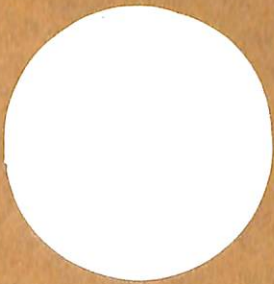
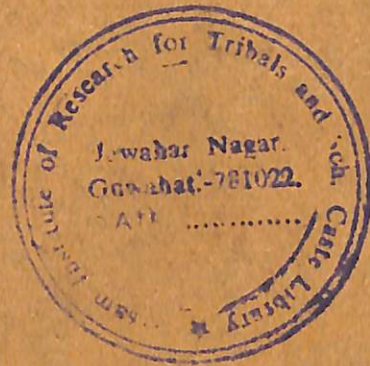




REPORT OF THE STUDY  
ON THE  
PROBLEMS OF FOREST VILLAGES  
IN ASSAM  
INHABITED BY TRIBALS



ASSAM INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH  
FOR  
TRIBALS AND SCHEDULED CASTES  
GUWAHATI-781 028



## P R E F A C E

The forest villages were established at the time of creation of reserved forests for the purpose of having regular work force for the plantation and maintenance of the trees of the reserved forests. The first forest village was established in Assam (undivided Assam) almost 90 years back (1901-02). At present Assam has 524 Nos. of forest villages within the jurisdiction of the reserved forests covering almost all the present districts of Assam. Slightly more than 3% of the area under the reserved forests are in occupation of the forest villagers. 47.11% of the forest villagers belong to scheduled tribes. Out of 524 Nos. of forest villages 233 Nos. have tribal population more than 50%.

Since the forest villages are not revenue villages the tribal people inhabiting in these villages are deprived of many benefits which would have been admissible to them if they would have lived outside the forest villages. The existing forest laws do not generally allow the different development departments to undertake welfare and development schemes meant for the tribals. The forest villagers also cannot mortgage their land under their possession to the financial institutions since the lands belong to the Forest Department although right of use and occupancy and the right of inheritance have been given to the forest villagers. The increase in the number of families in the forest villages because of the growth of population is also detrimental for the reserved forest themselves since the available land within the reserved forest cannot sustain more and more families unless the reserved forests are encroached by cutting trees and by opening up new areas to be brought under cultivation. This has posed as a serious problem to the Forest Department. There are also other problems connected with the collection of minor forest products.

In order to make an indepth study of the problems of the forest villages inhabited by the tribals, the Tribal Research Institute, Assam (the present Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes) has taken up the study of the problems of the forest villages inhabited by the tribals during the year 1989. But due to the prevailing circumstances, it was not possible to complete the study within the stipulated date.

The present report is an outcome of the study conducted by the Institute. It covers 24 forest villages inhabited by the tribals out of 233 in 14 Forest Divisions. The entire task of this study was assigned to Dr. G.C. Sharma Thakur, Joint Director of our Directorate. The present study deals with the growth and development of the forest villages in Assam, demographic characteristics, infra-structural facilities, education and literacy, employment, drinking water supply, marketing, small scale industries, major problems, economy, income and expenditure, indebtedness, livestock, felt needs, facilities provided by the Forest Department and many other matters. On the basis of the findings based on the data collected from the field studies the suggestions to the solution of the problems are also given.

It is hoped that this study will help the different Govt. departments in general and the Forest Department in particular to have a better understanding of the problems faced by the forest villages and solutions thereof.

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Dated Guwahati  
the, 31st March, 1991.

Assam Institute of Research for  
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## SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

### 1. Coverage

( i ) Out of 524 Nos. of forest villages, 233 Nos. have been identified as tribal forest villages i.e. forest villages having 50% and more tribal population constituting 44.5% of the total forest villages.

( ii ) For the present study out of 233 Nos. of tribal forest villages 24 Nos. i.e. 10% of the villages have been selected at random from 14 forest Divisions.

( iii ) The tribes who live under the reserved forests belong to various ethnic groups such as Boro-Kachari, Rabha, Mishng, Lalung (Tiwa), Deori, Sonowal Kachari, Barmans of Cachar and Karbis.

### 2. Governance

( i ) Major reserved forests lie in the plains areas of Assam and naturally plains tribes are found in sizable numbers in the reserved forests.

( ii ) They are governed under the Rules for establishment of forest villages and over all provisions of the Assam Forest Regulation 1891 (Vol.I).

( iii ) Because of this peculiar position, the tribal forest villages do not come under

Contd.II.



the purview of the Panchayati Raj Act or the Tribal Sub Plan.

- (iv) As regards development of the forest villages specially in the context of post independence Planned Development nothing tangible has been done.
- (v) In 1984-85 a Forest Village Development Scheme was initiated only to be abandoned in the midway.
- (vi) Integrated Tribal Development Projects also do not extend the benefits to the people living in tribal forest villages because of different Forest Rules and Regulations.

### 3. Communication

- (i) A good number of villages do not have easy communication facilities.
- (ii) Although majority (16 Nos.) of the tribal forest villages under survey lie within 0-1 km. from the nearest all weather roads, yet the condition of these roads is such that for only four or five months in a year these roads become actually all weather.
- (iii) Out of 24 Nos. of surveyed villages 14 Nos. of tribal forest villages have only fair weather Katcha roads the condition of which during summer can be felt rather than described.

Condt. III.



### III

- ( iv ) Three of the surveyed villages have only foot tracks inside the villages.
- ( v ) In 14 Nos. of villages only bullock cart is used as the sole means of conveyance.

#### 4. Health Care Facilities

- ( i ) Health care facilities are far from adequate.
- ( ii ) Three numbers of villages do not get health facilities easily as the villagers have to go 6 to 10 kms. to receive such facilities.
- ( iii ) 2 Nos. of the studied villages are situated at a distance of 11-15 Kms. from the nearest State dispensaries and the villagers hardly get any medical facility from these dispensaries.

#### 5. Veterinary facilities

- ( i ) Fifty percent of the surveyed villages are not served by suitable Veterinary Centres within a reasonable distance from the villages.

#### 6. Educational facilities

- ( i ) Pre primary educational facilities are not adequate in the villages under study.



#### IV

Only 5 Nos. of schools have been located in the 24 Nos. of surveyed tribal forest villages.

