

TRIBAL TRADITION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE HILL AREAS OF ASSAM



DR. GIRINDRA NATH DAS

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IN THE HILL AREAS OF ASSAM**

DR. GIRINDRA NATH DAS
District Research Officer,
Karbi Anglong, Diphu.

**ASSAM INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH FOR
TRIBALS AND SCHEDULED CASTES
GUWAHATI**

Tribal Tradition and Development in the Hill Areas of Assam: A book containing proceedings, recommendations and papers presented in a seminar on *Tribal Tradition and its Relation to Development in the Hill Areas of Assam* held in Guwahati from September 19 to 21, 1996, edited by Dr. Girindra Nath Das, District Research Officer, Karbi Anglong, Diphu-782 460

Published by
Director, Assam Institute of Research
for Tribals and Scheduled Castes,
Jawaharnagar, Guwahati-22.

Cover photographs - A Karbi damsel
- Front view of a bachelors' dormitory
of the Jeme Nagas of Assam

First Edition, March 2006

Price - Rs. 40.00

Printed at Jip Print Associates, Chandmari, Guwahati-3



A. C. Nath



P. K. Phukan

This humble publication is dedicated to the memory of
LATE ANANDA CHANDRA NATH
AND
LATE PRANAB KUMAR PHUKAN
*(faculty members of the Directorate of Assam Institute
of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati)
who left the mortal world prematurely
on August 25, 2000 and
March 16, 2006 respectively.*

PREFACE

The autonomous districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills together constitute the Hill Areas of Assam. The two full-fledged districts were originally two subdivisions viz., Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills of the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district which was created on November 17, 1951. On February 2, 1970 the North Cachar subdivision was upgraded into a civil district. Similarly, the Mikir Hills subdivision was constituted into Mikir Hills district which was renamed as Karbi Anglong on October 14, 1976. In accordance with Para 2 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India the North Cachar Hills District Council with H.Q. at Haflong and the Karbi Anglong (Mikir Hills) District Council with H.Q. at Diphu came into being on April 29 and June 23, 1952 respectively.

According to 1991 Census the total surface area covered by the Hill Areas of Assam is 15,322 sq.km and the total population is 8.13 lakh out of which the scheduled tribe population is 4.40 lakh i.e., 54.15% of the total population of the two hill districts. In this context it may be pointed out that as per 1991 Census the Karbis with a total population of 2.85 lakh constitute the major ethnic group while the Dimasa Kacharis with 0.65 lakh population form the next dominant group in the Hill Areas of Assam. Of course, the highest concentration of the Karbis and the Dimasa Kacharis is observed in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts respectively. Other ethnic groups like the Nagas, Garos, Khasis & Jaintias etc., Kukis and Hmars living in the Hill Areas of Assam fall within the population range of 10,000 to 25,000. On the contrary, the Chakmas, Man-Tais, Hajongs, Mizos, Pawis, Synthengs and Lakhers are having less than 5,000 population each. Whatever be

the population pattern, it is worthwhile to mention here that the hill tribes had been maintaining their traditional beliefs, customs and practices through various social and political institutions since time immemorial. But, however, with the passage of time ; and because of spread of modern education, influence of Christianity and increased culture-contacts etc ; one observes a sustained erosion in many areas of their traditional knowledge and skills. Some of these have been lost for ever whereas many others are on the verge of extinction. These abrupt changes without having a semblance of continuity very often prove to be detrimental in the process of development. It is, therefore, apparent that some suitable strategies need to be contemplated for achieving socio-economic development among the hill tribes by taking recourse to a model of synthesis between the tradition and modernity.

Taking into consideration all the above facts, a three-day seminar on the theme *Tribal Tradition and its Relation to Development in the Hill Areas of Assam* sponsored by the Development Commissioner for Hill Areas of Assam, Dispur was organised at Guwahati in collaboration with the Directorate of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar, Guwahati during September 19-21, 1996. The parameters for presenting the papers in the seminar were :

1. *Tribal Tradition & Identity Crisis in the Hill Areas of Assam*
2. *Traditional Management of Land, Forest and Water in the Hill Areas of Assam*
3. *Socio-cultural heritage of the tribal communities in the Hill Areas of Assam*
4. *Role of Traditional Tribal Institutions in the Development of the Hill Areas of Assam and*
5. *Customary Laws of the Hill Tribes and their Relation to Development in the Hill Areas of Assam*

Altogether nineteen papers were presented during six academic sessions in the seminar. The presentations, by and large, were very resourceful and could generate a very lively and enthusiastic follow-up discussion and deliberation.

I am grateful to the Development Commissioner for Hill Areas of Assam, Dispur for granting financial assistance to organise the seminar on such a vital issue. Moreover, I am indebted to Prof. B.M.Das, Professor Emeritus, U.G.C. Emeritus Fellow under whose guidance the three-day seminar was successfully organised. I would also like to express my deep sense of gratitude to Prof. M.C. Goswami, Professor Emeritus, Gauhati University (expired on July 20, 2002) who whole-heartedly took part in the deliberations and offered valuable suggestions. Dr. R.Zaman, ACS, Director, AIRTSC, Guwahati extended his co-operation towards smooth sailing of the academic sessions of the seminar. I am thankful to him. Moreover, I extend my hearty thanks to all the participants who made the seminar a grand success.

The present publication is, in fact, a compilation of the seminar papers alongwith summary of the Proceedings and Recommendations of the seminar. I would like to thank Mrs. N.A.Hazarika, ACS, Director, AIRTSC, Guwahati who took initiative for arranging publication of the volume ; and procured necessary fund from the Government.

It is earnestly hoped that the publication would receive good response from the administrators, policy makers, academicians, researchers and general readers as well.

Dated Diphu
the 30th March, 2006

(Dr. Girindra Nath Das)
District Research Officer,
Diphu.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

1. **Dr. P. C. Phangcho,**
Principal, Rangsin College,
Donkamukam - 782 485
Karbi Anglong (Assam)
2. **Dr. Kandarpa Kumar Barman,**
Professor & Head,
Department of Economics,
Gauhati University,
Guwahati - 781 014
3. **Oriwell Terang,**
Deputy Director General (Retd.)
Department of Tourism, Govt. of India,
Rongkangtui, Diphu - 782 460
4. **Dr. N. N. Sarma, Dr. S. R. Paul and Dr. D. Sarma,**
Regional Agricultural Research Station,
Assam Agricultural University,
Diphu - 782 460
5. **Dr. Tanmay Bhattacharjee,**
Reader and Incharge,
Department of Political Science,
Assam University,
Silchar - 788 014
6. **Dr. K. C. Mahanta,**
Professor, Department of Anthropology,
Dibrugarh University,
Dibrugarh - 786 004
7. **Dr. Dilip Kumar Kalita,**
Senior Research Fellow,
Folklore & Oral Traditions Deptt.,
Anundoram Barua Institute of Language,
Art and Culture (ABILAC),
Guwahati - 781 030
8. **Dr. Dharmeswar Duarah,**
Officer-in-charge, Cultural Centre, Haflong,
Haflong - 788 819
North Cachar Hills (Assam)
9. **Dr. Jeuti Barooah,**
Director, Law Research Institute,
Gauhati High Court,
Guwahati - 781 001
10. **Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur,**
Ex Director, Assam Institute of Research for
Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar,
Guwahati - 781 022
11. **Dr. Rani Kakati (Hazarika),**
Reader, Department of Anthropology,
Gauhati University,
Guwahati - 781 014
12. **Dr. Rafiquz Zaman, ACS**
Director, Assam Institute of Research for
Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar,
Guwahati - 781 022
13. **Dr. R. P. Athparia,**
Anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India,
North East Regional Centre,
Shillong - 793 001
14. **Dr. A. K. Borah and Shri P. N. Bharali,**
Lecturer, Department of Sociology,
Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh - 786 004 and
District Research Officer, Dibrugarh - 786 001
15. **Dr. Nabin Chandra Sarma,**
Professor and Head,
Department of Folklore Research,
Gauhati University,
Guwahati - 781 014

16. **Deben Saikia,**
Lecturer, Department of Geography,
Rangsina College,
Donkamukam - 782 485
Karbi Anglong (Assam)
17. **Ananda Chandra Nath,**
AIRTSC, Guwahati - 22
18. **Lakshi Kanta Muchahary,**
Asstt. Research Officer,
Office of the Chief of Division,
Zonal Field Evaluation Unit,
Diphu - 782 460
19. **Dr. Girindra Nath Das,**
District Research Officer,
Karbi Anglong, Diphu.

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KARBI TRADITION AND IDENTITY CRISIS

P. C. Phangcho

ABSTRACT

The topic has been dealt in the light of history giving the results of contact of the Karbis with the culturally more developed people such as the Jaintias, Ahoms, Britishers and in the present-day time with the common plainsmen of Assam. The paper also highlights the important aspects of detribalisation as a result of changes brought to their society through new religious faiths and practices, modern education, transport and communication as well as other infrastructure of development, especially after granting them the Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Sixth Schedule has brought to them a spectacular change/development in the present-day time by providing modern infrastructure and amenities on the one hand and seriously affecting their tradition and identity on the other, particularly in respect of traditional law of land and forest ownership, way of living, food and dress habit, language and culture and socio-political behaviour. It has, therefore, been suggested that while implementing the schemes for modernisation and development the local sentiments and tradition are to be taken into account so that the folk do not have to experience any identity crisis.

Due to lack of a detailed and systematic historical work on the tribe, it is now rather quite difficult to present a total picture of the Karbi tradition in respect of its socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political aspects. A scholar, therefore, has to satisfy himself by merely analysing

the stories and folklore verbally narrated by the aged persons, short references made in the Ahom *Buranji* (Devi, 1968) and in the records of the British Government. These particulars, although not sufficient, give atleast something about Karbi tradition from the past. Tradition and history are two inseparable things that are corollary, and can be regarded as important documents supporting the identity of a tribe. Karbi identity, therefore, is not only based on the present phenomenon of its dialect, food and dress habit, style of living, social customs and economic activities, etc., but also on its tradition and history. The question of identity crisis comes when the folk feel or visualize the situation where the existing socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political systems are in danger or in a state of being overwhelmed due to some external influence of or contact with a stronger culture. Such situations have occurred with regard to the Karbi identity, and there are instances of their reactions to such occurrences. In this paper, therefore, some of the vital points of the Karbi society have been discussed to highlight their tradition and identity crisis.

Let us take the Karbi's contact with the Jaintias that happened after their migration to the Rongkhang area for settlement as the first instance of external influence. They lived in the Jaintia territory for many centuries. During this time the former Karbi identity had undergone changes to a considerable degree in respect of language, religious faiths and activities, religious songs and dances, etc. For example, a good number of Khasi-Jaintia words used in Karbi and the popular *Chomangkan* dance of the Karbis believed to have originated from the Khasis are now very much a part of the Karbi culture. Upto that extent the Karbis did not consider the entrance of the Mon-Khmer

culture could be a problem to their culture and identity. But when they found that their popular leader and great warrior Thong Nokbe was treacherously killed by the Jaintias and thereafter, when they could sense that the Jaintias were going to impose their matriarchal norms on the Karbis, they felt very much insecure as their patriarchal identity was thereby going to be destroyed. The Karbi customary law of inheritance whereby a son became the heir of his father's property and became the head of the family, was considered to be very vital of a Karbi social law and identity and as such, they were not prepared to forsake it at any cost. As a result, many Karbi families came down from the Rongkhang hills to the Ahom territory in the Nagaon plain across the Kopili river. The Ahom king not only rehabilitated them but also provided protection and reinstated their king at Rongkhang under his guardianship thereby helping the Karbis fully practise their traditional custom and retain identity in their own way.

During the British time the Karbis experienced two most important changes : (i) Spread of Christianity and (ii) Land and revenue settlement. In the latter part of the nineteenth century a few Karbi families at Tika of Baithalangso were converted to Christianity by the Baptist Christian missionaries. This new religion brought to them a new faith as well as modern education through the study and practice of the Bible. The Christian families and their children thus got the opportunities to know about the western and the most developed societies of the world. This also brought to them a new perception and a tremendous change in their outlook towards the age-old religious faith and practice, and to a considerable extent in their day-to-day life. So also was the change brought by the land and

revenue settlement introduced by the British Government. In the actual hilly areas, however, this arrangement did not affect them at all; but in the lower portions such as the valleys of the Kopili and the Langpi of Nagaon (now within Karbi Anglong) practically came under the cadastral areas. By this new administrative system the individual Karbi families became land owners - earlier land was owned by the entire village under the guardianship of the village headman *Sarthe* (or *Gaonbura*). As a result of this the community system of cultivation *Jirkedam* began to vanish, and gradually it spread to the actual hilly areas where non-cadastral lands were (still today are) freely cultivated under the method of shifting cultivation (*rit*) by individual families.

During the time of Srimanta Sankardeva (1449 - 1568 AD) and later down to the British time, a great social change took place among a section of the Karbis living in the Nagaon plain by way of conversion into *Sankari Vaishnavism*. This, however, did not occur in the actual hills and remote areas. Most of such converts were later given lower rank as *Koch* in the hierarchy of Hindu society. Thereafter their way of life, traditional custom, language, culture, etc., drastically changed practically assimilating with the common Assamese culture and way of life. Such a phenomenon, therefore, could be regarded as a clear instance of identity crisis. One can also observe similar occurrences among the plains Karbis due to their day-to-day contact with the other plains people. These we may accept as few examples of detribalization happening among most Karbis living in the plains.

The creation of a separate administrative unit that is the autonomous district for them is a landmark in the

history of the Karbis. The very purpose of the autonomous district is to give them the opportunity of self-administration for development and progress according to their own genius under the norms of the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution. In this context it is worth-mentioning that their traditional administrative system has not been discarded - still well in existence although it has nothing to do with the pace of development in the modern context. This traditional *Habai* (or *Habey*) system of administration, one can say, is a mark of identification, and is particularly concerned with the functioning and practices of the religious rites and traditional socio-cultural activities. It can, therefore, be called a way to retain and safeguard their traditional identity. On the contrary, the modern administration apart from giving them the taste of true democracy, has given them modern education, agriculture, transport and communication, employment and the entire infrastructure of development.

In the early days of creation of the district, the District Council and the State authorities took up some measures regarding the utilization of land and forest resources in the district by passing Acts and undertaking schemes. The purpose was to stop *jhuming* and shifting of villages. Mention may be made of the Mikir Hills District (*Jhuming*) Regulation 1954, scheme of Model Villages in 1964 and Coffee and Rubber plantation scheme under the Assam Plantation Crops Development Corporation Ltd. (1974), etc. Through these Acts and legislature and schemes, the District Council authority has brought about a reform in respect of utilization of land and forest resources, development of crops, shifting of villages and so on. This is undoubtedly to provide better economy and better infrastructure for development of the people. But by doing so the State and the

District Council authorities became the owners of most of land and forest resources ignoring the traditional rights and ownership of the villagers. The new innovations introduced by the authorities, therefore, are evil necessities from the point of view of general economic development on the one hand and the safeguard of traditional socio-cultural identity of the people on the other.

As a result of the development processes being started under the modern administration, urbanization at some points is the eventuality. This has opened up opportunities for outsiders to come over there for employment and business, and even for permanent settlement in due course. The local Karbis too have got opportunities not only to sell their handicrafts and various products but also to contact with the outside people who are invariably from different cultural backgrounds. In due course of time such urban centres have become the growth points/centres causing a great impact on the socio-economic and socio-cultural change or transformation towards modernity. Diphu, Donkamukam, Hamren, Baithalango, Howraghat, Bokajan and Jirikyndeng may be cited as few examples which took their shape in the beginning as headquarters of either Block, *Thana* or district.

Opening of mining and hydroelectric power generation industries at few places of Karbi Anglong such as Amtereng (hydroelectric project) and Bokajan (cement factory) have also attracted employment and job seekers from within and outside the district. The outsiders after a few years become either semipermanent or permanent dwellers. Following them businessmen and traders also come there, and thus significantly contribute to the rapid

growth of non-agricultural population.

Availability of vast open cultivable lands in the peripheral areas and foothills that are contiguous to the plains and even some interior places of Karbi Anglong have attracted large sized agricultural and landless population from the plains districts of Assam and elsewhere - mostly of non tribal blood. Such people although do not get land settlement, in couple of years time economically dominate the local tribals (e.g. Karbis) in agricultural sector by utilizing the cultivable lands under the *Paikas*, *Sukti* or *Bandhak* (mortgage) systems. Under such a situation of vicious circle the actual land owner becomes poorer and penniless virtually losing everything except the ownership by name.

Introduction of developed transport and communication facilities following the extension and development of roads to the interior places undoubtedly provided a great scope to the inhabitants to have contacts with the people of outside world, especially with the urban dwellers and their societies. The development of transport and communication facilities, therefore, has not only helped the people in their mobility but also has provided a scope to get a perception about the modern world. This has encouraged even the illiterate mass to educate their children in schools and colleges in urban and semiurban areas if such institutions are not locally available. There are instances of youths travelling fifty kilometres on buses everyday to attend classes in high schools and colleges.

It has also been observed that during one and a half decades or so there is spectacular growth in the number of primary and senior primary (middle) schools in the district.

During the recent years a few venture colleges also have come up at different places providing the scope of higher education among the local Karbi youths and others. This development has not only contributed to the growth of literacy and general education but also a better linkage of the Karbis/other indigenous tribals with the mainstream of Indian culture. In a sense, this is one of the inlets through which modernity has entered into Karbi society resulting in a considerable degree of impact upon the Karbi traditional culture and identity.

During the late sixties the hills tribal leaders of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills districts of Assam launched a movement for the creation of a separate political unit for the hills tribals basically with the intention to provide a safeguard to their tribal culture and identity. When the autonomous state of Meghalaya comprising the two hills districts was formed on January 21, 1972, the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district (now Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills) was given a choice whether or not to join the newborn political unit, under the Article 244 (A) of the Indian Constitution. The article has also provided for a right to its people to form a separate political unit whenever desired. The leaders including the local leading political parties like the *Karbi Adorbar* and the youth organization *Karbi Riso Adorbar* opted for remaining with Assam. It may be mentioned that Meghalaya is a tribal Christian state while the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills is a tribal Hindu area. This fundamental difference in religious faith and sentiment was perhaps the root cause of this district not joining the Christian state of Meghalaya. Here we find another instance of Karbi people's crucial decision on the question of religious and socio-cultural identity.

Basing on the provision given by the Article 244(A) the Karbi people, namely the youths with the help of Dimasa and other tribals launched a movement during the eighties and the nineties. They demanded the implementation of the Article with the intention to form a separate political unit for the Karbi and the Dimasa people. The youth organizations like ASDC (Autonomous State Demand Committee), KAASDCOM (Karbi Anglong Autonomous State Demand Committee), KSA (Karbi Students' Association), ADSU (All Dimasa Students' Union) and KANCHASDCOM (Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee) engineered the entire movement. This movement was virtually inspired by the historic Assam Movement on foreign nationals' issue, and the former took its birth soon after the latter died down following the signing of Assam Accord in 1985. The Karbi Movement had given a tremendous impetus to the minds of the Karbi youths not actually over the foreign nationals' issue but over the issues like social modernization, modern identity (with some modification to the traditional one) and, of course, the creation of an autonomous state for better self-administration and so on. Later, however, the idea of implementing the Article 244 (A) vanished after signing the MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) on 1st April, 1995. *Karbi Nimso Chingthur Asong* a leading Karbi women organization, *Karbi Cultural Society*, *Karbi Lam-met Anei* a leading literary organization are some of the social organizations mostly led by the youths and these are very actively and regularly working for the modernization of Karbi identity in respect of woman status, culture, literature and so on. These organizations either directly or indirectly extend support to the Karbi Movement.

A new era has begun in the history of the Karbi people after the signing of the MoU or the Karbi Accord. This political arrangement has empowered the local self government i.e. the Autonomous Council to exercise its power of administration under the Governor more efficiently and effectively. The general welfare of the people, all developmental activities and infrastructure are expected to ensure prosperity of the entire district but apprehensions also prevail in the minds of both the Karbis and the non-Karbhis for their cultural identity and economic existence. The older generation of the Karbis does not seem to fully take the younger generation that holds the administrative power, into confidence. According to the older, the younger one seems to ignore the traditional culture and identity. For instance, the traditional *Habai* system of administration in which the younger does not like to take part, and therefore, it remains an affair of the aged and practically uneducated social leaders. On the contrary, the younger generation whole-heartedly takes part in the MDC (Member of District Council) type of administration. It is, however, no denying the fact that the Autonomous Council has shown efforts to retain and safeguard some of the traditional festivals and practices of the Karbis as well as of other tribals. The non-Karbhis outside the norms of the Sixth Schedule, on the other hand, are jointly fighting for the establishment of their rights equal to that of the Karbis. But then a section of the Karbis regards this as an act based on antagonistic emotion with the purpose to curtail the growing size of Karbi tribalism and its identity. It is, therefore, no surprising a fact when a section of the Karbi youths takes the path of militancy as a counter force to fight against.

By looking at the present trend in respect of socio-

political and socio-economic development in the Karbi Anglong district, the Karbi tradition and identity can be said to have reached a transitional state - the question of safeguard of Karbi identity on the traditional foundation and the question of progress of the people with the tempo of modernity both seem to have equal importance. Strong opposition to modernity will certainly slow down the pace of progress but help restore the traditional culture and identity. Strong opposition to the traditional socio-economic and cultural systems, on the other hand, will drastically harm the Karbi traditional identity. It is, therefore, deeply felt by the author that while introducing and implementing the developmental schemes, the socio-cultural aspects should not be ignored. A change or reform could not be accomplished in a day or two. The district authority, has also equal responsibility to provide safeguard and protection to the traditional socio-cultural aspects of the people, however, with some modifications so that the new (modern) and the old generations can adjust themselves to the changing situation brought by modernity. Political and other non-political social organizations have to play a crucial role effectively for the protection of Karbi culture and identity in a situation where non tribal and non Karbi culture seem to be growing stronger in the present-day time.

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TRIBAL ECONOMY OF THE HILLS OF ASSAM : SOME DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Kandarpa Kumar Barman

ABSTRACT

The development of the hills region of Assam, despite the availability of abundant resources, is not sustainable due to inadequate infrastructure, inappropriate technology and socio-economic constraints. In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the various issues of tribal development in the light of agriculture and industries. The tribals in the hills mostly depend on agriculture which itself is subsistence by nature resulting low rate of return per hectare. Moreover, the practice of *jhum* cultivation causes extensive damage not only to the fertility of soil but to the ecology and environment also. Similarly, the industrial sector is also not developed and resources available in the hills have not been fully explored. There are plenty of scope for the development of forest-based, agro-based and fruit processing industries based on local resources and indigenous technology. But no special efforts have been made to develop these industries as a result of which tribals have not been benefitted through industrialisation. Therefore, it is highly essential to develop suitable institutions and appropriate technology for sustainable development of the hills.

The Hill Areas of Assam comprising Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts cover a total geographical area of 15,332 sq. km. with a total population of 8.04 lakh as per 1991 Census. Thus, the two hill districts account for

19.5% of the State's total geographical area and 3.6% of the State's total population. The Karbi Anglong district is predominantly inhabited by the Karbis while in the North Cachar Hills, the principal tribe is the Dimasa Kacharis. Besides, there are many tribes viz., the Jeme Nagas, the Rengma Nagas, the Hmars, the Kukis and the Khasis, etc., inhabiting the hill areas.

The tribals in the two hill districts of Assam present a unique situation in terms of resource endowments, resource use patterns, technological levels and levels of living. The livelihood pattern and the way of living of the hill tribes emerge out of their respective interaction with their immediate environment.

Various tribal development programmes were initiated by the Government of India from time to time for the development of tribal communities but almost all the programmes were inadequate for dealing with the complex problems of tribal development. According to the Shilu Ao Committee (Govt. of India, 1969) the main problems of tribal communities were related to indebtedness, land alienation, educational backwardness and inadequacy of communication.

The National Committee on the Development of Backward Areas (Sivaraman Committee - Govt. of India, 1981) commented that each tribal area presented more or less unique situation in terms of resources, people, social constraints, infrastructural development, etc. Two types of approaches were recommended for the tribal development. Firstly, an area approach which envisaged comprehensive integrated approach in tribal concentration areas called the

Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP). The other is dispersal tribal community approach where specific programmes are identified for their development.

The hills region of Assam is having varied type of resources but the development of the region is not sustainable which is the result of lack of infrastructural facilities, adequate technology and socio-economic constraints. In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss some important issues of tribal development in the hills region of Assam in the light of agriculture and industries. The concept of sustainable development is also discussed in this context.

TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN THE HILLS REGION OF ASSAM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The tribals of the Hills of Assam mostly depend on agriculture which is subsistence by nature. In the plains area of the two hill districts, the people use to practise wet cultivation while in the hilly portions they happen to practise shifting cultivation which is ecologically unsound and economically not feasible. Apart from agriculture, tribals also depend on their natural resources like forests, wild life, pastures and grazing lands for their sustenance. These are common property resources.

The resource productivity (return per unit of resource) of the tribal region is getting degraded and their productivity is also decreasing owing to the constant pressure of population both human and livestock on the natural resources, unscientific management of resources and lack of appropriate technology to suit the complex

problems of hill tribes. Therefore, the most important issue in tribal and hill development is that of sustainability. A conceptual framework of sustainable development is shown in Fig. 1.

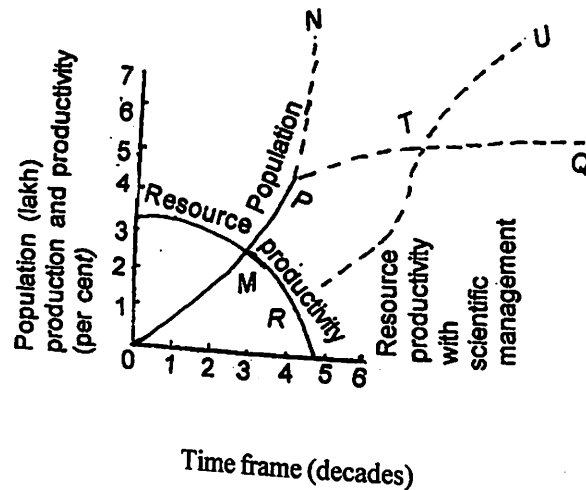


Fig. 1 : Sustainable development model in the Hills Region of Assam. The model has been quoted from Shah, 1992.

The natural resources of the hills region of Assam viz., its land, forests, pastures and grazing lands which provide life support to the tribals and other hill people living in the hills region are fast depleting. This has been shown in Fig. 1. OMPN shows the population growth curve which is increasing. But owing to resource crunch, out migration and family planning endeavours, the curve is assumed to take the path PTQ. In the absence of such measures, the curve will take the path as shown by dotted line PN. On the other hand, resource productivity starts falling from point M, after which the gap between resource productivity curve and population growth curve is increasing. But with scientific

activity curve may be increased from R to T and hopefully along the dotted line TU. This decreasing biotic pressure and scientific management of natural resources for increasing productivity are two key elements for attaining sustainable development in the hills of Assam.

AGRICULTURE IN THE HILLS ECONOMY OF ASSAM

Agriculture is the mainstay of the tribal people inhabiting the Hill Areas of Assam. *Jhum* cultivation is the way of life to most of the hill tribes in Assam. According to the Report of the National Agricultural Commission, 1976 the area under *jhum* cultivation is 4.15 lakh hectares with involvement of 45,600 tribal families in the Karbi Anglong district and 0.83 lakh hectares with involvement of 13,000 tribal families in the N.C.Hills district. The extent of settled agriculture in both the districts is very less. Besides shifting cultivation, the tribals depend on hunting and fishing as their supplementary sources of food. Due to ever decreasing period of *jhum* cycle, the *jhum* cultivation has become very wasteful causing loss of forests, loss of soil fertility and biodiversity and thus, the method is not sustainable in the long run. Several schemes have been launched by the Assam Government to control *jhum* cultivation with the primary objective of reclaiming land, constructing terraces, providing irrigation wherever possible and allotting it to the *Jhumias* for settled agriculture. Schemes like 'scheme for establishment of model villages', 'cash crop plantation scheme' and 'composite scheme', etc., have also been implemented in the Hill Areas of Assam. Moreover, 17 projects each in the Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills districts have been taken up for execution under the Integrated Jhumiya Development Programme during the

period 1986-87 - 1990-91. Apart from the above measures, 36 villages of the Karbi Anglong district and 40 villages of the N.C.Hills district have been brought under the Compact Area Development Programme (Das, 1990 : 7).

But despite the various measures adopted, their success has been marginal. It is, therefore, very important to know the constraints in the success of the *jhum* control schemes. Since most of the tribals are poor, illiterate and conservative by nature, sermons on sustainability and ecological degradation are not going to help the situation. The most important considerations are economic. The return per hectare must be taken into account while adopting any strategy for motivating *jhumia* families for settled agriculture. The tribals do not have the required cash for purchasing inputs like fertilizers, insecticides, better tools and implements. Banking facilities have been grossly inadequate to provide financial accommodation to the tribals. The Regional Agricultural Research Station, Assam Agricultural University, Diphu is undertaking research works to evolve suitable crop varieties for the Hill Areas of Assam. The Station also conducts various research works for improving cropping system and cultural practices. But no tangible results have come out, so far. In a hilly terrain with undulating topography, high altitude and slopes, horticulture is recommended as it is an environment friendly and higher income generating farm level enterprise. But *jhumias* with a subsistence economy are reluctant to divert their lands to horticulture as it has a long gestation period. Two types of strategies can be suggested for this purpose (Shah, 1992). Firstly, wage employment should be made available to the *jhumias* on a continued basis till they are able to develop their own resource base for individually owned agricultural

economy. Secondly, sincere efforts are needed to train and develop skills in the *jhumias* to adopt new technology of agricultural production in their terraced lands. While adopting new technology, the tribals must be convinced that their net return from settled agriculture is much higher than the shifting cultivation. There is growing need to develop appropriate technology to meet the complex problems of hills agriculture and a package of practices based on local conditions and environment should be developed and that has to be simple and pragmatic. The existing extension services are not adequate and, therefore, a new farming system approach has to be followed which must be adaptable to the tribals.

INDUSTRIALISATION AND TRIBAL ECONOMY

The Hill Areas of Assam are rich in natural resources. There is tremendous scope for growth and development of various types of industries based on available natural resources. The Dhebar Commission (Govt. of India, 1961) spelt out the parameters of an industrial policy of the tribal areas. The Commission commented that the march of industrialisation cannot be halted but it should not sweep the tribals off their feet. In other words, the tribals should not suffer environmentally and mentally through industrialisation. At present, there are a few major industries located within the jurisdiction of the Hill Districts - they are Cement Corporation of India, Bokajan ; M/S North East Cement Ltd., Umrangso ; M/S Vinay Cement Ltd., Umrangso ; M/S Wood Craft Products Ltd., Diphu and M/S Mikir Hills Forest Products, Bokajan. Apart from the major industries there are a large number of Small Scale Industries like rice and flour mills, saw mills, cotton ginning mill, handloom and textile industries, handicrafts, etc.

Apart from the industries mentioned earlier, some more other industries like Hume Pipe Factory, Bakery, Stone Crushing, Lime making units and some miscellaneous industries like Steel furniture making unit, printing press, spice grinding, candle making, decorative textile units are coming up recently owing to the initiative of the District Industries Centre. Karbi Anglong is rich for handloom product and bamboo & cane products. Industrial Estates, Growth Centres and Commercial Estates have also been set up in the Karbi Anglong district for the growth of industries.

But despite the various industries operating in the Hill Areas of Assam, the tribals and hill people in general continue to work at the subsistence level. They have suffered in both ways - their environment has got degraded and the availability of raw material for their cottage, small and handicrafts industries has become scarce. Thus, they have lost their traditional mechanism of the control of the environment.

Therefore, it is an urgent necessity to adopt suitable strategy for the growth of industries based on local resources and indigenous technology so that the tribals and hill people in general get direct benefits through industrialisation. Forest-based industries, agro-based industries and fruit processing industries may be set up through the initiative of District Industries Centres and with the participation of the local entrepreneurship so that the profits go to the tribals. In this connection, motivation, training, supply of industrial inputs, credit and availability of capital are absolutely necessary. The District Industries

Centres, the Assam Hills Small Industries Development Corporation, the Commercial Banks, the North Eastern Council and the Autonomous District Councils can take necessary action in this regard.

