share croppers. As shown else-where the fellow Kaibartas also do not possess enough land but there are a few employed persons in these villages who cannot devote full time in agricultural pursuits and the share croppers, who are only 5 (13%) in all the four villages get chance to earn their livelihood. Thus the share croppers are always at the mercy of these persons and they cannot demand share as per the Adhjar Act. Generally 50 : 50 rate is maintained between the land owner and the share cropper.

As regards agricultural assistance from Government it has been reported that no household received any assistance while one family got agricultural loan. Naturally the villagers have to depend upon themselves for agricultural improvement. The surplus position of agricultural products is disheartening as only one household showed surplus.

There is only one household which has a small fishery and this household sells fish from own fishery. On enquiry it is revealed that there is no Government assistance for improvement of fisheries. However, one family received fish seeds from Government.

Only eight households are getting the benefit of fishery co-operatives and equal number of households are depending upon Government fisheries. The Mahalders who get the Government fisheries through auctions allow the fishermen to catch fish as per terms and condition stipulated by them and generally these Mahalders prefer outside fishermen to local Kaibarta fishermen. Two households have no other means but to depend upon the mercy of these Mahalders. There are 7 Nos of households which derive their daily income from the fish caught in individual fisheries. It is seen that these fisheries are mostly owned by non Kaibartas. Sixteen (41%) households like the terms and conditions fixed by Government while 5 (17.9%) households have reservation. This latter group wants that the terms and conditions fixed by Government should be more liberal.

Due to lack of transport facilities 7 Nos of households sell their fish at the site while 16 Nos of households sell fish at market. It is reported that income of the latter category of fish seller is higher although selling fish at the market is a strenuous affair. Again 10 Nos of households sell fish through auction entailing sufficient loss of income, while 13 Nos sell fish individually as per prevailing market price. Due to lack of resources, majority of the households doing fish business borrow money from local businessmen returnable preferably on the same day. The interest varies from Rs. 5.00 to Rs. 10.00 per month. There are 12 Nos of such households in the four villages and out of these, 8 Nos borrow money from local Mahajans and only 4 Nos of households borrow their meagre capital from other richer persons, mostly non Kaibartas.

There are six Kaibarta families in these villages who no longer practise fishing. We tried to know whether this change is due to Government policy, raising the caste status, dead fisheries, due to installation of new projects, fishing as a derogatory trade or other reasons. All these six households mentioned 'OR' i.e. other reasons for changing the traditional occupation. These other reasons are lack of sufficient fund, employment in Government and private undertaking. Our own experience while



doing field work among the Kaibartas is that the Kaibartas, by and large, prefer agriculture and employment to fishing as fishing is no longer lucrative to maintain a family with the basic necessities of life.

Kaibarta women are experts in weaving and the womenfolk in majority of the households weave their own clothes. Many women earn some money by selling clothes. Endi chadars are woven by 9 Nos of families only and only one family gets Government assistance.

Infrastructural facilities provided by Government are inadequate. Out of 39 Nos of households 26 Nos of households have one thatched house each. Most of the houses have no boundary fencing. Houses are clustered and due to lack of suitable plinth, they become unhygienic. There are only 13 Nos of households which can be categorised as katcha Assam Type. Not a single family possesses sanitary latrine. Water supply facilities too, are inadequate. Thirty three households get water from public well, five households use river water while only one household possesses a private well.

The acute poverty condition of the Kaibartas can be highlighted from the income-expenditure pattern. There are five (12.82%) families within the annual income range of less than Rs. 1000/- Nineteen (48.75%) families are in the annual income group of Rs. 1000/- to 3000/-. The number of families having annual income of Rs. 3000/- and Rs. 6000/- to Rs. 9000/- are 8 and 7 respectively. Incidentally it may be mentioned that the last two groups of households have their habitations in an urban setting i.e. Hajo. The urban people have scope to engage themselves in multifarious avocations besides fishing.

As regards expenditure, 24 (61.5%) Nos of families spend Rs. 1000/- to Rs. 3000/- per year and most of the expenditures are on food items, clothes, house-building materials. These families are always in debt as they have to spend unavoidable expenditures on rituals, ceremonies etc. Even the condition of 15 Nos (38.5%) in the expenditure bracket of Rs. 6000/- to 9000/- is not better although they manage without loan. Here again the Hajo Kaibarta

Tola village steals the limelight as 7 Nos (18%) of families of that bracket alone belong to this village. Because of the urban character their expenditure pattern is not similar with that of the rural ones. Most of these families possess service holders.

There are 7 Nos of families having surplus and they help their fellow villagers with loans, of course, with 5% to 10% interest per month. As many as 32 Nos of families have no savings of any kind and most of them (24 Nos) are indebted. Out of these 24 Nos of families, 15 Nos are indebted to mahajans, 3 Nos to Financial Institutions and 6 Nos to others which include fellow villagers. The purpose of the loans is mainly to maintain the household and for expenditure like medical treatment, business and other unavoidable family obligations. Tables 10, 11 and 12 show the income-expenditure pattern and indebtedness position of the four Kaibarta villages.

**TABLE - 10**  
Showing the Income Pattern of the four Kaibarta villages

Sl. No.	Name of the village	Income Range P. A Rs.					
		Less than 1000/-	1000/- to 3000/-	3000/- to 6000/-	6000/- to 9000/-	9000/- to 12000/- and above	
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	1	10	6	5	nil	nil
2.	Nareng (Bajrapara)	3	8	nil	nil	nil	nil
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	1	1	1	nil	nil	nil
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	nil	nil	1	2	nil	nil
Total :		5	19	8	7		
		(12.8%)	(48.8%)	(20.5%)	(17.9%)		

**TABLE - 11**

Showing the Expenditure pattern of the four Kaibarta villages

Sl. No.	Name of the village	Income Range P. A Rs.				
		Less than 1000/-	1000/- to 3000/-	3000/- to 6000/-	6000/- to 9000/-	9000/- to 12000/-
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	11	6	5	nil	nil
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	11	nil	nil	nil	nil
3.	Maina Sundari Kaibarta	2	1	nil	nil	nil
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	nil	1	2	nil	nil
Total :		nil	24	8	7	
			(61.5%)	(20.5%)	(18%)	

**TABLE - 12**

Showing the indebtedness position of four Kaibarta villages

Sl. No.	Name of the village	households indebted	indebted to Mahajan	indebted to Financial Institutions	indebted to Others
1.	Hajo Kaibarta Tola	14	8	2	3
2.	Narenga (Bajrapara)	6	4	nil	3
3.	Mainasundari Kaibarta	2	2	nil	nil
4.	Umananda (Kerpa Vitha)	2	1	1	nil
		24	15	3	6

**Conclusion :**

The Kaibartas constitute second largest scheduled caste group in Assam. Economically they are most vulnerable section of people. Basically they are fishermen but of late a trend towards changing profession is noticed. A large section is willing to accept agriculture as main profession. The main constraint in this respect is shortage of agricultural lands. As their traditional occupation was and still is, fishing, the past generations of the Kaibartas did not care to possess agricultural lands. No doubt today some of them possess agricultural lands but the output is meagre as the lands in most cases are of inferior quality. They are marginal holders and naturally are in the poverty-group along with the landless agricultural labourers.

Fishing profession is no longer lucrative as the major sources of fishing are controlled by the middlemen and the local fishermen have to depend upon the mahaldars. Fishing cooperatives formed by the fishermen are not functioning properly and in many cases they are existing only in name.

Their occupations are largely in the unorganised sector. This occupational profile of the Kaibartas is linked with very low economic and social status. They have little assets or no asset and they suffer from dual handicap of social disability and economic deprivation.

The practice of untouchability still persists in the rural areas in disguised form. This covert practice of untouchability can be noticed in group actions.

Education is considered as one of the major determinants for improving the condition of the backward communities. "One of the most important social objects of education is to equalise opportunity enabling the deprived castes and individuals to use their education as a level for the improvement of their condition". No doubt the Kaibartas have a reasonably high percentage of literacy 30.38 as against state's literacy percentage of 28.72 as per 1971 census. But if we take into account the large drop out figure as well as the figure of students beyond L. P. and M.E.

School, the Kaibartas do not have an enviable picture. Economic distress and compulsion to rely on school age children to earn or look after young children dissuaded many parents from sending their sons and daughters to school. Another major handicap are age-old poverty and consequent indebtedness, low enrolment, dropout at school stage combined with the old notion that girls should stay in the house and learn house hold chores only. It is high time that this traditional value loaded arrangements should undergo change. The overall backwardness of the Kaibartas can be attributed to their peculiar socio-economic condition and its solution requires a systematic effort from Government as well as non Government agencies.

**A few steps to be taken in this direction are :**

1. While distributing ceiling surplus lands, the Kaibartas should get some preference. Generally the ceiling surplus lands are of marginal or sub marginal qualities. Government should develop such lands with state fund and then allot these lands to the Kaibartas. Alternatively while allotting such lands to the poor Kaibartas, the amount required for land development should also be granted simultaneously to the allottees.
2. Inputs like seeds, fertilisers, irrigation water should be made available. Instead of asking the poor villagers to visit the officers at urban areas, the officers should visit the villages along with the inputs. The process entails elimination of middlemen, who at present, are exploiting the Kaibartas. In this context the allotment should be made in clusters so that the people can take advantage of many of the common facilities which are not otherwise available when the lands are scattered. Such block allotment would help in forming an umbrella which would reduce the scope of malpractices.
3. Share croppers' rights should be protected without jeopardizing the fellow feelings among the co-villagers.
4. Due to lack of follow up measures some of the ambitious schemes of various development departments do not serve the purpose.

5. The Fisheries Department/Corporation should take particular care to organise the fishermen and supply them with suitable fishing implements as per their needs. It has been reported that fishing implements such as nets supplied by Government department to the Kaibartas do not in some cases suit the local situation. Needs of the villagers should be ascertained first and only then the materials should be supplied.

6. Efforts should be made to earmark group wise percentage of the allotment under NREP, RLEGP etc. so that each group of the scheduled caste gets due share.

7. Many Kaibartas of urban areas engage themselves as rickshaw pullers, thelawalas etc. Most of these rickshaws and thelas are owned by non Kaibartas. The Department of Welfare of Plains Tribes and Backward Classes, Government of Assam should provide them with soft loan with nominal interest (say 4% per annum) enabling them to own the rickshaws and thelas.

8. There are quite a good number of Kaibarta uneducated youths in the urban areas who are searching after some employment. They do not have any particular production skill. A nodal organisation in district or sub-divisional level may be established providing training and subsequently assisting them to take up employment/self-employment.

9. Due to poverty condition the parents are reluctant to send their sons and daughters to school. Government may consider compensation to the parents of the school going boys and girls on selective basis.

10. Occupational mobility is more prominent among the Kaibartas. While formulating development schemes this factor should be taken into consideration. There should be an appropriate linkage between assistance to the Kaibarta workers in acquiring professional skill and their placement in respective trades.

11. Representation of the Kaibartas in the Gaon Panchayat Samabai Samities should be ensured. Special thrust may be given for the marketing aspects. Fishery Co-operatives should be strengthened and revitalised.

12. While filling up reserved quota for scheduled castes in various Government and non-Government posts, representation of smaller groups including the Kaibartas may be ensured.

13. The curriculum of adult education should be designed on the basis of felt needs of different occupational groups after taking into consideration the peculiarities of the surroundings and work atmosphere. The cultural characteristics should also be taken into consideration in the process of involving the learner groups to participate and derive benefit from the adult education programme. The people should be made to realise that education is an act of knowing and equipping oneself for a better living standard and not mere parrot memorisation rather it is relevant and meaningful for improving their professional knowledge and awareness about the job they do.

14. Indebtedness is cutting at the root of the Kaibarta economy and unless this social evil is rooted out, all development activities will bear no fruit. Government should make a detailed house to house survey in respect of indebtedness cases and ensure repayments of the outstanding loans through Government agencies. A certain amount of the loans and subsidies may be earmarked for the purpose. One copy of the statement of repayment of the monthly instalment may be given to the borrower and another copy may be kept at the disposal of the disbursing agency. In this way the role of middlemen will be totally eliminated.



\* Paper presented by the author in the Seminar on 'Dimensions of Poverty among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of Assam' held at Dudhnoi College in August 1986, organised by the Tribal Research Institute, Assam.

## Socio-Cultural Dynamics Of Scheduled Castes Development

Spread over entire rural and urban areas of Assam, the sixteen sub castes of the scheduled castes account for 9,12,537 as per 1971 Census or 6'24 per cent of Assam's total population of 146'25 lakhs (1971 Census). As there was no Census in 1981 in Assam, the estimated projected scheduled caste population of Assam in 2986 in 13,77,961 majority of the scheduled castes live in rural areas, the percentage being 90.6. It may be mentioned that the percentage of urban scheduled caste is higher than the state's total urban population which is 8'8 per cent. This urban status however, does not indicate a normal high socio-economic standard with allied modern urban facilities. There are sizable influx of rural scheduled caste people to towns in search of employment and small petty avocations like fish selling, thela pulling, rickshaw plying, opening panshops, doing menial jobs in "hotels and in individual households, etc. Besides there are scheduled caste Harijans like the Bansphors, Dhobis, Dholis, Maharas, Lalbegis, Mehtars, Muchis, who live urban areas doing all low and unclean jobs with pitiable economic standard.

Among the sixteen scheduled caste sub castes, the Namasudras and the Kaibartas account for 32'97% and 32'31% respectively of the State's total scheduled caste population followed by Patnis (9'41%), Muchis (4'47%), Hiras (3'58%), Banias (3'10%), Malis (2'40%), Dhobis (2,30%), Bansphors (0'7%), Bhangis (0'7%), Dholis (0'4%), Maharas (0'1), Jalkeots (0'3%) and Lalbegis (0'01%).

Unlike the scheduled tribes, the scheduled castes do not have distinct traditional material culture. Except the scheduled castes who are living in urban areas coming from different states, the overall socio-religious practices of the rural scheduled caste people do not materially differ much with those of the non scheduled castes who live close by. However participation in

socio-religious occasions has been generally restricted to the members of the caste groups and very few except the microscopic rich and influential members of scheduled castes can participate actively in public socio-religious functions.

The economic base, particularly of those living in rural areas, is agriculture. As per 1971 Census 53.5% scheduled castes people are engaged in agricultural activities as against 55.95% of the State's total. The people are never self sufficient in agricultural products as cultivable lands are insufficient. The main reason for lack of agricultural lands is that originally the scheduled caste people, by and large, were not agriculturists and the forefathers of the present generation of scheduled castes did not care to possess lands in those days when there was enough foodstuff and needs and aspirations were limited. Due to lack of agricultural base the scope of economic development has been hindered and the present generation is feeling the pinch of acute hardship. About 50% of the scheduled caste people are in a perpetual state of indebtedness which can be attributed to the age old deficit economy accelerated recently by lack of employment opportunity and other social disabilities like shyness of contact and age old inferiority complex of under estimating their capabilities. The Assam Indebtedness Relief Act, 1975, is still to make visible impact in this regard.

Next to agriculture the rural scheduled caste people have had to depend upon fishing particularly by the Kaibartas, Namasudras and Jalkeots. Pottery and goldsmithy are the important occupations of the Hiras and Baniyas respectively. But of late occupational mobility has been observed among these groups and agricultural activities become the accepted profession of the scheduled caste communities living in rural areas. But as mentioned earlier the scheduled caste people had to face problems in the changing profession. They lack the agricultural skill and their paddy fields are not suitable for a flourishing crop because the people entered into the profession at a late stage and the lands under their possession are mostly marshy or high lands and the people do not have sufficient resources to improve those

lands. The condition of the non-agricultural scheduled caste communities is no better. The Baniyas do not get enough to maintain their families as the people no longer use ornaments made by this community. The urban dwellers like Bansphors, Muchis, Mehtars, Maharas have to switch over to other professions because of the changing social scenario. Machine made cheaper articles were popular with the people and the scheduled caste people who produced bamboo items of day to day use can no longer withstand the stiff competition of plastic items. In Kamrup district we had observed that a few scheduled caste families used to live with the earnings of playing drums in festivals and other socio-religious occasions but now-a-days people do not employ them in such festivals and Kamrupiya Dhulia', a renowned institution mostly of the scheduled caste people, is fast disappearing.

The scheduled caste groups of urban areas who were not the autochthones of Assam are engaged in various occupations such as leather work, washing cloths, sweeping and scavenging etc. These all occupations are in the unorganised sector. The groups which are engaged in carrying night soil, scavenging, sweeping, flaying and tanning have been relegated to very low, economic and social status. Majority of them have very little assets and they suffer from the dual handicap of social disability and economic deprivations.

Although not to that extent which is prevalent in some other states of the Indian Union some kind of disguised untouchability still prevails in group actions especially in the rural areas. Because of the lesser numerical strength, the scheduled castes can hardly assert themselves in getting the benefits provided by Government. It is well known that poverty has been writ large upon the scheduled castes since past generations. Poverty, malnutrition and consequent indebtedness are the socio-economic constraints inherited by the scheduled caste people from their forefathers and these problems still remain unsolved even in spite of the implementation of the Special Component Plan within the State Plan.

A study conducted by the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes on the socio-economic condition of the Kaibartas reveals a disheartening picture. The Kaibartas till about two decades back had fishing as major source of income and most of the Kaibartas depended solely on fish trade. But to day the situation underwent metamorphic changes. The fishermen from other states have snatched the age old trade from the Kaibartas and for this the local Mahaldars are largely responsible. Even those who are clinging desparately to this business inspite of the odds, are suffering from the 60 : 40 syndrome i. e. a sizable share of their catch is to be given to the Mahajans who provide them with the capital for day's catch. Further, poor fishermen are indebted to the influential Mahajans who belong to both scheduled caste and non scheduled caste. This indebtedness is a never ending affair and the poor fishermen have no alternative but to bow down to the whims of the Mahajans. The fishing sources like rivers, becls are not accessible to the poor fishermen as the same are auctioned to the Mahajans who generally prefer the Bihari fishermen to the local ones. Consequent upon degradation of the traditional income sources and non availability of fresh avenues, the time worn economic backwardness has been further aggravated.

Educationally, too, the scheduled castes are behind the non scheduled caste people. As per 1971 Census the percentage of literacy among the scheduled castes was 25'8 as against 28'3 for the entire State while the all India average was 29'5. Sex-wise it is 18.3%, for male and 7.5% for female. Sub-caste wise, the Bantias with 38.8% came first followed by Kaibartas 34%, Patnis 31.3%, Hiras 27.4% and Sutradhars 26%. The peculiar socio-economic environment of the scheduled caste inhabited villages, coupled with dependence upon the school going children for assistance in the day to day economic pursuits, are the major deterrents for the socio-educational backwardness. These were some of the stark realities which compelled the planners to quantify amounts in the Fifth Five Year Plan for the socio-economic upliftment of this sector of population. But mere quantification appeared to be inadequate and in order to provide

more economic support, a new strategy was evolved during the Sixth Five Year Plan. A separate sub-plan known as 'Special Component Plan (SCP) for the welfare of the scheduled castes was formulated. For implementation of the SCP schemes funds from four sources have been earmarked. These are (1) Flow from State Plan (2) Flow from Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes (3) Special Central Assistance and (4) Institutional Finance. Suitable sectorial plans based on grass root study have been chalked out and income generating schemes have been incorporated. It was seen at the end of Sixth Plan that the desired progress was not there. In Assam the outlay ratio was law than 60%. The Working Group on the Development of the Scheduled Castes formed during Seventh Five Year Plan observed "Some of the Departments avoided strenuous exercise of earmarking fund especially for the development of scheduled castes". The Working Group has termed this as "attitudinal problem lack of proper orientation". The main argument put forward for such action was that a large portion of the total State Plan Outlay was in indivisible sectors like Power, Irrigation, Road, Transport etc. But there are scheduled caste villages which are, by and large, exclusive and beneficiaries in blocks could be easily located in such areas. The 'cluster cum saturation approach' started during Sixth Plan has much relevance even in the Assam situation. Incidentally it may be mentioned that in a particular scheduled caste inhabited area two or more subcastes live together. Thus we find that Kaibartas and Bantias, Hiras and Kaibartas, Namasudras and Hiras live side by side indicating a harmonious living of more or less similar socio-economic standard.

As mentioned earlier, the people are changing their traditional occupation under various compulsions and the literates and semi literates among them are seeking employment in Government and semi Government organisations and private firms in the urban areas. Although statutory provision of 7% reservation of vacancies for scheduled caste is under implementation, yet the position has not improved much. The main constraint here again is the overall socio-economic backwardness of the people. It is not uncommon to find roster

vacancies reserved for scheduled castes lying unfilled for years due to non availability of suitable educated and experienced scheduled caste candidates. Unless the general economic backwardness is removed, the economy of the scheduled caste people will always remain at a considerable distance from the take of point. Raj Bahadur the honourable representative of the then Central province and Berar in the Constituent Assembly rightly remarked "To ask for representation however, on class or caste basis in the service is to remedy that disease only superficially. But we have got to cure the disease from its very roots."

Caste based reservation of vacancies in services and posts and reservation of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies for the scheduled castes are short term ameliorative measures to remove the centuries old neglect and apathy of the enlightened section of the people and these should not be considered as the be all and end all. Today the great traditions' are in a mood to help the little tradition' to march ahead and Government in the Centre as well as in the States have taken suitable steps in that regard. Socio-cultural development of the scheduled castes depends largely on mutuality and it is largely visible in the present day Indian inter and intra society relations especially in the urban social milieu.



\* Bulletin of the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, Vol IX, 1994, Ed. B.K. Hazarika

## A study on the Anti Poverty Measures for the Scheduled Castes of Assam

### *Introduction :*

Spread over the entire rural and urban plains areas of Assam, the sixteen groups of the Scheduled Castes of Assam Viz. Bansphor, Bhumali - Mali, Brittil Bania, Dhupi-Dhobi, Dugla-Dholi, Hira, Jalkeot, Jhalo-Malo-Jhalo Malo, Kaibarta-Jaliya, Lalbegi, Mahara, Mehtar-Bhangi, Mushi-Rishi, Namasudra, Patni and Sutradher account for 16,59,412 as per 1991 Census constituting 7.4% of Assam's total population of 2,24,14,322. The bulk of the SC population of Assam live in rural areas 86.18%. The PC of SC population decreased to 6.85 of the total population of 26,655,528 as per 2001 Census.

Among the sixteen groups of SC the Namasudras and Kaibarta account for 32.47% and 32.31% (1971 census) respectively of the total population of the state followed by Patnis 9.4% (1971 census). Muchis 4.47% (1971 census), Hiras (3.58%) and Sutradhars 3.58% (1971 census). The percentages of other SC groups are negligible so much so that the Lalbegis account for only 0.01% only.

The Scheduled Castes of Assam are at various stages of development. The economic condition, educational status, percentage of literacy etc. vary from group to group. Majority of the SC people practice agriculture as their main occupation. Next to agriculture fishing and fish trading are another important occupations of the SC people particularly among the Kaibartas, Namasudras and Jalkeots. The Hiras have pottery and the Banias have goldsmithy as main occupations. Of late these groups are also engaged in agricultural activities as the demands of the traditional items they produced dwindled considerably. The SC groups of urban areas who are not early settlers in the state are engaged in various occupations such as leather work, washing

cloths, sweeping, scavenging etc. These all occupations are in unorganised sector. The scheduled castes engaged in carrying night soil, flaying and tanning have very low economic and social status. They have hardly any assets of material culture worth the name and they suffer from dual hardship of social disability and economic deprivations. Disguised untouchability still prevails in group actions. They can hardly assert themselves in getting the opportunities provided by Government. Due mainly to the stigma attached to the professions coupled with untouchability of course in disguised form, the scheduled castes are a socially disgruntled lot.

It is well known fact age old poverty has been writ heavily large upon the scheduled caste communities. Poverty, malnutrition, chronic indebtedness, social disability and malnutrition are the social constraints inherited by the SC communities from their ancestors and these problems still remain unsolved.

Although agriculture is the main occupation of most of the major SC communities, yet due to acute shortage of sufficient agricultural lands the people are not able to produce annual requirement of paddy. 47.22% of the total workers among SCs are cultivators against state's 50.90%. The percentage of agricultural labours among the SC communities is 13.4 as against 12.99 for the state of Assam (census 1991). Almost all of them are marginal land holders and naturally are in the poverty group along with the land less agricultural labourers. The economic condition of the SC groups whose main profession is fishing and fish trading is far from satisfactory since the sources of fish like small rivers, beels etc. are not easily available as these are controlled by moneyed Mahaldars and local rich fish traders, belonging to both SC and non SC communities, who prefer outside fishermen from near by states to local petty traders. Consequent upon depletion of the traditional income sources and non availability of fresh avenues, the problem is mounting leading to further aggravation of their socio-economic backwardness.

Educationally they are far behind the non SC people. As per 1991 census the PC of literacy among the SCs was 53.94

as against 52.89 for total population of Assam. Compared to all Assam figure of 52.89 (1991 census) literacy for the scheduled castes, the percentage of literacy of the S.Cs of Assam is not very discouraging. Here again much remains to be done as most of the educational benefits are enjoyed by a few well improved SC groups only. As caste wise figures of literacy for 1991 is not available the literacy figures for 1971 census are incorporated here which will depict an overall picture.

**TABLE**

Showing the caste wise P.C. of literacy of Assam, Cansus 1971

Sl. No.	Name of the SC	Total Population	Total PC of literacy	Mal e Literacy	Female literacy
1.	Bansphor	6093	15.16	23.13	4.74
2.	Bhuimali Mali	22175	26.54	35.73	16.16
3.	Brittial Bania, Bania	28087	38.95	50.46	25.73
4.	Dhupi Or Dhobi	20801	30.12	37.28	21.21
5.	Dugla or Dholi	4013	14.98	21.99	7.03
6.	Hira	32624	27.40	38.74	15.32
7.	Jalkeot	2537	26.33	35.21	14.40
8.	Jhalo Malo	3,2978	15.25	25.36	5.86
9.	Kaibarta or Jaliya	2,94,809	30.38	39.90	20.35
10.	Lalbegi	45	33.33	40.74	22.22
11.	Mahara	899	13.62	19.67	6.54
12.	Mehtar or Bhangi	7296	14.49	21.86	5.18
13.	Muchi or Richi	40,774	12.77	18.76	5.36
14.	Namasudra	3,00,813	21.33	30.65	11.19
15.	Patni	85,910	31.88	41.10	22.22
16.	Sutradhar	32,703	26.27	37.54	13.74
	Total	9,12,557	25.8	35.00	15.7

Note - State PC of literacy 28.72, Male 37.19, Female 19.27



It is seen that the PC of literacy is higher among Brittil Bania, Dhupi/Dhobi, Kaibarta, Lalbegi and Patni groups where as the same is considerably low for Bansphor, Dugla, Mahara, Muchi and Jhalo Malo.

Education is considered as one of the major factors for improving the socio-economic condition of the backward communities. Most important role of education is to equalise opportunity enabling the under privileged communities as well as individuals to use their learning as a lever for the improvement of there socio-economic status. The pitiable economic condition of most of the scheduled castes, is the major constraint for the educational backwardness. Low economic profile coupled with dependance upon school going children for assistance in the day to day affairs are deterrents for a healthy socio-economic growth. These were some of the factors of consideration in the Planning Commission while quantifying amounts for the upliftment of the communities till the Fifth Five Year Plan. But it was seen that inspite of the quantification of allotment for scheduled castes their plight remained generally unchanged. "Lack of economic support" has been considered as the main cause of extremely low pace of development of the scheduled castes during the earlier plan periods i.e. till the Fifth Five Year Plan. Thus more definite steps had to be evolved as anti poverty measures and a new strategy known as Special Component Plan (S.C.P) for scheduled castes was enunciated in the Sixth Five Year Plan. Special Component plan is a combination of SCP, Special Central Assistance and Development Corporation for Scheduled Castes Ltd.

The S.C.P was formulated during 1979-80 with a view to channelise the flow of benefits and outlay from the general sectors in the plan of the state and the central ministry for the development of the scheduled castes in financial and physical terms. It was designed in order to accelerate the hitherto slow pace of economic development of the scheduled castes by taking up suitable sectoral plans. For the poorer sections i.e. below poverty line categories composite income generating schemes

were envisaged enabling them to cross the poverty line. These family oriented income generating programmes embraced all the major occupational groups such as agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, share croppers, fishermen, sweepers, scavengers etc. The S.C.P aims to improve the living condition of the scheduled castes through various welfare programmes like Minikit Demonstration, Input Distribution in Flood Prone Areas, Distribution of High Yielding Varieties of wheat Seeds, Plant Protection, Distribution of Agricultural Implements, Land Reclamation, 50% Subsidy sale of Fertilisers, Farmers' Training, Development of Horticulture, Protective Afforestation, Gully Control etc. Under the Veterinary Department schemes like Distribution of Bullocks, Milch Cow, Poultry and Duck Units, Pig Units, Buffalo Units, Veterinary Dispensaries, First Aid Centres, Training Programme for Farmers etc. were undertaken. During the 7th Five Year Plan another scheme known as Duck cum Fish Farm was implemented for the benefit of the scheduled caste families below poverty line. The Veterinary Department launched Dairy Development Scheme during 1985-86. Under the Fishery Development programme various schemes like Training in Fisheries, Assistance to Private Pisciculturists, Fisheries Extension Service, Development of Beel Fisheries, Marketing and Transportation, Development of Reservoir Fisheries, Fish Farmers' Development Agencies, Grants to Assam Fisheries Development Corporation were undertaken.

Social Forestry Scheme was introduced to cover the SC families. The scheme was meant to benefit the entire SC community by providing scope for engaging casual labour under the Antodaya concept to extend benefit to the poorest of the poor. Besides special programmes of rural development namely I.R.D.P, NREP are chalked out under the 20 point programme with setting apart of 10% state's plan allocation. Under the Panchayat and Rural Development Department Community Development Schemes like Minor Irrigation, Health and Sanitation etc. have been implemented in 121 Development Blocks of Assam. Under Nutrition Scheme children and pregnant mothers of SC communities are benefitted.

During the 6th plan additional schemes like Scholarship to the physically Handicapped students, Prosthetic Aid to the physically Handicapped Persons, Balwadi Programmes, Rehabilitation Grants to Physically Handicapped Persons, Stipends to Physically Handicapped Persons for Vocational Training, Grants-in-Aid to Voluntary Organisation, Vocational Training and Rehabilitation of Women in Distress were implemented.

Scheduled caste women are expert weavers but due to poor economic condition, professionalism has not developed among them. The Directorate of Weaving and Textiles had undertaken schemes like Production of Handloom Fabrics, Expansion of Training Programmes, Development of Handloom Co-operatives and Welfare of Handloom Weaver etc.. Similarly the Department of Co-operation implemented Fishery Co-operative Societies, Credit Co-operative Societies and other Co-operative Societies such as Housing, Transport, Industrial Labours Ricksha Puller, thereby ameliorating the poor economic condition of the scheduled caste people.

The Departments of Irrigation, Rural Electrification have also chalked out schemes for upliftment of scheduled castes. Under the Village and Small Industries Inplant Training for Entrepreneurs and the Entrepreneur Development Programme under the Department of Industries were undertaken. Again under Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme 75% capital investment subsidy was provided. The scheduled caste artisans engaged in handicrafts are provided with improved tools to improve the quality of their products.

The Elementary Education Directorate provides free text books, free uniform to girl students and attendance scholarship to the SC students. Attendance Incentive Scheme, Book grants, Excursion Grants are also available for SC students under the Secondary Education Department.

Rural Dispensaries in SC inhabited areas, Sub Centers and Subsidiary Health Centres were also provided.

Over the years till 9th Five Year Plan new schemes have been incorporated under various sectors of Development. The Housing Board has ambitious schemes like Janata Housing Scheme for EWS. Rural House sites for Scheduled castes. The Backward classes sector has many benevolent schemes like prematric scholarship to SC students, prematric scholarship for children for those engaged in unclean work, Post Martic scholasship for SC students, stipend for Craftsmen Training in ITIs, Grants for Construction of Girls' Hostel for SC Girls, Grants for Construction of Boys' Hostel for SC Boys, Book Bank for Medical, Engineering, Veterinary, Agriculture students; National scheme for Rehabilitation of scavengers, Family Oriented Income Generating Scheme, Grant to Non Govt. Educational Institutions, Grants to NGOs, Financial Incentive for Intercaste Marriage etc.

Above is an overview of the schemes implemented by Government as anti poverty measures which will go a long way to improve the socio-economic backwardness of the scheduled caste people ensuring an egalitarian society nased on equality.



## Poverty Among the Kaibartas

### Some Economic Issues

#### *Introduction*

The Kaibartas, one of the major Scheduled Caste communities of Assam are scattered throughout the plains district of Assam. Out of the sixteen scheduled caste communities of Assam, the Kaibartas occupy the second largest position having a total population of 2,94,809 as per 1971 Census. Since 1981 census could not be conducted in Assam, the precise number of Kaibartas people at present is not known. The Kaibartas constitute 32.4% of the total scheduled castes of Assam. They are an important segment of the greater Assamese society who are considered as a backward caste and for whose economic upliftment various measures have been adopted under the Scheduled Caste Component Plan.

There are about 770 Kaibarta villages in Assam which are in the plains areas of the Brahmaputra Valley interspersed with other non-scheduled caste people. There is no compact area of the Kaibartas and they are spread in urban as well as in rural areas. Their percentage of literacy according to 1971 census is 30.38 against the State's percentage of literacy of 28.72.

The Tribal Research Institute, Assam had conducted a study on the socio-economic condition of the Kaibartas and the theme of the present paper is based on the findings of the study of 77 sample Kaibarta villages drawn from urban, semi-urban, rural and interiormost areas of 14 plains districts of Assam.

#### *Economy of the Kaibartas*

It is well known that fishing is the sole means of livelihood for the Kaibartas and they possess the requisite expertise in this

profession. Of late due to various factors the fishing community has to perform their avocation under serious handicaps. Many among them do not like to stick to their traditional occupation. Out of 179 households surveyed, 427 (62.8%) depend solely upon fishing. But only 53 (7.8%) households have own fisheries. It may, however, be noted that the own fisheries mentioned above include tanks which are not potential sources of fish for all the seasons. Eighteen numbers of households depend upon local Mahajans for their capital and the rate of interest of these Mahajans is 10% p.m. Some of the Mahajans charge 3% interest per day. The villagers catch fish in the fisheries owned by the Mahaldars who demand 40 paise for each rupee and the individual fisherman gets 60 paise. Majority of the villages, 42 (54.5%) have fishing sources like beels, rivers, tanks etc. near the villages, Twenty villages (25.9%) are found without fishing sources at an easy reach. They purchase fish from the Mahaldars and sell those with some profit in the market. The profit is marginal in their cases. Besides they do not get regular supply of fish. Four (5.19%) Kaibarta villages have switched over to agriculture and fishing as a profession is not resorted to. The main reason is non-availability of fishing sources near the villages and irregular supply of fish by the Mahaldars. Even in the case of fisherman who depend upon fish business the fish supply is uncertain in the greater part of the year and they are maintaining their business with much difficulty. Further, the Mahaldars, by and large, do not like to enter into contact with the local petty fishermen. Because of this situation the small fishermen's economic condition is deteriorating. The rich fishermen on the other hand are becoming richer because of their mastering the manipulating tactics. The pitiable economic condition is reflected in the occupational structure of the sample Kaibarta families which is shown in the tabular form below.

**TABLE - 1**

**Main Occupational Structure of the 679 Sample Kaibarta  
Households with 4444 Family Members**

<i>Main occupation</i>	<i>No. of persons engaged</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Fishing	409	9.20
2. Agriculture	319	7.18
3. Services	136	3.06
4. Business	130	2.93
5. Daily wage earner	90	2.02
6. Net making	9	0.2
7. Weaving	39	0.9
8. Others	3,312	74.51
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,444</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data (Table 1) pin point a tangible shift from the traditional occupation of a community to 'others' which did not contribute anything materially for the overall economic development of the Kaibartas. Only 409 persons i.e. 9% have been engaged in fishing although the community possess the requisite expertise in the profession. The Kaibartas of today, particularly living in the rural areas prefer agriculture but inspite of their rural base only 319 persons or 7% have been engaged in agriculture. Neither the position of employment is encouraging because only 3% have been engaged in services under various Govt. and Semi-Govt. offices. Thus the occupational structure depicts a disheartening economic status of the Kaibartas because as many as 74.5% of the population live on uncertain and casual sources of income. Of course non workers like students and persons below 6 years and above 60 years are also included in

this category. This 'others' category includes begging, keeping sons and daughters as man servant and maid servants in the rich peoples' houses belonging to both Kaibarta and non-Kaibarta castes, plying 'Theelas' and rickshaws on daily rental basis etc. The Kaibartas are expert in net making, weaving, japi making and such other small scale cottage industries but it has been observed that only 0.2% and 0.9% of the Kaibartas in sample study are engaged in small scale industries like net making and weaving respectively.

Co-operative societies, particularly fishery Co-operative societies could play significant role in ameliorating the poor living condition of the Kaibartas. There are 60 different categories of co-operative societies in the villages under study, but the functioning of these societies is hardly satisfactory.

Weaving is considered as subsidiary source of income of the womenfolk and in many Kaibarta families the womenfolk help their men in running the family affairs with their income. The Boa Kata Samabai samitis could play important roles in this regard but in majority of the Kaibarata villages these societies are non-existent or if there is any, the same is not functioning properly. Out of 77 sample villages only 13 (16.88%) villages have Boa Kata Samabai Samitis.

It may be noted that Kaibarta representatives in the Gao Panchayat Samabai Samitis (GPSS) situated in the Kaibarta villages are very few. Although the GPSS are established in the Kaibarta inhabited areas, the population pattern of the entire GPSS area is such that non-Kaibartas are more in number and naturally they get the upperhand. Besides the apathetic attitude and age old inferiority complex of the Kaibartas are responsible for their non inclusion in the managing committees of the GPSS. As regards representation on the Fishery Co-operative Societies and Boa Kata Samabai Samities, the position is satisfactory. Almost all these societies are managed and controlled by the Kaibartas. The main lacuna, however, is that these societies are not running properly and most of the Fishery Co-operative societies are defunct. The main function of these societies is to

help the fishermen to make out their living by taking less fish Mahals, But it has been observed that the office bearers of the societies fall easily in the trap of the unscrupulous Mahaldars and the very aim of establishing a fishery Co-operative by the fishermen themselves has been frustrated.

It is interesting to note that the educated section of the Kaibartas do not despite their traditional profession i.e. fishing but they prefer jobs in Govt. and Semi-Govt. organisations. They argue that alternative source of living on agricultural land is very negligible and therefore, Govt. should provide employment opportunities to them. The educated youths of 48 villages (out of 77) do not consider fish selling business as derogatory and they are ready to enter into the business provided protective measures are available. It may be mentioned that fishing as a profitable business lost its traditional glamour to the Kaibartas because sources of fishing are controlled by outside Mahaldars, traditional sources of fishing such as beels, marshy lands, etc. are gradually drying up or utilised for other purposes. Rivers, beels, marshy areas are the sources of fishing in Assam but of late most of these sources are not open for fishing for common Kaibartas. The business is largely in the hands of Bihari wholesalers and most of the Kaibarta fish sellers depend upon the secondary sources. The profit margin is very low in this type of business. Besides the supply is not regular and the Kaibartas have to live on the mercy of the middlemen. There is no dearth of fishery potentialities in the Kaibarta inhabited areas but the Kaibartas have been ousted from this traditional business by the unscrupulous middlemen. In the areas where the Kaibartas catch fish in smaller quantities for day to day income the position is somewhat different. During winter season the income from fish trade is almost regular but during summer season the income is practically nil. In the flood prone areas the condition of the Kaibartas are beyond description.

#### *Small Scale Industries*

There are very few small scale industries run by the Kaibartas. Except the extremely poor families, almost every

Kaibarta household possesses a traditional loom and the hand spun clothes are a source of income for the womenfolk. The poverty stricken Kaibarta women maintain the families by weaving clothes, the yarn for which is supplied by the richer fellow villagers or other non-Kaibartas.

The Kaibarta menfolk possess necessary skill for bamboo and cane industries but due to lack of raw materials most of the menfolk remain idle for the major part of the year. They do not have the initial small capital to purchase the raw materials. Basti lands are totally inadequate to grow bamboos.

Eri rearing industry has great potentiality and the Kaibarta women are eager to rear Eri, Cocoons. But due to poverty most of the families are not in a position to purchase Eri Cocoons. However 54 families are rearing Eri Cocoons and on an average each of these families is in position to produce one Eri Chadar in a year and that too for household use only.

There is good scope for Japi industry but here again the Kaibartas are not in a position to purchase the raw materials. From the field investigation it was found that each family of Marisha Alahi Gaon of Dibrugarh district earn Rs. 250 p.m. four to six months a year by selling japis.

#### *Marketing*

Daily, bi-weekly and weekly markets play significant roles in the economic life of the Kaibartas in as much as a large section of the Kaibartas depend upon these marketing centres for their earnings. Nearness of the market from the village is an important factor because the fish traders' profit is determined by the distance factor to a considerable extent. If the petty fish traders are required to carry the marketable fish to a distant market in a bus or a rickshaw, their income diminishes and vice-versa. It has been seen that majority of the Kaibarta villages are situated at an average distance of 3-4 Kms from the markets.

#### *Land Holding*

Fishing was the traditional occupation of the Kaibartas and only recently they have switched over to agricultural

activities. The Kaibartas have been largely handicapped because of acute shortage of land. As they traditionally depend solely upon fish, the forefathers of the present generations of the Kaibartas did not care much to occupy land. A good number of families even do not possess the minimum homestead land. Out of the 679 sample families 14 (2.06%) were landless. Bulk of the families i.e. 395 fall within the land range of 0-5 bighas and these are mostly below poverty line families. As these lands include homestead land also, the lands under cultivation is negligible. Besides all the lands are not productive. It was found that only 157 (23.13%) families possess 1-5 bighas of land each under cultivation and 138 (20.33%) families possess 5-10 bighas of cultivable land each.

#### ***Indebtedness***

Indebtedness cuts into the vitals of Kaibarta economy. From our sample we found that 624 (91.9%) families are always in debt. As many as 306 (49.03%) families take loans from Mahajans and those families are perpetually in debt. Only 50 families (8.07%) have taken loans from financial institutions. Two hundred and sixty eight (42.90%) families take loans from other i.e. from fellow villagers with nominal interest or no interest. Majority of the households take loans for running day to day affairs. Thus out of 624 families as many as 330 (52.88%) take small loans on per month basis for maintaining the families.

#### ***Conclusion***

Till recently a fishing community by tradition the Kaibartas are no longer an exclusive fishing community. Due mainly to economic reasons, majority of the Kaibartas have switched over to agriculture, business and service. Economically they are a vulnerable section and most of them are indebted to Mahajans. "The main cause of their occupational mobility are non-availability of sources of fish, government's take over of the fisheries, emergence of non local and non Kaibarta Mahaldars and malfunctioning of the fishery co-operatives which were expected to play the role of a nodal agency for economic upliftment of the

Kaibartas. As fishing was their traditional occupation, the forefathers of the present day Kaibartas did not care to possess agricultural lands and today the Kaibartas in a changing occupational status are facing acute shortage of agricultural land.

In order to give some relief to the Kaibartas following measures may be taken.

1. Fishery Co-operatives among the Kaibartas should revitalised.
2. Marshy lands near the Kaibarta villages should be converted into beel fisheries.
3. The beels and rivers should be auctioned in favour of the registered Fishery Co-operative Societies, thereby eliminating the Mahaldars.
4. Suitable ceiling surplus lands may be allotted to the Kaibartas alongwith necessary fund for improvement of the lands.
5. Raw materials like yarn, bamboo cane, etc., may be supplied to the needy Kaibartas at subsidised rate.\*



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\* Rural Development in North East India-Perspective, Issues, and Experiences. Ed. R. K. Samanta, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi 1990.

## Some Reflections on Changing Traditional Occupation in Two Kaibarta Villages of Jorhat District of Upper Assam

*(The paper has been divided into two parts. In the first part an introductory note on the Kaibartas has been incorporated. It may be noted that no systematic study has yet been made about the Kaibartas of Assam and the materials presented here are collected from the references made by eminent historians and ethnographers in their writings on the tribes and castes of Assam. In the second part, basing on the above data, an effort has been made to analyse the field data of two Kaibarta villages of Jorhat district).*

### PART - I

The Kaibartas constitute the predominant scheduled caste community in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Although fishing is their traditional occupation, many of them have accepted the profession of boatmen as a source of living while a sizeable section is engaged in agricultural activities. As fishing is, by and large, a primary occupation of the Kaibartas, most of the Kaibarta villages are found on river banks or near the beels, rivers and streams where fishes are available. As per 1971 Census their total population is 2,94,809 i.e., 32.41% of the total scheduled caste population of Assam. Their percentage of literacy is 30.38.

Opinions differ regarding the origin of the term Kaibarta. In Assam the term is used mainly to indicate the people whose main profession is fish trade. Thus Doms and Nadiyals come within the fold of the Kaibartas.

Some authors try to include the Keots in the fold of the Kaibartas. William Robinson traces Kaibarta origin among the Keots who are no longer considered as Kaibartas. "The Nadiyals or Doms are on the whole the most numerous tribe in Assam. That they originally emigrated from Bengal there can be little doubt. Their original employment is that of fishermen .... There are a good many Keyots or as some please to call themselves Kaibartas. They are divided into several classes, the two principals are called the Haluwa Keyots and the Jaluya Keyots. The former class are chiefly cultivators of the ground; they retain the worship of Krishna. The Jaluya Keyots are fishermen and without having relinquished their name or profession have in many points following the tenets of Mahomed; yet they keep themselves distinct as a caste and will not mix with the Moslems."<sup>1</sup>

Although Doms and Nadiyals of Assam are categorised as Kaibartas, yet traditionally there are clear cut distinctions between the Kaibartas and Keots on the one hand and Doms and Nadiyals on the other. B. C. Allen observes, "The names Kewat and Kaibarta are used more or less indiscriminately for the same caste in Assam. Owing to the comparative scarcity of the higher castes, the cultivating Kewats occupy higher position in this province than in Bengal, but some of them have taken to styling themselves Mahisya Baisya as they resent the attempt on the part of the Nadiyals or Doms to assume the name Kaibarta.... The Nadiyals or Doms are a fishing caste and in Assam have never performed any of the degrading offices assigned for them in Bengal. They are cleanly in their persons and great purists in the ceremonies of their religion."<sup>2</sup>

Montgomery Martin has also drawn similar demarcating lines between the Kaibartas and Keots on the one hand and Doms and Nadiyals on the other. "The Nadiyals or Doms are more numerous than the Koch as they extend over both Assam proper and Kamrup. Their manners exactly resemble those of the colony which has settled at Goyalpara.... Notwithstanding their care in eating they are considered as impure. There are a

good many Haluya Keots who cultivate the ground and Keyots who fish. The former are pure and usually assume the title of Kaibarta, the latter are impure but have not adopted the Muhammadan doctrine as those of Rongpur have done."<sup>3</sup>

The term Kaibarta has got currency for the fishing communities like Doms, Nadiyals and Jaluwa Keots. In the early writings also no serious attempt was made to trace the origin of the Kaibartas. Risley, however, has provided us with some useful information. "There seem to be good grounds for the belief that the Kaibartas were among the earliest inhabitants of Bengal and occupied a commanding position. Many centuries ago five separate princedoms - Tamralipta or Tamluk, Balisita, Turka, Sujamute and Kutabpur - are said to have been found by them in the Midnapur district and it is perhaps not unreasonable to infer from its traditions that part of the country must have been one of the earliest seats of the tribe.... The simplest explanation of the relation between the Kaibarta and the Kewat appears then to be that both belonged to one and the same tribe, but that the branch which settled in Bihar gradually became endogamous and adopted a Hindu name."<sup>4</sup>

Risley traces the origin of the Kaibartas in Bengal. He mentions a legend to substantiate his finding. "There was a powerful tribe called Kewats who were raised to the status of Sudras by Ballal Sen conferring on them the title of Kaibartas in return for their undertaking to abandon their original profession of fishing."<sup>5</sup> The internal structure varied from place to place. Thus in Central Bengal and Maldah the cultivating groups are called 'Halik' or 'Chasa' while the fishing groups are designated as 'Jalik' or 'Jalwal' or 'Jaliya'. Risley further informs us that in areas like Bakarganj the cultivating Kaibartas have various names such as Halia Das, Parasara Das or Chasi Kaibarta while the fishing Kaibartas are referred to simply as Kaibarta.