- ( ii ) The percentage of tribal students in these schools is found to be 93.07%.
- ( iii ) All the surveyed villages have Lower Primary schools. Two numbers of the L.P. schools are run by the Forest Department and the rest are managed by the State Elementary Education Directorate.
- ( iv ) The percentage of tribal students in these schools is sufficiently high (89.53%).
- ( v ) 84.53% students read in middle schools. The position of girl students (tribal) attending middle schools is also encouraging (85.38%).
- ( vi ) Out of 437 Nos. of students attending H.E. schools from the tribal forest villages 392 (89.70%) belong to tribal communities.
- ( vii ) Out of 120 (80 boys and 40 girls) College going students from these tribal forest villages 119 (79 boys and 40 girls) belong to the tribal communities. It may be mentioned that in 9 Nos. of the surveyed villages there are no college going boys and girls.



- (viii) Only seven students are studying in Medical, Technical, Agriculture and Veterinary institutions and interestingly all of them hail from one Deori village of Dibrugarh Forest Division.
- ( ix ) The economic condition of most of the tribal forest villagers is such that the guardians can hardly meet the educational expenses of their sons and daughters.
- ( x ) The dropout figures are more in the lower primary standard which itself is an indicator of the most pitiable economic condition of the people.
- ( xi) Adverse situation of the tribal forest villages, like flood, fear from wild elephants, lack of transport and communication, lack of consciousness coupled with poverty are the causes of dropout figures.

#### 7. Employment

- ( i) Although there are 129 Nos. of employed persons in the sample villages, most of the jobs are of third and fourth grades.
- ( ii) Only in Madhupur Deori Forest village class I and Class II employees totalling 18 Nos. have been found.
- (iii) Four villages have not even a fourth grade employee.



- ( iv ) Employment under Forest Department is not reckonable.

#### 8. Drinking water facilities

- ( i ) Most of the villages depend upon ring wells and Katcha wells which cause great health hazard.
- ( ii ) Tanks and rivers are also used as the sources of water.
- ( iii ) Pipe water scheme is almost non existent.
- ( iv ) The efforts made by the Forest Department for providing drinking water to the forest villages is not satisfactory.

#### 9. Marketing facilities

- ( i ) The villagers mainly depend upon the weekly 'hats' which are in most cases, located at a considerable distance from the villages.
- ( ii ) Only 3 Nos. of villages have fair price shops and the stock position in these shops is not satisfactory.
- ( iii ) The grocery shops maintained by other people in the neighbourhood are the only source of day to day essential articles.

#### 10. Cooperative Societies

- ( i ) Cooperative societies are not established in any of the surveyed forest villages.



- ii) Some Gaon Panchayat Samabai Samitis are situated near the villages but the tribal people do not get the required items at the time of need.

#### 11. Small Scale and Cottage Industries

- ( i) Due to non availability of raw materials and due to acculturation process small scale and cottage industries are fast disappearing.
- ( ii) Almost every tribal household possesses a loom and the womenfolk weave clothes for the use of the family members.
- (iii) The villagers consider the cottage industry as subsidiary occupation and the additional income generated by the cottage industry products help the forest villagers to meet some expenses incurred in social visits, education, annual household worship etc.

#### 12. Unemployment

- ( i) As many as 81 Nos. of households out of 94 Nos. of sample households do not possess any service holder.
- ( ii) Persons holding occupation other than forest employment are very few.



## VIII

### 13. Land

- ( i) The forest villagers enjoy only usufructuary rights over their lands allotted under Forest lease.
- ( ii) The right of transfer and sale is not given although the Authorities have agreed to the mutual transfer of the originally allotted land to the sons after the death of the allottee.
- (iii) Encroachment of forest land is becoming a problem for the Authorities as well as to the Original forest villagers.
- (iv) In most of the cases it is found that the land per family as shown in the official records was allotted to a number of households in decades back and the same lands are further divided among the sons.
- ( v) So far the cultivable lands are concerned the yield per Bigha is sufficiently low due to various factors like flood, depredation of wild animals, old method of cultivation etc.
- (vi) Homestead lands shown per family as per Range Office record no longer remain the same in the practical field as the original allottee has distributed the piece of land to the sons.

Contd. IX.



## IX

(vii) While 62.77% of the families possess less than 2 Bighas of homestead land each, 4.26% of families do not possess homestead lands.

(viii) Three families have been found to be without any cultivable land.

### 14. Income and Expenditure

( i ) About 74% of the surveyed tribal families are found to be below the poverty line.

( ii ) 88.3% of the families depend wholly upon agriculture which is considered as primary occupation.

(iii) 11.7% of the families earn their livelihood by serving as day labourers.

( iv ) The villagers generally do not keep any record of expenditures. Food items constitute the major source of expenditure.

( v ) Very less amount is spent on health care.

(vi ) 36.18% of the families are not in a position to spend even one rupee each for education of their wards.

(vii) Another major source of expenditure of the tribal forest villagers is the

Contd.X.



observance of festivals including socio-religious ones. It is a fact that many families are becoming poorer due to excess spending in such occasions which is done mainly to maintain the social status.

(viii) The savings habit of the people is not reckonable.

#### 15. Indebtedness

( i) Out of 94 households as many as 33 Nos. of households have outstanding loans in cash ranging from Rs.100.00 to Rs.2000.00

( ii) Petty loans are taken from fellow villagers and these are repaid generally in kind just after the harvesting operation.

(iii) Small loans are also taken from local Mahajans, Marowari and Bengali traders at variable interest.

(iv) Generally interests are charged at 10% p.m.

( v) Most of the loanees are permanently indebted to the traders and Mahajans.



## XI

because they have to meet the family requirements for which flow of cash is not regular.

- (vi) Loans are taken for multifarious purposes like daughter's marriage, performance of death rites, visiting distant relatives, religious occasions and day to day expenditures etc.

### 16. Industrial loan

- ( i) Some of the tribal forest villagers are eager to receive industrial loan but except 3 Nos. of households others are not getting such loans.
- ( ii) The main constraint in this respect is the non-possession of transferable rights over their lands.
- (iii) However, one family of Madhupur Deori Forest village under Dibrugarh Forest Division manages to get various kinds of loans by mortgaging the forest land for a period of seven years.

### 17. Livestock

- ( i ) The tribal forest villagers are acute poverty stricken and are not possessing even the required number of livestock although agriculture is their primary avocation.



XII

18. Housing

- ( i ) Most of the people live in Katcha Assam Type thatched houses having 2/3 small rooms.
- ( ii ) The Forest Department prohibits collection of house building materials without prior permission. The villagers, however, may collect the required house building materials like thatch, bamboo, Ikra etc. on application to the local Divisional Forest Officer/Range Forest Officer.