CONCLUSION

The Hill Areas of Assam need special treatment for economic development. There are plenty of resources both human and natural, but due to lack of scientific management and appropriate technology, the hills region is still lagging behind with the rest of the plains districts. Rather, the resource productivity has been decreasing, ultimately posing a serious threat to the future development of the tribals. If their degradation continues to an irreversible level, then the tribals and the other hill people would be put in a precarious condition. Therefore, for sustainable economic development of the hills, efforts must be made to develop suitable institutions and appropriate technology so that each one can participate in the development process.

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TRIBAL TRADITION AND ITS RELATION TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE HILL AREAS OF ASSAM

Oriwell Terang

[Shri Oriwell Terang was the first District Research Officer at Diphu. He worked for about a year (20.6.63 to 2.6.64) in this establishment. Later on, he worked in various capacities within the country and abroad till his retirement in the year 1990 as D.D.G., Department of Tourism, Govt. of India. We extended our invitation to him to present a paper and participate in the seminar. Shri Terang expressed his inability to attend the seminar due to domestic circumstances but sent a brief write-up. We are grateful to him. His write-up is reproduced here. - Editor]

Tribals normally live in the interior and inaccessible areas. Therefore, they are found in the hills and mountainous regions. They are thus keeping away from the people living in the plains areas. Being in the inaccessible place they are more secure and live freely and independently in their own way of life. Their tools and weapons are primitive for the pursuits of economic activities. Consequently they have to work hard for their livelihood and generally they are poor. In contrast tribals living in towns and villages well connected by roads have changed their lifestyle by adopting the modern way of life. Many of them are educated and become civil servants in the State and Central Government establishments, Engi-

neers, Doctors and Traders and few are doing contract works and business. However, we are talking about the common tribal people living in the remote areas.

Irrespective of their economic conditions, tribals have their own customs and traditions distinctive from the people living in the plains areas. These customs and traditions regulate their economic activities and social behaviour. There are elaborate customs at the time of births, marriages and deaths. So also there are traditions for their economic activities. Whatever may be their social customs and traditions there is nothing that stand in the way of development in the Hill Areas of Assam. On the other hand, the government can do a lot in improving their economic conditions by way of financial assistance and organising the market outlets of the agriculture products, handicrafts and handloom produce.

By and large, their main economic activity is agriculture. Living in the hill areas, they adopt the method of cultivation known as *jhuming*, as there is hardly level plot of land for wet cultivation. This method involves clearing the jungles, cutting down the trees and then growing rice along with maize, sesame, melon, cucumber, etc. The fertility of the soil last only two years or so and then they have to shift to another plot. In this way the whole area is left barren. This problem should be looked into by the government and non-government agencies (NGO). The people should be discouraged to practise *jhum* cultivation. Some alternative occupation may be offered so that the forest and soil can be conserved. One alternative is to lure the tribals to cultivate wet paddy field, but this can be possible in the plains areas or on limited plots of land in the valleys of the

hills. Government should give financial assistance for irrigation facilities.

To improve economic conditions people should be encouraged to cultivate commercial crops and not to depend solely on rice cultivation.

Traditionally the tribal people make their own dresses which are beautiful and colourful. They also make the handicraft items for domestic purposes. The products of both handlooms and handicrafts items can be marketed. Government can help to channelise these products.

POSITIVE APPROACHES TO THE SHIFTING CULTIVATION IN THE HILLS ZONE OF ASSAM

N.N.Sarma, S.R.Paul and D.Sarma

ABSTRACT

Shifting cultivation (*jhuming*), the age-old practice adopted by the hill tribes of Assam has many deleterious effects on soil, climate and economy. Approaches have been made by the State Government through various agencies to control it but the farmers are still far away from accepting it. To motivate the *jhumias* new approaches have been made from the Regional Agricultural Research Station, Diphu with suitable models alternative to shifting cultivation. The model included use of manure and fertilizers, sowing of agronomic crops across the slope and inclusion of perennial horticultural crops. Moreover, identification and recommendation of suitable cropping sequences for the hill slopes, cultivation in between contour grass-hedge resulted increased production, minimising run-off, erosion and loss of available nutrients.

Cultivation in the hilly region is of two types : one practised on permanent and well developed lands known as settled agriculture and the other on the hill slopes or *jhum* land called *jhuming* or shifting cultivation. Settled cultivation is confined to plains and valley lands and to some extent foot hills and terraced land whereas shifting cultivation is confined to hill slopes and hillocks. In India, shifting cultivation is practised throughout the hill areas of North

Eastern States (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Tripura), Sikkim, Orissa, Bihar, U.P., Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala. In the North Eastern States the area available for *jhum* cultivation, area sown under *jhum* annually, tribal family involved, area/tribal family and *jhum* cycle are furnished in Table I.

TABLE - I
Extent of shifting cultivation in N-E India

States	Area available for <i>jhum</i> cultivation ('000 ha)	Area sown under <i>jhum</i> ('000 ha)	% of area of available <i>jhum</i> land	Tribal family involved ('000 ha)	Area/tribal family (ha)	<i>Jhum</i> cycle (years)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Arunachal Pradesh	248.58	92.00	37.0	81	1.13	2.69
Assam	498.30	69.60	13.0	58	1.20	7.11
Manipur	100.00	60.00	60.0	50	1.20	1.67
Meghalaya	416.00	76.00	18.2	68	1.12	5.47
Mizoram	604.03	61.61	10.2	45	1.37	9.74
Nagaland	608.00	73.54	12.1	80	0.92	8.22
Tripura	220.79	22.30	10.1	43	0.51	9.61
Total	2695.70	455.05	16.8	425	1.07	5.90

(Source : Agarwal, 1987)

SHIFTING CULTIVATION

Shifting cultivation is defined as 'the custom of cultivating, clearing, scattering in the search of natural vegetation and of abandoning them as soon as the soil is

exhausted and this included the certain areas shifting of household in order to follow the cultivator's search for new fertile land (FAO, 1957).

CHARACTERISTICS OF SHIFTING CULTIVATION

1. Selection of hill slope ;
2. Cutting and burning of vegetation (slash and burn)
3. Use of human labour as the main output ;
4. Non-utilization of draught animals ;
5. No use of manures, fertilizers, plant protection measures ;
6. Use of hand operated simple tools ;
7. Adoption of mixed cropping ;
8. Abandoning land after 2-3 years of consecutive cultivation ;
9. Rotation of field rather than crops and
10. Shifting of dwelling houses, if necessary.

Shifting cultivation is not practised uniformly. It differs from hill to hill and even among the tribes adopted differently. The important crops included in the shifting cultivation are rice, maize, sesame, cotton, tapioca, ginger, turmeric, arum and cucurbits. Shifting cultivation is restricted to rainy season (*Kharif*) and confined to a period of 2-3 years, thereafter, the land is abandoned. The longer the time of return to any part the better is for total regeneration and total fertility of land. In the earlier days long term *jhum* cycle of 20-30 years was followed (Chatterjee and Maiti, 1984 : 221) but presently due to increased population pressure, it has been reduced to 3-6 years.

PROBLEMS OF SHIFTING CULTIVATION

Shifting cultivation leads fast to ecological disequi-

librium by depleting forest covers, encouraging chances of soil erosion to cause removal of top soil, silting river beds and thereby threatening the existence of life itself. Moreover, it has numerous damaging effects on soil and climate ultimately affecting crop production and economy of hill people. In general shifting cultivation encourages soil erosion, run-off, denudation of forests, destruction of germplasm including erratic behaviour of rainfall.

APPROACHES TO CONTROL SHIFTING CULTIVATION

Since shifting cultivation is a detrimental process, Government has taken up some projects to combat shifting cultivation and divert the *jhumias* to settled cultivation. Such projects are (a) *Jhumia* Settlement Orchard and (b) Integrated *Jhumia* Development Project. In the former, the orchards are established at the Government (Department of Agriculture) initiation and when the fruit trees start bearing it is handed over to the *jhumia* families based on the allotment by the village council. In the Integrated *Jhumia* Development Project, assistance in the form of inputs is given to the farmers for settled cultivation. The Department of Agriculture helps them in scientific laying out of the orchard and planting is done by the villagers. Inputs in the form of fertilizers, chemicals, planting materials, fencing materials, etc., are supplied free at initial stage, the subsequent maintenance is done by the farmers.

State Government has a scheme to construct bench terrace in subsidised rate. However, farmers are not interested because terrace cultivation gives very poor yield due to removal of top soil. Construction of terrace is also difficult in certain region with loose soil and in most places

it has proved to be very much expensive and initially encourages heavy soil erosion.

In spite of all these efforts and facilities available none have attracted the hill farmers to keep away from shifting cultivation. The hill farmers are continuing *jhuming* with variation in *jhum* cycle till today and would continue in future also if an acceptable alternative technology is not provided. Motivating *jhumias* to settled cultivation is very hard job as they do not give up easily this age-old practice. However, efforts are to be made to evolve an improved practice in the place of shifting cultivation which should be identical to *jhuming* with better utilization and management of *jhum* land to lessen the possible damages.

RESEARCH APPROACHES TO CONTROL SHIFTING CULTIVATION

ICAR Research Complex had developed a 'Model Land Use' as an alternative to *jhum* for use in the slopy land. It is shown in Table II.

TABLE II
Model Land Use

Slope	Approx. % of total area	Land use	Conservation measure
1	2	3	4
Lower portion	33.5	Agriculture	Bench terracing
Mid portion	33.5	Horticulture	Half moon terracing
Top portion	33.0	Forestry	-

Two crop sequences viz., rice (April-July) - sweet potato (July-Nov) and rice (April-July) - rice (July-Sept) - cowpea (Oct-Jan) are recommended for general cultivation for the *tilla* land of Tripura. High density planting of pineapple in the hill slope (34%) with legume as companion crop to act as soil conservation measure has provided yet another alternative for tackling the *jhum* problem.

Regional Agricultural Research Station, Diphu has already conducted some experiments relevant to hill agriculture with special reference to shifting cultivation. Efforts are being made to find out improved practices identical to *jhuming*, but more productive and less injurious to soil and environment. Improved technologies in the place of shifting cultivation in the *jhum* land have already been identified and recommended for general cultivation. The technologies included : (1) replacement of traditional varieties by the improved ones, (2) use of manures and fertilizers to maintain soil fertility, (3) inclusion of perennial horticultural crops along with agronomic crops to encourage settled cultivation, (4) judicious crop selection and placing them in scientific manner for better production and utilization of land. It was reported that growing pineapple, turmeric, ginger and arum in the border and rice, maize, sesame and cotton in line across the slope in the middle, significantly out yielded traditional *jhum* in terms of rice-equivalent yield (Sarma, et al., 1995 : 196-201).

Summer rice (direct seeded) - greengram (*kharif*), summer rice (direct seeded) - cotton (*kharif*), and summer rice (direct seeded) - *araha* (*kharif*) crop sequences with 200% cropping intensity are recommended for the 25-30% hill slope under rainfed conditions.

Maize-based cropping systems with 200% cropping intensity viz., maize (summer) - blackgram (*kharif*), maize - pigeonpea, maize - greengram, maize - mustard (*rabi*) and maize - potato are identified for hill slopes.

Intercropping blackgram, greengram and sesame either in single/double row or broadcasting in between inter row spaces of *araha* recorded more remunerative without affecting the yield of *araha*.

CROPPING SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

Better agro-techniques, improved varieties, high quality seed and improved crop and pest management practices often provide the best opportunities for increasing agricultural output. A key technique that is integral to improvement in hill agriculture is contour cultivation. To minimise soil erosion and run-off, vegetative or cultural methods can be followed effectively. Perennial grasses in the form of hedge are useful in this regard. Once vegetative hedges are established they are permanent. When they are followed as contour guidelines for cultivation and planting, the resulting moisture and soil conservation increases yield by atleast 50% over traditional methods.

Perennial grasses for controlling soil erosion and run-off were evaluated. Both guinea and citronella grasses were found efficient erosion control grasses for this zone. Direct seeded rice (summer) - greengram (*kharif*) in between two grass strips treatments recorded yield of 73.88 and 59.15 q/ha in terms of rice-equivalent with soil erosion of 2.84 and 4.08 t/ha/annum respectively. The grass hedges were more effective in slowing the movement of water and

eventually formed terrace with accumulation of soil along the contour.
Summer rice (direct seeded) - sesame (*kharif*) and maize (summer) - sesame (*kharif*) with pineapple contour strip at the top of the main crop strip were recommended for increased production and conserving soil fertility in the 25% hill slope.
Suitable fertilizer application techniques have been identified for the hill slope. Two-third of the fertilizer are to be applied in the upper 1/3rd area, and rest 1/3rd of the fertilizer in the middle, while the lower 1/3rd are left unfertilized.

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ABSTRACT

A deeper study of traditions would yield the facts that every society is, in fact, evolving over a certain period of time. At the same time, the concept of development is also bound by time and place. Therefore, the idea of development should be imposed over such interactions between development and tradition. In the bizarre atmosphere of the north-east, the concept of development should be understood in its 'core' sectors. Even, the idea of Welfare should be understood in its 'core'. The basic needs of the people should be attended to and the allurements of consumerism should be avoided.

Consumerism breaks up traditions very quickly and gives us a distorted picture of development which is not really 'native' of the place. Again, the present essay seeks to redefine the term tribe in the actual context of the north-east. A society is judged by its propensity to produce effectively which sustains the society and not by blind imitation of consumerism.

Diphu and the people of Karbi Anglong always have a special place in my heart. I still remember that sleepy unadorned and hospitable town that was Diphu which was then slowly giving up its village appearance and took the attire of a small town. That was another August Day in 1968. We took the town as it was. The jacks in the night made a symphony of sounds which perplexed many among us who

TRIBAL TRADITION AND ITS RELATION TO DEVELOPMENT

Tamray Bhattacharjee

had lived in big towns prior to coming here. There was every possibility of trampling a snake in the night time walk unless one was watchful while the jackals and snakes had uninterrupted sway over the jungle in and around the township, the so-called 'development' drove them out of the area.

The Karbi village Kanther Terang (Sri Rong Bong Terang had corrected my information by saying that it is actually Kangther Terang) was located near the Diphu Police Station in the early sixties but it had gradually hopped out of the town when faced with the prospect of increasing onslaught of urbanity. The Agro-Economic Research Centre for North East India, Jorhat made some studies under Dr. P.D.Saikia on this village and had recorded some information on the setting of a Karbi village society.

The land in the Karbi traditions for ages was not considered a purchasable commodity and like Pahom in the famous story of *How much land does a man need ?* could covet the abundance of it. The *jhum* cycle was very wide and an ordinary Karbi had an abundance of choice. The nomadic character of a tribal village did not face the problem of shortage of land in the undulating hills.

A tribal society was restless for economic reasons. The *jhum* land needs the natural replenishment by nature after a plot is tilled for some time. The mode of cultivation indicates a set of people as the tribals. The *jhuming* or the slash and burn is the traditional mode of cultivation for almost all tribals of the north-east and the Karbis are no exception. Therefore, a 'tribe' becomes distinguishable

from the non tribals by the mode of cultivation.

Secondly, a tribal society when left without a sovereign authority overhead, has always the problems of attacks and counter attacks. A tribal community can only expect attacks when left alone. The inter tribal disputes resulting in bloody commotions are all too common among the Nagas. The Naga-Kuki feuds in recent years in the State of Manipur have economic, political and military manifestations. Charles Lyall, on the basis of information gathered from Edward Stack had written in his book *The Mikirs* that the Karbis (formerly called the Mikirs) once settled in the territory of North Cachar Hills in great strength and they had moved in the territory of the Jaintia kings to save themselves from such attacks. Their adversaries were the Nagas, Kukis and Kacharis.

Some Karbis had spilled over to the Ahom territory and they became loyal subjects of the Ahom kings. The Karbi traditional institutions like *Mei* and *Meipi* were typical Ahom influences while the political institutions like the *Lindokship* was influenced by the *Lyndohship* in the Khasi Hills and *Langdohship* in the Jaintia Hills. This type of interactions occurred in the historical period.

Every tribe lives and functions within the definitional content only. By definition, a tribe is a sequestered entity, marries within themselves, speaks a dialect and generally abhors forces of market economy and high industries. No tribal traditions go beyond this definitional content and if any tribal group goes beyond it, it loses the tribal characteristics. A tribal person when comes under the full exposure of such socio-economic expansion, becomes truly

restless.

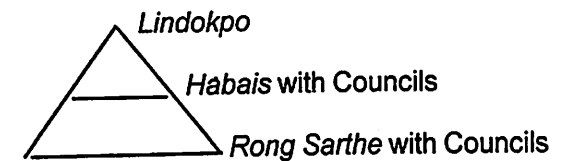
A tribe is a stage of human development and it is not by any means a permanent entity and when we consider it as such, it is a misconception. Moreover, the division of human group into tribals and non tribals as permanently fixed entities brings into play not only two groups of people warring with each other but also two socio-economic formations.

A human group is evolving always and as a group they are rational and when they emerge out of isolation, they consciously or unconsciously become adaptive. A characteristic of a tribe is that they thrive only in isolation. The Karbis lived in comparative isolation for a long time and it had its effects on the making of their psyche. The Karbi story of human origin is that all human groups were born of the eggs laid by the bird *Woplakpi*. The isolation taught them that the human groups which emerged were their neighbours - Assamese, Khasi and Naga. They were in contact with those people only. The Karbis were last from the egg and they were fearful of the environment. The story has a message to give and they cannot break that barrier of isolation.

The Karbis whom I saw at Diphu and in the high hills of Khanduli and Hamren in 1968 are changing fast. The traditional tribal system in Karbi Anglong, a triangle of power as depicted in the next page does not hold sway any more. Even the *Terang* or Bachelors' Dormitory is fast breaking up with the socio-economic formations showing marked changes being influenced by the all India cultural incursions. They cannot remain in isolation any more. Tribalism faces

more challenges than the non tribal culture because it is defined while the non tribals' culture is undefined and therefore, may move along easy progression.

A Karbi *traditional* political triangle



The above political system served them well in a situation in isolation. The hegemonistic overhead Kingships under which they lived for centuries had not touched them 'substantially' and whatever changes were wrought, those were minimal. These outside influences did not interfere with the inner core of the social system. Sri Rong Bong Terang in his engrossing novel *Rongmilir Hanhi* described the changes in the Karbi society which was hundred percent rural-based. This was a transition from some kind of morbid 'staticity' to a little upward swing towards enlightenment. Sar-ik Terang of the novel symbolises a transition.

TRANSITION - WHAT WE MEAN

Those who read tribal literature often, know that even going to school in those days had meant conversion to Christianity. The Karbi word *Sekure* was a corruption of the word 'school' and it meant Christianity. In the Garo Hills, it meant the same although the word used there was different. Only a few days ago there was a seminar in the Assam University, Silchar (24.8.96) and one speaker was most enthusiastically narrating the condition that the White *Sahibs* were greatly admired by the tribals of the north-east before the Independence. He cited examples.

But the Census of Assam in 1921-23 had clearly indicated that the Dimasas were slowly and gradually 'disappearing' from the N.C.Hills due to devastations by epidemic and opium. The welfarism with large scale money pumping was unknown at that time. All the tribes had lived in splendid isolation. Many British officers, foremost among them was Hutton who did his specialisation among the Nagas and Parry, the officer in the Lushai Hills had eulogised the theory of isolation. The insertion of the idea of the Excluded and Partially Excluded Area into the Government of India Act 1935 was greatly the results of this approach.

But even in those days the Kuki Revolt (1918-19) and the Naga Revolt (Jadunang's and later on by Guidinliu) in 1931 did occur and in the splendid isolation of the hills, these revolts were suppressed by the Colonial Government with 'outside world' quite at dark about their occurrences.

Nowadays, all battles are mechanised and fought with imported weapons. We know that these are deadly weapons and these are aimed at ousting the state control over a certain area or for wiping out the adversaries. The Third World Countries, throughout the world harbour largest number of insurgent groups inimical to the States. It is the affluent First World Countries which sell their arms. Now markets for selling arms have emerged in places like Bangkok and Bangladesh to siphon out the arms.

The British did not face it but the Independent India now faces - terrorism of worst kind. At least, in the pre-independence days, there were few international sponsors

of terrorism. With the weapons made from their own cottage industries, they could not withstand their adversaries' superior fire power. Now the insurgent groups have more lethal weapons at their disposals than the State could claim to have. It is almost an open war of attrition between the State and the insurgent groups. 'So called' development has come to a stop with guns booming all around.

TRIBALISM AND ITS FUTURE

We have already indicated that tribalism is a phase in the human development - we may be allowed to say that it is an early phase. The tribalism has its manifestation in all spheres of social life - economics, religion and the social structure. In the sphere of religion, it is the nature worshipping. Long ago Jyotirindra Chowdhury wrote a book *Comparative Study of the Adi Religion* wherein he tried to show that all religions had come to the present state through a process of evolution. The early Vedic religious beliefs were based on nature worshipping. Adis are a well known tribe of Arunachal Pradesh.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the writer of the famous novel *Anandamath* had given beautiful illustrations of nature worshipping by the early Vedics. Bankim Chandra wrote about this phenomenon in his essays and not in the novels. But the modern religion has travelled a long distance and had developed an abstract philosophy of the supreme 'entity' that is called God.

So the transformation occurs to a people who make progress - a social evolution. The Jute, the Angles, the Saxons and the uncivilised Britons all were the tribal ances-

tors of a great and proud people called the English whose language we use for communication.

The Karbis of the nineties have made sufficient progress even to discuss and articulate on Article 244 A. The way they organise political rallies, issue pamphlets and galvanise their youth is the clear indication that the Karbis of the nineties are a different proposition and they are coming out of the shell of tribalism and making progress as a people.

We have also noticed that the insurgents active in this region belong to certain religion. In the sociological term, a certain strong 'we' feeling is developed which is different from 'they'. The NSCN (IM) openly declares in their emblem that 'Nagaland for Christ'. The Bodo outfits have large concentration of Christians. The Manipuris in their political assertion denounce the Vaishnavism which influenced their evolution as a social group for some centuries. The same phenomenon is happening in Tripura. This particular phenomenon is not given due attention in the overall study.

Does Christianity only capable of articulating grievances against the State? Or is it the elites in every tribal society want to strengthen their power base through the employment of religion so that 'we' feeling may be strengthened further? Or it gives them a better foreign support?

The excessive display of tribalism by different 'groups' would bring in a very chaotic situation in the north-east which cannot be congenial for development. Every

cultural entity is a beauty in its own place and tribal cultures are unique. The Karbi ceremony of *Chomangkan*, a death ritual reminds me of our own ceremony and it is found that there is good deal of similarity. But the excesses in money spending would take away the beauty inherent in it. The ritual could be modernised in the light of vast changes occurring around. But when a tribal culture is an exercise for staticity, it not only stops its own development but a complex emerges in mind which sees dangers from others. Violence is often the manifestations of such complex which rises in scale in the mind of a tribal people for a long time.

Yet, I do not associate ritual performance by a tribal group with their backwardness and actually it is not. But when it stops communicating with the greater process of evolution, it really becomes backwardness. In our country, the system evaluation is not undertaken with seriousness. When we talk about globalisation, we cannot speak in terms of contraction. In Assam, there is a campaign for contraction all around. When we say globalisation, we mean globalisation of ideas.

The Karbis with their recent spurt of activities, can steal a march over all others through very genuine involvement in welfarism. It must be well understood that Karbi Anglong with its vast plain lands may invite settlers who may prefer wet cultivation. Gradual upgrading of their mode of cultivation may take them a long way in the scale of social development. The traditional *jhuming* method does not yield more than the subsistence level. Agriculture in the long years to come will be the main profession but the improvisation is necessary.

DEVELOPMENT UNDERSCORED

The dictionary meaning of the word development is 'bring to maturity, elaborate, bring forth, bring out, evolve'. Development is a conscious effort to improve the condition. It is a comparative term. Unless we know the previous situation, the latter 'development' cannot be measured and ascertained. Development, again, is an interactive term and it is not occurring in isolation.

Again the material development can be divided into two categories - development in the 'core' and the development which is inessential and transient. When we say the development in the core, we mean the most important aspects of a society and their development. We, in socialistic terms identify that as food, shelter, cloth, education, communication, water supply and irrigation. These will touch people at their roots.

In a subtle way, the development in the 'core' impinges upon the people's traditional way of life. In a sense, the development in the real sense is opposed to traditionalism and in practical condition a good deal of sacrifice is necessary. In the modern world, this fast interaction is breaking up the barrier of such inertia. Japan, upto the mid-nineteenth century was closed to the outsiders and the outside ideas but in the twentieth century, due to worthwhile interactions, she is a vibrant economy in the world.

Coming back to the closer focus of the north-east, a process has started but it is not an 'industrial growth process' attached to productivity but a consumerism deve-

loped on imitation is increasingly becoming an order here. When we talk of the development in the core, we mean an earnest attempt at the base of productivity in the real terms. When we convey the message of tribalism in the north-east, we mean some sort of protectionism not related to marketable surplus from production. This will be, in actual circumstances, a sense of dependence on the part of the people.

Diphu as an urban habitat was started around 1951 and after a few decades of 'teething' time, now has become a middle ranging town with some facilities. Naturally, a good section of tribal people had moved to the town for settlement. They have a level of expectations in material terms. The urban conditions are not dissociated from the sprawling rural setting which really 'produce' and feed a town. It is a relationship or in more specific terms, a partnership.

The production, particularly in the field of agriculture is to be increased which, in fact, touches people at heart in the rural area. The crafts of different nature which give marketable surplus should be encouraged and an idea of self-reliance should be propagated. In our younger days, we saw the Khasi carpenters, masons, vegetable and fish settlers and large number of other people engaged in commercial activities in the town of Shillong and they were sufficiently skilled in their business and those were the days, the concept of tribal and non tribal was not fully developed and the society was still interactive.

In a corrosive way, the sense of dependence is entering into the psyche of the Khasi people who were

vibrant and industrious people and were known for their skill and craftsmanship. Comparatively speaking, the Karbis of Karbi Anglong are a modern society and in the field of political and economic arena, they are new and it is to be understood clearly that unless the whole political system is not production-based, there is no hope of survival in the hostile setting around us.

In the north-east, extortion and dacoity are the major industries which do not have any relationship with production. How this situation has come to such a pass, we do not pay much attention to. Why do a large number of insurgent groups have become violence prone and extortionists? The alienation of the tribal people has travelled from the concept itself. Insurgency barring a real few are the result of ever widening gap between the rich elite at the top and the poor thousands at the grassroots. It exemplifies the inefficacy of a system.

Traditionalism does not suffer if people take to system of production. Japanese are the tradition bound people but at the same time, extremely production oriented. The electronic gadgets coming from the rest of India have flooded the tribal homes in the north-east. There is also 'Maruti Revolution' - the purchase of cars by the elites in the hill headquarters. The diversion of 'development' money for so-called consumerism has hit the mind of the people in the tribal areas. It has affected the mind of the non tribals too in the plains but there we have wider production base.

In the end, like Harold Laski who wanted the concept of sovereignty to be surrendered, I want the division of human group into tribal and non tribal should be surrendered

and replace them by the word 'People' only.

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THE PROBLEM OF TRIBAL TRADITION AND IDENTITY IN ASSAM

K.C.Mahanta

ABSTRACT

It is since the beginning of the fifties of the twentieth century that westernization and urbanization began to appear in the North-eastern region on a substantial scale. Under the impact of the neo-elements entering North-east India since 1950, the tribesmen of both the hills and the plains of Assam have been experiencing myriads of changes. Neo-elements of culture are being borne into this region by the non-tribal upcountry immigrants from the heartland of the country who are permanent and/or semi-permanent settlers in the North-east. These have verily changed the age-old traditional material and aesthetic life-ways of the tribesmen of Assam, notwithstanding the administrative following of Nehru's five fundamental principles concerning socio-political deals with the tribesmen. It has been noted that over the last fifty years or so forces of change are working on the tribesmen so heavily that tribal identity could hardly be kept in tact over the next fifty years or so in the context of the global dissemination of scientific and technological innovations in all walks of life.

INTRODUCTION

In Assam there are tribesmen both in the hills and the plains. Most tribal habitats are located in the most

inaccessible, remotest regions being situated far off from the din and bustle of urban complexes. It is a fact that the Assam tribesmen both in the hills and the plains have lived age-old isolated life ; they never in the history of their habitations felt the need of having thorough transport and communication in their own locality. Nowhere in the tribal land the notion of distance and remoteness baffled a tribal mind. Distance or remoteness was structurally considered to be a part of the way of life. Since known historical times each sedentary tribal group has lived the isolated self-content subsistence pattern of life within the periphery of its own little tradition (Redfield, 1941). Such an isolated age-old secluded life, in the course of its long history of existence, had had occasional contacts for some dire material needs to be fulfilled with the nearest centre of urban life where abounded centres of great tradition (Redfield, 1955). The occasional interaction between a little and a great tradition, eventually get established as a perpetual phenomenon, the former receiving feed-back from the latter. In the process, the little tradition borne by the tribesmen, get enriched and redefined as a result of protracted contact with the Assamese, the non-tribal bearers of great traditions. Notwithstanding the occasional casual interaction between these two distinct groups of people, the tribal folks did never lose their cultural ethos and have since maintained their socio-cultural life in a steady form, with little metamorphosis over hundreds of generations till recent years. The tribesmen of Assam consistently manifest an almost obsessional adherence to the norms, practices and patterns. It can reasonably be asserted that tribal norms and patterns die hard, and the tribal life gets very much characterised by a good deal of consistency, stability and immutability. These features are

formed in the social life through highly effective kinship bond that remains ever saturated with emotional feeling of attachment and a sense of dependability in the face of most unforeseen eventualities of life. Kinship relationships ramify all aspects of socio-cultural life - material, spiritual and aesthetic-binding individuals in an unbreakable bond of fellow-feeling.

TRIBAL TRADITION

A socio-historical perspective in the life of a tribal community shows that its norms and practices get built up over the generations with little mutability or any trace of dynamism in the formative process. These are moulded and shaped and become steadfastly adhered to in the people's life. The multiple socio-cultural ways and means, modes, methods and practices adopted and imbibed by each and every community member get steadily but constantly internalized into a norm and pattern, that becomes an inherent part of the individual's personality. It becomes bound with the person concerned, developing a sense of emotional attachment and a sense of impartibility from the mass of acquired socio-cultural features. Most of the people's norms and practices get cemented in the people's psyche, through constant intra-community interaction. In the internalization of behaviour patterns, kinship relationships play a key role, as stated above. As a system, it imparts the sense of obligation and responsibility. It also provides a sense of security against various odds in the life of an individual. Man reposes confidence in the efficacy of the kinship system of the community. The notion of joint responsibility intrinsic in the kinship relationships acts as a great safety valve at the time of facing unforeseen eventuality

or life-crises.

The aforesaid general characteristics are clearly manifest in the behaviour patterns of the tribal groups of Assam. Being aloof and geographically isolated as they lived till practically mid-fifties of the twentieth century, the tribesmen build up and nourish the community as the most dependable and reliable support in life. An individual outside the periphery of the community is an anathema and is never worth living his or her life. It provides a person with ground for internalizing the behavioural patterns - the social norms - as a member of the community. These are jealously guarded and most assiduously preserved. Folklores and folktales get built up around the traditional norms, their effectiveness and impact on the society are greatly admired and great social values are assigned to them holding them in great esteem. Not unoften verses, songs and ballads are composed depicting the glorious and heroic exploits of the clan-heros who are not infrequently elevated to the status of mythical beings with superhuman qualities. Protracted internalized norms that are perpetually practised and followed are invariably given an aura of sacred heritage hallowed by the names of the ancestors. Any deviation from the established norms tinged with the sacrosanct memory of the lamented forefathers are fraught with grave misfortune or adversity in the family.

TRIBAL AND NON-TRIBAL HABITATIONS

In Assam since long before the advent of westernization and urbanization, the tribesmen used to have differential degree of exposure to non-tribal behavioural

patterns and customs and material components. The Assam tribesmen, irrespective of their abode in the hills or the plains, were exposed first and foremost to the non tribal Assamese people inhabiting the sprawling Brahmaputra valley. The two groups of people, namely the non tribals of the Brahmaputra valley and the tribesmen of the hills and the plains of Assam, have had since dim historical past their own distinctive ways and means and norms of conduct, differing in speech, food-habits, economic pursuits, ritual beliefs and practices and various other socio-political and aesthetic ways of life. The tribal people living in the plains, the plains tribals, have had, however, easier and more frequent access to the Assamese plains-dwelling than the hill-dwelling tribesmen had. But on historical perspective and empirical study, it could be well understood that the Assamese and the tribesmen maintained a marked distance in all sorts of socio-cultural relationships, barring occasional exceptions. Both the groups of people maintained their own separate distinctive socio-ethnic identity and existence without any active, perpetual interaction whatsoever except on a few definitive occasions. There are explicit variations in the ways of life lived and followed by the tribal and non tribal people of Assam. Such variations are seen in respect of spoken languages, aesthetic ways and manners of life-ways followed and the material conceptions and belief-patterns pursued by the two groups of people. Basically Assamese has been serving as the lingua franca among the various ethno-linguistic groups ; it, nevertheless, provided impediments at cementing social bonds. Apart from the language barrier, adoption and practice of diverse ways and means to eke out livelihood and following of varieties of aesthetic and ritual beliefs and practices have virtually kept the two groups of

people quite emotionally distinct and separate with little interaction between them for hundreds of generations.