In Assam eminent literatures and scholars like Lakshminath Bezbarua, Rai Bahadur Kanaklal Barua and famous historian Rajmohan Nath tried to trace the origin of the Kaibartas. According to Bezbarua and Kanaklal Barua, the Kaibartas were

Dravidians.<sup>6</sup> Gunabhiram Barua in his Assam Buranji<sup>7</sup> has not elaborated about the Kaibartas. It appears the Kaibartas of Assam in those days were insignificant in numbers and in later years their numbers inflated with the wholesale inclusion of the Doms and Nadiyals into the fold of the Kaibartas. However in the said Assam Buranji the Kaibartas have been referred to while describing the Keots. 'The Keots come within the fold of the Kaibartas'. Incidentally it may be mentioned that in Orissa the Kaibartas and Keots are grouped together with Dhibara. Fishing is their main profession.

About Doms and Nadiyals the Buranji throws some light. 'Doms are living in Assam since a long time. Fish catching, fish selling, boat making and boat plying, lime making and selling are their main professions. Now they are engaging themselves in agriculture and other trades. In trade and commerce they are considered as inferior caste. There is no definite source about the origin of the word Dom. The Doms of other parts of North India are very low castes. They make baskets and sell those and some are engaged in cremating dead bodies. Among them some traders are also found. When Buddhism was in full vigour the low castes embracing Buddhism tried to take revenge upon the Brahmins but when Hinduism was revitalised, those who did not accept Hinduism were hated by the Hindus and called them Doms. In this way they formed a separate class outside the Hindu fold. As the Brahmins did not accept them as disciples, the Doms had to satisfy themselves with the Kalita Gurus.' (Extract from original Assamese text).

Similarly nothing could be found about the Kaibartas in the Assam Buranji written by Haliram Dhekial Phukan,<sup>8</sup> although a full chapter entitled 'Jati Bibhag' on the various tribes and castes of Assam, is devoted. However Dhekial Phukan mentions about the Doms, Jaluwa Keot and Nadiyal. "Jalui Keot O Dom Ei Dui Jati Matsya Byabasai Kare.... Dom Jati Soumar Pithate O Pragjyotishpure Adhik. Taharder Madhye Adhik Lok Dhanandhyao Ase, Banijya Byabasai Anekei Kare Sutarang Lekha Parao Jane. Apar Tahara Ek Ek Jan Eman Besh Bhusaniwta Hoiya Bhraman Kare Je Keh Dom Jnan Karite



Pare Na. Taharder Jajak Brahman Prithak Ase-Apar Tahardiger Je Brahman Tahara Domer Adrista Rajaska Kanya Bibah Kare, Kintu Bibahanantar Punarbar Domer Grihe Bhojan Kare Na. Ei Dom Jatiera Apon Sadmabesh Kariya Uttam Jatir Saite Milita Hoiya Akarya Karibek Emat Asanka Kariya Raja Taharder kapale Ek Rohit Matsyer Sihna Godna Deoaiten, Taddara Tahara Jati Gopan Karite Parita Na.-- Ei Kshonei Tahardigake Dom Kahile Ragapanna Hoi, Nadiyal Name Apnake Kshyata Kare." Free English translation : 'Jalui Keot and Dom practise fishing. The Doms are concentrated in Soumar Pith (Upper Assam) and Pragjyotishpur (Kamrup). There are very rich people among them also. Many are engaged in trade and commerce and they are literate. A few persons among them travel with such costly dresses that nobody can recognise them as Doms They have their own Brahmans. These Brahmans enter into marital relations with grown up girls of fellow Doms but after marriage they donot take food in Dom's house. In order to prohibit mixing of the Doms with the high castes, the Rijas (Kings) compelled them to put in a Rahu fish mark in the forehead so that they would not be able to hide their caste... Of late they become furious when they are referred to as Doms. They prefer to call themselves Nadiyals'.

That the Kaibartas are a very old and recognised community is testified from the reference of Kaibartas in the 'Santi Parba' of the Mahabharata (3/16).

Bimal Dev and Dilip Lahiri have made interesting revelation regarding the origin of the Kaibartas of Assam. "An analysis of ancient records - 'Mojohar' and copper plate granted by the Ahom king Siva Singha during the years 1135 B. S. and 1657 Saka in favour of Borpeta Satra reveal that a sect of the Kaibartas, some of whom were fishermen by profession adhered to Buddhism in early days and that for their non acceptance of Hinduism which was then prevalent in Assam, they were looked down upon by the Hindus of Assam and were contemptuously called Dom. From the famous Mojohar of 1135 B.S. it also appears that three persons viz Sarva, Daika and Saranga who happened to be the sons of one Bolo Dom were Hinduised by

the illustrious Vaisnava reformers Sri Sankardeva and Madhavdeva and were declared and recognised in the Mojohar as Kaibarta and 'Bhakats' of Borpeta Satra..... It is significant to note that there always existed a strong desire among the Doms of Assam Valley to acquire the caste name Kaibarta. The issue also received support from the religious head of Nogora Satra of Golaghat."<sup>9</sup>

B. C. Allen opines that Kaibartas are very few in numbers in Assam. The Nadiyals or Doms prefer to call themselves as Kaibartas. "In Kamrup the names Kewat and Kaibartta seem to be interchangeable. The Kaibarttas are divided into two functional groups which for all intents and purpose are separate castes, the Halowa and Jaliya. In Assam proper the Jaliya Kaibartas are very scarce but the Nadiyals or Doms are endeavouring to get their claims to the name acknowledged by Government. The genuine Jaliya Kaibartas, however, marked the difference between themselves and the Nadiyals by declining to sell fish except on the river bank within a paddles throw of the boat and abstaining from the use of the 'Ghokota' net. The Kewat or Kaibartta in Assam is a clean Sudra Caste ranking immediately after the Kalita. In addition to the Jaliya there are six other sub divisions. - Mali, Halowa, Seoli, Neoli, Katharoa and Bhari of which the Mali ranks highest though all six have taken to agriculture."<sup>10</sup>

About the etymology of the name Kaibarta there are various shades of opinion. Some aged Kaibartas say that the name had its origin from 'Ka' meaning water and 'Vartta' meaning livelihood. But we donot trace the meaning of 'Ka' as water in the Assamese, Prakrit or Sanskrit languages. The word had its origin probably in the Brahman and 'the Sanghita' age when it was known as Kim Varta, Kim i.e., awkward or ugly, Vartanam, i.e. occupation. Kaibarta thus was a person following a low or humiliating occupation. Risley, opines "This he adds, would be in keeping with the pedigree assigned to the caste in Manu where the Kaibarta also known as Margava or Dasa is said to have been begotten by a Nishada father and an Ayogavi mother and to subsist by his labour in boats."<sup>11</sup>

## PART - II

### A. Bagar Gaon

The village lies at a distance of about 22 Kms. from Jorhat, the headquarters of the district and 6 Kms. from Titabar Tiniali. The village is exclusively inhabited by the Kaibartas. There are 55 households with a population of 495 (male 290 female 205). The village is connected with Titabar with a katcha fair weather motorable road. The nearest all weather motorable road is at a distance of about 5 Kms from the village. Medical and High school facilities are available only at Titabar. Till the date of our survey (October '84) the village has only one graduate and 5 Nos. of H.S.L.C. passed youths. Only one youngman has been studying at Titabar college from the village.

Out of 55 households only one household, 1.81% (Table 1) is found to be engaged in fishing trade. This household possesses only two bighas of land including one bigha homestead land. The head of the family purchases fish from Jorhat wholesale market and sells those at Titabar. The informant revealed that fish trade is no longer lucrative as the profit margin is very low. Besides, due to non availability of local fish he is facing difficulties to earn any profit, particularly during summer season. He expresses his willingness to earn his bread only through cultivation. It may be noted that traditional occupation like fishing, weaving etc. are in the unorganised sector.

Table I shows the occupational pattern of the families of the village.

**TABLE - I**  
**Occupational Pattern of Bagar Gaon**

Fish Sellers		Cultivators		Cultivators Cum Service holder		Day Labourers	
No. of families	P.C	No. of families	P.C.	No. of families	P.C.	No. of families	P.C
1	1.81	45	81.83	7	12.74	2	3.62

There are 45 families whose main occupation is agriculture. They form 81.83% of the total families of the village against all India percentage of scheduled caste cultivators of 28.17. Seven families, 12.74% have service holders and these are well off economically because these families have agricultural lands too. Only two families, 3.62% are found to be living on alms or serving as day labourer. There is only one household which has more than 45 bighas of land and this is the richest family in the village having sizeable income from agriculture as well as service (a member of the family is serving as L. P School teacher). On an average each household possesses six bighas of land including homestead land. There are two extreme cases where landed property is practically nil and the families live on begging.

The cultivators are happy with their present profession and they donot like to return to the old profession of selling fish. The poorest of the poor i.e., beggers as well as the day labourers too prefer other sources of living than fish selling. They are ready to open grocery shops if Government help is available.

The reasons for abandoning the traditional fish selling business are \_

1. The profession is considered as derogatory.
2. The traditional occupation has dual handicap viz. social disability and economic deprivation.
3. The income is not lucrative.
4. As there is no marshy land, river, beels near the village, income from fish is uncertain and not regular throughout the year.
5. Society's attitude towards fish trade compels the younger section to seek other professions.

### B. Bhitar Kakila Namani Chuk :

The village is situated at a distance of about 13 Kilometers north of Jorhat, the headquarters of Jorhat district. Situated on the bank of river Kakila the village is experiencing annual flood

of the river Kakila and the Brahmaputra which is only about half a kilometer from the village.

Bhitarkakila Namani Suba with 523 households is a big village with four 'Subas' or parts, viz Ujani Suba, Major Suba, Namani Suba and Baragharia Suba. For our survey we selected Namani Suba having 82 Nos. of Kaibarta families and 2 Nos. of Brahmin families who act as priests of the Kaibartas. For our present study we are excluding these two families.

The total population of the village is 493 (male 265, female 228). The Jorhat Neamatighat P.W.D. road connects the Kakila road cum embankment by the side of which the village is situated. Besides protecting the villagers from the onslaughts of recurring flood, the embankment helps them to eke out their living. The low lying areas lying on the eastern side of the embankment are the natural fisheries while the paddy fields lying on the western side of the embankment provide the villagers with their requirement of paddy.

There is a post office within the village. The nearest telegraph office (Jorhat) lies at a distance of 13 Kms. from the village. Although there is a state dispensary at Tinali, about 5 Kms. from the village, the villagers prefer to go to the Jorhat Civil Hospital at a distance of about 16 Kms.

The Bhitarkakila L.P. School caters to the basic educational needs of the small children. One hundred and ninety six students (110 boys and 86 girls), all from the Kaibarta community are studying in this school. There are only 10 (6 boys and 4 girls) high school going students although the Nam Kakila H. E. School is situated only at a distance of 1 Km. from the village. Six boys and two girls from this village are prosecuting higher studies in the Bahona College at a distance of about 5 Kms. from the village.

The condition of drinking water is not at all satisfactory as most of the villagers use water from the Kakila river. Government have supplied 3 Nos. of tube wells. The water of the tube wells contains high percentage of iron.

Table No. II shows the occupational pattern of the village :

**TABLE - II**  
**Occupational Pattern of Bhitarkakila Namani Suba**

Fish Sellers		Cultivators		Cultivator Cum Fish seller		Day Labourers	
No. of families	PC	No. of families	P.C.	No. of families	P.C.	No. of families	PC
17	20.23	45	53.58	19	22.62	3	3.57

Out of 84 families, 17 (20.23%) families earn their livelihood by selling fish and they have no subsidiary sources of income. The cultivators numbering 45 families (53.58%) are also living from hand to mouth as the paddy lands are scares. Most of the cultivators are not self sufficient and they sell fish occasionally to earn some extra money. They constitute 22.62% of the families of the village. Three families 3.57% have no other source of income except day labourer. Oftentimes they have to resort to begging, as the labourers are not engaged regularly.

There are three graduates, fourteen H.S.L.C. passed youths and one I.T.I. passed young man in the village. Except a few class III and grade IV service holders, the village does not possess any gazetted service holder. From the list of service holders shown below one can ascertain the standard of employment among the Kaibartas of the village.

Name of the posts	Nos.
L.D. Assistant in H.E. School	1
L.D. Assistant in State Govt. office	2
L.P. Teachers	2
Driver	2
Police Constable	3
Road Mohorri	1
Steamer Master	1

Selling of fish was the traditional profession of the villagers but of late most of the villagers prefer plough cultivation which is the prevailing agricultural practice among the neighbouring non Kaibarta villagers. Suitable paddy lands, however are very scarce as the forefathers of the present day Kaibartas did not care to possess any landed property nor they ever thought of resorting to agriculture as the only source of living. The ready made answer of 45 households to our queries as to why they do not stick to their traditional profession, i.e., fish selling, was that sources of fish are fast dwindling, most of the beels and fisheries have been taken over by Government and the terms and conditions of the fish mahaldars are not satisfactory. Besides, education is spreading fast in the village and the educated people are reluctant to follow the traditional occupation. Social attitude towards selling fish is one of humiliation and young boys do not like to carry the business at Jorhat town. The educated and young boys prefer Govt. jobs and running of shops to selling fish.

#### **Conclusion :**

The survey reveals that the Kaibartas who were traditionally fishermen by profession are no longer sticking to that profession with the traditional fervour. Only some elderly persons are maintaining the age old tradition. In our present study of two Kaibarta villages, we found that persons engaged in selling of fish are very negligible in Bagar Gaon where as the Bhitara Kakila Namani Suba village possesses only 17 such families (20.23%). It was found that none of the villages possesses individual fisheries and the villagers following the profession of fish selling have to depend upon Government fisheries. Individual fisherman finds it difficult to carry on the business as per terms and conditions laid down by the Mahaldars. Income from fish is not regular and the Kaibartas prefer agriculture to fish selling business. It was also found that the educated persons among the Kaibartas do not like to follow their parents' fish selling profession. They opine that fish sellers are looked down upon by the non Kaibartas and they therefore prefer Government jobs and other

independent avocations.

The General economic condition of both the villages is not satisfactory. It was seen that the plight of the villagers who are accepting agriculture as main profession is better than that of the fish sellers. Therefore in both the villages the most important felt need is agricultural land. The existing agricultural lands per family are utterly inadequate.

Formerly women folk also helped their men by catching and selling fish. But today the women folk catch fish for household consumption only. Beels and marshy lands are not available near the villages. The womenfolk are expert weavers but due to lack of purchasing power they are not in a position to purchase the required yarn.

Most of the villagers are unaware of the benefits extended by Government and other welfare agencies. The people in general are suffering from inferiority complex, which has cut at the vitals of the Kaibartas since time immemorial. Except one or two educated persons, the villagers in general do not know that the Government have taken welfare measures to ameliorate the poor economic condition of the scheduled castes of Assam under the Scheduled Caste Component Plan. Unless some concrete steps are taken to remove the inferiority complex, the pitiable economic condition of the Kaibartas will never be improved.\*

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## Tai Aitonia

The Aitonias are a small section of the Man Tai tribe. The present abode of the Aitonias is spread in Sarupathar, Borpathar areas of Golaghat district and foot hills of Karbi Anglang district. There are only eight Aitonia villages in both these areas and these villages are interspersed with non Buddhist and non tribal populations.

The Aitonias are not separately enumerated in the Census Report of 1971 nor they are considered as Scheduled Tribe in the whole of Assam. Sometimes, they get some facilities by introducing themselves as Man Tai speaking which is a scheduled tribe in the hill areas of Assam.

The approximate population of the Aitonias will be 2000.

Some distinctive traits of their traditional culture are still intact which can be traced in their food habits, dress, house pattern, folkways, clan organisation, marriage, religious beliefs and death rites. The Aitonias have their own method of preparing and preserving food. They prepare steamed rice (Sakhao) which is their favourite food taken twice a day. The poorer families are however, satisfied with boiled rice, along with rice, they take meat and fish when available. They prefer leafy vegetables and root products and the elderly persons avoid oil. Special preparations of fish and meat which can be preserved for weeks, are used in their socio religious occasions.

They construct platform type houses raised about one meter above the ground. A typical Aitonia house has compartments with the help of a wooden ladder.

Both men and women, wear traditional house woven clothes. The school going boys and girls and persons employed in offices and schools use modern mill made clothes. But while

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\* Bulletin of the Tribal Research Institute (AIRTSC) Assam, Ed. B.N. Bordoloi, Vol-I, No. III, 1985.

in house they use only traditional dress.

They are patriarchal people and descent is traced through the male line. The father may keep one share of his property for his exclusive use but after his death the share goes to that son who takes his care in his old age.

The Aitonias are bilingual. They speak Tai Language among them but when they talk with a non Aitonia they talk in Assamese.

The tribe is divided into a number of clans both big and small. It may be noted that except in the case of marriage, reference to the clans is hardly made. Marriage within the clan is prohibited. Generally a member belonging to a senior clan does not marry a person from an inferior clan. The origin of the clan names may be traced either from natural objects or from some characteristics and special abilities of their ancestors.

Every Aitonia village has a Gaonbura or village headman (Hoban) who is appointed by the villagers. He presides over the council of the village elders and his opinion is respected by all. He holds office till his death. Next in the social hierarchy is the pathak (Trayo) who acts as a guide in all the religious occasions he is well versed in the culture and tradition of the people and holds office till his death. The headman is assisted by an office bearer called Barik who acts as a liaison officer between the villagers and the headman.

Under the category religious organisation comes the monks along with their attendants. The Bhikshoos or senior monks rank the topmost in the religious hierarchy. The next higher rank is Sraman who also leads the life of a Bhikshoo. The attendants are trainees and besides assisting the monks, they recite the religious books to upgrade themselves to the rank of Sraman.

The Aitonias use certain kinship terms of address and reference to designate the kin members of various types. The terms of reference are more distinctly applied than the terms of address. It is observed that certain classificatory terms used in connection with primary, secondary and tertiary relatives are

also applied to the relatives of the younger ones. Sex difference is also maintained. Different terms are used to denote kins of differentiation in the Aitonia kinship terminology. There are distinct kinship terms for persons of older generation. While the younger ones are addressed by personal names.

An Aitonia family generally consists of father, mother and their unmarried children. In other words they have a nuclear or primary family. The elementary type, however, has a variable where further generation of old father, old mother of the existing head of the family i.e., member of the family of orientation, live together. Extended or joint families are very few. Within the family, economic cooperation in the day to day life is maintained by all members. The parents and agnatic elders are consulted in important family affairs like marriage, death ceremony etc. The paternal uncle is respected and his advice sought in all social and economic matters, when the father is dead. The interests of an individual family are merged with the general interests of all the villagers.

The Aitonias strictly adhere to clan exogamy although departure from the age old tradition cannot be ruled out. Adult marriage is the rule and the boys and girls usually marry between the ages 25 - 28 and 18 - 22 respectively. They are monogamous. Plurality of wives does not confer special privilege or honour. Levirate is in vogue but cases of such type of marriages are few and far between. The people take strong view in respect of premarital or extra marital relation, if any. The society allows cross cousin marriage. Widow remarriage is also allowed and in such cases the new husband has to pay to taken amount (Rs. 10/-) called Kaprai to the brother of the former husband of the widow.

Among the Aitonias two types of marriage are prevalent i.e. formal (Aolongmic) and informal (Aopoimi). The former entails a huge expenditure and long drawn procedure and therefore, such type is restricted to the well-to-do sections only. Informal marriage is popular. In the Aitonia marriages, Passag or the mediator plays an important role.

They also charge bride price (Tanka Tangho) at the time of marriage which is more applicable in the informal type of marriage, where the bridegroom is required to pay a maximum of Rs. 500/- and minimum of Rs. 150.00 as bride price. Now a days the amount is very nominal and the educated boys do not like to accept bride price.

Both cremation and burial are practised by the people depending upon nature of death and age. Dead bodies of children, suicide cases, women who die during delivery of an issue, dead bodies of Thyphoid, Cholera, Small pox cases etc. are buried without any cremation. The corpse is disposed on the same day. The main purification ceremony is observed on the sixth day after death.

A feast is arranged for the villagers and prayers are held where the monks preside over. Gifts are offered to the monks. A comparatively less important ceremony is observed on the following day. During the mourning days the monks are invited to recite verses from the religious books.

The economic base of the people is wet paddy cultivation on which the people wholly depend for their sustenance. They produce sali paddy in their fields. Mustard, potatoes, arums and other Kharif crops are grown by a few families only. The people sell a sizable portion of their paddy for meeting the day to day expenditures and other expenses incurred during festive occasions. The poorer families depend upon the richer ones during the lean months.

Lands are owned by individual families. There is no joint ownership of land. Forests, however, are owned and managed by the state Government. Many families own small forests which serve as resource materials for the construction and repairing their houses as well as for the kitchen. On an average, each family possesses 8-10 bighas of land including homestead land. The families having insufficient land resort to share cropping. Income from subsidiary sources is limited. Takau (palm) leaves are widely used as roofing materials. Most of the families derive some extra income from mustard seeds, shoulder bags and other

winter crops. More than 60% of the families are not self sufficient as regards paddy which is their main crop.

The Aitonias do not like to serve as day labourers particularly in the residences of non Aitonias. They, however, prefer other jobs like teacher, office assistants, contracts and other high category posts.

Money economy and modern way of living have penetrated into the far flung Aitonia villages. The boys and girls prefer modern dresses when they go out. TV sets, transistor radio sets, bicycles, torches, wrist watches, chairs and tables etc. are found in many households. Thus a good amount of their income today, is spent on dresses, furniture, school fees, modern cooking and dining paraphernalias etc. The religious beliefs and practices including festivals are similar with those of the Tai Phakes. Like the Phakes, the Aitonias are proud of their religion. There is, therefore, no religious convert among the Aitonias.

The Aitonias have a village Council constituted by the village headman and the elderly male villagers. All the local disputes are settled in this council. The people abide by the decisions of the Council ungrudgingly.

The Aitonia villages of the plains districts are covered by the Gaon Panchayat. Some villages fall within the jurisdiction of the Karbi Anglang district under the Sixth Schedule and they are covered by the District Council. The educated persons are taking interest in the welfare activities of the villages and they take certain decisions. At the same time they do not transgress the powers of the traditional village headman.

There are tangible changes in the material culture of the Aitonias due largely to the contact with the non Aitonias and also due to opening up of the villages. The youths are searching for avocations outside the village and they are entered into the petty trade and commerce because of scarcity of land. Problem of employment is acute while the demand for modern dresses, modern household items, etc. is increasing. Individualism has replaced the old corporate living to a considerable extent. The people are becoming conscious about their rights. They are

pressing hard for inclusion of the community in the Scheduled Tribe list of Assam as their present identity (Man Tai Speaking) is vague.



## Tai Khamyang

The Tai Khamyangs are known popularly as Noras. The Noras are regarded by the Ahoms as their close Kinsmen. However that may be, the Noras were a comparatively civilized people. They are Buddhists and are generally employed as astronomers and writers.

The present Khamyang villages are located mainly in Sivasagar and Jorhat districts of upper Assam. Their habitations are interspersed with non Khamyang populations and they prefer to live in plains areas like other rural Assamese people.

The exact population figure of the Khamyangs is not available as the 1971 Census did not enumerate this group separately. However, from the field study, it was found that the total Khamyang population will be around 6500 approximately. Some distinctive traditional features are still found among the population in respect of house pattern, clan organisation, marriage, religion, death rites, folk beliefs etc. They live in plains areas preferably beside a river. Like the Tai Turungs and Tai Aitonias they also construct their houses in raised platforms at least one metre above the ground. Acculturation process is largely visible in respect of their food habits, dress pattern, household artifacts, language and in social behaviour. They adopted the rural Assamese lifestyle to a considerable extent.

Unlike the Tai Phakes, Tai Turungs, Tai Aitonas, the Tai Khamyangs do not speak the Tai language. They speak Assamese language in their day to day life.

The society is split into nine clans namely Thumung, Bailung, Panyok, Chowlu, Chowlek, Chowlik, Tungkhong, Chowhai and Chowchang. These clans are exogamous and except in marriage, reference to the clans in their day to day life is hardly made.

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\* Encyclopedic Profile of Indian Tribes, Ed. Sachchidananda, and R. R. Prasad, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi - 2



The Khamyang kinship system broadly tallies with that of the cognate groups like the Tai Turungs, Tai Phakes or Tai Aitonas. Their kinship terminology can be called as descriptive although trace of classificatory kinship terminology is also found.

Both lineal or primary and joint families are found in the society but preponderance of the former is noticed. Even in the nuclear families, the members maintain cordial relation with the separated units and in matters of marriage and death rites, the opinion of the agnatic as well as cognatic elders is sought. The oldest member of the family is respected by all the members of the family of origin. Health problem in a family is by and large, still a community affair as the community at large is affected by illness in individual families.

Adult marriage is the rule. Marriage within the clan is prohibited. Polygamy except in special cases like infertility and weak health, are very rare. Levirate and sororate are in vogue. Widows are allowed to marry and in such marriages no formal ceremony is observed.

Among the Khamyangs two types of marriages are prevalent viz; formal and informal. The formal is an expensive one and naturally the poorer families do not show much eagerness to this type of marriage. Preponderance of informal marriage is the characteristic feature which is recognized by the society.

Some decades back the payment of bride price at the time of marriage was compulsory, but today the system is disfavoured. Some poor families, however express their willingness to receive bride price. The token bride price in the form of a basketful of betel leaves and nuts is enough to satisfy the demand of the bride's parent.

The Khamyangs observe a neat function to mark the name giving ceremony of a child. The girl imitates her mother in her daily chores while a boy learns the activities and do's and don'ts from the elderly male members.

A simple ceremony is observed when a girl attains puberty. The girl is considered as impure during the puberty period.

Right from early childhood the young boys and girls help their parents in various agricultural activities. The girls must learn weaving and it is customary for the womenfolk to wear clothes woven by themselves. This tradition continues till today. In the case of young boys, the school going boys now a days do not find time to assist their parents in agricultural activities. But during holidays they assist their parents.

The dead bodies are cremated with exceptions of the dead bodies of children and unnatural death cases which are buried. The corpse is disposed on the same day. The main purification ceremony is observed on the 6th day. Entertaining the villagers with a big feast and offering of gifts to the monks constitute the main function of the purification ceremony.

Like other fellow plains tribal and non tribal people, the Khamyangs too depend upon agricultural activities for their sustenance. They are wet paddy cultivators and the age old practice of plough cultivation is still followed. Their lands are fertile and most of the families get their annual requirement of paddy. On an average, each family possesses 8-10 bighas of land including homestead land. The womenfolk also take part in the agricultural practices particularly in transplanting and harvesting operations. Besides, they weave clothes in their looms mainly for use of the family members. Winter crops are also grown for local consumption. Poultryies are reared by a few families.

Today, the Khamyang self sufficient economy has been badly effected by the increasing needs of modern day to day items like transistor radios, wooden and steel furniture, china wares, mill made dresses, bicycles, wrist watches etc. The parents can hardly meet the increasing needs of their sons and daughters. Due to increase of population and fragmentation of land, the youths are not gainfully employed in agriculture and there is a panic search for employment elsewhere.

All the Buddhist communities of Assam practice similar rituals and socio-religious festivals. As Buddhism is a worldly recognised religion, the Khamyangs do not feel the necessity of

embracing any other religion to upgrade themselves in the estimation of the people in general. They maintain cordial relation with the neighboring Hindu and Christian populations.

The Khamyangs are plains dwellers and like all other plains tribal and non tribal villagers, they too have Village Councils constituted by the village headman and the elderly male villagers. All the local disputes like theft, encroachment of land, illegal marriage, assault etc. are settled in this Council. The decisions of the village Council are honoured by the people. The Khamyang villages fall within the jurisdiction of Gaon Panchayat and facilities provided by the Gaon Panchayat are extended to these villages. The villagers elect representatives to the local Panchayat.

The Khamyang villages are surrounded by non Khamyang villages mostly belonging to the Ahom community and tea and ex-tea garden labour habitations. Besides, the villages are well connected with all weather roads and modern infrastructural facilities are available in the far flung villages. Inter village transactions take place and the mode of traditional culture is affected. The educated youths are searching employment. The traditional leadership pattern also has undergone tangible changes. The educated sections are consulted in the socio legal matters, although in the socio religious matters, the Gaonbura maintains his traditional role. Changes are noticed in the material culture. What remains intact is the religious beliefs and practices.



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\* Encyclopaedic Profile of Indian Tribes, Ed. Sachchidananda, and R. R. Prasad, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi - 2

## Tai Phake

The Tai Phakes are a small lesser known Buddhist community of Assam plains who are mainly concentrated on the banks of the river Buridihing, a tributary of the river Brahmaputra, in the district of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. The Phakes use the prefix Tai which means celestial origin as they claim to belong the great Tai or Thai family.

Five groups of the Tai people i.e., Tai Phakes, Tai Aitonias, Tai Turungs, Tai Khamyangs and Tai Khamtis are Shan people who at different times of history, entered Assam from their original habitat Mogoung.

Tai Phake villages are not found in exclusive pockets, rather these are interspersed with non Phake villages mostly belonging to ex-tea garden labourers and other Assamese people.

The Tai Phakes are not included in the scheduled tribe list of Assam, hence they were not enumerated separately. The population, however, is maintaining its traditional characteristics intact. Their present population will be about 4000.

The Tai belongs to the Siamese-Chinese branch of the Sino Tibetan linguistic group.

Rice is their staple food. They have variety of fish and meat preparations fitting with different socio religious occasions such as panao (dry fish), ngu haing (dry meat), pasom (sour fish), patek (preserved fish) etc. Sakhao (steamed rice), is their speciality. Mushroom, bamboo shoots, cane sprouts are favourite items. They do not rear poultries or animals for local consumption. Beef is prohibited. Tea is a popular beverage and it is the first item of entertaining visitors. Alcoholic drinks are prohibited, although some young people occasionally take locally brewed rice beer in the market place,

The womenfolk are expert weavers and they weave the

clothes of all the members of a family. Both male and female wear their traditional dresses, Man's dress includes a paaton (lungi), a shirt or pullover or Ganzi (purchased from local market), a fa fek mai (white chaddar) and a white turban, while a woman wears a chin (a mekhela), a nangwat (breast cloth) and a chairchin (cloth belt). The elderly women wear white turbans. A Tai Phake priest or Bauda Vikshoo can be easily distinguished by his yellow dress and cleanly shaven head.

Broadly, the Tai Phake society is split into two categories ordinary villagers who follow Astasheel' (eight principles of Buddhism) and non cultivating vikshoos (monks). Every village has a Chowman (headman). Besides, there is a Pathak (reader of scriptures and assistant of the monks) who concerns himself with religious matters. He holds office till his death. Similarly, the Chowman also holds office till his death. He has a superior position in the society and through him alone, the villagers perform inter and intra village activities.

The Phakes have a number of exogamous clans. It was reported that originally they had one thousand and one clans, (Fan Kun Pak Pai Chu Neng) but today, they possess only a few. They have also a number of sub clans which are exogamous. The Phake clans are named after some natural objects and characteristics of their ancestors. Thus, the origin of the Thumung clan is traced from a king, Wingken means chief of one hundred and one clans. Phake clans are not originated from totemic objects. People of different clans live in a village and except in the case of marriage clan differentiation is hardly noticed. Clan names are not used as surnames and a common title Kauhain (Gohain) is used.

The Phake terms of reference are more in numbers than the terms of address. The villagers do not confine kinship terms within the limit of actual kin members, rather they are extended to non Phake outsiders also.

The Phakes practice avoidance between husband's elder

brother and younger brother' wife. Avoidance is also practised between younger sister's husband and wife's elder sister.

Although nuclear or primary type of families are found in good numbers, preponderance of lineal joint families i.e. parents with a married son and unmarried sons and daughters and either of the parents with a married son and unmarried sons and daughters is noticed.

The Phakes practise clan exogamy. Monogamy is the prevailing practice. Polyandry is unknown in their society. Adult marriage is the rule and boys and girls marry in between the ages 25-28 and 18-22 respectively.

There are two types of marriage among the Tai Phakes, viz. formal and informal. The formal (Ao Long Me) marriage is celebrated with a detailed long drawn formality and the latter without. The formal marriage is usually planned and arranged by the parents. The residence is patrilocal but the married women, if childless, may return to their parents after the death of their husbands.

Bride price (Tanka) is prevalent. There is no fixed bride price but generally Rs. 140.00 is charged which may increase upto Rs. 240.00 or decrease to Rs. 7.00 depending upon the groom's economic status. Bride price may also be paid in kind like buffaloes, bullocks etc. as special cases.

Divorce is a rare phenomenon, Widow remarriage is allowed and there is no detailed ceremony for such marriage. A simple feast is offered to the villagers.

The Phakes observe a simple ceremony called Ao Long Lukon in connection with the naming of a new born child after 15 days or one month from the date of birth of the child. Only old women are invited for this ceremony. The women select a name synchronising the day of birth and accordingly the name is formally announced.

On the day of giving first food to the child another ceremony called Chan Khwan, is observed.

The Phakes observe a neat ceremony in connection with

the attainment of puberty by a girl. The girl is confined for two days in a room. On the third day, she is bathed and a white chaddar is given to her as sign of reaching adulthood.

In the day to day life, the girls follow the trades of their mothers while the boys help their parents in agricultural activities. They also attend schools regularly. No boy or girl remains unmarried when they reach the marriageable age i.e., 18-22 years for girls and 25-28 for boys.

Dead bodies are cremated but dead bodies of persons who commit suicide, victims of Typhoid, Cholera, Small Pox and wild animals etc. are buried. The main purification ceremony is observed on the 6th day after death. The Bauddha Vikshoos chant prayers and gifts are offered to them. The villagers are entertained with a sumptuous feast. A comparatively less important ceremony is also observed on the seventh day.

The people depend upon agriculture for their sustenance. They resort to wet paddy cultivation. On an average each family possesses 6-10 bighas of land. The needy families who do not possess sufficient land, cultivate the lands of richer families. By and large the people are self sufficient with paddy. The age old system of plough cultivation is resorted to. They rear cows and bullocks. A few families only rear poultries. Leaves of palm trees (Takau) are widely used as roofing materials. They also sell these leaves to the non Phake neighbours. Winter crops, particularly potatoes, mustard, arums are grown for local consumption as well as for market. The womenfolk are expert weavers and earn money by selling shoulder bags which have a flourishing market. 'Tona Kapor' (locally woven cloths widely used by some of the tribal people of the Arunachal Pradesh) fetches a good price and these are sold to the Marwari traders at wholesale rate. A characteristic feature of the Phake agricultural economy is that almost every household employs a labourer belonging to ex-tea garden labour community. Some of the families employ such labourer throughout the year while others employ them during the peak agricultural season only.

The Phakes do not like to serve as day labourers and

therefore one hardly finds a Phake day labourer in the neighboring tea plantations. The people prefer jobs like teachers, office assistants and other high posts in Government and private undertakings. One or two families are earning substantial income from contracts.

The people profess Buddhism and Lord Buddha is their supreme god. Every village has a Bauddha Vihar and Lord Buddha's image is installed in it. Regular prayers are held in the Buddha Vihar by the monks who live permanently in the temple campus. Every family maintains a prayer corner in the house where regular prayer is held by the oldest male member of the family. The people put utmost value in the gifts to the monks.

The Tai Phakes practice certain extra Buddhistic religious rites. The Finaam, a house hold deity is worshipped to protect them from evil spirits. An annual worship is observed in honour of this deity sometime in November or after the harvest. Another deity called Fisomyung is worshipped on community basis. It is believed that this deity protects the villagers from outside enemies and evil spirits.

They also believe in the mysterious power of certain objects and persons. The elderly Phakes attribute diseases to the malicious activities of supernatural agencies. Certain magico-religious rites are performed to appease them. They, however, do not possess any magician or wizard to cure the evil effects. The old men and women jointly and severally perform the rites.

The healing effect of magical white thread wrapped round the wrist is widely believed by the Phakes. The holy thread is procured during the Annual Poi Chang Ken festival held in the month of April.

The Phakes adhere to certain taboos in respect of socio-religious behaviour. For example jackfruit trees should not be used in individual households. Similarly, evening meals are taboo for those who follow eight principles of Buddhism. The monks must not take evening meals.

The Phake festivals are closely linked with their religion.

Throughout the year they observe various festivals. : Poi chang Ken - This is a three day annual festival of ceremonial bathing of Tri Ratna i.e. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha held during April (14th to 16th).

Lu Cheti- This festival is held after two or three days of the Poi Chang Ken festival. Chaityas (Pyramid like earth construction) are dedicated to Lord Buddha along with gift to the monks. It is believed that offering of Chaityas relieve the people of all sufferings and natural calamities.

Poi Nen Hok - This is an annual religious festival held on the Buddha Purmina day in May to commemorate the Lord Buddha's birth and death. Prayers are held in the temple and articles of daily use are offered to the monks.

Meiko Chum Fai - On the full moon day of Magh (January), the Phakes observe a festival of fire on the river bank. A Meji (heap of firewood about 8/10 meters high) is constructed and on the appointed date the same is fired amidst merrymakings and cheers. Prayers are held and gifts are presented to the monks. A special preparation called khaotek (mixture of fried rice, dal, potato, arum and sesame) is the most essential item of the feast. After the prayer the young boys and girls engage themselves in a rope pulling (tug of war) event.

Poi Nen Chi - It is an annual religious festival held on the 12th day after the new moon of the month of Fagun (February). Ceremonial offerings of Chaityas made of earth or sand and offering of gifts to the monks are the important features of this festival. Offering of Chaityas is considered as the most important gift the people can offer in this life.

Poi Kathin - It is also an annual festival of considerable religious significance which is held in the month of Kati (November). In this festival, a monk's full drees along with other valuable articles are offered to each of the monks of a Vikshoo Sangha. One may not be able to offer any gift to the monks throughout one's life but if he gives a Kathin (monk's full dress woven during a day and the night), he will get all peace and

happiness.

It may be noted that the Phakes belonging to the microscopic religious minority group feel proud of their religion as Buddhism is a world religion and they observe their religious rites with Catholic sincerity. They, however, maintain a liberal attitude towards the followers of other religions. They are accepting the modern way of life without effecting the core of their traditional culture. The young boys and girls are getting education through English medium schools but they are at the same time scrupulously preserving their original Tai language. Great traditions have superfluous impact upon the people. The core remains intact.

In each Phake village there is a village Council constituted by the elderly male villagers. The council is headed by the village headman or Gaonbura. All the disputes of the villagers are settled in this Council with the help of their traditional law book called 'Thamachat'. The traditional code book contains rules of social behavior. Punishment for the breaches of law have also prescribed.

Of late, a new leadership has emerged in the socio political arena and the educated youths are accepting offices like Gaon Panchayat Presidents and members. Even then, the new generation leaders are not transgressing into the domain of the traditional leaders. The traditional leaders, too, are giving due recognition to the young leaders.

The Tai Phakes are scrupulously preserving their traditional way of life inspite of the changes all around. But they cannot remain aloof in the vast changing world as some changes are noticed in their day to day life, T.V. sets, Transistors radios, modern wooden and steels furniture, electrical gadgets, crokeries etc. are becoming popular. The people are educating their children in English medium schools and because of spread of education, inter community linkage is fast growing. The Phakes are realising the efficacy of modern paraphernalias like fertilisers, tractors, vehicles, cameras, torches etc. They feel the necessity of MBBS doctors in the vicinity of their village and even for minor ailments,

they are required go to the nearest dispensary at a distance of 8/10 kilometers.

As mentioned earlier, the Phakes are, by and large economically self sufficient and they have been able to maintain a cordial socio-cultural linkage with great traditions. Unlike most other tribal groups, the Phakes do not apprehend any problem situation regarding the survival of their ethnicity.



## Tai Turung

The Tai Turungs are also a small tribal group of Assam. At present the Turungs are concentrated in five villages of Golaghat and Jorhat districts of upper Assam.

The Turungs are not enumerated separately, hence actual census figures are not available. However, our own survey indicates about 3500 souls spread over the five villages in two districts mentioned above.

They live in platform type houses. They have been able to maintain their traditional tribal traits in respect of food habits, dress, clan organisation, marriage, death rites, folkways etc. Like the Tai Phakes and Tai Aitonias, they have their own method of preparing and preserving food. Steamed rice is their speciality. They take fish and meat when available. They rear cows and bullocks. Milk is taken along with tea. Rice beer is not prepared locally as consumption of rice beer is prohibited by religion. Both men and women wear traditional dresses but men and young boys use modern mill made clothes also. The womenfolk also use certain items like blouse, chadar, brassiers which are available in the local market.

They are patrilineal people. The sons inherit the father's property. Sometimes the father divides the property equally among the sons during his lifetime. He may also keep a share for his personal use which goes to that son after his death who looks after him during old age.

The Turungs speak a language which is a mixture of the Singpho and the Tai.

They know Assamese language which is taught in the lower Primary schools situated in the Turung villages.

There are two broad divisions among them viz. Tailung and Taioi or Durung and Drarai. Today, however, the Turungs hardly refer to such divisions. They have a number of exogamous

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\* Encyclopedic Profile of Indian Tribes, Ed. Sachchidananda, and R. R. Prasad, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi - 2

clans namely Lungking, Chowman, Namchom, Chaopu etc. The people do not like to mention the clans in their day to day life and except in the case of marriage, reference to clan is hardly made. They do not have totemic clan and the clan names are mostly traced from some characteristics of their ancestors or from some natural objects.

The Turung kinship system has a distinct descriptive character. However, certain relations are referred to with specific classificatory terms.

There is a preponderance of nuclear type of family among the Turungs. Extended families are very few. The nuclear pattern, however, does not weaken the emotional bond among separated brothers. There is mutual co-operation among the families and socio-religious ceremonies are jointly observed. The younger always takes advice from their parents or father's brothers.

Adult marriage is the rule among Turungs. Marriageable ages for boys and girls are 20-26 years and 18-22 years respectively. Marriage within the clan is prohibited and polygamy is very rare in the Turung society. Plurality of wives is not regarded as an index of social prestige. Widow remarriage is allowed and the deceased husband's younger brother can marry his elder brother's wife. In no case, however, the deceased younger brother's wife is taken as wife by the elder brother. They are maintaining the traditional characteristic of observing most of the marriage ceremonies through informal (Frongwa) system. Like other Buddhist communities they too, have an office bearer called Pasang in their marriage ceremonies who act as a go between or middleman.

Bride price (Pho) is prevalent among them which is more applicable in case of informal marriage. Such bride money is fixed at Rs. 500.00 at the maximum and Rs. 50.00 at the minimum. Payment is made in terms of cash only.

The Turungs observe a name giving ceremony for the new born child where only women members participate. A child gets early training at home and later he or she is sent to a school. She gets her initial training through mother and other

female members of her family and clan. Similarly a boy learns the realities of life through the elderly male members. They observe a neat ceremony in connection with the attainment of puberty of a girl. The young girls help their mothers while the boys assist their fathers in agricultural activities. They also attend schools regularly.

The dead bodies are cremated. The main purification ceremony is held on the sixth day. The Buddhist monks preside over the death rites. A feast is arranged for the villagers on this occasion.

The Turungs are agriculturists and they wholly depend upon wet paddy cultivation. On an average each family possesses eight bighas of land excluding homestead land. Of late the pressure on land is increasing due to rise of population. Again due to contact with outsiders and traders and due to expansion of audio visual aids to the far flung Turung villages, the needs of the hitherto self sufficient villagers are galloping faster causing imbalance in the economic life of the people. Competition, rather than cooperation is raising its ugly head. The womenfolk, however, are maintaining their traditional weaving and dyeing thereby contributing to the family income. They help menfolk in agricultural activities and collect roots, herbs and creepers from the forests.

The Tai groups follow Buddhism with Catholic sincerity and religious beliefs and practices of all the Tai groups are same. They observe similar religion and festivals like those of the Tai Phakes and Tai Aitons.

The people belong to great world religion i.e. Buddhism, hence impact of other religion is not felt among them. There are no religious converts among the Turungs.

Every Turung village has headman called Merengdingla who remains in charge of the village administration. He presides over the village council constituted by the headman and elderly villagers. The Council decides all the local disputes and inflicts punishment to the offenders.

Of late, new leaders are emerging from among the educated youngmen and they take decisions in respect of matters relating to general development of the village. The Gaonbura or village headman's role, however remains intact.

Some superficial changes are noticed in respect of material culture which cannot be avoided in an open society. Inter community linkage is a marked feature in today's fast changing world and Turung villages are not exception in this regard. Regarding traditional culture, the people have been able to maintain most of the traits intact and they are pressing hard for scheduled tribe status. Although they come under the broad category of 'Man Tai Speaking' which is a scheduled tribe in the hills districts under the Sixth schedule, yet due to absence of specific inclusion of their community in that broad head, the people are not given facilities meant for scheduled tribes.



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\* Encyclopaedic Profile of Indian Tribes, Ed. Sachchidananda, and R. R. Prasad, New Delhi - 2

## **Forest Villages of Assam Inhabited by Tribals**

### **Origin, Problems and Prospects**

#### **Origin**

Assam is traditionally famous for its forests particularly ever green forests and out of a total 75,155 hectares of forest land in the entire country, Assam possesses 2855 hectares of forest land. In 1951-52 the area of reserved forest in Assam was 33,550 sq. km. which has been subsequently reduced to 17,317 Sq. Km. in 1981-82. According to the National Forest Policy 1952, Assam should maintain 33 percent of the total geographical area of the state under forest for environmental safety. Considering the importance of forests in the ecological balance, due emphasis was laid on reservation of forests in the post Independence period.

In Assam reservation of vast areas of forest land was undertaken during the British rule. After the formulation of reservation of forests, considerable importance was given to the scientific and systematic management of forests. Initially the authority had to face certain problems in respect of manpower as in those days density of population in or near the forest areas was remarkably low. In fact most of the forest areas were devoid of population except for a few dispersed pockets of indigenous tribal population. Assam in those days, particularly before Independence, was famous for dreaded diseases like Malaria, Kalazar etc., wild animals, flood and contagious magic. Habitation was difficult as most of the forest areas besides being inaccessible, was known to be highly Malaria and Kalazar infested zones. Communication facilities were conspicuous by their absence as the forest areas were located in far flung areas at a considerable distance from the main commercial and



administrative centres. It was a difficult task to mobilize labour force for harvesting and silvicultural operations.

Another constraint was the absence of regular flow of labour force in the forest areas. As mentioned above habitation in those days was a very difficult task as the people had to move from place to place. It was the tendency of the villagers to move away from their regular habitat and establish new villages in distant places. The main reason for the above tendency was the hazard from the inhospitable ecology coupled with absence of roads and transport facilities. Even the fringe areas of the forest were not covered by the transport facilities. This single factor contributed largely for non availability of labour force for forestry work. The forest authorities had a trying time to procure labour force. Oftentimes plantation work had to be suspended. Against this back drop the necessity for the creation of a regular labour force was urgently felt and the concept of forest village gained currency. Forest villages were set up within the limits of reserved forests in the nineties of the last century, 1901-05 to be precise. At the outset 35 Nos. of forest villages covering three erstwhile districts of Assam were established. There were 8 Nos. of forest villages in Cachar district 15 Nos. in Goalpara district and 12 Nos. in Kamrup District. Today the number of forest villages increased to 524 Nos. with a total population of 1,50,233 comprising 20,694 families.

The forest authorities had created another segment of forest dwellers in Assam who were known as Tangias and this section formed an additional labour force. The Tangias were not regular forest villagers in respect of allotment of land also in respect of terms and conditions laid down by the Forest Department. They were given 2 bighas of homestead land and for cultivation they were allowed to cultivate the intermediate spaces within annual plantation areas. They were engaged in raising and maintaining plantation.

Every forest villager was allotted upto 5 bighas of land including homestead land. Besides each working member living in that household was entitled to receive 10 bighas of land. The

ceiling, however, was fixed at 35 bighas per household on payment of nominal land revenue. It may be noted that the forest villagers did not possess the right of transfer of land and they were given only right of use and occupancy over the land. In lieu of the facilities offered by the Forest Department, the forest villagers were required to render 5 days' free labour which entitled them to the privileges of free grazing, 10 Nos. of cart loads of firewood annually, house building materials free of royalty.