19. Felt needs

- ( i ) The most important felt need of majority of the households is cultivable land.
- ( ii ) The villagers want to avail themselves of the facilities provided under Tribal Sub Plan and allied welfare schemes.
- ( iii ) The villagers want that the old concessions granted to them by the Forest Department should be continued as the villagers are poverty stricken people and income from any other sources is almost nil to majority people.
- ( iv ) The villagers also want that revenue village status should be given to the forest villages so that the tribal forest villagers can get loans offered by various financial institutions.

- ( i ) Most of the people live in Katcha
- ( ii ) The villagers want to avail themselves of the facilities provided under Tribal Sub Plan and allied welfare schemes.
- ( iii ) The Forest Department prohibits



REPORT OF THE STUDY  
ON THE  
PROBLEMS OF FOREST VILLAGES IN ASSAM INHABITED BY TRIBALS

Introductory :

Assam is traditionally famous for its forests particularly evergreen forests and out of a total 75,155 hectares of forest land in the entire country, Assam possesses 2855 hectares of forest land. In 1951-52 the area of reserved forest in Assam was 33,550 Sq.km. which has been subsequently reduced to 17317 Sq.km. in 1981-82. In terms of percentage the reduction of forest area is 48.3 during this period. According to the National Forest Policy, 1952 Assam should maintain 33 percent of the total geographical area of the state under forest for environmental safety. The huge deforested area have had unwholesome effect in the overall socio-economic life of the people living in Assam so much so, that Assam, a proverbially rainfed area had to undertake drought relief measures. Deforestation caused due to cutting of trees for fire wood, timber, livestock, fodder cultivation on steep slopes, combined with unscientific agricultural practices and badly designed roads have led to ecological imbalance. Deforestation is also caused due to encroachment of forest lands. Sizable tracts of forests are cleared every year by encroachers for constructing dwelling houses, cultivation and for grazing. In Assam, according to a recent survey figure 11 percent of the 17317 Sq.km. of reserved forest area is under encroachment. The National Remote Sensing Agency has stated that the destruction of forests has led to adverse environmental situations and if unchecked, this single factor alone will turn Assam into semi desert situation in the distant future. Considering the importance of forests in the ecological equilibrium due emphasis was laid on reservation of forests in the post Independence period.

In Assam reservation of vast areas of forest land was undertaken after the British rule. After the formulation of reservation of forests, considerable importance was given to the scientific and systematic management of the forests. Initially the authorities had to face certain problems in respect of manpower as in those days density of population in or near the forest areas was remarkably low. In fact most of the forest areas were devoid of human habitation excepting a few dispersed pockets of indigenous tribal population. Habitation was an acute problem as most of the areas were highly Malaria and Kalazar infested zones.

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In the forest areas communication facilities were conspicuous by ~~their~~ absence. The areas were lying at a considerable distance from the commercial and administrative centres. It was a difficult task to mobilise labour force for planting, harvesting and silvicultural operations as the local people were ~~shy~~ to earn livelihood by engaging themselves as labourers, however, poor they may be.

Another constraint was the absence of regular flow of labour force in the forest areas. In those days due to adverse climatic and topographical reason, the people had to move from place to place. - Though lands were lying vacant and the nomadic villagers did not face much problems in establishing new villages whenever they faced natural calamities and suffered from diseases. Inevitable ecology coupled with absence of roads and transport facilities made the people nomadic. Even the fringe areas of the forests were not covered by transport facilities. The situation contributed largely for non availability of labour force for forestry work. The forest authorities had to face acute problem of labour resulting occasional suspension of plantation work. Against this backdrop the forest authorities felt the urgency of establishing a regular labour force and in this way the concept of forest village gained uppermost consideration. Forest villages were set up in the peripheries of the reserved forests.

The first forest village in Assam was established in 1901-02 in Longai Reserve, Sylhet (now in Bangladesh). The eligibility condition laid down by the forest authorities was the adaptability to work in a ~~hostile~~ ecological setting. The successful experiment of this idea of forest villages encouraged the authorities to establish more such forest villages, so much so that a major decision was taken at conservators level for establishment of forest villages in all cultivable areas of all reserve forests. Thus by the year 1902-03, 15 number of forest villages were established. The number increased to 90 in 1905-06 and 145 in 1913-14.

Three districts were selected to start the functioning of the forest villages. These were Cachar, Goalpara and Kamrup. There were 8 Nos. of forest villages in Cachar district, 15 Nos. in Goalpara district and 12 Nos. in Kamrup district. Today the number of forest villages increased to 524 including 60 Nos. of Tangia villages with a total population of 164261 comprising 20,694 families covering 52950 hectares of forest land and extending jurisdiction of almost all the 23 districts.



More than 3 percent of the areas under reserve forests are in occupation of the forest villagers.

Perhaps it will not be out of context to mention here the contribution of the Tangias- the additional labour force of the reserved forests which the forest authorities had created to augment the activities of the reserved forests. The Tangias are not regular forest villagers in respect of allotment of land and also in matters of terms and conditions laid down by the Forest Department. They have been engaged in raising and maintaining plantation and for their services the forest authorities sanction 2 Bighas of homestead land to each family. They, however, are allowed to cultivate the intermediate space lying within the annual plantation areas.

Each forest villager was allotted 5 Bighas of land which included homestead land. Besides, each working member living in that household was entitled to receive 10 Bighas of land. The ceiling, however, was fixed at 35 Bighas per household on payment of nominal land revenue. The forest villagers did not possess the right of transfer of land and they enjoyed only the right of use and occupancy. In lieu of the facilities offered by the Forest Department, The forest villagers were required to render 5 days free labour and 20 mandays paid labour in a year at the prevailing rate of wages. The villagers enjoyed other facilities in kind such as free grazing of cattle, 10 Nos. of cartloads of firewood annually, house building materials like thatch, bamboo, 'Ikra' etc. free of royalty. The annual lease, however, have had to be renewed by the Forest Department regularly.

The Forest Department imposed restrictions on the entry of outsiders to the reserved forest areas. As already mentioned the forests were set up at a far flung areas without infrastructural facilities like good roads, potable water, ~~potable water~~, schools shops etc., The villagers could not visit the nearby weekly hats even for their petty purchases because of difficult communication system as well as fear from wild animals. Thus to cater to the needs of the

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villagers such as barbers, teachers, shopkeepers, hair dressers etc. the Forest Department allowed entry of non forest dwellers to the reserved forest areas and they were allotted homestead land only. At least 50% of the forest villagers must place the requirement of such personnel inside the forest village before the Forest Department.