Materially and intellectually relatively advanced non tribal Assamese people of the valley as being precursors and torch-bearers of sophisticated advanced life-ways in Assam were obsessed with a notion of superiority in relation to the followers of the 'lowly' ways of life, that is, the tribal ways. The notion of superiority in the behavioural ways on the part of the non tribal Assamese people has since been acting as a hiatus between the tribal and non tribal folks in Assam.

Notwithstanding the aforesaid socio-cultural barricades and disparity inhibiting emotional integration and interaction between the tribal and non tribal groups of people, occasions in the past were not lacking for transient get-together and exchange of news, views and goods and services. Regular weekly markets in the neighbourhood of a cluster of Assamese villages were the only forum for get-together and it served as a means of communication between the tribal and the non tribal Assamese folks. These markets used to provide the two groups of people with opportunities for interpersonal communication and for selling and buying or exchanging of household goods and agricultural produces. Tribal men and women were regular visitors to the weekly markets in the plains with their home-grown saleable produces. And on their way back home, they would buy scarce goods like salt, match boxes, kerosene oil, mill-made clothes, glass wares and glass beads and cosmetics, etc. The markets thus served as the most regularly haunted ground for transient but important social interaction once in a week since dim remote past.

Ethno-social history of the people of Assam speaks eloquently of these weekly get-togethers as occasions for binding on everlasting social friendship, at times not excluding the ritual friendship or the classic concept of being *Shakha* between a tribal and a non tribal individual.

ENCULTURATION AT WORK

In the context of the above delineation, it is pertinent to assess the tribesmen's attitude to their socio-cultural ways of life that has in recent years come under the vortex of formidable forces from outlandish sources. Present day tribal cultures, however isolated and remotely situated they might be, are constantly subject to on-coming stresses and strains in the form of myriads of alien norms, practices and ways of life that are invariably accompanied with numerous material gadgets with extraordinary devices for manipulation and labour saving utility. These material components that are available with utmost ease from international markets serve as the source of aesthetic pleasure and comfortable life-ways at minimal effort. These having had universal appeal and acceptability have achieved naturally spontaneous entry into the households of the tribesmen of Assam over the last few decades. Apart from the outlandish material components, one can visualize unprecedented development spurt in many other socio-cultural aspects of life. The structural change in the Assam tribal cultures come to the forefront, when one ponders over the indigenous tribal concepts of distance and time. In the classical pre-development days, these concepts were the part of the total life, whereas presently these are conceived of as having distinct separate entity and value, and accordingly in tune with the changed notion, the work-norm gets re-adjusted

and mobilized. Also the concept of value in the in-put of human physical labour has diminished, but it has come to be enhanced with the addition of man's intellectual propensity and contents. The list of in-coming material wealth and intellectual contents that have reached and influenced all sections of population everywhere not excluding the tribesmen of Assam, can well be lengthened to comprehend the enormity of the unprecedented spurt of the formidable outlandish discordant forces in the form of industrialization and urbanization and westernization. In Assam, these have penetrated every nook and corner of the society, including the age-old secluded and isolated tribal population. People of the first and second ascending generations in the tribal societies of Assam in their prime of life had never been accustomed to witnessing such unprecedented development dash in every aspect of socio-cultural life.

Presently, with the acquisition of new mostly alien material goods and adoption of heterogeneous modes, practices and norms of life, inevitably there has ushered in a good deal of metamorphoses in the age-old traditional ways and means of life. Empirical observations in the Assam tribal life have shown that traditional tribal family, marriage and kinship systems and ritual patterns and belief-system, etc., among various tribes and communities are undergoing steady modifications over the last few decades under the impact of the modern west-oriented forces. It might be noted that metamorphoses in the material and aesthetic behavioural patterns of the tribesmen of Assam have come about relatively rapidly in the post-1950 decades compared to the earlier years, thanks to the recent development of transportation and

communication in the international as well as national spheres. Apart from the changes in the social norms and practices, cultural and age-old practices have manifested large-scale changes. Primitive hunting and gathering as means of subsistence livelihood have diminished, and intensive production methods are being widely resorted to in the recent years. Other domestic practices like weaving, dress and personal decoration patterns, cooking methods, house-building material-cum-process, agricultural practices, etc., have also manifested changes, and new methods and practices are being resorted to by the plain and hill dwelling tribesmen of Assam.

The recent development in the means of transportation and communication has resulted in great mobility of men and material, concepts and ideologies, norms and values into the tribal habitations. Influx of non tribal traders, businessmen, industrialists and skilled and unskilled labourers and a host of various other workers has considerably metamorphosed the indigenous tribals' psyche concerning their obsessional attachment with the place of birth and pursuit of primitive vocations.

On the backdrop of the above delineations, in view of the rapid culture contact with in-coming alien material and immaterial cultural elements, the ethnographer tends to believe that in no time the traditional tribal cultures would be on the verge of disappearance and be replaced by modern west oriented neo-culture complexes. In consonance with this belief, however, so far the tribesmen of Assam have not opted for, or been swept away wholly by, neo-culture components. On the contrary, the indigenous tribesmen's choice is still a determining one. A good many

neo-element is despised and hardly finds any access into the tribal community life. People's choice still has its exclusive role and it is this that sifts the ones acceptable from amidst the despicable or the detestable.

NEHRU'S PRINCIPLES OF TRIBAL DEVELOPMENT

Notwithstanding the people's incompatibility to certain norms and patterns of in-coming culture elements, on account of these being highly formidable and mobility-prone, it was feared that the tribal cultures might be overwhelmed and swayed by the alien in-coming ones. More specifically, around the very on-set of the second half of the twentieth century, apprehensions ran high that the Assamese, the dominant non tribal community in the Brahmaputra valley, would eventually overwhelm and engulf the primitive satellite groups of tribesmen. In the pan-Indian context, the Assam tribesmen's socio-political position was thought to be volatile and vulnerable, and liable to be quickly battered and vanquished. The portent of swallowing up small isolated groups of tribesmen by the pan-Indian dominant immigrants or neo-settlers was indeed alarming. The fear from this ominous eventuality was needed to be assuaged. In this context it is worth referring to the Foreword by Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India at the period, to the second edition of *Philosophy For NEFA* by V.Elwin. With regard to the tribal problems in India, Nehru evolved five fundamental principles for tribal development which he mentioned in the Foreword.

The five fundamental principles are as follows :

- (1) *People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them.*

- (2) *Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.*
- (3) *We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed, especially at the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.*
- (4) *We should not overadminister these areas or overwhelm them with multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institution.*
- (5) *We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved.*

The scrupulous adherence to these fundamental principles of Nehru over the last several decades have preserved the tribals' inherent basic rights and interests and saved them from ruthless exploitation by neo-settlers, traders and usurious money-lenders. At the same time over the years, norms for tribal administration have been followed as to enable the tribesmen to develop their own genius. Over the last half a century, tribals have nowhere been overwhelmed in Assam nor is there any trace of decline of the tribal inherent ethos thanks to the scrupulous observance and following of Nehru's principles.

This, however, does not mean that tribal societies in Assam have remained steady and unchanged. Myriads of changes that have occurred both in the material as well as non-material life-aspects, as noted in the foregoing pages, have virtually enriched the quality of tribal life, refined the traditional methods and practices and last but not the

least, widened the area of exploitation of the livelihood means of the people. Development in term of acquired material components and improvement in the system of roads, transportations and communications, eradication of erstwhile infectious killer diseases have cumulatively made present day tribal life more comfortable and aspiration-prone than life in the first half of the twentieth century. By and large the improvements have come about without any perceptible erosion in the tribal traditional ethos of life.

CONCLUSION

In the context of the aforesaid observations on tribesmen's socio-ethnic existence in Assam, it is worthwhile to understand if the newly acquired, highly disparate material elements of culture in combination with the new ways and means of life would keep the tribesmen's socio-ethnic identity unaltered in course of time. Could the aforementioned Nehru's principles be effective in shielding the tribesmen's basic identity in tact ?

Global enculturating forces that are presently swaying world-wide are indeed formidable sparing no indigenous culture of the world on a small or large extent. These forces emanate from the phenomena of industrialization, westernization and urbanization. Against these in-coming phenomena, survival of any non-Western cultural identity, in view of multiple elements constituting the culture, is somewhat more volatile and susceptible to change, being loosely or weakly integrated than a non-tribal one. A non-tribal culture as it generally becomes based on protracted history behind it, it turns out to be more resistant

and less resilient than a tribal culture. A non-tribal culture, therefore, can relatively withstand the external onslaughts compared to a highly volatile tribal culture.

Further in the face of the non-traditional alien advancing elements of culture intruding into the land of the Assam tribesmen over the last few decades, the geo-physiographic and bio-socio-cultural environments have deformed considerably necessitating a good deal of re-adjustment of the pristine traditional tribal life-ways. In the wake of continuous re-adjustment, in almost all aspects of traditional life patterns, there would inevitably be ever more increasing inflow of alien elements without any respite. Under the rapidity of inflowing forces, hardly could the optimum level of absorption and imbibition of the alien elements be determinable. Under such emerging circumstances, over prolonged period within the life-span of the present day and forthcoming youngsters, associate forces like horizontal and vertical mobility are likely to effect dispersal of population on a wide scale resulting eventually in obliteration of tribal identity. Tribalism may, in the context of universal globalised culture, turn out to be an anathema.

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TRIBAL TRADITIONS, DEVELOPMENT AND TRIBAL IDENTITY

Dilip Kumar Kalita

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the concepts "tradition" and "development" are tried to be explained. The relations between "tradition" and "folklore" and between "little tradition" and "great tradition" are also pointed out. The traditions of a nation and a tribe are also differentiated. Tradition has been viewed here in the tribal context. The tribes do not differentiate between "little" and "great" traditions within their own fold. Moreover, tribal traditions are sacred to the tribe alone. They are hardly shared by others. In the past some tribal traditions were absorbed into the "great traditions" of the Indian sub-continent. The tribes also have absorbed materials of the "great tradition". It has been pointed out in this paper that development takes a toll of certain traditions. So care should be taken that traditions are not totally wiped out for the sake of development, as traditions are necessary for the maintenance of identity of the tribes.

1. Tradition and development are two concepts which apparently flourish at the cost of the other. This is more so in the tribal scenario. Tradition and folklore are two very closely related phenomena. Bascom (1953) went to the extent of saying that 'all folklore is traditional but not all traditions are folklore.' On the contrary, Ben-Amos (1971) maintained 'some traditions are folklore, but not all folklore

is traditional'. Whatever may be the proportion of tradition in folklore or folklore in tradition, it is beyond doubt that tradition and folklore are very close to each other. In tribal societies this bond is observed to be more close than non tribal societies. There are many reasons for this. A study of the nature and scope of folklore will reveal that most of the tribal traditions are folklore.

2. Folklore consists of oral literature, social folk customs, material culture and performing folk arts (Dorson, 1972). It is transmitted orally as accepted by most of the folklorists. But there are folklorists who believe that it is transmitted not orally but aurally (List, 1972). In tribal societies most of the literature have been transmitted either orally or aurally as writing is only a recent phenomenon in many tribes. Moreover writing was a taboo in some of the tribes. The customs in tribal societies are also mostly folk customs, handed down through the verbal art. The other two categories, namely material culture and performing folk arts are also abundantly present in tribal societies without having their counterparts in the 'great tradition'. Whatever material of the great tradition have been absorbed in the tribal cultures have remained at the level of the folk, enriching the folklore of the tribals.

3. The term 'great tradition' denotes the pan-Indian traditions while the term 'little tradition' denotes the local traditions which have little to do with the pan-Indian tradition. These two terms are used as synonyms for the terms 'classical' and 'non-classical' also. If the tribals have a tradition which is little tradition as compared to the pan-Indian or classical 'great tradition', they have only tradition within their own fold. 'In tribal context at least one thing is

less blurred : there are no 'little traditions' and no 'great traditions' either' (Handoo, 1989). The traditions which the tribals have, do not have any room for distinction between great or little tradition within the same cultural fold. Yet some traditions are viewed with more sacredness and are religiously followed, while some are not. But this does not make any difference of validity of the traditions.

4. Though the terms 'folklore' and 'tradition' have been used almost synonymously, we cannot overlook the total mass of traditions and its independent existence. 'Tradition refers to primarily materials only, to an unsystematic array of cultural elements and features that have been made available to a particular social group during a longer period of time and in different contexts. This is the supply of cultural items handed down by ancestors or offered to the group from outside. Some of it has been adopted (and adapted) whereas the rest has to be rejected by the group' (Honko, 1988).

5. The traditions of a tribe and the traditions of a nation have to be distinguished. A tribe as a 'concept is associated with a lower level of technology. A tribal society is marked by its smallness, its relative isolation from other groups, intimacy and communication among its own members with customary modes of behaviour and a strong sense of belonging together, absence of stratification and formal state structure' (Sen, 1995).

6. A nation, more particularly the Indian nation, as we are primarily concerned with the development of the hill areas of Assam vis-a-vis the Indian sub-continent, as a concept is best expressed in the maxim - 'unity in diversity'.

Diverse racial, cultural, religious, social and linguistic components make the Indian nation. The Indian cultural mosaic is inlaid with the multicoloured gems of various cultures from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and the run of Kutch to the North-east. Yet there is one commonness : they share the Indian ethos which can be termed as the 'great tradition'.

7. Tribal traditions are sacred to the tribe alone. At times it is seen that the tribes also share the 'great tradition'. For example, the Ramayana story is sung or told as tribal versions by the Mizos of Mizoram, Khamptis of Arunachal Pradesh, Karbis of Karbi Anglong, etc. But the reverse order is hardly to be found to have taken place in the recent past. Of course, it did take place in the remote past. For example, the *Vedas* also incorporated tribal beliefs, customs and rituals. The *Atharvaveda* which consists mostly of charms and incantations were things of the little tradition and nurtured mostly by the tribals. But considering their popularity the custodians of the *Vedas* finally incorporated them in the fourth and final *Veda* (Stutley, 1982).

8. In the North-east the tribal scenario is a bit different from the rest of the country. Many of the non-tribals here are erstwhile tribals who entered the fold of caste Hindus through a process of voluntary conversion. The proximity of kinship and habitation also have led to the influence of non-tribals, mostly Assamese life and lore, on the tribal life and lore and vice-versa. The Assamese language, folklore, culture and traditions are ladden with tribal elements. Attempts have been made throughout the ages to find the roots of these tribal elements also in the pan-Indian tradition. That is why even the etymology of words like *Karbi* is attempted to be traced back to Sanskrit *Pragyata* (Barua, 1972).

9. Tribal traditions have undergone some amount of change because of the onslaught of contemporary education, political systems, economic activities, communications and the media. The education system of the country has not been able to include the folk or tribal learning and knowledge. There has always been a tendency to discard whatever is folk or tribal for the sake of development. The system of agriculture, namely *jhum* cultivation has been viewed as a deterrent for the ecology. Of course, the *jhum* cycle, that is, keeping the *jhum* land fallow for eight to ten years after three consecutive years of cultivation has been shown by many a scholar to be an eco-friendly system. The political system has made provision for autonomy but the tribal chieftainship has not been taken into consideration thereby turning of powerful administrative system into a mere socio-cultural institution. Complex trade and commerce have jolted the age-old self-sufficient value-based economy of the tribals. Transport and communication systems have opened up new vistas which have made the tribal identity ill at ease. The media have poured in pan-Indian materials disproportionate to tribal life and lore.

10. New ideas, new amenities, new knowledge and new lifestyle are the fruits of development which will take a toll of some amount of tradition of any given culture. But if for the sake of development the whole of the tradition is uprooted then it will create identity crisis which is detrimental to the existence of variety of ethnicity.

11. In planning for development of the hill areas of Assam this factor is to be taken into consideration. Much harm has already been done to the identity of the tribals

and their traditions through the process of development. If planning is done on the basis of grass root level study of various tribal traditions, a value-based developmental programme can be chalked out which will usher in development and yet retain the age-old traditions of the tribals which will help in retaining the tribal identity for the years to come.

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ROLE OF TRADITIONAL TRIBAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HILL AREAS OF ASSAM

Dharmeswar Duarah

ABSTRACT

A good number of hill tribes such as the Dimasa, Karbi, Zeme Naga, Rengma Naga, Hmar and Kuki, etc., have been inhabiting the Hill Areas of Assam. Due to insufficient crops production, non-availability of marketing facilities, poor communication, illiteracy, poor awareness about different developmental programmes they are left behind in the darkness. Some traditional institutions are either day by day dying down or acting in a retouched form. Traditional youth organisations of different tribes are modified and set up as modern patterned youth clubs. The concerning government development departments may execute the different welfare programmes through the traditional institutions without harming the traditional socio-cultural heritage of their own.

The Hill Areas of Assam consist of two districts viz., North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong. This area is an agricultural area par excellence and agriculture is the chief occupation of the rural people. Not only her economy but also her social and cultural patterns are determined by this avocation. Many hill tribal communities like Dimasa, Karbi, Zeme Naga, Kuki, Hmar, Hrangkhoh, Biata, Vaiphei, etc., are living in the Hill Areas of Assam. With the march of time, this area is undergoing tremendous changes in its nature and composition but the green hills, the rivers with their enchanting courses keep alive the rich tradition, custom, art, craft and culture.

All villages of the tribal people are either under the North Cachar Hills District Council or Karbi Anglong District Council. In this way, they are included in the District Council offices from the political and administrative point of view. It may be mentioned here that the different tribal communities have their own traditional political organisation based on the democratic principle. Being in an unorganised state and left entirely to themselves, some of their customs are slowly disappearing. But some powers and positions of the office-bearers of the village organisation are still in existence.

Among the Dimasas, the village council consists of *Khunang* (Headman), *Dilok* (Assistant Headman), *Daulathu*, *Habaisagao*, *Pharai*, *Mantri*, *Hangsebukhu* and *Jalairao*. Traditionally the oldest member of the village becomes the *Khunang*. Nowadays an active person, above thirty years old is selected as *Khunang*. The next to the *Khunang* in seniority of age would be the *Dilok*. He is the Assistant *Khunang* (Assistant village headman) who is responsible for performing the duties of *Khunang* if he is too old. In Dimasa village council position of *Daulathu* is obsolete. Though there is only one headman and one *Dilok* in a village the number of *Daulathu* varies. The next to the *Daulathu* is *Habaisagao*. He is elected by vote of the male heads of the households of the village and his duration of service is only for two years. In a village there are two numbers of *Pharai*. They are promoted to the position of *Habaisagao*. The duration of service of a *Pharai* is also two years. In a village there should be four *Mantries* in a village council. He is selected by the *Khunang*, *Dilok*, *Daulathu*, *Habaisagao* and *Pharai* in consideration of their merit, efficiency and willingness. The tenure of a *Mantri* is four years. The assistants to the *Mantries* are called *Hang-*

sebukhu. The tenure of service is not limited. Lastly, all the married members of the village are the *Jalairao*, the lowest rank in the Dimasa village council. On the other hand, the unmarried youths do not belong to said council. The two main functions of village organisation are executive and judiciary. All development and organisable works are included in the executive functions. On the contrary, the maintenance of law and order in a village is the main function of judiciary.

The youth dormitory *Nodrang* plays an important role in the Dimasa society. During the young age, the boys and girls are trained up for their prosperous future. In the youth institution, all kinds of activities are trained. Young boys and girls do everything for the development of the society under the leadership of *Nagahoja* and *Malahoja* respectively. As like as other tribal people of the Hill Areas of Assam in every village there is an organisation of the youths. For this, a long house is made in the middle part of a village which is known as *Nodrang* - the youth dormitory. In the evening all the youths gather in this house, perform musical and dance programmes and sleep there. All guests of other communities are hosted in this house. All kinds of community meetings and performance of cultural items are also organised at the courtyard of the *Nodrang*. A big and long log is placed in front of the house to sit on. This is called *Kamding*. The strength of the youth organisation is responsible for all round development of the Dimasa society. The *Nodrang* is needed for the protection of the people from any kind of dangerous situation created by enemy or ferocious animals. The unity and goodwill among the youths of the village are maintained only by the *Nodrang*. From the long past, the youths of a village have been ready

to fight against the foreign enemies and ferocious wild animals unitedly. Nowadays also this custom is continued. They also help and co-operate with the villagers in cultivation, marriage and harvesting ceremony called *Bisu* or *Busu*, any kind of distressful circumstances, any other social service like tilling the land of an invalid, roofing the house of a widow. The command of the boys' leader *Nagahoja* is to be obeyed by all boys and the command of the girls' leader *Malahoja* is to be obeyed by the girls. The leader also takes care of the youths. In the field of dance and music, playing musical instruments, art and crafts, cane and bamboo works, games and sports and social education the *Nodrang* plays an important role. Both boys and girls lead equal freedom in life. It may be noted here that after marriage, they cannot live with their parents. Therefore, they try to make their own house and find out an agricultural land separately from their dormitory life.

The youth economic institution of the Dimasas is called *Hangsao*. Agriculture is the main occupation of the Dimasas. *Hangsao* is based on the motive of co-operation and mutual help. They help many families of the village for finishing the works in the *jhum* and in wet land paddy fields. In this way, they earn and spend at the celebration of the *Hangsao-manaoba busu* festival.

The Karbis of the Hill Areas of Assam constitute an important ethnic group. They have also some traditional institutions. These are socio-political or economic in nature. Some of them have been continuing and others have proven outdated in the modern context. The village council of the Karbis is called *Mei*. All the elderly male members are the members of the council also. The village headman

presides over the council. All the village disputes are settled by the *Mei*. Moreover, it takes decisions if the village is to be shifted to new *jhum* site. Village council distributes *jhum* lands to the families of the village.

The bachelors' dormitory of the Karbis is called *Farla* or *Jirkedam*. On the other hand, where the bachelors' dormitories are not existent, the youth clubs *Risomars* serve more or less the same purpose.

The dormitory is constructed in a middle place of the village. All the unmarried boys, above ten years of age are the general members of the dormitory. They spend the nights in this house. 'The *Farla* or *Jirkedam* has 10 nos. of office-bearers like *Kleng Sarpo* (King), *Klengdun* (Chief Minister), *Suderkethe* (Commander), *Sudersu* (Prince designate), *Barlanpo* (Surveyor), *Motan Are* and *Motan Arbe* (Guides), *Chengbruk Are* and *Chengbruk Arbe* (Small drum beaters), *Than Are* and *Than Arbe* (Convenors), *Me Apai* (Fire keeper) and *Lang Apai* (Water keeper)' (Bordoloi, 1987 : 65).

The youth club consists of girl members also. All boys office-bearers are assisted by the girls. A girl selected as associate member is known as *marpi*. This title *marpi* is added after the designation of a boy member. For female member, the *Klengsarpo* will be known as *Klengsarpo -a-marpi*. Like this, other titles also are added *a-marpi*.

Both boys and girls work in the *jhum* field. They clear the jungle, burn the shrubs, till the soil with hoe or small spade, sow the seeds, harvest paddy and other crops, bring the harvest to the dormitory, etc. The group

also works for each family. They are trained formally by the village headman. The group looks after the ailing person, his agricultural works and domestic works. It also helps the individual householder in his religious festival, in a death ritual *Chomangkan*, etc.

In the dormitory, girls also take training of spinning *endi* and cotton yarns, weaving loom looms. They carry the rich cultural heritage through folk tale, folk song, music and dance practised during their dormitory life. 'The formal training in the dormitory is of three years duration, after which the girls live with parents or get married. This type of dormitory training is not to be found nowadays in Karbi society. The girls, specially in urban and semi urban areas used to go to school, preparing themselves for a modern society' (Medhi, 1993 : 37).

In the Karbi society of the Karbi Anglong district, the grain bank called *Kerung Amei* is a traditional institution. As an economic institution based on the helpfulness and co-operation it helps the poor families.

The Zeme Nagas live in the North Cachar Hills district of Assam. In every Zeme Naga village there is a village council. The office-bearers of this village council are *Matai* (village headman), *Mataichopoo* (Assistant headman), *Kadipio* (land-lord), *Paitinku* or *Tingkupoo* (priest) and village elders. All executive and judiciary functions are performed by the village council called *Hai muitoi pou*.

The boys' dormitory of the Zeme Nagas is called *Hanghooki* and the girls' dormitory is called *Loochooki*.

All boys and girls of different clans may be the member of these organisations. The members of the organisation are called *Kiangga*. The leader of the boys is known as *Hooli a topa* and the leader of the girls is called *Hou momu toupui*. The youth dormitory is a long and big house. A family also stays at the back side of the house. The head of this family maintains the youths' problems and takes care of them. In this dormitory the boys take the education of art and culture, handicraft, dance and music, cane and bamboo works, cultivation and other activities of the future life. Co-operatively the boys and girls help the villagers in the cultivation, marriage ceremony, festivals, social service, etc. They are also responsible for extending help and co-operation towards the poor and the disabled persons.

Girls also take training of spinning and weaving, dance and music, etc., in the girls' dormitory. The importance of *Hangsooki* and *Loochooki* for the development of the society is remarkable.

Most of the Kuki tribal people live in the North Cachar Hills district of Assam. In Kuki society the role of the village headman is very important. He is called *Haosa*. Generally the word *Haosa* means a wealthy person. Therefore, he is the most important and honourable person. He distributes the *jhum* land among the villagers for cultivation. He maintains law and order situation in the village. He has the power of justice and punishment *Haosathaneina*. In all spheres of social life the *Haosa* plays an important role. For his service, all families of the village offer a basketful of paddy called *Changsoo* to him as an annual tax. Though the *Haosa* has more power, he cannot be a dictator. He has to take a decision after the discussion held with the

elders of the village.

Kuki villages have also the youth organisation called *Lom*. All boys and girls are the members of the *Lom*. The leader of the *Lom* known as *Lom Haosa* is selected by the *Haosa* and village council *Samang Pachong*. The leader must be a hard-working and intelligent boy. The leader of the girls is known as *Lom Upanu*. Thus, among the boys also there is another leader called *Lom Upa*. All the youths take training of discipline, peace and fellow feeling, etc. They work together for the welfare of the society.

The Hmar tribal people live in the Hill Areas of Assam also. Most of them live in the North Cachar Hills district. This community has youth dormitory called *Buanzawl Chear*. In this house the boys of about fifteen years take rest at night. The leader of the youth organisation called *Valupa* is selected from among the youths. The youth organisation is called *Thalai Pawl*. Like other tribes, the youths of the Hmar community take active part in all kinds of social activities. The system of the working together is called *Luwam*. By beating drum they work hard together which is known as *Butu khuong lawm*.

Traditionally the villages of the Hmar community have been running a village council in democratic system. There are some office-bearers of the village council like *Lal*, *Khawn Bawl*, *Tlangsam* or *Tlangva*, *Thirsu*, *Thiompu*, *Thiomruo*, etc. The village headman is known as *Lal*. The elders select him. He is assisted by more than seven other officials called *Khawn Bawl* or *Chiahmang*. The *Lal* and the *Khawn Bawl* select the *jhum* land and it is distributed among the families of the village. A little portion of the production is offered to

the *Lal* which is called *Busung*. The *Khawn Bawl* also receives a portion from the *Busung* which is known as *Jalen*. The Publicity Officer is called *Tlangsam* or *Tlangva* in Hmar community. Black-smith is called *Thirsut*. The priest is known as *Thiompu* while the person having the spiritual power is known as *Thiomruo*. All the members of the village council are responsible for overall development of the society.

Among the traditional customs of the Hrangkhoh tribe the village administration is mentionable. For all round development of the village the village council takes many active parts. The office-bearers of the village council are *Kalim* (headman), *Kabur* (assistant headman), *Parhuilak* (public relation officer) and *Rultangba* (youth leader), etc.

A portion of Biata community is inhabiting the North Cachar Hills district of Assam. The tribe has also the village council. It consists of some office-bearers like the village headman *Khuopu*, Chief Officer *Chiorkalim*, Secretary of Chief Officer *Char*, publicity officer *Tlanva*, etc. More or less all these office-bearers of the Biata tribe take charges of different activities and responsibilities for the development of the community.

In the North Cachar Hills district another tribe called Vaiphei is found. This tribe has a village council which consists of the office-bearers like village headman *Khawpa*, the land-lord *Hausapu* or *Inpipu*, publicity officer *Thangsumpu*, black-smith *Thiksikpu*, leader of the hunting force or military *Tunpu*, etc. The village council takes initiative for the development of the village.

Though the traditional tribal institutions take bold steps for all round development, in fact, the goal is yet to be attained. The rural hill tribal people are predominantly agriculturists. They use to cultivate with the age-old process like *jhuming*. The production is not more than required. Due to non-availability of sufficient agricultural produce, lack of marketing network, inadequate communication facilities, illiteracy of the people and lack of awareness of development programmes, the tribal people have not been able to march ahead. These problems need to be carefully studied and necessary steps for development of the hill tribes should be undertaken.

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CUSTOMARY LAWS OF THE HILL TRIBES AND THEIR RELATION TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE HILL AREAS OF ASSAM

Jeuti Barooah

The people of the Hill States of North-Eastern region are exactly the same as any other people of the country with the same human needs, aspirations, loves and fears and the same faults and the same virtues. There is no difference. But where these people differ is in the kind of life where they are governed by their laws and practices. They have developed their own outlook and ways of doing things.

Customary rules, regulations and practices are the unwritten or uncodified codes of conduct in a particular socio-cultural unit. These acquire public sanction in due course because of their uninterrupted continuity. Customary practices are universal in character. They are observed in all societies savage or civilized, illiterate or literate. At the same time customary rules and practices are to be understood in contrast to the written or codified rules of personal or public conduct or constitutional laws passed by certain legislative bodies or organisations.

With this background, the ethnic situation in the north-east is unique. The simple societies of the hill areas do not yet possess any codified law for social control. But they have perennial customs supported by effective social

sanctions. Under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Autonomous District Councils have been established in the States of Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and in the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills of Assam. No district councils have been formed in Nagaland and Arunachal. These Regional Councils and the District Councils of the tribal areas are empowered to make laws with respect to land, forest, canal, water-course, shifting cultivation, establishment of village or town and its administration, appointment of, or succession to, chiefs or headmen, inheritance of property, marriage and divorce and matters relating to any other social customs. Therefore, the people of these tribal areas are governed by norms based on customary laws. These customary laws are different in different tribal areas according to the environment of the respective tribal societies. They often vary even among the same tribe of different regions. With the exception of the matrilineal societies in the land of Meghalaya, most societies in the region are patriarchal and patrilineal.

It appears that these customary laws are closely related to the land of the people. Land is the life of the people, being the source of livelihood or productive resources. Moreover, land is associated with the laws of inheritance and succession and even with the matrimonial matters in the matriarchal societies. But the allotment, occupation or use of land is not of the same nature in all the tribal areas of this region. It differs from tribe to tribe and from locality to locality even in the same state.

The system of rights over land is closely connected with agricultural practices. The system where shifting culti-

vation prevails, will not be the same as that where permanent cultivation is the rule.

Let us have an idea to see how the customary laws and practices, prevailing in the Hill Areas of Assam, are closely linked with the developmental process of that particular area - how these customary laws are controlling the entire social structure of each tribe including the system of land tenure, inheritance and succession.

The autonomous hill districts of Assam constituted in accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, comprise the two districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. In the Karbi Anglong district we find the major concentration of the Karbis. On the other hand, the predominant tribe in the N.C.Hills district is the Dimasa Kacharis. Moreover, various tribes like the Jeme Nagas, Rengma Nagas, Hmars, Kukis and Khasis, etc., are also found to be permanent habitants.

Karbis in Diphu subdivision do their shifting cultivation individually. Though selection of the hill sites, where *jhuming* is to be done, is made by the *Gaonbura* in consultation with the villagers, there the collective activity ends. After selection of the broad region, the Karbi cultivator chooses his own particular site, often far away from others, so that shifting cultivation plots are not adjacent to each other.