As entry of outsiders to the reserved forests was restricted, the forest villagers had to face certain difficulties in respect of the services of barbers, teachers, shopkeepers etc. Due to difficult communication system, the villagers could not visit the nearby weekly hats. Besides these hats were situated at distant places. Thus to cater to the needs of the forest villagers the Forest Department allowed entry of the non-forest villagers to the reserved forest areas and they were allotted homestead land only. It may be noted that the Forest Department allowed entry of these sections of outsiders on demand from more than 50% of the forest villagers.

#### *Forest and Tribals :*

Out of 524 Nos. of forest villages, 234 Nos. are tribal forest villages. The tribal people of these villages constitute more than 50% of the total population. The Kamrup West Forest Division with 58 Nos. of villages has the highest number of tribal forest villages. These villages cover an area of 1593.29 hectares. Some details of the forest villages and tribal forest villages are shown below in table I and table II.

TABLE - I

Sl. No.	Name of the forest circle	Name of the forest Divn.	No. of villages	No. of families
1	2	3	4	5
1.	Western Assam Circle	Kachugaon	104	4706
2.	-do-	Haltugaon	27	1644
3.	-do-	Dhubri	14	304
4.	-do-	Aye Valley	12	698
5.	Eastern Assam Circles	Digboi	16	1545
6.	-do-	Doomdooma	3	26
7.	-do-	Dibrugarh	23	787
8.	-do-	Sibsagar	22	946
9.	-do-	Golaghat	15	1028
10.	Northern Assam Circle	Lakhimpur	9	421
11.	-do-	Darrang East	9	247
12.	-do-	Darrang West	18	736
13.	-do-	Nagaon	15	824
14.	Central Assam Circle	North Kamrup	2	42
15.	-do-	Kamrup east	1	41
16.	-do-	Kamrup west	61	1291
17.	Hills Circle	Silchar	62	2476
18.	-do-	Karimganj	43	1437
19.	-do-	N.C. Hills	1	20
20.	-do-	Karbi Anglong East	7	365
21.	Tangia villages	-	60	1120
			524	20694

TABLE - II

Sl. No.	Forest Divisin	No. of tribal forest villages	Area of FV. (Hectares)	Total population	Tribal population
1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Kamrup West	58	1593.29	6342	6337
2.	Kachugaon	51	8366.10	22638	18369
3.	Silchar	20	1713.76	4011	3179
4.	Haltugaon	19	2606.16	10040	9772
5.	Dibrugarh	12	1462.20	4836	4836
6.	Darrang West	11	1034.47	2544	2460
7.	Lakhimpur	9	738.93	2060	2054
8.	Digboi	8	923.09	3677	2270
9.	Karimganj	9	544.95	2255	1689
10.	Sibsagar	7	911.00	4762	4111
11.	Aye Valley	7	1748.92	3075	2524
12.	Dhubri	6	297.00	1544	1544
13.	Nagaon	6	348.90	2170	1964
14.	Karbi Anglong East	3	236.40	840	840
15.	Golaghat	2	44.64	388	288
16.	Northern Kamrup	1	N.A.	425	300
17.	Kamrup East	1	61.52	273	273
18.	Darrang East	3	-	-	-

It has been observed that of late the population of the forest villages is increasing rapidly. The families are multiplying with separate establishments and number of households are increasing. Thus in most cases the figures of households in the official records donot tally with the actual households in the field. The limit of utilisation of forest land for non forestry purposes in such village settlements has exceeded leaving no

scope for further extension. The actual area of cultivable land per family is greatly reduced. It appears if the pattern continues further land holdings of individual families will be too small to be economically viable.

Forest villages were established within Reserve Forest areas and these were governed under the Rules for establishment of Forest Villages and overall provision of the Assam Forest Regulation 1891 (Vol-I). Thus they were kept outside the purview of the Panchayat Act. The responsibility for enforcing development activities among the tribal forest village remained with the Forest Department. Thus villagers did not get the benefits of the five year Plans. They are not having the basic amenities. The condition of the roads, school building is deplorable in most cases. There are 223 Nos. of ring wells, 35 Nos. of tube wells, 10 Nos. of tanks, 378 Nos. of L.P. Schools, 18 Nos. of Medical Sub Centres, 47 Nos. of M.E. and 15 Nons. of H. E. schools and 27 Nons. of Sub Post Offices in the forest villages and most of these facilities are of pre Independence period. The villagers are extremely backward economically and educationally. It was reported that the villagers are not in a position to get the benefits from D.R.D.A. and Banks as their lands cannot be mortgaged. The people therefore generally want that they should be declared as revenue villages. Alternatively they may be allowed to mortgage the land for getting loans.

The Forest Department of the Govt. of Assam had launched a centrally sponsored, scheme, Improvement of Forest Villages' during 1984-85 with an outlay of Rs. 266.00 lakhs. It was an ambitious scheme with definite objectives like undertaking of individual beneficiary schemes thereby improving the economic condition of the poor forest villagers. It was also intended to raise the literary level of the children. The communication system needed immediate attention and the scheme had earmarked amount for the improvement of roads. Improvement and construction of school building, establishment of Veterinary Centres and Dispensaries, minor irrigation, grain Banks, Gobar Gas Plant, weekly Forest Village Market and extension of Rural Electrification were also undertaken.

In our sample survey of the forest villages inhabited by tribals we noticed that the plight of the tribals living in the forest as forest villagers is not satisfactory in comparison with the socio-economic condition of the co-tribals who are living outside the forest. The 1984-85 Development Scheme could not bring any tangible change in the life pattern of the tribals as the Scheme was discontinued after one year's term. The problems of the tribals in the forest villages are such that one year's developmental programme on selective basis could hardly touch the fringe of the problem. It is therefore suggested that the scheme drawn for the welfare of the forest villages should be revitalised and it shall be an annual affair.

The tribal people in the forest villages are suffering from certain complexes, arising out of their poor economic condition. They are not having sufficient agricultural land and their anger is reflected in the form of peripheral encroachment and devastation of the marginal forest areas around the villages.

Arrangements should be made to allow the forest villagers to mortgage their land for obtaining loans from D.R.D.A., Co-operatives and Banks etc.

Forest villagers and forests are inseparable units. The destiny of the forest villagers are closely linked up with the existence of the forests. Only the formation of a symbiotic relationship between the two would usher in progress and plenty for both.



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\* Bulletin of the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled castes, Ed. B.N. Bordoloi, Vol - I, No. VI, 1989.

## The Banais-Profile of an Unknown Community

The origin of the Banais, an ethnic group of Lower Assam, is shrouded in the thick cloud of conjecture. There are quite a good number of ethnographic accounts of the various ethnic groups of Assam published in the pre-Independence and post-Independence period, but nowhere do we find any reference to this forgotten community. Perhaps due to their lesser numerical strength they were unable to draw the attention of the ethnohistorians. Besides, the people maintained close intra-tribe proximity with the Hajongs and the Rabhas, and the Banai leaders failed to represent the case of the Banais before the Kaka Kalelkar Commission. The present ethnographic account has been built on the field experience among the Banais of Goalpara district during the early part of 1992.

Regarding their origin, the elderly Banais narrate a story which bears sufficient socio-historical significance. During the reign of King Naranarayana, there lived two brothers in Kamatapur named Bano and Hajo. Following the traditional tribal practice the two brothers established two separate villages. Unable to bear natural calamities the inhabitants of Hajogaon left the village and established new villages. In course of time clan names were derived from the names of those villages. Similarly the inhabitants of Baansali established new villages. They had their own clan names. The people believe that the name of the community Banai has been derived from Banu who is regarded as the benevolent ancestor of the Banais.

Census figures about the Banais are not readily available as they are not separately enumerated. According to a local survey conducted by the All Assam Banai Development Samity, their total population is 13,000 (approximately) spread over 65 villages in the following districts of Assam : Goalpara (17 villages), Bongaigaon (five villages) Kokrajhar (four villages), Dhubri (13 villages), Lakhimpur (seven villages), Sivasagar (12 villages) and Karbi Anglong (seven villages). It was also reported that there

are 32 Banai villages in Meghalaya. A few stray pockets are found in Kamrup, Nalibari, Barpeta, Golaghat and Dhemaji districts also, Their main concentration is in Goalpara district.

This lesser known community which has cultural affinity with the Hajongs, a hill tribe, has been able to maintain most of its traditional tribal traits including the dialect. It has 41 clans (nikni) which are exogamous. Except in case of marriage, reference to clan in day to-day life is hardly made. This has helped in avoiding vertical or horizontal split in the society. Because of its close association with the Garos and Rabhas, the Banais have adopted one or two clan names of the two communities. Trace of matriarchal system is observed in the Banai society.

The Banais are preserving their traditional material culture intact, with certain changes here and there. The changes due to acculturation may be called superfluous as the core of the culture has not been affected with the addition of foreign elements.

Houses are constructed with locally available materials like thatch, bamboo, wood and the pattern is almost similar to that of the Boro Kacharis or Rabhas. Houses are constructed surrounding a courtyard.

The male persons wear pakhra gamsa and a locally woven shirt. The educated persons who generally move out to towns and growth centres for various day-to-day avocations prefer modern dresses. Ranga patin and argon woven in their looms by the womenfolk, constitute the main dress of the women. Young boys and girls no longer restrict themselves to the traditional dresses. Rather, they prefer modern dresses especially when they go to schools and colleges and visit distant relatives. During socio-religious occasions they wear traditional dresses. The women folk wear typical traditional ornaments mostly of silver, like nat, dhiri, bajuban, bagbaju etc.

Their staple food is rice. Chicken and fish form their delicacies. Crabs and snails are also taken when available. Herbs, roots and creepers are collected from the nearby forests. The poorer sections depend mostly on these items as side dishes.

Mustard oil, dal and spices are included in the culinary practices of the richer sections. Locally brewed rice beer which is an essential item of their daily men constitutes the prestigious item to entertain guests. Nowadays, however, consumption of rice beer is limited to festive occasions only.

Monogamy is the prevailing practice, and except in case of death of the first wife, a second wife is taken. The people scrupulously follow the rule of clan exogamy in their marriages. Both formal (negotiated) and informal (runaway/eloped) marriages are prevalent in the society but the preponderance of the latter type is noticed. No Brahmin priest is employed and the marriage ceremony is solemnised by propitiating 'Kani Deo' (Padmawati) and Chandi in their traditional style. Although the patrilocal system is largely prevalent in the society, in certain cases the groom also goes to live in the bride's house permanently. Rice beer forms the most essential item in a Banai marriage feast. The groom's family is required to give a big basketful (bhar) of selected items like betel leaves and nuts, rice etc. A big fish (preferably Barali) is a must item in this bhar.

Bride price (pan) system is prevalent notionally and the amount is nominal. It may be from Rs. 5.00 to Rs. 25.00 depending upon the paying capacity of the groom.

From the manner of worship, names and numbers of deities, the Banai religion may be called Hinduism. Yet traces of animism cannot be ruled out. Every household possesses an altar in the courtyard encircled with improvised bamboo barricades where family worships are performed regularly.

The Banais observe three socio-religious festivals in a year, namely, Nikni Puja (Baara Kshtra), Kani Deo Puja and Rowa Laga Nritya. The village priest (dipsi) offers oblations to these deities and the merrymakings start only after the formal offerings to the deities. Rice beer is profusely consumed in such festivals. Singing and dancing continues where both males and females irrespective of age take part.

The Banais follow the patrilineal system of inheritance, and descent is traced only through the male line. It was reported

that till a few decades back they used to follow both patrilineal and matrilineal systems.

Both cremation and burial of the dead are in vogue in the Banai society but the people prefer the latter type. The purification ceremony (ghatkamani) is observed on the tenth day after death. Hindu influence is observed in the shaving of heads by the sons prior to the purification ceremony. The main function is held on the following day where a grand feast is arranged with pork as the most essential item.

The Banais speak a language which bears similarity to that the Hajongs. The people speak fluent Goalparia language with Bengali accent. The educated persons can express their ideas in Assamese fluently. The Banais are also rich in folk songs, folk tales, legends and proverbs. These are mainly occasion-specific.

"Change is the constant of culture". Every society undergoes changes because of socio-economic and political reasons. The Banai society is no exception. But the society remains very backward both economically and educationally. Infrastructural facilities are inadequate. For instance, the Pub Jira Banaigaon lying at a distance of 8 km, south of Krishnai in Goalpara district with 150 households is an extremely backward village. The villagers live in small thatched houses following the age-old agricultural practices. A majority of the families have agricultural labourers. On an average, each family has 5 bighas of land including homestead.

Till the date of survey (February 1993) the Banais had only four graduates (all BAs) and about 40 HSLC passed boys and girls. Most of these boys and girls discontinue study after this examination. In all they have two teachers (one LP and one ME), one sanitary inspector and two accountants. The villagers feel that they possess all the characteristics of a tribal community but they have been deprived of the benefits of the Tribal Sub Plan because they are not included in the S. T. list of Assam.



## Folk Tradition of The Tai Phakes

### *Introduction :*

The Tais or Shans first appeared in history of Yunnan and from there they migrated into upper Burma (Gogoi 1976). In the sixth century they migrated from the mountains of southern Yunnan into the valley of Sheweli and adjacent regions (Gogoi 1971) in the thirteenth century, one of their tribes i.e. the Ahoms conquered Assam. They were followed by other Shan groups like the Khamti, Phake, Aitonia, Turung and Khamyang (Gait 1963). Today, these populations are sparsely distributed in Lohit district of the Arunachal Pradesh, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Karbi Anglong, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam.

The Tai Phakes, also known to the local people as Phakial, a small population spread in seven riverine villages of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Upper Assam were originally a hill tribe within the famous Tai family (Sharma Thakur 1985). They are shan people and lived at Moongkong till 1700 AD (Leach 1954). They entered Assam through the Patkai range in the later half of the 18th century.

The Tai Phakes were not enumerated separately in the latest Census Reports, hence their exact population cannot be ascertained. However, our individual field studies show about 4000 Tai Phake souls in Assam. They are mostly found in the river banks of the Buridihing river. Their villages are interspersed with non Phake populations but they are scrupulously maintaining their traditional culture and language.

### *Folklore of The Tai Phakes*

The folklore of the Tai Phakes indisputably forms an invariable part of their historical, cultural and literary tradition. The simple and unengineered truth, high ideas and uncritical imagery, naive and untutored expression and ethical conceptions

of the folklore provide us with ethnohistorical, cosmological, cultural, social, economic, religious, ethical and aesthetic aspects of the Tai Phakes. The myths, legends, songs, stories etc. are not merely enthralling, rather these are the storehouse of the past, portraying the herodic deeds, information about the rich cultural tradition of the community. These folklores are the true and uncontaminated reflections of the manners and customs, socio religious beliefs and practices, material culture, legal system eschatological beliefs, social and political organisation, language, art and culture et al.

In the light of the above introductory penpicutre a discussion of the folk tradition of Tai Phakes is presented here. The specimens of folk stories, folk songs, customary law, cosmology and dream of the Tai Phakes have been documented as narrated by a few old man of Tai Phake villages of Naharkatia and Joypur of Dibrugarh district.

### *Legendary Origin Of The Phakes :*

Pu ing Change, an old man of Margherita Bor Phake village narrated a story regarding the origin of the word Phake. It was revealed that the legend was in vogue in Mogoung and a Bauddha Vikshoo of Bor Phake Bauddha Vihar and collected the same while visiting Mogoung.

In the distant past the people of Mogoung were not divided into distinct groups having different identities. In course of time due to inter group differences and natural urge for supremacy there appeared distinct groups. The ablest and strongest among the groups wanted to prevail upon other groups. One day an old man came across a huge stone lying in the jungle and an idea beamed into his mind. He informed all the groups about the same and it was decided that the man who could pierce the stone with an arrow would be the chief among all the groups.

At first members of the group known as Khamti tried but in vain. In order to avoid social humiliation, they left the place. Kham means abandon and Ti means place. They are the Khamtis of present day Arunachal Pradesh.

Now it was the turn of the second group. The strong and stout male members of this group tried several times but could not pierce the stone. They became furious and left the place. They are the Aitonias. Ai means eldest and Ton means anger.

The group of people now known as Phakes were anxiously observing the display of the skills of the other two groups. They knew that it was futile to pierce a stone with arrows and therefore they secretly collected some beehives from the jungle and fixed a small quantity of the same on the arrow heads. Thus the Phakes became the rulers of the place where the big stone lay. Faa means stone and ke means old.

### *Mokhaan (Folk Songs) :*

The Tai Phakes are sufficiently rich in folk songs but today one rarely hears a song in the Phake villages. Even during the festivals which, however, bear a religious orientation, the people do not sing the traditional songs.

The Phake folk songs can be classified into five categories namely :

1. Mokhaam = love songs.
2. Mokhaam Oi Maa Ping Saa = Cradle songs.
3. Mokhaam Lao Luk = Lullaby.
4. Khekhyang = Descriptive songs.
5. Mokhaam Choyyoy = Special festival songs.

### *A Mokhaam :*

Mokhaam or love songs are the outburst of the youthful yearnings of the lovers and the beloved sung mainly in the riverside or in groups of young boys and girls gathered for social occasions like marriage. Like other Folk songs the beginning song is meant for the elderly villagers who are requested to bear with them for trespassing on their moral and spiritual arena.

A few specimens are given below. An effort has been made to provide a free English translation.

### **Tai**

1. Kaantra chaa Kaantri Chaa Oi,  
Ao Teng Chip Neu  
Pang Muthi chi Kaantra Ma Koi,  
Kaantri Chaa Kaantra Oi,  
Ao Teng Luttom.  
Mok kang Ka Chi,  
Kaantra Chaa Ya.

### **Trn. 1**

If unknowingly we are displeasing you, then we pray before you (O, elders) with folded hands and handful of flowers. Please forgive us.

### **Tai 2.**

- Mou Tu Cheng Maaog  
Naang Koi Cham Khong,  
Nek Leo Khe Cheng  
Naang Meng Waang Naai  
Mou Tu Cheng Maaog Haai Yaa.

### **Trn 2.**

The Chirpings of water bird are very sweet but my beloved surpasses the sweetness of that bird too. The songs of Jilli bird take us to a dream land, yet those sweet melodious songs cannot match with my darling's voice.

### **B. Mokhaan Oi Maa Ping Saa : (Cradle songs)**

The Phake cradle songs are generally sung by an old woman and the subject matter might include anything and everything under the sky. In those songs rhythm and symmetry do count for much.

### **Tai**

- Maa Ping Chaa, Maa Ping Chok,  
Chek Ho Haai, Maai Ao Tong.

Chang Myu Chaang Tin Pi Haa Yaa,  
 Yaa Nunchet Chetnun, Cheing Pu Naaing.  
 Yaa Naang Aam Naang, Aam Haai Kinkhaao,  
 Naang Aai Haai Ta Fe Naa Haong,  
 Fo Mon Chaang Kraa Tin Pung  
 Taung Mun Ngu Chaam Hing  
 Hing Hing Yaa Pu Oi, Yaa Oi,  
 Yaa Waan Kaa Kaake Yaa,  
 Myu Aan Naang Naaing Naaing Nun,  
 Khu Maa Faai, Naaing Nung Mayaa,  
 Khe Lung Myung Kin Paasaa Paalom,  
 Yaatom Kaai Hi Khon, Laan Khaam Oi.

**Trn.**

Oh, rope (of the cradle), Why are you making a creak creak sound? The cradle will stop if you extend your legs like the tall grasses, which come out in the mounth of Asadh (July/August). It will move again if you shrink your legs.

Even old people will feel like young if they sit in the cradle.

Mother weeps because she wants to take eggs.

Mother weeps because she wants a male companion.

The legs of the man are like those of wild elephants. His belly is very big. He grows thousands of Sugar cane plants. These are becoming red like the Kusum fruits or a burnt house. These are red like a piece of burning firewood used for lighting a pipe by a Chinese. Oh my grandsons only this much I could narrate before you.

**C. Mokhaam Laaoluk :**

**(Lullaby)**

Young girls and mothers carrying small children on their backs wrapped in white chadars are common sights in a Phake village. The babies generally lie quiet but when they start crying the sisters or mothers give rhythmic jerks and sing lullaby.

**Tai. 1.**

Top Chaa Chaa Oi, Chaa Chaati,  
 Het Nung Me Maan Kaa Khon Myu,  
 Top Chaa Chaa Oi, Chaa Chutaang.  
 Het Nung Maa Myung Kaung,  
 Khaawaan Chu Chukaana.  
 Haa Hop Faating Chaa Kong  
 Nyukaa Chon Khyuk Maa Tinaang Waai,  
 To Khaai Khik Manaai,  
 Naaimaa Hoi Hoi Neng.  
 Chung Faao Kaa Oi, Haa Pen Chum.

**Trn. 1**

Clap your hands, my little darling, clap. You clap like a Burmese dancer, you clap your hands. I like the little children of Hukong who also clap their hands while dancing merrily. Through their hands they reach the heavenly abode of God. They dance like this.

I want to ctch fish in the Betani beel but did not get fish. I could catch only a snail. When Burnt, The snail becomes white like lime and rice powder.

**Tai 2.**

Kaai Oi, Nan, Nan,  
 Chung Maa Ye Pon tap,  
 Ho Maaog Chaaog Waan.  
 Fo lung Paan Khaao Nani, Nan Nan,  
 Chung Maa Manan Ye,  
 Hit Maa Chache Taog  
 Laang Kaai Naamak Maai Khaai,  
 Nan Oi, Nan, Nan.

**Trn. 2**

Oh my chicken sleep. If you do not sleep someone may kill you and your little head will be found only in a curry plate.



Oh my dear child sleep. If you do not sleep a fox may come under the platform of the house. Therefore sleep my dear, sleep.

**D. Khekhyang (Descriptive Songs) :**

In these songs past incidents effecting the social life of the people are described in rhyme. Mythological or historical episodes are also narrated by the old men and women before the inquisitive youngsters. In these songs, the story predominates and the chanting is calculated to enhance the effect of the narration. Rhythm does not count much and it is the narration that bring these songs within the domain of music. It was reported that formerly this type of song was sung at the closing of certain festivals, but today the practice is no longer in vogue.

**Tai**

Khaalaa Nga Ngi Choiput  
Aaok Thaaong Ki Aan Aaok  
Pawaan Tok Him Fang  
Naam Hok Ching Paaichaan,  
Mussaa Tu Aang Ngi Thun Kya,  
Kip Khan Ngoi Ta Ko Thong Pe  
Pulisat Aaki Schiraam Chounaang  
Urpaan Maa Kraa.  
Aaming Peng Khyaa. Paam Young  
Ngip Haong Kho Khaang Nip  
Maa Kon Haaing. Paung  
Kon Haaing Harkam Netyu  
Pen Yam Aaok Tim Kaang.  
Panung Haaing Kyam. Ainu  
Maam Triksaan Oi Chan Maaiku  
Tai. Aan Ti Khun Faai Mun Mun  
Ye Ngun, Saakeret Maan Phyek  
Kho Pe, Poi Chayaing Mi te Haanaai  
Hop Kin Ka, Chao Khaao Oi,

Poi Chaaing Mi Te Haanaai  
Khowap Kinkaa Chowwaa  
Khaao Na.

King Mung Khaai Taai Fi  
Haale Pa Khaao Myot Pe Mo Waa  
Tann.

Fe Tai Wok Yung Mi Paa  
Fung Khaai Taai Kaa Kopen Waan.  
Ataang Tapang Faagun  
Maah Kaa Thaam Funchaa  
Kaa. La Kyaam. Penai La  
Taa Haa Pe Chung. Taai Nung  
Naa Khaam Tan Chouchitta.  
Myung Maa Mou Pe  
Aanchok Chaak.  
Fe Khen Hai Waa Paai  
Kaa Kaai.

**Trn.**

They (Phakes) reached Joypur through the western pass after a long sojourn. The river Dehing was on the southern corner of our village. Ngi Thun Kyo was the Mauzadar who always took the land revenue in full. Sachiram was the head police officer. Only the young British officers lived in pucca houses. The order came from a very far distance. Orders for clearing the jungles also had to come from that land lying beyond seven seas. The officer was a young man of good physique. His name was Harkam and his chin was covered with beard. His strength was like that of the Hanuman.

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Urpaan Maa Kraa.  
Aaming Peng Khyaa. Paam Young  
Ngip Haong Kho Khaang Nip  
Maa Kon Haaing. Panung  
Kon Haaing Harkam Netyu  
Pen Yam Aaok Tim Kaang.  
Panung Haaing Kyam. Ainu  
Maam Triksaan Oi Chan Maaiku  
Tai. Aan Ti Khun Faai Mun Mun  
Ye Ngun, Saakeret Maan Phyek  
Kho Pe, Poi Chayaing Mi te Haanaai  
Hop Kin Ka, Chaa Khaao Oi,

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**Trn.**

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All the people, even animals and birds were afraid of him. He was very courageous and never surrendered.

In the month of January this year a buffalo disease broke out

Such kind of disease is very dangerous. Almost every day buffaloes were dying.

The manuscripts Kaauthaam and Kaau Laa Kyaam must be ceremonially presented to Lord Buddha during the month of Fagun (March). Thus said the head monk.

The villagers accepted the proposal.

The disease disappeared.

#### E. Choyyoy (Special festival song)

Among the Phakes there are songs for special festival occasions like purification ceremony of an old and respected person in the village. The subject matter of these songs, however, has no direct relation with the ceremony. Young girls gather in the house of the deceased for dehusking paddy and choyyoy songs are composed and sung on that occasion. The girls put questions and answers are given by the young boys and vice versa. Not infrequently they achieve true lyrical effects. These songs are also becoming obsolete now-a-days.

Tai

Choi Oi Choi Choi Chong

Choi Hat Nginnaa, Haap Pa

Tuning Mesaang Ka Ki Khon Myu

Choi Oi Choi, Chaang Choi

Hao, Tilaana Hao Pa,

Tunaang Mekholla Chaang

Ka Choi Oi Choi

Naa Mai Pang Oi, Cheng

Nung Chang Ngaai, Sakhaao

Naang Chao Chippi Paai

Naai Taamaaing Maa Itao  
Che, Choi Oi Choy.

Tam Khamo Tam Lu  
Chaang Oi, Choi Oi Choi,  
Taang Khun Haan Nik Paan  
Nechaao Khaao Taawan  
Taang Che, Choi Oi Choi  
Tam Khaao Taang Fraache,  
Choi Oi Choi, Taang Khun  
Haafi Taang Meu Maa Ne  
Chao Khaao Taawan Na  
Che, Choi Oi Choi.

Trn.

The movements of the dancers have symmetrical effect with the tune of the musical instruments. The rhythmic sound of our choyyoy songs have symmetry with the sound of the mortar.

(Girls) Oh the offshoots of the Medang hill ! if you could eat rice, I would have offered my share also to you.

(Boys) Oh, darlings, after dehusking paddy and cooking rice you offer Taangchom to Lord Buddha and therefore you will attain Nirvana first. We will not get Nirvana.

#### Folk Tales

The recital of folk tales forms a good recreation of the aged people. The story teller occupies the position of a historian or a professional. The dramatic recital of the tales with characteristic gestures to an eager and intensely sympathetic audience has to be actually witnessed to appreciate their full significance to the listeners and the narrator.

To casual observer the folk tales may appear to be figment of imagination meant only for recreation. But if a minute study is made one will find that they are nothing but the mirror of the tribal mind...Folktales are a faithful reflection of the world as it

appeared to the primitive mind (Frazer 1959). The folktales also reflects the culture of the people (Boas 1939). Malinowski (1949) goes one step further and opines that the tales and myths act as true guide to the people. A few Tai Phake specimens of the folk tales are given below.

#### **Pung Kun Faan (Story of a stupid son).**

Once upon a time there lived a mother with her only son. One day they went to a forest to collect some roots and creepers. Suddenly one insect fell on the neck of the mother and seeing the insect the son warned his mother to remove the insect. The mother asked her son to cut the insect with a dao. The foolish son without thinking for the consequence cut the insect as well as his mother's neck.

#### **Pung Ling (Story of Monkey's red anus)**

Once upon a time there was an old couple who maintained a flourishing brinjal garden. A monkey used to come to the garden regularly and destroyed many brinjal plants. The old man thought out a plan to kill the monkey and accordingly he told his wife that he would lie down in the brinjal garden posing as a dead man and as soon as the monkey came he would be awakened. As per plan the old man posed himself as a dead man. As usual the monkey came. The old woman said to her husband. Take the dao and axe and kill the monkey. The old man began to chase the monkey and finding a big water jar near by the monkey entered into it. The old man could not kill the monkey for fear of breaking the water jar. Suddenly the monkey came out from the pot and began to run. The old man was chewing betel leaf and nuts and seeing the monkey he spat the red pan juice on the back of the monkey. Thence forth the anus of the monkey became red.

There are interesting folktales like Naang Sen Pung (story of a wise woman) which have a high ethical standard and the social life of the Phakes is reflected through such folktales.

Pu Son Lan (Advice from grand parents to the grand children) is a voluminous manuscript containing do's and dont's for the children. The manuscript is written in papers prepared

locally by the Phakes themselves and the same is preserved through generations. Below a few specimens of the maxims with English translation are presented.

#### **Tai 1.**

Peu Kon Cho Khok Kaai

Mi Maakboi Khen Ton.

2. Chom Che Nik Fu Khaam.

3. Khaat Saang Yaa Khaang Non.

4. Ho Piya Loi Naam Tung

Chaam Ngok Ma Chao

La Pi Yaa Taai Kho Kho

Naap Chaang Tok Hoi.

5. Khaam Naam Haa Nu Khon,

Pun Paai On Chung Noi.

6. Pa Me Chao Tung Chaang

Fong Chao, Tap Ke Cheu Khaao

Lem. Yaa Tyu Maa Tai Moi Khot

Hoi Ko Nao.

7. Haa Paaing Pon Chung Haaok.

8. Mohaa Lop Ching Mi Haaog Hu Ti Ko Chaai.

9. Paangnaa, Ratanaa, Champaa Fraa Traa Chang Kha  
Chao Ko yaam Ning Tak Kha Kom Na Taaing Kom Paai.

10. Ho Chaang Yaai Ta Mep Yu Yung Tsa.

#### **Trn.**

While engaging yourself in daily duties, you should spare some time for hearing good advice (from elders).

If you are clean and tidy others will adore you.

People condemn the lazy people

Do not while away your time on the plea of tiredness.

Do not swim in the flood water. Do not walk over the bridge during summer which was constructed during winter (which was constructed for dry season only).

If you happen to cross a river on foot, always walk behind others.

You should show due respect to your relatives. They should be pleased because ancestors are the same. They will take care of your parents in their old age.

If you love others, others will also love you.

Anger and temptation like darkness should always be avoided.

God, religious person and wise men should be feared and respected.

In the forest the tiger does not display its nails, similarly you should not be proud of your knowledge and wealth.

#### **Fe Faan (Dream)**

The Phakes possess a very elaborately documented manuscript on dream called Fe Faan which bears sufficient importance in the socio-cultural life of the people particularly elderly sections. By and large, the younger generation do not know that there is such an indigenous treasure.

As regards effects of the dreams, the dreams can be classified into four broad categories, viz;

1. If one sees anything or anybody in the dream about which some discussion took place during the day, then such dream will have no effect in the real life.

2. Dreams seen during illness have no effect.

3. If there was an earnest desire to see something or somebody in the dream then such dream has no effect.

4. If one leaves the bed at night and eats somethings and again goes to bed and dreams a dream such dreams bear no resemblance at all in the real life.

Dreams seen on Sunday have effects on one's life, on Monday one's own relative, on Tuesday one's parents, on Wednesday, one's own Children, on Thursday one's distant relatives, on Friday one's domestic animals and on Saturday one's own self.

#### **Namic (Superstition)**

The elderly people believe in a number of superstitions which indirectly control their daily activities. A few specimens are given below.

1. If a crow craws continuously for some time, it is believed that either a guest will come or some bad news will be heard on that day.

2. One will be poor if he sews his turban. Similarly a woman should not wear the Chin (Mekhela) upside down, otherwise she will suffer from misfortune.

3. The tripod of the fireplace should not be removed, otherwise some misfortune will occur.

#### **Tai Khaam (Proverbs) and Khaan Taa (Riddles)**

In their daily conversations the Phakes use a number of proverbs which bring life to the conversations.

In their leisure hours, specially during winter season the elderly Phakes sit around a fire place with little children and recite riddles. The elderly persons ask riddles and the children give answers.

A few specimens of proverbs and riddles are given below.

#### **Tai Khaam--**

##### **Tai**

1. Choup Waan Chao Mit Myaao

2. Nu Kin Kaa Kaa Chaang Ngu.

##### **Trn.**

Poison in the heart but honey in the mouth.

The mice are eating the seedlings and the serpent gets the punishment. (The real culprit escapes, only the innocent is victimised.)

#### **Khaam Taa**

##### **Tai**

1. Ngo Yaa Thao Maan Kaang Khamm Phe Kaang Naai. Waati Chaang?

### Trn.

Old Cow becomes pregnant at night and delivers a calf in the morning.

Wht is it called?

(Ans-Mosquito net)

### Tai

2. Khaa Aao To Ching Iktin Mu Mou Naai Le Paai Eli  
Khop Phaa Chaat Khoi.

Buin Buin;

Whati Chaang?

### Tns.

It has no body, no hands, no legs, yet it can fly every where what is it called.

(Ans-Mind)

**Thaamaacha**at (Manuscript on customary law)

The Phakes possess a very elaborate code of traditional law which they call Thaamaacha and while deciding cases they refer to this code. It is written in Tai language. The code contains rules of social behaviour. Punishment for breaches of law have also been prescribed.

Regarding the origin of the Thaamaacha, a mythological belief is prevalent among the Phakes. Thaamaacha was sent to this earth by Lord Brahma before the four incarnations of Lord Buddha i.e, Kakachaan, Kaunaagong, Kasapaa and Gauttamaa. During that time one benevolent king named Kiksaamaangwas ruling in the kingdom of Hangsaawati. The king decided cases as per codes prescribed in the Thaamaacha, A few specimens of the Codes are shown below.

**Laak, Khaaopak, Khaaosan, Thongaa** (stealing of paddy, rice and sesame). If a rich person steals half mound (about 19 kg.) paddy or rice or sesame then, on detection he shall have to return five laangs (mound) of paddy, rice or sesame as the case may be. For the poor the punishment is less i.e. per one Taang of paddy stolen, the poor thief has to pay two taangs

of paddy.

**Laak Ngun** (money), **Khaan** (gold). **Tong** (brass). i.e. (Bellmetal Plate), **Maan** (cloth). If anybody steals these articles, then the same will be taken back. Scolding is also approved.

**Fu Yaa Fit Ful Let** - The punishment for assaulting an old man is Rs. 300.00. If the offender is unable to pay the fine, then he can be sold as a serf and the sale proceeds are given to the offended old man.

**Khong Pyun Tok Haai Kip Naai** - It a son sells his paternal property during his father's life time and without his father's consent and if later on the father detects such case, then be (father) is allowed to get back the property, provided the father pays double the price to the purchaser.

**Fit Me Fit Luk** - A man is fined with Khaam Kaa Thi (gold worth more than 10 grams) for sitting or gossiping with another man's wife in a lonely place. The woman has to return the presents if any given by the man.

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## Pu Son Lan :

### Folk Tradition of The Tai Phakes

Folk stories, myths, maxims, proverbs etc. play important roles in the life of the traditional communities. Malinowski, Jung and Levi-Strauss have immense contribution towards interpretation of folk stories as a reality and experience which is reflected in the socio-cultural milieu of the tradition-bound societies. The study of the past history of various ethnic groups reveals that folk traditions incorporated in the folk songs, folktales, proverbs, maxims, riddles etc., contribute largely in shaping up the society.

The present paper deals with maxims, associated with the socio-religious and ethical life of the Tai Phakes, a lesser known Buddhist community of Dibrugarh district of Upper Assam, with a population of not more than 2000. Among the Tai Phakes stories depicting past glories are told by the aged and infirm to the young children specially during winter season. Below a few specimens of maxims of the Tai Phakes with English translations are presented. Due care has been taken to avoid any misrepresentation of meaning and Tai specimens with translations have been read and reread before the informants as well as educated persons belonging to the Tai Phakes who know both Tai and the Assamese language.

The Phakes have many folk stories like *Pung Kun Faan* (Story of a stupid boy), *Pung Ling* (Story of a monkey), *Naang Sen Pung* (Story of judicious woman) and *Pu son Lan* (Advice from grand parents to grand children). The last one is an exhaustive story-cum-maxim and a few specimens are presented here. The manuscript is written in papers prepared indigenously by the Phakes themselves and the same is preserved through generations. The present article is based on a manuscript found in the possession of Chaocha Gohain of Tipam Phakial village

near Joypur (about 7 kms north of Naharkatia town). It may be mentioned that some of the specimens presented in this paper, had been published in abbreviated form in my book 'The Tai Phakes of Assam'.

#### Tai

#### Free English Translation

1. Nei Le Wān Neng Pu  
Khāng Chāi Nei Nāo To  
Hu CHot Kāo Se Pān  
Khoi Tā Tiyā, Tāo Khok  
Ho Howk Khing Yom,  
Ying Nāi Yu Chāo Hyong  
Pān Sing, Thung Mā  
Aniksa Tātkaī , Khām  
Sāng Mownāi Chāng Son  
Wāi, Pu Chāo Khon Wān  
Chāi, Chāo Owk Lām, Nei  
Le Myunong Puk Ching Ti  
Bin Nā Ko Pāk Hong Khā  
Lām Khām Chāng Pu Tak  
Lāo.

The old grandfather is thinking that his days are numbered. Along with the increase of age, the energy is fast depleting. Till now no advice was given to anybody. Now he is willing to give some advice. He wants his grand children to follow in right earnest what he speaks.

2. Māt Tā Wāti Tinglog  
Kheye Ton Chai Ying Luk  
Lān Kow Pu Chāo. Ya  
Khāo Khā Khām Un Ngin  
Chāng. Mā Tā Ai Ye Nām  
Ik Tun Ngī Kop E Nāng  
Aam. Thug Khām Pu Tak  
Lāo Chyu Khān Yā Yom  
Nān Hāola, Cho Thong  
Nām Khām Wā Kāo Ngin.  
Kāna Mou Ho Chāng  
Chom Ka Tāng We.  
Pyung Chang Pu Hāo  
Mow Ne Chon Lāo Hāi.

Oh; My grand sons, come leaving aside all your works, come to me. I will give you some good advice. Do not make delay. Come soon. Hear my words, otherwise you will repent afterwards. You may tell others that grandfather did not give any advice.

3. Nim Khing Nong Tāi  
Khāng Yā Wāng Koā  
Myu Nāai Nāgn Kāi Ep  
Chāng Khing Kham Ni Pu  
Tak Lāo.  
Sit beside me and hear  
me. These are good advices.
4. He Hu Thom Pu Tak Lāo  
Ching Myun Chāng Chā  
Ko Chām Ao Tāwān Lān  
Khām Ai.  
Hear me attentively.  
Remember these by all  
irrespective of age.
5. Ching Chu Thom Tung  
Nam Khām Wā Kāo Son  
Jām, Ying Tot Ni Pen Chu  
Chen Khā Kānā.  
Here my advice  
sincerely. In future these will  
help you.
6. Cho Nāi Chāt Nā Yung  
Ni Pen, Mun Tot Lo Khot  
Cing Hāi Nāi.  
There will be no  
progress even in your next life.  
You will be ruined.
7. Pen Kon Cho Khok Kāi  
Mi Mākboi Khen Ton.  
While engaging yourself  
in daily duties, you should spare  
some time for hearing good  
advice (from elders). If you are  
clean and tidy others will adore  
you.
8. Chom Che Nik Fu Khām.  
People condemn the lazy  
people.
9. Hai Na Hao Ma Ka.  
When you plough your  
fields, bring your spade to  
every nook and corner.
10. Khāt Chang Yā Khāng  
Non.  
Do not while away your  
time on the plea of tiredness.

11. Ka Khun Long Kham  
Chen.  
When you go for any  
business, do not say that you are  
feeling pain on the legs.
12. Fān Few Chāng Pin  
Ngo Chye Pā Khāt  
Fung Lāng Lom Fā  
Hom Ke le. Ying Chai  
Fong Kho Che Chot  
Chot.  
If you are extremely poor,  
you lose all sense of proportion.  
You sew again in the sewn clothes.  
People will feel pity upon you.
13. Lok Lem Wāi Nāo  
Hāng Poi Tāo Yā Nāp  
Len Chin Thok Men  
Tām Tin.  
All men and women will  
laugh at you. While walking on  
the road, walk slowly and steadily.  
Do not run. You should do the  
works intelligently.
14. Kā Nā Hāo Liu Lang  
Lum Chām Ching Ti  
Nai  
Before leaving, you should  
look back of your seat, something  
may be left.
15. Lom Chong Yā Nāp  
Khon Lun Te Chāng  
Pin Khin, Khāmai Nok  
Tāi Chong Phyi Pong  
Yom Nām Che Mou  
Chāng.  
Even if you are capable of  
ascending to the top of a tree you  
should not do so.
16. Ho Piya Loi Nam Tung  
Cham Ngok Ma Chao  
La Pi Ya Tai Kho Kho  
Nap Chang Tok Hoi.  
Do not swim in the first  
flood water. Do not walk over the  
bridge during summer which was  
constructed during winter (i.e.,  
which was constructed for dry  
season only).
17. Khām Nām Hāo Nu  
Khon, Pun Pāi On  
Chung Noi.  
If you cross a river on foot,  
always walk behind others.



18. Pāi Nāo Hāo Pā Fā,  
Chu Chā Hām Kon  
Sun Khong Long Chu  
Mi Nām Ma Chām  
Hao Nāi He.

Wherever, you go, you should carry a dao. You may be confronted with a tiger or a dacoit.

19. Khong Khe Khing Yā  
Fāk Lāk Nāk Kāng  
Kop Kong Che Nāt  
Khāo Ken Hā Khom  
Chā Hāok Kān Lem.

For your self defence you should always carry a bow or a dao.

20. Yā Pāi Ao Tāi Kha  
Chāo Pyun Ngon Chilā  
Faing Khing Tāwān.

Carrying bow or dao does not mean that you should kill any living being. You should maintain the *sheel* (Panchsheel)

21. Nor Khun Yā Tun Lā  
Wāng Fā Cheu Khān,  
Luk Yāo Pāi Chāo  
Ngāo Myu Ao Chi Pān  
Chok Nā.

Do not sleep late in the morning. Do not while away time after leaving the bed. Wash your face immediately.

22. Hāi Kāng Ik Nā Peng  
Hing Naāi Cho Hp  
Chāing Chon Long Pok  
Ko Chāng Khing Ling  
Hāong Hyn Je.

After that you should visit the fields (paddy) and the campus of the house.

23. Pa Me Chāo Tung  
Chāng Fong Chāo, Tap  
Ke Chu Khāo Lom. Yā  
Tyu Māo Ai Moi Khot  
Hoi Ko Nāo Wān Pa  
Chāo Yik Long Ao,  
Chāo Khāo Hāo Hāk  
Khyun.

You should show respect to your relatives. They should be pleased, because, ancestors are the same. They should take care of your parents in their old age.

24. Fāog Fān Hāog Cho  
Hāwong Wān Pān  
Māing Ku Chāong.

If anybody from your clan becomes poor, you should help him.

25. Koun Cham Koun Tāi  
Khām Tow Lāng Top  
Hāi Kha Him Tāi Hyon  
Nyu Khing Kyu Chong  
Nop Hāog.

You should maintain good relation with your neighbours. There should be give and take between you and your neighbours.

26. Hāo Pāing Pon Chung  
Hāok.

If you love others, others will also love you.

27. Pon Chā Hāo Yā Fon.

Others may be angry with you but you should not lose temper.

28. Lo Fā Kān Khān Nāi  
Yā Hāog Māi Chāg  
Hāo.

You should not be jealous of others' wealth.

29. Mohā Lop Ching Mi  
Hāog Hu Ti Ko Chāi.

Anger and temptation like darkness, should always be avoided.

30. Tosā Kān Ot Se Yā Ni  
Nei Chet.

Leave off your pride and anger.

31. Khong Pā Khi Ku  
Chāt.

If you donot keep yourself free from these three (anger, temptation and pride) there will be no end of your miseries.

32. Komnā Kāo Chon  
Chāog.

One should control his mind just like one brings the wild animals under control.

33. Pāng Nā Thāo Nā Ke  
Ting Lāi Yā Mu Kāi  
Nāp Ta.

One should show due respect to the wise and elderly persons. Before asking anything to them, one should think about the matter.

34. Pangna Ratana  
Champa Fra Tra  
Chang Kha Chao Ko

God, religious person, wise men should be feared and respected.

Yam Ning Tak Kha  
Kom Na Taing Kom  
Pai.

35. Su Fā Yā Nong Yāo  
Wāo Fēo Fon Chāng  
Khā.

36. Hit Nāag Hāo Kung  
Hang.

37. Ho Chāng Yāi Ya To,  
Mep You Yung Toso.

38. Pen Mau Lāt Yā Khan  
On, Owk Chu Nākā  
Ong Long Pong Chāng  
Hou Hāng Myun Yet  
Yet Chā Fā Kong Long  
Ken Nung Nāi Ka Mou  
Āo Māi Tai Tak Ma  
Mānāog.

39. Fāi Me Yā Long Chā.

40. Poi Chung Khing Long  
Kāi Hāog Pāi Wāi  
Wāng Yān.

41. Mi Ngun Mou Chāng  
Chāi Ko Pāi Fā Yon  
Khāong.

42. Mikhā Ma Chāng Pāing  
Hām Kin Hāng Fong  
Pāi.

If you are not blessed  
with intelligence, power and pelf,  
do not pose, as if you possess  
all the qualities.

One should live within his  
means.

In the forest the tiger does  
not display its nails, similarly you  
should not be proud of your  
knowledge and wealth.

Without asking you should  
not speak out your mind. The  
drum makes sound only when  
somebody beats it.

Do not be addicted to  
gambling.

Do not make any test of  
your strength anywhere and  
everywhere.

Do not give money  
whoever asks. You should know  
how to use money.

A servant will not serve  
properly if the owner does not  
take care of him he deserves.

43. Mi Lok Mou Ne Chou  
Lok Khon Chāng Fit  
Pon.

44. Mi Me Mou Chāng  
Hak Katak Fāk Yān  
Ngu Ngun.

45. Kemān Mou Chāng  
Kham Ham Nāi Ām  
Pen Kha.

46. Pin Khun Mou Hak  
Kha Ko Pa Kongin  
Chang.

47. Kon Mung Kāi Ma Chu  
Yā Pāi Chi Ti You Hāo  
Non.

48. Pin Kha Mou Yam  
Khun Ham Kin Mon Fu  
Chao

49. Kon Niyā Pāi Hit Chak  
chi, Nei Le Mān Pin  
Kham.

50. Pin Chep Mou Chāog  
Iyā Ilā Itemā.

51. Pin Chāng Mou Chāng  
Lāo Pun Wā Ko Nok  
Māog Kon Tung.

52. Srā Li Tāpe Wine Chu  
Hu Chāng.

53. Srā Mou Kyāng Mi Teu  
Pi Ya Mou Kāog.

A son will become a truant  
if the parents do not control him.

You should develop good  
relations with your wife, otherwise  
you will be in trouble.

If the Gaonbura is  
inefficient, a village cannot make  
any progress.

If the king does not love  
his subjects his enemy will be  
increased on all sides.

Outsiders and guests should  
not be taken into the bedroom.

One should not be  
ungrateful to the person who gives  
shelter.

A wise man never acts as  
witness.

If a wound is not cured in  
time, it will spread to other parts  
of the body.

One should be well versed  
in the profession to which he has  
been engaged.

The disciples should try to  
imitate their teacher (*Guru*).

Advice should not be  
sought from an uninformed  
teacher (*Guru*).