#### Forests and Tribals :

Traditionally tribals are associated directly or indirectly with the forests. In 1982, Committee on Forests and Tribals, Government of India observed that forests not only provide food, fruits and fodder to the tribals, but also satisfy their deep rooted sentiments. The Scheduled Area and the Scheduled Tribes Commission headed by U.N.Dhebar had strongly recommended that the future forest policy should be based on the recognition and restoration of the rights of the tribals. It has been admitted on all accounts that tribals cannot be detached from forests and whenever such an attempt is made we see the tribal uprising. The famous Chipko movement, for example, in the Sub Himalayan region. Here in Assam we find tribals who not only consider the forests as their resource base for certain items of house building materials but also use the forests as venue for holding certain socio-religious ceremonies. Certain trees and leaves and branches of some trees have socio-religious and magical significance. Almost all the tribals collect roots and creepers from the forests. Thus the relation between forests and the tribals is very intimate.

Out of 524 Nos. of forest villages, 233 Nos. have ~~been identified~~ *been identified* as tribal forest villages i.e. forest villages having 50% and more tribal population constituting 44.5% of the total forest villages. The tribes found in the forest villages are the Scheduled Tribes as entered in the Scheduled Tribe list of Assam. Details are shown in Table I and II below.

Contd.5.



Table I

Showing the name of the forest circle, ~~name~~ of the forest division, no. of villages and no. of families

S1. Name of the No. Forest Cir- cle	Name of the Forest Divn.	No. of villages	No. of families
1	2	3	4
			5
1. Western Assam	Kachugaon	104	4706
2. -Do-	Haltugaon	27	1644
3. -Do-	Dhubri	14	304
4. -Do-	Aye Valley	12	698
5. Eastern Assam	Digboi	16	1545
6. -Do-	Doomdooma	3	26
7. -Do-	Dibrugarh	23	787
8. -Do-	Sibsagar	22	946
9. -Do-	Golaghat	15	1018
10. Northern Assam	Lakhimpur	9	421
11. -Do-	Darrang East	9	247
12. -Do-	Darrang West	18	736
13. -Do-	Nagaon	15	824
14. Central Assam	North Kamrup	2	42
15. -Do-	Kamrup East	1	41
16. -Do-	Kamrup West	61	1291
17. Hills Circle	Silchar	62	2476
18. -Do-	Karimganj	43	1437
19. -Do-	N.C.Hills	1	20
20. -Do-	Karbi Anglong	7	365
21. Tangia villages		60	1120
T O T A L :		524	20694

Contd.6.



Table II

Showing Forest Division, No. of tribal forest villages, Area of forest villages in hectares, total population and tribal population

S1. No.	Name of Forest Division	No. of tribal forest villages	Area of forest villages in Hect.	Total population	Scheduled tribe Population
1.	Kamrup West	58	1593.29	6342	6337
2.	Kachugaon	51	8366.10	22638	18369
3.	Silchar	20	1713.76	4011	3179
4.	Haltugaon	19	2606.16	10040	9772
5.	Dibrugarh	12	1462.20	4836	4836
6.	Darrang West	11	1034.47	2544	2460
7.	Lakhimpur	9	738.93	2060	2054
8.	Karimganj	9	544.95	2255	1689
9.	Digboi	8	923.09	3677	2270
10.	Sibsagar	7	911.00	4762	4111
11.	Aye Valley	7	1748.92	3075	2524
12.	Dhubri	6	297.00	1544	1544
13.	Nagaon	6	348.90	2170	1964
14.	Karbi Anglong East	3	236.40	840	840
15.	Golaghat	2	44.64	388	288
16.	North Kamrup	1	N.A.	425	300
17.	Kamrup East	1	61.52	273	273
18.	Darrang East	3	N.A.	645	645
T O T A L :		233	22631.33	72525	63455

The inhabitants of forest villages are of heterogeneous groups comprising scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, Other Backward Classes and Caste Hindus. The scheduled tribes constitute Boro Kacharis, Rabhas, Miris (Mishings), Lalungs (Tiwas), Sonowal Kacharis, Deoris, Barmans of Cachar and Karbis.

Contd. 7



Among these, the former two groups namely Boro Kacharis and Rabhas are found in larger number of forest villages. The main economic pursuit of the tribes living in the forest is agriculture. Forestry work namely silviculture, harvesting and development work as well as collection of minor forest produce are additional source of employment. Paddy is the major crop followed by mustard. Winter crop is produced in a very small scale.

Objective -

No systematic study has yet been made about the socio economic condition of the tribal forest villagers. As mentioned earlier the forest villages lie within the reserved forests and are governed under rules for establishment of forest villages and overall provision of the Assam Forest Regulation 1891 (Vol I). Because of this special position of forest villages, they did not come under the scope of the Panchayat Raj Act. As a result these villages remained under the sole control of the Forest Department and as will be seen in the following pages development activities in these villages were conspicuous by ~~their~~ absence. Of late populations have been multiplied and encroachment of forest land has taken place at an alarming rate. Illegal felling of trees and clearing of forests of the valuable trees took place threatening an ecological imbalance in the immediate future. But a question arises why the tribals are trying to feel that forests are no longer their friends. The tribals are realising that they have been gradually alienated from the forests.

In this back drop the Tribal Research Institute, Assam undertook this study in order to assess the socio-economic situation prevailing among the ethnic groups living in the reserved forests who remained outside the purview of the development measures adopted for their brethren.

Contd.8.



outside the reserved forests. An assessment of socio economic condition is fruitfully done by a combination of diverse factors. Economic variables such as income, expenditure, savings, investment, indebtedness etc. are salient indicators of socio economic condition of the people. No less important are the social indicators such as education, health, nutrition etc in order to find out a more realistic picture of the socio economic situation. Social and physical environment in which the people live have also to be taken into consideration because their living conditions are greatly influenced by infrastructural services such as water supply, road communication, electricity, marketing etc. available to them. These facilities contribute largely towards improvement of the living conditions. Rise of income alone cannot improve the overall living condition specially in the context of tribal situation. The social variables have inseparable connection with the existing infra-structural facilities. The socio-psychological imbalance led to social unrest inside the tribal forest villages although the unrest has ~~not~~ taken ~~menacing~~ proportion. Suitable development measures based on empirical study conducted on these backward tribal people living within the forest areas, are the need of the hour. Tribals' involvement on the development of forests should be made to generate feelings among the tribals that forests are their properties and preservation of forests means the protection of their ethnic identity. Hitherto the tribals have been alienated from the forest resources. Non tribals are dominating the scene without caring the sentimental and age old involvement of the tribals.