Cultivation in the same plot is continued for 2/3 years and then the *jhumia* shifts to another site. He does not generally return to his old plot, but even if he does, it is not as a matter of rights. Anyone else may occupy it meanwhile

and he cannot have any objection to it. The position, therefore, is that no trace of right of use and occupancy is acquired in Diphu subdivision in any *jhum* plot. One of the peculiarities of Karbi *jhuming* is that sometimes the whole village shifts its homesteads to a different place, to pursue the shifting cultivation. The old village disappears completely. All this was possible in the past without much difficulty, because the land was in plenty and population was sparse. But with the increase of population, shifting anywhere and everywhere without any restriction has been destructive of natural vegetation. The *jhum* cycle is also becoming shorter and shorter than before. Realising that *jhuming* is a wasteful method, the District Council, as early as in 1954 passed the Mikir Hills District (*Jhuming*) Regulation, 1954.

In order to stop their habit of shifting habitats and also to wean away people from shifting cultivation, the Karbi Anglong District Council established a number of model villages in the low lying hill slopes in the year 1963. Thus the *jhumia* families have been rehabilitated in compact areas by providing homestead and cultivable land and houses and other basic amenities. The Council has also started several Integrated *Jhumia* Development Projects to offer the scope for permanent cultivation. As a consequence, the Karbi society has accepted the new situation for a better socio-economic life in the changing social milieu.

At the death of the father, properties are inherited by his sons, but not by his daughters. In absence of any male issue, property will be inherited by the nearest male relative of his clan.

In the North Cachar Hills, the land of Dimasa villages can be divided into three types viz., (i) the *jhum* land (ii) the dry land and (iii) the wet land.

The ownership of the wet land is permanent and the wet lands are taxable. But the *jhum* lands and the dry lands are tax free. But they pay a house tax of Rs. 4/- per family to the District Council as authorised under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.

The paternal property which consists of mainly the real estates is inherited by sons only. Daughters have no right to inherit the paternal property even if there is no son in the family. Similarly sons can never inherit the maternal property even if there is no daughter in the family. Only the common property is shared by the sons and daughters equally.

The routine administration of each village in Karbi Anglong is run by the village council known to them as *mei*. Each council is presided over by a headman or *Gaonbura* called *Sarthe*. The District Council recognizes the functions and duties of the *mei* and does not interfere with the customary rights and privileges of the community.

The *mei* is the primary unit of the Karbi traditional institution. It performs developmental works for the benefit of the village people. It is also the trial court of the village. Disputes arising out of land ownership, adultery, theft, etc., are solved through it. Serious decisions like shifting of the village to a new place or distribution of *jhum* sites among the people are also taken up through the *mei*. But the fines imposed on the guilty person do not exceed Rs. 50/-.

The *mei* has lost its original power in the present day society. Nowadays, the villagers prefer to go to the law courts instead of referring the disputes to the village council.

The traditional organisation of the Dimasa Kacharis at the village level is called *Salis*, the village council. In fact, it is an organisation for village administration with multifarious activities. The village council is headed by *Khunang* - the traditional village headman who has both executive and judiciary powers. His executive powers consist mainly of giving guidance in respect of celebration of community festivals in the village, while his judiciary powers consist of trying of cases, maintenance of law and order in the village, etc. The village council settles disputes, tries cases of thefts, incests, etc. No community function in a Dimasa village can be performed without the prior approval of *Khunang*.

But due to the spread of education and developmental activities in different aspects, the Dimasa people have now availed of the new avenues, opportunities and changes for the betterment of the society.

Thus, if we analyse the administration of justice in the Hill Areas of Assam, one point that comes up again and again is whether time has not arrived for a uniform pattern of administration of justice throughout the State of Assam - plains or hills? Answer is negative. Because firstly, these areas are at different stages of development. An indiscriminate application of civil and criminal laws everywhere uniformly may bring about disastrous consequences.

Secondly, as observed by J.N.Das, the concept of justice itself is different in the hill areas and the principle of compensation cannot be replaced suddenly by the principle of deterrence. On the other hand, the rates of compensation may be enhanced and graded so that they become effective as deterrent, too. Tribal penalties of to-day are not too harsh. The scales of compensation are often too nominal.

The customary laws particularly those relating to inheritance, marriage, etc., may be compiled and consolidated and codified. Along with this more powers in administration of justice may be given to the recognised village authorities for the development of these hill areas.

But what constitutes development? We generally measure development in terms of statistical figures, showing the growth rate in various terms. For any development planning the most important requirement is the availability of reliable data. But unfortunately such data are not always available.

The term development has also come to acquire a wide variety of meanings and interpretations in the hands of economists and sociologists. For anthropology, as defined by Prof. A.C. Bhagabati (1990 : 11), 'the notion of development goes beyond the economic and quantitative changes. The quality of life, including cultural aspects and emotional relationships should also come within the orbit of the concept of development. By and large, this approach to development has been ignored in the hill areas'.

The District Councils of Karbi Anglong and North

Cachar Hills should come forward to incorporate this approach for a meaningful development of the society as a whole.

While concluding, I beg your permission to raise one more issue relating to the development of the right to development. A landmark event in the enunciation of new human rights occurred when on 4 December, 1986 the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Right to Development. In the words of Upendra Baxi, 'on the agenda of the states and peoples of the world still remains the major historic task of finding concrete ways and means to develop the right to development'.

In this context, the conception of the right to development embraces the following crucial notions, mainly, :

(i) the right of peoples to self-determination, as meaning the 'right freely to develop their political status' and to 'pursue their economic, social and cultural development'

(ii) their right to 'full and complete sovereignty over all their wealth and natural resources'

(iii) all fundamental rights, human rights and fundamental freedom being 'indivisible and interdependent'

(iv) equal attention should be given to promotion and protection of all rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural

(v) equality of opportunity for development

It would not be irrelevant to mention here that effective measures should be undertaken to ensure that women have an active role in the developmental process.

At this point, permit me to briefly place before you the status of women prevailing in the hill areas of Karbi Anglong. In the patriarchal system of family structure in the Karbi society, the women have more or less equal status with men. Even after marriage, the bride retains her surname. However, there are certain restrictions in respect of women even in the present day society. For example, a Karbi woman is not allowed to attend a village court for any trial. In the community feast also the women are not allowed to partake food along with men. Even in the performance of community worship (*Rongker*) the presence of women is taboo. But it has been observed that gradually Karbi women have also been coming up to accept the challenge of transition.

Lastly, regarding removal of obstacles to development, we have to take steps to eliminate all obstacles to development which arise from the failure to respect rights and freedom - civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. We are burdened with a duty to remove these obstacles.

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THE SIXTH SCHEDULE AND THE IDENTITY CRISIS OF THE KARBIS - A FEW OBSERVATIONS

G.C. Sharma Thakur

ABSTRACT

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India provides various protective and preventive measures to the hill tribes of Karbi Anglong district ensuring preservation of tribal characteristics in tact while bringing the tribal people to the level of development of other advanced sections. To fulfill this aim a self rule mechanism designated as Autonomous District Council has been approved so that appropriate measures can be taken to check evil effects of assimilation and acculturation. But in spite of these constitutional safeguards, the Karbis over the years are apprehensive of losing their identity caused due to large-scale fraudulent occupation of land by the migrants mostly belonging to Bangladesh. The District Council enacts stringent rules to check illegal transfer, lease, mortgage of land to non tribals but the age-old traditional practices stand in the way. The Karbis are indebted to these people since the time of their forefathers who invited some migrant people to clear jungle and cultivate the lands. Officially the lands are in the names of the local Karbis but the lion's share of the produce is enjoyed by the migrant settlers. Mere passing of rules will not relieve the Karbis from the clutches of the migrants. The Karbis in the rural areas should be motivated to realise the seriousness of the problem. The District Council should make an indepth survey of the indebted families and chalk out plans to relieve the villagers from the clutch of the migrants.

The paper has been divided into two parts viz., the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India and the identity

crisis of the Karbis. The Sixth Schedule guarantees all kinds of protection to the hill tribes and identity crisis emerges due to the illegal and fraudulent action of the trespassers and the inaction or lack of appropriate measures on the part of the powers that be. To study the problem in true perspective a peep into the background of the formation of the special protective measures under the Sixth Schedule is relevant.

A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THE SIXTH SCHEDULE

The special treatment of the hill communities dates back to the sixties of the 18th century when the East India Company was entrusted with the superintendence of all laws and the collection of all revenues. The North East region was brought under the British supervision in matters of trade and commerce. Because of the rich natural resources the region attracted the special attention of the British authorities of Bengal particularly from the date of grant of the Dewani of Bengal to Robert Clive in 1765. Captain David Scott was sent to the Garo Hills in 1815 who submitted his report in 1816. As per the report the Governor General in Council appointed a Civil Commissioner of North East Rongpur. Regulation X of 1822 was passed for administration of the areas of North Eastern India. The Government of India Act 1833 and Government of India Act 1835 under the British East India Company passed laws effecting these areas. The Government of India Act 1870 extended the jurisdiction to the Assam Valley, Hill districts and Cachar.

The Scheduled Districts Act was passed in 1874 and a Chief Commissioner was appointed for Assam in that year. In fact, the 'Scheduled Districts' Act may be

treated as mother of the Sixth Schedule as special administration was recommended under the Act for 'those remote or backward tracts of provinces of British India which had never been brought within or had from time to time been removed from the operation of the general acts and regulations and jurisdiction of ordinary courts'. The Chief Commissioner of Assam was empowered to exclude any part of 'Scheduled Districts' from the operation of the Act. Later on, in 1918 the Montagu-Chelmsford Report opined that 'there was no material on which to found political institutions'(Tupper). The Government of India Act 1919 incorporated the recommendations of the said Report and empowered the Governor General in Council to declare any territory in British India to be a Backward Tract under Section 52 A(2) of the Act. As per the provisions of the Act the Governor General in Council declared the following tribal areas as 'Backward Tracts' :

1. The Garo Hills District
2. The British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District other than the Shillong Municipality
3. The Mikir Hills (in Nowgong and Sibsagar districts)
4. The North Cachar Hills (in Cachar district)
5. The Naga Hills District
6. The Lushai Hills District
7. The Sadiya Frontier Tract
8. The Balipara Frontier Tract
9. The Lakhimpur Frontier Tract

The Sixth Schedule was enacted to administer these territories. These were non Regulation areas and were brought under simplified judicial and administrative proce-

dures of a special law. This special treatment continued till passing of the 1935 Act. The tribal people of these areas enjoyed security of land freedom to maintain traditional life and culture and customary practices. However, some changes were made in the Government of India Act 1935 and accordingly these areas were designated as Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. The Mikir Hills were brought under Partially Excluded Areas as the Mikir Hills in Nowgong and Sibsagar districts contained sizable non tribal people. The administration of these Partially Excluded Areas was vested in the Council of Ministers subject, however, to the Governor exercises his individual judgment. This arrangement of provincial Government continued till 1937. The Cabinet Mission 1946 recommended special attention for these areas in the Constituent Assembly.

After independence special provisions were made under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for the administration of the tribal areas as per recommendation of the North East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub Committee of the Constituent Assembly of India. The committee favoured autonomous administration enabling the hill tribes to maintain their traditional socio-religious beliefs and practices, customs and traditions and modes and morals as these are distinct traits of their culture and preservation of these traits will enhance national interest. Besides, the autonomous system would protect the tribals from exploitation of the people from advanced areas. The assimilation process was considered to be detrimental to the national integrity and unity. It was intended to bring the simple, unsophisticated tribals to the mainstream in a gradual process. Development programmes should be implemented in these areas in such a manner so that the

tribal people should feel pride to become citizens of India.

FEAR OF IDENTITY CRISIS

The above historical background pointedly indicates that the hill tribes including Karbis have Constitutional Rights to preserve their special status and the District Council of the Karbi Anglong district executes various Acts and Rules to preserve the Karbi identity unimpaired. But in spite of the Acts and Rules, the problem of alienation of tribal land and indebtedness continues, although in a disguised form. The District Council enacted the Mikir Hills District (Transfer of Land) Act 1959 and Regulation of Money Lenders Act 1953 prohibiting transfer of land by way of sale, lease, mortgage, etc., to non tribals but surreptitious transfer and lease of land is continuing. There is not much problem in respect of *jhum* lands as there is community ownership of such lands and authority of the Village Council still prevails. But the problem arises when the villagers have switched over to wet paddy cultivation and the District Council too, allowed individual ownership in the lands where permanent cultivation is practised. It is true the ownership remains with the Karbis but the actual tillers are non Karbis and the lion's share of the produce is enjoyed by the non Karbis. Initially the Karbi owners welcomed the non Karbis particularly the East Bengal refugees to perform the difficult job of clearing the jungles, tilling the lands and they maintained a cordial relation with the immigrants. But as time passed, more and more outsiders had poured in into the interiormost areas and they became apprehensive of losing valuable agricultural lands.

The problem of identity crisis may be discussed in

the light of similar crisis in the plains districts of Assam where a six year movement to drive out the illegal foreigners was taking place ultimately leading to the famous Assam Accord of August, 1985. In fact, the Karbi problem of today is, by and large, the offshoot of the problem of infiltrators in the plains of Assam and in this backdrop an analysis of the influx of foreigners problem of Assam is relevant here.

The influx of foreign nationals, particularly East Pakistani settlers dates back to the year 1931 when 8 lakh immigrants came to settle in the plains districts of Assam, then a part of British India. These immigrants had occupied government land as well as lands belonging to the indigenous people. Initially the local people did not resist much as there was enough lands but when the flow of immigrants continued and large-scale occupation of lands of indigenous people took place, there was unrest among the local people. Conflicts took place between the local people and the immigrant settlers. The government had to intervene and in 1920 the famous 'Line System' was introduced in Nowgong district. It may be mentioned here that a sizable portion of erstwhile Nowgong district came under the jurisdiction of the present Karbi Anglong district. According to the Line System boundaries were demarcated beyond which the immigrants were forbidden to have any possession of land. The system had not much tangible effect as the lands of immigrant settlers increased substantially from 481 thousand acres in 1930-31 to 5967 acres in 1940. There was further increase of the lands of immigrant settlers and the figures touched 14,669 thousand acres in two decades i.e. 1930-50 in the Assam Valley region.

The problem of losing Karbi identity even under the well protected umbrella of the Sixth Schedule may be viewed from the immigration of tribal people from Assam, particularly Bodo Kacharis who migrated to the Karbi Anglong district after independence and began to settle permanently. Of late, the Bodo Kacharis are demanding hill tribal status under the Sixth Schedule and the matter has been taken up by the Bodo leaders of the plains districts along with their demand for Bodo land. The Bodo leaders of the plains districts of Assam are also insisting on the Sixth Schedule status for the Bodo Kacharis of Karbi Anglong district. As per 1971 Census there are 28,265 Bodo Kacharis in Karbi Anglong district spread over four Police Station areas viz., Baithalango (3,922), Howraghat (18,953), Bokajan (127) and Diphu (5,263).

The abnormal decennial growth rate of population in Karbi Anglong district is causing much anxiety among the Karbis. The growth rate of population of Assam and Karbi Anglong district has been shown in a tabular form below :

TABLE
Growth rate of population of Assam and Karbi Anglong district

State/District	1951-61	1961-71	1971-91
1	2	3	4
Assam	34.98	34.95	53.26
Karbi Anglong	79.21	68.28	72.79

The growth rate in Karbi Anglong district, then Mikir Hills district, in 1941-51 was 30.96 while the rate of growth for Assam during the decade was 19.93. This phenomenon cannot be explained in terms of natural growth. Annual rate of increase of population depends mainly upon two principal factors viz., natural growth rate and infiltration. The annual growth rates of Kerala and Tamilnadu are below the national growth rate. While the all India growth rate is 54.39% during 1971-91, Kerala and Tamilnadu have growth rates of 36.31% and 35.58% during that period. On the other hand, Rajasthan's rate of growth 70.79% far exceeds the all India rate during the period. These figures, however, do not indicate large scale infiltration of illegal migrants as the figures tally the natural growth rates of these states.

There are some socio-cultural factors regarding the high rate of growth in the Karbi Anglong district. It has already been mentioned that the Line System was first introduced in the erstwhile Nowgong district which indicates that East Pakistani immigrants were occupying lands in that district. When a part of Nowgong district came under the Karbi Anglong district, naturally sizable immigrants began to settle in that district and thus we find a very higher growth rate since 1951-61 to 1971-91.

The Karbis are a simple folk and they prefer to maintain cordial relation with other ethnic groups. There were enough virgin lands inside the inaccessible forest areas and the immigrant settlers occupied those lands. The Karbi people did not grumble as they were shifting cultivators and did not know much about wet paddy cultivation. Besides, the rural Karbi people were not in a position to realise the gravity of the situation and they were

concerned with the benefits received from the immigrant settlers. The Mikir Hills District (Transfer of Land) Act 1959 has ample provisions to safeguard the land interests of the local people but due to various factors like ignorance, lethargy, chronic indebtedness of the Karbis the problem remained unsolved. 'Taking advantage of the loopholes in the Mikir Hills District (Transfer of Land) Act 1959 and also the ignorance of the tribal people the non tribal immigrants, specially those from East Bengal (present Bangladesh) have already become the virtual owners of land under permanent cultivation, although lands are still in the names of the tribal people' (Bordoloi, 1986 : 137).

The traditional practice of giving lands on rent and lease to non tribals cut at the root of Karbis' self assertion and this practice is largely responsible for the present crisis. For example, the *Paikas* system of the Karbis enables the non tribal cultivators who are mostly immigrant settlers to possess the usufructuary rights while the real owner of the land gets a mere one-eighth of the value of the produce. Thus, the real owner becomes a titular owner. The Transfer of Land Act 1959 does not prohibit *Paikas* system. The contract is made for a year or so but the same is renewed after the contract period. A time may come when the immigrant settlers will claim ownership of land due to long possession just like the annual lease or *Tauzi* holders in the plains districts of Assam who possess ownership of land by paying the actual value of the land fixed by government. Immediately this may not happen because of the protection under the Sixth Schedule but in the long run clashes and social unrest cannot be ruled out. Similar situation may occur in case of lands under *Sukti Bandhak*. Although the initial contract is for a year, yet the arrangement

continues year after year. Under this system one bigha of land is given as mortgage for a mere 180 kgs. of paddy per year.

Under the *Khoi Bandhak* system the non tribal cultivators enjoy the benefits of land owned by the tribals by paying a very negligible cash per bigha as rent of the mortgaged land for a period of five years. The lands are supposed to be reverted to the owners after the stipulated period of contract. But the economic condition of the Karbis is so pitiable that they are hardly able to get out of the clutch of the non tribals. As the cash is received in advance, the people spend the same in non productive socio-religious occasions. The practice helps the owners of the lands to lead a leisurely life. The prevailing rate of *Khoi Bandhak* is Rs.150/- per bigha for 5 years. The Act passed by the District Council has a glaring loophole as the above mentioned land relations are not considered as illegal in the eye of the law. 'The political elite do not seem to have taken note of how the tradition is being replaced by callous law of cash transactions and how the operation of money economy has been corroding the tribal economy' (Dutta, 1986 : 154).

The above traditional land relations help the non tribal cultivators to develop intimate personal relation with the owners of lands. They extend help to the owners with cash and kind at the time of need. The owners cannot displease their so-called well-wishers and in this way the contract continues year after year.

The above pen picture clearly indicates the gravity of the problem of losing Karbi identity in the near future.

The problem should be viewed from the grassroot level and unless some practical measures are taken to improve the pitiable economic condition of the Karbis, the fear psychosis will continue to haunt leading to a grave situation. The rural people should be motivated to realise the impact of liberal land relations with the immigrant settlers. Unless they realise that the traditional system is being circumvented by some crafty people under dubious method, there is no hope of getting relieved of the quagmire of the fear psychosis of losing identity in their own land in spite of the protection under the Sixth Schedule.

Community ownership has to be preserved if necessary, in a modified form by organising co-operative societies. A survey should be conducted to find out outstanding debt of each family and measures should be evolved to provide cash for debt redemption thereby relieving the poor Karbi people from the clutches of the illegal immigrant settlers. The traditional system should be restructured in such a way that modernisation becomes a boon in the socio-cultural pattern. In this connection the observations of Singh (1987 : 4) may be a solution : 'The tribal societies, particularly in the north east have been fortunate in having been able to retain and improve some of their traditional customs which helped them to enjoy a democratic social life. The process of modernisation certainly calls for some changes It is, however, necessary to safeguard the main contents of the customs and traditions which have contributed to a healthy growth of the society. The most practical course is to modify these customs to the extent required to meet the demands of modernisation. It is not proper to completely destroy or uproot the wholesome customs of any particular community

by transplanting other laws and rules never followed by them before. The change for the better must be in spirit of the ancient tradition of the race or tribe'.

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DEVELOPMENT : A DISTANT DREAM

Rani Kakati (Hazarika)

The design for development of the tribal people is made mostly by the people who are not the participants in the whole process. Why everybody is worried about the tribal development and thereby improving the condition of the tribal people, what they want to do ? That is a great question. Why should we try to improve others ? Probably we think we have solved our problems, there is nothing to do for our own development ! Perhaps, the idea comes from the thought that we people are superior in all respects and only totally fit people to do developmental works among other tribal communities who are still very backward. The whole idea comes from the feeling of inequality which means non tribals are more intelligent than the tribals and so on. When certain developmental programmes are taken up by the government the target people's opinion is never taken into account as if they are just like the rats or guineapigs, experiments will be carried on them simply because they do not know anything. Though equality is given to all (Justified) in the Constitution - these are not implemented in practice. The tribals are equally concerned about their economic conditions. They have their right to accept or reject any developmental plan or programme. Their sentiment is hardly understood by others. Simply solution is found in imported ideas of change (based

mainly on western countries) which is analysed with the help of concepts like cultural contact, acculturation, folk-urban continuum bridge action, westernization, urbanization, industrialization, modernization, etc. Tullis (1973) comments '.... the attempt is primarily to divert attention from the fundamental contradictions in society and bring order to the prevailing turbulent situation by propagating imported or foreign collaborated technology and suggest various pacifying programmes in that regard'. Earlier, Anthropologists participated in the power and privileges of the dominant groups (Memmi, 1967 : 17) and justified the actions of the colonial governments on the ground that the native people had no knowledge of what was good for themselves : hence the colonial powers in their mission to civilize the 'savage' had to be assisted in all possible ways (Pathy, 1987 : 2). In (post colonial) later period Anthropology of development has emerged as a kind of community development and social work for the third world which is expected to develop gradually in a cumulative way by participating in Western science, technology, education and culture (Pathy, 1987 : 7). The notion of development includes both economic development and social and cultural changes which accompany it. Little importance is given on the sufferings of the subject population, their constraints and the created gaps of the cultural traits that have been removed or introduced abruptly by a foreign element. Again, the problem of implementation of developmental plans and programmes is a crucial one. On many occasions we have heard that the responsibility for implementation of developmental programmes has remained with officials who are not fully equipped for such works. In such situations can we really expect desired results ? Who will answer that

question of development of human spiritual or material level of achievement? Is it not a very delicate question to be answered if such a change leads to mental dissatisfaction (or psychological disorder) to a person or a community as a whole?

This paper, therefore, intends to name the developmental programme as a 'distant dream' based on Western ideas and technologies. Justifications are made by saying that it is necessary to improve the conditions of the tribals so that they can take part in the nation building process and compete with the outside world. But in practical situation, the tendency is seen or felt to be otherwise, as most of the tribal people are now demanding autonomy (partial or full) for them from the control of State Govt.

In these scientific days of achievement it is not possible to stop coming of new ideas and technology to any community. But before taking up such project, it should be the duty of the governing agencies to let the people know about advantages and disadvantages of the project, the type of work to be done, the fund position and end results, etc. They should be given enough time to discuss, allowed to express their likes and dislikes and only after that such project should be implemented.

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SOME KEY ASPECTS OF FOREST MANAGEMENT IN TRIBAL AREAS

Rafiquz Zaman

A large number of tribal people prefer to make the forest as their home. There are certain advantages for the tribal people who enjoy living in forest. The forest provides them with building materials. It also provides them food-fruits of various types, edible leaves and nourishing roots, etc. The fauna is also available for their hunting. The streams in the forest provide them with fish. The tribal people enjoy hunting freely in the forest. Further, forest provides them with fuel-wood for cooking their food. Apart from these advantages, the tribal people enjoy some sort of geographical isolation from other people. To live in isolation without interference from communities outside is a kind of desire for almost all the tribals. This is because of their shyness of contact and also backwardness. In view of the fact that they remained in isolation in dense forest, they developed certain primitive traits with their distinct culture which they liked to maintain.

The British rule of India started in the middle of the 19th Century. Before the advent of the British, the tribals in the forest enjoyed complete freedom in the forest. Forest was their lifeline and the tribals living in the forest could not think of anything without forest. The East India Company came to India in 1600 with a trading motive and they fully

exploited this. Wherever the British went they always kept their trading interest in mind. Throughout India, the attitude of the British for administration of forest covered areas was targetted mainly on their trading interest and not on the tribals living in the forest.

The British felt the necessity of extending their authority in the forest areas for effective tapping of the forest produce. In the pre-British period, the commercial exploitation of the forest was not there. The forest was used only for domestic needs of the tribals living within the forest. The British felt the need of imposing restrictions on the tribals living in the forest for effective exploitation of the forest for boosting their colonial desire.

It is interesting to note that before the State control on forest came into being, the tribals had some customary regulations of people's right over forest land and forest produce. The forest was owned by the community as a whole and the tribals considered forest as the perpetual source of food, fodder and fuel for the welfare of the community. Some customary regulations are mentioned below :

- (1) To stop indiscriminate exploitation in order to have a sustained supply of forest produce.
- (2) Restrictions on certain types of forest or ponds or stretch of rivers for total production.
- (3) Restriction on family over the quantum of exploitation was imposed by the community. The exploitation had to be as per the needs of the family.

Apart from these, some other customary regulations were followed because of religious compulsion. The availa-

bility of vast forest reserve with limited tribal population had helped in maintaining the ecosystem with these customary regulations. Whether the customary regulations of the tribals would have been sufficient to manage the forest in a scientific way in the long run is, of course, a debatable point.

The intention of the British for control over the forest in India was evident as far back as 1806 when the British reserved deep forest in coastal areas of Malabar. The British were interested in exporting teak for ship building purposes. England was fighting at that time with Napoleon and durable ship with good Indian teak was necessary for military purposes.

Later on, the British considered the tribals living in the forest as hindrance in their total exploitation of the forest. The British colonial emperor depended heavily on Indian forest which was so resourceful. However, the British called for scientific management of forest in India and started working on that line. How scientific was their attitude will be revealed only in the enactment of Acts that followed. The British established an Imperial Forest Department in 1864.

A memorandum was issued in 1855 which outlined guidelines restricting the movement of the forest dwellers for the purpose of preservation of forest. The memorandum also sought to put restrictions on people's right over forest. Tribals were allowed to live in the forest but only by following the restrictions imposed on them. In other words, the tribals living in the forest were considered as intruders. It may be noted that tribals living in the forest were also used by the British to exploit forest at reasonably low cost.

The tribals provided cheap labour in cutting, loading and transportation of timber, etc.

THE GOVERNMENT FOREST ACT, 1865 : The memorandum was not sufficient to impose restriction on the tribals and extend state monopoly over the forest. The British realised this and in order to enhance the power of the Government, the Government Forest Act, 1865 was passed.

The ramification of the Government Forest Act, 1865 was far-reaching and subsequent Acts enacted during the British period was only improvisation over this Act. The Act provided any land covered with trees, brush-wood or jungles to be owned by the State. At the same time, the Act provided punishment for the breach of any provision of the Act including arrest of offenders and confiscation of implements used by offenders. Total state control, restrictions on tribals, punishment were all new things to the tribals. While the tribals were exploiting forest for their domestic needs, the British were interested in commercial exploitation of the forest. The restrictions on the tribals were uncalled for. The British had succeeded because there was nobody to protest at that time.

The fall out of the Indian Forest Act, 1865 is that the tribals can do nothing in forest. In fact, by the provisions of the restrictions and punishment for offence, the tribals were chained and their age-old freedom in the forest was curtailed drastically.

INDIAN FOREST ACT, 1878 : This Act was much more comprehensive than the Act passed in 1865. Certain forest terms like tree, timber, forest produce were clearly defined.

For the first time forest was classified as (1) Reserved Forest (2) Protected Forest and (3) Village Forest. In reserved forest, everything was restricted unless permitted. In protected forest everything was permitted unless restricted. In village forest, the Government retained its authority to cancel or assign the right to village community.

Further, the Act made provisions to settle the claims of tribals on land declared as forest. Only Forest Officers can settle the claims as per the Act.

The fall out of this Act was manifold.

(A) Demarcation and fencing by the Forest Department in the forest to exercise and enhance state control over the forest has led to loss of control of the forest dwellers over their habitat. The forest dwellers who depended mostly on the forest declared as reserved and protected turned now to the village forest to meet their domestic needs. Overdependence on village forest by the forest dwellers has led to faster denudation.

(B) The tribals living in the forest had always been used by the British for commercial exploitations as tribals were available at much cheaper rate. The role of the tribals so far as conservation and protection through their customary regulation is concerned was over.

(C) With the enactment of the Act and classification of forest, the communal ownership concept of the tribals vanished and communal responsibility of the forest evaporated.

NATIONAL FOREST POLICY, 1894 : Based on the report by Voelekar on Indian Agriculture for the first time, the close relationship between forest and agriculture was recognised.

By the National Forest Policy (NFP) 1894, cultivation of permanent nature was encouraged in forest area. Only the area of forest yielding inferior timbers were to be managed by local population. Hill forest was classified for protection. Only the forest providing valuable timber was to be used for commercial purposes. The forest was classified as forest for preservation, forest for commercial purpose, minor forest and pasture land. The NFP 1894 stressed mainly on revenue aspect and commercial supply of forest produce. To the utter surprise of the tribals, even pasture lands which were used by the tribals for grazing of their domestic animals were taken out of their communal control thereby removing all sorts of tribal ownership on forest.

INDIAN FOREST ACT, 1927 : This Act was same as the Act of 1878, only penalty for offences was increased.

The Acts formulated in the pre-Independence era by the British were based primarily on enhanced revenue collection and commercial exploitation by increasing state control over forest. Although the British were talking about the scientific management of forest through preservation and conservation, in effect, the Acts formulated by the British were always aimed at increasing restrictions on tribals inhabiting the forest. This was because of the mis-conception of the British regarding the tribals who used forest for their domestic needs only. Dr. I.M.Hutton, an ICS officer who made extensive study on tribals aptly remarked : 'Far from being of immediate benefit to the primitive tribes, the establishment of British rule in India did most of them much harm than good the early days of the British administration did very great detriment to the economic position of tribes through ignorance and neglect of their rights and

customs'.

It may be noted that when Government of India Act, 1935 was passed by the British, the forest was included in Provincial Legislature (Item 22). The effect of this provision was that the individual Provincial State started making laws on forest according to the necessity of the State. The enactments made by the Provincial States were more or less in conformity with the Acts made by the British and there was nothing special made for the tribals. The scenario that emerges in the pre-Independence stage so far as the tribals living in the forest are concerned is definitely very grim. Because of authoritative control of the British and the unheard voices of the tribals because of their backwardness and aloofness, no remedial measures were possible.

POST-INDEPENDENCE SCENARIO :

Like everybody else in the country, probably there was some expectation of the forest tribals to get some justice when India attained freedom. The first policy document in post-Independence India was National Forest Policy, 1952. Strangely, this policy supports all the concepts embodied in the National Forest Policy, 1894 and there was nothing new in this policy. To the surprise of all, there was no mention of the tribals at all. This is really very sad. The policy emphasised the growth of forest based industries for the national interest.

At the time of framing of the Indian Constitution, probably the forest tribals were not represented before the Constituent Assembly. The problems and deprivation of the

tribals for nearly 70 years since 1865 were not highlighted by anybody. As a result, nothing specific was mentioned in the Indian Constitution adopted in 1950 for amelioration of the condition of the forest tribals although the general problems were taken care of along with other scheduled tribes enlisted in the Constitution. Nothing has been mentioned even in 'the Directive Principles of the State Policy' regarding forest and the tribals living there. However, by the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 with effect from 3.1.1977, a clause namely 48 A was included for protection and improvement of environment and safeguarding of forest and wild life. Clause 48 A reads as : 'the State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forest and wild life of the country.' The necessity of including a clause on forest was realised only after nearly 30 years of independence. Even this clause has no specific mention about the tribals living there whose freedom in the forest was taken away by the British as long back as 1865 thereby reducing them to mere cheap labourers. This was the height of exploitation during British rule. A clause embodying the problems of the forest tribals and even that of the flora and fauna in the Constitution in 1950 would have protected the rights and privileges of the forest tribals and environment.