54. Kon Khin Hom Nãm  
Lão Yã Pãi Khão Khon  
Phung. One should avoid the  
heavily drunk man.
55. Fulok Khin Chãog Ngo  
Yã Mou La Nãp Loi. One should not accompany  
a person of ill repute.
56. Muk Cho Hok Tang ãa  
Yã Lãli Pãi Pong. A good man should not  
accompany a hunter or a  
fisherman.
57. Fu Chãng Pet Khãm  
Fãng Yãng Yong Am  
Hom Fãi. One should not have any  
relation with those who can not  
honour their commitments.
58. Kon Chup Nãm Tãn  
Nãi Yã Thom Nãm  
Khãm Khãi Mun Khãn. One should not rely upon  
the talkative person.
59. Ka Op Chãp Yoto  
Phong Ko Yã Pãi Kãog. Vainglorious person should  
be avoided.
60. Kon Chãog Hãt Chãog  
Chã Yã Pet Tã Khãt  
Khãm. One should not enter into  
a debate with a person who loses  
temper easily.
61. Kon Chão Choi, Kon  
Meo Yã Pãi Peu Keu  
Pãing Ngun. One should avoid the  
jealous persons.
62. Hãn Cho Tãing Tang  
Kãm Nun Nop Kãi Fãi  
Lãing Chung Fãi  
Tãwan, Lãn Khãm Oi. Oh, my dear grand sons, always  
go with a torch in the darkness.
63. Fu Chã Chin Chãog  
Ngo Chaf ãmlãt Chi  
Chubwan Mingnung  
Nãm Fyung Chãog  
Ning Kot Nãog Khi. Wicked persons have  
honey in their mouths and poison  
in their minds.

64. Ka Fu Myãt Kon Ni  
Tiu Pi Chãng Chon Hão. A goodman will speak and  
act good in all situations.
65. Lã Fe Ik Chelã, Hãong  
Nã Wã Ching Kyãm.  
ãok Chi Ying Fãk  
Khom Ni Chãog Kãi  
Yoi Fom ãm Nãi. The advice of the *Guru* and  
parents should be devoutly  
followed even if those appear to  
be very hard to follow initially.
66. Khãm Khãn Chãog Lug  
Tãn. Always speak good of  
others.
67. Khyung Ku Cha Che  
Chim Fi Kon Pin Nung  
Yung Num. Good deeds of men shine  
like the bright light of the moon.
68. Mi Nãi Long Chong  
Chãm Kon Chãng Chãn  
Khong Tãm Ni Ing  
Chãi. There are male and female  
beings in this world, similarly there  
are both good and bad (sides of  
everything).
69. Mãng Ka Hãng Khen  
Nung ãi Fi Chãog Mão  
Ni Kon Meo. Some people wear clean  
clothes but their minds are full of  
evil thoughts.
70. Mãng Kon Fak Hãng  
Chã Khon Mãn Khing  
Chilã Fãing Khing. Some people lead a simple  
life but their hearts are pure.
71. Mãng Ka Kon Kon Mi  
Chãog Mao Hi ão Tun  
Niu Khong Mou Khão  
Lu. You Kãnãn Tãi Nãi  
Lãm Mãk Pon Tung Lãi  
Wãn Tãi Pun ãoching. There are some rich  
persons but they are niggardly and  
they die unwept and unsung. Their  
properties are enjoyed by others.
72. Mou Feo Yã Nap Lun  
Hão Hu Mun Chon Chao  
Nakte Yã Lon Kyang  
Wãng Chão Thuk Fing,  
Nak Mão Hão Hom. There should not be hard  
or very small physical labour,  
rather it should be in the medium  
scale. If one sits in one border of  
a boat, the boat sinks.

Khyung YungNung  
Fang Hyo Lom.

73. Khāing Feo Mou Hoti  
Lāli Yāp Che Nāi Nu  
Neng Wong Ken Chāo  
Frā Sikkyā Nāng  
Khong Nu Tāola, Āo  
Pung Ting Chāi Khām  
Lin Mon.

Just like Lord Indra appeared before Lord Buddha who was meditating for six years and played his *Vina*. Lord Indra first tuned his *Vina* in a very low tune and Lord Buddha did not like the tune. Then Lord Indra played his *Vina* in high tune which too, was disapproved by Lord Buddha. Then Lord Indra tuned in a medium tone, and Lord Buddha was also pleased.

74. Nān Feo Mou Ti Fing  
Kā Ān Kyām Chewāi  
Kung Wing Ping Khām.

One should not keep the urgent works pending for tomorrow.

75. Khām Feo Ka Chāng  
Lo Chu Hāo Ho Pung  
Kyāng Oon Feo Ka  
Mou Ni Tāng Khi  
Chāng Ma Khon,  
Pyung Nāi Khān Nāo  
Chu Hāo Khyung Nu  
lyung Pyung Hāp Pāing  
Kun.

One should not be very fat or very thin. Just like a shoulder load gives trouble if it is weighty on one side and light on the other.

76. Pung Naog Hao Ho Ti.

One should follow the customary rules in all walks of life.

77. Ngāo Me Kāo Khāng  
Ho Yā Kho To Yok  
Len Paing Me Yā Nāp  
Lon, Chung Nai Ho  
Ngun Ko Pin Khin.

Enemy is very close to you.  
You should not trust even your wife.

78. Nāp Ān Thon Chit  
Kon, Chāo Lung Ik  
Chāo Tin Ān Ni  
Chāmchi Ka Pāik Pa  
Yong Me Fun.

Women are of seven kinds. There are good and bad among these. Four are good. They donot protest even if their husbands beat.

79. Fu Hāi Cham Chām  
Koun.

Three types (of women) are bad.

80. Ying Chāi Puk Ak Tang  
Hāong Chu Nik Lan  
Chu Hang Mun.

Even one's own children may be enemies.

81. Tun Wān Pi Nang Kāo  
Māng Fāo Chāng Fit  
Kyun.

Even a very old friend or a relative should not be taken into confidence. There is every chance of breaking the good relationship due to quarrel.

82. Yā Pāi Thi Neo Khāng  
Mit Wāi Chyu Hāi Nāi  
Wān Tāi Ām Chom  
Noi.

One should not be miser. Nothing accompanies the dead. Niggardly people donot earn any reputation.

83. Nak Nān Fā Pung Che  
Nām Myong Kon Lop  
Fo Lāk Le Khom Fāi  
Hom Kop Hāok Kām  
Ken Hou Kāu Khon,  
Pa Fāi Thun Fi Lo, Mu  
Yām Chāng Tat Men,  
Mi Cho Fung Lan Chu  
Yong Nāi You Pung  
Chāog, Kān Che Nāi  
Yong Mi Hyong Hi  
Mou Chu Lot.

King, thief, Javeline, evil spirits, serpent, bear, tiger are the enemies. One should be careful about all these.

84. Khum Tāi Ik Khun  
Thāo Khāo Hām,

Old age, sickness, death, temptation, anger, greed come to

Khung Chip Năo Kao us along with our birth.  
 Wāng Tang Năog Pă,  
 Lofa Āan Khăog Năi,  
 Tosă Kop Tannă,  
 Abikshă Chăokhin,  
 Aok Chu Iyung Khăng  
 Chong Ma Pin To Híp  
 Hom.

85. Mangalăi Chi Chon Once born in this earth, one  
 Pañ Pak Khăm Tăng has to proceed to heaven or come  
 Făn Hăong Chăo Kăo back to earth alternately. There is  
 Pă Pin, Mou Kat Yen no escape from this. There are four  
 Hou Măi, Pung Năo Hells. Once born, nobody can  
 Aam Pa Myung, escape from these four Hells.  
 Ngyung Fak Ka Kami,

86. Pen To Wăi Hăo Along with birth comes the  
 Khong Chăo Kăo Khen wordly anxieties. Nobody can  
 Ton Top Hon Mou Chu escape from these. We cannot cast  
 Yăo, Pen Kon Chou off our wrongs even in various  
 Pon Kă Chăn Nă births. Oh my grand sons we will  
 Chăng Sră Tak Mă, not attain *Nirvana* unless we are  
 Petcho Păn Chang Năi free from rebirth and the wrongs  
 Tak Hăn, Khe Chou Kă attached to it.  
 Tiyă Koi Tăn, Lăn  
 Khăm Oi.

87. Chi Chim Fi You Fă People love the donors. God  
 Hok Khong Păn Pong loves those who are loved by their  
 Khăp Chon Theo Făn fellow beings. After their death  
 Thă Wăn Pin Kon Ka they go to better places.  
 Myăt, Năi Nang Ha  
 Chang Fă Pyăt Chăt  
 Tyu Chom.

## Advice to the Grand daughter

Tai

Free English Translation

1. Yă Wăo Tin Khun Hon Pon. You should not visit your neighbour's house often times.
2. Ngun Chăo Nung Hit Nim. Maintain a stable mind.
3. Yă Năp Lă Chok Năm. Do not talk much.
4. Fang Yăm Hăk Pa Mě. Pay respect to your parents.
5. Hok Oui Hăo Hit Kăi. Practise weaving always.
6. Chăo Khăm Hăo Yăm Fo. Always take care of your husband.
7. Ko Tăi Nung Chăo Păng. Husband is like a king. He should be honoured sincerely.
8. Chop Wăn Lăt Choi Choi. Please him with love and affection.
9. Koi Kom Nă Kom Păi. Do not disobey him.
10. Hak Pachăo Mechăo Tungchăo. Have great respect to your parents-in-law.
11. Khop Mo Khăik Tăo Hat Thung Hyon Lung Chăo. You should be well prepared for sudden guests.
12. Khi Ching Thing Thăng Thoi Oi Oi Tăk Lăi Kăm Ning Yă Năm Kop Făi, Khan Wăi Hăo Ko Lăong. Whenever any guest comes, you should first ask him whether he had taken his meals. If he replies in negative, you should entertain him.
13. Tan Năi Ken Ti Chăo Pu Lăt Hăo Chu Ngin, Puk Am Măi Chăo. I am giving you these advice, always bear these in your minds.

The impact of these maxims can be felt by any visitor to a Tai Phake village. The people are extremely hospitable and they are never rough. One will be impressed by their sense of proportion, humour and politeness. They are a contented sort of people and devoutly believe upon the religious motto - *Daanong Traanong Manusyaanaang* (meaning : One's well-being is assured by his gifts). Material possessions are hankered after but not at the cost of their moral values. The people have a faith upon the life after death. They believe that the soul is immortal. One will be free from rebirth after the attainment of *Nirvana* (Maxims 6, 85,86). The people have clear perception of cleanliness (Maxims 8,10,11). Poverty is a curse and only hard work can raise a person from degraded status (Maxims - 12,21,22). The maxims contain necessary guidelines regarding agricultural activities which is the major avocation of the people (M-9). The non-formal educational system has had great impact upon the people and the do's and donot's prescribed in the maxims are scrupulously adhered to by the Tai Phakes (M-13,50,20). Although the Tai Phake villages are surrounded by non-Phake populations, they have been able to maintain their distinctive culture intact. The maxims 23 to 30 have a great bearing upon their behavioural pattern in respect of their dealings with their own people as well as with the non-Phakes. Humility is a special trait of the people which is manifest in maxims 33 to 38.

Almost every Tai Phake family keeps at least one helper mostly from the ex-teagarden labourers. The Phakes treat these helpers as members of the family and they are happy and contented people (M-42). Their motto *Sabbo Satta Sukhitaa Bhabantu* (meaning-let peace and happiness prevail upon all living beings) is reflected in the maxim 42.

*Pu Son Lan* has great relevance for all the villagers, nay, for entire humanity irrespective of age and sex. Thus maxim 43 warns the parents about the truant son, maxim 44 reveals the secret of success in conjugal life, while 45 warns the villagers to select the right person for the post of *gaonbura*, because the fate of a village rests upon the effective role the *gaonbura*

plays. The *Pu So Lan* contains valuable guidelines (Maxim 47) for the family members which have universal application.

In fine *Pu So Lan* is a reservoir of moral lessons for all, which, if followed in its letter and spirit, bestows one with peace and happiness leading to the path of *Nirvana*. (Maxims 48 to 87). To the discerned readers the maxim 83 may appear to be fallacious wherein the king or chief is considered as enemy of the people. But in the context of the tribal millieu, the maxim has some truism. Although the king or chief in the olden days were expected to be benevolent ruler yet in most occasions the ruler became despotic. The power hungry ruler in those days entered into feuds with the neighbouring rulers causing untold sufferings to the subjects.




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\* 'Folklore in North East India,' Edited Soumen Sen, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1985.

## A Glimpse of the Folk Tradition of the Tai Phakes A Lesser Known Buddhist Community of Upper Assam

This small write up is based on extensive and exhaustive field study conducted by the researcher with a view to preserve the prestigious folk tradition of the Tai Phakes (popularly known as Phakials) from the onslaught of the changing trend in the socio-cultural pattern. The multidimensional aspects of the Phake folk tradition do not allow casual treatment of mere collection of the same rather one has to maintain intimate touch with the tradition with a macro-level approach. The researcher collected some of the rare specimens of the folklore by following participant observation method. It may be noted that the folklore is closely inter woven in the social institutions like family, marriage, various rituals and ceremonies connected with birth and death. Since the folklore as existing amongst the people would be unwieldy to describe into, some specimens of folk wealth covering selected folk songs, folk tales containing socio legal values and having sufficient educational bearing along-with ingredients of social control have been taken up for discussion. In fact these value based folklores of the Tai Phakes contain healing effects of much of the socio cultural ailments of all the people of all the time. C.M. Bewra in his 'Heroic Poetry' therefore rightly refers to the magical effects of songs. "When a man is full of sorrow he should listen to song of glorious deeds and he will be cheered."

In the Tai Phake folk songs (Mokhaam) treatment of love forms a major theme. Desire for union, description of the beauty of the lover and beloved, frustration arising out of separation due to parental matrimonial arrangement are common sentiments in these songs. Not only that, the folk songs provide sufficient information about the social life, topography and socio legal system

of the people. Thus Phake socio-cultural pattern is reflected in the 'Mokhaams' which can be categorised as:-

'Mokhaam' or love songs

'Mokhaam Oi Maa Ping Saa' or cradle song

'Mokhaam Lao Luk or lullaby 'Khekhyang' or descriptive song and 'Mokhaam Choyyoy' or festival song. Khekhyang or descriptive song Mokhaam choy yoy or festival song

"Mokhaams' are love songs which are sung by the young boys and girls during festivals and social ceremonies like marriage. These songs are sung during harvesting operations also. Here is a specimen -

'Mokhaam'

Tai

'Waatinaam Waan Khaamni Taan Hengpi Maa Mou Koi  
Oi, Pi Moun Maat Tonglu Mokyaa, Kochowche Haap Tou Aota,  
Watinaam Waan Khaam Chentaan Maa Mow Hengpi Koi Oi,  
Pi Moun Maat Luhom Maak Mouni Chen Haap Tong Waai Tah

FREE ENGLISH RENDERING

You are so handsome that my desire is not fulfilled even if I look at you for thousands of years. Perhaps in our previous life we were worshipping Lord Buddha together. You should love me just like you love a lotus

MOKHAAM OI MAA PING CHAA

Like all other cradle songs, the Phake cradle songs too contain profuse similies and examples. These are generally sung by elderly women and the subject Matters include various Objects of nature, animals, humun beings and deities. Naturally in a Phake cradle song the ropes of cradle make creaking sound with a rhythm. The cradle stops as the baby extends his legs but moves as soon as he shrinks the legs. In the song the extension of legs is compared with those of tall grasses grown during 'Asaar' month. There may not be continuity in the subject matter of the song. Thus descriptions like creating sound of the cradle to mother's desire for a man with legs like those of an elephant whosc belly is very big and who poduces thousands of sugarcane

find place in such songs. The sugracane in these songs, may be red like 'Kusum' fruits or a burnt house.

### MOKHAAM LAAOLUK

Lullabys are fast disappearing from the Phake society. Today women folk busy themselves in various non traditional family activities and modernism has penetrated into the distant riverine., Phake villages. English medium system of education is becoming popular and one will not be surprised to see phake girls riding a bicycle to the nearest English medium schools at Naharkatia. T.V. sets are seen in phake villages specially among the few households of urban educated people. In this backdrop traditional lullabys are neglected by the people and a day will come soon when such songs will totally disappear from the society. The following song collected from Tipam phake village near Joypur in Dibrugarh district is a rare item of the folk culture.

#### Tai

Kaai Oi Non, Non, Chung Maaon Ye Pon Taap Ho  
Maaog Chaaog Waan Fo Lun paan Khaao, Non, Non Chung  
Maaon Manan Ye Hit Maa Chache Taaog Laang Kaai Naamk  
Maai khaa Non Oi, Non, Non

#### Free English Translation

Oh my dear child (Children) go to sleep. If you do not sleep some body may kill you and your little head will be found inside a bowl. Oh, my dear child, sleep If you do not sleep, a fox may come under the platform, Therefore my dear child, sleep.

#### Khekyaang

The Phakes have a unique tradition of reciting past incidents in rhythmical description popularly known as 'Khekyaang'. Usually such songs are recited at the end of certain festivals. The educative role of these songs cannot be underestimated as the recitals help the younger section to know about the past as well as the traits of their culture. Thus a

'Khekyaang' song narrates how the Tai Phakes reached Joypur through the western pass after a long sojourn. The river Dihing was on the southern corner of the village. Ngi Thun kyo was the Mauzadar who took the land revenue in full. Sachiram was the head police officer. Only the young British officers lived in pucca houses. Orders for clearing the jungles had to come from the land lying beyond seven seas. The officer was a young man of good physique. His name was Harkam and his chin was completely covered with beard. His strength was like that of 'Hanuman'

The 'Khekyaang' also describes about an epidemic that took place in eighty one (perhaps 1881) which caused heavy damage to the buffaloes.

#### Tai

King Mung Khaai Taai Fi Haale Pa Khaao Myot pe Mo  
Wai Taan Khe Naam Chaam Kaaong Nok Khaai Tem Cheng  
Hao Aan Pen Thon Laai Paak

#### Free English translation

In the month of January of this year a buffalo disease broke out. The riverside was full of buffalo bones. If bones were counted one would have found that hundreds of buffaloes were dead in this epidemic.

The epidemic subsided only when the villagers offered oblations to Lord Buddha.

#### Tai

Ataang Tapang Faagun Maah Kaaothaam  
Funchaa Kaa La Kvaam, Penaai La taa Hao Pe Chung  
Taai Nung Naai Khaam Tan Chouchitaa Fe Khen Haai wao  
Paai Kaa Kaai

#### Free English Translation

The religious manuscripts 'Kaaothaam' and 'Kaa La Kyaam' were ceremonially presented to Lord Buddha during the month of 'Faagun' (February-March) of that year. Thus said the headmonk



The disease soon disappeared .

### 'Choyyoy song'

This is another interesting folk song of the Tai Phakes which is almost non existent at present. Young boys and girls sing such songs in socio-religious occasions like purification ceremony of an old and respected man in the village. These songs are mostly question answer type dialogue in rhythm where young girls put questions and the boys give reply and vice versa. The subject matter of the songs may not have direct connection with the festive occasion. The English translation of a choyyoy song like this :-

Girls -- Oh, the soft shoots of Medang hill, if you could eat rice I would have offered my share also to you.

Boy -- Oh darling, after taking out the husk from the paddy and cooking the rice you offer 'Taangsom' (a long narrow strip of cloth woven locally by the women folk for ceremonial offering to the Lord Buddha) and thereby you will attain 'Nirvana' and we will be deprived of the great thing of life i.e. Nirvana'.

Story telling is a popular hobby among the elderly persons of the Tai Phakes. These tales are not mere instruments of recreation, rather they act as mirror of the tribal mind. Frazer opines, "Folk tales are a faithful reflection of the world as it appeared to the primitive mind and we may be sure that any idea which commonly occurs in them, however absurd it may seem to us, must once have been an ordinary article of belief."

The folk stories not only offer delightful recreation, they also contribute largely towards the intellectual attainment of the people. Thus the folk story 'Pung Kun Faan' (story of a stupid son) contains immense wealth of knowledge which is of practical use in the day to day life. Similarly 'Pung Ling' (story of a monkey) provides laughter as well as moral teachings. Perhaps Naang Sen Pung' (story of a judicious woman) is a unique example of folk tradition of the Tai Phakes in respect of socio-legal aspects. The female judge 'Chu Thaamaachaari' is an embodiment of social justice.

Pu Son Laan' (advice from grand parents to the grand

children) is another characteristic traditional treasure of moral teachings of the Tai Phakes which has relevance in any society at any time. A few specimens are presented here.

### Tai

Khaatchang Yaa Khaang Non 'Pa Me Chao Tung Chaang  
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Khot Hoi Ka Nao Waan Pa Chao Yik Long Aao. Chao  
Khaao Haa Haak Khyun.

Koun Chaam Koun Taai Khaam Tow Laang Top Haai  
Khaa Hin Taai Hyon Npy Khing Kyu Chong Nop Haaog  
Mohaa Lop Ching Mi Haaog Pu Ti Ko Chaa.

### Free English Translation

Do not while away your time on the plea of tiredness

You should show due respect to your kith and kin. They should be respected equally. You should maintain your parents in their old age. You should maintain good relation with your neighbours. There should be regular exchanges between you and your neighbour.

Anger and temptation like darkness should always be avoided. In the 'Pu Son Laan' there are specific advice to the grand daughters.

Yaa waa Tin Khun Hon Pon Chao Khaam Haa Yaam  
Faa Khom Mo Khaaik Taaot Hat Thung Hyon Lung Chao

You should not visit your neighbour's house very often.

Always take care of your husband. You should always be prepared to receive unexpected guests.

The Tai Phakes possess a well documented manuscript on dream called 'Fe Faan. In olden days dream played significant role in the society but today people do not reckon much on dreams. The younger sections do not care to consult the elderly persons about the dreams. In fact most of the people do not put any importance in the analysis of their dreams. Some specimens of the Fe Faan are presented here which were collected long back (1960) from an old villager of Tipam Phake village near

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Joypur.

If one drinks milk in dream his wealth will be increased and he will get due appreciation from the people.

Riding a tiger in dream signifies success. Similarly ploughing a field in dream indicates increase mental happiness. If one catches a thief he will die soon. Drinking liquor in dream is ominous and mental anxieties will increase. Similarly hearing an owl's voice at dream indicates serious illness to the person :

The Phakes believe (according to the 'Fe Faan) that dreams seen on Sunday have effect on one's own wife on Monday, one's own relative, on Tuesday, one's parents, on Wednesday, one's own children, on Thursday one's distant relatives, on Friday one's domestic animal and on Saturday one's ownself.

Besides the above, the phakes have proverbs (Tai Khaam) riddles (Khaam Tai) and superstitions (namic) which have socio-cultural significance in their social life.

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\* Souvenir, Government Law College Students' Union, Guwahati, January 22-24, 1991

## The Season Of Bihu

The Rangali Bihu, also called Bohag Bihu, the most colourful spring dance festival of Assam is observed throughout the length and breadth of the state to herald the advent of spring and new year, beginning from the last day (*Sankranti*) of the month of Choitra (14th April). As the merrymaking and festivities continue for about a week in the month of Bohag, the festival is also known as Bohag Bihu or Saat Bihu.

Most of the tribes of Assam observe Rangali Bihu in their own traditional style. The Boro Kacharis call it Baisagu, the Tiwas name it Bisu, the Deoris call it Bohagiyo Bisu, the Rabhas observe it as Nava Barsha, the plain Karbis call it Johong Puja and the Tai Phakes observe trus festival as Pani Bihu or Poi Chang Ken. Unlike other festivals, the Rangali Bihu has a universal and secular appeal to heterogeneous populations irrespective of caste, creed, religion and ethnic affiliations. There may be local variations in manner of observation, duration and catholicity but the core i.e. welcoming the new year with gay abandon is the characteristic feature of all the Bihus.

### The Baisagu

The Boro Kacharis observe a weeklong socio-religious festival beginning from the *Choitra sankranti* which they call Baisagu. It begins with the Gopuja (worshipping of cows and bullocks), as animals form prized assets of the Boros. The cows and bullocks are ceremonially bathed in a river or beel and the young boys throw cut pieces of gourd, brinjals, turmeric etc. on them so that the yield of the animals increase year after year (Bausour bausour er hanja, hanja). The animals are beaten with dighlati, so that they become strong. In the evening they are given specially prepared cakes and are tied with new ropes especially prepared for the occasion.

The second day of Baisagu, dedicated to human beings is started with the melodious Chatrawali tune of the flute. People believe that this particular tune has the magical effect of damaging the embryos of reptiles.

Early in the morning the people worship their presiding deity i.e. Bathow Burha and Ma Kamakhya.

Young boys and girls form groups and sing and dance to the music of drum (kham), cymbal (jatha), flute (siphung), tharkha and ramtal. The elderly persons, both male and female, take part in the Bihu dance. For a period of five days, dance groups visit each household and perform song and dance. This is called Maagan. The money received from each household is spent in a feast at garjasali, a place of worship on the outskirts of the village.

The Boros observe certain taboos during Bihu. Paddy should not be taken out of the granary during Bihu. Processing of paddy in the mortar should not be done. Selling of products grown in the homestead land is also prohibited.

#### **Tiwa Baisak Bisu**

The Than puja forms an important part of the Tiwa Rangali Bihu festival. Pujas are offered to the main deities such as Mahadeo, Mahamai, Jongkong, Kesaikhati etc. Before the Puja, the elderly villagers wrap the fruit bearing trees in the campus of their houses with paddy stalks, with the belief that such action produces more fruits.

On the sankranti day 13/14th April early in the morning the Gharbura (an expert in traditional tribal folklore) sacrifices a fowl in the Barghar or the courtyard of the barghar and offers prayers to the deities. In some villages, the Bagh Raja is worshipped, while in others Kuber is propitiated. Depending on the manner of death of the sacrificed fowl, the villagers determine the general well being of the villagers in the coming year. After the Puja, a mixture of water and rice powder is sprinkled over the granary, cowshed, cookshed, weaving shed etc. This is known as Haapsaa Puja. *Jou* (rice beer), chicken and rice cakes are offered to the ancestors. The womenfolk prepare a special curry of chicken and leaves of an indigenous plant, which, however, cannot be taken by anybody unless the aged members of the family accept the *Jou* first.

After bathing, the villagers gather in the barghar and a prayer is held. A feast of *ju* (rice beer), chicken or dry fish is arranged. Ancestors are also worshipped on this occasion.

In the evening, Biswakarma and Kuber are worshipped in the courtyard. Flesh of white chicken and *ju* are essential for such puja. The villagers purify the agricultural implements by sprinkling a mixture of water and rice powder. The womenfolk prepare a special Bihu delicacy with chicken, sprouts of arum and stem, leaves of pasatia, tulse, bihlangani and mangamari.

The husori songs and dance continue for seven days.

#### **Deori Bohagiyo Bisu**

The Deoris observe Rangali Bihu, which they call Bohagio Bisu, in their traditional style. The formal ceremony begins on the sankranti of the month of Sot (14th April) if it falls on a Wednesday. The Deoris consider Wednesday as the most auspicious day for observing any religious ceremony. If on any particular year, the sankranti does not fall on Wednesday, then the Bohagio Bisu is deferred till the next Sunday or Wednesday.

The Bisu must precede the worshipping of the presiding deity in the Thanghar (public congregational hall). Sacrifice of a goat is essential in such puja. Once in every four years, a buffalo may be sacrificed for the well being of the villagers.

In the early hours of the sankranti day each household solemnises the Suwasani Puja. Towards noon, all the villagers gather in the Thanghar and the Bordeori (head priest) offers puja to the presiding deities. Goats, fowls, ducks are sacrificed for the well being of the villagers. On this day the elderly members visit the houses of the younger co-villagers and bless the members of the family. The visitors are entertained with *Suje* (rice beer) and *Khaaji* (a delicious curry) prepared with cane sprouts and chicken.

In the meantime, the young boys and girls arrange their respective dancing groups. The Bisu dance is formally begun at the Thanghar campus and after that the dance parties visit each household starting from the Bordeori's house.

Early in the morning the people worship their presiding deity i.e. Bathow Burha and Ma Kamakhya.

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On the following Wednesday, the closing day of the Bihu, the villagers gather at the Thanghar for a special prayer. The husori parties pray to the presiding deity of the Thanghar to forgive them for any omissions and commissions during the festival.

The Deori Bohagiyo Bisu has a close relation with Deodhani dance performed by an adolescent girl. The Deodhani is believed to possess supernatural powers.

#### **Sonowal Kachari Rangali Bihu**

The Sonowal Kacharis observe Rangali Bihu in style almost similar to neighbouring Assamese people, with a difference in the husori performance.

The Sonowal Kachari male husori parties carry a long bamboo pole and placing the same in the courtyard, beat the bamboo with small sticks while maintaining a rhythm with the music of drums, cymbals and songs. The bamboo is placed horizontally in the courtyard on three bamboo stands and some of the members of the husori party beat the bamboo pole while others sing and dance. The Husori parties visit each household and perform husori and Bihu dances. The villagers offer betel leaves and nuts, a few rupees and a Bihuwan (Assamese towel) or a seleng (a locally woven sadar) on a xarai and the Husori party blesses the members for a trouble free new year.

The concluding dance is performed in a central place of the village where all the villagers participate, irrespective of age and sex.

#### **Rabha Naba Barsha**

The Rabhas, observe the Chaitra Sankanti as Gohali Deo Puja and cows and bullocks are worshipped as Amaataa Bhan (invaluable assets). For Gohali Deo Puja, an altar is made in front of the cowshed where reeds (ekraa) and Vithetita (an indigenous creeper) are planted representing deities. Three portions of rice powder along with betel leaves and nuts are kept on a plantain leaf. A fowl is sacrificed, the flesh of which is cooked with rice powder. The priest chants mantras and offers a portion of the cooked food to the deities. After this

formal offering, this favourite delicacy (Bhog) of the deities is placed in an out-of-the-way place near a forest. The remaining portion is distributed among the participants of the ceremony. The Rabhas believe that if the children of the co-villagers come to share the Bhog in groups, then there will be more calves in that year, thereby increasing the cattle wealth of the family. The head of the household takes a bowl of rice powder and water and sprinkles the content over the agricultural implements.

The following day, young boys and girls arrange Husori parties and perform Bihu dance in the courtyard of each household. The families seek blessings from the Bihu dancers and offer them cash. Merrymaking continues for about four or five days. The money thus collected by the young Bihu dancers is spent on a community feast. With this the festive occasion comes to an end.

#### **Mishing Rangali Bihu**

One of the major plains tribes, the Miris (Mishings) perform Rangali Bihu with traditional mirth and merry making. Although Ali-Aye-Lrigang and Porag are their major festivals, yet the Rangali Bihu occupies an important place in the socio-cultural life of the people.

The Bihu starts on the Sankranti of the month of Sot (April 14) with ritual cow-worship. Husori forms an integral part of the Mishing Bihu festival. Mishing Oi Nitoms (folk songs) sung during Bihu is the natural outburst of youthful hearts (subject matter varies from love to separation of lovers). The youths rehearse Bihu songs and dances from the second week of Choitra i.e. towards the last part of March. At night, young boys and girls in separate groups practise songs and dance at the outskirts of the village to the accompaniment of drum and cymbals. Some influence of Assamese folk songs, even verses of the Kirtan of Shri Sankardeva, can be noticed in the Mishing husori songs. One member starts the song and the same is repeated by the others of the party. They form a circle and touch one another's hands while dancing.

On the following Wednesday, the closing day of the Bihu, the villagers gather at the Thanghar for a special prayer. The husori parties pray to the presiding deity of the Thanghar to forgive them for any omissions and commissions during the festival.

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The concluding dance is performed in a central place of the village where all the villagers participate, irrespective of age and sex.

### **Rabha Naba Barsha**

The Rabhas, observe the Chaitra Sankranti as Gohali Deo Puja and cows and bullocks are worshipped as Amaataa Bhan (invaluable assets). For Gohali Deo Puja, an altar is made in front of the cowshed where reeds (ekraa) and Vithetita (an indigenous creeper) are planted representing deities. Three portions of rice powder along with betel leaves and nuts are kept on a plantain leaf. A fowl is sacrificed, the flesh of which is cooked with rice powder. The priest chants mantras and offers a portion of the cooked food to the deities. After this

formal offering, this favourite delicacy (Bhog) of the deities is placed in an out-of-the-way place near a forest. The remaining portion is distributed among the participants of the ceremony. The Rabhas believe that if the children of the co-villagers come to share the Bhog in groups, then there will be more calves in that year, thereby increasing the cattle wealth of the family. The head of the household takes a bowl of rice powder and water and sprinkles the content over the agricultural implements.

The following day, young boys and girls arrange Husori parties and perform Bihu dance in the courtyard of each household. The families seek blessings from the Bihu dancers and offer them cash. Merrymaking continues for about four or five days. The money thus collected by the young Bihu dancers is spent on a community feast. With this the festive occasion comes to an end.

### **Mishing Rangali Bihu**

One of the major plains tribes, the Miris (Mishings) perform Rangali Bihu with traditional mirth and merry making. Although Ali-Aye-Lrigang and Porag are their major festivals, yet the Rangali Bihu occupies an important place in the socio-cultural life of the people.

The Bihu starts on the Sankranti of the month of Sot (April 14) with ritual cow-worship. Husori forms an integral part of the Mishing Bihu festival. Mishing Oi Nitoms (folk songs) sung during Bihu is the natural outburst of youthful hearts (subject matter varies from love to separation of lovers). The youths rehearse Bihu songs and dances from the second week of Choitra i.e. towards the last part of March. At night, young boys and girls in separate groups practise songs and dance at the outskirts of the village to the accompaniment of drum and cymbals. Some influence of Assamese folk songs, even verses of the Kirtan of Shri Sankardeva, can be noticed in the Mishing husori songs. One member starts the song and the same is repeated by the others of the party. They form a circle and touch one another's hands while dancing.

Drum, flute, Takaa, Gogonaa (Gunggaang) and flute made of buffalo horn besides the small cymbals are the main musical instruments used in the Bihu dance.

The husori parties perform dance in each household beginning from the first day of Bohag (April 15) and continue for about ten to fifteen days. The entire village is surcharged with music and dance. The villagers visit each other's household and apang is offered to all. The Husori parties are regarded as the most auspicious visitors by the families and offerings of betel nut, some cash and locally woven clothes (Seleng or Gamosa) are made to the parties in a xarai. The members of the husori party are entertained with Apang especially prepared for the occasion. At the end of the dance, the party blesses the family for a happy and peaceful life.

#### **Pani Bihu-'Poi Chaang Ke'**

There are six non-scheduled Buddhist ethnic groups in Assam viz the Tai Phakes, the Tai Khamtits, Tai Turungs, Tai Aitonias, Tai Khamyangs and Tai Dowanias who also observe a religious ceremony synchronising with the Rangali Bihu. They call this Pani Bihu. The Tai Phaks call this festival 'Poi Chang Ken'.

The festival starts on the Sankranti of the month of Choitra. A Bauddha Vihar is constructed outside the main temple and Buddha idols are taken to this temporary Vihar for the three-day bathing ceremony. During the three days, Tri Ratnas (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) are bathed by each of the villagers. Lord Buddha is represented by the idols, Dharma by the scriptures and Sangha by the head priest and monks. Prayers are held before and after the bathing. Each one of the villagers bring water three times from the river and pour water on the Tri Ratnas. This continues for the days. The temporary Vihar is i.e. househod luminated at night and the young boys keep vigil throughout the nights. They also sing and dance mostly Assamese Bihu songs.

The concluding ceremony is called Poi Chat. On this day,

after formal bathing of the Buddha, idols are taken to the main Bauddha Vihar. The head priest recites Mangal Sutra and purifies all the objects with sacred water.

Young boys and girls now start the Pani Bihu and sprinkle water on one another. Towards noon, all the villagers gather at the Bauddha Vihar and a general prayer is held. Gifts are offered to the months containing special Bihu item i.e. fired rice (Khaotek).

Although Poi Chang Ken is strictly a religious festival, yet due to acculturation and intimate relation with other fellow Assamese people, the young boys sing Bihu songs and dance. Inter-community Bihu greetings are also made during the Pani Bihu days. The Tai Khamyang of Sivasagar even arrange Husori parties at the end of the religious festival and perform Bihu dance in each household.

#### **The Johong Festival of the Amri Karbis**

The Karbis inhabiting the plains districts of Kamrup, Nagaon, Golaghat Darrang and Sonitpur districts are called by the Karibis of the hill district as Dumrali or Amri Karbis. The main festival of the plains Karbis is the Johong Puja akin to the Bihu festival of Assam. The puja is also observed on the first two days of the month of Bohag. The festival is arranged in the house of the head of the village who is called Bangthe. Sacrifice forms the main element of Johong Puja. In olden days, the Karbis used to worship Johong before starting a battle. Even today, they maintain the tradition by performing war dance during the festival. They use a flute (murip and a drum (seng) during the dance.

After observing the twoday worship, people visit each household taking shields and swords in hand and dance merily to the tune of murip and seng. They perform Husori in the courtyard. of the househod. The families entertain the dancers and seek blessings for a happy and prosperous new year. ♦♦♦

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\* The Sentinel, Guwahati, 12th April 1998



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## **Rehabilitation of the Jhumias-A case study of two tribal villages of Karbi Anglong district**

In Assam shifting cultivation (Jhuming) is practised in the two hill districts namely Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills district and the major tribes practising Jhuming in these two districts are the Karbis and Dimasa Kacharis. Of late Government of Assam have taken certain steps to motivate these tribal people about ill effects of shifting cultivation and some concrete steps have been adopted to rehabilitate the jhumias.

In this paper an humble attempt is made to focus the rehabilitation programmes of the jhumias of two villages of Karbi Anglong district namely Chutianala Adarsa Gaon and Kheroni Gaon under Lumbejong Development Block of Karbi Anglong district. Till recently the tribals of these two villages had resorted to shifting cultivation as sole means of their livelihood and as they shifted from area to area along the line of jhum cycle, they could not enjoy the fruits of infra-structural benefits offered by the Government under various heads of development. The position changed considerably after their rehabilitation.

The Chutianala Adarsha Gaon is situated at a distance of 8 kms from Diphu Manja Road. There are 75 Nos of Karbi households with an approximate population of 505. The people of this village had no experience of wet paddy cultivation as they were jhumias, but today most of them are good paddy cultivators. They cultivate paddy in the paddy fields adjacent to the village and the head work of the Chutianala Lift Irrigation Scheme is located in the vicinity of their paddy fields. The Chutianala Lift Irrigation Scheme has been designed to supply water in an area of 120 hectares and it was completed in July 1983. The project supplies water to 30 Nos of families of this village and these families are getting the required quantity of

water. Rest of the families are yet to be covered by the Project and they practise jhuming. The Diphu river provides the source of water for the Project but the water level of this river is not satisfactory for full utilisation of the 4 Nos of irrigation pumpsets. The villagers nostalgically narrate their attachment to jhum system of cultivation whenever they face the problem of water scarcity. Besides jhuming was their way of life and as settled cultivators in the plains areas, they have to face certain difficulties. Each family possesses 8 Bighas of cultivable land on an average and unlike jhum in lands they cannot cultivate the plains on community basis. Besides they are facing the problem of social inequality arising out of possession of land, position or location of paddy land and consequent affluency of a section of co-villager. As mentioned earlier only 30 Nos of families are getting the required amount of water to irrigate their lands and rest still depend upon jhum sites. The economic condition of the former villagers is tolerably improved and social disparity grows. The first casualty of this situation is the disappearance of age old amity and fellow feeling among the villagers. Sri Bura Sing Terang of Chutianala village told us that due to irrigational facilities he could get 80 mounds of paddy, 30 mounds of sesame and 6 mounds of mustard in the year 1986-87. Thus he could earn Rs. 13500.00 from these sources alone in that year whereas his neighbour whose lands are lying in elevated area where irrigation facilities are not available, could not produce even one third of his paddy or mustard.

On the other hand the people are enjoying many other facilities which they could not have dreamt of had they lived in difficult terrain depending solely on shifting cultivation. Although not a single house-hold gets electric connection in the households, the facilities, however are extended to the villagers. The villagers told us that first they want to purchase C.I. Sheets and the minimum furniture like one or two chairs, a table and one or two cots etc and then they will go for electric connection. A large member of youths eke out their livelihood by serving as day labourer in the Coffee Estate lying adjacent to the village and the prevailing wage is Rs. 12.00 per day. However they are

happy with the educational facilities extended to the village by the District Council at Diphu. The L.P. School has two teachers. There are 4 Nos of ring wells in the village supplied by the District Council authorities. The condition of the road passing through the village is not satisfactory and it is a fair weather road only. However the same is connected with the Manja-Diphu main road. For medical treatment the people have to go to the Diphu hospital. There is one Village Key Veterinary Centre. For their business transactions the villagers have to go to the Manja or Diphu bazars. The villagers feel the necessity of a community recreational Centre. The students after completion of primary education have to go to Manja or Diphu for availing themselves of secondary education. There is no infra-structure for marketing of agricultural produce and the business men of Manja avail the opportunity.

Every household possesses a traditional loom and the womenfolk weave clothes not only for themselves but for the menfolk also. The District Council authorities have supplied 4 Nos of looms to the village.

With the financial assistance from the Fishery Department, Shri Pansing Terang has started a Fishery and he is earning additional income of Rs. 350.00 as per annum.

The Dimasa Kacharis of Karbi Anglong district like their brethren the Karbis too practised Jhuming and still are practising jhuming. But jhuming system of cultivation has its limitation in the present day context of population explosion and consequent pressure upon land. Hence the people volunteered to accept settled cultivation and Government also propounded the Integrated Jhumia Development Programme (IJDP) in Kheroni village in the year 1982-83. The village Kheroni lying at a distance of about 13 kms from Diphu is inhabited by the Dimasa Kacharis constituting about 150 Nos of households. Under the Integrated Jhumia Development Programme 30 hectares of land have been distributed among 28 Nos of families for orange, pine-apple and Coconut cultivation.

The individual beneficiary scheme was also implemented

and pig, goat, poultry, ploughcattle were distributed among the villagers. Besides weaving and black smithy schemes were also implemented. Under the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) loan cum subsidy worth of Rs. 2000/- were sanctioned to selected villagers for purchase of bullocks. It was reported that middlemen or agents play their roles while processing loan proposals and in most cases the beneficiaries have been deprived of the real benefits.

#### Conclusion :

From the pen picture presented above what emerges is that Government's intention of bringing to an end of the practice of wasteful shifting cultivation has been appreciated by the tribals and they are realising the detrimental effects of this mode of cultivation. The efforts to eliminate this, however, rehabilitation are to be expedited and all the families in a village should be treated at par while offering benefits. For example if benefits are offered to the 28 Nos of families out of total families of about 150 Nos, the non benefitted families suffer from inferiority complex. Sentiment of these simple, unsophisticated people should be considered while selecting beneficiaries. It is true due to constraint of fund sometimes the entire village may not be benefitted at a time. But instead of taking more schemes, entire fund may be grouped in a single item, say distribution of plough bullocks, so that all the needy families in a village get the benefit in the same year.

The Jhumias have had their own way of life and they were happy with what they had. In our effort to rehabilitate them care should be taken to provide the infra-structural facilities uninterrupted. In our field survey we have seen that out of 75 Nos of households in a village only 3 Nos of households got irrigational facilities regularly and their economic condition also improved. Naturally the deprived families preferred to resort to their age old jhuming in the distant hills. It should also be ensured that water from the pumps flow out regularly otherwise agricultural output may be decreased. It was reported that before implementation of the Chutianala Lift Irrigation Scheme the

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villagers used to get an average output of 15-16 mounds of paddy per bigha, whereas after implementation of the scheme the production of paddy has been reduced to 9-10 mounds per bigha due to erratic supply of water.

The middlemen are committing heinous crime by exploiting the simple tribals and it is not exaggeration to say that cause of present day tribal unrest is the exploitation of the tribals by the vested interests. Thus when the jhumias come to lead a peaceful life by resorting to settled cultivation, they are mortified to find the corrupt practices. Shri Mani Chandra Bey of Kheroni Gaon lamented that he got Rs. 1300.00 only although the authorities had sanctioned Rs. 2000.00 for him for a pair of bullocks.

Emphasis should be laid on selection of genuine individual beneficiaries, procurement of healthy and better breeds of cattle and poultry and establishment of village Co-operatives for providing infra-structural facilities for marketing the agricultural and other products of the tribals. Steps should be taken to examine medically the cattle and poultry at the time of distribution of the same to the beneficiaries. These measures will surely provide a stimulus for growth of the economy of the rehabilitated jhumias.



## **Land Alienation And Indebtedness in the I.T.D.P. Areas of Assam - A Case Study of Marigaon I.T.D.P.**

Land Alienation is one of the major problems among the tribes of Assam and in fact it is the primary cause of deteriorating economic condition of the tribals. It is something like a historical process and the victims are reconciled to their fate. There is hardly any consciousness among the tribals about this great economic malady. The problem is so deep rooted that all the tribal developmental programmes with an agriculture based economy are handicapped by the induction of this age old economic constraint. The characteristic feature of this phenomenon is that it is a legacy of generations and a gradual process in which the tribals are compelled to transfer their lands to other tribals and non tribals as a last resort to survive.

The land hungry village tribal as well as non tribal Mahajans are keeping the poverty stricken tribals under their clutch for generations. The modus operandi of the Mahajans is as follows. When a member of the tribal community faces acute financial hardship he naturally approaches the local Mahajan who is in most cases a non tribal, for some cash or kind. He offers a certain piece of agricultural land as mortgage to the Mahajan for a stipulated period. During the period of mortgage the owner of the land is deprived of cultivating his land. The Mahajan who transacts this unholy affair virtually becomes the owner of the land during the period of agreement. The rate of interest is excessively high. Generally three mounds are charged as interest for every one hundred rupees given on loan. One mound by local practice is equal to about 38kg. If the price of one mound of paddy at current price is say, Rs. 80/-, the interest for Rs. 100/- comes to Rs. 240/- P.A. The poor tribal people who take loans on such terms hardly have the capacity to repay the loan along with interest. Sometimes they pay the interest but the

principal remains unpaid. There is no end of felt needs of the tribals and even when the old loan remains outstanding, they again approach the Mahajans for loans on similar terms. In this way the loan outstanding goes on increasing and the poor loanees have no other alternative but to alienate a piece of paternal land. The Mahajans cultivate the land and reap the entire benefit. Thus the ownership right is temporarily transferred, although it is stipulated in the agreement that the land will come to the possession of the mortgagor provided they return the money at the end of the agreement. But what happens in most cases is that the actual owners are not in a position to return the money as they always live from hand to mouth. Ultimately they are compelled to sell their land to the money lenders who take the land on mortgage. These are always shady deals because the mortgagors have to put their signatures or thumb impression in the dotted lines of the blank paper and they do not receive the reasonable value of their lands as they have already lost the bargaining power. Thus the temporary alienation of land becomes a permanent one as time passes.

Another system, locally known as 'Khai Khalas' (particularly in Mangaldoi areas) is also in vogue in the plains tribal areas which literally means redemption of loan on utilisation of the mortgaged land for a definite period. This is some kind of usufructuary mortgage. Under this system the money lender cultivates the land for a specific period agreed to by the borrower at the time of borrowing money. After the period is over the amount of loan is treated to be redeemed and the land comes to the owner. The system as it is, appears to be more harmless but in practice it is not so. The period of mortgage is so fixed that it gives a good return to the mortgagee sufficient to account for the principal and a high interest. In most cases the tribal owners have to borrow money every year against a particular part of land. In this way the land remains in continuous occupation of the money lenders. This is a disguised form of land alienation without transfer of title.

The egalitarian tribal society enjoins on its members certain social obligations and cash money is urgently required to meet these obligations. Besides, cash money is also required for meeting

the necessary expenses in connection with the marriage of a son or daughter, death rites and such other religious ceremonies. The tribal people spend considerable sum of money on these occasions although financially they are not expected to spend even a quarter of that sum. The poor tribal families have no other source of getting money other than selling their lands to the Mahajans who are in most cases non tribal.

The Lalungs (prefer to call themselves as Tiwas) living in the Marigaon I.T.D.P. areas are economically depressed sort of people. Although they were the original settlers in the areas and were masters of all they surveyed initially, yet ironically they are the most vulnerable section of the people today in so far as possession of agricultural lands is concerned. This state of affair happened after Independence when large scale immigrants entered into the district of Nagaon. These immigrants at first occupied the most inaccessible areas and the local inhabitants had not much to grumble. But as time passed the flow of outsiders increased. The simple tribal folk became victims of multifarious strategies of these immigrants. As a result the indigenous tribals lost most of their valuable agricultural lands. The table I below shows the distribution of tribal families by size of land holdings (in Hectares).

TABLE - I

In Hectares

Sl. No	Size of land possessed	Scheduled Tribal	
		No of household	Total land possessed
1.	Below 1.0	5270	3661.08
2.	1.0 to 5.0	6192	10940.34
3.	5.0 to 10.0	210	1273.42
4.	10.0 to 20.0	17	205.98
5.	20.0 and above	-	-

(Source -- Bench Mark Survey, Govt. of Assam 1978).

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(Source -- Bench Mark Survey, Govt. of Assam 1978).