#### Methodology :

For the present study out of 233 Nos. of tribal forest villages 24 Nos. i.e. 10% of the villages have been selected at random basis from 14 Forest Divisions. Most of

Contd.9.



the villages have 50 percent or more tribals. Occupational data were collected from the heads of 94 Nos. of households which is the sample size for the study. The data were collected by visiting each selected tribal forest village personally. Two sets of schedules were prepared for collection of data, one for household study and the other for village information. Field observation was used for recording the socio-economic condition from a close range. Basic information of the forest villages in general had been collected from the records of the Chief Conservator of Forests, Government of Assam, Guwahati for preparing a detailed outline of the report. All respondents who constituted mostly of the heads of households were personally contacted and their views were recorded .

Necessary particulars of each village such as geographical location, infrastructural facilities such as transport and communication system, education, health and other basic amenities were recorded in the village schedule. Data were collected during the period from May 1986 to June 1988. As the tribal forest villages lie in far flung areas devoid of all weather roads, collection of data took much time. Tabulation and analysis of data were in progress after the collection of data. Report writing was also started along with tabulation and analysis and the same was completed in the early part of 1990.

The Report is divided into two parts i.e. Part A and Part B. In Part A detailed village information had been recorded while the exhaustive household data had been incorporated in the Part B.

Contd.10.



P A R T    A  
Chapter    -    I

Demographic Information

Elsewhere it has been mentioned that 24 Nos. of forest villages having more than 50% tribal population have been selected for the present study. These villages are spread in 14 Nos of Forest Divisions covering an area of 1818.19 hectares of forest land. There are altogether 7458 persons in these villages out of which 6603 belong to scheduled tribe communities of Assam, both plains and hills. The following table shows the distribution of scheduled tribe population in the 14 Nos. of Forest Divisions.

Table    III

Showing the name of the Forest Division, name of the tribal forest village, area of the forest village, total population and scheduled tribe population in the sample villages

Name of the Forest Divn.	Name of the tribal forest village	Area of the tribal forest village in Hect.	Total Population	Scheduled tribe population
1	2	3	4	5
Kachugaon	Jaleswari	266.60	708	516
	Majati	133.00	208	208
	Garufella	60.40	179	179
	New Khagrabari	20.50	141	141
	Ramendrapur	86.60	386	258
Kamrup West	Borjhar	56.20	252	150
	Japangbari	30.30	157	157
	Rajapara	20.00	76	76
	Ouguri	27.00	130	130
	Ranikhamar	10.00	80	80
	Bogdoba	28.30	85	85

Contd. 11.



1	2	3	4	5
Haltugaon	Bashbari	138.50	786	786
	Bhadrapur	113.00	589	589
Silchar	Naxatilla	88.60	405	175
Nagaon	Singimari	64.00	405	405
Aye Valley	Bordongi	175.20	372	210
Dhubri	Alokjhar	80.00	571	571
Darrang West	Urahilaga	68.67	204	168
Lakhimpur	Elengmari	14.19	477	477
Darrang East	Cherelia	N A	147	147
Sibsagar	Gomotha	20.60	162	162
Dibrugarh	Madhupur Deori	250.60	560	555
Digboi	Amguri	52.93	297	297
Karbi Anglong East	Madhuram Terang Basti	13.00	81	81
T O T	A L	1818.19	7458	6603

The forest villages are inhabited by various ethnic communities such as Boro Kacharis, Rabhas, Deoris, Miris (Mishings) Sonowal Kacharis, Barmans of Cachar and Karbis. The distribution is shown in the tabular form below.

The Table IV shows that the percentage of tribals to total population in the 24 Nos. of sample villages is as high as 88.5. The Boro Kacharis are the largest group of people inhabiting 10 Nos. of forest villages followed by the Rabhas who are found in seven numbers of villages. The Miris (Mishings) and the Karbis are found in two villages each while the Deoris, Sonowal Kacharis and Barmans of Cachar are found in one forest village each.



DEMOGRAPHIC PARTICULARS OF FOREST VILLAGES INHABITED BY TRIBALS

1	Name of the tribal forest village	3	Name of the forest division	4	Name of the forest range	5	Name of the district	6	Name of Sub-division	7	Total No. of houses	8	Total No. of tribal houses	Total population			Tribal population			15	Name of the tribe	Non-tribal population			19	Other caste groups within the tribal forest village
														M	F	T	M	F	T			M	F	T		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18									
1	Gomtha F.V.	Sibsagar	Sonari	Sibsagar	Charadee	12	12	75	87	162	75	87	162	(Mishing)	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
2	Maahpur Deori FV	Dibrugarh	Dibrugarh	Dibrugarh	Dibrugarh	62	62	275	285	560	272	283	555	Deori	3	2	5									(One house hold)
3	Urahloga FV	Darrang (West)	Amaribari	Somitpur	Tezpur	33	33	105	99	204	88	80	168	Boro Kachari	17	19	36									Ex-tea garden labour (5 house hold) Mundé and Oraon.
	Borjhar F.V.	Kamrup (West)	Loharghat	Kamrup	Guwahati	42	29	143	109	252	83	67	150	Rabha	60	42	102									Ex-tea garden labour
	Ouguri F.V.	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	19	19	75	55	130	75	55	130	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
	Rani Khamar FV	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	7	7	40	40	80	40	40	80	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
	Rajapara No.2 FV	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	8	8	33	43	76	33	43	76	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
	Bogdoba F.V.	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	11	11	48	37	85	48	37	85	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
	Japangbari FV	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	12	12	52	105	157	52	105	157	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
	Cherella FV	Darrang East	Borgang	Somitpur	Bis-Chariatall	17	17	77	70	147	77	70	147	Kardi	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
	Amguri Dev. Block FV	Dibrot	Lakhipathar	Tinsukia	Tinsukia	25	25	152	145	297	152	145	297	Sonowal Kachari	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
	Majati FV	Kachugaon	Kachugaon	Kokrajhar	Gosaigaon	44	44	109	99	208	109	99	208	Boro Kachari & Rabha Kachari	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
3	New Khagrabari FV	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	29	29	73	68	141	73	68	141	NIL	NIL	NIL										NIL
4	Garufella FV	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	29	29	96	83	179	96	83	179	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
5	Jaleswari FV	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	95	95	370	338	708	268	248	516	-Do-	102	90	192									Ex-tea garden labour (Santal)
5	Namendrapur FV	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	-Do-	51	51	204	182	386	135	123	258	-Do-	69	59	128									-Do-
7	Bhadrapur FV	Haltugaon	Gaurang	Kokrajhar	Kokrajhar	46	46	298	291	589	298	291	589	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									Ex-tea garden labour & Nepalis.
3	Bordangi FV	Aye Valley	Sidli	Kokrajhar	-Do-	66	50	190	182	372	109	101	210	-Do-	86	76	162									
1	Jashbari FV	Haltugaon	Gaurang	-Do-	-Do-	50	50	397	389	786	397	389	786	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
1	Allokhar FV	Dhubri	Goma	Unubri	Dhubri	161	161	290	281	571	290	281	571	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
1	Jeingimari FV	Nagaon	Jorajan	Nagaon	Nagaon	72	72	205	200	405	295	200	405	-Do-	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
2	Naxatilla FV	Katakhal	Loharabund	Cachar	Silchar	27	12	205	200	405	95	80	175	Barmans of Cachar	121	109	230									Namasudras, Ex-tea garden labour
3	Madhura Teerang F.V.	Karbi Anglong East	Silantjan	Karbi Anglong	Diphu	24	24	46	35	81	46	35	81	Karbi	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
4	Hilengmari F.V.	Lakhimpur	Harmuty	Lakhimpur	N. Lakhimpur	53	53	191	286	477	191	286	477	Miri (Mishing)	NIL	NIL	NIL									NIL
						955	951	3740	3709	7458	3307	3296	6603		458	397	855									