NATIONAL AGRICULTURE COMMISSION, 1976 : The findings of the National Agriculture Commission i.e. NAC 1976 were highly tragic for the tribals. The Commission has failed miserably to identify the real exploiters in the Indian Forest and instead made a ruthless presumption that the tribals have exploited the forest. The stress on commercialisation of agriculture and protection of industrial wood by NAC is quite acceptable for national interest. But there is no rea-

son to annihilate the interest of the tribals who have been exploited since the era of the British. In short, the tribal cause was not highlighted even after 29 years of Independence.

INDIAN FOREST BILL, 1980 : The Indian Forest Bill, 1980 had widened the scope of various forest terms to include more resources available in the forest. Further, judicial powers were conferred to the forest officers alongwith some discretionary powers. This Bill also wanted to protect forest from the people - meaning the tribals. There was no concern at all for the livelihood of the tribals.

The Indian Forest Bill, 1980 became Forest Conservation Act, 1980. The only silver lining in the process of the enactment of the Forest Act is the widespread protest in the country. For the first time in 1982, attention of the Government turned to the tribals. Another forest policy document was prepared by the Government in 1983 and subsequently revised in 1987. The tribals are now ventilating grievances because of injustice done to them through some ecologists and scholars.

NATIONAL FOREST POLICY, 1988 : The National Forest Policy (NFP), 1988 is a giant leap forward in enactment of Forest Acts since the era of the British. For the first time, the specific section 4.6 on tribal people and forest was incorporated. The symbiotic relationship of the tribals with the forest was recognised by the Government. The Policy clearly stated for protection of customary rights and concessions of the tribals. Again the domestic need of fuel, fodder, minor forest produce and construction timbers were considered to be the first change on forest produce. The concept of associating the tribals for protection, conservation and

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development of forest was recognised. The pro-tribal attitude of the National Forest Policy emerged very clearly in this document after 40 years of Independence.

THE CHALLENGE :

The National Forest Policy Resolution of 1988 is yet to be converted into a new Act. There are indications regarding vested interest playing active role to subvert the spirit and thrust embodied in the resolution. Various State Governments including Assam are working for implementation of 1988 resolution. But effort so far is not yet deep rooted.

There will be dramatic shift in outlook of the Forest Department if they are to involve tribals in forest management. To associate the tribals in the management of forest is not an easy task. Since the era of the British, tribals have not been involved in any way in management of forest. They are poor managers to manage forest. The perception and conception of the tribals are quite different from that of the Forest Department. That the tribals are backward and shy to speak out their mind comes as a big hindrance for joint forest management. Further, it is yet to identify the different problems of the tribals living in the forest.

But the policy document of 1988 provides a great opportunity to serve the tribals who are hard core poor and down-trodden. The association of the tribals may come as a boon for the conservation and protection of an eco-friendly forest. All attempts by the Forest Department in this regard may be found to be much more responsive. In order to sort out various problems of the forest and of the tribal people, the Forest Department may look forward to active

involvement of various other departments.

For implementation of the policy document, however, there are a lot of worries. One worry may be delay in decision making. Till the other day, it was the directive of the Forest Department to implement any scheme as they like. With the concept of joint forest management many decisions will have to be discussed with the tribals before implementation of the scheme. The delay in decision making may be compensated to great extent by the improvement in quality decision and restriction in implementation. It appears also that the power that was enjoyed by the forest officials shall be curtailed because of the association needed for joint forest management. There are other concerns also. The policy may be an impediment in revenue earning of the Government since the tribals may not favour the felling of the trees even though the felling has been done for scientific reason. At this point, the contractor's interest is also likely to be hampered. With the united efforts of the forest tribals consciousness among the tribals may lead to more active interaction which is likely to hamper national interest.

It may be stated that the Forest Department is a very well knit organisation from top to grass root level. Most of the officials receive training on regular basis. The Forest Department has long experience in forest management. The policy document has been framed after a lot of deliberations and it was initiated at the behest of the government on the advice of ecologists, sociologists, anthropologists, environmentalists and others.

The information available at the moment reveals that there are State-wise differences in the procedures for iden-

tification of the areas to be covered by joint forest management. There are also differences in deciding the unit of operative community, role of traditional tribal leaders, role of Gaon Panchayats, role of NGOs and so on. This is a metamorphic stage where everybody concerned with flora, fauna, environment, tribal people and national interest may ponder and bring out the strategies to work wholeheartedly for the implementation of the 1988 Policy Document in true letter and spirit. The question lies - can we break the ice in the near future ?

ROLE OF TRADITIONAL TRIBAL POLITICAL INSTITUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE KARBIS OF THE HILL AREAS, ASSAM

R.P. Athparia

ABSTRACT :

The Karbis or the Arlengs known as Mikirs are a major tribe of the Hill Areas of Assam. They had a more or less organised State before the extension of the British rule in the region. During the British period, the Karbis were allowed to run their own political affairs and the British administration as a matter of policy interfered as little as possible in the traditional system. But following Independence a group of people, mostly young men of the time, with political acumen tinged with a traditional bent of mind, came into being. They were prepared to provide the modern maiden leadership to the tribemen.

The broad objective of this paper is to focus attention on the traditional forms of the socio-political organization of the Karbis where District Council and the State Administrative machinery, besides the Central Government function side by side without distinctive clash in their respective areas of operation. Their traditional political institution which is a three-tier one persists even now as one mechanism for tribal social control than as a live political force.

INTRODUCTION

The Karbis constitute a major hill tribe of Assam. They are mainly concentrated in Karbi Anglong district formerly known as Mikir Hills. They are also distributed over

many more areas adjoining this district. They are found in some pockets of Nagaon, Kamrup, North Cachar Hills, Golaghat, Nagaland, Khasi and Jayantia Hills of Meghalaya. The ethnic name Karbi connotes brotherhood. It is the custom of the Karbis to keep fire alive in the hearths and offer portions of all eatables to the ancestral spirits before consuming.

The Karbis live in homogenous villages. They exhibit a peculiar habitual custom of not settling down at a place for a considerable period of time. Permanent habitations are, therefore, rarely seen. Villages are frequently shifted from place to place within a definite territorial limitation. The causes for this kind of shifting are diverse. The death of the village headman, epidemic or scarcity of water, all these together or separately may cause the shifting.

The broad objective of this paper is to focus attention on the traditional forms of the socio-political organisation of the Karbis of the Hill Areas of Assam where District Council functions side by side without distinctive clash in their respective areas of operation. It is also to see the adaptability of the traditional institutions to adapt itself to the ever changing socio-political and socio-economic situations in a tribal community.

TRADITIONAL STATE OF ORGANISATION

Among the Karbis, particularly the Karbis of Hamren Civil Subdivision of Karbi Anglong district, a State like organisation is found. The State is a territorial as well as an administrative unit, the political rights and obligations are territorially delimited. The Karbi State or Karbi *Rajya*

is divided into three broad territories called *Alongri*. The three *Alongris* are : Rongkhang, Chinthong and Amri. These are again divided into sub-territorial divisions called *Longris*. In all, there are twelve *Longris* or sub-territorial divisions. Each *Longri* controls a number of villages which are known as *Arongs*.

Regarding the demarcation of a *Longri*, there are controversies among the Karbis. Some claim that all the twelve *Longris* are found only in the Rongkhang *Alongri*, while others speak of *Longris* to be in existence only in the areas that were under the Jayantia rulers. Whatever may be the confusion, the Karbis conform to the view that there are twelve *Longris* in the Karbi land. This shows that the institution of *Longri* serves the socio-political purpose rather than anything else with the aim of developing a sense of solidarity and cohesion.

Lyall (1908 : 15) also referred to the *Alongri* territorial divisions of the tribe, but he is silent about the *Longri* divisions. According to the author, these *Alongri* territorial divisions are as follows : (i) the hilly portion of Mikir Hills referred to as Chinthong (ii) North Cachar Hills and the hilly parts of Nagaon referred to as Rongkhang and (iii) the Khasi and Jayantia Hills called Amri. The natives, however, say that the Umtu river, a tributary of the Dhansiri divides the territories of Chinthong and Rongkhang while the Longsong river of the Kopili is the demarcation boundary of Rongkhang and Amri.

SEAT OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

The Karbi Chief, known as Karbi *Recho*, is the administrative and judicial head of the entire State. The Cen-

tre of the Karbi traditional organisation is located at Niz Rongkhang village or the village inhabited by all the *Pinpomar* (Councillors) of greater Karbi society. This village is also known as *Baruagaon* or *Pinpo-arong* where all the traditional *Pinpomar* reside or are expected to reside. Lyall (1908 : 5) mentions, 'they have dim traditions of a king of their own in the good old days, whom they call *Sot Recho* His seat is said to have been in Rongkhang (or Ronghang), perhaps connected with Ni-hang (*Rong-village*).'

The *Pinpomar* are the chosen or selected representatives of the *Kur-Abang* i.e. the council of the clan elders serving as ministers or advisers to the Karbi Chief or the Karbi *Recho*. Tradition demands their living away from their wives and children. They are expected to live on the contributions made by the respective members of each clan-clusters which they represent in the Chief's Council. It may be mentioned here that the Karbis have five principal clans and for each there is a *Deng Achar* who is the most elderly and experienced man among the members of his clan. It is his duty to collect rice or paddy from each household for the maintenance of the *Pinpomar*.

THE ALONGRI INSTITUTION

Among the Karbis the *Alongri* institution is the permanent body with a perpetual central agency in the form of the *Recho* who is an overall co-ordinator par excellence. It is through his co-ordination that all social, political and religious life of the people are coalesced.

The three *Alongris*, namely, Rongkhang, Chinthong

and Amri are very much part and parcel of the whole land, although the Karbi *Recho* does not exercise an overall effective power over the two *Alongris* other than Rongkhang. Unlike Rongkhang, the other two units do not possess Karbi chiefs comparable in power and position to the Karbi *Recho* of Rongkhang. In fact, these two units of the Karbi land are very much under the administrative jurisdiction of the Rongkhang *Alongri* Council i.e. *Rechomei* or *Recho's* Council. These two units are in effect governed by *Lindoks* or Councillors belonging to specific clans and sub-clans. It is again observed that the *Lindoks* of Chinthong and Amri are in no way the representative functionaries of the *Rechomei*. The Karbi *Recho*, therefore, could not be said to be involved even remotely in the political affairs of the two units. It is true that before the extension of the British rule in this part of the country the age-old Karbi indigenous traditional system was in vogue. Though the Karbi *Recho* was not directly involved in the political affairs of Chinthong and Amri, these units were not beyond the administrative purview of the *Recho*. Accordingly, he is always treated by the people of the three *Alongris* as the supreme head. It is from this supreme functionary that matters concerning Karbi life in very many aspects go revolving. He is virtually the most effective final 'law giver' to the society but at the same time he is more of a symbolic figure-head than a real executive of the entire set-up. The *Recho* is the central figure round whom the tribal life revolves and through him the activities of the tribe are controlled. He is the ruler, the judge and the guardian of the Karbi customary laws but he is not the absolute ruler of the entire Karbi land. The Karbi *Recho* is thus known to be most effective figure-head in the state's functions of judicial and administrative nature. The *Recho* is hardly supposed to exercise his prerogative to arrive at

a final decision of his own.

It is the body of the *Pinpomar* who helps in deciding the people's grievances and their needs and aspirations. It is seen that no decision in the *Rechomei* is one-man decision. It is generally a collective one. A discussion that comes up for decision in the *Rechomei*, the particular *Pinpomar* finally arrives at an agreed solution which is nothing but a common consensus. It is the *Pinpomar* who enjoys the most effective decision making power in the Karbi political set-up. At every step of the process of socio-cultural and socio-political functioning, the co-operation between the *Recho* and the *Pinpomar* forms the very basis of the political structure of the Karbis. It is the *Pinpomar* who possesses the discretionary power concerning day-to-day functioning of the system including the power to dismiss the Karbi *Recho* if the latter violates any social norm. A breach of social norm is viewed seriously in the Karbi society. All efforts are undertaken as remedial measures for stopping such breach of norms for maintaining social normalcy. Above all, the decision of the *Pinpomar* is taken as final in all socio-political and socio-religious affairs. It is thus evident that the *Pinpomar* exercises the judicial and administrative functions of the entire Karbi land through the *Rechomei*.

THE LONGRI INSTITUTION

The *Longri* institution which comes next to the *Rechomei* in importance and significance, is found not in the whole Karbi land. It is confined to the western part of the district. The *Habe*, the hereditary chief of the *Longri*, is a subordinate official of the *Rechomei*. This institution of

Longri is thus a connecting link between the *Rechomei* and the *Arongs*, that is, the villages.

As stated above, the Karbi villages are usually temporary settlements. A village under certain conditions invariably breaks down into a number of small units, each forming a separate village under a new *Sarthe* or the headman of the village. For this reason, a structure like *Longri* became necessary to maintain the unity and solidarity among the ever-increasing and somewhat unsettled villages. The *Habe* and his co-functionaries govern the respective areas under their charge only to submit to the governance of a still higher authority represented by the *Recho* and his Council of advisers. This is nothing but a minor image of village polity.

One striking feature of the *Longri* Council is that it includes all the village functionaries including the *Sarthe*, the head of the village unit. It is the *Habe* who appoints all the functionaries except the *Sarthe* on the advice of the villages gathered through voice vote or verbal majority support in a congregation of the villagers. Thus, a sort of democratic principle is followed in selecting the *Longri* functionaries like the officials of the *Rechomei*. However, in the choice of functionaries for the *Longri*, clan does not have any role to play. A functionary may come from any clan irrespective of its status and position, unlike the one in the *Rechomei* Council. Similarly the *Kur Abang* that plays the significant role in the choice of a representative to be sent to the *Rechomei* Council as a functionary, does have no role at all in the choice of officials to the *Longri* Council.

It may be noted that the *Habe* controls a number of

villages including the one of his own *habitation*. Here, in the *Habe*'s own village obviously a dual authority prevails - the functions of the *Habe* do often overlap with those of the *Sarthe*. Under this duality of authority the *Sarthe*'s role in the village affairs becomes insignificant.

THE VILLAGE INSTITUTION

The village level socio-political institution i.e. the *Mei* is found all over the Karbi land. The very word *Mei* might have been derived from the Assamese word *Mel* meaning *meeting*. The *Mel* was in existence in the Ahom political system and the Karbis might have picked up the word in their own socio-political system. In the western part of the district, the structural pattern of the *Mei* is like that of the *Longri* or *Rechomei*, and the *Sarthe* who is a subordinate official of the *Longri* is the supreme authority of the *Mei*. In the eastern part, where the *Mei* is an independent body without any *Longri* or *Rechomei*, whatsoever, the *Sarthe* is the topmost functional head of the *Mei*.

The *Sarthe*, the important functionary of the village council is in overall charge of the day-to-day affairs of the village. These are both intra-village as well as inter-village activities. As such his presence is necessary in taking decisions on all matters effecting an individual's life from cradle to maturity and death.

In true sense, the *Sarthe* is the pivotal actor of the whole traditional political system. The *Sarthe* being at the village level may be considered at times to be more effective, as far as the day-to-day functional roles are concerned than other officials of the *Longri*. Another duality of autho-

rity occasionally prevails between the *Sarthe* and the *Borgaonbura*, the village official, attached to a number of villages at the behest of the District Council. Such a duality occurs in the resident village of the *Borgaonbura* where the *Sarthe* is the normal functionary. However, a *Borgaonbura* by any implication is not an important personality in the village affairs and there arise few occasions of open conflict between the two functionaries.

In fact, the sense of responsibility and the spirit of the co-operation, as the villagers are to be aware of, are mostly initiated and developed by the *Mei* and every person holds it in high esteem and owe. The orders and rulings of the *Mei* are hardly defied by the villagers as people have spontaneous esteem and regard for the institution.

IMPACT OF MODERN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The modern political system that came about in the post-Independence period in the Karbi hills did not go against the very spirit of the Karbi traditional democratic norm. It speeded up the tempo of the politicisation among the Karbis. The District Council, a very vital organ of the modern political norm, ushered in a new era in the political behaviour of the people. It began to provide people with new political ideology and political professionalism. It also began to provide incentive to the people to go for national sphere of political life.

Before the British period, the Karbis lived in a Sovereign State. The people did not have any taste of subordination and the people did not feel for any autonomy. During the British period the Karbis more or less had virtually the

same experience of Sovereignty as the British did not have any effective interference in the tribal life-ways. In post-Independence period, the Karbis became a part of the Sovereign State of India. As a subordinate nationality for the Karbis now there appears a sense for autonomy and that was offered under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. This provision of autonomy has helped the Karbis continue the tradition and old practices side by side with the oncoming new democratic norms.

It is also noticed that the modern democratic institution has opened up a new vista for modern maiden leadership to stage a debut in the present development of political set-up. The neo-leaders in early fifties could arouse the political aspiration of the people. Political aspirations grew among the people and it resulted in the formation of the district, the very living symbol of political aspirations of the otherwise traditional minded Karbis of the time. Earlier leadership was confined to the periphery of the village, *Longri* and *Alongri*. But the new leadership had broader outlook beyond the confine of the *Alongri* system.

ADAPTABILITY OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION

It is observed that two distinct political bodies - *Alongri* and District Council - began to function in the Karbi land after Independence. Each body has its own demarcated area of operation. Modern political affairs, management and economic development are the primary functions of the modern democratic institution. It is the topmost policy making body of the Karbi land. It is this institution through which the Karbis have been taking the advantage of consolidating the modern leadership and

have since followed the Constitutional path to achieve political goals.

In contrast to the modern political institution, the traditional socio-political norms and the inter-related customs of the society are all rooted in another institution called the *Alongri*. It regulates the judiciary and socio-religious matters of the society according to the traditional norm. This institution is very important for maintaining the age-old norms and practices. The Karbis live within the jurisdiction of the *Alongri* to which their forefathers had inalienable mystic ancestral relationships. So, the institution as it maintains the socio-political and socio-religious sectors of life is one jealously nourished and nurtured by the people at large. Nevertheless, the *Alongri* system has not retained its pristine features. Some of the aspects of the *Alongri* have lost its sharpness in the face of the developing socio-economic and socio-political forces.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it can be said that the traditional and modern democratic institutions are at work, fully subserving the society. The structure and power of both the institutions are somewhat unequal. The political role of the two institutions is also different. Despite these disparities, the traditional institutions are a living force functioning without any clash with the modern political institution.

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DEVELOPMENT OF KARBI SOCIETY : NEED FOR RESTRUCTURING ITS TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS

A.K.Borah and P.N.Bharali

The Karbis who were one time popularly known as Mikirs as opined by Grierson (1967 : 1) belong to Naga-Bodo sub-group who penetrated into Assam like other Mongoloid tribes long back. Their population was first recorded in the Census of 1901 numbering 87,046 (Lyall, 1971 : 1). The Mikirs presently call themselves as Karbis and among the fourteen hill tribes they are the largest in numbers. They constitute 1.14% of the total tribal population of Assam according to 1991 Census. The tribal population of Assam, however, constitutes 12.82% of the total population of the State. Among the hill tribes the Karbis are having a rich cultural heritage though with the advent of endogenous forces a tradition-modern continuum is being noticed. To be more precise the winds of change are noticed in their traditional institution. As such, in this paper a taxonomical exercise is made to project their main traditional institutions which helped to maintain integrity and solidarity in the Karbi society in the past and their present trends of change.

The traditional institutions of the tribes of the various parts of North-east India helped to maintain the emotional bonds among their kinsmen which could be termed as emotional solidarity in Durkheimian sense, cultivation of

'we' feeling in Sumner's sense. Thus the traditional institutions of the Karbis also were not exception when someone had to consider the roles of these institutions in maintaining integrity of the Karbi society through time space continuum.

If we closely look the Karbi society we find that there are three important traditional institutions which were functioning actively in maintaining harmony (Mores and Folkways levels) and integrity in economic sphere of the society.

In this context more specifically the earlier traditional village council of the Karbi society commonly known as *Mei* which helped to arbitrate and adjudicate the disputes of the villagers based on conventions - which had a long history of its origin, fossilized and crystallised over times. Unlike the present legal structure to which the present Indian Judiciary belongs; the village council of the Karbis viz., *Mei* used oral tradition and mores. The village chieftains were the living storehouse of oral traditions and conventions and as such, all disputes of the villagers were settled amicably, to which all elderly members of the village concerned were extending help as they were also members of the council. As such, in the Karbi society every village whether big or small one had village council. This village council *Mei* had other functions also in the past, more importantly when most of all the Karbi people were shifting cultivators and the practice of shifting their village to a new site for doing shifting cultivation by abandoning the earlier one - to regenerate its fertility - the distribution of shifting cultivation sites was made by the village council to which the villagers did not oppose and in earmarked areas each of the families was

doing shifting cultivation without any protest. In this context it may be noted that originally in the ecological settings of the Karbis, land belonged to the *Kurs* (*Kurs* refer to clan) (Saikia, 1967). Each of the five *Kurs* viz., *Ingty*, *Inghee*, *Terang*, *Teron* and *Timung*, as time passed by, emerged as broad kindred group and they were practising shifting cultivation in respective cultivation sites by adhering the shifting cycles. It may be mentioned more precisely that community land ownership pattern was prevalent among the Karbis though presently this pattern is gradually being replaced by the individual ownership pattern. With this change the village council *Mei* lost its importance in selecting shifting cultivation sites and virtually it became defunct in this regard. Further, in settling disputes also between the individuals of the village it lost its importance for the reason that nowadays the individuals prefer to go to law courts for getting justice which is provided by Indian Judiciary and where the legal laws are codified and written one instead of the unwritten laws of the village council which as stated earlier were based on conventions.

The second traditional institution of the Karbis was the village dormitory which was commonly known as *Farla* in many places of the Karbi ecological settings. This was also known as *Jirkedam*. The existence of village dormitory was not unique to their own as among other tribes of North-east India, the village dormitory as an institution was in existence. As such, in case of Karbis this was not exception. The Karbis used to construct the village dormitory in a place which was easily accessible from all nook and corners of the village and in many cases it was observed that the dormitory was constructed at a midpoint of the village settings. This village dormitory was a functional organisation

which used to teach the younger unmarried male folks the rich traditional heritage and trained them how to prepare lands for shifting cultivation through slash and burn method, make the implements individually that were needed for shifting cultivation. Further, the village dormitory of the Karbi society was helping the younger male folks to accept the oral traditions and also to cultivate the concept of 'we' feeling among the members of the village. Because this *Farla* as a village institution used to perform all social services to the villagers and also if needed to the individual families, when situation demanded. For the services no remunerations were demanded.

Furthermore, the members of the village dormitory were helping the poor, destitute, helpless and old people in such a way that all these people were to be specific - not dying out of starvation. Really this was one of the unique and finest careing services rendered by the *Farla* of the Karbi society. However, it is very painful to state that from our own field experience in some places of Lumbajong Development Block, Howraghat Development Block, Nilip Development Block that with the advent of endogenous forces like modernisation in general and growing of individualism at all interactional levels the community sentiment nurtured by the *Farla* of the Karbi society gradually faded away.

It is the irony on the part of the Karbi society that the organisational set up of the *Farla* as recorded by different writers like Bordoloi et al. (1987 : 65) was exhibiting a strict hierarchy and various works of it were earmarked to be performed by the specific designated individuals, simply vanished with the onslaught of modernisation process. The

modernisation instead of helping to cultivate unity and integrity in the society helped to cultivate sub-cultures like low empathy, community disorganisation and mutual disturbances, etc. In reality the Karbi society is suffering from syndrome in its social sphere. While modernisation is welcome in the Karbi society but the way it is coming is not desirable. If the colourful traditional institutions like *Farla* could be taken on backdrop then possibly this fast modernisation syndrome with conflicting sub-cultures could not have been experienced. However, in a modest way the present authors would try to provide a scenario as to how traditional institutions could be revived in a new way to augment the process of development of the Karbi society.

The third - in the present context (the last one) - traditional institution among the Karbis was the grain bank and it was popularly known among the Karbis as *Kerung Amei*. This was a unique traditional institution among the Karbis as it was the finest example of primitive communism among them. This grain bank used to serve the needy people of the village during the non-harvesting periods by providing grains as per their requirements. The grains which were provided by the villagers themselves on quota basis and all the villagers used to donate grains to this community grain bank with a view to get grains in times of need. This was an institution which was an economic one and was based on emotional solidarity of the village people.

Bordoloi et al. (1987 : 66-67) mentioned that there were three types of grain banks among the Karbis and they described them as under :

'In the first type all the families irrespective of their social status has to contribute 5 kgs. of paddy after the

annual harvest to the grain bank. During the lean months of the next year the poor and needy families are given paddy on loan with the condition that the principal along with 50% interest in kind must be returned after the harvest.

The second type of grain bank is confined to the male youths of the village. An assigned plot of land is cultivated by them and the produce is kept in a granary. During lean months paddy is given on loan to the needy Karbi families to be repaid with 50% interest after the next harvest. The paddy found to be excess of requirement is sold only to the Karbi families at 10% less than the prevailing market price. The sale proceeds are used for the improvement of village library, school building and approach road, etc.

The third type of grain bank is confined to the aged male members of a Karbi village. In this case also like the type II an assigned plot of land is cultivated by all the aged persons of the village and the produce is kept in a store constructed specially for this purpose. This bank serves as the co-operative credit society. Paddy of the bank is sold when the price goes up and the sale proceeds are given to the needy families on loan to be repaid with cent percent interest.

From the above description it could very well be commented that this traditional institution helped the people in times of need by providing food grains and as Bordoloi et al. (1987 : 67) contended, it helped to get rid of the unscrupulous village *mahajans*.

However, our field study which was conducted among the Karbis of Howraghat Development Block revealed the

gradual extinction of this important traditional institution. The villages of Sapong area, centre Bazar area and in some villages nearby Howraghat town did not have such grain banks. In most of the villages it had been found that the Karbi villagers already came under the clutch of non tribal people who forced them to alienate their lands under different systems viz., *Paikas, Sukti Bandhak, Khoi Bandhak, Mena and Adhiars* systems (Bordoloi, 1991 : 216-218). These systems virtually made the Karbi people refugee in their own lands and made them to live like paupers. This is really a very dreadful situation though we could see in the limited way while conducting our field study. It is feared that if this present trend of alienation of tribal land would continue then the Karbi society as a whole would suffer severely in its socio-economic development. We hope this point should be seen critically.

From the foregoing paragraphs it is becoming clear that no traditional institutions of the Karbi societies are functioning due to onslaught of modernisation process (mainly induced). As stated earlier, modernisation process is welcome but not at the cost of the people for whom this process is initiated to make their quality of life better, durable and enjoyable. That is why, the present authors are of the opinion that the traditional institutions of the Karbis should be viewed to act as catalytic agents for augmenting the process of development in the Karbi society.

The village council *Mei* should be revived in all Karbi villages and combining ten *Meis*, one inter *Mei* could be formed covering a particular geophysical setting. More particularly this inter *Mei* would include ten villages which are adjacent to each other. With the 73rd Amendment of

the Constitution the much discussed concept of devolution of powers to the grass root levels for making area specific developmental plans, execution of the same by the village people could be handled by this inter village *Mei*. As envisaged in the Assam Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 at least five thousand village people should be there for forming a village panchayat but that could possibly be met by this inter *Mei* as Karbi villages are thinly populated. However, considering the geophysical setting of the villages the District Council may rectify the new Panchayat Act and pass new Act for keeping less number of members instead of five thousand to form a village Panchayat. However, the procedures of electing the Presidents, Secretaries and Members should be elected as stated in the Panchayat Raj Act with necessary rectification of requiring the representation of less number of villages by each individual members and other office-bearers. The District Council should introduce this new concept of inter *Mei* for proper devolution of power in the development process and the monitoring authority should be the Development Block. If this could be done, the villagers would be able to identify themselves as Actors (in Parsonian sense) for their own economic development by chalking out the developmental plans of their own village settings to which they know better and for execution of the same necessary funding should be provided by the District Council.

The *Farla* or *Jirkedam* should be revived and like the previous village council inter *Farla* could be formed with necessary funding from the District Council to buy ecologically suitable agricultural farming machineries for mechanisation of agriculture in the villages. Inter *Farla* can act as Co-operative Farming Society which would be more

understandable and acceptable among the Karbi villagers. Of course, in this context, it may be mentioned here that one such Co-operative Farming Society named Centre Bazar Co-operative Farming Society was formed at Centre Bazar in the year 1988 and initially though it could attract people for co-operative utilisation of landholdings yet in latter years it lost its significance.

A proper anatomy should be made about loosing of significance of this society and this should be replaced with inter *Farla* or inter *Jirkedam* which should cover individual cultivable land holdings of a cluster of minimum five villages. This is necessary to make the inter *Farla* as viable institution to work in the Karbi setting. However, more numbers of villages can be included under inter *Farla* or inter *Jirkedam* if the agriculture lands are less in number for providing necessary modern facilities for agricultural operation. This will enable the individual Karbi cultivators to get rid of alienation of land under different systems as stated in the preceding paragraph.

The grain bank *Kerung Amej* should be revived side by side with the forming of inter *Farla*. However, this grain bank should not only receive grains through contribution of the villagers but also it should act as sale deposit of seeds, spare parts of agricultural machineries, diesel, etc., needed in agricultural operation in mechanized way. Like inter *Farla* this grain bank also should include five villages and this should be equipped with all the facilities as stated above, in which District Council's funding would be required so that farming operation through mechanization should not suffer from the non-availability of improved seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, spare parts and more importantly the

diesel to run agricultural machineries. Easy accessibility of required facilities through grain bank would help the mechanization of agriculture successful in Karbi village settings.

To conclude it may be stated that revival of traditional institutions of the Karbi society by infusing in them the new roles to be played as stated in the immediate preceding paragraphs would go a long way in modernising Karbi society. In this context, it is expected that the District Council would take the matter very seriously.

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VERSE NARRATIVES OF THE DIMASAS : A STUDY OF NATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

Nabin Chandra Sarma

(ONE)

The Dimasa tribe is an important branch of the great Boro group. They are culturally Indo-Mongoloid and linguistically belong to Tibeto-Burman family. Generally the term *Kachari* is also used to suggest various tribes such as Boro, Sonowal, Thengal, Dimasa and so forth. The Dimasas are still known as hills Kachari and even they were considered as a sub-tribe of the Kachari tribe till the middle part of the twentieth century. But later on they were considered as an independent tribe particularly in the Census Report of India, 1961. The bulk of the Dimasas have accepted Hinduism by the process of Sanskritization. Of course, very recently a few Dimasas have converted into Christianity due to the impact of the proselytizing zeal of the Christian missionary. According to the myth prevalent orally amongst them, they are the children of Bānglā Rājā who may be equated with Siva-Mahādeva. The Dimasas are mostly settling in the North Cachar Hills district. On the other hand, the Dimasa settlements are also found in the Karbi Anglong and the Cachar districts of Assam.

The etymological meaning of the term *dimâsâ* may be explained in these ways : *di* = water, *mâ* = big and *sâ* =

children, i.e. children of a big river. The Dimasa believe that they are the children of the river Dhansri or Dhansiri. After migration they used to settle on the banks of the river Dhansiri and thus they were known as Dimasa. The Kacharis of the Brahmaputra Valley are known as Bodo (or Boro) or Bodofisa, i.e., children of Bodofa. Similarly, the Kacharis settled permanently on the banks of the river Dhansri or Dhansiri call themselves Dimasa or Dimafisa. The Dimasas of the district of Cachar are also known as Barman (Bordoloi, 1984 : 247).

Both the patrilineal and the matrilineal system of descent are prevalent in the Dimasa societies. They determine their descent depending on the sex difference. As for example, a man primarily determines his descent from his paternal grandfather as well as concurrently from maternal grandmother. A woman primarily determines her descent depending on her maternal grandmother and at the same time from her paternal grandfather. So it is evident that the Dimasa descent system is a combination of matrilineal and patrilineal modes (Danda, 1978 : 42). Clan exogamy is an important feature of the Dimasas. They are strictly monogamous. The practice of polygamy is not in vogue. Of course, sequential polygamy is also not uncommon. The concept of lineage is not found in their societies. In the social organisation of the Dimasas, the family seems to be the strongest structural and functional unit.

(TWO)

Although the Dimasa language is not rich in written tradition nonetheless it is rich in oral tradition. Verse narrative or ballad is an important genre of oral tradition. The

Dimasa oral tradition may claim its uniqueness in respect of verse narratives or ballads. But out of a large number of ballads only seven ballads have been explored so far. These ballads may be classified into the following classes viewing the contents revealed in the body of these verse narratives, e.g.,

- (a) Historical : *Jinijâ Râji* and *Mâibângmâ Hâ-gâr-bâni* ;
- (b) Legendary : *Dishru* ;
- (c) Magical or supernatural or wonderous : *Snemduri* and *Amâluh-Dimâluh* ; and
- (d) Realistic : *Johâyâ*, *Hârifâ* and *Perbâlâ-Gângelâ*.