It is seen that families possessing 20 hectares and above are nil and majority of the households are classed within the range of 1-0 to 5-0 hectares. As these lands include homestead lands also, real agricultural lands fall far short of the annual requirement of paddy.

Land alienation within and outside the tribal belts and blocks is one of the pressing problems within the entire Sub-plan areas of Assam particularly because of influx from other areas including Bangladesh, Nepal and Bihar. Apart from the special provisions under which tribal belts and blocks were created no special laws were enacted to protect the tribal land. The main drawback of the above provisions was that the members of the scheduled tribes and other inhabitants of the area (tribal belts and blocks) as on a particular date were treated at par and this helped the outsiders to claim the original inhabitant status.

Again due to various reasons, even the special provisions for belts and blocks have not been effectively implemented. As a result large scale alienation of tribal land within the project area has taken place. The Government of Assam weaponed with the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act 1947 tried to protect the tribals from the clutches of the land hungry outsiders. But still the problem could not be solved. Again an amendment of the said act had to be brought in the year 1964 wherein it was specifically mentioned that "notwithstanding anything contrary in any law, usage, contract agreement, no person shall acquire or possess by transfer, exchange, lease, agreement or settlement of any land in any area or areas constituted into belts and blocks in contravention of the provisions of sub section (1). From the commencement of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act 1964 no document evidencing transaction for acquisition or possession of any land by way of transfer, exchange, lease, agreement or settlement shall be registered under the Indian Regulation Act 1908 if it appears to the registering authority that the transaction has been affected in contravention of the provisions of sub section (2)."

In spite of such benevolent measures from the Government

side, alienation of tribal lands falling under the tribal blocks continued which will be testified by the following data published by the Sub Committee of Advisory Council for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) on Settlement of Land in Tribal Belts and Blocks and of Forest Land, 1976.

Bhalukjari Tribal Block under Marigaon was constituted vide RD. 91/46/94 dated 17-11-50 to protect the interests of the tribals over land measuring 2466 Bighas under Marigaon Revenue Circle but 10 in-eligible persons have occupied 31 Bighas of land and 4 in-eligible persons have grabbed 13 bighas of patta lands inside the tribal blocks. Similarly 277 in-eligible persons have occupied 1153 bighas of land under Jamadari and Barangani pathar Tribal Blocks of Laharighat circle. In the same tribal block as many as 355 ineligible persons have occupied 2240 bighas of patta lands. There are three tribal blocks under Raha circle namely Bagariguri Tribal Block, Amchoi Tribal Block and Boronchila Tribal Block where 67 persons have illegally possessed 221 bighas of land and 88 ineligible persons got patta over 491 bighas of tribal land. The Table No. 2 shows the position of tribal land alienation in the I.T.D.P. areas of Assam.

TABLE - 2

No. of households transferred land to non tribals during last 10 years and from last 10 to 30 years

Category	No. of households	No. of households transferred land to non tribals during last 10 years		No. of households transferred land to non tribals during last 10-30 years	
		House-holds	percen-tage	House-holds	percen-tage
S. T.	179395	13029	7.26	10173	5.7
Others	151807	12427	8.18	9969	6.6
S. C.	19692	1255	6.37	906	4.6
Total	350894	26711	7.6	21048	6.00
I.T.D.Ps					

(Source :- Bench Mark Survey, Govt. of Assam, 1978)



It is seen that families possessing 20 hectares and above are nil and majority of the households are classed within the range of 1-0 to 5-0 hectares. As these lands include homestead lands also, real agricultural lands fall far short of the annual requirement of paddy.

Land alienation within and outside the tribal belts and blocks is one of the pressing problems within the entire Sub-plan areas of Assam particularly because of influx from other areas including Bangladesh, Nepal and Bihar. Apart from the special provisions under which tribal belts and blocks were created no special laws were enacted to protect the tribal land. The main drawback of the above provisions was that the members of the scheduled tribes and other inhabitants of the area (tribal belts and blocks) as on a particular date were treated at par and this helped the outsiders to claim the original inhabitant status.

Again due to various reasons, even the special provisions for belts and blocks have not been effectively implemented. As a result large scale alienation of tribal land within the project area has taken place. The Government of Assam weaponed with the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act 1947 tried to protect the tribals from the clutches of the land hungry outsiders. But still the problem could not be solved. Again an amendment of the said act had to be brought in the year 1964 wherein it was specifically mentioned that "notwithstanding anything contrary in any law, usage, contract agreement, no person shall acquire or possess by transfer, exchange, lease, agreement or settlement of any land in any area or areas constituted into belts and blocks in contravention of the provisions of sub section (1). From the commencement of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act 1964 no document evidencing transaction for acquisition or possession of any land by way of transfer, exchange, lease, agreement or settlement shall be registered under the Indian Regulation Act 1908 if it appears to the registering authority that the transaction has been affected in contravention of the provisions of sub section (2)."

In spite of such benevolent measures from the Government

side, alienation of tribal lands falling under the tribal blocks continued which will be testified by the following data published by the Sub Committee of Advisory Council for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) on Settlement of Land in Tribal Belts and Blocks and of Forest Land, 1976.

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Total I.T.D.Ps	350894	26711	7.6	21048	6.00

(Source :- Bench Mark Survey, Govt. of Assam, 1978)

The above data pin point magnitude of the problem of alienation of tribal land. The tribals are becoming restive and they want more positive action from the Government. The registering authority should be more vigilant in this regard.

#### **Tribal Indebtedness :**

A proverb goes that Indian villagers are born in debt, live in debt and die in debt. The truism of this proverb is more applicable in case of the Assam tribes, particularly plains tribes. There are certain basic characteristics governing the tribal agricultural economy.

These are, extreme dependence for livelihood on the primary sector, low participation rate in the tertiary and secondary sectors and chronic indebtedness. The problem of indebtedness in the tribal society is more or less related to the low per capita land holding and also to the practice of brewing rice beer. Rice brewing is one of the primary causes for absence of capital formation in the hands of the tribal cultivators. However poor a tribal may be, he has to perform various socio-religious ceremonies throughout the year where he spends considerable amount of money. As shown elsewhere the bulk of the tribal possess lands within the range of 1 to 5 hectares which includes homestead land. They can hardly afford the annual expenditures from agricultural sources. Thus they have to depend upon the local Mahajans. They prefer the payment in kind and not in cash, a condition which is most profitable to the lenders as the burden of the interest rate is not immediately felt by the borrower. In the Marigaon I.T.D.P. areas these unscrupulous Mahajans demand one mound of paddy (approx 38 kg.) for lending Rs. 20,00. The interest is collected just after the harvest.

In the Project area mainly the Bangladeshi refugee Mahajans act as money lenders. The Afghan nationals are not many in the Project areas.

The Assam Rural Indebtedness Relief Act 1975 has tried to solve the problem of rural indebtedness. Prior to this the Assam Money Lenders Act 1934 and the Assam Debt

Conciliation Act 1936 were not very much effective and as a result indigenous money lending at exorbitant rate of interest made much head way. It is seen that whatever institutional credit facilities are available in the rural areas, these have not reached the rural families who have become victims of exploitation. As a result the poorer section of the tribal families live in perpetual debt, lose their landed property thereby swelling the number of agricultural day labourers. Government have tried to solve this knotty problem by establishing banks and co-operative societies. But it is observed that Co-operative societies in the plains tribal areas are not making much progress. The G.P. level Co-operative societies did not function as desired due to various drawbacks particularly in management and implementation. The age old poverty and ignorance of the tribals are no less responsible in this regard.

The Assam Rural Indebtedness Relief Act 1976 proceeded in the right direction, although much remains to be done even after enactment of this piece of regulation. This act relieves the burden of indebtedness in respect of the scheduled debtor i.e. landless agricultural labourer and artisan belonging to scheduled tribe or scheduled caste with not more than 3 bighas of agricultural land in possession, the principal source of income being agriculture in case of agricultural labourer and practice of implement in case of an artisan. This Act has not solved the problem of entire rural indebtedness. Further it has not provided for an alternative source of credit required by the poor tribal families to replace the credit source of the private money lenders. What is required therefore, an institutional credit on easy terms and in an easy procedure to the poor tribal cultivators to meet their credit needs both for productive purposes and for family maintenance i.e. loans for solemnising festivals, marriage ceremonies and death rites.

What is probably most desirable is the formation of local capital among the tribals. If Government and other welfare agencies try to solve the problem of tribal indebtedness by distributing grants and loans, a time may come when the tribals

may solely depend upon grants and subsidies. Thus the idea of small savings should be installed in the minds of the tribals. It is observed that on the weekly hat days the villagers sell their local produce and spend the amount in purchasing their necessities. The petty money lenders or their agents gather in the hat and collect the instalments of their principal amount. Even the Mauzadars send tax collectors to the weekly hat to collect the annual land revenue. There is good scope for the small savings organisation to utilise the weekly hat days for deposit mobilisation scheme. The local unemployed educated youths may be utilised for this purpose on commission basis.

Co-operatives, if properly organised can play significant role in ameliorating the poor economic condition of the tribals. It would be worth while to mention a few concrete cases of rural indebtedness from the I.T.D.P. areas of Marigaon.

Most of the Lalungs of Niz Bhurbandha Gaon Panchayat take loans from the Bangladeshi Mahajans of the area in the month of July, August every year when their stock of paddy is exhausted. For a loan of Rs. 100,00 the Mahajans charge 5 mounds of paddy which the borrowers have to pay during harvesting season. Most of the villagers of Niz Bhurbandha Gaon Panchayat are, therefore, at the mercy of those Mahajans.

Majority of the villagers of Dhupguri under Kohtali Gaon Panchayat are indebted to the Marowari Mahajans of Marigaon, a sub Divisional Headquarter town. On an average each family in that village took Rs. 20,00 as loan during 1978. The Mahajans accepted only paddy in lieu of their money i.e. 5 mounds of paddy for Rs. 100.00. It is reported that the villagers take loans not only to meet their day to day expenditures in the lean months but also for casual and paltry expenses like visiting a relative in a distant village or going to the district headquarter town at Nagaon. Sometimes arrear dues accrue and are spilled over to the next year when the cultivation in a particular year is effected by flood or pests. In this way the villagers are perpetually in the clutches of the Mahajans.

Damal village under Baghara Gaon Panchayat is almost exclusively inhabited by the Lalungs and this is one of the backward areas of the Project. Except 2/3 households all the families are not self sufficient in agriculture. They depend upon the Marowari Mahajans for their requirement of paddy. For a loan of one mound of paddy the villagers have to pay 2 to 3 mounds of paddy. Every year this situation prevails and the villagers are at the mercy of the Mahajans. There are cases when the Mahajans grab the land of the debtor if the arrear dues accumulate. The Gaonbura of Topakuchi village under Raha G. P. narrated such acts of indebtedness. The modus operandi of the Mahajans is that they appoint middlemen from among the tribals themselves who share certain percentage of profit from the Mahajans.

It is seen that most of the tribals are indebted to money lenders and the role of traders and land lords is not prominent. The table shows this position.

**TABLE - 3**  
**No. of scheduled tribe households indebted to money lenders, landlords, traders etc.**

	Money lenders	Land lords	Traders	Total
Morigaon I.T.D.P.	1348	—	—	1348
Total for 19 I.T.D.Ps	36444	—	29	36473

(Source :- Bench Mark Survey, 1978, Govt. of Assam).

It may be noted that the tribals generally feel shy to mention about their indebtedness and it is very difficult to find out the gravity of the situation from the figures submitted to casual investigators.

In order to relieve the tribals of the age old problem of land alienation, and indebtedness the causes of these acute problems should be analysed and the suitable remedies suggested. In our considered opinion the causes of these problems broadly are :-

1. Grinding poverty of the tribals and consequent lean months' requirement of paddy.
2. Influx of large number of non tribal immigrants.
3. Ignorance of the tribal people in regard to the existence of prevailing law prohibiting the disposal of their lands in any form within tribal belts and blocks.
4. Unholy alliance between the officials responsible for registering documents and the non tribal purchaser.
5. Absence of proper machinery to look after the implementation of the provisions of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886 as amended up to date, in-spirit and action.
6. Apathy of the local tribal leaders towards the magnitude of the problem.
7. Absence of suitable institutional credit in the tribal areas.
8. The tendency on the part of the tribal people to secure money for any purpose by disposal of their only means of livelihood i.e. landed property.
9. Large scale avoidable expenditure in socio-religious occasions.
10. Consumption of rice beer.
11. Presence of vested interests among the tribals who act as middlemen between the money lenders and illiterate tribals.
12. Absence of traditional corporate living due to contact with non tribals which, however, is inevitable in the present circumstances.
13. Absence of easy institutional credit facilities. Most of the tribals do not have periodic patta. Many even do not possess periodic patta to attain eligibility to get loans.

In the light of the above, we may suggest certain remedies. All illegal transfers should be cancelled and lands transferred illegally should be restored to the tribals. A machinery should be created, involving non officials, to look after the implementation of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulations. Training of the tribals regarding prohibitory provisions of land within tribal belts and blocks should be organised. Cheap institutional credit facilities should be extended considering the special needs of the tribals. Efforts should be made to revitalise the traditional tribal Co-operative institutions. Co-operatives in the tribal areas should function as departmental stores catering to the multifarious needs of the tribals. At present stocks are limited in these societies and the supply of the controlled commodities is also irregular. Last but not least tribal welfare should be vested in the hands of dedicated persons who can not be tempted with easy pecuniary gains.



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## **Constraints of Tribal Development in the Plains Areas of Assam as Reflected in Few Studies Conducted by the Tribal Research Institute : Assam**

The Tribal Research Institute, Assam had so far conducted quite a good number of studies in various aspects of the tribal life, both plains and hills of Assam. These studies conducted under two broad heads namely Research and Evaluation, pin point the constraints, strategies of tribal development keeping in view the special requirements of various tribes which might have, nay, will surely have a bearing on the perspective planning for the development of the tribes of Assam.

For the present paper four published reports and one unpublished report have been taken into consideration which, I suppose, will focus the major constraints of development of the plains tribes of Assam. These reports were prepared on the basis of extensive field work in the far flung tribal areas of Assam by the faculty members of the Tribal Research Institute. It may be mentioned that reports of the Tribal Research Institute, Assam and for that matter reports of few other Tribal Research Institutes in India have been given due weightage by the Ministry of Welfare, Government of India. In this connection it is relevant to the comments appeared in the Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (April '79 -- March '80) Second Report of Government of India. "Most of the Tribal Research Institutes have completed about two decades of useful research..... Since the time of introduction of Sub Plan Schemes their working has acquired a new orientation and the institutes are contributing to the task of planning in the preparation of Tribal Sub Plan and other project reports including those of Modified Area Development Approach and Micro Projects for primitive tribes etc. Thus the tribal Research Institutes are

endeavouring to strike a healthy balance between the theoretical and practical research."

In the early sixties the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Government of India observed "The Tribal Research Institutes failed to play a functional role in bringing about the co-ordination of research with the formulation of Welfare of Planning". But the Tribal Research Institute Assam established only in early 1977 made honest efforts to contribute its might towards tribal welfare planning and the reports published so far have been able to make good impact on planners and administrators.

The Reports taken for discussion are :

### **A - Published Reports.**

1. Report on the Working of the Gaon Panchayat Level Co-operative Societies in Tribal Sub Plan Areas and LAMPs in the Hill Areas of Assam.
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4. Study on the Displacement of tribals due to Installation of Industrial and Irrigational Complexes - A Case Study of Dhansiri Irrigation Project in Darrang District.

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5. Study on the Problems of Forest Villages of Assam Inhabited by Tribals.

The above mentioned reports contain useful information on various problems of the plains and hill Tribes of Assam and suggestions for removing the constraints have been incorporated. Keeping in view the theme of the Seminar, the main thrust of the paper has been laid on constraints of tribal development with special reference to the plains tribes of Assam. Suggestions for

1. A Survey of Administration in Tribal Areas with Special Reference to Bihar Prasad, L.M. - Tribal Development and its Administration - Edited L.P. Vidyarthi, New Delhi-1971.

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The report indicated that the G.P.S.S. did not make sincere efforts to enroll all the Scheduled Tribe families. Only 10% of the societies out of 40 Nos of sample societies could claim to have tribal membership above 50%. Thus non tribals dominated the scene which was contrary to the formulation of T.S.P. concept. The tribals were disillusioned to find the contrast between the concept of co-operating and the spirit of official co-operation imposed on them.

Most of the loans issued were in the form of short term loans and even in this sphere the position was not encouraging. Out of 40 Nos of sample societies, 21 Nos offered S.T. loans to the members in 1975-76 but the figure came down to 10 in 1979-80. The reason for this was mainly the lack of credit worthiness of the potential borrowers.

Most of the tribals especially those living in the reserved forests did not possess title over their lands. It was also noticed that a few societies extended the benefit of loans to the marginal farmers whereas the actually needy agriculturists did not receive loans.

The co-operatives in the tribal areas were expected to provide the tribals with agricultural inputs but most of the societies under study presented a dismal picture in this regard. Only 4 Nos of societies had supplied agricultural inputs during the period from 1975-76 to 1979-80.

One of the major aims of establishing G.P.S.S. was to relieve the poor villagers from the clutches of the unscrupulous Mahajans. But the study presented a disheartening picture in this regard. The members of G.P.S.S. procured finance from sources like village Mahajans which included both tribals and non tribals. These Mahajans always deceived the poor tribals. For example in Boko G.P.S.S. area under Kamrup district the Mahajans charged 40 kg of paddy in lieu of the cash loan of Rs. 25.00. The prevailing market price for 40 kg of paddy was Rs.



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55.00 to Rs. 65.00. In Goreswar G.P.S.S. area Kabuli money-lenders charge 15% interest per month for their loans. In Salkocha G.P.S.S. area the rate of interest for Mahajan's loan was 35% to 40% . p.m.

Most of the G.P.S.S. areas are rich in raw materials for cottage industries such as cane, bamboo, reeds, silk-worm etc. but it was observed that the G.P.S.S. did not make much effort to utilise the resources. The societies could help these industries by providing financial assistance, raw materials at subsidised rate and arranging market for the products.

Oftentimes unemployed youths have been encouraged to engage themselves in self help activities for which government assistance is liberally extended. In tribal areas the G.P.S.S. could act as catalytic agent in this regard but in fact the societies could do precious little to minimise the unemployment problem. The G.P.S.S. could extend substantial help and guidance to the unemployed youths by establishing cottage industries like oil ghani, paddy husking, khandsari, chakki unit, brick making, bamboo and cane furniture industries, pineapple preservation unit, Eri and Silk industries, 'Miri Jim', 'shoulder bags' etc.

The G.P.S.S. were however burdened with a problem in respect of liberal granting of loans. The loan outstanding position acted as deterrent in the smooth functioning of the G.P.S.S. The loan outstanding increased from Rs. 1,16,580.00 in 1975-76 to Rs. 6,93,989.00 in 1979-80. The poor economic condition of the tribals is the major hindrance in this regard. Besides the G.P.S.S. office bearers did not consider one important factor seriously in the matter of realisation of the loans. The villagers generally prefer to repay the outstanding loan just after the harvesting operations and the co-operative society office bearers could have taken this opportunity to realise the outstanding loans.

Credit and marketing are the two major activities of G.P.S.S. but in the present set up the two activities were kept in separate watertight compartments. Except procurement of paddy the G.P.S.S. did not purchase other surplus products like handicrafts, ericocoons, horticultural products, cash crops, objects

of art etc. Co-operative credit can play major role in changing the economic structure of the tribals. Dr. Gadgil gives due emphasis on this particular aspect of co-operative society which only can relieve the tribal villagers from the age old burden of debt. "The Co-operative credit is most suited for agricultural needs.....Loans for current agricultural needs such as seed, manure etc. and for consumption should be strictly repayable at the end of the agricultural season each year. Loans for intermediate periods for productive purposes such as the purchase of bullocks and implements etc. and for certain non productive purposes such as ceremonial expenditure which are rendered necessary by the special circumstances and the psychological make up of the farmers might be advanced by society to the extent of its own resources in share capital and reserves and any intermediate term finance it is able to obtain from the central financing agency".<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Transfer and Alienation of Tribal Land in Assam

Probably the most glaring constraint of tribal development particularly in the plains district of Assam is the alienation of land and indebtedness. The National Seminar on Alienation of Tribal Land and Indebtedness organised by Tribal Research Institute, Assam, at Guwahati during March 1984 discussed this social malady. The author's paper entitled 'Land Alienation and Indebtedness in the ITDP Areas of Assam. A Case Study of Marigaon ITDP' also highlighted this problem.

Land alienation is something like a historical process and the victims are reconciled to their fate. There is hardly any consciousness among the tribals about this economic problem which is so much deep rooted that all the tribal development programmes in an agriculture based economy are handicapped by the induction of this age old economic constraint. The characteristic feature of this phenomenon is that this a legacy of generations and a gradual process in which the tribals are compelled to transfer their lands to other tribals and non tribals as a last resort to survive.

3. General Reoprt of the committee of Directors, All India Rural Credit Survey.

55.00 to Rs. 65.00. In Goreswar G.P.S.S. area Kabuli money-lenders charge 15% interest per month for their loans. In Salkocha G.P.S.S. area the rate of interest for Mahajan's loan was 35% to 40% p.m.

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The egalitarian indigenous societies enjoin on its members certain social obligations and to fulfil those obligations money is urgently required. Cash is also required for meeting necessary expenses in connection with marriage of a son or daughter, death rites and other socio-religious ceremonies. The tribal people spend considerable sum of money on these occasions and majority of them are so vulnerable economically that they are not expected to spend even a quarter of the sum of money spent. The poor tribal families have no other source of getting money other than selling their lands to the Mahajans who are in majority cases non tribals. The land hungry Mahajans are keeping the poverty stricken tribals under their grip for generations.

Land alienation within and outside the tribal belts and blocks is one of the pressing problems in the T.S.P. areas mainly due to the influx from other areas including Bangladesh, Nepal and Bihar. The Government of Assam weaponed with the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act 1947 tried to protect the tribals from the clutches of the land hungry outsiders. But still the problem could not be solved. Again an amendment of the said Act had to be brought in 1964 where in it was specially mentioned that "notwithstanding anything contrary in any law, usage, contract, agreement no person shall acquire or possess by transfer, exchange, lease, agreement or settlement of any land in any area or areas constituted into belts and blocks in contravention of the provisions of Sub-Section (1). From the commencement of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act 1964 no document evidencing transaction for acquisition or possession of any land by way of transfer, exchange, usage, agreement or settlement shall be registered under the Indian Registration Act 1908 if it appears to the registering authority that the transaction has been affected in contravention of the provisions of Sub-Section (2)".

In spite of such measures from government side alienation of tribal land falling under the tribal belts and blocks continued which has been corroborated by the Report of the Sub-Committee of Advisory Council for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) on

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A more serious constraint for tribal development in Assam Plains is the chronic indebtedness. The problem of indebtedness in various tribal societies is more or less related to low per capita land holding, lack of modern scientific method of agriculture, lack of infrastructural facilities, practice of brewing rice beer in large quantities during festivals etc. The bulk of the tribals possess land within range of 1-5 hectares which include homestead land. Most of the villagers can hardly afford to meet the annual essential expenditures from agricultural products. Thus they have to depend upon the local Mahajans.

The Assam Rural Indebtedness Relief Act 1975 has made attempts to solve the problem of rural indebtedness. Prior to this the Assam Money Lenders' Act 1943 and Assam Debt Conciliation Act 1936 were not very effective and as a result indigenous money lending at exorbitant rate of interest made much headway. In this connection we may refer to the Report of the Agricultural Finance Sub-Committee 1945 headed by Dr. D.R. Gadgil which has relevance even today. "We recommend a strict regulation of the business of the money lender....The money lenders have adopted many indigenous methods to get round the provisions of the law. The experience of almost all countries including those where the standard of literacy is very high and where the public is in a position to deal with the money lenders more or less on an equal footing is that regulation is seldom a success unless institutional credit is developed on a wide scale : institutional credit alone by force of competition can prevent the money lenders from deviating from the fair dealings prescribed by the law.....It you make the co-operative better the money lender would recede into the background."<sup>4</sup>

It has been observed that whatever credit facilities are available in the rural areas the same have not percolated to the really needy families. The poorer section of the tribals lives in

4. Reorganisation of Rural Credit in India, Gadgil, D. R. Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics, No 2 (April-June 1956) P. 123.

perpetual debt and loses their landed property thereby swelling the number of agricultural day labourers. The co-operative societies and branches of nationalised banks have been established in the rural areas to tackle this problem but co-operative societies are not doing much so far the credit aspect is concerned.

The grinding poverty of the tribals and consequent 'lean months' requirement of paddy, influx of large number of non-tribal immigrants, ignorance of the tribal people in regard to the existence of prevailing law prohibiting the disposal of their lands in any form within tribal belts and blocks, unholy alliance between the officials responsible for registering documents and non tribal purchasers, apathy of the local tribal leaders towards magnitude of the problem, absence of suitable institutional credit in the tribal areas, the tendency of the tribal people to borrow money for any purpose by dispensing of their only means of livelihood i.e. landed property, large scale avoidable expenditure in socio-religious occasions, presence of vested interests among the tribals who act as middlemen between the money lenders and illiterate tribals, absence of corporate living due to contact with non tribals etc. are the major constraints so far as the alienation of tribal land and indebtedness among the plain tribes of Assam is concerned.

### **3. Impact of Enforcing Liquor Prohibition on the Boro-Kacharis in a Rural Setting :**

Oten it has been alleged that brewing and consumption of rice beer hamper the economic progress of the tribals and therefore prohibition is recommended. In order to ascertain the impact of enforcing liquor prohibition among the Boro-Kacharis a study was conducted by the Assam Tribal Research Institute during 1978-81. Two Boro Kachari villages namely Baragari and Ghilaguri under Datoma Tribal Development Block of Kokrajhar district were selected for the study. Necessary field data were collected on the basis of 100% household survey. There were 106 Nos of households in Ghilaguri village with a total population of 632 while the Baragari village with 141 Nos of households had a total population of 457.

The study revealed an interesting picture in respect of rice beer brewing and consumption by the Boro Kacharis. The popular belief that rice beer consumption is a part and parcel of tribal socio-cultural life and consumption of rice beer hinders progress has been nullified especially in the case of the Boro Kacharis of Kokrajhar district.

The Baragari village was noticeably advanced in the field of education. This unfamiliar phenomenon was peculiar to this village. It was found that rice-brewing and selling was done by some families to meet the educational expenditures of the college going students who were prosecuting their studies at Guwahati. It was also found that the villagers were suffering from acute economic hardship as they had insufficient agricultural lands. Income from other supplementary sources was also not reckonable. Therefore a sizeable section of the villagers had been forced by circumstances to illicit distillation of rice beer and to earn their livelihood as well as to meet the cost of education of their wards. It may be mentioned that the percentage of literacy in the village was 25.67 (male 39% female 11.4%) as per 1971 census where as the State percentage of literacy was 28.72.

In contrast the Ghilaguri village was not much advanced educationally although the economy of the village was comparatively better than Baragari village. The percentage of literacy was only 18.3 (male 26.7%, female 9.5%). Another interesting picture of the village was that inspite of economic affluency the villagers discarded the habit of rice beer brewing and consumption. The women folk of Datama area were strictly against brewing and selling of rice beer and in furtherance of the effort to implement prohibition they raided the illicit dens of Baragari village on several occasions and in the process they had to undergo social boycott and physical injury. The women folk of Datama including some women of Baragari village preferred total prohibition as they had to bear the pangs of sufferings most. They appealed the excise authorities to stop the menace but the excise authorities had certain difficulties in this

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regard. They had to restrain themselves in dealing with the tribal people who resorted to illicit distillation under the cover of restricted permit offered by Government. The Assam Liquor Prohibition Act 1962 sanctioning brewing of rice beer for tribals at the rate of 3 litres per family had more often been dishonoured and this permission helped the people to brew rice beer in unlimited quantities. The government also could not do away with this licence as the Boro Kacharis, particularly the traditionalists wanted rice beer for their religious ceremonies.

#### **4. Study on the Displacement of the Tribals due to Installation of Industrial and Irrigational Complex - A Case study of Dhansiri Irrigation Project of Darrang District**

Tribal Development in the plains of Assam has been beset with another recent man made constraint i.e. installation of major industrial and irrigational complexes and consequent displacement of the tribals. Although in Assam displacement of the tribals due to the said installations of industries has not taken place significantly, yet the impact of the few industries on the tribals cannot be underestimated.

The Dhansiri Irrigation Project of Darrang district was taken up by the Tribal Research Institute, Assam for studying the extent of displacement of tribals due to the installation of the Project. The report was published in 1984.

The Project is located at Odalguri Sub-Division of Darrang district and investigation was made in 23 Nos. of tribal villages in and around Odalguri town and Rowta Charali. The villages are primarily inhabited by the Boro Kacharies, a major plains tribe of Assam. The study reveals that altogether 1001 Nos of tribal families had lost about 1184 Bighas of land which includes cultivable as well as homestead. The acquisitioned land included periodic patta land, annual lease land, and T.B. land (Tauzi Bahira land). Due to acquisition of land some families became landless. The lands that remained after acquisition proved uneconomic. The affected families had to sell those lands and leave the traditional hearth and home with disgust. Many families did not

get compensation as their cases were still to be decided by the court. The authorities did not provide alternative lands in lieu of the acquired lands. The displaced families had to wait for 4 to 6 years to receive the compensation and as a result they could not purchase the equal amount of land lost with the money received as compensation at a much later date. Displacement has made the families poorer as they could not utilise the cash judiciously. They had not cultivated the habit of saving money. Compensation paid in instalments further worsened the condition of the poor tribals.

Till 1983 there were 343 Nos of acquisition cases pending at various stages and on various grounds. One could realise the sufferings of the affected families who were compelled to consider the Project as a bane and not as a boon. They raised a few points while criticising the attitude of indifference of the concerned authorities in computing compensation for the acquired land. The authorities did not consider the demand of substitute land in lieu of the compensation in cash. Thus it was felt that while installing a major irrigation project or an industry in a tribal area the families that are likely to be affected should be identified first and a full fledged rehabilitation scheme on the basis of this identification should be incorporated in the project report.

#### **5. Study on the problems of Forest Villages of Assam Inhabited by Tribals**

A sizeable section of the scheduled tribes of Assam plains live inside the reserved forests who are classified as forest villagers. They are governed under the Rules for Establishment of Forest Villages and overall provision of the Assam Forest Regulation Act 1891. After the formulation of the reservation of forests during British rule considerable importance was given to the scientific and systematic management of forests. Initially the authorities had to face certain problems in respect of manpower as in those days density of population in or near the forest areas was remarkably low. In fact most of the forest areas were devoid of population except for a few dispersed pockets of indigenous tribal population. Assam in those days particularly



before independence was famous for dreaded diseases like Malaria, Kalazar, wild animals and contagious magic. Habitation was difficult as most of the forests besides being inaccessible was known to be highly Malaria and Kalazar infested zones. Communication facilities were conspicuous by their absence as the forest regions were located in far flung areas at a considerable distance from the main commercial and administrative centres. It was a difficult task to mobilize labour force for harvesting and sylvicultural operations. People moved from place to place in search of safe residential areas. The inhospitable ecology coupled with absence of roads and transport facilities made the lives of the people miserable. The forest authorities had a trying time to procure labour force. Against this backdrop the necessity for creation of a regular labour force was urgently felt and the concept of forest village gained currency. Forest villages were set up within the limits of reserved forests in the nineties of the last century, 1904-05 to be precise. At the outset 35 Nos. of forest villages covering three erstwhile districts were established. Today the number of forest villages increased to 524 Nos with a total population of 1,50,233 comprising 20,694 families. There are 234 Nos of forest villages inhabited by tribals i.e. villages having 50% or more tribals.

In Assam no systematic study in respect of the problems of the forest villages inhabited by tribals has yet been made. The Tribal Research Institute, Assam has undertaken the study on the problems of tribal forest villages in the later part of 1987. Twenty three Nos. of tribal forest villages have been selected on the basis of 10% sample and field data of the said villages have been collected. Certain field observation in respect of the problems of the said villages have been recorded below.

Initially the forest villagers had no problems so far as land was concerned. Every villager was allotted 5 Bighas of land including homestead land. Besides, each working member living in that household was entitled to receive 10 Bighas of land. The ceiling, however was fixed at 35 Bighas of land. It may be noted that the forest villagers do not possess the right of transfer of land and they are given only the right of use and occupancy

over their lands. In lieu of the facilities offered by the Forest Department, the forest villagers are required to render 5 days free labour to the Department which entitled them to the privileges of free grazing, 10 Nos. of cart loads of firewood annually and house-building materials free of royalty. With these facilities offered by the Forest Department the forest dwellers could maintain a peaceful life with their limited wants. But problem arose when members of the family increased and shrinkage of forest areas started due to illegal felling of trees. The forest villagers became unhappy when they found that their relatives are in a better position in the neighbouring areas of the forests only because they are within the jurisdiction of Gaon Panchayats.

As mentioned earlier forest villages are governed under the Rules for Establishment of Forest Villages and they are kept outside the purview of Panchayati Raj System. Thus they are expected to be content with what the Forest Department provides. Of late population of the forest villages is increasing rapidly. Due to the opening of the far flung forest areas with modern infra-structural facilities, the pressure on forests is increasing. In most cases the figures of households in the official records do not tally with those of the actual households in the field. The limit of utilisation of forest land for non forestry purposes in such villages has exceeded leaving no scope for further extension. The actual area of cultivable land per family is greatly reduced. It appears if the pattern continues further, land holding of individual families will be further fragmented leaving no scope for economic viability. The Forest Department is compelled to curtail certain amenities to these villagers.

The forest villages are not having even the basic necessities. The condition of the roads, which are mostly managed by the Forest Department is pitiable. There are forest villages which are not approachable during summer. Less said the better about the condition of the L P School buildings. Health facilities are not easily available. Sometimes condition of a patient becomes serious on way to the dispensary while carrying him or her in a 'thela' or push cart. There are 223 Nos of ring wells. 35 Nos of tube wells and 10 Nos of tanks which are grossly inadequate.

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Not all the forest villages have L P Schools as there are only 378 L P Schools in 524 Nos of forest villages. There are 47 Nos of M E Schools and on an average the students have to walk 5 kms to attend H. E. Schools. It is relevant to point out that most of these facilities are of pre-independence period and if we compare the socio-economic condition of the forest villages with that of the fellow scheduled tribe villages lying outside the reserved forests, a very disheartening picture emerges. The forest villagers do not get bank loans because their lands are not mortgageable. They want the forest villages should be brought under Revenue Department so that they may get the facilities enjoyed by non forest villagers. Of late Government of Assam is seriously taking up this matter.

The 1984-85 Tribal Forest Village Development Scheme sponsored by the Central Government with an outlay of Rs. 266.00 lakhs for economic development of the tribal forest villages could hardly do much to ameliorate the age old backwardness of the forest villagers. It is not understood why the scheme was discontinued. The condition of the forest villagers is such that even after declaration of the forest villages as revenue villages some special measures like that of 1984-85 Tribal Forest Development Scheme should be undertaken to bring these villages at par with fellow tribal villages lying outside the reserved forests.

#### Conclusion :

What emerges from the above is that the welfare schemes are formulated well keeping in view the socio-economic upliftment of the target group i.e. scheduled tribes but main lacuna lies in the implementation. For example at present there is no alternative to co-operation and G.P.S.S. in the tribal areas staffed by dedicated staff and dedicated members of the managing committee will surely be able to deliver the goods. The high officials of the co-operative Department should pay regular visits to the G.P.S.S. which is not done at present. Besides boosting morale of the staff of G.P.S.S. this will act as a check in the malpractices. Bage rightly observes, "As an administrator and as a man among the masses I know why a government machinery

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Rice beer consumption by the tribal people is a traditional necessity which has close link with most of their socio-religious ceremonies. However a tendency towards decreased consumption, at least in the day-to-day life, has been noticed. The village under investigation i.e. Ghilaguri may be an example. The people of this Boro Kachari village having faith both on traditional beliefs and Brahmaism are discarding the rice beer habit without causing any imbalance to their socio-religious beliefs and practices.

As regards displacement of tribals due to installation of industrial and irrigational complexes, the suggestion for rehabilitation of the affected families instead of cash relief, that too in instalments, incorporated in the Tribal Research Institute Report should be implemented. While preparing project report this rehabilitation aspect should invariably be included in the report.

Tribal forest villagers are most vulnerable section of the tribals as nothing tangible could be done for their upliftment during the plan periods. They are facing acute shortage of

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Not all the forest villages have L P Schools as there are only 378 L P Schools in 524 Nos of forest villages. There are 47 Nos of M E Schools and on an average the students have to walk 5 kms to attend H. E. Schools. It is relevant to point out that most of these facilities are of pre-independence period and if we compare the socio-economic condition of the forest villages with that of the fellow scheduled tribe villages lying outside the reserved forests, a very disheartening picture emerges. The forest villagers do not get bank loans because their lands are not mortgageable. They want the forest villages should be brought under Revenue Department so that they may get the facilities enjoyed by non forest villagers. Of late Government of Assam is seriously taking up this matter.

The 1984-85 Tribal Forest Village Development Scheme sponsored by the Central Government with an outlay of Rs. 266.00 lakhs for economic development of the tribal forest villages could hardly do much to ameliorate the age old backwardness of the forest villagers. It is not understood why the scheme was discontinued. The condition of the forest villagers is such that even after declaration of the forest villages as revenue villages some special measures like that of 1984-85 Tribal Forest Development Scheme should be undertaken to bring these villages at par with fellow tribal villages lying outside the reserved forests.

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## **Status Of Plains Tribal Women With Special Reference To The Mishing Women As Reflected In 'Oi Nitams' Proverbs And Legends**

Very little scientific study was made in respect of the socio cultural life of the plains tribes of Assam which constituted a sizable chunk of the population of Assam. No where the term plains tribes is found in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act 1976 but nine numbers of tribes mentioned in the Scheduled Part II. Assam under item 15, in the state of Assam excluding Autonomous district have been considered as plains tribes. These are Barmans of Cachar, Boro-Boro Kachari, Deori, Hojai, Kachari Sonowal, Lalung, Mech, Miri and Rabha and they are mainly found in the two valley districts of Assam. As per 1971 Census these tribes constitute 9.18% of the total state population. The Boro Kacharis with 610459 population followed by the Miris (Mishings) with 259551 constituted 45.41 and 18.31% of the total scheduled tribe population of the plains tribes as per 1971 Census.

Of late studies on various aspects of these communities have been made but practically no focus is given to the problems of the tribal women. Except a few lines depicting more or less equal status given to the tribes, no exhaustive study was yet been made on the status of tribal women.

The word status may have various meanings and it may vary from country to country, people to people or tribe to tribe. Status depends largely on the qualities or attributes which are considered essential in a particular society. The status of an individual in tribal society may be considered in this perspective. In the tribal society division of labour between the sexes is scrupulously maintained. Certain spheres like child rearing, food gathering, cooking, weaving, preparing rice beer, fire wood

collecting etc. are exclusively meant for the womenfolk. The menfolk except in special circumstances do not trespass into the domain of the women. Similarly there are specific activities for menfolk like hunting, ploughing, wood work, metal work, stone work, house buildings etc. Even in these fields the contribution of womenfolk cannot be underestimated because womenfolk perform most of the other household activities relieving the menfolk to do their exclusive work. The menfolk therefore do not and cannot think that they are a superior lot and likewise the women develop no complex that they are neglected. The sexes are not status conscious and there is mutual co-operation between the sexes in each other's activities.

Generally status means the position or rank in relation to others. It may also mean a rank in the hierarchial order. Status is variable. For example the status of the Gaonbura in the tradition bound societies has undergone metamorphic changes in view of spread of education and changing leadership from the Gaonbura to the educated elite section. Similarly the status of tribal womenfolk in the present day tribal societies varies considerably comparing the status prevalent a few decades ago. No longer an educated tribal youth prefers to marry a daughter of the Gaonbura or a rich man of the village simply because she is daughter of the Gaonbura. An educated tribal boy seeks an educated girl as a life long partner, although the economic standard may not tally. The concept of status is also changing along with the attitudinal changes.

By and large, the changes in most cases are superfluous and the tradition gets upperhand. Education among the tribal women is not spreading in the desired lines and thus impact of change of status of women is only marginal. Status of women in the tribal setting has a wider connotation. It is observed that a husband takes suggestion from his wife in family matters and the wife too decides matters as approved by the husband. The exclusiveness in certain spheres does not debar a woman from exercising her authority in the wider family affairs. Certain issues like whether the children should be sent to school or engaged in

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household activities, which boy or should be a match for the marriageable, daughter, whether a particular household deity should be worshipped in a particular month or day (Women's health as well as menstrual period has to be counted) etc. are decided oftentimes by the women which are generally not vetoed by the men. Of course there are exclusive spheres for the men like the village council where women must not take part unless required by the elders as witness. But the womenfolk do not grumble for this nor the feeling of negligence by the menfolk is reflected in their attitude. Evens Pritchard (1965, 51-52) therefore observes, "Looking at her social position from outside and from our point of view we may say that she has an inferior position and she is not resentful on account of it. She sees herself as different from man and as having a social status different from him but if we may state her attitude in our own way of speaking it is for her less a matter of level than of difference of status. Primitive women do not see themselves as an under privileged class against a class of men with whom they seek to gain social quality. They also never heard of social equality and also they do not want to be like men".

In this backdrop let us examine the case of status of plains tribal women of Assam placed in a patrilineal type of inheritance and patrilocal residence. The plains tribes are found in the plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys. Their habitations are interspersed with non tribal population. Naturally sizable section of the plains tribals is an assimilated and accultured people. Sanskritisation process is visible in many of them. Thus the status of plains tribal women cannot be treated in the typical tribal background of olden days. The cultural ethos of non tribals have penetrated into the domain of the tribals. Spread of education, expansion of trade and business' activities in or near a tribal village, have affected the traditional socio-cultural values, modes and morals. The role of tribal womenfolk has undergone some changes in the changing surroundings. Evens Pritchard's observation is relevant in this regard. "Women's position in society is in the long run dependent on every body's position, that we all stand or fall together" (Evans Pritchard 1965,55).

Among the Mishings (a riverine plains tribe of Assam) the womenfolk play significant role in the society. Women are treated as partners in the day to day life. There are folk songs (Oi Nitam') where women are regarded as one's friend, philosopher and guide. One gets inspiration to shoulder the life's burden with the company of the sweet heart.

*'Kaje Oiya, Molaji  
Arjida Gam Akumka  
Awanari Poukampou  
Donyi Polo Dak Kampau'*

(Meaning - come my beloved, constructing a humble cottage on the bank of the beautiful river. Suwansiri let us live together as husband and wife. Under the moon and the sun and beneath the vast expanse of the sky we will pass our days in that humble cottage).

To the Mishing youths girls are the epitome of beauty. Every limb of beloved is pleasing to the eyes. Even the shadow is considered as golden and eye-catching

*'Oi Oi Oisiri Amigolog Miksiri  
Yal Lopou Genenom Kapau Moula  
Duhyenou'*

(Meaning - Beauty pervades through all the organs of your body. O my beloved! Even your golden shadow is a treat to the eyes).

Woman are a source of inspiration to maintain a congenial conjugal life. A Mishing can bear all the sufferings if he gets his beloved.

*'Garu Al Lagi Mang Men Jek Ae Lagimang  
Oi Nam Pamil Kayuba Takla Daye'*

(Meaning - There is no need of buffaloes or bullocks for ploughing the fields. I am lucky because I got you as my wife. I will cultivate with spade alone).

household activities, which boy or should be a match for the marriageable, daughter, whether a particular household deity should be worshipped in a particular month or day (Women's health as well as menstrual period has to be counted) etc. are decided oftentimes by the women which are generally not vetoed by the men. Of course there are exclusive spheres for the men like the village council where women must not take part unless required by the elders as witness. But the womenfolk do not grumble for this nor the feeling of negligence by the menfolk is reflected in their attitude. Evens Pritchard (1965, 51-52) therefore observes, "Looking at her social position from outside and from our point of view we may say that she has an inferior position and she is not resentful on account of it. She sees herself as different from man and as having a social status different from him but if we may state her attitude in our own way of speaking it is for her less a matter of level than of difference of status. Primitive women do not see themselves as an under privileged class against a class of men with whom they seek to gain social quality. They also never heard of social equality and also they do not want to be like men".

In this backdrop let us examine the case of status of plains tribal women of Assam placed in a patrilineal type of inheritance and patrilocal residence. The plains tribes are found in the plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys. Their habitations are interspersed with non tribal population. Naturally sizable section of the plains tribals is an assimilated and acculturated people. Sanskritisation process is visible in many of them. Thus the status of plains tribal women cannot be treated in the typical tribal background of olden days. The cultural ethos of non tribals have penetrated into the domain of the tribals. Spread of education, expansion of trade and business activities in or near a tribal village, have affected the traditional socio-cultural values, modes and morals. The role of tribal womenfolk has undergone some changes in the changing surroundings. Evens Pritchard's observation is relevant in this regard. "Women's position in society is in the long run dependent on every body's position, that we all stand or fall together" (Evans Pritchard 1965,55).

Among the Mishings (a riverine plains tribe of Assam) the womenfolk play significant role in the society. Women are treated as partners in the day to day life. There are folk songs (Oi Nitam') where women are regarded as one's friend, philosopher and guide. One gets inspiration to shoulder the life's burden with the company of the sweet heart.

*'Kaje Oiya, Molaji*

*Arjida Gam Akumka*

*Awanari Poukampou*

*Donyi Polo Dak Kampau'*

(Meaning - come my beloved, constructing a humble cottage on the bank of the beautiful river. Suwansiri let us live together as husband and wife. Under the moon and the sun and beneath the vast expanse of the sky we will pass our days in that humble cottage).

To the Mishing youths girls are the epitome of beauty. Every limb of beloved is pleasing to the eyes. Even the shadow is considered as golden and eye-catching

*'Oi Oi Oisiri Amigolog Miksiri*

*Yal Lopou Genenom Kapau Moula*

*Duhyenou'*

(Meaning - Beauty pervades through all the organs of your body. O my beloved! Even your golden shadow is a treat to the eyes).

Woman are a source of inspiration to maintain a congenial conjugal life. A Mishing can bear all the sufferings if he gets his beloved.

*'Garu Al Lagi Mang Men Jek Ae Lagimang*

*Oi Nam Pamil Kayuba Takla Daye'.*

(Meaning - There is no need of buffaloes or bullocks for ploughing the fields. I am lucky because I got you as my wife. I will cultivate with spade alone).

The Women, too, prefer a life companion who is proficient in the realm of cultivation. They know very well that agriculture done systematically and sincerely alone can bring prosperity. As she will have to play a role in the smooth functioning of the family, the husband must be a true agriculturist and not a day dreamer. Thus in 'Oi Nitam' the beloved sings:

*'Mela Dula Kapiyen Person Maril Dagne-do  
Gimanei Kapiyen Ager Ela Daned'.*

(Meaning - If one is always conscious in dresses then he finds no time to work and becomes lazy. Instead of marrying a fashion conscious man it is better to marry an energetic and diligent peasant).

A Mishing's desire to get his sweet heart is sometimes frustrated due to social restrictions. The Siyang river does not stand in the way as Mishing people are expert boat pliers but the economic disparity and social status put hindrances.

*'Nokke Dolung Kakonse  
Nokke Dolung Kekonse  
Siyange Asi Dungkonna  
Kali Dakgom Kapama'*

(Meaning - Your village is on this bank and my village is on the other, separated by the Siyang river the thirst of seeing you has never been satiated).

Among the Mishings arranged marriages are few and far between and young girls prefer eloped marriages which have social recognition. The girls develop love towards the lovers during Ali-Ai-Ligang and Po-Rag festival dancing sequences and they marry their lovers without studying the consequences. Sometime the advice of parents are of no avail. But in the later life they repent.

*'A Babke Lavirde Mirsi Dikpe Digdang  
Menamoke Lunamde Alotipe Tigadai*

*A Baobi Ludagai Ngoluk Bikala Gilankka  
Memura Sula Gikala Sempin Dugem Patku*

(Meaning - The advice of my parents burnt me like hot chillies whereas my lover's pleadings appeared to be testy salt. My parents advised me to accept the boy they selected for me but I, an accursed soul, was tempted towards my lover as if to shoulder the burden of this pang of poverty althrough the life).