It may be noted that the number of caste groups in the selected tribal forest villages are very few. Only seven numbers of villages had non tribals belonging mostly to the ex tea garden labour communities. It has also been observed that almost all the sample villages (23 Nos.) are inhabited by a single ethnic community each while a single village has two tribal groups. Thus a general homogeneous character of habitation is noticed. On enquiry it was revealed that the co-operation from the members of the same ethnic community is necessary in most of their socio-cultural decisions and therefore one tribe one village idea is favoured. The administrators during British days and even after Independence took note of this basic socio-psychological need of the forest village dwellers while selecting people for the forest villages. As mentioned earlier forests and tribals are inseparable entities and this has been testified by the non-tribals living inside the tribal forest villages. Among the non tribals majority belongs to the ex tea garden labour communities like Santals, Kols, Mundas who are considered as scheduled tribes in the Chotnagpur plateaus. Only one Koch family is traced in a forest village. The forest villages of Cachar district are mostly inhabited by non tribals and even in our sample village majority belongs to Bihari, Namasudra and ex tea garden labour communities.

Contd.13.



CHAPTER II  
Infra Structural Facilities

In the village schedule exhaustive sub heads were included in order to get as much as a clear socio-economic picture of the forest villages inhabited by tribals. Thus sub heads like nearest motorable road to the villages, near<sup>ness</sup> to the railway station, civil sub divisional H.Q., condition of the village roads, transport and communication, posts and telegraph facilities, health facilities, vaterinary facilities, educational facilities, ~~Drinking~~<sup>Drinking</sup> water supply facilities, Co-operative Societies, fair price shops, cottage industry, attitude towards family planning etc. were incorporated in the schedules, the findings of which are shown below.

Motorable Roads

Out of the 24 Nos. of sample villages, 16 Nos. lie within 0-1 km from the nearest motorable road. Five numbers of villages are situated within 2-4 km from the nearest motorable road while 2 Nos. of villages lie at a distance of 6 kms from the nearest motorable road. One village, however is located at a distance of beyond 6 kms. from the nearest motorable road. Thus it is seen that a good number of tribal forest villages are deprived of easy communication facility. Although majority (16 Nos.) tribal forest villages lie within 0-1 km from the nearest motorable roads, yet the condition of these motorable roads is such that for only four to five months in a year the roads are actually motorable. As these motorable roads are constructed by the Forest Department mainly to carry the logs from the forests, they become unfit for small vehicles.

Nearness to the Railway Station :

It has been observed that not a single tribal forest village from our sample lies within 0 - 5 kms from the nearest railway station. Only one village is found



within 6-10 kms from the nearest railway station. Five numbers of villages are situated at a distance of 11-15 kms, 2 Nos. at a distance of 16-20 kms and 9 Nos. of tribal forest villages lie within 21-40 kms. from the nearest railway station. There are 7 Nos. of villages which are situated at a distance of beyond 40 kms from the nearest railway station. The data indicate that the forest villages are not in a position to travel at cheaper cost.

Nearness to the Sub Divisional H.Q. (Civil):

Most of the tribal forest villages are situated at a considerable distance from the Civil Sub Divisional H.Q. Sub Divisional H.Q.s provide various socio-legal facilities and the villagers have to visit these H.Q.s at considerable cost. In our sample study only one village is found to be situated within 5 kms from the Sub Divisional H.Q.s. Similarly no village was found within a distance of 6-10 kms from the Sub Divisional H.Q.s. Two numbers of villages are found within 11-15 kms an equal number at a distance of 16-20 km, four numbers at a distance of 21-30 kms while another four numbers of villages are situated at a distance of 31-40 kms. The people can hardly visit the Civil Sub Divisional H.Q.s if the same is located at a distance of 41-50 kms from the villages. In the study we found that there are 3 Nos. of villages lying at a distance of 41-50 kms and they can hardly visit the Sub Divisional H.Q.s as the journey involved sufficient time and money. It has also been observed that the villagers of six numbers of villages who are required to travel 51-70 kms to reach the Sub Divisional H.Q.s, do not go to the Sub Divisional H.Q. at all. Same is the case for another 2 Nos. of tribal forest villages which are located at a distance of 71-100 kms. from the Sub Divisional H.Q.s. It was found that the villagers, by and large, are unconcerned about the location of the Sub Divisional H.Q.s as they have nothing

Contd.15.



to do with this Civil Sub Divisional H.Q. They are mainly concerned with the Forest Range office and the local weekly hat.