(a) Historical ballad

This class of ballad generally deals with historical events like enemy attack, cruel lords, stories about events that affected the life of local communities, episodes about national and social heroes and so forth. Such type of ballads may function as oral history and they may furnish material for written history.

In the ambit of the historical ballads of the Dimasas two ballads may be included, such as, *Mâibângmâ Hâ-Gârbâni* and *Jinijâ Râji*.

The Mâibângmâ Hâ- Gârbâni : This ballad narrates a historical event of the Dimasas which forced them to foresake Maibang, one of their capitals. The new invaders Ahom attacked the Dimasa Kingdom which resulted in the fall of Maibang and thus they were driven away from Maibang. The story-element of the ballad is no doubt weak, nonetheless an idea of the historical event may be traced. As such it is not lack of narrative elements.

A Dimasa king was lamenting being unable to restore Maibang from the possession of the Ahoms. He along with his subjects would not be able to stay at Maibang under the Ahoms. They were compelled to abandon Maibang, a capital so dear to them, a capital full of memorials of their forefathers. They would have to live in the vicinity of unknown communities. He could not protect Maibang even he failed to uphold the interest of his subjects. Here is a specimen :

“We are compelled to abandon Maibang
I could not protect the interest of my subjects
Where will we go now ?
We will never get a place like Maibang.
But we cannot stay here,
We will have to forsake Maibang.” (Duwara, 1988 : 135)

Jinijâ Râji : This ballad is also based on historical event. Tradition has it that once the Dimasa ruled over the entire south bank of the Brahmaputra river. The capital of their kingdom was situated near the present Naharkatiya. But the Ahoms subjugated their kingdom and eventually the Dimasas were driven back to the western bank of the river Dhansiri. Even they were forced to leave Dimapur by the Ahom military. The then Dimasa king shifted the capital of his kingdom to Maibang. But during the rule of Rudra Simha, the Ahom soldiers defeated the Dimasa king and thus they occupied Maibang. As a result, the Dimasa king had to flee to Khaspur.

The ballad was composed in the above mentioned historical setting. Like the first historical ballad, this ballad is also structurally loose and only a faint idea of the historical events may be guessed. The ballad reminds the Dimasas

in general to their past valour and glory and encourages them to stand unitedly to protect the age long tradition of the Dimasas. Here is a specimen :

“O my Dimasa people !
You are the worthy sons of the soil,
Don't forget the tradition of your grandmother ;
Don't embrace the foreigners' tradition.
O my Dimasa people !
Promise to follow the tradition of your forefathers,
And to restore your land.” (Barua, 1980 : 31)

(b) Legendary ballad

The legendary ballad aims to narrate a legend. A legend is a tale which has historic validity (Linda Degh, 1972 : 73). It may be considered as the archive of the pre-history of a people. The legend relates an extra-ordinary experience or event which is believed to be true. Linda Degh opines that the legend does not have a polished style, its frame and form do not co-ordinate narrative elements into a logical chain. Hence, the legend is extremely variable, reacting sensitively to local and immediate needs that modify and reformulate both the narratives and the messages they communicate. The legend, above all, is more local than the tale, more likely to develop local patterns in spite of its tendency to migrate and spread cross-culturally. It ranges from the simple communication of belief through various levels to the most intricate, multi-episodic narrative (Ibid).

The legendary ballad of the Dimasas encompasses only one ballad namely, *Dishru*. The theme of this ballad is

summarized below :

Hariram was a very powerful king of the Dimasas. Like other kings of the Dimasa land he wanted to proceed to dense forest for hunting wild elephants and horses. At that time his queen was pregnant. The king called on an astrologer to know about the sex of the would be child. The astrologer told him that a male child would bring fortune, on the contrary, a female child would bring misfortune. As such, the king advised his queen to nourish the child in a golden palanquine if she delivered a male child and to kill forth with if she delivered a female child. Thus, the king set out for hunting. There upon, the queen delivered a female child. The ministers advised her not to kill the infant. She did not kill the baby. The child was named after Dishru. Sixteen years rolled on. Dishru attained womanhood. King Hariram came back with his soldiers. He wanted to marry the girl being enchanted with her beauty. The queen disclosed the secrecy relating to the girl and told that Dishru no other than his own daughter. But the infatuated king turned a deaf ear to the advice of his wife rather he killed her thinking that the queen was the only impediment in between the king and Dishru. But being aware of the evil design of the father Dishru fled in midnight to Manipur. Thereafter nobody had seen her (Barua, 1980 : 37-50 ; 1981, 95-119). A stanza of the ballad is given below as a specimen :

“O queen who is She ?
So beautiful the girl is !
I shall have her as my queen.
Is she a young maid of the Asim (Ahom)
Or is a youth of the Thuru ?
No matter I shall marry her.” (Barua, 1980 : 40)

(c) **Magical or supernatural or wonderous ballad**

The ballad in which magical or supernatural or wonderous element predominates is called magical or supernatural or wonderous ballad. To some scholar magic is an essential part of a ballad. Observes Wimberly : "..... the ballads give no evidence of organised witch cults, which is a matter of some importance. Magic appears to be regarded as one form of traditional lore, to which any one from queen to peasant might have recourse in time of need" (1928 : 60). Further, mention may be made that magic in the ballads is thus rather homespun stuff, if it is not work by beings of supernatural quality and powers (Gerould, 1957 : 148).

Two ballads current in the oral tradition viz., *Snemduri* and *Amâluh-Dimâluh* may be termed as ballads of magic or supernatural or wonderous ballads, since magical or supernatural elements predominate in the context of these two ballads.

Snemduri : Snemduri was the youngest sister of seven elder brothers. She lost parents at her early childhood. Snemduri was brought up by her seven brothers. She attained womanhood. One day all the brothers went to a forest in search of wood to make a loom for their sister keeping her inside a closed door hut. She was instructed by them not to open the door until and unless she heard the call of her seven brothers. Thus they set out.

A wicked demon who resided near the homestead of Snemduri along with his sister wanted to marry Snemduri but he could not find out a good chance as she was always

well guarded by her elder brothers. The much awaited golden opportunity came to him. He then proceeded and requested Snemduri to open the door. But the girl refused vehemently to do according to the direction of the demon. There upon, the sister of the demon who was a witch could perform all deeds by her magical power. She requested Snemduri to open the door in the voice of her eldest daughter. The panic stricken girl opened the door quickly but having seen the demon instead of her brothers she got nervous. The demon closed the door and took away Snemduri.

After a while all the brothers came and requested her repeatedly to open the door. Even they made futile attempt to open the door. They could realize that Snemduri was taken away by the wicked demon. Being frustrated they committed suicide jumping into a burning fire. The death of all the brothers had delighted the demon. He came back along with Snemduri to the courtyard of the seven brothers and proposed to marry her. She wanted to play a trick. Snemduri directed the demon to fetch water from a nearby spring in a perforated bamboo tube. He obeyed the direction and proceeded. In that opportunity she decorated a mortar with beautiful dresses and ornaments and kept it at her loom and jumped into the same burning fire to save herself from the lust of the demon. The enraged demon thought that Snemduri was busy with weaving. With a view to devouring Snemduri he crashed the mortar in such a way that all his teeth got cracked and thus he breathed his last.

A fragment of the ballad is furnished overleaf.

"All the brothers meet with death
Surely Snemduri shall be mine."
The demon proposed thus,
Snemduri played a trick,
She directed the demon
To fetch water in a perforated bamboo tube
from a nearby spring.
The demon obeyed and thus proceeded.
She decorated a mortar with her costumes,
Kept the mortar at her loom
And jumped into the burning fire." (Barua, 1980 : 56)

Amaluh-Dimaluh : This ballad is also known as *Langlabdao-Harangdao* as it narrates the tragic death of *Langlabdao-Harangdao*, the hero of the verse narrative. The hero hailed from the royal clan known as *Langlabdao-hasnusa* and the locale of the ballad was *Maibang*, one of the capitals of the *Dimasa* kingdom.

Langlabdao-Harangdao passed his childhood days by playing with two little girls *Amaluh* and *Dimaluh*, who were the daughters of a witch. At the youth, *Langlabdao-Harangdao* fell in love with them. But the parents of the hero did not approve his marriage with *Amaluh* and *Dimaluh*. On the other hand, they chose a suitable bride. being jealous *Amaluh* and *Dimaluh* made a plan to take revenge on the hero by their magical power.

One day they persuaded *Langlabdao-Harangdao* with honeyed words to go to a dense forest. The hero could not refuse them. In the forest *Amaluh* and *Dimaluh* fervently requested the hero to bring flowers from a tall *Sago-palm* for their chignons. The hero climbed the tree accordingly.

There upon, *Amâluh* inflicted evil charms on the person of the hero :

"I am chanting these magical charms
Be affected *Langlabdao-Harangdao*
Be the figures of either hand merged into the stem.
Be the hair stuck with the leaves of the *Sago-palm*
Be the hands merged into the skin of the tree."

The person of the unfortunate hero thus stuck into the *Sago-palm*. The father of the hero along with his followers cut the tree, but they could not see the hero but could see only a tuft of the hero's hair. Then a pair of *myna* birds flew away from the fallen tree. *Amaluh* disappeared but *Dimaluh* committed suicide. Here is a specimen :

"O my dear *Amâluh-Dimâluh* !
The *Sago-palm* is very tall,
I cannot climb.
But at the cost of your love
I am climbing.
O my dear *Amâluh-Dimâluh*
What's wonder ! my hands merge into the stem,
My hair stick to the leaves of the *Sago-palm*
O my dear ! neither I can move nor can climb."

(d) **Realistic ballad**

This type of ballad reflects "a more or less realistic attitude to life and may describe ordinary affairs even love, occasionally. The marvellous hardly enters into them" (Goswami, 1970 : 51). A few such type of ballads are also found in the oral tradition of the *Dimasas*. Of these *Johaya*, *Harifa*, *Perbala-Gangela* are worth mentioning.

Johâyâ : *Johâyâ* was a young and handsome artist. He could sing and play on drums with superb perfection. Similarly he was proficient in catching fish. *Johâyâ* was loved by all for his extraordinary qualities. A young maiden endowed with youthful charm loved him. At that time the colonial rule of the British was expanded upto Chittagong. They took a plan to construct railway lines in that area. The officers entrusted to this work, were in dearth of labourers. Even they procured labourers from the hills region of Assam. *Johâyâ* was taken away forcibly by them as a labourer. He could not live happily at the unknown place. His mind and heart were always attracted by the enchanting panorama of the Dimasa land and the sweet memory of his beloved. *Johâyâ* had to suffer a lot, even he could not sing a song. Being disappointed he disappeared. His beloved was waiting for him with a high hope. She tried to solace her heart by singing tragic songs. A fragment of the ballad is given below as a specimen :

"*Johâyâ*, my beloved may come.
The beloved of *Johaya* comes out
She casts glances with love and passion around,
But she perceives none.
Again hearing the barking of dogs
She comes out, *Johâyâ* may come.
But sees nothing except a group of fishermen."

Hârifâ : The ballad entitled *Hârifâ* narrates a beautiful love-story. *Hârifâ* and *Dumâidi* are delineated as the hero and the heroin of this ballad respectively. The hero was a young merchant. He used to carry his merchandises by boat and sold his commodities at the village markets of the Dimasa land. One day he met a young girl named *Dumâidi*. At the

first sight they fell in love. Both the hero and the heroin wanted to marry each other. She took him to her father's house to have consent from her parents and seven brothers. But they flatly refused to accept *Hârifâ* as their son-in-law and insulted him. Being frustrated he proceeded towards the ford and started to row the boat. His sweetheart could not remain patiently but followed him and requested *Hârifâ* to take away her with him. At the first instance *Hârifâ* vehemently rejected the proposal of *Dumâidi*. But ultimately *Hârifâ* accepted her as his wife and both of them proceeded by a boat to the land of *Hârifâ*. Thus the ballad is ended with a happy union of the lover and the beloved. Here is a specimen :

Hârifâ proceeded by steering a boat.
Dumâidi ran through a bank of the river
"O my beloved *Hârifâ*, please listen to me."
"O my sweetheart *Dumâidi*
I have heard your request,
Please tell what's the matter?"
"O my beloved *Hârifâ*, please listen to me.
I am willing to dine with you in the same dish.'

Perbelâ-Gangelâ : This ballad tells a fascinated love-story. *Perbelâ*, a Dimasa youth loved *Gangelâ*, a Dimasa maiden more than his life. But one day being angry with beloved *Gangelâ* he set out to his own village. *Gangelâ* could not bear the pangs of separation with her would be husband. She made attempts to trace out *Perbelâ* with endless tears. But her attempts were futile. The people of the area could not remain aloof. They made a plan to bring *Perbelâ* back. At the request of the villagers he came back. The villagers solemnized the marriage ceremony of both *Perbelâ* and

Gangelâ. Thus, they again started *jhum* cultivation in their fields. Here is a specimen :

Water of the river Bâilâ flows.
Tear of Gangelâ also flows.
Water of the river Bâilâ has an end,
But the tear of Gangelâ has no end.

(Duwara, 1988 : 117-18)

(THREE)

Folklore particularly verbal art mirrors the native ethnography. The apparent meaning of a prose narrative is not the real meaning of this genre. Since, in the context of either prose-narrative or verbal narrative the unsaid is more important than what is said. As such, it is difficult to say that verbal art aims to give amusement only. Of course, amusement may be one of the multiple functions of verbal art. This genre of oral folklore may furnish ethnographic information of a particular tribe or community. It is a known fact that verbal art is a kind of reflection or native ethnography of the society in which it is prevalent. So it can be assumed that there is a direct relationship between society and its verbal art. Society being the primary factor in the relationship and verbal art appears to be secondary factor. As such, verbal art may furnish us direct information about a society in which it exists.

The prose narrative or the verse narrative of a given society is a text and it may 'reflect the modal or typical mental content of the people in a society ; these are data that deal.... directly with states of mind' (Kalin et al., 1966 :

570). According to Kalin the thematic content of either prose narratives or verse narratives is the thought system of that society, which can be best compared to ethnographic ratings. Again, the ethnographic ratings are nothing but the "description of the action or reality system" (Kalin et al., 1966 : 584-86). So it can easily be assumed that the natives describe ideal behaviour in their narratives" (Janson, 1977 : 277).

Colby tries to interpret the narratives from two aspects, e.g., (a) the behavioural model and (b) the psychological (psycho-analytic) approach. Under the aspect of the behavioural model, Colby observes that narratives may describe sanctions and prohibited behaviour or describe various types of useful behaviour and strategies (Colby, 1966a : 381). The narratives are created by the natives of a particular culture to present the ideal system of norms prevalent in the contemporary society. Colby says that narratives are a model for behaviour and as such will be more structured than actual behaviour (Colby, 1966b : 798). So, we can come to the conclusion that narratives are a reflection of the native society. Rightly does observe Boas : ".....we may expect that the dominant cultural interests are reflected in them (narratives, myths). The incidents mirror the life of the people and their occupations and social life may in part be reconstructed from these tales" (Boas, 1938 : 622).

The other aspect of Kolby's interpretation is psychological or psycho-analytic. To him a narrative "may function as a catharsis it may liberate one from the immediacy of his own situation" (Colby, 1966a : 381). The psycho-analytic approach is primarily based on the direct relationship between narratives and society.

The narratives particularly the verse narratives of the Dimasas may reflect their cultural mores, as such they may rightly be considered as the native ethnography of the Dimasas. As for example, it may be pointed to the *Dishru*, a wellknown verse narrative of the Dimasas. The narrative has mirrored a society in which polygamy was in vogue. Even a husband killed the first wife to pave the way for his second marriage. The social status of woman was inferior to male. Infanticide particularly female infanticide was customary in the Dimasa societies. This can be testified by the fact that king Hariram ordered his queen to kill the child if she delivered a female baby. The Dimasas believed in the prediction of astrologer. Hunting was popular even among the kings. They hunted elephants, horses and so on.

The father's incestuous infatuation to his young girl as narrated in the verse narrative entitled *Dishru* may be explained from the ethnographical points of view. The incestuous infatuation of the father towards his own daughter and daughter's attempt to resist her father by escaping herself from the palace - all these events may be explained in terms of the conflict between the patriarchal system and matriarchal order in which the matriarchal system is defeated. Originally the Dimasa society was matriarchal which was succeeded by authoritarian, patriarchal principles. The incestuous desire of the father to his daughter may again be explained from the Freudian points of view. Says Monkey-Kyrle "what Freud really had in mind was that all men inherit an innate, not an acquired disposition to incest, which under the conditions of almost every type of family organization will bring them inevitably into conflict with their fathers" (Monkey-Kyrle, 1930 : 192).

In the present we have severe taboos against incest and infanticide as well as parricide but these acts were stronger in the past. Because, primeval man must have been much more emotional and jealous, and less restrained in his pulses, than modern man (ibid).

The ballad entitled *Dishru* is also associated with the rain compelling rite current amongst the Dimasas. Belief has it that if the ballad is sung to the accompaniment of *muri* (a wind instrument) and *khâm* (drum) in the context of rain compelling rite rain will come. Moreover, it is also believed that being worried and disheartened Dishru left the palace and proceeded towards north and there she transformed herself into a big river. This river is known as Dhansiri still today.

The Dimasas follow the patriarchal social system. Male is the owner of property. Nuclear type of family is in vogue in their societies. Of course, joint family system is also not uncommon. A family runs in accordance with the direction of the head of the family. The mother of Dishru was killed at the instance of her husband. Similarly Dishru was compelled to forsake her house by her father. Hârifâ was rejected by the father of Dumâidi as a suitor of his daughter. In many cases, it is also seen that a young girl does not hesitate even to violate the directions of her father and elder brothers. Dumâidi not even violated the directions of her father and elder brothers but even accepted Hârifâ as her husband disregarding the patriarchal binding of the society. In the context of marriage clan exogamy was strictly followed and the act of violation was considered as incest. The parents of Langlâbdão-Hârângdão vehemently rejected to marry Amâluh and

Dimâluh as they were not reckoned in the same clan of Langlâbdâo-Hârângdâo. A legal marriage cannot be settled unless the social approval. In this context, approvals of the kinsmen and the kinswomen are also needed.

The practice of *jhum* cultivation was and is still popular among the Dimasas. During the cultivation and at the time of harvesting both marriageable young men and women sing songs full of love and yearning which give them an opportunity to meet and exchange their feelings and to choose their life partners. The ballad *Perbelâ-Gangelâ* may furnish such reflections of the Dimasa societies. The verse narratives mentioned above may give us a fair idea regarding the economic life of the Dimasas. The economic life is primarily based on agriculture. As they live in the hilly areas as such, they have to depend on *jhum*, i.e., shifting cultivation. Paddy and maize are the major food crops of the Dimasas. Besides they produce sugar-cane, pepper, bottle-gourd, pumpkin, cotton, banana and so forth. In addition to agriculture, food gathering, collection of forest products, raising the cattle, pig and poultry birds, spinning, weaving and practising of sericulture, fishing and hunting are important aspects of their economy. Terrace and wet cultivation are unknown to them. *Ju*, i.e., rice-beer, pork, areca-nut and betel-leaves are essential items in various contexts such as marriage ceremony, worships, social gatherings and so on.

The historical ballads may furnish information of their migration, settlement, political rivalry and battle, changing of the places of capital and so forth.

At the beginning of the ballad *Jinijâ-Râji*, prayers

have been offered to Mâdâidâo (= Siva) and Mâdâidi (= wife of Siva i.e., Pârvati). Both Mâdâidâo and Mâdâidi are traditionally enjoying exalted position in other ballads and traditional oral songs also. So it is logical to say that the Dimasas were and are still worshippers of these two deities. Besides they believe in different ghosts, spirits, demons and witches. Like the Misings, the Dimasas also considered Wednesday as the most auspicious day. The mother of Langlâbdâo-Hârângdâo had proceeded to settle the marriage of her son on a Wednesday.

Ballads like *Dishru*, *Snemduri*, *Amâluh-Dimâluh* and so forth may testify that spinning and weaving, cooking are requisite qualifications of an ideal bride.

Most of the ballads may give a clear picture of various beliefs and superstitions, rites and rituals current among the Dimasas. The dive of an otter and the rattles of *dâukangra* (i.e., a kind of bird) at the time of setting out, are considered as inauspicious.

Thus, the ballads of the Dimasas may cast significant light on various dimensions of their cultural life such as, ethnic composition of the population, language spoken, social structure, religions embraced, world-view, styles of art and so forth. Detailed and systematic study of this genre of verbal art would give a comprehensive picture of the native ethnography of the Dimasas.

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE LAND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT BY THE HILL KARBIS IN HAMREN SUBDIVISION OF KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT

Deben Saikia

ABSTRACT :

Natural gifts when utilised by human beings with their available tools and technology for their satisfaction, turn into resources. All human activities are concentrated around the resources. Extent and mode of resource utilisation of a particular locality determine the economic standard of the same.

The hilly section of Assam is inhabited by a number of tribal groups. Their standard of living is lower than the surrounding plains. As such, mode of resource utilisation is also primitive. This section possesses a substantial quantity of natural gifts but due to some inverse circumstances these are yet to be fully utilised. The recent governmental efforts to make a breakthrough to the adverse social, economic and geographical conditions face a number of hindrances. A proper qualitative study regarding the estimation of available wealths, methods followed by the population section concerned, prevailing culture of the society and ultimately formulation of suitable policies that can cope up with the existing values are the necessities that the situation demands. In this paper an attempt is being made to touch the above objectives for Hamren subdivision of Karbi Anglong district.

Hamren is one of the three subdivisions of the Karbi Anglong district of Assam. It covers a geographical area of 3,385 sq km., with a total population of 1,83,396 as per 1991 Census. This region is the north-east extension of Meghalaya

plateau which is an integral part of Deccan plateau of South India, separated by Garo-Rajmahal gap. Topographic condition is very uneven due to the presence of alternate low hills, leaving only a little fringe of plains to the north and north-east, formed due to the erosional action of the Kopili and its different fingers. Endowed with tropical climate this region is the homeland of a numerous ever-green and deciduous varieties of trees.

This region is traditionally occupied by a number of tribal groups of which Karbis are dominant. The concept of environmental determinism can be well recognised - the thoughts, beliefs and practices are strongly shaped by the physiographic factors that have compelled this region to remain backward as compared to the neighbouring plains.

As a tribe of hill region, like the other parts of the country as well as the world, they sustain upon the agricultural activities by following their traditional method. Their food habit is also supplemented by collected roots, leaves and fruits from the nearby forests. At the same time they manage their habitat knowingly or unknowingly their confines.

The status of 'partially excluded area' as introduced by the British Government and their 'close door policy' to these areas deserve considerable importance in respect of preservation of their tradition and culture.

In recent years a number of departments and scholars are engaged with an attempt to unearth different dimensions of the tribals. Though late, these analyses have created a platform for further study and implementation of

policy formulated by the departments.

In this paper an attempt is made to focus some light on their traditional land resource management and the new position in response to the introduction of new policies especially formulated for this region. In this connection, both land and forest endowments of this region are included here within land resource group.

TRADITIONAL MODE OF RESOURCE MOBILISATION

(1) MANAGEMENT OF LAND: The day-to-day lifestyle of the individuals and the community as a whole of the Karbi tribe is shaped largely by nature. Natural gifts when utilised by the mankind for their benefits with their cultural equipments turn to resource. Karbis are the children of nature. Their philosophy, custom, tradition and the societal values develop as a result of interaction with the soil. Before establishing this locality as their homeland they already acquainted with the technique of shifting cultivation which they are supposed to have learnt from a Kuki man. Close man-land relationship is indispensable in this method of cultivation.

The land area which they consider to be their own, actually belongs to the entire village community. It restricts the growth of individual sentiment. The headman and the elderly people of the village usually select the sites for felling and burning of vegetative cover for the purpose of *jhuming*. Initially this practice necessitates the shifting of their settlement, but it is restricted by some boundaries, defined with some permanent features. The reasons behind this

can be summarised as follows :

1. Originally they are hill dwellers, that is why, they ultimately encroach upon the hilly tracts of the region and select this form of livelihood.
2. More than 90% of the region is covered with hills. Very little amount of plains land is available for other forms of cultivation. Further, the equipments in their possession are also very crude and primitive.
3. Archaean granite and basalt rocks cover a large portion of the surface. Thin soil formation in areas devoid of rocks favours only this mode of cultivation.
4. Sparse distribution and less number of population also create suitable atmosphere for the same.
5. Tropical climate favours the quick regeneration of vegetation and dense growth of deciduous and evergreen forests that increase the organic soil nutrients.
6. Almost all the agricultural products that they need in their daily life can be accrued from the same field.
7. Communal feelings and the sentiment of mutual help have driven off the necessity of private property and the likes. This has shaped their customs and traditions.
8. Their culture grows with the development of shifting cultivation.

Consideration of the above points helps to arrive at the conclusion that the environmental, economic and social factors provide them with extra advantage to make a stronghold with the soil. The portrait of shifting cultivation is the sole form of land resource management within the society.

The land revenue system was absent within the Karbi kingdom and a nominal share was offered to the ruling

family (the King of the traditional monarchical system known as *Lindokpo*) as a sign of obedience and honour to the King. The members of the ruling family, usually distributed almost in all the prominent settlements, have the responsibility to gather the offering and despatch it to the Capital. The actual time duration of the system that prevails within this community is not known. But it is proved that during the reign of Ahom King Pratap Singha (1603 - 41 AD) the Karbis managed their habitat and settled themselves well. Their rich culture and tradition were also recognised by the British administrators who let them maintain the status quo by declaring this region as 'partially excluded area'. The same principle was also followed by the Sub Committee of Constituent Assembly (1947) at the advent of Independence. It decided to rank this area under the Sixth Schedule and offered some provisions to help maintain their tradition, custom and scope for self-government.

(2) MANAGEMENT OF FORESTS : Like all the other tribal groups of the world the Karbis also have no such definite tradition to preserve or conserve this precious forest resource. Virtually, during those days there was no idea as to what is degradation or economic use of the resource which was further devalued by abundance of species.

Materials for construction of their houses are solely forest products. Wood, bamboo, cane and thatch, etc., are used to build platform, walls and covering of roofs of their houses that are usually constructed at the slope of the hills. The Karbis are expert in handicrafts. They make necessary items from the forest products like bamboo, cane, etc., for their day-to-day and social use with extreme efficiency. The practice is not confined to a particular section only, but

almost all the family members use to do it. Traditional medicines are collected from the nearby forests by the experts of the community that are used in various types of diseases. The experts recognise the species with medicinal quality and plant them in their homesteads. It is supposed that there was no provision for preserving the forest areas as 'Mrigayaban' (Hunting forest) for the ruling family. Their culture supports that they prefer the standing dense forest for habitation because it provides suitable hiding shelter for their houses as well as villages, so that these are not easily exposed to the enemies. Some of their social customs seem to be interesting as the management of forest resource is concerned. Karbi social custom prohibits the felling of mango and jackfruit trees, they believe it to be unlawful. There is provision for penalty if anybody cuts these trees without prior permission of the village authority concerned, because they believe that their King at the time of birth took these fruits into his mouth. Though there is no scientific base behind such belief it can be accepted that the products of these trees supplement their foodstuff to some extent, and unconsciously they follow the forest preservation policy. Another superstition prevalent among the people of Timung clan (*Kur*) is that their geneology is related to a special species, locally known as *Sikagomari* and there is prohibition of cutting this variety of tree. The community also regards the *peep*le tree as precious one which is also a figure of the same concept.

The practice of community and individual hunting is prevalent among the Karbis. Boar, hare, etc., are killed when they are abundant during the three prominent periods of the year. This is specially done at the time of the germination of seeds at the *jhum* field, immediately

after rainfall and burning of forests, when there is plenty of growth of new soft grass. Regarding the tiger, a rare species, they have an interesting speculation. Attack of a tiger on any member is regarded as a sign of great sin, who is not fit for survival in this heavenly world. Further, felling or clearing of trees are strictly restricted in the areas where tigers use to live.

The points discussed above and other customs of the community support the idea that traditional land and forest management procedures are well balanced in the prevalent political, economic and social standard of the community. In a society like that of the Karbis, where necessities of life are minimum, mutual help and superstitions dominate the scene, one cannot expect more developed concepts than the prevalent ones. Though there are some drawbacks within the system that have existed, one cannot blame the community. At present also they are not able to get rid of the drawbacks of the environment.

THE NEW CONCEPT

The traditional and old concepts of the Karbis have changed a lot with the changing features of economy, politics, social and environmental conditions. Spread of education, diffusion of new innovations, policy formulation and implementation by the authority concerned, etc., have modified their tradition, culture and customs to some extent. Shifting cultivation and rational treatment of the vegetative cover have become a great concern to the social workers, politicians, policy makers, young and elite class of the society and ultimately to general public. Economic development with the utmost use of available natural resources

is now the prime objective of the local government. Environmental degradation stands in its ultimate position. Increase of population due to natural birth and influx has made the situation worse. Experts and planners have evolved new devices for controlling *jhum*. The once popular system is now regarded as most destructive form of cultivation in terms of soil erosion, forest degradation, low productivity, enhancing flood situation and ultimately the environmental imbalance. The rise of the concept of private property as a result of cadastral survey in this hilly region has not only modified the traditional customs but also lessened the traditional bindings.

In this context we must view the problem from a new dimension. Some of the points noted earlier relate to the fact that the hilly and uneven terrain, climate, insufficient capital and tools, little scope for extension of plains land for wet cultivation and application of modern inputs like machineries, irrigation, chemical fertilizers, etc., restrict modernisation attempt of this principal sector of economy that provides sustenance to more than 85% of the total population.

The result of the survey conducted by Assam Remote Sensing Department in 1992 clearly shows that the area and number of total population engaged in shifting cultivation are gradually showing an upward trend in spite of constant efforts to regulate *jhum*. National Agricultural Commission (1976) reports that in the Karbi Anglong district 4.15 lakh hectares of land is under shifting cultivation involving 45,600 tribal families, a larger section of which belongs to the Hamren subdivision. Reduction of *jhum* cycle though regarded as bad to the soil and environment, the burning

of forest increases soil nutrients to a great extent. Burning of vegetation increases soil pH 5.10 to 5.50 ; potassium 210 to 510 kg/ha and calcium exchange 7.15 to 9.46 meg% (Borthakur et al., 1983). The most important point to consider in this respect is that rituals, traditions and customs of the Karbi society are intimately related to *jhum*. *Jhuming* can be regarded as culture to the Karbi society.

The other side of the picture is different. Increase of population reduces the *jhum* cycle from 8-10 yrs to 3-5 yrs. Loss of soil cover with vegetation is the main drawback of this system. The soil erosion under different systems of cultivation as reported by various authors is shown below :

<u>Land use system</u>	<u>Soil loss (tones/hac)</u>	<u>Reference</u>
1. Shifting cultivation	30.2 to 170.2	Singh et al. (1980)
2. Buny method	40.0 to 50.0	Singh (1981)
3. Pineapple along slope	24.0 to 62.6	Ghose (1976)
4. Homestead areas	upto 67.2	Singh & Singh (1981)
5. Natural bamboo forest	0.04 to 0.52	Singh & Singh (1981)

Though the above figures reflect a higher loss of soil under shifting cultivation, nature and structure of ground determine it to some extent, which is applicable for this region. But the compound effect of *jhum* fields with homestead shifting increases the figure to an unbearable extent. So different long and short term measures are taken to motivate the concerned population towards a different dimension. The local government from its initiation formulated some of the attempts to control the shifting cultivation. Mention of some of them will not be out of place.

(1) The Mikir Hills (Land and Revenue) Act 1953 provides for management of land and assessment and collection of land revenue within the jurisdiction of the present Karbi

Anglong District Council.

(2) The Mikir Hills District (Transfer of Land) Act 1959 is very important for the management of land as it provides means for protecting and promoting the interest of the scheduled tribes (Hills) on land.

(3) The Karbi Anglong District (Land Reforms) Act 1979 makes provision to reform the mortgage and *paikas* system of the district, the system which benefitted mainly non tribals. The hoe-tax and the *Sangkhazana* (House Tax) systems for the *jhum* plots and houses have also been eradicated with this Act.