As mentioned earlier the process of acculturation deeply penetrated into the living pattern of the plains tribes and the same can be traced in the 'Anu Nitams'. Here we have noticed that a beloved is considered as Radha and the lover as Krishna. It may be noted that the Mishings maintain their love and separation is unheard :

*Oi Ya Radabi Na Oiya Krishnabi Na  
Oi Ya Muruli Bedung  
Gakula Brindabane Addung Kadung  
Ngoike Biuwe Adung  
Kayumnam ....*

*Dunme Dumyabulu Dumdum Mandung  
Pirme Yame Bulu Pempem Muddung*

*Namil Naseibulu Nitam Madung  
Pantai Plaibulu Paksa Sadung  
Ngoike Sisang Oiya Biupe Baddung  
Oiya Kapsang  
Oiya Tatpasang  
Kamnam.....*

(Meaning - Oh my darling, you are Radha and I am Krishna. The divine flute is pouring melodious tune. The Gakula and the Brindabana are surcharged with that tune. Our Bihu is approaching. Dunam and Dumayam are beating the drums. Pirmi and Yame are playing with pipes. Namil and Nasei are singing songs. Pantai and Paloi are dancing. Our youth has found

expression in the Bihu. Therefore, my darling, let me enjoy your dance once and let me hear your song once).

Mishings glorify the women not only in the youthful days but the company of the beloved is sought although, even after death.

*'Chapori Oi Chapori Chapan Dolo Ramad Kapam  
Ai Ngonyik Mikkide Yipam Suyepe'.*

(Though the mortal remains of your being will be cremated in this bank and mine will be on the other, yet the smoke of the cremation ground will unite both of us).

The Mishing women contribute their mite for the well are of the families and one will be surprised to see the busy schedules of the Mishing women if he passes a night in a Mishing house. They leave their beds when the cocks crow before dawn. Pounding of rice starts before dawn while the elderly women remain busy in cooking meals. By the time the sun changes its red hue, they complete the preliminaries in the agricultural operations.

In the Oi Nitams women's role in agricultural operations is reflected in the following song.

*'Ame Oiya Gayuma  
Muti Oiya Tiyuma  
Anke Logne Asido  
Kasi Nale Bomyma*

(Meaning - Oh, my darling, how you look beautiful at reaping crops, you look so nice while spreading the sheaves in the water abrest, you look so charming with the sickle).

Not only the womenfolk help their men in agricultural activities and other household culinary chores, they weave clothes for all the members of the household. The 'Miri Jims' woven by the Mishing women are prestigious pieces of art. The womenfolk have nothing to grumble for all these activities. A Mishing woman may not be allowed to become member of the 'Kebang' (Village

Council) but for that she does not feel that she is neglected or ignored. They know it very well that traditionally 'Kebang' or 'Bane Kebang' has been a male prerogative and they have observed that the menfolk have high estimation for them in the day to day life.

The supreme goddess of the Mishings is the 'Ane Donyi (mother Sun). The 'tiri Bora' (an official to supervise the activities of the women during 'Porag' festival) plays significant role in the Mishing society. Another indicator of women's better position in the society is the prevalence of widow remarriage. Again the system of bride price although nominal, indicates that women are treated as invaluable asset for the family.

Among the Mishings men and women are seen dancing and singing in groups during socio religious ceremonies. Collective action during the celebrations of rituals, magical beliefs and practices, worship of deities, marriages etc. is the characteristic feature. Women in all these occasions play equal role with men. The society provides equal opportunities to all men and women and the entire community is inter woven with permanent tie of perpetual unity, co-operation and organised effort.

Although the Mishings glorify the womenfolk in their 'Oi Nitams' and women's role is recognised in the smooth functioning of the conjugal life, yet there is no dearth of proverbs and folk tales depicting women as root cause of all evils. A proverb goes like this.

*'Ampe Pemilaka Megga Guda  
Neng Amelaka Ayaryang Lenda'*

(Meaning - A neglected fire burns the house. Females are the root cause of all evils).

In a folk story of Mishings' arrival in the plains we find how the beautiful girl named Turi caused irreparable damage to the eternal peace between the two villages. The story goes like this, Moying was a handsome young boy of Minyong clan. There was a very beautiful girl in the Damra villages named Turi. When she grew up her father announced that his daughter would

be married to a wrestler only. In those days wrestling was the prevalent custom in the Mishing society to judge the valour of the contestant youths. Hearing Turi's father's announcement, Moying proceeded towards Damra village. Moying was a famous wrestler and could easily defeat the rivals of Damra village. Turi's father was glad to find such a suitable match for his daughter and gave his daughter in marriage to Moying. Moying returned to his village along with his beautiful wife.

The young boys of Damra village wanted to take revenge upon Moying. As per custom after a few days of marriage the son-in-law has to pay a visit to the father-in-law's house accompanied by the wife. He should bring rice beer pots (Apong) also. Accordingly Moying proceeded to the father-in-law's house with wife and other articles of food. In Damra village the young unmarried boys prepared a feast and a big pig was killed for the purpose. It was announced that the feast was arranged as a mark of respect for Turi's return to her village after marriage. Moying and Turi were invited for the feast. When Moying came to participate in the feast the boys of Damra village caught hold of him and tying his hands and feet with a rope and packing him in a 'tom' (a bamboo container) threw away into the river. Turi could not bear this and committed suicide.

The news of this ghastly episode spread everywhere. The people of Moying's village became furious and they also made a plan to teach the Damra youths a lesson :

Accordingly they arranged a feast and invited all the people of Damra village. The young boys of Damra village knew about the conspiracy and they sent only the elderly people to the feast. The people of Moying village appeared to be very hospitable and they honoured the guests with 'Apong'. When the guests were fully intoxicated the host villagers locked both the doors of the house where the guests were resting. They beheaded all the guests of Damra village. One old man, however, escaped miraculously and he spread the news of this ghastly massacre in his village.

The young boys of Damra village planned to take revenge and proceeded to Moying village. But in the meantime the Moyings vacated the village.

'Dine Miram' was the head of all the villages in that area and all respected him. The Moyings pleased him by offering potatoes and arums and told him about their plight. He allowed the Moyings to flee away and himself lay on the road. The Damra youths found Dine Miram in that position and could not dare to proceed further. They returned to their own village. In the meantime the Moyings reached the plains and till today they are living in the plains.

### Conclusion :

Status is variable depending upon the cultural ethos, modes and morals and inter personal relations. Determining and measuring status in a tribal setting is a difficult task where status consciousness is at a low key and corporate life is the characteristic feature. Thus the status of women in the patrilineal and patrilocal plains tribal societies may at a casual glance appear to be low to non tribals but the womenfolk, born and brought up in their respective cultural milieu may not consider their status low. The women in these societies are least status conscious and they are happy if they get equal treatment. If we study the states of plains tribal women in this backdrop we find that the plains tribal womenfolk enjoy equal status in their societies. There are certain spheres like the village council where the entry of women is restricted but the womenfolk have no grumbling over that nor they consider it as deprivation of their right. They accept the prohibition as traditional necessity. Peace and harmony in the family front is of prime importance rather than hankering after status. Even the educated womenfolk do not consider the existing social position as inferior.



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## Marriage Among The Lalungs (Tiwas)

The Lalungs, also known as Tiwas, are mainly found in the district of Nowgong, Assam. There are a few Lalung villages in the western areas of the Karbi Anglang district and Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya. Four Lalung villages are also found in Dhemaji areas of Lakhimpur district. They entered Assam through the north eastern hilly tract of Assam from their original habitat i.e. Tibetan plateau. Probably they are the last Bodo groups entering Assam through this tract. According to 1971 census the total Lalung population of Assam is 95609. Living in the Assam plains, surrounded by non-Lalungs for centuries together, the Lalungs have been able to maintain many of their traditional tribal characteristics. They have their own dialect but Assamese language is widely used in their day-to-day life. Traditionally they are believed to be matriarchal people but matriarchy is fast disappearing and patriarchal system is setting deep roots in the present day Lalung society.

The Lalung villages like all other plains tribal villages are important units in the organisation of their socio-religious life. Although plains tribes, their houses are almost similar to those of the Assamese rural people. Namghar (Assamese public congregational hall) is a popular institution among the Lalungs especially with the followers of Mahapurushia cult. The non-converts have their traditional Barghars (Congregational house for the members of a clan). In every village members of a particular clan form a Khuta (a cohesive social group) and every Khuta has a Barghar which the people consider as a very sacred institution. The people believe that the benevolent presiding deities of the Barghar protect them from all calamities. The Lalungs had a proud tradition of a well managed dormitory system known as *Deka Sang*. This formed the training centre for all the young boys of a particular clan or subclan. It was also used as a venue for the village council. Unfortunately this

important institution is no longer existing in the plains Lalung villages.

The lowest administrative unit of a Lalung village is the Buni consisting of more than one village. For the smooth running of the Bunis there are different office bearers namely *Lorok, Forongai, Changmaji, Karoimaji, Deori, Hatari and Randhani*. The Lalungs are divided into a number of exogamous clans. (*Wali or Kul*) namely *Macharang, Macherang, Magor, Madur, Ladur, Puru, Sagar, Maloi Fangsong, Puma, Dafoi, Mithi, Lamfoi, Sukai Khoroi* etc. Originally there were only twelve clans but later on these main clans were sub-divided into a number of sub-clans (Dhan Bangah).

Among the Lalungs, both primary and joint family systems are in vogue. The people are mainly agriculturists and Sali, Bao and Ahu are the major crops.

Before the advent of the British the Lalungs had their own independent chiefs whom they called Deo Raja. One of the important principalities of the Lalungs was Gobha and under Gobha there were twelve small Rajas called *Sato Raja* and *Pacho Raja*. The Raja is helped by a number of hereditary office bearers such as *Bordaloi, Konwar, Patra, Barbarua, Dhulia, Dalia, Kalia* and the *Paik*. In recent years considerable changes in the Lalung village structure have taken place. Four office bearers namely *Pathek, Medhi Gayon* and *Bharali* play different roles in the socio-religious ceremonies of a village. Politically villages are administered under the Panchayati system.

The Lalungs consider themselves as Hindus and Lord Mahadeo (Fa Mahadeo) is their supreme god. Besides *Mahadeo* they worship *Ganesh, Parvati Badarmaji Baolkong, Lakshmi, Padumi, Kalika, Kamakhya Saru Ai, Bar Ai, Akari, Adheli* and *Kanai*. Sacrifice of goat, fowl, pig forms essential part of worship. The public place of worship and sacrifice is known as *Than*. It constitutes an earthen platform and the Dao or bill hook which is held worthy in itself to receive adoration. Their prayer to god is a mixture of Assamese and Lalung words bearing local inflections.

The Vaisanava Lalungs of Pachoraja area have three broad categories namely Sarania, Saru Koch and Bor Koch. A Sarania becomes a Saru Koch by giving up the habit of taking of rice beer and pork. Majority of the Saru Koch of Nowgong belong to this category. When one rises to the next higher social hierarchy i.e. Bor Koch, he becomes a perfect Hindu. He performs his religious rites according to the Vedic rules. The Bor Koches, however, do not employ Brahmin as priest, rather they employ their own people as priests who show proficiency in Shastras. This section of the Lalungs consider themselves as superior and they do not intermarry with the non-converts. Going one step advance a section of the converts are discarding off the Brahmanical rites and they are declaring themselves as Haridhwania. Thus in the religious place a rift is visible, but by and large, in the general socio-political place all these three sections do not maintain any reservation and they declare themselves as Lalungs.

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

The people are exogamous and marriage within a clan is strictly prohibited. Monogamy is the socially and legally recognised type of marriage. Polygamy is not practised by the Lalungs. Preferential marriages including cross cousin marriage are not in vogue. The people believe that the two big stones called Momai Bhāgin Sila lying close to each other on the bank of the China river near the Basundhari Than represent the accused Sola Sing and his niece who entered into illegal sexual relation. The people of Sahari village compelled the couple to leave the village. They came to Basundhari Than but the goddess Basundhari also cursed them to remain as stones for their sin.

Levirate is not practised, while sororate is still popular. Window remarriage is not practised by the Lalungs at present.

Cases of divorce are very rare and there is harmonious relation between husband and wife.

The Lalungs have four forms of marriage, namely, (1) Bor-Biya (2) Gobhia Rakha (3) Joron Biya (4) Paluai ana Biya.

The well to do and educated Lalungs prefer Bor-Biya form of marriage which entails huge expenditure and long drawn formalities. In this type of marriage the guardians of the prospective couple take the initiative. Zelas or go-betweens who are experts in the historical and legendary background of the Lalungs, play important roles in such marriages. Negotiations for marriage are done on the commission of the interested parents by Zela.

In case of Bata Bhaga the prospective groom's father and two or three of his relatives proceed to the girl's house. They carry one rice beer pot, betel leaves and nuts and rice powder cakes with them. Acceptance of these presents by the girl's father shows his readiness to give his daughter in marriage to the party.

In the form of *Kharu mani Pindhua Bhar* parents of the proposed groom visit the girl's house along with a few relatives. The father of the boy carries a gold ring and the mother carries a pair of dress for the girl. The girl's father invites the villagers and entertains them with rice beer. The girl comes out and bows down before the elders who bless them. Her would-be parents-in-law offer the presents to her.

The *Bor Bhar* form of marriage requires a party consisting of two old men and two old women, one young boy and two or three relatives of the proposed groom to visit the girl's house with a big Bhar (two big open baskets) containing two small gaurds, two basketful of rice, one pot of rice beer, some betel leaves and nuts. The girl's parents invite a few villagers and entertain all the guests in a big feast. Items of the feast must include the flesh of five fowls.

In *Khatira Bhar* type of marriage a party from the proposed groom's house consisting of elderly relatives of the groom along with the Zela proceed to the girl's house. They carry a big Bhar consisting of one big pot of rice beer, one big basketful of

rice cakes, two small gaurds and betel leaves and nuts. The Zela of the girl's party is also invited. Discussions take place between the Zelas regarding the details of the marriage. On this day a date is fixed for the marriage ceremony. Bride price (Rs. 60.00 to Rs. 100.00) is also fixed on this date. It should be noted that at present the educated Lalungs do not accept or offer bride price.

Bor Biya refers to a type of marriage which involves formal ceremony at dead of night. During the day sumptuous feasts are arranged for the villagers. Rice, beer and pork are essential items in their marriage feast.

At night the groom along with his friends and the Zela proceed to the girl's house. Formerly the groom wore a specially prepared dress consisting of big Powal Mani I (a kind of indigenious bead) and Gam Kharu (bracelet). He also wore a garland of flowers around his head. Nowadays dress used in the day-to-day life is worn with the difference that the clothes are sewn newly. As soon as the marriage party reaches the bride's house, the groom is taken to an open place. Elderly villagers of the bride's village sit around the groom. The bride and the groom then bow down before the elders who bless them to remain as true and faithful husband and wife for the rest of their life (Ek Swamy Ek Patni). Then the elderly male persons of the bride go inside the house. There they are entertained with Tusaju (a specially prepared rice beer). The couple bow down before them, who bless them in return. They give some advice to the couple. They also ceremonially disconnect the Kul of the bride which is called Kul Singa or Joi Jenga Singa or Bor Bhar Singa. From this time the girl loses her relation with the household deity of her parents. She also forfeits her right of her parental Hatham. 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 Hatham at her husband's clan.

Towards dawn the couple return to the groom's house. The parents of the groom receive the couple at the entrance. A few elderly villagers are invited. The couple bow down before them who bless them. Rice beer is offered to the invitees by the

bride and with this marriage ceremony comes to an end.

## 2. Gobhia Rakha

At present the Lalungs are patrilocal. But a very thin link of the old matrilocal system is traced in the *Gobhia* system of marriage which is prevalent in their society. Generally parents having a lone daughter prefer to have a *Gobhia*. Except the entertainment of the villagers with a small feast, no other ceremony is necessary for such marriage. The couple is taken to the *Barghar* of the bride's clan where the elderly villagers bless them to remain as EK Swamy EK Patni. In case of *Gobhia* marriage *Kulsinga* may not be performed. A *Gobhia* can be cremated in the *Hatham* of his original parents if the elderly people of the parent's village so agree.

## 3. Joron Biya

It is an arranged marriage minus the details of a Bor Biya. The father or guardian of the prospective groom meets the father or guardian of the prospective bride and discuss about the marriage. When both the parties agree, a date is fixed for the Joran ceremony. On the fixed date the boy's party consisting of the elderly relatives proceed to the girl's house. They carry gold ornaments and dresses for the girl along with three *Bhars* (one *Bhar* consists of two big basket full of eatables), two Bor *Bhars* and one *Garkhia Bhar*. *Sandah* (fried rice powder), *Anguli Pitha* (a finger shaped rice cakes), rice beer pots, curd, gur and betel leaves and nuts are the main items which must be carried in these *Bhars*. The boy's party offers the dresses and ornaments to the girl's father. The prospective bride is taken out before the elders and she is asked to wear those ornaments and dresses as her consent to the marriage. The girl's father entertains the villagers with rice beer. The boy's party leaves the house along with the bride. In this way the Joron marriage comes to an end.

## 4. Paluai Ana Biya

Majority of the Lalung marriages are solemnised accord-

rice cakes, two small gaurds and betel leaves and nuts. The Zela of the girl's party is also invited. Discussions take place between the Zelas regarding the details of the marriage. On this day a date is fixed for the marriage ceremony. Bride price (Rs. 60.00 to Rs. 100.00) is also fixed on this date. It should be noted that at present the educated Lalungs do not accept or offer bride price.

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## 4. Paluai Ana Biya

Majority of the Lalung marriages are solemnised accord-

ing to this system. The young boy and girl develop love at first sight in the socio-religious occasions like marriage etc. If the boy finds it impossible to get his sweetheart through a formal wedding, then one night with the help of his friends he takes away the girl. Next day two or three relatives of the boy proceed to the girl's house to inform the girl's father about the matter. The father of the girl generally does not come in the way.

### **Sajati Dekhua**

On the seventh day after the incident, a ceremony is observed in the *Barghar* of the boy's clan. Elder male relatives gather at the *Barghar*. Rice beer is profusely supplied to the participants. A party from boy's house consisting of two relatives of the boy and the *Zela* proceeds to the girl's house on this day. The party after discussion with the parents of the girl finalises a date for visiting the girl's house by the couple. The girl's father records his demand about the presentations to be made to him by the groom's parents.

On the stipulated date preferably after a week, the couple along with some friends of the groom proceeds to the girl's house. A big *Bhar* containing one big rice beer pot, one basketful of *Pitha* (rice cakes) one *Thok* (a big bunch) of nuts and 5 *Gusi* (20 pieces make a *Gusi*) betel leaves is carried by the groom's party to the girl's house. The girl's parents invite the villagers who are entertained with rice beer and feast. Towards afternoon the bridegroom's party returns to its village. On this particular day the *Zela* of the groom's party fixes a date for the *Bhar Singa* ceremony.

### **Bhar Singa**

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 big *Bhars* have to be carried to the girl's house. One *Bhar* is called *Jurani Bhar* which contains one big basketful of rice and one big pot of rice beer. The other *Bhar* which is called *Jenga Singa Bhar* contains on big basketful of *Anguli Pitha* (finger

shaped rice cakes boiled in water) and one big pot of rice beer. Over and above these two *Bhars* the party must carry two cocks and three hens and a sufficient quantity of betel leaves and nuts. Both these *Bhars* are taken to the *Barghar* of the girl's clan where elderly villagers gather for the occasion. The groom bows before the relatives of the girl by offering betel leaves and nuts in a *Sarai*. A cock is sacrificed to mark the occasion. The girl's father arranges a big feast and all the villagers partake of the feast. Rice beer is an essential item in the feast. The couple bows before the elders who bless them. From this day the girl is affiliated to the clan of the husband. The groom pays Rs. 7.00 or 9.00 as token bride price which goes to the public fund. (Formerly the bride price ranged from Rs. 107.00 to 707.00 but the educated Lalung youth today are trying to abolish the bride price system). The couple returns to the boy's house in the afternoon.

### **Ghar Sina Bhar**

After two or three days the couple again proceed to the girl's house with one or two friends of the boy. They bring a rice beer pot and a basketful of tiffin (*Sandah*). This *Bhar* unlike the previous *Bhars* is given to the parents of the girl. The parents of the girl give necessary utensils and furniture to the girl. It should be noted that the relatives of the girl's family bring presents like rice, vegetables, utensils etc. and the parents of the girl are greatly relieved of the economic burden. Towards evening the couple return to the boy's house. The ceremonial aspects of the marriage are concluded along with this ceremonial *BHAR* and the couple is recognised as husband and wife by the parents of the girl.

### **Conclusion**

Among the Lalungs, marriage is considered as indispensable for fecundity. Marriages are solemnised after the attainment of puberty. Marriage within the same clan is prohibited. Monogamy is the socially recognised type of marriage. The people adhere to the dictum *EK Swamt EK Patni* i.e. a man

should possess only one wife. Kulsinga (formally disconnecting the clan relationship) must be performed in a marriage ceremony. In Gobhia system of marriage the same may be deferred.

The Lalungs have four forms of marriage. They are : (1) *Bor Bhar* (2) Gobhia Rakha (3) *Joran Biya* and (4) *Paluai Ana Biya*. Incidence of the last one is the characteristic feature of the Lalung marriage. The *Zelas* or go-betweens are essential persons in a marriage ceremony. Similarly a feast is inevitable in a Lalung marriage where locally brewed rice beer forms an essential time.

In a Lalung marriage *Hom* ceremony is performed only by a section of the converts. For *Hom* ceremony they employ their own priests.

Bride price, even if it is nominal, must be paid. But the rigour of the same is not felt in the present day Lalung marriages.

Like many other plains tribes the Lalungs also consider marriage of a particular member of the village as a community affair. Not only the kin members, the fellow villagers too cooperate with their mite.

In the present Lalung society widow remarriage is not popular and divorce is few and far between.

#### Notes

The data embodied in this paper are based on field work done during 1973-75. However the following articles were consulted while preparing this paper.

1. 'Tiwa Sakalar Krishti', 'Ringsang', Bordoloi Buddhiman, - A Journal of the All Assam Tiwa Yuba Chatra Sanmilan, 1st Year, Vol. 1, 1973.
2. 'Tiwa Jatir Parichai' Bordoloi Dharmaram, Ringsang, 1st Year Vol. I, 1973.
3. 'Ekhon Tiwa Gaonor Samaj Bybasthar Eti Dish', - Duara Sraddhananda, Ringsang, 1st Year Vol. I, 1973. ♦♦♦

\* Published in 'Family, Marriage and Social Change on the Indian Fringe' Edited S.M. Dubey, P. K. Borodoloi, B. N. Borthakur, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1980.

## Problem of Land Alienation in the Foothills of Murkongselek-Jonai and Sadiya Areas of Assam

### Introduction

The foot-hills popularly known as transferred areas of Murkongselek-Jonai and Sadiya now falling within the jurisdiction of Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh districts respectively formed originally a part and parcel of North East Frontier Agency, now renamed as Arunachal Pradesh. In order to protect the interests of the tribals on land in the tribal areas, the government implemented the benevolent Tribal Belt Scheme and accordingly the Abor Mishmi Tribal Belt was constituted under notification No. RAD/Rev/-73/50/43 dated 13.3.51. The Sadiya Tribal Belt and Tirap Tribal Belt, now in the district of Dibrugarh and Jonai Tribal Belt, now in Lakhimpur district, fall within the jurisdiction of above mentioned Abor Mishmi Tribal Belt with an area of 34,84,800 bighas or 1780 square miles. Although the belts lie on the foothills of Tirap, Lohit, Siang and Subansiri districts of Arunachal Pradesh, yet the inhabitants of this area have had closer relation with the plains people as testified by the historical records. The Abors (Adis), Mishmis and hill Miris used to visit nearby Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur towns for their day-to-day transactions. "The Miris (plain Miris) had been under the civilising influence of the plains long before the advent of the Ahoms in Assam." Thus the division of hill Miris and plains Miris existed since time immemorial, although there is ethnic affinity between the two. "The Miris occupied the plains and lower hills along the north bank of the Brahmaputra from the Subansiri (Somdiri or Sundri) river on the west and as far as the Dihong river in the

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east."<sup>2</sup> "The Hill Miris lived in the hills west of the Dijmoor and to the north of the Sissi and Dhemaji Mauzas of the Lakhimpur district and the plains Miris were found along the course of the Subansiri."<sup>3</sup> In those days most of the hill tribes were not self-sufficient as regards food stuff and other necessities. On the other hand, the people living in the foot-hills led comparatively an easy life with their settled cultivation. So these tribes committed raids on the fertile plains below to fill up their deficiencies. "The Hill Miris commanding by their position of the cultivated tracts of Bordoloni, Sissi and Dhemaji had acquired an acknowledged right to 'Posa'."<sup>4</sup> The word 'posa' literally means a collection or subscription for a common purpose. In its special sense of payment to a hill tribe, it strictly denotes the subscription which the village raised in order to meet the customary demands of their visitors from the hills, in other words, blackmail."<sup>5</sup> The above references amply testify to the possession of the foot-hill areas, now known as Transferred Areas of Murkongselek-Jonai, by the Miris since a long time.

Similarly the foot-hills now known as Sadiya Transferred Area were the stronghold of the Chutias who ruled the country east of the rivers Subansiri and the Disang, with the exception of a strip to south and southeast. The Deoris, one of the four sections of the Chutias, are the major tribal group of this area.

Before entering into the kernel of the land alienation problem in the above mentioned transferred areas, a few information regarding the topography, existing facilities, administrative set up, communication facilities etc., of the areas might help in understanding the problem in proper perspective.

The Jonai Tribal Belt is approachable from two directions. One can reach Jonai by boat which plies from Dibrugarh, headquarters of Dibrugarh district, to Pasighat (Arunachal). After a tiresome boat journey about eight hours in the Brahmaputra, one reaches Tinmilegehat where the Jonai bound passengers change for a more strenuous six miles road journey of foot through dense jungles. On the way one encounters a few cluster of thatched platform houses of the Miris (also known as Mishings).

At Jonai the headquarters of Jonai sub-division of Lakhimpur district, the SDO's office is the nucleus of the administrative structure. The Block Development Office, Jonai dispensary, government aided Jonai H. E. School, etc. are situated within a radius of 1/4 km from the SDO's court. The market centre at Jonai is at a distance of about 1/2 kilometer from the SDO's court and almost all the shops are owned by non-tribals. A few PWD roads having a total length of about 68 km connect the headquarters with the neighbouring tribal villages.

The belt can also be reached from north Lakhimpur, the district headquarters town. The Arunachal Express, introduced mainly for the benefit of the tribals of the transferred areas as well as of Arunachal Pradesh, terminates at Jonai. If one travels from north Lakhimpur to Murkongselek by train, one will meet more non-tribals than tribals which indicates the flow of non-tribals into the inaccessible areas of this belt.

The Mishings of this area are well represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly having two members. The area under the belt was constituted into a Community Development Block in 1958 and considerable developmental activities have been going on. At the sub-divisional level, mahkuma parishad and at the village level, gaon panchayats are looking after the development needs of the people. Besides, for an integrated development at faster rate, the area is covered by the Dhemaji Integrated Tribal Development Project. Pending implementation of the project, the area is receiving due attention under the tribal sub-plan.

Politically, Jonai and Sadiya have been tagged into a single reserved constituency but geographically the areas are not contiguous. Hence, if a person from Jonai wants to visit Sadiya, he has to cover a circuitous route. Sadiya belt is served by both road and railways Tinsukia junction is one of the major railway junctions of upper Assam and Sadiya bound passengers are required to board a branch train at Tinsukia which terminates at Dangari. Before the great earthquake of 1950, this branch train was terminated at Saikhowaghat. But today the ferry ghat at



Saikhowa is at a distance of about 10 km from the railhead, Dangari. From Dangari there are good communication facilities up to Saikhowaghat. Although there is a branch train from Tinsukia, the Sadiya bound passengers prefer to travel by state transport buses from Tinsukia. The ferry ghat lies at a distance of about half a kilometer from the bus station. After crossing the river Brahmaputra one reaches Kundilghat. Chapakhowa, the headquarters of SDO, Sadiya, is about 15 km from Kundilghat. One has to travel this distance in the Arunachal co-operative bus which goes via Chapakhowa. Chapakhowa is a clean and sparsely located administrative centre which is linked with the interior tribal villages with a net work of PWD and kutcha roads. The old Sadiya of historical and cultural importance which was the centre of military expedition of the Ahoms, Khamtis, Singphos, and the British, is no more. The great earthquake of 1950 engulfed the whole of Sadiya with all its traditional treasures.

Out of these three belts, the Tirap Tribal Belt and Sadiya Tribal Belt comprise of 150 sq miles and 190 sq miles respectively. The Jonai Tribal Belt covers an area of 429.77 sq miles i. e. 8,30,526 bighas. Out of this huge tract of land about 80,000 bighas are fit for cultivation and upto now only 22 numbers of villages have been surveyed. Table 1 indicates that there are altogether 121 villages under Jonai Tribal Belt and out of these only 22 (18.18 per cent) are cadastral and the rest 99 (81.82 per cent) non-cadastral. Thus it is seen that a large number of villages under Jonai belt are still non-cadastral. This facilitates the immigrants to occupy land in this belt. The position is quite different in the Sadiya Tribal Belt. Here out of 176 villages as many as 150 (85.22 per cent) are cadastral and 26 (14.78 per cent) are non cadastral. Out of the total area of 429.77 square miles, 155 square miles fall within four reserved forests -- namely, Gali Reserved Forest, Paba Reserved Forest, Chenga Reserved Forest and Jamjing Reserved Forest. There are two forest villages within the Jonai Tribal Belt namely Bijoypur (188 families and Gali Borbali 40 families) within Gali Reserved Forest.

**TABLE - I**  
Cadastral and non-cadastral villages under Jonai and Sadiya Tribal Belt (Census 1971)

Name of the Tribal Belt	Total Villages	No of Cadastral Villages	P. C.	No of Non-Cadastral Villages	P. C.
Jonai	121	22	18.18	99	81.82
Sadiya	176	150	85.22	26	14.78

The Population of Jonai Tribal Belt according to 1971 census is shown below.

Scheduled tribes	21,165
Scheduled castes	124
Others including Nepalese	10,935

In 1961 there were only 24 tribal villages within the Jonai Tribal Belt and almost all of them were exclusively inhabited by tribals belonging to the Miris (Mishings) and Adis, the latter having only 3 villages. But in 1971 there were as many as 82 tribal villages in Jonai Tribal Belt area and out of these only 31 belong to the tribal exclusively. In 1961, the Sonowal Kacharis, a plains tribe of Assam were few and far between in the Jonai Tribal Belt, whereas in 1971 there are good number of Sonowal Kacharis inside this belt. The Miris and Adis who are the original inhabitants of this belt resent very much this migration of other plains tribes. Non-tribals in considerable numbers have penetrated deep into the tribal belt.

The position in respect of Sadiya Transferred Area in 1971 is peculiar in the sense that preponderance of tribals in this belt is hardly felt at all. There are 186 tribal villages under this belt and out of this only 19 villages can be categorised as tribal villages. Nepalis, Ahoms, Sonowal Kacharis are the main immigrants in this belt.

The total population of Sadiya as per 1971 census is 64,252. But according to 1951 census the total population of Jonai and Sadiya taken together was only 32,163. The tribal population in the Jonai and Sadiya tribal belt areas are 19,825 and 3,008 respectively. Tables II and III show that with a total area of 1,82,723 acres under the Jonai belt, the percentage of tribal population is 61.52 as against 4.68 per cent tribals with an area of 1,67,527 in the Sadiya Tribal Belt. Similarly there is a marked difference in the area under tribal villages in Jonai and Sadiya belts. While the former belt has 1,29,436 acres within the tribal villages, in the latter only 14,747 acres are included under the tribal villages.

**TABLE - II**

Tribal population of Jonai and Sadiya tribal belt areas (Census 1971) -

Name of the Belt	Total Population	Tribal Population	P.C. to Total
Jonai Tribal Belt	32,224	19,825	61.52
Sadiya Tribal Belt	64,252	3,008	4.68
Total	96,476	22,833	

**TABLE - III**

Total area and area under tribal villages of Jonai and Sadiya tribal belt (Census - 1971)

Name of the Tribal Belt	Total Area (in Acres)	Area Under Tribal Villages (in Acres)	P.C. to Total
Jonai	1,82,723	1,29,436	(70.8%)
Sadiya	1,67,527	14,747	(8.8%)

In the Tirap Tribal Belt there were 2002 tribals and 5000 Nepalis in 1951 as against 5002 and 20,000 tribals and Nepalis respectively in 1971. Table IV shows that there are vast areas of land under the heads unirrigated area, cultivable waste and

area not available for cultivation in both Jonai and Sadiya belts. These areas are far away from habitation and non-tribals as well as tribals are fraudulently occupying those lands. Out of a total area of 1,67,527 acres in Sadiya Belt, 73,656 acres (43.97 per cent) are unirrigated, 41,983 acres (25.6 per cent) are cultivable waste and 42,925 acres (25.62 per cent) are not available for cultivation. In Jonai Belt too, out of 1,82,723 acres, 63,051 acres (34.51 per cent) are unirrigated, 74,146 acres (40.58 per cent) are cultivable waste and 39,797 acres (21.78 per cent) are not available for cultivation.

**TABLE - IV**

Unirrigated lands, cultivable waste lands, and area not available for cultivation under Jonai and Sadiya tribal belts (Census 1971)

Name of the Belt	Total Area	Unirrigated Area	Cultivable Waste		Area not available for Cultivation		
			P. C.	P. C.	P. C.	P. C.	
Jonai	182723	63051	34.51	74146	40.58	39797	21.78
Sadiya	167527	73656	43.97	41983	25.60	42925	25.62

**The Problem**

In this study we confined ourselves with two tribal belts namely Jonai and Sadiya tribal belts as they present, by and large, a homogenous picture. The problem therefore relates to the situation prevailing in the above two tribal belts along with those of Dhemaji administrative area which is contiguous with the tribal belts. The population of these belts is primarily Mishings (Miris with the Adis as the next group). With the opening of rail communication up to Jonai, there is an influx of Bodo Kacharis, Ahoms, Nepalis and a few Bengalis. The lands particularly in Jonai belt are largely non-cadastral.

The Adis learning the benefits of wet cultivation have migrated to the foot-hills and have also established new villages in the plains portion all along Dhemaji-Along-Pasighat border. Much more martial than the Mishings, theirs is a close knit society. Conscious of their past history, they claim a superior identity. Their social life is completely dominated by the 'Bangos' at the head of which is the 'Bogung Bakang' located in the Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The 'Bogung Bakang' controls those tribals through the 'Bangos' which are stated to be 12 in number. In the stated area 2 'Bangos' are operating namely 'Ramlo Bango' and 'Logo Bango'. As told in the introduction, the Adis, even though they did not occupy the land available in the plain areas of the foothills as the tract from Subansiri to the Brahmaputra was practically empty, had a feeling that they are the masters of this area. With the coming of the Mishings and Ahoms from nearby areas like Sibsagar, Dhakuakhana, Dhemaji and other places, these people appeared to have become suspicious. The new-comers in the earlier years appeared to keep the local Adis satisfied with various small favours. But when their numbers increased and when they started claiming proper settlement from the revenue authorities, the Adis started positively resenting and creating difficulties. In June 1972, 260 Adis of Arunachal Pradesh trespassed into Milanpur area of Assam and ransacked the Mishing villages destroying crops, devastating houses and looting away valuables. Fifteen Mishing families were badly affected. Again in the same month some Adis and Mishings jointly attacked the Nepalis of Lumpong Basti. Thirtythree Nepali houses were burnt to ashes and two persons were killed in the clash.

The Adis of Arunachal Pradesh began to settle in the state of Dhemaji near the villages of the newcomers. But when clashes occurred, they preferred to seek redress with the Arunachal authorities. The Adis claim the land in these plain areas on the foot-hills as theirs and some of them employed in Arunachal Pradesh as jamadars, political inspectors and political assistants threatened these areas as disputed ones. They further argue that the artificial line of boundary drawn between Arunachal

Pradesh and the state of Assam had been done by the Britishers without consulting them and therefore they would not recognise it.

The word 'transferred' used since 1951 while referring to these areas has added not a little to this feeling of being unjustly separated from their brethren in Arunachal Pradesh. They claim the entire area north of the river Brahmaputra in the eastern sector as theirs. They assert that they had intimate ties with the Ahom kings who, according to them, acknowledged their authority over this entire area. "The Hill Miris commanding by their position the cultivated tracts of Bordoloni, Sissi and Dhemaji had acquired an acknowledged right to 'Posa' and the Ahom government recognised it. Unlike the land of the Nagas, the land of the Miris had neither strategic nor economic importance to the Ahoms which might have prompted them to take a different course of action. Therefore to protect the country from their inroads and maintain peace and order within the country, the introduction of the 'Posa' system by king Pratap Singha, which stabilised and regularised the supply of the deficiencies of the Miris from certain specific villages of the plains below set apart for that purpose, was perhaps the best policy invented by the genius of the Ahom King Pratap Singha who was also known as Buddhiswara Narayan on account of his extraordinary intelligence. The effectiveness of this policy is proved by the fact that the British government, the successor to the Ahoms, did not do away completely with the 'Posa' system. It is with this notion the Adis of Arunachal often come to this area and occupy land driving out other settlers by using force whenever necessary, at times wounding the religious sentiment of the Hindus (Mishings, Kacharis and Nepalis). The local Adis, too, are in general lending them full support because all of them are guided by the central 'Bokum Bokang' as well as 'Arunachal Sangam'. "It transpires that 801 square miles out of 1190 sq. miles have been kept included in the state of Arunachal" (Source- Report of the Sub-Committee of Advisory Council for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) on settlement of land in tribal belt blocks and of forest Land, 1976).

The Mishings on the other hand feel that the whole of this transferred area is for their settlement only. However they are not complaining anything against the early settlers (Adis). The old Mishing settlers do not accept the newcomers, whether they are Adis or Mishings. This is due to the fear that their unauthorised occupation of government waste lands will be lost with the occupation of more and more lands by the migrants. In fact large number of Mishings and Kacharis of Majuli, Dhemaji and north-Lakhimpur have entered into this area in recent years particularly after the extension of the railway line up to Jonai and encroached upon government waste lands, right from Dekapam, Jamjing, Telam areas up to Jonai. Again influx of Nepalis, fresh from Nepal, has been making the matter more complicated. At first the Adis and Mishings did not object the entry of a few Nepalis into their territory. It is reported that in a few cases the local tribals particularly the 'Gams' encouraged the non-Mishings to occupy land specially where virgin soil had to be cleared and made cultivable. Once the process is completed, they bring charge against those non-tribals as illegal entrants. In majority of the cases, the Miris are not successful and illegal occupation continues. But when the Nepalis claimed settlement, conflict arose. The area being largely non-cadastral and the EAC at Sadiya and Jonai not having sufficient land record staff, no effective action against the encroachers could be taken. This had led to huge depredation of forest wealth and increasing number of clashes. Eviction was carried out against the encroachers in Gali Reserve Forest in 1972 but they have re-encroached.

Prior to 1969 no encroachment case was instituted against the encroachers but there was no lack of efforts to evict the encroachers. Till 1969, 3367 families have been evicted but without any tangible gain because the same sets of evicted families re-encroached the lands from where they were evicted.

About 222 Nepali families were evicted from Lumpung village in the year 1973 but out of these 222 evicted families, 42 families had re-encroached upon the Chereng village.

There is considerable encroachment in the reserve forests under Jonai Tribal Belt. About 750 families have encroached in the Paba Reserve Forest while 1350 and 270 families have illegally occupied tribal belt lands in Gali and Chengajan reserved forests respectively. In 1972 eviction operation was carried out against the encroachers in Gali Reserved Forest but without any tangible gain.

Thus total area of land encroached upon is 11,694 bighas 1 katha and 18 lessas and out of these only 336 bighas 2 kathas and 4 lessas are occupied by the tribals including Sonowal Kacharis and the rest had been kept occupied by outsiders particularly Nepalis. This large scale encroachment took place between 1961-75. Community wise figures of the families who are in possession of the unauthorised land within the Sadiya Tribal Belt are given below :

1. Nepalis	1,360 families
2. Bengalees	85 "
3. Biharis	36 "
4. Scheduled tribes	21 "
5. Assamese	5 "
6. Muslims	1 family

(Source : Report of the Sub-Committee of Advisory Council for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) on settlement of land in tribal belt/blocks and of forest land, 1976)

#### Conclusion

1. What emerges from the above observation is that Nepalis form the largest number of encroachers in the tribal belts under Sadiya and Jonai.

2. There should be thorough check-up of the Nepalis who possess grazing permits prior to 1969. To check the Nepali and other infiltrators there should be two check posts, one at Dirak and the other at Dhala (Saikhoa).

3. A list of landless persons eligible to secure lands within tribal belt may be prepared and lands may be allotted against those persons.

4. The border with Arunachal Pradesh should be clearly demarcated.

5. Following demarcation, cadastral survey of this entire area from Dhemaji to Murkongselek should be completed and settlement should be given villagewise for Adis, Mishings and other tribes in accordance with the latest land policy. This would satisfy the Adis' demand and remove their fear as they could live in groups of Adi villages together. It would also carry the advantage of preventing the Mishings from trying to sell land to newcomers. The Adi aversion to payment of land revenue could be dealt with by allowing the village to collect the revenue as they did collect the 'Pollta' in the past. They could also be allowed certain other privileges like collection of bamboos, thatch for roofing etc. from the reserved forests.

6. SDO of Jonai and Chapakhoa should be given more power under the revenue rules for quick eviction and settlement. There should be close and intimate collaboration between the SDO and ASO of Jonai and Sadiya so far as settlement policy within tribal belt/block is concerned.

7. A machinery to follow up the actions of the land records staff should be created for Jonai and Sadiya areas.

8. There should be a police out post at Telam. Instances of clashes, riots criminal intimidation are not very few in that area and all these incidents originate mainly from disputes over land.

9. Equitable distribution of land on the basis of land records prepared during the resettlement operation may be made as quickly as possible. The practice of giving the 'Gams' upper hand in the matter of distribution of land should be discontinued. The panchayats should also not come in the picture as that will create more difficulties than bringing any order in this regard. There are lot of vested interests and they are playing major roles in the panchayat affairs. Once a systematic distribution of land is achieved, the general policy will apply as in other areas of the state. Such distribution of land through land record staff should however be scrupulous.

10. The Jonai and Chapakhoa police stations should be strengthened by posting more personnel, specially armed police.

11. The TD blocks of Sadiya and Jonai could do a lot to ameliorate the economic condition of the tribals. It is essential that government comes forward with a special time-bound development programme for this valuable zone, as was done for the Mizoram, in order to remove the long felt needs of the Adis and Mishings.

12. The possibility of establishing a training-cum-production centre in the style of Arunachal district centres, to train the tribal youths in manufacturing match stick may be explored. Raw materials for such centres are easily available locally.

13. Similar facilities offered to the tribals by the Arunachal Pradesh authorities should be extended to the scheduled tribes irrespective of hill tribe or plains tribe living within the transferred areas.

14. Persons serving in the transferred areas should undergo some kind of orientation training in the Tribal Research Institutes so that before going to serve the tribals the officers are well equipped with necessary information regarding the socio-cultural and religious life of the tribes of the transferred areas.

15. Last but not the least a trusted batch of dedicated public servants is required who will be in charge of implementing different development schemes in the tribal belt/blocks.

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3. *Lakshmi Devi, op cit, pp 156-157.*
4. *Alexander Mackenzie, op cit, p 34.*
5. *Government Publication, Physical and Political Geography of the Province of Assam, Assam Secretariat, 1896, p 216.*
6. *Lakshmi Devi, op cit, p 165. ♦♦♦*

\* Published in Land Relations in North East India, Edited by B. B Dutta and M. N. Karna, People's Publishing House, New Delhi 1987.

## **Some Demographic Aspects of Integrated Tribal Development Projects of Assam with Special Reference to the Marigaon-Nagaon I.T.D.P.**

### ***Introduction***

The Constitution of India envisages special development provisions for the scheduled tribes who are living in the far flung tribal areas without the benefits of modern infrastructural facilities like all weather roads, medical and veterinary dispensaries, good drinking water and the like. The founding fathers of the constitution, therefore incorporated certain provisions in the constitution for the welfare of the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes, so that these backward tribals could be brought to the national main stream of development. The Government, therefore, have formulated special programmes for these areas as early as the fifties of this century in the form of Special Multipurpose Tribal Blocks and subsequently Tribal Development Blocks. These programmes continued till the end of the Fourth Five Year Plan and were able to cover only about 40% of the total tribal population. Some achievements were made in this regard but differences in the level of development of the tribal areas and the surrounding regions, by and large, continued. A new approach known as Area Development Approach was adopted for tribal development in the beginning of the Fifth Five Year Plan where all areas with more than 50% tribal concentration were identified in the Tribal Sub-Plan Areas and Special schemes were formulated known as Integrated Tribal Development Projects. The Government of Assam accordingly have identified 19 I.T.D.Ps throughout Assam. It may be mentioned that these I.T.D.P areas do not intersect the existing administra-

tive boundaries. All the development departments were directed to formulate special schemes for these areas. In order to coordinate the activities of various development departments, project officers (redesignated as Project Directors) drawn from Senior Assam Civil Service Cadre were appointed. These nineteen I.T.D.Ps are Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Gauhat-I, Gauhati-II, Goalpara, North Lakhimpur, Tezpur, Dhemaji, Morigaon, Jorhat (Majuli), Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Golaghat, Silchar, Sibsagar, Barpeta, Nalbari and Mangaldai.

### **Marigaon I.T.D.P.**

The Integrated Tribal Development Project, Marigaon of Nagaon district is one of the 19 I.T.D.Ps, identified by the Government of Assam for all round development of the tribals mostly Lalungs (Tiwas) living in the project areas. The I.T.D.P. Marigaon is like most of the I.T.D.Ps in Assam is also not a compact area. The tribal villages under the project fall within the jurisdictions of 4 development blocks namely Mayong, Kapili, Bhurbandha, and Laharighat. The Project areas extend upto 4 Police Stations viz. Marigaon, Laharighat, Mikirbheta and Raha and three revenue circles namely Marigaon, Laharighat and Raha. The Project area consists of selected tribal villages of 22 Gaon Panchayats. The total estimated geographical area of the Project is 608.08 Sq. Km. which is 38.32% of the total geographical area (1587 Sq. Km.) of Marigaon Sub-Division.

### **Population Characteristics**

The total population of Marigaon Sub-Division as per 1971 Census is 4,29,259 and out of that 70,738 are scheduled tribes, the percentage being 16.48. The population of the project area is 1,38,189 out of which 68,639 i.e., 49.67% are scheduled tribes. The tribal population of the project area constitutes 96.36% of the total tribal population scattered in different areas of the Sub-Division. It may be mentioned that in Assam Plains Districts the scheduled tribes are not concentrated in exclusive pockets. One may find non-tribal villages with sizable population in between two tribal villages. Besides the plains tribes, the project area has

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a sizeable number of scheduled castes belonging to the Kaibarta, Namasudra and Sutradhar groups. The figure is 12,688 i.e. 9.30% of the total population of the I.T.D.P. Caste Hindus, Muslims refugee Bengalees and people of other backward classes are also found. These populations are not located in exclusive areas. Their villages are co-existing with the scheduled tribe villages. The total population of these sections of people according to 1971 census is 55,552 i.e., 12.1% of the total population of Marigaon Sub-Division.

As per Bench Mark Survey of the I.T.D.P. areas of Assam 1978, conducted by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam, there are 22,86,927 persons within the 19 Nos. of I.T.D.P. areas. But as per 1971 census the total population of the project area was 19,55,055. Thus there is an increase of 16.68% in 8 years' period. Similarly the growth rate of scheduled tribe population during 1971-78 is 19.72% within the project areas. The recorded scheduled tribe population as per Bench Mark Survey 1978 in 19 Nos. of I.T.D.P. areas is 12,56,770 as against 10,49,763 scheduled tribe population of 1971 census in the I.T.D.P. areas. The decennial-growth rate of 1961-71 of scheduled tribe population in the I.T.D.P. areas is 37.95%.