Table V (1) shows the number of tribal forest villages from the nearest motorable road and Table V(2) shows the number of tribal forest villages from the nearest railway station while Table VI indicates the nearest Civil Sub Divisional H.Q. from the tribal forest villages.

Table - V(1)

Number of tribal forest village	Distance from the nearest motorable road
16 ( 66.7%)	0 - 1 km
5 (20.8%)	2 - 4 "
2 ( 8.4%)	5 - 6 "
1 (4.1%)	above 6 km.
24	

Table - V (2)

Number of tribal forest villages	Distance from the nearest railway station
Nil	0 - 5 km
1 ( 4.1%)	6 - 10 "
5 ( 20.8%)	11 - 15 "
2 ( 8.4%)	16 - 20 "
9 ( 37.5%)	21 - 40 "
7 ( 29.2%)	40 above
24	

Table - VI

Number of tribal forest villages	Distance from the Civil Sub Divisional H.Q.s
1 ( 4.1%)	0 - 5 km
NIL	6 - 10 "
2 (8.4%)	11 - 15 "
2 (8.4%)	16 - 20 "
4 (16.6%)	21 - 30 "
4 (16.6%)	31 - 40 "
3 (12.5%)	41 - 50 "
6 (25.1%)	51 - 70 "
2 (8.4%)	71 above.
24	



Communication :

We tried to elicit information in respect of the condition of the village roads within the tribal forest villages and a very disheartening picture emerged when we found that as many as 14 Nos. of villages have only fair weather katcha roads the condition of which during summer can be felt rather than described. Three numbers of villages have only foot tracks inside their villages, gravelled roads pass through four numbers of villages while three numbers of tribal forest villages are found by the side of the pucca motorable roads. The Table VII below shows the communication facilities of the tribal forest villages.

Table - VII

Communication facilities	No. of villages	p.c
Foot tracks	3	12.5
Katcha Fair weather	14	58.4
Gravelled	4	16.6
Pucca	3	12.5
	24	100%

Transport Facility :

Information was also collected in respect of available transport facilities in the tribal forest villages. Even in this late 20th Century bullock cart ~~is~~ found to be the sole means of conveyance for the villagers of 14 Nos. of tribal forest villages. Eleven numbers of villages can avail themselves of public buses within 2 to 3 kms walk from the villages, Motor car facilities can be availed by 10 Nos. of villages all throughout the year, while 2 Nos. of villages get such facility during winter season ~~only~~ only. Boat is the only mode <sup>of</sup> conveyance for one village. Bicycles are used by a few villagers of all the 24 Nos. of villages for short distance ~~fr~~ tours.

Contd.17.



### Other Facilities :

We also tried to get information regarding libraries, youth clubs or community centres in the sample villages and it was revealed that only six numbers of villages have libraries and none of the villages possess any youth club or community centre.

### Post and Telegraph Facilities

The post office facility for 14 Nos. of villages are within a distance of 0-2 km. The same are available within 3-5 kms for 8 Nos. of villages. Two numbers of villages have the postal facilities within 6-10 km. The telegraph facilities are not easily available. Only 2 Nos. of villages have such facilities within 0-5 kms while one village gets telegraph facilities within 6-10 kms from the village. Thus a sizable number of the sample villages (21 Nos.) have to go a long distance in order to get the telegraph facilities. Seven numbers of these villages, however, get telegraph facilities : at a distance of 30-40 kms from the villages thus compelling the villages of these last group i.e. 21 numbers of villages to spend a sizable amount in transport. The position is shown in the tabular form below, and none of the villages possess any youth club or community centre.

Table - VIII

Showing the distance of the tribal forest villages to the nearest post and telegraph offices

<u>Post Office Facility</u>			<u>Telegraph Office Facility</u>		
Number of Villages	P.C. Distance to the nearest post office		Number of Villages	P.C. Distance to the nearest telegraph office	
14	58.34	0 - 2 km	2	8.34	0 - 5 km
8	33.33	3 - 5 "	1	4.16	6-10 "
			5	20.84	11-15 "
			4	16.66	16-20 "
2	8.33	6 -10 "	4	16.66	21-30 "
			7	29.17	31-40 "
			1	4.16	41 above
24	100%		24	100%	

Contd. 12.



## Health Facilities

Among the most important felt needs of the forest villagers, the health facilities stand first in the order of preference. The topography of the villages is so hostile particularly during summer that such facilities in or near the village ~~are~~ keenly felt. In the sample villages an effort was made to find out the health facilities provided by Forest or Health Department. Majority of the villages get such facility within a distance of 0-5 kms. Out of 24 Nos. of villages only 9 Nos. (37.5%) could get health facilities provided by the state dispensaries at a distance of 0-2 kms and 8 Nos. (33.3%) of villages had these facilities at a distance of 3-5 kms. Three Nos. (12.5%) of villages do not get health facilities easily as the villagers have to go beyond 6 kms and upto 10 kms to receive such facilities. Two numbers (8.3%) of villages are situated at a distance of 11-15 kms from the state dispensary and the villagers are facing lot of difficulties in this regard. Same is the situation for another 2 Nos. (8.3%) of tribal forest villages which are situated at a distance of 16-20 kms from the nearest state dispensary. Table IX below shows the dispensary facilities available for the tribal forest villages.

Table - IX  
Showing dispensary facility for the sample  
tribal forest villages

No. of tribal forest villages	Distance to the nearest state dispensary	p.c.
9	0 - 2 km	37.5
8	3 - 5 "	33.4
3	6 - 10 "	12.5
2	11 - 15 "	8.3
2	16 - 20 "	8.3
24		100%

Comtd.19.



### Veterinary Facilities :

More or less similar situation prevails in respect of veterinary facilities. All the tribal forest villagers eke out their livelihood from agriculture and naturally they depend upon the cattle for their sustenance. The people therefore want that veterinary dispensaries should be within easy reach of the villagers so that they can get the services of the veterinary doctors without spending much time and money. The location of the forest villages should be considered while establishing veterinary dispensaries. Out of 24 Nos. of villages, 9 Nos. (37.5%) have veterinary facilities within 0-2 kms and these villages are in a better position to get the services of veterinary doctors at the time of distress. Three numbers (12.5%) of villages are conveniently situated so far as veterinary facilities are concerned as the distance from the veterinary dispensaries to these villages is within 3-5 kms. For the rest 12 Nos. (50%) of villages the distance factor stands in the way of getting necessary veterinary facilities. Thus five numbers (20.83%) of villages are situated at a distance of 6-10 kms and another equal number of villages are located at a distance of 11-20 kms. Two numbers (8.3%) of villages are practically not in a position to get veterinary facilities as the nearest veterinary dispensary lies at a distance of 21-30 kms. Table X indicates the distance of the tribal forest villages from the nearest veterinary dispensaries.