(4) The Mikir Hills District (*Jhuming*) Regulation 1954 prohibits the shifting of the villages from the present sites without previous permission of the Executive Committee of the District Council. This regulation also noted for fixation of village boundaries in the hills which were absent previously. This regulation also provides that the rotation, period of *jhuming* and the area cultivated by an individual, etc., will be determined by the Executive Committee. So, it deprives of the village council from the selection of *jhum* sites. Any contravention to the regulation will be required to pay upto Rs. 500/- as penalty.

(5) The Mikir Hills District (Forest) Act 1957 is most important for the management of forests. Besides reserve forest and state reserve forest this Act makes provision for District Council's proposed reserve forest. Collection of minor forest products, burning of forests, trespassing or damage by felling of trees are also strictly prohibited. A penalty of Rs. 500/- is charged for violating the provisions of the Act.

Besides these Acts formulated for the resource management and well-being of the society a number of new schemes are also introduced to change the feature of land and forest utilisation. Some of them are :

1. The model village scheme was introduced during 1964 to motivate the *jhumias* to settled agriculture by providing a household water supply facility and plains land for wet cultivation with an amount of 5 *bighas* per family.

2. As an alternative to *jhuming* coffee and rubber plantation scheme was introduced by the Assam Plantation Crops Development Corporation (APCDC) which was constituted in the year 1974. In this district altogether 12 estates (coffee = 5 nos., rubber = 7 nos.) have been started by the Corporation.

3. With the objective of rehabilitation of *jhumia* families to settled cultivation the composite project was introduced during 1974-75 for the welfare of the *jhumias*.

4. Integrated *Jhumia* Development Programme (IJDP) was introduced during 1986-87. To preserve ecology and environment diverting *jhumias* to settled means, building up of economic strength of the family, involvement of local tribals in all the stages of the project and above all, all-round development of the practitioners are the main objectives of the IJDP.

An evaluation of the schemes stated above shows that the model village and composite project schemes face a stiff non co-operation from the *jhumias*. There are many loopholes of the failure of the schemes. Inability to touch

the ground level of the society, lack of proper study and knowledge of the policy makers, non-familiarity with the social custom and tradition of the schemes, poor infrastructural facility of the region, etc., are the main reasons of the failure of the schemes. The other schemes viz., Coffee and Rubber Plantation and Integrated *Jhumia* Development Programme, though seem to be partially successful, they are not achieved to the extent of being supplementary to the prevailing system. Because only a small section of the society, especially from the educated section shows some interest in these projects. Further only a few estates are not sufficient as alternative.

CONCLUSION

The traditional resource management scene of the subdivision is dominated by *jhum* cultivation, customs and habits of the society. *Jhuming* shows the responses of the society to available resource. During the earlier days their traditional resource management system was well balanced with nature, when a large part of the area was covered with forest and the number of population was low. Above all, the necessities of the society were limited. The local environment shaped their lifestyle and no question of economic development arose.

With the spread of the concept of economic development the scene turns a lot. The new generation with a motive to change their economic structure, specially after gaining the political power in hand, has attempted a lot for alternative and extensive use of natural resources as a means to change the feature. In this area where no plains land is available they have to search for some alternative

means by which the people still practising *jhum* can be provided with facilities and motivated off from their practice. They are now in a triangular form of problems viz., continuation of *jhum* which is only a self-sustained activity or even low, will not help to economic development ; full scale and indiscriminate use of available resources (land and forest) will lead to drastic damage to the environment which is worst of all ; and drive towards a higher level of economic development.

This region is devoid of any valuable mineral resources except land and forest (in the form of soil, sand, rocks, timber, fuel wood, bamboo, cane, medicinal creepers and other minor forest products). They are the main source of revenue for functioning of their local government. The National Forest Policy 1952 states that as much as 60% of the total area in the hills should be covered with forest to maintain ecological balance. Now this subdivision with a mere 54% of land with forest cover classified as (i) State Reserve Forest - 129.27 sq. km. (ii) District Council Reserve Forest - 138.60 sq. km. (iii) Unclassed State Reserve Forest - 469.24 sq. km. (iv) Proposed Reserve Forest - 35.26 sq. km. (Total = 1737.47 sq. km.) clearly indicates that it is below the accepted norm. Afforestation activities brought another 1384 sq. km. of area upto 1991. The statistics of 1991 shows that the forest products are reduced to a half during the last three years i.e. 1989-91 e.g., roundwood from 1449.48(000) M³ to 778.31(000)M³, firewood from 15-61 (000)M³ to 160(000)M³. It is only a Government account. The unlawful and unaccounted exploitation will manifold the figure that shall give us the actual picture of enhanced destruction to this resource. In this respect some suggestions can be offered for proper

maintenance of the land resources.

- (a) Introduction of horticultural crops at different levels of *jhum* field will minimise the loss of soil. For example, there may be natural vegetation at the upper level of the plots, *jhum* crops at the next strip ; pine apple, etc., at the third and bamboo plantation at the lower level may give a profound result.
- (b) No drastic step should be taken to eradicate *jhum*. Such attempt may become a sentimental issue, because their culture is interwoven with it. Thus the objectives should be only to reduce the strain.
- (c) Restriction upon *jhum* plots should be imposed. The sites having less than 45° slope may be allowed for utilisation.
- (d) Use of chemical fertilizers or organic manures and high yielding varieties of seeds may extend the period of *jhum* cycle. This can be done with the help of extension service.
- (e) The hoe tax or *Sangkhazana* which was withdrawn should be imposed again, so that the extent of clearing is reduced a little. However, it may not be actually possible.
- (f) A geological and pin-point socio-economic survey is urgently necessary for the assessment of the resources and a strong data base.
- (g) Selective cutting of mature trees and successive

afforestation activities can maintain the vegetation well.

- (h) Development of infrastructural facilities in the forest areas like road maintenance, etc., and accessibility to market of the minor forest produce will help both the forest and the society concerned.
- (i) Popularisation of less labour and cash gaining practices e.g., poultry farming, pig rearing, bee keeping, etc., and pisciculture at the marshy areas of the hilly section will lessen the strain on land.
- (j) Plantation crops like rubber, coffee, citronella, etc., should be introduced on small farm basis so that every family can maintain each farm and get the return easily.

The above measures are considered as some of the alternative means to maintaining the natural resources of the region at the present context. The plans for resource utilisation and economic development of the region should be taken on long and short term basis. As the group concerned is the child of nature, every policy should touch the base level of the society. The policy should be oriented towards land and forest. A single alternative will not be sufficient but a bunch of measures based on inter disciplinary approach can collectively reduce the strain and help to change the system. Proper policy formulation and good will of the Government are highly essential. The local government have to do a lot in this respect.

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USE OF TRADITIONAL SPIRIT OF THE PEOPLE OF THE HILL AREAS OF ASSAM FOR THEIR DEVELOPMENT

Ananda Chandra Nath

ABSTRACT

Traditional institutional system imparting education among the Ao Nagas may be grafted to the traditional system - *Jirkedam / Terang* among the Karbis of Karbi Anglong and *Nodrang* among the Dimasas of North Cachar Hills as an experiment to improve their literacy. This will go a long way in changing the attitudes of the present-day Karbi and Dimasa youths towards modern life and development. Thus, it will be easier to bring the two little known and backward tribal communities to the mainstream of national life and ultimately to the global society.

The scheduled tribes have not made any appreciable headway in the literacy and education in comparison to other people despite many opportunities and welfare measures provided by the Government. Article 45 of the Constitution of India guarantees free and compulsory education to all the children upto the age of 14 years. Article 46 also ensures the promotion of the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections, mainly the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes and also to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitations. In order to grant educational facilities for the scheduled tribes, the Government has been making various efforts to education by extending educational institutions,

schools, hostels, free distribution of books, uniforms, reservation of seats in higher educational institutions and other ancillary benefits and a number of scholarship schemes.

The developmental programmes of any society abiding in the secluded area are to be broadened to accommodate the things like conservation and preservation of indigenous institutions which may be effectively utilized as the medium of their change at the grass root level. A favourable outcome can be obtained for tribal development only by accepting and involving the people themselves and indigenous institutions in formulation and execution of various plans and schemes at the micro level of that society.

Changes occur continuously in culture with the progress of time in response to changes in the physical and social environment. History and tradition are corollary which can be regarded as important documents to identify a particular tribe.

The traditional institutions of the tribes helped to maintain the emotional bonds among their kinsmen. In most of the North-east tribes changeable trend is being noticed in their traditional institutions which would lose their identity in the near future and more precisely it will never come to its original or initial existence.

In this paper a broad objective is made to project the traditional institutions which helped to maintain integrity and solidarity in the tribal societies, mainly among the Dimasa Kacharis living in the Hill Areas of

Assam and to suggest measures for revival of dying traditional institutions.

The Karbis and Dimasa Kacharis belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The highest concentration of the Karbis is found in the district of Karbi Anglong while some of their brethren have settled in some pockets of adjoining districts of Morigaon, Nagaon, Kamrup, Golaghat and North Cachar Hills of Assam. Moreover, their settlements are sparsely found in Nagaland and Khasi & Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. The main concentration of the Dimasa Kacharis is found in the district of North Cachar Hills. Apart from their main habitat a small group is found in the Nagaon, Karbi Anglong and Cachar districts of Assam and also in Dimapur of Nagaland.

Both the tribes, the Karbis and Dimasa Kacharis have their own traditional institutions. The *Mei* is the primary unit of the Karbi traditional institution which maintains law and order in the village and ensures peace amongst the Karbi people, and the *Salis* is the traditional organisation of the Dimasa Kacharis which is meant for village administration with multifarious activities of their own but both the institutions are village council. The importance of the village council *Mei* indeed lost its function and activities due to the present change. Most of the individuals virtually prefer to go to the courts according to their will for getting better justice provided by the legal laws which are codified and written one instead of unwritten customary laws based on village council.

The bachelors' dormitory is called *Terang* or *Farla* or *Jirkedam* by the Karbis and *Nodrang* by the Dimasa

Kacharis. *Jirkedam* and *Nodrang* are the two social institutions which are, more precisely, the educational centres for the youths of the village to achieve manhood with dignity. However, in the context of *Jirkedam* Das (1993 : 13) comments, ".... the future Karbi generations will be quite at dark about the manifold activities of this institution unless the District Council authority comes forward to undertake certain positive measures for revival of the dormitory in some form or other considering its glorious ancient past, in toto."

Except the office bearers the functions of the *Risomar* (youth club) and the *Jirkedam* are more or less similar. The former is usually found in the plains areas of the district while the latter is mainly restricted to the hill areas particularly in the Hamren subdivision. It takes keen interest in their traditional dances, music, games and sports. The *Hangsao*, one of the youth associations, is an economic institution of the Dimasa Kacharis. The main function of this institution is to help the people in completing works in the agricultural fields. Whatsoever amount of remuneration is received or collected, goes to their joint account and later on, they spend it in the celebration of *Bushu* festival. At present this institution is gradually diminishing to a considerable extent.

Apart from these institutions the *Kerung Amei* - the indigenous institution is prevalent among the Karbis. *Kerung Amei* is nothing but a grain bank. The main function is to preserve paddy in the granary and to provide assistance to the needy people of the village particularly during non-harvesting period against interest. Das (1993 : 14) has clearly mentioned about the main object and function

of three types of grain banks prevalent among the Karbis.

In the first type each family of the village is member of the institution and has to contribute 40 kg of paddy immediately after completion of harvest. The total amount of paddy is preserved in the granary (*Apuru*). The needy or poor families can collect the required quantity of paddy on the condition of 50% interest that would be paid in kind along with the capital after the next harvest.

In the second type the adult boys of the village cultivate paddy in a specific plot of land and the production thus obtained is preserved in a granary. During the lean season necessary amount of paddy is given to the needy person on loan against 50% of interest while the surplus quantity is sold to the village people normally at a discount of 10% of the ongoing market price. The amount is deposited to the post office or bank. Later on, they utilise the accumulated amount for development of school building, village library and approach road, etc.

The third type of grain bank is confined to the adult male members of the village. All families of the village are its members. A suitable plot of land is cultivated by them and the produce is preserved in a granary. As soon as the price of the paddy goes up they sell the entire quantity and give the sale proceeds to the needy families on loan which is to be repaid with 100% interest.

Such type of institution is prevalent in the village Gossaigaon near Bijni. The village is mainly inhabited by the Bodo Kacharis. The institution extends help to the needy families of the village particularly during the lean season.

Moreover, it renders services to develop infrastructural facilities such as road, bridge, etc., in and around the village. Similar example of assertion of the community over individual interest is common in almost all the tribes of North East Region. For instance, in Kamlerthabi in Manipur the clan organizations are supporting young students for attaining higher education and the villagers are pooling the resources together to run a high school and a college (Roy Burman, 1990 : 158).

Except in few cases the grain banks are not functioning effectively among the Karbi society. It has been observed in most of the Karbi villages that the non tribal people like *Mahajans* or shopkeepers engulf the tribal people by alienating the tribal land, under different systems viz., *Paikas, Sukti Bandhak, Khoi Bandhak, Mena and Adhiar*. The functioning and popularity of these traditional institutions are virtually diminishing to such an extent that the Karbi people come under the clutch of non tribal people.

Similar examples have also been observed among the Dimasa Kacharis of the North Cachar Hills district of Assam.

The *Jirkedam* among the Karbis is a pile dwelling house and is built in a place of the village which is easily accessible from all corners of the village. Generally it is built in a mid point which is more communicable for the village settings. At the age of 10-12 years the boys become eligible for the *Terang / Jirkedam* membership until their marriage. It is an educational institution which teaches each and every member the rich traditional heritage and gives training in agriculture i.e., how to make the agricultural implements

that are used in slashing and burning the jungle to prepare the land for *jhum*/shifting cultivation. The younger members help the elder ones and they must have to learn the traditions from the elder members who render all social services to the villagers and also to the individual families, if needed, at any circumstances, i.e., helping the poor, helpless and old people, destitute person, etc.

The *Nodrang* among the Dimasa Kacharis is constructed by the young boys at the centre of the village settings which is easily communicable from all corners of the village after giving assent by the adult people of the village. Each boy of the village after attaining the age of 12 / 13 years becomes eligible for the *Nodrang* membership. There is no particular ceremony or formality to entering into a *Nodrang* for the first time. According to the age the members are divided into senior and junior groups, the latter being always obedient and obsequiously submissive to the former. In olden days the youngfolk prepared the arms and ammunition and they guarded the village against the enemy as a defence party.

Same type of institution is prevalent among the Aos of Mokokchung district in Nagaland which is known as *Ariju* or *Arichu* and *Tzuki* where the young menfolk and womenfolk use to sleep at night. The members of the *Ariju* are divided into five groups according to age, as *METAM SANGRR* (11 to 15 years), *MUIEN SANGRR* (16 to 19 years), *MUPONG SANGRR* (20 to 23 years), *KOSHA SANGRR* (24 to 26 years) and *RIONG SANGRR* (27 years plus). The *Ariju* is an educational traditional institution to carry on the rich heritage through different kinds of training. Each member of the *Ariju* is put to various tests to ascertain his capability to perform

the function according to the rules of the *Morung*. The *Ariju*, nowadays, has lost its importance and usefulness as guarding which was its main object against the slaughtering or head hunting in the village in bye gone days and it is defunct in the modern continuum.

It gives the pleasure to highlight from my own field experience that the present day activities are one of the unique and the finest careing services rendered by the *Ariju* of the Ao tribe. Those boys who opt for higher education or go out for different educational lines cannot go through the *Ariju* life. So, the practice of having such *Ariju* life virtually is frowned but in some cases they use as the boys' hostels in the first stage. During this period they undertake education as other school going pupil besides their normal *Ariju* life. They receive all sorts of educational facilities from the authority which helps the boys in both ways.

The tribal villages located in the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts are small in size and scattered miles apart. Hence it is not possible to establish school in each tiny village. Therefore, an experiment may be conducted by grafting the traditional institution *Ariju* of the Ao Nagas to the traditional institutions *Jirkedam* and *Nodrang* of the Karbis and Dimasa Kacharis respectively in order to improve the level of literacy among them.

To conclude it can be stated that the traditional and modern institutions play important roles among the tribal societies. So, the various development programmes at the grass-root level should be planned and implemented so that the indigenous institutions along with the modern institutions could be preserved effectively.

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NODRANG : ITS RELEVANCE TO DEVELOPMENT

Lakshi Kanta Muchahary

ABSTRACT

Nodrang is a traditional institution of the Dimasa Kacharis living in the North Cachar Hills district of Assam. The young boys constitute it and learn the skills of their ancestor from the senior ones. The skills relate to handicrafts especially of cane and bamboo. The skills on beating *Kharam* and whistling of the *Muri* and the *Muri Wathisa* are taught here. Various sports activities are carried out and strength of the youth is tested through various means. Many unwritten legends are narrated to the younger ones.

Decisions are taken up to increase its activities which are of various nature, viz., co-operation and humanitarian. The jungles are cleared for cultivation as well as the roadside jungles are cut. The *Nodrang* boys extend their services to the widow and helpless weaker section of the society by erecting their dwelling house as well as of clearing jungle for *jhum* cultivation. At the call of the village authority, the boys extend their services too. They watch the village and prepare themselves at any cost to face the time of adversary.

Proper utilisation of the services of *Nodrang* can certainly augment the trend of development. The local authority should take sincere effort for its development.

INTRODUCTION

Nodrang is a traditional institution of the Dimasa Kacharis. Its existence can be found still in the Dimasa villages of the North Cachar Hills district of Assam. *Nodrang*

is a bachelors' dormitory. It is constituted by the young boys of a village. To constitute it, prior consent is, of course, necessary from the elderly people of the village. It is a place of cultural activities of the Dimasas. The young boys devote time for beating *Kharam* (drum) and playing the *Muri* (flute made of *Kholosi* tree) and the *Muri Wathisa* (flute made of bamboo). Moreover, the young boys acquaint themselves with various types of dances. *Nodrang* is a place of learning handicraft works also. Danda (1978 : 114) states : 'A few of them are always industrious and spend their time in weaving baskets and mats.' In *Nodrang* the young boys learn to split bamboos for making various needful things of the community. *Sangkhon*, *Maijay*, *Khamflu*, *Longkhai*, *Dikhangra*, *Khaillem*, *Longkhaidu* are most essential things. The young boys learn to make these articles in the *Nodrang*. Furthermore, *Nodrang* is like a watchman of the Dimasa villages. Nirupama Hagjer mentions that in ancient time the youths, prepared with arms and ammunition used to sleep at *Nodrang* just like a village defence party. If unfortunately enemy attacked the village, they would immediately inform the villagers so that they could manage to run away from the village. If unable to run away, the people, irrespective of age and sex, would fight against the enemy. Another important function of *Nodrang* was that the youth has to keep constant vigil against the sudden attack of the wild animals in the village. They had to kill or drive away the animals by hook or by crook.

Nodrang is a male dominated institution. Only the young boys of the village can be members of it. Neither a married young boy nor a young girl can be its member. Except for special occasions, females are not allowed to attend the *Nodrang*.

SIZE OF NODRANG :

Nodrang is of different sizes. Depending upon the availability of young boys in the village, the size of *Nodrang* is determined. If a village has a large number of young boys, the size of *Nodrang* will be of big size. On the other hand, a village having a few number of young boys will have small size of *Nodrang*. Danda (1978 : 113) opines : 'It is a long house having sleeping arrangements for the bachelors.'

To constitute a *Nodrang*, nowhere, the required number of the young boys has been mentioned. It has been observed that a reasonable number is necessary to constitute it by which activities of *Nodrang* can be carried out effectively. If the number of young boys of a village is not adequate, the constitution of *Nodrang* may be avoided so that the dignities and status of *Nodrang* remain safe and unblemished.

The size of *Nodrang* is, therefore, meant to accommodate its members. Large number of members have large size house while the small number of members have small size house.

THE MODE OF CONSTRUCTION

It has already been mentioned that the size of *Nodrang* varies from village to village. After obtaining consent from the elderly persons of the village, the young boys take up steps to construct the house. Danda (1978 : 113) states : 'It is usually situated at the centre of the village.' Das (1993 : 18) mentions : 'The bachelors' dormitory which is known as *Nodrang* among the Dimasas, is constructed

by the young boys in a suitable place within the village.' An elderly person who once regularly attended *Nodrang* has stated that the site of selection in order to select a *Nodrang* is emphasised on suitability. It is selected in such location of the village so that villagers are kept away from getting disturbances viz., sleepless night, frequent awakening of the babies. Also conveniency of *Nodrang-goers* is taken into consideration at the time of site selection. The building of *Nodrang* is constructed to accommodate its members comfortably. It is constructed in such location of the village which appears to be an ideal site. The doors of *Nodrang* are kept systematically - one will be on its entrance and the other will be on the backside of it. A big piece of wood is placed in front portion of the *Nodrang*. It is called *Khamding*, the size of which ranges from five feet and above. If the *Nodrang* gets big number of members, the *Khamding* will be placed accordingly to suit the strength. In fact, it signifies the strength of the young boys of a *Nodrang* of a village. It serves as blockade to the *Nodrang*. One has to jump over it in order to enter into the *Nodrang*. One of the elements for selection of the members to *Nodrang* is the strength required for jumping over the *Khamding*. However, it is exempted in case of a cripple boy. Upon the *Khamding*, *Nodrang-goers* sit and relax. Moreover, the people of the village use to sit on it at the time of attending meeting or enjoying dance performances on the courtyard of the *Nodrang*. The *Khamding* has other utilities also. Because of it, one cannot easily enter into the *Nodrang*. The wild animals like wolf, fox, bear, etc., cannot easily harm the inmates of the *Nodrang* at night.

ITS PROPERTIES

In a *Nodrang*, the young boys of the village make

their bed attaching to the wall of the house. The beds are made, out of split bamboos, raising at a considerable height from the floor by affixing pieces of wood or bamboos as support. The sleeping mat, pillow and other personal belongings are also kept there. In Semkhor which is located at a distance of 28 km from Maibang, the subdivisional headquarters of the North Cachar Hills district of Assam the young boys keep the skull of Mithun (*Bos frontalis*) along with its horn affixing on one of the strong posts of the *Nodrang*. The young boys use it for warming up their body for athletic games performed in and around the *Nodrang*. It reminds us about the tools used by modern athlete for warming up their body in order to take up exercises as well as performing athletic events. The *Kharam*, *Muri* and *Muri Wathisa* are the musical instruments of a *Nodrang*. Besides these, large stones of various sizes are piled up nearby the *Nodrang*. *Re-min* (a polished wooden stick used for grinding paddy) or alternative piece of wood or bamboo is kept for playing a kind of tug of war game.

KHARAM : It is a drum of small size. The *Gamari* wood (*Gmelina arborea*) is preferred to make this musical instrument. The dry skin of goat or wild deer is used for making the drum.

MURI : *Muri* is the key to the Dimasa culture. It is made out of *Kholoshi* tree. *Muribar*, *Muriphung* and *Murimati* are its various parts. These are joined together to give the complete shape of the *Muri*. There are six holes for playing it. In rare cases, the number of holes is seven which is made on the *Muri* where the thumb is placed. *Memu* (a piece of dry paddy plant cut into small pieces) is dipped into water and is fixed on the edge of the *Muri*. Thus, a *Muri* is finally pre-

pared for playing in the *Nodrang*.

MURI WATHISA : *Muri Wathisa* is a kind of flute made out of bamboo. A small size of bamboo is found in North Cachar Hills. Out of this, it is made for playing in the *Nodrang*. Like other flute, it contains six holes for playing.

NODRANG - ITS ACTIVITIES

The activities of *Nodrang* can be categorised into two viz., inside the *Nodrang* and outside the *Nodrang*.

INSIDE THE NODRANG : "*Tang-Tang-Gintang-Tang ...*" Inside the *Nodrang*, the young boys learn to beat the *Kharam*. In the midnight, the sound of *Kharam* echoes from one range to another range of hills of North Cachar Hills and touches the heart of the listeners. If somebody happens to hear it, he or she can be sure that it is nothing but the *Kharam* of a *Nodrang*. The *Nagahoja* leads the group for beating the drum. The unskilled hand of the young learner moves his finger for beating the drum.

Muri and *Muri Wathisa* are played in the *Nodrang*. The new learners whistle roughly and thus, they keep on learning with all efforts. During the moonlit night the young boys learn various dances of their community. At the beating of drum and enticing tune of the *Muri* and *Muri Wathisa*, the *Nodrang*-boys hastily come to the courtyard of the *Nodrang* and go on dancing upto late night. During the winter season the junior ones lit the fire nearby the *Nodrang* to keep the participants warm.

In the *Nodrang* the young boys learn to make vari-

ous handicraft works. Danda (1978 : 114) states : 'A few of them are always industrious and spend their time in weaving basket and mats.' The handicraft works include making of *Khamflu* (basket), *Longkhai* (*khang*), *Yamjalang* (mat), *Khalem* (a kind of reservoir made out of cane with lid for keeping clothes, etc.), *Longkhaidu* (a rope of *khang*), *Saokhon-Mayjay* (a bamboo platter) and *Re-min Samtho* (a kind of tool for grinding paddy), etc. Beginning from splitting of bamboo and smoothening of it for weaving, the young boys are thoroughly taught. Thus, *Nodrang* happens to be a centre for learning handicraft works.

The young boys of *Nodrang* make chit-chat. Some of them gossip with others of the same age while others go on listening the legends of their community as well as of others.

OUTSIDE THE NODRANG : The young boys of the *Nodrang* perform various activities outside the *Nodrang*. The *Busu* is the harvest festival of the Dimasas. It is celebrated once in a year. The *jhumias* observe it in November or December while the wet cultivators observe it in January or February. It may be called as festival of welcoming New Year because the New Year of the Dimasas begin after its celebration. In recent years the Dimasa have considered the month of February as an ideal month for observing *Busu*. Thus, a uniformity for observing the *Busu* is settled.

To observe *Busu* the young boys of *Nodrang* take active part. They collectively cultivate *jhum* fields of other farmers and receive money as remuneration. Danda (1978 : 116) comments : 'Though every one takes part in *Busu* it is mainly a festival of the youth.' A joyous and meaningful

celebration of the *Busu* depends upon the young boys. In other words, the effective *Nodrang* can have an effective celebration of the *Busu*. Danda (1978 : 117) further states : 'In the first day of *Busu* the young boys gather in front of the headman's house in the afternoon, and together chant *ho ! ho !*.' It is called *Surem*.

Nodrang-boys perform social services too. They render free services viz., construction of roads, cutting of jungles and construction of houses, etc. Danda (1978 : 114) mentions : 'They are ready to carry out any order issued by village headman. Any member of the village may ask for their joint service for house-building or clearing jungles for agricultural purpose.' Sometimes, they work at the request of any individual of the village. If they work, they are entertained with rice beer which is a traditional custom of the Dimasas. Moreover, they are offered a nominal payment for their service.

The young boys of *Nodrang* keep vigilance of the entire village. Danda (1978 : 114) comments : 'But if the village is endangered by enemy, they feel it their joint responsibility to protect the village from the enemy attack.'

NODRANG - ITS RELEVANCE TO DEVELOPMENT

From the discussion about the traditional institution of the Dimasas - *Nodrang*, we come to know that its existence is still found in the North Cachar Hills district. Among the Dimasas, its influence has not faded away completely. The older section of the people of the society remember their past participation and vast experiences derived out of it. On the whole, these points may be noted in relation to its

relevance to development :

1. *Nodrang* may be used for development of the traditional dances of the Dimasas. In this fast changing world, the tribes are frequently facing their identity crisis. The traditional culture and dances can challenge such onslaught. It stands as a shield. Effective preservation of this institution shall be an asset. It is conducive and programme implementation may be carried out by this institution.

2. Many Development Departments viz., PWD, Forest, Agriculture and Sericulture, etc., have provisions of casual or part time works. Any work under such provisions may be given to *Nodrang* of that area. In this case, the Departments should have knowledge of existence of the *Nodrang*. We have already mentioned that the young boys of *Nodrang* render services which are either free in nature or subject to nominal payment. Utilisation of their services will definitely benefit the both. One way, it can help indirectly for its survival.

3. The products of *Nodrang* are of bamboos and canes. The extent of utilisation of such products are limited viz., the village itself or the neighbouring village. But the qualitative nature of these products has a good commercial prospect. Opening sale-booth in public gathering sites the products can be sold out. The local authority should take active part for selecting proper sites and constructing such booths. Rural unemployment problem can thus be solved to a considerable degree.

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THE CUSTOMARY LAWS OF THE KARBIS AND THE ISSUE OF CODIFICATION : A CASE STUDY IN KARBI ANGLONG

Girindra Nath Das

ABSTRACT

The Karbis inhabiting the Karbi Anglong district of Assam have been subscribing to their customary laws and practices since time immemorial. They have been able to maintain their own tribal identity with distinctive socio-cultural traits in spite of internal and external influences. It has, however, become absolutely necessary to know whether codification of the customary laws will be relevant for the Karbi society with the changing situations or not. For this purpose, a detailed study on the various dimensions of the customary laws and practices prevalent among them may be undertaken by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and later on, on the basis of the study, steps may be taken for accepting or rejecting the so-called codification exercise.

INTRODUCTION

Karbi Anglong is an autonomous hill district of Assam with a total geographical area of 10,434 sq. km. and a total population of 6.62 lakh as per 1991 Census. Under the provisions of para 2 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Karbi Anglong (Mikir Hills) District Council came into existence on June 23, 1952. The nomenclature of the Council has been slightly changed to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council by deleting the word District as per Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1995.

The district is inhabited by various ethnic groups. Among the tribal communities the Karbis occupy the predominant position and the district is known after their name. Other tribes are the Dimasa Kacharis, Garos, Khasis, Jayantias, Rengma Nagas, Man-Tais, Tiwas, Hmars, Kukis and Bodos, etc. Moreover, there are Assamese, Bengalis, Tea and Ex-Tea Garden communities and Hindi speaking people in the district. According to 1991 Census the scheduled tribe population accounts for 51.5% of the total population of the district. The district occupies the largest geographical area out of the total number of 23 districts of Assam. But the density of population per sq. km. is found to be as low as 64 as per 1991 Census. The rate of literacy excluding 0-6 yr age group in the district is 45.57% as against 52.89% of the State. The rural population constitutes 89.37% of the total population inhabiting the district. The civil subdivisions of the district are Diphu, Hamren and Bokajan.

THE KARBIS AND CUSTOMARY LAWS

The Karbis are Indo-Mongoloids. They belong to the Kuki-Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the great Sino-Tibetan linguistic family. While dealing with the original habitat of the Karbis Bordoloi (1985 : 64) opines : "The original home of the Karbis, like the other tribes of North-East India, was the Western China near the Yang-te-Kiang and the Howang-ho rivers. From these places, they went down the courses of the Chindwin and the Irrawaty rivers and entered Burma and stayed there for sometime. From Burma they went down the courses of the Brahmaputra and entered Assam by the north-east route through the Patkai Range along with other Tibeto-Burman races before several centuries B.C."

Although the major concentration of the Karbis is in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, their settlements in a scattered manner are seen in several districts of the State viz., North Cachar Hills, Nagaon, Morigaon, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Kamrup, etc. Moreover, they are found in Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Regarding their existence outside the States of north-eastern region, Phangcho (1989 : 175) comments : "Now our knowledge does little beyond the jurisdiction of North-East India that there are verbal reports about Karbi population living in Sylhet and Burma. May be true. However, I admit that without the help of a detailed and comprehensive written history of the tribe it is very difficult to give an explanation on the subject with authenticity."

The regional divisions of the Karbis are three in number. In this context Bordoloi (1987 : 55) comments : "From the point of view of habitation, the Karbis are divided into three groups, namely ; *Chinthong*, *Ronghang* and *Amri*. These groups are otherwise known as *Chinthong*, *Nilip-Ronghang* and *Amri-Marlong*. Those who live in the plains districts are called *Dumrali*. Fundamentally, these groups do not differ from each other and they should not be confused with clans." The Karbis have five clans (Kur) viz., *Teron*, *Ingti*, *Inghi*, *Terang* and *Timung*. Each clan is further divided into several sub-clans. Teron (1974 : 7) reports the number of sub-clans of *Teron*, *Ingti*, *Inghi*, *Terang* and *Timung* to be 6, 5, 30, 6 and 30 respectively.