There is an abnormal growth rate of scheduled caste population in the I.T.D.P. areas during the period 1971-78, which is 66.42%. According to the said survey the scheduled Caste population of the I.T.D.P. areas in 1978 was 1,12,660 as against 67,695 in 1971 census. The decennial growth of scheduled castes in the I.T.D.P. areas in 1961-71 is 24.75%. The increase may be attributed to the influx of scheduled caste people into the I.T.D.P. areas. Compared to the high growth rate of scheduled caste in the I.T.D.P. areas, the growth rate of non-scheduled tribe and non-scheduled caste i.e., others is much low i.e., 9.54%. The variation of scheduled caste population during 1971-78 is highest in Nalbari I.T.D.P. (342.50%) followed by Silchar (245.11%), Tezpur (191.76%) and Tinsukia (168.97%).

The majority of the scheduled castes of Assam took agriculture as profession only recently. They do not possess

sufficient agricultural lands and are always in search of agricultural lands. The traditional profession is no longer lucrative. For example the potential beels and river sources have been taken over by Govt. and these have been auctioned to the moneyed scheduled caste people. Thus the petty fishermen have been deprived of their source of fishing and their means of living is day labour. As per 1971 census out of 19,19,947 scheduled tribe person only 29,632 i.e., 15.4% are engaged as agricultural labourers, where as the percentage varies considerably in the case of scheduled caste. Thus out of 9,12,639 scheduled caste persons 34,712 i.e., 38.03% are engaged as day labourers. In Assam tribal villages are co-existing with scheduled caste vil-lages and some of the richer scheduled caste families are pos-sessing land of poorer section of the tribals.

Let us now examine the case of Marigaon I.T.D.P where I had the opportunity of visiting most of the Gaon Panchayats having scheduled tribes and scheduled castes as major popula-tion during the formulation stage of the Marigaon I.T.D.P. in 1978. The Bench Mark Survey 1978, revealed that in Marigaon I.T.D.P. also there is an unnatural increase of scheduled caste people during 1971-78. The tables IA and IB show that the increase of scheduled caste during 1971-78 is 42% where as the percentage of increase of scheduled tribe population in the same period is 9.7%. During a period of 8 years the increase of scheduled caste population crossed the decennial growth of 1961-71 which was 24.75%.

**TABLE - IA**  
**Nagaon/Marigaon I.T.D.P.**  
**Population as per 1971 Census**

Total Population	Scheduled Tribe Population	Scheduled Caste Population	Others
1,01,685	53,745	8,834	39,106



**TABLE - IB**  
**Population as per Bench Mark Survey**  
**(Universal) 1978**

	Total Population	Scheduled Tribe Population	Scheduled Caste Population	Others
Variation during 1971-78	1,22,426 20%	58,949 9.7%	14,108 4.2%	49,369 26.5%

As mentioned earlier the scheduled caste villages of Marigaon I.T.D.P. are closely found in and around the scheduled tribe villages and it is quite probable that the land needy scheduled caste people namely Namasudra, Kaibarta and Sutradhar might have penetrated into the nearest I.T.D.P. areas and returned as inhabitants of the I.T.D.P. areas.

The percentage of decadal variation during 1961-71 in Assam and Nagaon district and percentage of variation during 1971-78 in the I.T.D.P. areas of Assam and Marigaon I.T.D.P. are shown in the tabular form below

(Source Assam Bench Mark Survey (Universal, 1978).

**TABLE - II A**

Percentage of decadal variation during 1961-71 in Assam and Nagaon district

	Scheduled Tribes	Scheduled Castes
Assam	37.95%	24.75%
Nagaon District	42.93%	64.96%

**TABLE - II B**

Percentage variation of S.T. and S.C in the I.T.D.P. areas and Marigaon I.T.D.P during 1971-78

	Scheduled Tribe	Scheduled Caste
All I.T.D.P areas	19.72%	66.42%
Marigaon I.T.D.P	12.74%	48.08%

Thus the above data pin point a peculiar demographic situation in the I.T.D.P. of Assam. This heterogeneous character of the population of I.T.D.Ps creates hurdles in formulating and implementing tribal development schemes.

The heterogeneity is not only reflected in the population content, but also in other spheres like language, literacy, educational status, economic condition etc.

In the Marigaon I.T.D.P. 10,432 households or 93.30% of the population speak 'Lalung' as mother tongue while 8.9% speak Assamese as mother tongue. The number of Bengali, Hindi and Nepali mother tongue speakers within the I.T.D.P. is only 1,323 (3.3%). There are only 1.2% Bodo speakers in the Marigaon I.T.D.P. areas. Thus preponderance of Lalungs (Tiwas) in the I.T.D.P. areas of Marigaon so far as mother tongue is concerned can be noticed.

In the entire nineteen I.T.D.P. areas 1,53,055 households i.e., or 43.6% of the total households speak Assamese followed by 82,430 or 23.5% Bodo speaking households. It may be noted that out of 19 I.T.D.Ps in Assam there is not an I.T.D.P. which is unilingual. For example Kokrajhar I.T.D.P. falling largely in the Boro speaking areas with mother tongue as medium of instruction upto the college level has only 38.4% Bodo speaking households. Similarly Dhemaji I.T.D.P. is a predominantly Miri (Mishing) inhabited area, yet we have only 15,039 households (49.9%) where Mishing is spoken as mother tongue.

**Conclusion**

What emerges from the above analysis is that development of the scheduled tribes through the I.T.D.Ps is a complex affair in the sense that the tribal villages are interspersed with non-tribal villages and therefore along with area development, family oriented approach will meet the aspirations of the tribals.

Unlike many other states of the Indian union, the I.T.D.Ps of Assam are not constituted with one or two tribes. In almost each I.T.D.P. there are population of three or more scheduled tribes, besides the non-tribals. The level of development and the cultural pattern differ from tribe to tribe. Therefore while formulating schemes for the I.T.D.P. the Socio-cultural factors of various tribes have to be taken into consideration.

In the I.T.D.Ps tribals and non-tribals live as brethren and there is an intimate relationship between the tribals and non-tribals. By and large, economic condition of the tribals does not differ materially with that of the non-tribals. Thus exclusive schemes for the welfare of the tribals cannot be drawn without benefitting the non-tribals. Therefore it is imperative that while formulating plans for the development of the tribals the needs and aspirations of the non-tribals of the I.T.D.P. whose economic conditions is not always sound as because they are non-tribals, should be taken into consideration. Thus resources from both T.S.P. and General Plan should be geared into the overall development of the I.T.D.P. areas. While doing so, emphasis should always be laid upon to provide the infrastructural benefit to the tribals. A coordinated approach by various development departments and tribal welfare agencies like the tribal Development corporations, Tribal Development Authorities will cater to the needs of the I.T.D.P. areas

It is seen that the growth rate of scheduled caste population in the I.T.D.P. area is accelerating and unless the influx is checked, a time may come when scheduled tribes in some I.T.D.P. areas will be overshadowed by non-tribals causing crisis of tribal identity.

The I.T.D.Ps. of Assam are multilingual. Along with the state language, other state and tribal languages/dialects are spoken. The tribals within the I.T.D.Ps. understand and speak Assamese and other languages spoken by the non-tribal neighbours. Thus multilingual character does not stand in the way of implementing development schemes for the tribals. For better understanding and good neighborliness the non-tribals within the I.T.D.Ps. should also learn the tribal languages/dialect and contribute their mite for the development of the tribal languages. Knowledge of tribal language is all the more essential for the non-tribal officials posted in the Integrated Tribal Development Project area.



\* Published in 'The Pattern and Problems of Population in North East India' Edited by B. Dutta Ray, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi 1986.

## Socio-Economic Change In Post-Independence Period In a Tribal Village In Assam

Bijoypur village, one of the 110 villages under Murkongselek Tribal Development Block of Lakhimpur District, had been selected as a representative model village for the study of Socio-Economic and Cultural Changes since 1947. Inhabited mainly by the Pagro Mishings, Bijoypur Village was carved out of five original small hamlets, namely, (1) Opar Tari, (2) Maj Tari, (3) Burisuti, (4) Rohodong and (5) Jonai. All these five hamlets were completely devastated by the great earthquake of 1950 and the stricken people of these hamlets established the present Bijoypur village in the year 1952. There are altogether 110 households in the village out of which only 17 belong to the Deori Tribe. These Deori families had migrated from Bihpuria (32 kilometers west of the Lakhimpur District Head Quarter) in the year 1966. There are 1361 persons in the village of whom 708 are males and 653 are females.

The village is divided into two parts, Upper Bijoypur and Lower Bijoypur and is connected by a Panchayat jeepable road with the Jonai, Ramdhan P.W.D. road. Unlike other Mishing villages, the Bijoypur has some special characteristics as regards village planning. The houses are constructed systematically on both the sides of the Panchayat road with sufficient marginal compounds and a gap of about 4 meters between them. The Murkongselek Jonai, T.D. Block had sanctioned Rs. 500.00 per family for this purpose. Any one visiting the village will be delighted by the natural scenery of the village. The vast expanse of paddy fields are on the southern side of the residential area.

There are four public congregational houses (Nam Ghars) and two Kali Thans in the village. The two primary schools

cater to the basic educational needs of the smaller children. The village library and the weaving centres are now defunct. For all their social and cultural amenities like marketing, administration, justice, post and wire-less service, medical treatment, games and sports, etc., the villagers have to come to Jonai Bazar.

## II

The predominant tribe living in the Bijoypur village is the Miri or Mishing who belong to the Tibeto-Burman Family of the Mongoloid group. "They are riverain tribe having a homogenous origin with the Pasi Miyongs and the Padams of Abor Hills. Originally they were a hill tribe within the ranges of the Abor, Miri and Mishimi hills of the present day Arunachal Pradesh and came down to the plains before the reign of the Ahom Kings and since then began settling in the riverain areas of the Brahmaputra and Subansiri rivers of Assam" (Allen - 1926).<sup>1</sup>

The Mishings still nostalgically remember their original link with the Adis. "The Adis call the plains Mishings as 'Aying BIRRANGS' (Plains brothers) and the plains Mishings call the Adis as 'Adi BIRRANGS' (hill brothers)". (Meckenzie - 1884)<sup>2</sup>. Till recently the Mishings were better known as 'Miris', a simplified form of 'Mieurieui'. "The name Miri was given by the Assamese to the people inhabiting the mountains between the Assam valley and Tibet". (Census - 1881)<sup>3</sup>. When the Mishings came down to the plains their introduction to the inquisitive plains people was to make themselves known as persons belonging to the land of the Mieurieus in the Abor hills. The people of plains being unable to utter the correct pronunciation, simplified it into Miri. Again this word Miri is not the synonym of 'Hill Miri' (District Gazetteer - 1926).<sup>4</sup>

The Mishings are found in four plains districts of Assam,

1. Allen B. C. - Assam District Gazetteer, Lakhimpur, Vol. III, 1926.
2. Meckenzie Alexander - History of the North-East Frontier of Bengal, P. 33. 1884.
3. Assam Census Report, 1881.
4. Assam District Gazetteer, 1926.

namely, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar and Darrang. They are living in the plains amidst Assamese and non Assamese people for about seven centuries. During this period many changes have taken place in the political and Socio-religious life of Assam and the cultural and religious life of the Mishings too, have undergone some tangible changes. In spite of these changes, the tribe still maintains its distinctive dialect and some of the fundamental social customs, traditions and beliefs.

### House :

Their houses are built on platforms raised about 1.5 meter above the ground. A typical Mishing house is sometimes as much as 40 meters in length and contains from 30 to 40 persons living in one great hall without compartments. The length and breadth of an average house is about 18 meters and 6 meters respectively.

The most important feature within a Mishing house is the hearth, 'Meram' which is looked upon with much respect. Besides cooking their daily meals certain offerings are also made in the hearth. There may be a separate hearth in the portico of the house where guests are entertained. This is a covered portico and access to it is made with the help of a ladder.

### Morung :

The 'Morung', which is commonly called as bachelor's dormitory is an important feature in the Mishing village. It is a public hall erected almost in all villages. The 'Morung' is constructed in a raised platform 1 to 1.5 meters above the ground without walls. The posts and the beams are decorated with wood carving of primitive, designs. Unlike the Naga 'Morung' the Mishing Morung is not a young man's house nor it is a 'Gitiora' of the Hos of Kolhan. The Mishing Morung serves the purpose for annual 'Porag' and other major festivals. Public gatherings such as 'Kebang' are also held here. It is also the usual venue for the village 'gams' (Chiefs) to give judgement of different cases. The house may not be permanent and it may be

constructed whenever occasion arises. At present in some advanced villages many of the old functions of the Morung have been taken over by the Namghars. Generally the 'Morung' is constructed in a central place of the village. During festivals the morungs are decorated and they become the centre of attractions of all the villagers.

#### *Agriculture :*

The Mishings are primarily agriculturists and the product of the fields is the chief means of their livelihood. Though agriculture is the principal means of support, yet among the Mishings of Bijoypur village it is still mainly in the subsistence level. They produce Sali paddy in their fields which is also the main crop. Ahu paddy is also produced as a subsidiary crop. Besides Sali and Ahu paddy, several varieties of summer and winter vegetables like potatoes, arums, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, etc. are grown in their fields.

The Mishings perform some ceremonies attached to agriculture. At the advent of the monsoon and before ploughing the fields they observe 'Ali-Ai-Ligang'. In the middle of cultivation, in the month of October, they perform 'Sarag Puza' so that the ancestor spirits may protect the flourishing sprouts from pests and other natural calamities. Again after the crops have been harvested, they worship 'Dabur'.

The Mishings believe that 'Kuber' (Lakshmi) is the goddess of wealth and agriculture and so the first bundle of crops is taken to the store in her name. Mustard seeds are widely grown in the village both for local consumption and for market. Rice is the staple food of the Mishings and along with rice leafy vegetables, edible roots, are taken as side dishes. Meat and fish are not everyday items of food, rather they are occasional delicacies. Their most favourite items are the pork and fowl. Both raw and dried meat and fish are used. Every household brews its own 'Apong (rice beer) and serves it as a drink to everybody, young or old. 'Apong is also considered as the essential item for entertaining guests.

#### *Dress :*

Before the mill made cloths invaded the Mishing villages, a Mishing woman would remain satisfied with a wide strip of cloth 'Sumpa' wearing in the waist extending up to the knee. In the breast they used a narrow strip of cloth called 'Galuk'. 'Hura' was the head dress. There was an extra small piece of cloth worn round the hips which showed distinction of married women from those of unmarried ones. The males used a long narrow strip of cloth round their waist called 'Kaping'. In recent years due to easy communication facilities mill made clothes have largely replaced their traditional dresses.

#### *Clan System :*

The Mishings are broadly known by two sections namely 'Barogam' and 'Dahgam'. But strangely enough such division is not found amongst the Hill Miris. In the Assam Census Report 1881 we find "the Miris are divided into two mutually exclusive sections, which are respectively known as 'Baro Gam' and 'Dahgam'. A third appellation of theirs is 'Chutia' which they say was given by the Ahom Kings and which seem to denote that they were found resident in the Chutia dominions at the time of their conquest by the Ahoms".<sup>5</sup> (Assam Census Report 1881). The Division is not watertight. These two divisions are further divided into a number of clans namely, amongst Barogam, Doley, Pegu, Kutum, Kuli, Pait, Basar, Pasar, Kardong, Misong, etc., and amongst 'Dahgam' - Moying, Chayang, Taye, Pamegam, Murung, Bori, Paow, Panging, Yein, Panchang, Noro, Koman, Pogag, Darik, Bosing, Rogon, Saro, Nagate, etc. Knowledge of clans is most important for marriage. It is to be noted that other than marriage purpose, clan distinction is never counted in their day to day life. The clans (Opings) mentioned above, are again subdivided into several sub clans bearing identical surnames signifying closest blood relation. The Mishings use the clan names as titles for surname. The clans derive their names from natural objects or from some characteristics of their ancestors.

5. Assam Census Report, 1881.

### **Marriage :**

With regard to clan the Mishings are endogamous but they are exogamous with regard to sub clan. Marriage within a sub clan, i.e., families of identical surname, cannot be made effective even if the sun rises in the west. Similarly marriage cannot take place between allied groups of families such as Pegu, Patir etc. As a rule the Mishings are monogamous but polygyny is not unknown as the well-to-do Mishings can marry more than one wife. Only the first wife enjoys the detailed ceremonies of a 'Midang' (formal marriage) and naturally occupies a favourable position among the wives. But the Mishing girls do not prefer to be second wives which they consider to be misfortune. Residence is patrilocal and after marriage the girl goes to live with her husband's family and the children born of their marriage bear their father's surname.

Broadly speaking the Mishings have two forms of marriage 'Midang' (formal) and 'Duglalanam' (informal). Both the forms are equally binding. The former is an expensive affair and it is usually planned and arranged by the parents. Pork and Apong are essential items for the marriage feast. The payment of the bride price is known as 'Alig'. In earlier days a mithun or its equivalent of Rs. 100.00 or so was charged as bride price. Today the educated Mishings prefer not to accept 'Alig' and those who accept bride price, the demand is not exorbitant.

### **Religious Beliefs :**

Although the Mishings introduce themselves as Hindus yet the students of tribal study are facing the problem of finding an appropriate nomenclature for the Mishings religion. On one side they are the devout followers of Mahapurushia Vaisnav Dharma and on the other side they are the worshippers of different gods and goddesses. Worshipping of spirits, sacrificing of fowls and consumption of rice beer are going hand in hand with the Vaisnava ideals according to which worshipping of different gods and goddesses and sacrificing of animals in the name of God, is prohibited. 'Anya Devi Deo, Nakariba Sew,

Bhakti Haiba, Byabhichar,' (Your religion will be polluted if you worship any other gods and goddesses except Lord Krishna). They worship the spirits underlying thunder and lightning, 'Mukling Taleng', earth and water, 'Among Asi', air and fire, 'Easr Eni'. These spirits are to be kept appeased with occasional offerings called 'Toleng Uii', and 'Rokpu Done.' There are various other evil spirits such as 'Asi Uii', 'Adi Uii', 'Yumrang Uii', etc. to whom all calamities are attributed. Another important spirit is 'Dopum Dorum' who is believed to be a three headed demon. The 'Mibu' or the village expert is the only person who can appease these spirits. Pigs, Fowls, Plantains, 'Apong', etc. are offered in the name of the spirits. The 'Mibu' possesses supernatural powers and from his early childhood he observes some rules regarding diet and behaviour. He is informed in dream that his god given sword 'Yoksa' has been kept in a particular place in the forest and one night he goes to that particular place without anybody's knowledge and brings his prized article. Thus he becomes a 'Miboo' and from that night he can have a direct relation with the spirits.

### **Death and the Attendant Ceremonies :**

Among the Mishings all the dead bodies irrespective of age, sex and nature of death are buried. Every village has a common burial ground. The grave is called 'Age'. The demise of one who has gained honour is announced by ringing a bell, 'Lenang'. Dead body is taken out to the courtyard not by the usual door but by a special door made in the back side wall. The corpse is bathed and kept in a Log-coffin called 'Rung Kung' after being wrapped in 'Empoo' (a bamboo mat 1.5 meters long and 1 meter wide). After the death the Mishings observe a four tier purificatory ceremony namely 'Tilani, on the 3rd day, 'Sushi' or 'Pyade' on the 6th day, 'Mahekia' on the 30th day and 'Daha' after one year or so. One can postpone the final ceremony, i.e., Daha maximum for a period of 3 or 4 years. Two or three families can jointly observe this function.

### III

Acculturation is inevitable for any living culture. Culture of any people undergoes changes along with the change of time. For the real grasp of any culture one must know the changes it undergoes and in order to do so one must also discover the direction of change. In the present study efforts have been made to pin point the changes in the Socio-cultural life of Mishings of Bijoypur village with special reference to the period after 1947 (1947-67). Emphasis has been given to the study of the changes in agriculture, education, health and hygiene, water supply, economic condition, dress, food habits and religious beliefs and practices. Out of a total of 110 households in the village 28, i.e. 25% have been selected for our present study.

#### *Economy :*

The Economic basis of the people of this village is agriculture. In respect of agriculture the pre-independence condition is tolerably improved. The villagers grow Sali paddy in larger quantities and lands for this cultivation are also abundant. The total lands under Sali and Ahu paddy are 2427 bighas and 507 bighas respectively. Before 1947 the people did not possess sufficient agricultural lands and as a result, the overall economic condition in those days was far from satisfactory. Today due to the availability of agricultural lands and necessary care taken by the block authorities, the position of food in the village is considerably better. Modern agricultural amenities like minor irrigation, pesticides and fertilisers are also available for the villagers. During 1958 two schemes of minor irrigations were undertaken. The total benefitted area was 1051 acres.

#### *Fertilisers and Pesticides :*

Magico-religious beliefs are prominent in the socio-religious life of the villagers. By and large the people do not like to apply fertilisers in their fields. Pesticides, however, are used and during a period of 5 years from 1963 to 1967, 3 quintals of pesticides were distributed by the Block authorities among the

villagers. There is not much improvement as regards agricultural practices. Some old system of transplanting and sowing of Sali and Ahu paddy respectively is followed. Mechanised farming is yet to get its due share.

But for the consumption of a good amount of paddy in the shape of rice beer, the position in respect of paddy would have been much better. On an average every household consumes at least 2 quintals of paddy per year in the shape of rice beer. Betel leaves and nuts are inevitable items not only in their day-to-day life but also in all their socio-religious ceremonies. These are not produced in the village and on an average each family spends Rs. 50.00 per year on these items.

Domestication of animals is practiced by the Mishings for food, ploughing and religious purposes. The people use the ox as power animal for drawing the plough and the cart. Consumption of milk is not very popular and the major portion of the milk is sold to the traders. Pigs and fowls are reared mainly for local consumption. Except Endi there is no other cottage industry worth the name in the village. As regards Endi chadars almost all the families are self-sufficient. 'Miri Jims' for which the Mishings are famous, are not produced in this village, as the raw material becomes very costly day by day. The people purchase their warm clothes from the market. Mishing women are experts in weaving and they weave the ordinary varieties of clothes for all the members of their family. The better varieties of clothes, which are used while going to towns or social calling, are purchased from the market. Thus a considerable amount of money is spent every year in purchasing bazar-made clothes. In the pre-independence days dependence upon bazar-made clothes was comparatively less and the elderly persons preferred home-made clothes. Before 1947 there was no organised cottage industry in the village but since independence the Tribal Development Block at Jonai has supplied six Endi spinning machines to the village. One weaving co-operative society was also established in the year 1957. Cottage industries like carpentry, cane work, pottery, tailoring, gold-silver smithy, black smithy, brassware,

beekeeping, etc. are non-existent in this village. The local Panchayat has supplied one sewing machine to a poor family. Two boys of the village have been trained in beekeeping industry at Bahona, near Jorhat.

Agriculture is the sole occupation of the people both in 1947 and in 1967. Employment in various other fields other than agriculture is negligible. In 1947 there were only 3 Government servants in the village and all of them were primary school teachers. The position of Government servants has not improved very much during the period after independence and today there are only 11 Government employees in the village. The Mishings of this village are not very enthusiastic regarding business. In spite of sufficient scope for the development of cottage industry with the help of Government subsidies, the people are not coming forward to utilise the opportunities. There are only 2 contractors in the village and only one is Government registered. They consider their profession as part time occupation. During agricultural season they remain themselves busy in agricultural activities.

The nature of present day household expenditure does not tally with that of the pre-independence one. Before 1947 the people incurred expenditures on kerosine oil, salt, clothes, gur, and bidis. Only a very few richer families could purchase cosmetics, umbrellas, chair, table, etc. In 1947 there were only 5 by-cycles in the village but today the number is 25. At present there are 3 transistor radios and one harmonium in the village. Today almost every household possesses cosmetics, umbrellas, hurricanes lanterns. Some families are having bed sheet, purdah and cup-plates also. Along with the rise of standard of living, the expenditure also increases manifold.

#### ***Socio-Cultural Life :***

Literacy has been defined as the ability to read and write simple capital letters. Even under this liberal criterion there were only 6 and 9 persons who were reading up to primary and high school levels respectively in the pre-independence days. But

after independence the position is slightly improved. There was no matriculates or graduates in the village in 1947. In 1967, however, there are 4 matriculates, out of which one is a female. Similarly in 1947, there was no graduate in the village where as in 1967 there are 2 graduates. Besides 3 boys from this village are studying in colleges. In 1947, only 6 boys studied up to high school standard but in 1967 as many as 15 students are reading in Jonai H.E. School, out of them 5 are females. Again in 1947, there were only 10 persons who passed the L. P. standard but the figure is 38 in 1967.

In the pre-independence days female education was not encouraged. Today the picture is completely different. In 1947, there was no H. E. School facilities within easy reach of the villagers but the present Jonai H. E. School is situated at a distance of only 8 k.m. from the village. Hostel facilities for both boys and girls are also available. As regards social organisation no marked change was visible. Same old traditions and folk beliefs are still followed with characteristic tribal reverence.

#### ***Health and Hygiene :***

As regards general health in the village there is marked change in comparison with the pre-independence days. Epidemics like Malaria and Pox, which were once the killer diseases are completely outrooted from the village. No longer the people rely solely upon the indigenous medicine and of late dependence upon the Jonai Hospital, which is situated at a distance of 8 k.m. from the village, has increased considerably. Today in almost all delivery cases the people depend upon the M.B.B.S. doctor.

#### ***Drinking Water :***

In the pre-independence days the people depended mainly upon the river Brahmaputra for their water supply but today the Panchayat authorities have supplied 8 tube wells and 6 ring wells to the villagers. The villagers use those tube wells and ring wells in both summer and winter seasons.

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### **Trade and Commerce :**

In 1947, the villagers had their weekly market within their village but the present Jonai Bazar is situated at a distance of 8 k.m. from the village. Before independence the Mishings sold their local products namely rice, mustard, potatoes and matikalai in the Murkongselek bazar. The same items are sold even today but the Mishings do not carry these items to the bazar. The Non-Mishing Bihari traders perform all the trade in this village. For their ordinary purchases like salt, kerosine oil, clothes, yarn, betel leaves and nuts, bidis, dao and spade, etc., the villagers come to the Jonai bazar. There are three grocery shops in the village which are run by the local villagers.

### **Co-operative Society :**

Before independence there was no co-operative society of any kind in the village but after independence one weaving co-operative society was established in the village in the year 1957. The Panchayat authorities had granted a building with four looms to the co-operative society. The villagers are availing themselves of the opportunities offered by the Mishing Multipurpose Co-operative Society with its head quarters at Jonai.

### **Conclusion :**

- (a) The most important gain, in post independence period the attainment of a stable life after 1950. Till 1950 they were a flood stricken people and every year they had to face the on-sights of nature. But the model set up of their village by the Murkongselek Jonai Development Block brought a new hope to the people which is reflected in their general socio-economic condition. Due to easy educational facilities and Government welfare measures percentage of literacy increased. In terms of quality also there is a reasonable improvement. Health and hygiene got a new lease of life. No longer the people have to surrender to the killer diseases like Small Pox and Malaria.

- (b) The second important change occurred in their Socio-Cultural life is the establishment of Gaon Panchayat system in the village. Along with the election of a Gaon Panchayat Secretary, some changes in respect of leadership pattern took place. No longer the 'Gam' or the Gaonbura is consulted by the Government Officials for any work to be done in the village. The Secretary, Gaon Panchayat, plays the necessary role in this regard. But the role of the traditional 'Gam' cannot be underestimated in so far as other socio-religious matters are concerned. In fact the 'Gam's' traditional role in this regard remains unhampered. The villagers obey him with traditional reverence. Again the 'Kebang' or the village council of elders still decides cases of local nature. It is presided over by the 'Gam'.
- (c) For general advice in secular matters, the villagers approach the Secretary of the Gaon Panchayat and the Head Master of the Jonai H.E. School, who hails from Bijoypur village. The Head Master is respected by all the villagers but in socio-religious occasions the 'Gam's' traditional position remains the same.
- (d) Although administration is brought into the threshold of the villagers and two Gram Sevaks have been appointed from the village yet the impact of modernism in respect of agricultural undertakings, is not felt. Same old traditional pattern is followed. Jhuming, however, is not resorted to, which was reportedly practised by two families of the village till 1955. The reason for the discontinuance of jhuming is that the lands belong to the Forest Department and restriction has been imposed on the utilisation of the fallow lands in wasteful cultivation like jhuming. Scientific method of cultivation is limited to the use of pesticide only. Block authorities have undertaken many ambitious schemes in the village but due to the age old

superstitious beliefs, the peoples' voluntary participation is not forth-coming.

- (e) There is no major change in respect of socio-religious beliefs and practices. All the rituals and ceremonies are observed with traditional tribal reticence. However, in respect of dress and daily habits certain changes are noticed which are superfluous. The core of their culture is maintained while keeping only a ventilation open for some changes. While cup-plates, purdah, chair and table, transistor radio-sets are used by almost all the families, they are not forming an integral part of their culture. They feel pride to entertain a guest (even non-Mishing) with their 'Apong' served in a belmetal bowl.

Although there is good scope for marketing of their local produce yet the people are not coming forward for trade and commerce. They sell their produce to the Bihari traders at half the market price. We have noticed that the village is maintaining the traditional distinctiveness while accepting only a little of modernism. As pointed by Nehru, "one must always remember, however, that we do not mean to interfere with their way of life but want to help them to live it. Development must be according to their own genius and not something that they cannot absorb or imbibe and which merely uproots them. .... But let this development and change be natural and be in the nature of self development with all the help one can give in the process." (Elwin - 1956)<sup>6</sup>.



6. Elwin Veerier - Myths of the North-East Frontier of India, 1958, p. 56.

\* North Eastern Research Bulletin, Department of Sociology, Dibrugarh University, Vol VII Summer 1976.

## The Lalungs (Tiwas)

### *Origin of the word Lalung*

Opinions differ in respect of the origin of the word Lalung, a Scheduled Tribe (Plains) of Assam, found mostly in the district of Nowgong. The Karbis called those people as Lalungs who were living on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. ('La' means water and 'Lung' means rescued). The river Brahmaputra gave shelter to those Bohemian people and hence they were known as Lalungs. It is assumed that there was a branch of the river Daiyang in the Karbi Anglong called 'Nilalung'. During the reign of the Kamata Kings, the Lalungs had to leave their original habitat and pitched their tents on the banks of the river Nilalung. Later on the people living on the banks of this river were known as Lalung.

### *Myths of Origin*

There is a popular legend behind the word Lalung. 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 follow the royal religion. A section of the Lalungs refused to accept that religious system and as a result the king's fury fell heavily upon them. As a punishment they had to bear a red imprint ('Lal' in Assamese) 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 popular mythological story behind the origin of the word Lalung. Once Lord Mahadev was heavily intoxicated with rice beer and while he was lying unconscious in a road, a stream of saliva ('lal') came out from the mouth of Lord Mahadev. 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 'lal')

A similar story with a little variation is also prevalent among the Lalungs. Once upon a time Lord Mahadev 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 these five drops of saliva. As these five human beings were created out of the divine saliva ('lal') 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 Mahadev as 'Manus Mahadev'.

#### *Origin of the word Tiwa*

The Lalungs prefer to call themselves as Tiwa. The name Lalung, they opine, was given by non-Tiwas and hence the preference. But in the official records and in the list of Assam Scheduled Tribes (Plains), we find only Lalung and therefore in the following paragraphs we will use the word Lalung. According to the Lalungs 'Ti' means water and 'Wa' means superior. As the Lalungs landed on the plains of Assam following the course of the holy river Brahmaputra, they might have introduced themselves as Tiwa to the inquisitive non-Tiwas. The legends prevalent among the Lalungs of Nowgong reveal that 'Ti' means water and 'Wa' 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 thus believe themselves to be descendants of the 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.

It might happen that after their appearance in the Assam Plains, the local Assamese called them as 'Tibbatias' meaning, people hailing from Tibet. In course of time this Tibbatia might have changed into Tiwa.

#### *Original abode*

When asked about their original abode, a few octogenarian Lalungs of Nowgong district expressed that originally the Lalungs belonged to the Hillali kingdom. The boundaries of this kingdom extended the whole of present Nowgong and eastern Darrang districts. At first they were residing on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra but later on their habitation area spread to the other bank also. As time passed the people preferred to call themselves as subjects of 'Lali' an abbreviated form of Hillali. On the northern side of Nowgong district there is a dead branch of the river Brahmaputra called Lali. Probably the capital of the Hillali kingdom was on the northwestern side of present Nowgong district. Reference of Hillali can be traced in their folksongs which are sung in their various socio-religious occasions.

Due to the invasions of Kamrup and Kamata kings, the people of Hillali fled away to the southern hilly tracts. They pitched their tents on the foothills extending upto Kandali, Bamuni and Kathiatoli. This Laopani, Jokkata, Amsi, Singimari, Sahari lying on both sides of the Kapili were the original typical Lalung villages. A section of the Lalungs proceeded towards Rongkhai, Langkoi, Amsi, Marjong lying on the boundary of the Jayantia hills. During the Kachari rule, these Lalungs were compelled to proceed towards Gobha, Dimaria, Khaplang khunchi of Joyantia hills and Nelli, Khola, Ouguri, Sonaikuchi, Kamarkuchi and Balikuchi under Nowgong district. Later on they came back to the foothills of western Nowgong extending upto Laopani and Jokkata. As the Lalungs preferred to live in the secluded foothill areas, the contemporary Ahom officials called them as 'Dantiyalia'.

During the reign of Swargadeo, Jayadhvaj Singha one independent Panchorajya (five principalities) was established under the Raha Administrative Circle. The Ahom administrative policy was to live and let live. They wanted to establish good neighbourly relations with the indigeneous people. Thus the Lalungs under the benign protection of the Ahom king returned to the plains and established five principalities namely Topakuchia,

Barapujia, Mikir Gonya, Phulaguria and Khaigoria. Later on some more Lalung villages were established on the south-eastern part of Nowgong district. During the reign of Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha 'Sato Rajya' (seven principalities) was established under the Jagi Administrative Circle. These were Kumoi, Tarani, Baghara, Tetelia, Kacharigonya, Sukhnagiya and Ghagua. Later on the Chiefs of these principalities were designated as Powali Raji (Mini Kings). As a result of the privilege, these Powali Rajas paid nominal taxes to the Ahom King.

Various scholars and even elderly Lalungs try to locate the original abode of the Lalungs in the 'Joyta Khariam' of Jayantia hills under present day Meghalaya. They point out to one distinct socio-cultural trait of the Lalungs i.e. the prevalence of matriarchal system. But the educated section of the Lalungs do not contribute to this line of thinking. During Kachari rule, a large section of the Lalungs had to leave their abode on the plains and fled away towards the Jayantia hills. As the Lalungs lived in the Jayantia hills for a considerable period of time, they had to accept certain social customs of the Jayantias. When the Jayantia king became a titular head under the powerful Ahom king and was obliged to supply serfs to the latter, the Jayantia king tried to utilise the Lalungs for that purpose and knowing the evil intention of the king the Lalungs fled away towards plains bordering Gobha. After arriving on the plains, they sacrificed one gourd, 'komora' symbolising their cutting off the relation with the Jayantias for all time to come. Since then the place assumed its name a Komorakata. Even today people of a particular clan among the Lalungs do not eat this vegetable.

Another legend describes them as originally inhabiting in the Jayantia hills, who moved into the plains of Nowgong district because they disliked the principle laid down by the Jayantias that all property should descend through the female line.

According to another tradition, the Lalungs were originally settled near Dimapur (the rail head for Nagaland from where a road to Kohima starts) but they moved into the hills to escape the disagreeable duty of providing the Kachari Raja with a daily

ration of six seers of human milk, an item of diet for which the king had an unreasonable craving. This peculiar craving for human milk has been corroborated by the historians too. In the history of the Kachari Rajas compiled by Dimarua Raja in 1772 A.D. it is recorded that when Pratappur, a city on the north bank of the Brahmaputra was captured by Arimatta, a large number of inhabitants fled to Demera, a fertile region in the country of the Kachari Raja. This Raja was in the habit of drinking human milk, a habit which earned for him the dislike of his subjects. One day two of the king's messengers entered the house of a Mikir woman and found her nursing her baby. One messenger remained in charge of the infant, while the other attempted to milk the mother, who, furious with indignation, struck him dead at her feet with a blow from a hoe. The Demera Raja feared that the Kachari Raja would punish him for this murder as it occurred within his territory. He therefore migrated northwards to Dimarua with all his people.

The Lalungs belong to the great Bodo tribe into which tribes like Bodo Kachari, Chutia, Deori, Rabha, Mech, Tippara or Tifra, Garo etc. included. In his 'Kachari Buranji' Dr. S.K. Bhuyan opines, "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." Mr. 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, Köch, Solanimiyas, Mahaliyas, Phulguriyas, Saraniyas, Dimasas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos and Hajongs.

In ancient times the three great divisions of the Bodos namely Tifra, Tiwa and Dimasa lived along the banks of a lake near Tibbet. In course of time they entered Assam through the northeast passes. The local people could not pronounce Tifra and thus Tifra became Tippara. The Tiwa had a complete new nomenclature and it was replaced by Lalung, while the Dimasa got a suffix to its original name and it came to be known as

Dimasa Kachari. Traditionally Tipparas, Lalungs and Dimasa Kacharis have close affinities. The Tipparas use 'Ti' for water and 'Fra' for father. The Lalungs too use 'Fa' for father. The Lalungs of Nowgong district address their lord as 'Fa Mahadev'. Again both the Lalungs and the Kacharis worship Siva as their supreme god. The synonyms for rice and water in their respective languages are 'Mai' and 'Di' or 'Ti'.

At present large concentration of the Lalungs are found in Kapili, Mayang, Bhurbandha, Kathiatali and Kampur Development Block areas of Nowgong district. A few Lalung villages are found in the western areas of the Karbi Anglong district and the Nartiang Elaka of the Jowai Sub-Division of Jaintia district of Meghalaya. There are four Lalung villages under the Dhemaji Development Block areas of Lakhimpur district.

### **Demography**

As per 1961 Census the total population of the Lalungs 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 Nowgong district as per 1961 Census was 87538 and out of that the Lalungs alone constituted 63%. Similarly in the Census of 1971 out of a total tribal population of 125115 in the Nowgong district 95609 i.e. 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 concentrates in the Nowgong district. Another characteristic feature of their demography is that while maintaining their distinctive tribal identities, the Lalungs are trying to assimilate the Assamese language and culture. In 1891 Dr. Grierson (Linguistic Survey of India) found 40000 Lalung language speakers in Assam but the figure came down to 10576 in 1961 Census.

The percentage of literacy among the tribals of Assam as per 1971 Census is 26.03 (males 34.62% and females 17.16%) against the all India figures of 17.63% for male and 4.85% for female. The percentage of literacy among the Lalungs as per

1971 Census is 21.5 (for male 31.5% and for female 11.2%). Out of a total Lalung population of 95609 (1971 Census) as many as 75118 i.e. 78.5% are illiterates.

### **Village Life**

The Lalung villages like all other plains tribal villages are important units in the organisation of their socio-religious life. Though a plains tribe, their houses are almost similar to those of their Assamese brethren. The villages are surrounded either by paddy fields and jungles or by a rivulet on one side and paddy fields and jungles on the other. The number of houses in a village may vary from 20 to 100. 'Borghar', 'Namghar' and 'Than' (all public congregational halls) are essential features of Lalung villages. The Namghar, however, is popular among the followers of the Mahapurushia cult only.

The Lalungs have had a proud tradition of well managed dormitory system called 'Deka Chang'. Of late this important institution has lost much of its pristine glory. The institution exists in a few Lalung villages as a prestigious traditional institution of the days gone by. The Deka Chang imparts training to the unmarried youths and it acts, by and large, as a welfare institution which is responsible for the welfare of the villagers in various aspects.

### **Village Structure**

Among the Lalungs a single village does not form the lowest administrative unit. It is 'Buni' consisting of one or more villages that forms an administrative unit. For the smooth functioning of a Buni there are different office bearers such as Lorok, Forongai, Pator, Changmaji, Koroimaji, Deori, Barik, Hatari and Randhani.

Before the advent of the British and consequent annexation of the Lalung principalities, the Lalungs had their own 'Rajas' whom they called Deo Raja. One of the important principalities of the Lalungs was Gobha and under Gobha there were twelve small Rajas called 'Sato Raja' and 'Pancho Raja'. There were several 'Bunis' under the administrative control of

each Raja. The Raja was assisted by a host of officers like Bordoloi, Kowar, Patra, Borbarua, Dhulia, Dalia, Kalia and Paik. All these offices were hereditary.

Today considerable changes in respect of the traditional village structure, have taken place. Besides the Gaonbura (village headman) each village has a Pathek, Barik, Medhi, Gayan and Bharali who have to perform various assigned roles in the socio-religious functions. Politically the villages are administered under the Panchayati Raj system.

#### *Agriculture and Food habits*

The Lalungs are primarily agriculturists. The outturn of the fields is the chief means of their livelihood. Sali, Bao and Ahu are their major crops. Jute, mustard and matikalai are also produced. Winter and summer vegetables of several varieties are grown for household consumption only. In all the agricultural activities co-operation among all the villagers is a salient feature. Besides weaving cloths and preparing meals, the womenfolk take active part in the agricultural activities.

Rice is the staple food of the Lalungs. Their two major meals consist of rice and vegetables. Foul and pork are their special delicacies. Previously home made rice-beer was an essential item in their daily menu but nowadays due to the poor economic condition consumption of rice-beer is restricted.

#### *Social Stratification*

##### **Clan Organisation**

The Lalungs are divided into a number of exogamous clans called 'Nane' or 'Kul'. The major clans are - Macharang, Madur, Maloi, Dafor, Sukai, Kasa, Cholong, Kakhor, Darfong, Damlong, Amchong, Loron etc. Originally they had only twelve clans but later on these main clans have been further sub-divided into a number of sub-clans, called 'Dhan Bangah'.

These subclans are :

Clan	Sub-clan
1. Macharang	- Machereng, Magor.
2. Madur	- Ladur, Puru, Sagara.
3. Maloi	- Kangsong, Pumba (Puma).
4. Dafor	- Mithi, Lomfoi, Morong.
5. Sukai	- Kharai.
6. Amfli	- Aagara, Chanchar.
7. Kasa	- Mithi.
8. Cholong	- Muni, Melang.
9. Amchong	- Amchi.
10. Kakhor	- Aagari.
11. Darfong	- Damlong, Kholre.
12. Loron	- --

It may be noted that the figure twelve has certain socio-political significance. "It seems to have been the practice in this part of India for kings to appoint twelve advisers or governors. Noranarayan had twelve ministers of state. Twelve chiefs of 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 become 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 sense". (History of Assam by E. A. Gait).

The Lalungs have a 'Khuta' system of social grouping which can also be called extension of a family. Following the genealogy each family of a certain clan forms a social grouping called 'Bangsha' or 'Khuta'. A 'Khel' (clan) consists of several such 'Khutas'. A single Khuta cannot 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 'Khuta'. Because whether solemnizing a marriage ceremony or observing death rites, the 'Khuta' plays an important role for the family.

A Lalung 'Khel' selects the 'Giyati' (priest) to preside over the socio-religious occasions like 'Karam' (purificatory ceremony after death) and allied ceremonies. The 'Zela' (mediator) plays a major role in a Lalung marriage and he must be selected by a 'Khel'. It may be noted that 'Giyati' and 'Zela' must not belong to the 'Khuta' in which the ceremonies are observed.

The Lalungs maintain a clan superiority. Thus 'Bara Bhuni', 'Na Bhuni', 'Sat Bhuni' divisions are noticed in their society. Inter-Bhuni marriages are allowed. The 'Bara Bhuni' clans are mostly found among the Karbis while the Lalungs have 'Na Bhunis' and 'Sat Bhunis'. The clans belonging to 'Na Bhuni' are considered as a superior class. For example, Melang clan belongs to 'Na Bhuni' and it is considered as a superior clan. It may 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'. They use a number of titles, which formerly indicated social hierarchy. The titles commonly found among them are Deo Raja, Deka Raja, Pator, Senapati, Konwar, Bordoloi, Doloi, Kakati, Manta Deori Bharali etc.

### Family

Among the Lalungs the family is a closely knit unit which is the basis for well co-ordinated social system. "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 sexual relationship and one or more children own or adopted, of the socially co-habiting adults" (Murdock, 1965). The Lalung family extends to a 'Khuta' (described elsewhere) and thus plays a major role in determining social behaviour among the members of 'Khuta'. Family is the training institute for the minors. Here they learn all dos and don'ts. Thus a family teaches how one's wife should maintain avoidance with her husband's mother's brother. The

Lalungs believe that the husband's mother's brother must not touch the niece's wife even if she gets drowned.

They have both nuclear and joint family systems. Usually a family consists of a man, his wife and unmarried children. But sometimes the same homestead may also be occupied by his married sons also. Father is the head of the family and all the members obey him.

### Kinship

Due to their long association with the Jayantias, the Lalungs adopted some of the socio-cultural traits of the Jayantias. Scholars, therefore, make an effort to include the Lalungs in the group of matriarchal people. In fact the Lalungs had followed the matriarchal system of inheritance but of late the practice has been done away with due mainly to the efforts of the educated sections of the people.

The kinship terminology prevalent among them may be termed as descriptive. But the use of certain classificatory kinship terminology cannot be overlooked. Thus 'Magara Ayung' is used to address the father's elder sister as well as mother's elder sister. Similarly Ma-aa-Ayung denotes the father's elder brother as well as mother's elder sister's husband. Some of the kinship terminologies prevalent among the Lalungs are shown below.

<i>English</i>		<i>Lalung</i>
Father	-	Pang
Mother	-	Ayang
Father's mother	-	Buri
Father's father	-	Aja
Son	-	Cha
Son's son	-	Chu
Daughter	-	Choja
Father's elder Brother	-	Ma-aa-Ayung
Father's younger Brother	-	Dada

Brother (elder)	'''	-	Kaka
Brother (younger)	'''	-	Gajal
Sister (elder)		-	Bai
Sister (younger)		-	Nana
Son-in-law		-	Jangai
Brother-in-law (elder)		-	Jela
Brother-in-law (younger)		-	Chali
Father's younger sister		-	Ani
Father's elder sister		-	Magara Ayung
Elder brother's wife		-	Bauji
Younger brother's wife		-	Achi.

#### ***Property and Inheritance :***

It was reported by the elderly Lalungs that the Lalung society had followed a matrilineal system of inheritance in the past decades which, however, is not practised non-a-days. Instead they practise a losely knit matrilineal system of inheritance. The Lalungs of the hilly region still follow the matrilineal system of inheritance. Even among the plains Lalungs of Nowgong district matriliney is practised by those limited few who keep 'Ghar Jiya' or 'Gabhia' i.e. the son-in-law lives with his wife in her house. In such cases the property goes from mother to daughter. Under the prevailing patrilineal system of the Lalungs, the daughters are eligible to share the property. Apart from the jointly owned family property, the individual members can acquire property which is confined to the personal requirements of the individual.

#### ***Marriage***

Among the Lalungs marriage is the accepted form of union between a man and a woman. Illegal unions, especially incestuous ones are very much dreaded and under no circumstances social recognition can be given to such unions. Marriages are solemnised after the attainment of puberty. Boys

usually marry between the ages of twenty two to twenty eight and girls between fifteen and twenty five. Clan exogamy is the general rule and monogamy is the socially and legally recognised type of marriage. Polygamy is avoided. Cousin marriage (both FSD and MBD types) are not in vogue in Lalung society. Levirate is not practised while sorrorate is resorted to by a few.

Widow remarriage is in vogue among the Lalungs. Cases of divorce are very rare and there is harmonious relation between husband and wife.

They have two forms of marriage, namely, formal marriage or marriage by negotiation (Khoja) and informal marriage or 'Gandharba' marriage.

#### ***Formal Marriage***

The literate and well-to-do Lalungs prefer this type of marriage which entails considerable expenditure and long formalities. It is celebrated with much pomp and grandeur. In this type of marriage the guardians of the prospective couple take the initiative. The prospective groom's father along with two or three elderly men of the village proceed to the girl's house and offer the proposal to the girl's parents. The party brings one earthen pot of rice beer (Zoo), some betel leaves, nuts and some rice cakes. This ceremony is called 'Bata Bhaga'. If the girl's parents accept the proposal, other formalities like 'Choa Chui' 'Kharu Mani Prindhwa Bhar', 'Bor Bhar', 'Khatira Bhar', and finally 'Biya', will follow. On the 'Biya' Day the groom accompanied by friends and relatives proceeds to the bride's house. The party is taken inside a 'Rabha' where elderly relatives of bride assemble. The bride is taken out and seated just beside the groom. The elderly villagers bless the couple to remain as 'Ek Swami Ek Bharjya' (live like one merging their separate identities). Earlier the 'Zela' discusses about the bride price and generally Rs. 60.00 to Rs. 100.00 are paid as bride price in the formal marriages (previously bride price was not charged in their marriages). A big feast is arranged with which the villagers are entertained.