According to the customary laws of marriage, no marriage can take place between members of the same clan since the members of a clan are considered to be brothers and sisters. In other words, the people strictly follow

the clan exogamy. Anyone violating this social norm is excommunicated from the society. Violation of this rule is called *Laisenam* among them. The Karbis practise monogamy. The preferential type of marriage is cross-cousin marriage (mother's brother's daughter). Marriage by negotiation is the normal procedure. There are mainly two types of marriages prevalent among them. When the bridegroom decides to serve in the father-in-law's house after marriage for a certain period of time, it is known as *Akemen* (marriage by service). On the contrary, if the bridegroom does not stay in the father-in-law's house, the marriage is called *Akejoi*. The third type of marriage based on mutual consent (*Osomer hijan chalangklok*) may also be referred to here. A boy takes the hand of a girl without approval of the parents and without arrangement of any formal ceremony. In this case, the marriage ceremony will have to be observed even in old age but naturally before the death of any member of the couple.

Widow marriage is permitted in the society. The widow should preferably marry a person who belongs to her deceased husband's clan. Junior levirate (*Pateng Paju*) is allowed while senior levirate is strictly prohibited. Divorce is approved by the village council. Of course, the case of divorce is rare among them. A pregnant woman is not allowed for divorce by the council. Adoption is permitted and it is carried out through some customarily accepted procedure which is known as *Hemphu-Bi-Doipet*.

Patriarchal family system is maintained by the Karbis. Father is the head of the family. He is vested with almost all authorities in the family. The line of descent is patrilineal. The children are recognised as members of the

father's clan. So far as inheritance of property is concerned, it has been found that sons, not daughters inherit both movable and immovable properties after the death of their father. If the deceased had no male issue, the nearest male relatives would inherit the property. Daughters receive mother's property like handlooms & accessories, dress & ornaments, etc.

Nuclear and joint family systems are mainly found among the Karbis. Numerically, nuclear families exceed joint families because of the fact that sons usually get separated from the original home after marriage.

Land is the main source of livelihood of the Karbis. Communal ownership of land is the traditionally recognised procedure. The village headman distributes *jhum* sites among the households of the village. Each family has only usufructuary right over the plot of occupied land.

Hinduism has a significant influence on the Karbis although they still retain most of their traditional beliefs and customs. Moreover, a section of the people has embraced Christianity. The Karbis believe in the existence of benevolent and malevolent deities and worship them accordingly. Above all, there is *Arnem Kethe* (supreme God), they believe. The Karbis believe in witchcraft (*maja*). A diviner (Male - *Uche*, female - *Uchepi*) tries to know the reason for prolonged illness of a person by means of counting rice or cowry. This is known as *sangkalang* (Assamese *Mangal-soa*). Sometimes, a witch (*Lodeppi*) possessing divine power is invited for deriving better results. The people use charms (*pherem*) for curing ailments like headache, indigestion, blood dysentery, etc. Oaths and

ordeals are also practised by them. Lyall (1971 : 37) observes : "Oaths and imprecations take the place of ordeals. Earth is put on the head, and the man says - "May I be like this dust !" A tiger's tooth is scraped, and the scrapings drunk in water : "May the tiger eat me !" Similarly, an elephant's tusk is scraped, and the scrapings drunk : "May the elephant trample me to death !" (*Ingnar ne pedong-nang*!). The copper ring worn by the *Uche* is dipped in water, and the water drunk, the man saying, "May the tiger catch me !" Another form of oath is *Tamhitni Kangjir asontot ne pangjir-nang*, "May I be melted like molten copper (or pot-metal) !" Such oaths are used to confirm promises, and also to attest evidence and proclaim innocence of a charge."

The traditional system of administration prevalent among the Karbis is monarchical. It is a three-tier one - *Lindokpo* (King), *Habe* (Head of a region) and *Sarthe* (Headman of a village) are at the top, middle and bottom level respectively of the administrative hierarchy. Nowadays, this system is obsolete. The three local kings of Rongkhang, Chinthong and Amri are, at present, considered as local chiefs. However, it may be mentioned here that the highest position among the kings is occupied by the Karbi *Recho* of Rongkhang who is selected from the Rongkhang sub-clan only. Next position is that of the *Lindokpo* of Chinthong. The *Lindokpo* of Amri occupies the last position.

There are four, three and two *Lindokpos* in Rongkhang, Chinthong and Amri areas respectively. The traditional capital of the Karbis is at Niz Rongkhang located about 21 km away from Hamren, one of the subdivisional headquarters of Karbi Anglong district. The *Lindokpo* governs the traditional administration with the help of

functionaries such as *Dili*, *Katharbura*, *Pator* and *Dengja*, etc., who form the Parliament (*Pinpomar*). The Kingdom (*Hawar*) is subdivided into several regions. A region comprising several villages is called *Longri* and each *Longri* is headed by a *Habe* who is appointed by the *Lindokpo*. The head of each village is called *Sarthe* who is appointed by *Habe*.

The *Pinpomar* is entrusted with legislative, executive and judicial powers. The *Lindokpo*'s decision will be final, if the *Pinpomar* cannot take final decision relating to a case. The supreme Appellate Authority is *Amampharo Amei* i.e. council of wise men drawn from the clans and sub-clans of the community.

The village council (*Mei*) consists of the President and the members. The President is the headman of the village while the members are the adult male members of the village. For smooth management of the council several functionaries such as *Risobasa* (Assistant headman), *Pheranke* (Informer), *Kurusar* (Priest) and *Ovebarim* (Adviser of the bachelors' dormitory), etc., are selected. The village council not only looks after the development works for the village people but also works as the trial court of the village. Whenever any dispute in relation to ownership of land, theft, quarrel or adultery, etc., takes place, it is referred to the council which settles it amicably. The guilty person is imposed fine not exceeding Rs. 50/- normally. On the other hand, the unsettled case is sent to the *Habe* or *Lindokpo* or the District Council for final settlement.

With regard to settlement of cases in connection with land boundary and *Laisenam* Das (1993 : 5) reports,

"At Rongpongve, there was a dispute between Harsing Timung and Longsing Killing for land boundary. Initially, the *Sarthe* and the *Habe* tried to settle the matter but it remained undecided. Later on, *Bor Dili* solved the dispute and the two persons agreed to abide by the decision which was served by the *Bor Dili*. With regard to *Laisenam* we may cite an example here. In the village Langsikha near Donkamokam, an illegal marriage takes place between a boy and a girl belonging to *Ronghang* sub-clan. *Bor Dili* comes along with his officials to the village and starts trial. He listens carefully to all the sayings and later on, declares his verdict to purify both the convicts. The priest performs sacrifice at jungle with an egg for the boy and pigling for the girl along with bottles of wine. As a symbol, dresses meant for convicts are also brought and these are purified. At the end, the *Bor Dili* offers the *puja*. He declares the marriage to be illegal and as a result, they are separated from each other." Das (1993 : 10) further reports, "It is interesting to note that appeals may be made to the *Lindokpo* against the decision of the *Mei* and necessary fines may be imposed upon the *Mei* by the highest authority. To illustrate the point, we can take help of an adultery case. In a certain family of a particular village of Umpanai area under Amri Development Block, the elder brother gets married. He remains frequently absent from home owing to various engagements and his wife stays with his parents. Gradually a heinous relationship grows between his wife and his younger brother. They involve in the act of adultery. This fact, later on, comes to the knowledge of the husband. But due to paucity of sufficient proof he is not in a position to proceed further. After a few months, the wife gives birth to a baby. The husband does not agree to have the legitimacy of the baby. Hence he calls the *Mei* for a suitable

solution. The *Mei* warns the culprit on the basis of the report of the husband. For a considerable period, the matter remains subsided. Later on, the two accused persons indulge in their old habit. On a dreadful night, the husband finds the two culprits involved in a compromising position inside the room. He closes the door slowly and steadily from outside and informs the village people. They come in group and catch them red-handed. The people bring them out from the house, shave their hair and start physical assault. They are disrobed and taken to an outskirts of the village and bounded for three consecutive days without providing sufficient food and drink. Finally they are released and driven out from the village. This fact spreads all over the area like wild fire. A relative of the woman appeals to the highest authority at Ronghang Rongbong against the *Mei*'s decision. Later on, the *Mei*'s decision is declared to be inhuman and unjust and as such, the *Mei* is imposed fine amounting to Rs. 3,000/-. The two culprits are directed to leave the village for good and to settle a new life somewhere."

CODIFICATION

The above penpicture reveals some of the customary laws and practices prevalent among the Karbis inhabiting the Karbi Anglong district of Assam. The main intention of the paper is not to highlight all their customary laws handed down from one generation to the other, but to provide an idea that the Karbis have been preserving their customary laws till date. It, however, appears that some of the customary laws have failed to withstand the onslaught of time and have gradually disappeared from the society primarily due to spread of modern education, cultural assimi-

lation and influence of Christianity, etc. Now, a situation has arisen whether the customary laws prevalent among the Karbis should be codified or not. If codified, will it serve any fruitful purpose in view of the existing administrative set-up? It may be relevantly pointed out here that the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council has not framed Rules for Administration of Justice. The Deputy Commissioner, Karbi Anglong is entrusted with the power of disposing cases under the Rules of 1937. Minor offences are settled by the village functionaries through customary laws. Taking into consideration all the above mentioned facts it may be said that a detailed study in respect of the existing customary laws and practices among the Karbis should be undertaken by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and the findings of the study should be discussed by a body of eminent experts including scholars drawn from various disciplines, administrators, planners, politicians, lawyers and functionaries of the Karbi traditional system, etc., in order to arrive at a final decision about codification of the customary laws.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am grateful to Prof. R.K.Kar, Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh for kindly going through the manuscript and offering his valuable suggestions for improvement of the paper.

SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SEMINAR ON TRIBAL TRADITION AND ITS RELATION TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE HILL AREAS OF ASSAM HELD IN GUWAHATI FROM SEPTEMBER 19 TO 21, 1996

In collaboration with the Directorate of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, the Office of the District Research Officer, Karbi Anglong, Diphu had organised a three-day seminar on *Tribal Tradition and Its Relation to Development in the Hill Areas of Assam* from September 19 to 21, 1996 in the auditorium of the Directorate.

The seminar was inaugurated by Dr. Pramod Chandra Bhattacharjee, Retired Principal, B. Borooah College, Guwahati at 11 a.m. on the 19th September, 1996. The inaugural session was chaired by Dr. Bhuban Mohan Das, Professor Emeritus, U.G.C. Emeritus Fellow. Prof. Madhab Chandra Goswami, Professor Emeritus, Gauhati University was the Chief Guest in the session.

Dr. Bhattacharjee in his inaugural speech dwelt at length about the races and characteristics of the tribes of North-east India. According to him man is basically religious and the tribal problem is mainly a human problem. The diversities of cultures are only a passing phase and unity of all people and race is the crying need of the hour.

Chief Guest Prof. Goswami started his lecture with offerings of traditional Karbi items representing *Horlang* to the Chairman of the inaugural function. He discussed the customary laws of the Karbis and laid stress upon customs of the tribal people what he called tribal heritage. While bringing modernism and development, heritage of the people should be given due weightage. Otherwise people will not accept development whole-heartedly. One must

know the tribal people first before venturing development activities. But present-day agencies of development are not well equipped with tribal tradition and heritage. Tribal land system should be studied in depth before introducing land acts and rules. There should be no imposition of changes. Let the tribals themselves desire changes, he said.

Chairman Dr. Bhuban Mohan Das, Professor Emeritus, U.G.C. Emeritus Fellow emphasized on growth. Growth and development are two aspects to be dealt with caution. Development should be in the need areas. Environmental, geographical situation should be taken into consideration. Tradition has an intrinsic value with tribal mode of living and ignorance of tradition will have negative effect on development. He cited examples from Arunachal Pradesh where tribal people overthrew the imposed changes.

Prof. Harish Sharma of the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University, Guwahati spoke about importance of tradition and custom in bringing development.

Earlier, Md. Rafiqz Zaman, ACS, Director of the Institute delivered the welcome address.

Shri P.N. Bharali, District Research Officer, Dibrugarh offered the vote of thanks.

FIRST ACADEMIC SESSION

The first academic session of the seminar began at 12 noon under the chairmanship of Dr. G.C.Sharma Thakur, retired Director, AIRTSC, Guwahati. Only one paper could be presented in this session due to lack of time. The paper on *Karbi Tradition and Identity Crisis* was presented by Dr. Phukan Chandra Phangcho, Principal, Rangsin College, Donkamukam, Karbi Anglong. According to him

the Karbis have been facing many obstacles to preserve and safeguard their traditional culture and ethnic identity during the different periods of history. At one stage the patriarchal identity of the Karbis was threatened by the matriarchal norms of the Jaintias. However, due to the efforts of the Ahom king they could protect their identity. During the colonial rule the conversion of some Karbi families to Christianity kept them aloof from their traditional religious activities. Due to influence of *Sankari Vaishnavism*, many Karbi families got converted to Koch of the Hindu social stratification, thus leaving their own way of life. Of late, the process of detribalisation has been strikingly observed among the Plains Karbis because of their close contact with the neighbouring plains people. Phangcho mentioned that with the creation of the autonomous district, growth of educational facilities, improvement of transport and communication network and other infrastructures have enabled the Karbis to have the taste of modernity. But large-scale immigration of tribal as well as non tribal population has caused serious concern among the Karbis. With the passage of time the non Karbis are demanding equal rights with those of the Karbis. As a result, a section of the Karbis has come out with militant activities to fight against the curtailment of Karbi tribalism and identity. Therefore, the author earnestly feels that welfare schemes should be formulated and implemented by the concerned agencies taking into consideration the tribal characteristics of the Karbis in order to safeguard their identity and uplift their socio-economic life.

Shri Ganesh Chandra Kakati, Curator of the Institute was the Rapporteur in this session.

SECOND ACADEMIC SESSION

The second academic session was held in the afternoon with Prof. M.C. Goswami, Professor Emeritus, Gauhati University, Guwahati in the chair. Two papers were presented in this session. The first paper was presented by Prof. K.C. Mahanta, Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh. The title of his paper was *The Problem of Tribal Tradition and Identity in Assam*. According to Prof. Mahanta the Assam tribesmen inhabiting the hills and plains had been maintaining their distinctive socio-cultural life till mid-fifties of the twentieth century. Subsequently their family, marriage and kinship systems, religious outlook and mode of livelihood, etc., has started manifesting changes under the influence of neo-culture components brought by urbanization, industrialization and westernization. The author, therefore, felt that the Assam tribes would not perhaps withstand the onslaught of the global enculturating forces to preserve their socio-ethnic identity in spite of strict adherence to Nehru's five principles (*Panchasheel*) for tribal development.

The next paper titled *The Sixth Schedule and the Identity Crisis of the Karbis - A Few Observations* was presented by Dr. G.C. Sharma Thakur, retired Director, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati. At the outset Dr. Sharma Thakur highlighted the historical background relating to the evolution of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Later on, he pointed out that despite Constitutional Rights possessed by the Karbis to preserve their distinct cultural traits and also a good number of Acts and Rules executed by the Karbi Anglong District Council for protecting their identity, the problem of tribal land alienation and indebtedness

has been taking place in the district primarily due to presence of Bangladeshi (East Pakistani) immigrants. As such, the Karbis have been experiencing identity crisis in their own homeland. Therefore, it is the need of the hour to undertake a detailed survey in relation to the indebted families by the Karbi Anglong District Council, Diphu to find out ways and means for relieving the Karbis from the clutches of the immigrant settlers and improving their socio-economic life, he suggested.

In this session Shri Ananda Chandra Nath of the Directorate of AIRTSC was the Rapporteur.

THIRD ACADEMIC SESSION

The third academic session of the seminar was held in the morning of 20.9.06 and the session was chaired by Dr. Phukan Chandra Phangcho, Principal, Rangina College, Donkamukam, Karbi Anglong. The first paper titled *Customary Laws of the Hill Tribes and Their Relation to Development in the Hill Areas of Assam* was presented by Dr. Jeuti Barooah, Director, Law Research Institute, Gauhati High Court, Guwahati. While explaining the customary laws of the Karbis and the Dimasa Kacharis living in the Hill Areas of Assam Dr. Barooah emphasized on compilation, consolidation and codification of the customary laws relating to land tenure, inheritance and succession. Moreover, more powers for administration of justice should be given to the village authorities. According to her the status of women among the Karbis is more or less equal to that of men but the women are not given any place in political, ritual and religious spheres. On the whole, all obstacles for meaningful development of the hill tribes should be removed, Dr. Barooah commented.

In the second paper titled *The Customary Laws of the Karbis and the Issue of Codification : A Case Study in Karbi Anglong* Shri Girindra Nath Das, District Research Officer, Diphu maintained that survey should be undertaken by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council among the major tribes viz., the Karbis, the Dimasa Kacharis and the Rengma Nagas, etc., for collection of the customary laws prevalent among them. Later on, a Committee involving legal experts, anthropologists and other related persons should be constituted by the Autonomous Council to ascertain whether the customary laws could be codified for the benefit of the tribal people inhabiting the district.

The third paper was presented by Dr. Dilip Kumar Kalita, Senior Research Fellow, Folklore and Oral Traditions Department, ABILAC, Guwahati. The title of his paper was *Tribal Tradition, Development and Tribal Identity*. Dr. Kalita explained the terms 'tradition', 'development', 'folklore', 'little tradition' and 'great tradition' elaborately. Further he mentioned that the age-old traditions of the tribal people have undergone changes due to influence of modern education, prevailing political and economic activities, improved network of transport and communication and the media, etc. Therefore, the author commented that planning for tribal development should be initiated taking the tribal traditions into consideration so that the identity of the tribes living in the Hill Areas of Assam is not lost into oblivion.

The fourth paper titled *Tribal Tradition and its Relation to Development in the Hill Areas of Assam* by Oriwell Terang, Deputy Director General (Retd.), Department of Tourism, Govt. of India was accepted as presented in absence of the author. Terang mentioned that the common tribal people living generally in the interior and

inaccessible hill areas possess distinctive customs and traditions which regulate their economic activities and social behaviour. In order to improve the economic conditions of the people, financial assistance should be provided by the Government. Moreover, the people should be motivated for cultivation of commercial crops. Proper marketing facilities for their agricultural produce, handicraft items and handloom products should be undertaken, he suggested.

Shri Girindra Nath Das, District Research Officer, Karbi Anglong, Diphu was the Rapporteur in this session.

FOURTH ACADEMIC SESSION

The fourth academic session of the seminar was held under the chairmanship of Prof. Man Singh, Gauhati University, Guwahati. Only one paper was presented in this session. The paper was jointly prepared by Dr. N.N.Sarma, Dr. S.R. Paul and Shri D. Sarma, Assam Agricultural University, Regional Agricultural Research Station, Diphu. The title of the paper was *Positive Approaches to the Shifting Cultivation in the Hills Zone of Assam*. While presenting the paper Dr. N. N. Sarma highlighted the characteristic features of shifting cultivation, various problems arising out of its practice by the people and also *jhum* control measures adopted by the Government. He mentioned that the Regional Agricultural Research Station, Diphu has conducted experiments to find out economically viable and environment friendly model as alternative to *jhuming*. Moreover, he suggested for practice of contour cultivation by the tribal people living in the Hill Areas of Assam.

Shri Girindra Nath Das, District Research Officer, Diphu acted as the Rapporteur in this session.

FIFTH ACADEMIC SESSION

The fifth academic session of the seminar was held after lunch under the chairmanship of Prof. K.C. Mahanta, Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh. A total of five papers came up for discussion.

Dr. Rani Kakati (Hazarika) in her paper titled *Development : A Distant Dream* pointed out that during formulation and implementation of the tribal development programmes, the opinion of the target people is not taken into consideration. Moreover, efforts are made to implement the programmes based on imported ideas and technologies. Again, sometimes the entire responsibility for implementing the welfare schemes is entrusted to such officials who are not aware of the cultural ethos of the concerned tribes. As a consequence, the tribal people have been demanding partial or full autonomy for their overall development.

The next paper was presented by Dr. Kandarpa Kumar Barman, Professor and Head, Department of Economics, Gauhati University, Guwahati. The title of his paper was *Tribal Economy of the Hills of Assam : Some Relevant Issues*. Dr. Barman emphasized that despite plenty of human and natural resources, the development of the hills region of Assam is not sustainable mainly due to lack of infrastructure, low level technology and socio-economic constraints. For sustained economic development, efforts must be made to develop suitable institutions and appropriate technologies to enable each and every individual to participate in the development process.

The third paper titled *Role of Traditional Institutions in the Development of the Hill Areas of Assam* was presented by Dr. Dharmeswar Duarah, Officer-in-charge,

Cultural Centre, Haflong. He explained the traditional institutions of the Karbis, Dimasas, Zeme Nagas, Kukis, Hmars and Vaipheis of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts. The development departments of the Government should implement the welfare schemes through the traditional institutions so that socio-cultural heritage of the tribes could be preserved effectively, Dr. Duarah commented.

Shri Lakhi Kanta Muchahary, Assistant Research Officer, Office of the Chief of Division, Zonal Field Evaluation Unit, Diphu in his paper on *Nodrang - Its Relevance to Development* discussed the activities of the bachelors' dormitory - *Nodrang* of the Dimasa Kacharis inhabiting the North Cachar Hills district. The author pointed out that *Nodrang* may be utilised not only for preserving traditional culture or extending service to the society but also for minimising rural unemployment problem to a considerable extent by means of opening sale-booths for the bamboo and cane products of *Nodrang*.

The last paper in this academic session was presented by Dr. R.P. Athparia, Anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India, Shillong. The title of his paper was *Role of Traditional Tribal Political Institution and Development of the Karbis of the Hill Areas, Assam*. While explaining the traditional socio-political organization of the Karbis inhabiting the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, Dr. Athparia commented that the traditional political institution of the Karbis, instead of being a live political force, has been acting as a mechanism for controlling socio-religious matters without any noticeable clash with the prevailing modern political system constituted under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

Shri Mrigen Das, District Research Officer, Kamrup was the Rapporteur in this session.

SIXTH ACADEMIC SESSION

The sixth academic session of the seminar was held in the forenoon of 21.9.96 under the chairmanship of Prof. Harish Sarma, Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University, Guwahati. The last day's deliberations began with the presentation of the paper on *An Analysis of the Land Resource Management by the Hill Karbis in Hamren Subdivision of Karbi Anglong District* by Shri Deben Saikia, Lecturer, Department of Geography, Rangsin College, Donkamukam, Karbi Anglong. Shri Saikia highlighted the traditional land resource management prevalent among the Karbis and commented that both long and short term policies without affecting the core of their culture should be undertaken by the Government for proper utilisation of the resources as well as economic development of the people.

The next paper titled *Development of Karbi Society : Need for Restructuring its Traditional Institutions* was jointly prepared by Shri A.K. Borah, Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh and Shri P.N. Bharali, District Research Officer, Dibrugarh. The paper was presented by Shri Borah. According to them the main traditional institutions of the Karbis viz., village council, village dormitory and grain bank are generally dying out due to onslaught of modernisation process and therefore, serious efforts should be made by the Karbi Anglong District Council for revival of these colourful institutions for augmenting the process of socio-economic development among the Karbis.

Shri Ananda Chandra Nath, a faculty member of the Directorate of AIRTSC, Guwahati in his paper on *Use of Traditional Spirit of the People of the Hill Areas of Assam for their Development* mentioned that the modified form of

Ariju, the bachelors' dormitory of the Ao Nagas may be grafted to the dormitory systems viz., *Jirkedam* of the Karbis and *Nodrang* of the Dimasa Kacharis for improving literacy in the villages and also for preserving their cultural heritage. According to him the welfare programmes should be implemented in such a manner that the indigenous institutions are not lost for ever due to influence of modern institutions.

The fourth paper was presented by Dr. Tanmay Bhattacharjee, Reader and in-charge, Department of Political Science, Assam University, Silchar. The title of his paper was *Tribal Tradition and its Relation to Development*. Dr. Bhattacharjee highlighted some issues like economy and sovereign authority among the tribes of North-east and particularly the Karbis of Karbi Anglong district. According to him improvisation of the mode of agriculture and marketable handicraft items are highly essential for the Karbis for attainment of self-reliance and for elevation to the scale of social development. Moreover, consumerism developed on imitation should be avoided because it has badly affected the tribal people in the North-east.

The next paper was to be presented by Dr. Nabin Chandra Sarma, Professor and Head, Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University, Guwahati. The title of his paper was *Verse Narratives of the Dimasas : A Study of Native Ethnography*. But he could not attend the seminar. His paper was considered to be presented. Dr. Sarma gave a brief ethnographic note on the Dimasas. Later on, he dealt with historical, legendary, magical and realistic verse narratives or ballads prevalent among them. According to him the ballads focuss light on various aspects of their traditional life and culture.

The sixth and last paper of the seminar was presented by Md. Rafiqz Zaman, ACS, Director of the Institute. The title of his paper was *Some Key Aspects of Forest Management in Tribal Areas*. The author mentioned that the British did not pay any attention to the tribals living in the forests but laid emphasis on revenue collection and commercial exploitation of the forests through the formulation of Government Forest Act, 1865, Indian Forest Act, 1878, National Forest Policy, 1894 and Indian Forest Act, 1927, etc. Unfortunately, in post-Independence period also nothing was mentioned about the tribals in the first policy document - the National Forest Policy, 1952. Moreover, the National Agriculture Commission, 1976 made the tribals responsible for exploitation of the forests. However, the National Forest Policy, 1988 reflected the pro-tribal attitude of the Government. The association of the tribals in the management of the forests may ultimately prove to be beneficial to the tribals.

Shri P.N. Bharali, District Research Officer, Dibrugarh acted as the Rapporteur in this session.

CONCLUDING SESSION

The concluding session of the seminar was started at 3 p.m. on 21st September, 1996 with Prof. Bhuban Mohan Das, Emeritus Professor in the chair. Dr. R.P. Athparia presented the summary report of the seminar highlighting the major issues that cropped up during the deliberations which were made in different sessions of the seminar. Later on, a small committee was constituted to give final shape to the recommendations of the seminar. Lastly, Md. Rafiqz Zaman, Director of the Institute offered the vote of thanks.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SEMINAR

Tribal heritage should be taken into consideration in a very serious way if at all development in real sense should be augmented in the Hill Areas of Assam. In the development process, the tribal land holding patterns that are in operation in the hill areas are not helpful for taking as a base for inflow of capital investment. As such, the seminar recommended that present land holding patterns should be modified to suit the need of the inflow of capital for development.

Tribal traditions specifically the customary laws should be studied in an indepth manner so that keeping the tribal traditions at the backdrop modernisation process suiting to different ecological settings of the tribes could be augmented. In doing so, tradition-modern continuum process should be geared up in ordered ways without disrupting harmony in the social fabric of the hill tribes.

The land use pattern of the hill tribes should be studied so that better land use could be made not only to raise crops like paddy but also other crops and horticulture.

The seminar stressed upon the need for input of ecologically viable technologies in different ecological settings of the hill areas, namely in cultivation, in households and in mass communication, etc., to make the quality of life of the people better, durable and enjoyable.

The infrastructures like good spatial communication facilities, market heads for selling the produce, etc., should be developed if the people of the hill areas are to be taken as partners for development.

Efforts should be undertaken for restructuring the village level social institutions like village council, village dormitory and grain bank to act as catalytic agents for percolating the political and economic powers to the grass-root level so that the hill tribal people could be the actors in the process of the development of their own specific geographical areas.

The seminar stressed upon the need for the revival of the oral traditions which are based on conventions for the management of forests in the tribal areas. It was also emphasized that the National Forest Policy, 1988 should incorporate the traditional forest management process of the hill tribal people to strike a balance between maintenance of ecology on the one hand and hill areas development in true sense in particular.

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Prof. P. C. Bhattacharjee inaugurating the three-day seminar



Prof. M. C. Goswami delivering his lecture as Chief Guest at the inaugural session

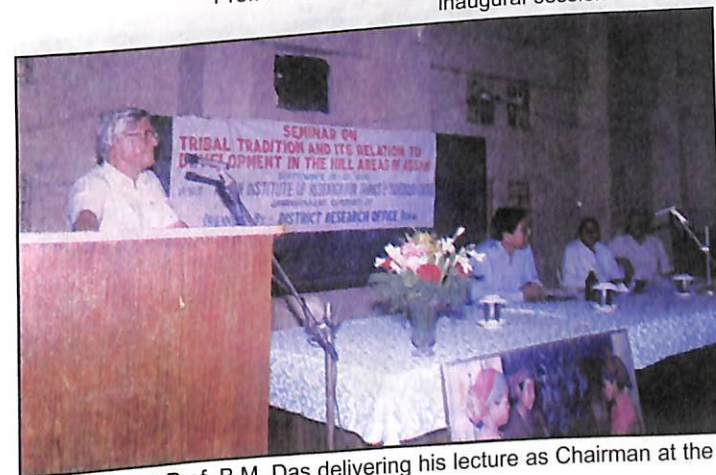


Photo shows Prof. B. M. Das delivering his lecture as Chairman at the inaugural session



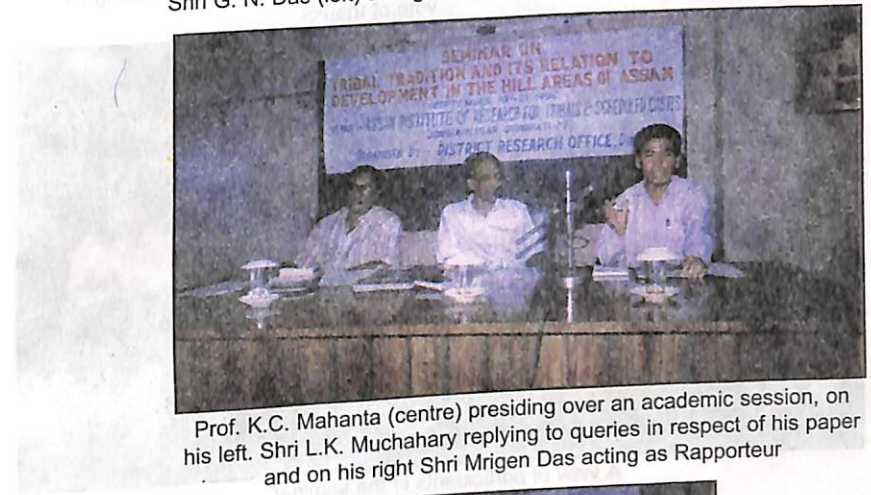
Prof. Harish Sharma seen addressing the gathering at the inaugural session



Dr. P.C. Phangcho (centre) chairing an academic session, Dr. Jeuti Barooah (right) replying to queries in connection with her paper and Shri G. N. Das (left) acting as Rapporteur



(L-R) Dr. P.C. Phangcho replying to queries in relation to his paper, Dr. G. C. Sharma Thakur chairing an academic session and Shri G. C. Kakati acting as Rapporteur



Prof. K.C. Mahanta (centre) presiding over an academic session, on his left, Shri L.K. Muchahary replying to queries in respect of his paper and on his right Shri Mrigen Das acting as Rapporteur



Prof. M.C. Goswami (centre) presiding over an academic session, on his right Prof. K.C. Mahanta after clarifying the points raised by the participants in relation to his paper and on his left Shri A. C. Nath acting as Rapporteur



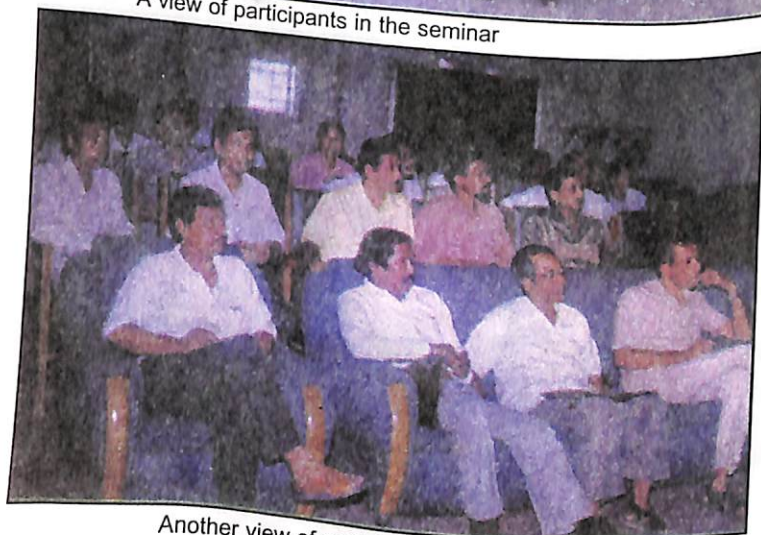
Prof. Harish Sharma (centre) chairing an academic session, Shri A.K. Borah (right) answering volley of questions in relation to his paper and Shri P.N. Bharali (left) acting as Repporteur



Prof. B. M. Das (centre) presiding over the concluding session of the three-day seminar, on his left Dr. R. P. Athparia presenting summary report of the seminar and on his right Md. R. Zaman offering the vote of thanks



A view of participants in the seminar



Another view of participants in the seminar