### *Informal Marriage*

The second form i.e. 'Gandharba' marriage is the most widely prevalent form of marriage among the Lalungs. It is a love marriage in which the lover takes away his beloved on a stipulated night. Next morning the lover's relatives approach the girl's parents and if terms and conditions laid by the parents of the girl are agreeable to the parents of the boy, the parents of the girl give consent to the marriage. In such marriages the bride price is nominal (For 'Panch Bhani' = Rs. 5.00, for 'Sat Bhani' = Rs. 7.00 and for 'Na Bhani' = Rs. 9.00). Rupee one goes to the common fund of the village while the remainder is owned by the girl's parents. The boy's parents entertain the villagers with a feast.

### *Marriage by Force*

In the strict sense of the term this type of marriage cannot be called a marriage at all because in such marriages, the girl hardly lives one night with the boy who takes her away without her consent. As soon as the matter is known to the parents and relatives of the girl, they rush to the boy's house and demand the girl. If the boy's family does not handover the girl, then the girl's relatives apply force and take away the girl with them. Next day the girl's parents invite an assembly of the village elders and a formal complaint is placed before it. Generally the judgment goes against the boy. As a punishment the boy's family has to pay a fine ranging from Rs. 100.00 to Rs. 150.00 along with rice-beer jar, betel leaves and nuts.

### *Joron Biya :*

Generally poorer sections resort to this type of marriage. The boy goes to the girl's house with some friends and carries one rice-beer jar, one basketful of rice/rice cakes, two gourds and some betel leaves and nuts. After the refreshment the boy takes away the girl with him to his house. After three or five days the couple visits the girl's house with some friends. They carry one 'Bhar' (two basketful of rice, betel leaves and nuts

etc.) and five fowls. 'Zelas' of both sides are invited. The invited elderly people formally recognise the couple on this day.

### *Political Institution*

Once the Lalungs had their own 'Kings' and the contemporary history also supports this. We had already mentioned about 'Pancho Raja' and 'Sato Raja'. Rajmohan Nath in his famous book 'The Background of Assamese Culture' has mentioned about Gobha Raja. 'They (Lalungs) appear to have been all along associated with the Jaintias living on the north eastern slope of the Khasi hills on the border land of the plains districts of Kamrupa and Nowgong. During the Ahom rule some Lalung chiefs near Raha were alienated by the Ahom chief stationed at Raha from the suzerainty of Jaintia. In 1834 Chatra Singha, the ruler of Gobha was alleged to have sacrificed several persons of Kamarupa before the goddess Kali and this made the British interfere and ultimately resulted in the annexation of Jaintia and thereby of the Lalung states to the British empire."

Henceforth the village administration was directly under the control of the district administration. The district authority, however, entrusted the village Gaonbura to assist him in the day-to-day administration and thus the Gaonbura yields sufficient political power. Even to-day he decides ordinary cases of local nature in a meeting of village elders. He is assisted by one official called Barika whose duty is to inform the villagers about the meeting and such other occasions. Appeals against a Gaonbura's decision rests in a meeting of chief of a 'Bangsha'. Cases of serious nature are decided by a meeting of big officials such as Doloi, Changmaji, Deoraja, Dekaraja, Pator, Senapati, Deori, Forongai etc.

Today all the Lalung villages are administered under the Panchayati Raj system.

### *Language and literature*

The Lalung language 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 and for education as well as for day-to-day exchange of thoughts the people use the Assamese language. The Lalungs residing in the hilly regions, however, are maintaining their language in tact. Of late an effort has been made to acquaint the younger sections with their traditional language. With a view to propagate Lalung language and culture the educated youths are coming forward. With that end in view two issues of annual magazine, The 'Ring Chang' (Echo) have been brought into light. The script used in the above mentioned publication is Assamese and most of the articles are written in Assamese language.

Except Reverend M. Balwan's work, which was written in Roman Script, no Tiwa grammar written in Assamese script has yet been published. Thus Rev. Balwan's Tiwa grammar becomes a milestone for the Tiwa language. It is learnt that 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 All Assam Tiwa Yuba Chatra Sanmilan has tried to revive the decaying Lalung language and culture and the response of the Lalungs to this venture is encouraging. Like all other plains tribes the Lalungs are also very rich in folktales and folksongs. Folktales regarding their original abode, place names, gods and goddesses and origin of the clans are very popular among the Lalungs. For example 'Hukaiwali-Ne-Khorong' (story of the origin of the Sukai Clan), 'Karai Thawa Nawariya' (story of a weeping boatman), 'Kumjeluka Aru Harinar Kingbadanti', (story of a snail and a deer) are recited by the elderly people before their grandsons.

### **Religion**

The religion of Lalungs is based on a belief in deities. Lord Mahadev is considered as the supreme God. He is be-

nevolent god who showers blessings upon those who worship Him with devotion. He is the creator, protector and destroyer of all. The mantra chanted by the priest invokes Him as "Fa Mahadev Jelaguru Arambhanire Sristini Garaki, Bhumini Garaki, Srajanta, Palanta, Rakhanta, Dekhanata, Guru, Nala Nila, Uran Buran, Charimuthi Jivar Garaki, Nali Rakhanta, Puli Rakhanta, Go Rakhanta, Po Rakhanta, Khawondata, Bhog Data, Byadhi Byapar Duri Karta". The Lalung deities should be regularly propitiated by offerings and sacrifices. Mahadev, Ganesh, Parameswar, Badarmaji and Baolakong are their chief gods while Ai Gosani, Lakhimi, Padumi, Kalika, Kamakhya, Saru Ai, Bor Ai, Aakari, Jagatjuri, Kani Adheli are the important goddesses.

The place of worship for each clan is called Borghar. Generally it is constructed in a central place of the village. Near the main post towards east contains the 'Mindaine Thuna' (post of God). An altar is made before this Thuna. One auspicious arrow called 'Jela' and one 'Lang Khui' (sacrificial dao) are placed on the 'Borghars'. The head priest of 'Borghar' is called 'Gharbura' or 'Bor Jela'. He is a respectable person of the clan.

To assist the 'Gharbura', there is a 'Saru Bura' in each 'Borghar'. This 'Saru Bura' cannot attain the position of a 'Gharbura' as male members of the 'Gharbura' can only attain that covetable position. Besides the above noted priests, there is a 'Hari Kunwari' attached to each 'Borghar'. She must be woman of the same clan where the Borghar exists'. She cannot change her residence even after marriage.

'Thans' (public worshipping place) are established for each village or a group of villages. A 'Than' is a big hall erected generally in an out of the way place near the forest. Public worships are performed in such Thans. There may be various Thans for different gods and goddesses. Thus 'Thans' are found in the names of Mahadev, Kesaikhaiti Devi, Bhagawati, Sani, Malthakur etc. Previously 'Jangkang' (god of agriculture) was also worshipped in the Than. But non-a-days 'Jangkang' is not worshipped in all villages. Sacrifices were must in Than Puja. Thus a tortoise was sacrificed before the goddess Kalika and a

buffalo or a black goat before Kesaikhaiti. To-day considerable changes have taken place in the mode of Than worship. Sacrifices are hardly resorted to. 'Mah Prasad' (mug, gram, banana etc.) is offered as 'Naibedyā' (offerings) before their gods and goddesses. This is happening due to the influence of Mahapurushia Vaisnav cult which is gaining a tangible ground in the Lalung villages. In fact in the decades back a good number of Lalungs were converted to Vaisnavism. They do not have 'Borghars' and do not take pork and rice beer. They worship Hindu deities in their 'Namghars'. In short they are leaving many of their traditional Pujas. Instead of worshipping 'Maldaka' and 'Sanidaka' by offering sacrifices, the Lalungs prefer to propitiate these deities by reading the 'Sani Charit' in the 'Namghars'. "Although there is no reference for a 'Namghar' in the Lalung traditional religion yet due to the spread of Vaisnava religion among the Lalungs, the institution of 'Namghar' occupies an important place in the religious system of present day Lalung's (Ringchang, 2nd year, Vol. II, 1976, by Shri Sraddhananda Duara). Another reason for the change towards Vaisnavism may be the expensive and irksome formalities of the traditional worship. The educated sections by and large, do not participate in the traditional worships. Thus today there are two broad religious divisions among the Lalungs - the traditionalists and the Vaisnavites (followers of the Vedic rites). The latter section has organised themselves under the 'All Nowgong District Tribal Sarania Sangha'. They are mobilising to bring the traditionalists into their fold while the traditionalists are putting resistance. A few Saranias are going one step forward by establishing 'Bhagawatia' system of worship under the guidance of Sankari Sangha. They do not follow the 'Hom Jagnya' and a Brahmin priest is not employed in their religious ceremonies. They are also known as 'Nam Kirtania' or 'Hari Dhwania'. It may be noted that although there are three sections of Lalungs in respect of their religious beliefs and practices yet an outsider hardly notices the rift. When occasion arises all the Lalungs irrespective of religious beliefs come under one banner.

### *Trends of Change*

The Lalung society has undergone some tangible changes in the recent years, because in the fast moving world no society can remain static. We had already mentioned about the changes that took place in the field of religion. In order to maintain the ethnic characteristics, the traditional societies must have economic self-sufficiency. The economic condition of the Lalungs is very much deplorable. They lack sufficient agricultural lands. The original lands owned by each family from generations cannot maintain the increased population. The impact is obvious. Corporate life in the Lalung villages is fast disappearing. Formerly one big pot of 'zoo' was all that a villager had to spend for constructing a house. A formal invitation for the purpose was necessary. But non-a-days that co-operative life is hardly seen. Preparation of a pot of 'zoo' is a costly affair. No more 'zoo' is an item to entertain guests. Young boys stage 'Dharna' for petty jobs in the Hindusthan Paper Mills at Jagi road. Whenever a political party worker decides to put pressure upon the authorities (for example S.D.O., Marigaon), he does not find it difficult to collect rural picketers belonging to both the sexes. What is needed is an assurance to provide the villagers with land and other amenities. Today they have to walk the distance of about 2/3 kilometers to collect one half litre of kerosene, that too after remaining in the queue for hours together. Individualism has penetrated into the hitherto unaffected Lalung society. They run after bank loans to sustain their economy which is also not easily available. The nationalised banks demand periodic patta land in lieu of the loan, and majority of the Lalungs do not possess pattas for their lands. If one visits any Lalung village he will be stupefied when he is informed that almost every household borrows money from local money lenders at 10% monthly interest.

Thus the society has been badly shaken by the prevailing economy. Due to spread of education and culture contact with the urban people, the mode of dress, particularly among the younger section changes. In order to meet the growing demands

of their wards the parents or guardians are borrowing money at exorbitant rate of interest.

Although the people are maintaining many of their traditional socio-cultural traits intact, modern ways of living have distinct impact upon their culture. Traditional manners and customs are left to the care of the old people while the upto-date ideas are implemented by the educated and younger section. But it may be noted that new ideas are introduced into their culture without destroying the very fabric of the traditional ideologies. A selective assimilation rather than merging of identities is preferred by all the sections of the Lalungs.

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## Salient Feature Of Kinship System of The Tai Phakes Of Assam

### Introduction

Before analysing the kinship system of the Tai Phakes it would perhaps not be out of context to mention that none of the Buddhist populations has yet been systematically studied from the anthropological point of view. Except for a few articles no work has been done on the small Buddhist populations of Assam including the Phakes. A brief introduction of the socio-cultural life of the people is, therefore, given below.

The Phakes are distributed in five villages in the district of Dibrugarh, more particularly in the banks of the river Buridihing. Their houses are built on platforms raised about 5' above the ground. The length and breadth of an average house is about 60' and 20' respectively. A house is divided into compartments and the front room (toup) is used as sitting room. Outsiders can easily enter this place. Every house contains a small room at the extreme rear end (toupfaun) where the household deity Finam, is worshipped. Sleeping rooms (tinon) are arranged according to the number of married couple in the household. Attached to the toup towards the south or east, an open place called tisan is kept for drying paddy and other domestic activities. The fireplace (fangfai) is looked upon with much reverence and it is constructed in the middle of the room. There may be an extra fireplace in the portico for winter months.

The Tai Phakes profess Buddhism and every village possesses a Buddha Vihar which is located in the middle of the village. Images of Lord Buddha are enshrined in an altar.

The social organisation of the Phakes may be considered at two levels. The first may be called the secular village organisation which includes the ordinary villagers whose main occupation is cultivation. The second is the strictly religious

organisation with the Buddha Vihar as its centre, in which the monk is the religious head.

Agriculture is the mainstay of Tai Phake life. They produce sali paddy. The majority of the villagers are self-sufficient in rice which is their staple food. Besides rice, leaf vegetables, edible roots, fish and meat are included in their diet.

The people have a gentle nature and are usually very polite in their dealings with other people. Outsiders and visitors are received with great courtesy.

The Phakes are divided into a number of exogamous clans. These are the *Thumung*, *Wingken*, *Manhai*, *Chowhailung*, *Kangmung*, *Chekhen*, *Mungnoi*, *Mahao*, *Homa*, *Homen*, *Chekhap*, *Choton*, *Tumten*, *Lokho*, *Misa*, *Tonkha*, *Pomung* and the *Kolo*.

Preponderance of patrilineal joint family is the characteristic feature of the Phake social system. The next place is occupied by nuclear or elementary type of family.

The Phakes consider marriage as indispensable social institution. Though clan exogamy is the rule, departure from the old tradition is not completely absent. Adult marriage is the rule and boys and girls marry between the ages of 20-25 and 16-20, respectively. They are monogamous. There is social approval in the cross cousin marriage. A man can marry his father's sister's daughter or his mother's brother's daughter.

Widow remarriage is widely prevalent among the Phakes. Divorce is not a common affair and can be made effective by the verdict of the village elders. Two forms of marriage are prevalent among the Phakes, namely formal (*aolongme*) and informal (*aopoima*). One is celebrated with detailed ceremony and the other without. Both the forms are equally binding and the informal marriage confers no social stigma to the married couple. There is no fixed bride price (*tanka*) but on an average it stays at Rs. 140.00. It may be more or less.

The Tai Phakes have varied rules of disposing of dead bodies depending upon age, sex and manner of death. Both

cremation and burial are practised. The main purificatory ceremony is observed on the 6th day. Entertaining the villagers with a big feast and offering of gifts to the monks are the main functions of the purificatory ceremony.

***Salient Kinship Features***

This article is based on the data collected from two Tai Phake villages, namely, Nam Phake and Tipam Phake near Naharkatia of Upper Assam. The study was undertaken to examine the quality and character of kinship in the community. "Kinship is a veritable institution in most simple societies, for it is the regulator of behaviour in innumerable situations. A kinsman renders services gratuitously for which an outsider receives compensation. He is natural adviser and assistant in difficult circumstances." (Radcliffe Brown, 1964) Raymond Firth (1936) calls it "the rod on which one leans throughout life."

There are altogether 26 kinship terms in the Tai Phake kinship terminology (which, incidently, is slightly lower than the world average of 27) of which 16 are classificatory and the remainder are denotative. Thus it is seen that their kinship terminology is primarily of classificatory nature. Tables I and II list the classificatory and denotative terms, respectively.

**TABLE - I**  
*List of Classificatory terms*

Classificatory terms.	Relative Classed.
Pu.	Fa Fa, Mo Fa, Hu Fa Fa, Wi Fa Fa, So Wi Fa, Da Hu Fa.
Ya.	Fa Mo, Mo Mo, Hu Fa Mo. Wi Fa Mo, So Wi Mo, Da Hu Mo.
Pichai.	(e) Br, Fa (e) Br (e) So, Fa (y) Br (e) So, Fa (e) Si (e) So, Fa (y) Si (e) So, Mo (e) Br (e) So. Mo (y) Br (e) So, Wi (e) Br (e) So, Wi (y) Br (e) So, Wi (e) Si (e) So.
Nong Chai.	(y) Br, Fa (e) Br (y) So, Fa (y) Br (y) So, Fa (e) Si (y) So, Fa (y) Si (y) So.

Pisao.	(e) Si, Wi (e) Si, Hu (e) Si, Fa (e) Si (e) Da, Fa(y) Si (e) Da, Mo (e) Br (e) Br (e) Da, Wi (y) Br (e) Da.
Nong Sao.	(y) Si, Fa (e) Si (y) Da, Fa (y) Si (y) Da.
Lung.	Fa (e) Br, Fa (e) Si Hu, Mo (e) Br, Mo (e) Si Hu, Wi (e) Si Hu.
Pa, Mepa.	Fa (e) Si, Mo (e) Si, Fa (e) Br Wi, Wi (e) Br Si, Mo (e) Br Wi, Hu (e) Br Wi.
Me Aah.	Fa (y) Si, Hu (y) Si.
Nong Pao.	(y) Br Wi, Hu (y) Br Wi.
Pi Khoi.	(e) Si Hu, Hu (e) Si Hu.
Pi Chao.	Wi (e) Br, Hu (e) Br.
Nong Khoi	(y) Si Hu, Hu (y) Si Hu.
Pa Chao	Hu Fa, Wi fa.
Mechao.	Hu Mo, Wi Mo.
Na Khoi.	Wi (y) Si Hu, Mo (y) Si Hu.

**TABLE - II**  
*List of Denotative Terms*

Denotative terms	Relative Denotes
Oo	Father.
Me	Mother.
Meleng	Step Mother.
Ao.	Father's younger brother.
Na chao	Mother's younger brother.
Pilo	Elder brother's wife.
Melo	Father's youner brother's wife.
Lukpao	Son's wife.
Ao khoi	Father's younger sister's husband.
Luk Khoi	Daughter's husband.

cremation and burial are practised. The main purificatory ceremony is observed on the 6th day. Entertaining the villagers with a big feast and offering of gifts to the monks are the main functions of the purificatory ceremony.

### *Salient Kinship Features*

This article is based on the data collected from two Tai Phake villages, namely, Nam Phake and Tipam Phake near Naharkatia of Upper Assam. The study was undertaken to examine the quality and character of kinship in the community. "Kinship is a veritable institution in most simple societies, for it is the regulator of behaviour in innumerable situations. A kinsman renders services gratuitously for which an outsider receives compensation. He is natural adviser and assistant in difficult circumstances." (Radcliffe Brown, 1964) Raymond Firth (1936) calls it "the rod on which one leans throughout life."

There are altogether 26 kinship terms in the Tai Phake kinship terminology (which, incidently, is slightly lower than the world average of 27) of which 16 are classificatory and the remainder are denotative. Thus it is seen that their kinship terminology is primarily of classificatory nature. Tables I and II list the classificatory and denotative terms, respectively.

TABLE - I

### *List of Classificatory terms*

Classificatory terms.	Relative Classed.
Pu.	Fa Fa, Mo Fa, Hu Fa Fa, Wi Fa Fa, So Wi Fa, Da Hu Fa.
Ya.	Fa Mo, Mo Mo, Hu Fa Mo. Wi Fa Mo, So Wi Mo, Da Hu Mo.
Pichai.	(e) Br, Fa (e) Br (e) So, Fa (y) Br (e) So, Fa (e) Si (e) So, Fa (y) Si (e) So, Mo (e) Br (e) So. Mo (y) Br (e) So, Wi (e) Br (e) So, Wi (y) Br (e) So, Wi (e) Si (e) So.
Nong Chai.	(y) Br, Fa (e) Br (y) So, Fa (y) Br (y) So, Fa (e) Si (y) So, Fa (y) Si (y) So.

Pisao.	(e) Si, Wi (e) Si, Hu (e) Si, Fa (e) Si (e) Da, Fa(y) Si (e) Da, Mo (e) Br (e) Br (e) Da, Wi (y) Br (e) Da.
Nong Sao.	(y) Si, Fa (e) Si (y) Da, Fa (y) Si (y) Da.
Lung.	Fa (e) Br, Fa (e) Si Hu, Mo (e) Br, Mo (e) Si Hu, Wi (e) Si Hu.
Pa, Mepa.	Fa (e) Si, Mo (e) Si, Fa (e) Br Wi, Wi (e) Br Si, Mo (e) Br Wi, Hu (e) Br Wi.
Me Aah.	Fa (y) Si, Hu (y) Si.
Nong Pao.	(y) Br Wi, Hu (y) Br Wi.
Pi Khoi.	(e) Si Hu, Hu (e) Si Hu.
Pi Chao.	Wi (e) Br, Hu (e) Br.
Nong Khoi	(y) Si Hu, Hu (y) Si Hu.
Pa Chao	Hu Fa, Wi fa.
Mechao.	Hu Mo, Wi Mo.
Na Khoi.	Wi (y) Si Hu, Mo (y) Si Hu.

TABLE - II

### *List of Denotative Terms*

Denotative terms	Relative Denotes
Oo	Father.
Me	Mother.
Meleng	Step Mother.
Ao.	Father's younger brother.
Na chao	Mother's younger brother.
Pilo	Elder brother's wife.
Melo	Father's youner brother's wife.
Lukpao	Son's wife.
Ao khoi	Father's younger sister's husband.
Luk Khoi	Daughter's husband.



The analysis of Phake kinship terms of address and terms of reference reveals 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 and (y) Si are addressed by their personal names. However, separate kinship terms are used for referring to them. Same kinship terms are applied by both male and female. It was noticed that the husband does not utter the name of his wife and the wife too never utters the name of her husband. After the birth of a child, they address each other teknonymously.

Fa (e) Br and Mo (e) Si are addressed and referred to by a classificatory term *lung*. The social behaviours in respect of paternal and maternal relatives do not differ very much. Both the categories of relatives command respect. The Mo Br takes keen interest in the general welfare of his sister's children. Like the Fa (e) Br he can be trusted with responsibility. In the same way, the term of address, *mepa*, for Fa (e) Si and Mo (e) Si is the same.

In the second ascending generation also similar kinship terms for agnatic and maternal secondary relatives are used. The term *pu* and *ya* are used for addressing Fa Fa, Mo Fa and Fa Mo, Mo Mo, respectively. Again it is seen that the terms of address and reference for Wi, Fa and Hu Fa and Wi Mo and Hu Mo, i.e., *pachao* and *mechao*, respectively, are same. Definite terms of address are applied for mother and step-mother. These are *me* and *meleng*, respectively. *Pilo* (c) Br Wi and *nong pao* (y) Br Wi are commonly used for wives of elder brother and younger brother respectively. Some kins are addressed by personal names but their kinship relations become distinct when they are referred to. For example, So So, So Da, Si So and Si Da are addressed by name but while referring to So So and Si So and to So Da and Si Da the terms *lanchai* and *lan sao*, respectively are used.

The Phakes use distinct terms of address and terms of reference for step relations. Step-mother is addressed by her

step-children by the same terms which they use to address their own mother, but the term of reference is different. For example, step-mother is addressed as *me* but she is referred to as *meleng*. Step-children are addressed by the terms which are used in case of one's own children, but the terms of reference are different. The term of reference for one's own son is *luk chai*, whereas the term of reference for step-son is *luk leng*.

In case of co-wives, the senior one calls the junior by name while the latter addresses the former as *pisao*, a term used to address one's elder sister.

Father's first wife's (e) So and (e) Da are addressed as *pichai* and *pisao* respectively by the children of the second wife. The (e) So and (e) Da of the second wife are addressed by the children of the first wife as *pichai* and *pi sao* respectively while the (y) So, and (y) Da are addressed by name. Here the seniority of age principle is adhered to.

In the first ascending generation, the secondary relatives, i.e., (e) Br So, (e) Br da, (y) Br So and (y) Br Da are addressed as *pichai* and *pisao*, respectively in case of elders and by name in case of younger. In case of minors the elders use only the prefix of the name while addressing. For example, if the name is *Am Le Pha*, *Am* is simply mentioned while addressing adding *hei* before the prefix. (e) Si So, (e) Si Da, (y) Si So and (y) Si Da are addressed by personal names. Sometimes they are addressed as *chai* and *sao* in an affectionate sense. Although Si So and Si Da are regarded as guest relatives yet the terms *pichai* and *lan chai* and *pi sao* and *lan sao* are used to address the elder and younger sons and daughters of the sister respectively.

Regarding a woman's relatives in her husband's household it was noticed that the terms *pachao* and *mechao* are used as terms of address and reference for Hu Fa, and Hu Mo, respectively. Hu (e) Br is addressed as *pichao*. A woman's relationship in respect of avoidance and familiarity to both Hu Fa and Hu (e) Br are not the same. A somewhat rigid customary rule of avoidance exists between a woman and her husband's elder

brother. Hu (y) Br is addressed by name but there is a distinct kinship term *pa ao* for referring to the person.

In respect of secondary relative, i.e., Wi (e) Br, a classificatory term *pichao* is used but there is no distinct term of reference. Although personal names are used for addressing Wi (y) Br and Wi (y) si, there are certain terms *pona* and *menachao*, respectively for referring to them. Wi (e) Si is only referred to as *pisao* but not addressed because the rule of avoidance is prevalent.

In case of tertiary relatives, Fa (e) Br Wi, Mo (e) Br Wi and Hu (e) Br Wi are addressed and referred to by the same classificatory term *pa* or *mepa*. Fa (e) Si Hu and Mo (e) Si Hu are addressed and referred to by a classificatory term *lung*. For Hu (y) Br Si a denotative term *mongpao* is used. The term *pichai* is used generally for addressing and referring to many other male tertiary relatives and *pisao* for female relatives. The term *nongchai* is applied for Fa (e) Br (y) So, Fr (y) Br (y) So, Fa (e) Si (y) So, Fa (y) Si (y) So.

In the second ascending generations, tertiary relatives Hu Fa Fa and Hu Fa Mo and Wi Fa Mo are addressed by the same classificatory terms *up* and *ya*, respectively. In the third ascending generation Fa Fa Fa and Fa Fa Mo are addressed and referred to as *pulin* and *yalin*, respectively. It was seen that in the case of quarternary relatives the terms of address and reference are similar. The quarternary relative Fa (e) Br So Wi is addressed and referred to as *pilo* which is also applied to address and refer to the secondary relative (e) Br Wi. It should be noted that most of the terms of address and reference for quarternary relatives are similar to those used in the case of secondary relatives.

In the analysis of the Phake kinship terminology it was found that certain classificatory terms used in connection with primary, secondary and tertiary relatives are also applied to the relatives of different generations. The term *pichai*, which is particularly used for primary relative i.e., (e) Br, is also used for some primary, secondary and tertiary relatives.

It was further noticed that Phake terms of reference are more in number than the terms of address. The villagers do not confine their kinship terms within the arena of actual kin. Rather these are extended to include outsiders also, who may not belong to the community. Those who are younger than one's father are called by the term *ao* and those who are older than the person concerned, by the term *pichai*.

### *Criteria of differentiation*

The Phake kinship system gives extensive recognition to the criterion of age, what Robert, H. Lowie (1966) calls 'bifurcate collateral system'. They use different terms for father (*oo*), father's elder brother (*lung*) and mother's younger brother (*nachao*). Older siblings are terminologically differentiated from younger siblings. For example, (e) Br, (e) Si are termed as and referred to by distinct kinship terms while (y) Br and (y) Si are addressed by personal names.

The generation differentiation also plays an important role in Phake kinship terminology. Persons of older generation are always regarded as older and are denoted by distinct kin terms while the younger ones are addressed by personal names. For example, Wi Fa, Hu Fa Fa (e) Si and Mo (e) Br Wi are addressed by the classificatory terms *pachao* and *mepa*, respectively. Similarly Fa Br (e) So, Fa Si (e) So, Mo Si (e) So, Mo Br (e) So are addressed and referred to by a distinct kinship term *pichai* whereas Fa Br (y) So, Fa Si (y) So, Mo Br (y) So, Mo Si (y) So are addressed by name and referred to as *nongchai*.

Sex differentiation is also maintained. Different terms are used to denote kin of different sexes who are related in the same way.

Distinctions in respect of terminologies for consanguinal and affinal kin are clearly made. However, in many instances affinity is ignored. Certain agnatic and affinal kin are addressed by the same term. For example, Fa (e) Si, Fa Br Wi and Mo (e) Br Wi are addressed by the same term *mepa*. Again brother's children (both MS and FS) and wife's brother's children are

referred to by the same terms lan chai (m) and lan sao (f). But it is to be noted that although the same kinship term is used for addressing and referring to both affinal and consanguineal kin, yet as regards behaviour some differences are maintained.

In Phake kinship terminology the principle of polarity is followed. But in respect of certain relationship the principle is not strictly adhered to. Wi (y) Si Hu and Wi (e) Si Hu refer to and address each other by a term *ka hom khoi*.

The study of kinship system of the Phakes pin pointed the joking and avoidance relationship prevalent in their society. Among the Phakes the joking and avoidance rules vary among different sets of relationships. In some relations avoidance means just to avoid the persons out of respect. In some other relations avoidance means a prohibition to utter personal names while in certain relations interaction 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 practiced between younger sister's husband and wife's elder sister. The avoidance between a man and his wife's mother is not very rigid.

Among the Phakes joking relationship exists between a man and his wife's younger sister. Similarly the elders do not find any fault if a woman jokes with her husband's younger brother. Sometimes husband's elder brother's wife and husband's younger brother's wife cut jokes. Joking relationship is also maintained between grand parents and grand children.

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\* Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology Dibrugarh University, 1974

## Selective Assimilation among the Tai-Phakes – A Case Study

The Tai Phakes, a small Buddhist population consisting of only two thousand souls, inhabiting the riverain areas of Dibrugarh District of Upper Assam, more particularly in the banks of the river Buridihing were originally a hill tribe within the famous Tai family. They entered Assam in the later half of the 18th century through the Patkai range. There are only five Phake villages in Assam. The peculiar feature of the setting of their villages is that each village is surrounded by non Phake people and the Phakes have to maintain intimate contact with these non Phakes in their day to day life. For the present study two Phake villages near Naharkatia namely Nam Phake and Tipam Phake villages having a total population of 638 were selected and survey was conducted during 1973-75.

By and large the Phakes are a tradition bound people. They construct their houses in their old traditional pattern, wear their traditional dress, speak their own Tai language, perform marriage ceremonies with their typical way, have their own folkways and legal system. The age old agricultural economy has been maintained. The Bouddha Vihar is the nucleus of the socio-religious life of the people. Their festivals are intimately related with the worshipping of Lord Buddha. The administrative structure of the Phakes is essentially democratic and simple. Although they do not have any formal council yet the meeting of the village elders headed by the gaonbura exercises the highest legal and judicial power. In religious matters, however, the verdict of the monk of the Bauddha Vihar is supreme.

Although the Phakes are trying their utmost to maintain their traditional tribal characteristics yet the society could not escape the change which is a social process. There may be differences of degrees but changes take place because man has

to organise his way of life according to the natural environment. He is to adjust himself with the broader social milieu. He is to avail himself of the common means of communications, common educational facilities etc. The changes that have crept in the Phake society, however, came not due to voluntary efforts, nor those have been forced upon them by outside agencies. These changes came as a social process. The people are surrounded by non Phake people and regular day to day contact with these non Phakes is un-avoidable. They sell their produce to the Bihari traders, they come to Joypur and Naharkatia weekly hats to sell their indigenous bags 'Tona Kapor' and to purchase daily necessities. The School students have to mix with the non Phake students. Thus contact is unavoidable. Nevertheless the predominating of the Phake culture is their firmness in continuity while keeping only window open for change. They prefer to accept certain traits of alien culture without effecting their core of culture. Thus the assimilation is selective in the sense that certain selected traits are incorporated into their culture which, they think enrich their culture.

For example education. Previously i.e., before independence the Phakes were satisfied with their traditional training methods. Pali language was taught to the students which helped them to study the religious scriptures. But gradually people felt the need of modern education. It is seen that lower the age group, the higher is the percentage of literacy. Inclination towards having education in the present generations is noticed. It is further observed that in recent years female education is encouraged. The Phakes feel that girls can also become economic partners by employing themselves in educational institutions and offices. They are realising that modern education greatly helps in getting jobs and therefore all the guardians are keen to educate their children. Since 1972 English medium education has drawn the attention of the villagers and in 1975 from one village near Naharkatia as many as 19 students (10 boys and 9 girls) are reading in St. Mary's school at Naharkatia. But it should be noted that the school going boys and girls regularly

visit the local Bauddha Vihar, where religious education is imparted in Pali language.

Contact with the non Phakes in their day to day life brought some changes in their material culture. In both Nam Phake and Tipam Phake villages except on Assam Type house, all the houses are built on platforms. But almost every household possesses chairs, tables, lanterns, cup-plates etc. Here again it should be noted that while the people are still adhering to the old pattern of house, they do not mind to decorate their typical traditional houses with photos, chairs, tables etc. Changes are also noticed in dress habits among the students. The boys use trousers and girls frock while they go to school but they never use such dress while they are at home. Similarly warm coats, sweaters, endi-chadars and shawls are popular among the Phakes.

Although no marked changes is noticed in respect of food habits yet bazar made sweets and biscuits are entering as one of the items to entertain guests. Here also the foreign items of food do not substitute the main item of traditional food which constitute steamed rice (Sakhao), dry fish (Pasom), and rice cakes (Paing) etc. They strictly follow certain customary rules while taking food. The convention that the males should take their meals before the females, is adhered to. It is to be noted that although traditional items of food are served in their socio-religious occasions, the people use modern utensils like aluminium plates, china cups and plates and glasses.

No change is noticed in the ceremonial aspects of marriage nor there is any deviation in case of death ceremonies. Even inspite of so much similarity with the cognate tribes like the Khamtis, Aitonias, Turungs and Khamyangs marriage does not take place between a Phake and any member of these tribes. Marriage is also not taking place between Phakes and other non Phake people. However some superfluous changes have been observed in the case of marriage. Due to larger contact with the non-Phakes the people have to invite the non-Phake neighbours to their marriages and they arrange non indigenous items like sweets, puris and vegetables for them while the

same old traditional feast is arranged for the fellow villagers. In some marriage microphones are used and Assamese marriage folksongs are sung by the girls. But it should be noted that these non Phake elements of culture have not been included as a part of their culture. These changes have been incorporated not on account of any pressure from external agencies but of necessity from within due to change of social environment.

Of late a new leadership in the socio-political arena has emerged among the rising educated youths. One Phake has been elected as a member of the Gaon Panchayat whose jurisdiction extends to surrounding non Phake villages. This new leader, however, does not play any part in the traditional socio-political affairs of the village which remains still under the domain of the gaonbura. Fitting a tube well in the village, construction or improvement of the village road passing through the village, establishing a weaving centre in the village etc. are being dealt by the new leader without clash with the existing traditional leaders.

The Phakes have their own indigenous methods of cure from various diseases. But of late the traditional magico-religious methods of treatment of diseases is resorted to as a first step only. The dispensaries are located near the villages and the Phakes have increasingly realised the efficacy of modern medicine. The people take the help of M.B.B.S. Doctor because they want easy and quick cure. Besides they are well off to spend money in medical treatment by a doctor.

### **Conclusion :**

The Phakes, a small Buddhist population, is probably a example of a tribe who has been able to maintain their traditional socio-cultural beliefs and practices modes and morals intact inspite of dynamic changes all around. The population has been maintaining its traditional distinctiveness notwithstanding a few superficial changes in their socio-cultural fabric, which have incorporated into the culture in its natural process. The people could very easily avoid complete or even partial assimilation

with the neighbouring non-Phake Culture. Following factors may be attributed to their maintenance of traditional distinctiveness.

(1) The Phakes profess Buddhism which is also prevalent in countries like Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka etc. The monks from these countries occasionally visit the Phake villages and the people are well acquainted with the happenings in these countries in so far as religious matters are concerned. The common phenomenon of Socio-cultural changes noticed among different tribes especially plains tribes of Assam like the Kacharis, Deori-Chutiyas, Mishings, and Lalungs is that cultural changes generally take place entering round changes in the religious beliefs of the people. The people ungrudgingly accept these changes in order to introduce themselves as member of a recognised religion. Among the Phakes, perhaps, this psychic need has not been felt owing to the fact that they belong to a recognised religion of international standing.

(2) The Phakes maintain very cordial relation with the brethren Tai populations like the Khamtis, Aitonias, Turungs, and Khamyangs. Interchanges of monks takes place among these populations. Although intermarriage among these populations does not take place, the religious affiliation alone, it appears, binds all these populations into a coherent whole. Feeling of oneness prevails among the members of these groups. Besides in their socio-religious occasions the Phakes very often have to extend invitation to the monks of these populations. Phakes are members of the World Buddhist Association and representatives of the Phake villages regularly attend the Annual Conference of the All Assam Buddhist Association. Buddhism as religious faith has so much penetrating impact upon the people that cases of conversion to other religion is reportedly nill among the Phakes.

The people devoutly follow PANCHA SHEEL and ASTA SHEEL (Principles of Buddhism). Although they follow their religion with a deep catholic sincerity yet they never criticise the manner, customs and religious beliefs of the non Phake people surrounding their villages. They are extremely courteous. Live and let live and non violence are their mottos. The early training

imparted to the children by the elders with the help of their language books like the PU SON IAN help the people in the later years to take a balanced view of other's religion and culture. Their folk-stories are a store house of maxims and do's and don'ts which have a great bearing on the moral set up of the people. The ultimate result of this religious tolerance is that there is no conflict of culture and the small population has been able to live peacefully with the alien non Phake populations.

Another important contributing factor towards the maintenance of their cultural identity and peaceful co-existence with non interference, is their economy. Generally conflict in rural areas arise due mainly to land disputes. But in the case of the Phakes such disputes are few and far between. The people are economically well off and they have been able to maintain economic parity with the neighbouring non Phake villagers. They are very co-operative. Needy people, whether Phake and Non-Phake, are always helped.

The superior caste feeling of the neighbouring Hindu people acted as disincentive for assimilation with the broader Assamese society. The Assamese people living near the Phake villages have not maintained any social intercourse with the Phakes who are treated as tribals. What I personally experienced is that the neighbouring Hindu people, except the ex-tea garden labourers, do not mix with the Phakes and inter-dining is avoided. On the contrary, the Phakes have no aversion to Hindu culture or for that matter to any other culture.

Thus it appears that this small lesser known Buddhist population with its micro-cosmic existence is preserving to a considerable extent the traditional traits of their socio-cultural life.



\* Bulletin (Special Issue) of the Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, 1978.

## Poi Chang Ken or Pani Bihu As Practiced by the Buddhist Communities of Assam

The three day Poi Chang Ken festival, also known as Pani Bihu observed by the Buddhist population like the Tai Khamtis, Tai Phakes, Tai Aitonias, Tai Turungs, Tai Khamyangs and Dowanias from the last day of the month of *Chot* (Sangkranti) to second day of the month of Bohag (April 13 to 15) synchronises with the Bohag Bihu festival of Assam. It is strictly a religious festival where the 'Tri Ratnas' i.e. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha of Buddhism are ceremonially bathed. The idols of Lord Buddha installed in the Bauddha Vihar, the scriptures representing Dharma and the head monk of the temple representing Sangha are worshipped and ceremonially bathed on the occasion.

A legend is prevalent among the Tai Phakes regarding the origin of the Poi Chang Ken festival. Once a dispute arose between Lord Brahma and Lord Indra regarding the number of days to be included in a year. Lord Brahma wanted that there should be sixty days in a month to which Lord Indra disagreed as in that case it would be difficult to allocate the seasons. He wanted thirty days in a month. As both of them did not budge an inch from their respective stands it was agreed that they would approach the wise king on earth for an amicable solution.

Accordingly both Lord Brahma and Lord Indra descended to earth and on way they decided that the winner of the dispute would behead the loser. The wise king of earth heard both of them and gave the verdict that there would be thirty days in a month. As per agreement the jubilant Lord Indra beheaded Lord Brahma. But surprise of surprises was that the beheaded Lord Brahma regained his head over and over again as Lord Indra

imparted to the children by the elders with the help of their language books like the PU SON IAN help the people in the later years to take a balanced view of other's religion and culture. Their folk-stories are a store house of maxims and do's and don'ts which have a great bearing on the moral set up of the people. The ultimate result of this religious tolerance in that there is no conflict of culture and the small population has been able to live peacefully with the alien non Phake populations.

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repeated his action. Both of them returned to heaven.

Lord Brahma had seven daughters and once during the course of discussion he told his daughters about the dispute with Lord Indra and the fall out of that. The youngest daughter could not believe that her father's head could not be bisected by a weapon. Lord Brahma then revealed that his head may be bisected from the body only if the same is cut by the grey hair in his head. The youngest daughter was searching for an opportunity and one day while Lord Brahma was asleep she pulled out the grey hair from her father's head and cut the head. Being perplexed she caught hold of her father's head in her hands. In the evening when her elder sisters came home she told them about her stupid action. The girls burst into tears and no amount of consolation could appease them. Being unable to keep the head of their father in a suitable place, the girls decided to keep the head in their hands turn by turn. In this way the intervening period of handing over the head from one girl to another came to be known as one year.

Days passed by and once while roaming inside a forest one of the daughters noticed an elephant that was lying asleep under the shade of a tree. An idea struck in her mind and she proposed before her sisters that the head of the elephant might fix into her father's body. The sisters agreed and accordingly the head of the elephant was cut and fixed into the body of Lord Brahma. Lord Brahma regained his life but one strange thing happened. Fire began to belch forth from Lord Brahma's elephant head and everything was burnt to ashes in the direction the head turned. Once while Lord Brahma's head faced towards earth and there was a great catastrophe. The people ran helter and skelter. They took out Lord Buddha's idols from the temples and started pouring water over the idols. Their prayers did not go in vain and Lord Brahma changed direction of his head. The earth was relieved of the great fire. Since then the custom of bathing Lord Buddha's idols once in a year continued.

The festival is observed by all the ethnic Buddhist communities. Preparations are made two-three days ahead of the

festival. An improvised temple called Kiyongfra is constructed outside the main Bauddha Vihar. The first day of the festival synchronises with the first day of the Assamese Bohag Bihu. All the villagers congregate in the main temple for a general prayer and after that Buddha idols are brought to the 'Kiyongfra'. There is a specific time to bring the idols to the 'Kiyongfra' which is determined as per the 'Sakeret' (almanac of Myanmar). The almanac indicates the manner of keeping the idols facing a certain direction in a particular year.

On the previous day the young boys and girls visit each household to collect certain measures of paddy which are kept in the outhouse near in 'Kiyongfra'. Towards dusk the elderly women gather at the outhouse and prepare fried rice (*aakhoi*) which is an essential item of this festival. While the villagers carry the idols to the Kiyongfra, the headmonk takes away the scriptures and binds these with a rope, one end of which is hung enabling the villagers to pour water on it which symbolises bathing of Dharma. The head monk then comes to the Kiyongfra and formally starts the bathing festival by pouring water on the boat. After this all the villagers pour water on the Buddha idols three times each. Each time water has to be carried in bell metal container from the nearby river. After bathing Lord Buddha, the villagers pour water three times on the rope end which is connected with the religious books and scriptures representing bathing of Dharma. This is followed by bathing of head monk representing bathing of Sangha. The monk sits on a wooden platform and the villagers pour water on his folded hands three times, each time carrying water from the river. In this way bathing of Tri Ratnas viz, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is completed. As a part of bathing of Dharma, the villagers pour water on the root of the pippal tree (*bodhi briksha*) also in a similar manner. At night the Kiyongfra is illuminated with hundreds of candles. Prayers are held where all the villagers participate. Bathing of Tri Ratnas, prayers and illumination continue for the second day which synchronises with the Assamese new year day also known as 'Maanuh Bihu'. The concluding ceremony is called *poi chaat*. On the previous night the *Gaonburah* an-



...  
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Meanwhile the young boys and girls sprinkle water on one another and entire surrounding is surcharged with laughter and merriment. Black colour prepared out of charcoal is used to smear the faces of the youngsters.

Poi Chang Ken, although strictly a religious festival, yet certain elements of Bohag Bihu are entering into traditional cultural mix of the people without, however, affecting the core of the culture as acculturation process is inevitable in an open society. During the festival nights the Tai Phake youths sing Bihu songs accompanied by drum beatings. Reciting Lik Chang Ken and performing *simi* (candle offering) Puja by the girls continue along with the Bihu songs by the young boys. What is striking is that the Tai Khamyangs of Sivasagar district perform Bihu Husori on the courtyards of each household after performing the religious part of the Poi Chang Ken festival.



\* The Assam Tribune, 16th April 2004

ANNEXURE-1  
 (TABLE-I) Showing Population and Percentage of the Scheduled Tribes of Assam, Census 2001

Sl. No.	Name of Tribe	Total Persons	Total Persons		Female	Percentage of the total ST.	Percentage of literacy		
			Male	Female			Total	Male	Female
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1	Boro Kachari	1352771	682710	670061	40.88	51.48	59.81	43.00	
2	Barmans of Cachar	15877	8024	7853	0.48	56.15	61.32	50.87	
3	Mishing (Min)	587310	299790	287520	17.76	49.12	5842	39.43	
4	Deori	41161	20809	20352	1.24	65.46	72.72	58.03	
5	Rabha	277517	140614	136903	8.39	56.37	64.33	48.20	
6	Lalung (Tiwa)	170622	85964	84658	5.16	51.53	59.77	43.17	
7	Karbi (Mikir)	353513	180136	173377	10.68	42.95	51.25	34.31	
8	Dimas	110976	56876	54100	3.35	49.14	57.28	40.58	
9	Sonowal Kachari	235881	119470	116411	7.13	70.52	76.22	64.66	
10	Mech	8997	4597	4400	0.28	70.97	76.09	65.64	
11	Hojai	1882	932	950	0.06	63.07	70.49	55.79	
12	Garo	21112	10739	10373	0.62	40.06	44.44	35.52	
13	Khasi	12722	6354	6368	0.38	27.55	28.61	26.49	
14	Any Kuki Tribes	28273	14666	13607	0.85	65.24	70.43	59.65	
15	Man, Taispeaking	739	375	364	0.02	67.50	72.27	62.63	
16	Any Naga tribes	21,706	11,077	10,629	0.66	47.09	55.51	38.32	
17	Any Mizo tribes	2957	1504	1453	0.08	62.80	67.55	57.88	
18	Hmar	14460	7429	7031	0.44	72.03	76.17	67.65	
19	Hajong	256	139	117	0.01	44.53	56.03	29.91	
20	Chakma	2478	1329	1149	0.07	15.13	24.07	4.79	
21	Lakher	11	5	6	0.01	81.8	80.00	83.33	
22	Sintheng	336	164	172	0.01	58.33	65.85	51.16	
23	Other tribes	47013	24414	22599	1.43	50.54	58.27	42.20	
	Total	3308570	1678117	1630453		62.5	72.3	52.4	

N. B. While determining P.C. of literacy, 0-6 age group children excluded

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23.	Other tribes	47013	24414	22599	1.43	50.54	58.27	42.20
	Total	3308570	1678117	1630453		62.5	72.3	52.4

N. B. While determining P.C. of literacy, 0-6 age group children excluded

**ANNEXURE-II  
(TABLE-II)**

**Showing Population and Percentage of the literacy of the Scheduled Castes of Assam, Census 2001**

Sl. No.	Name of Castes	Total Persons	Male	Female	Percentage of literacy		
					Total	Male	Female
1	Bansphor	14760	7623	7137	41.05	51.62	29.76
2	Bhujmali/Mali	57974	29936	28038	61.28	67.93	54.19
3	Brittal Bania	47974	24590	23384	70.39	76.79	63.39
4	Dhupi etc.	49929	26003	23926	65.83	72.14	58.97
5	Dugla etc.	6364	3300	3064	45.86	49.09	32.47
6	Hira	55106	28031	27075	61.71	70.57	52.53
7	Jalkeot	23511	12225	11286	59.41	67.91	50.20
8	Jhalomalo	77533	40326	37207	43.51	53.07	33.14
9	Kaibarta etc.	581559	297433	284126	60.75	67.95	53.22
10	Lalbegi	552	305	247	45.47	54.09	34.81
11	Mahara	1725	934	791	47.25	55.35	37.67
12	Mehtar, Bhangji	12715	6676	6039	51.35	61.30	40.33
13	Muchi, Richi	70954	370.33	33921	39.72	50.25	28.22
14	Namasudra	555621	288814	266807	50.00	58.43	40.87
15	Patni	151992	78990	73002	64.00	68.83	58.78
16	Sutradhar	62032	32001	30031	56.77	64.58	48.45
	Generic Castes	55648	29454	26194	57.60	65.86	48.32

N. B. While determining P.C. of literacy, 0-6 age group children excluded