Table - X

Showing the distance of the tribal forest villages from the nearest veterinary dispensaries

No. of tribal forest village	Distance of the villages to the vety. dispensaries	p.c.
9	0 - 2 km	37.5
3	3 - 5 "	12.5
5	6 - 10 "	20.8
3	11 - 15 "	12.6
2	16 - 20 "	8.3
2	21 - 30 "	8.3
24		100%



Private Medical Practitioners :

We tried to elicit information regarding the facilities provided by the private medical practitioners to the forest dwellers. It has been observed that the state dispensaries in most cases are situated at a considerable distance from the tribal forest villages and the private medical practitioners play significant roles so far as giving relief from ailments of common diseases like 'Influenza, Malaria etc. are concerned. But the experiences of the tribal forest villages under study tell a different story in as much as there is no private medical practitioner within 0-2 kms from the villages. Only in 2 Nos. (8.3%) of villages the private medical practitioners are found within 3-5 kms while one (4.2%) village has private medical practitioner within 6-10 kms. The distance of rest of the 21 Nos. of villages varies which is shown in the tabular form below :

Table - XI

showing the distance of the villages to the nearest private medical practitioners

No. of tribal forest village	Distance of the villages to the nearest private medical practitioner	P.C.
Nil	0-2 km	
2	3-5 "	8.3
1	6-10	4.2
5	11-15 "	20.8
3	16-20 "	8.3
5	21-30 "	12.6
6	31-40 "	20.8
6	41 above	25.0
24		100.00

Contd. 21.



The above table indicates that for 6 Nos. of villages the nearest private medical practitioners are available at a distance beyond 41 kms. One can imagine the troubles and expenses involved in such situations. Very often the patient dies on way when he or she is carried to the nearest bus point in a 'Thela' or an improvised palanquin.

### Educational Facilities:

Regarding educational facilities in the tribal forest villages the position is very disheartening. Out of the 24 Nos. of surveyed villages only 5 Nos. (20.8%) have Pre-Primary schools. The total enrolment in all these schools is shown in the tabular form below :

Table - XII

Showing the Enrolment position in the Pre Primary schools of the surveyed Tribal Forest Villages

No. of Pre Primary schools	Total Enrolment			Enrolment of Tribal Students out of the total		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
5 Nos.	289	162	127	269	152	117
		56.05%	43.95%	93.07%	93.82%	92.12%

### Pre Primary School :

It is clear from the above table that the percentage of tribal students in these Pre Primary Schools is quite satisfactory. We have seen that out of 289 students as many as 269 i.e. 93.07% belong to the tribal forest villages. Girls' education at least at the lowest ladder of schooling gets a better start in as much as 92.12% of the total enrolment of girl students are girls from the tribal forest

Contd.22.



villages. The percentage of tribal students, however, decreases at a faster rate and at the 3rd or 4th standard of the L.P. school the percentage drops to an unbelievable level which will be reflected in the table showing the age group of tribal students.

### Lower Primary School :

In respect of lower primary schools, all the 24 Nos. of tribal forest villages possess one L.P. school each. Out of these, two schools are run by the Forest Department, one is a veture school and the rest 21 Nos. are run by the Education Department. All these schools are within easy reach of the villagers i.e. the L.P. schools are located at a distance of 0-1 km from the villages. Like the Pre Primary schools, the enrolment position of these schools, at least in the early stages, is satisfactory. The percentage of tribal students in these schools is sufficiently high. Out of 1481 students, 1326 (89.53%) belong to tribal communities. The enrolment position is shown in the tabular form below :

Table - XIII

Showing number of Lower Primary Schools in the tribal forest villages with their enrolment

No. of Lower Primary Schools	Total enrolment			Enrolment of tribal students		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
24	1481	805	676	1326	713	613
		54.35%	45.65%	89.53%	88.24%	90.68%

One disheartening aspect of the tribal students of Lower Primary Schools is that in the earlier stages i.e. in class I and class II there are quite a

contd.23.



good number of tribal boys and girls but after these stages the number of tribal students show a down ward trend. The reason for this state of affair is that the tribal boys and girls when they come up in ages are required to assist their parents in the household chores like tending cattle, remaining in charge of the little kids when the parents are away in the fields etc. Besides, most of the parents of this section of students are not in a position to meet the basic necessities of the school going boys and girls. Thus we have seen that in the age group 6-8 years there are 587 students and the figure comes down to 370 in the age group <sup>9-11 years and in the age group</sup> 14 years and above there are only 203 students. Table below shows the age group of the tribal students in the Lower Primary standard.

Table - XIV

Showing Age Group of Tribal Students of Lower Primary Schools

Below 6 years			6-8 years			9-11 years		
Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
304	167	137	587	309	278	370	199	171

12-14 years			14 years and above		
Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
219	125	94	203	103	100

Middle English Schools :

In the Middle English standard further slash down happened and the reason is mainly economic backwardness of the tribal families inhabiting the forest villages. In our sample villages out of 24 Nos only 19 Nos have M.E.

Contd. 24



schools within a reasonable distance from the villages. Number of villages having M E schools in between 0-2 km are 18 while there are no M E schools in between 3-5 kms from the villages.

The distance from one tribal forest village to the nearest M.E. school has been found to be within 6-10 kms. Out of these 19 Nos. of M.E. schools, 11 Nos. are managed by the Department of Education, seven numbers are venture while one M.E. school is managed by Forest Department. The Table below shows the number of general students and tribal students from the tribal inhabited forest villages attending M.E. schools.

Table - XV

Showing number of general students and tribal students from the forest villages inhabited by tribals attending M.E. schools.

No. of M.E. schools	Distance from the villages	Number of students from the Tribal forest villages			Number of tribal students from the tribal forest villages		
		Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
18 Nos	0-2 km						
NIL	3-5 "	472	253	219	399	212	187
1 No	6-10 "		53.60%	46.40%	84.53%	83.79%	85.38%

From the above table it is clear that there are good number of tribal students attending M.E. schools the percentage being 84.53. Similarly the position of girls attending M.E. schools is also encouraging in as much as 85.38% of the tribal girl students are attending M.E. schools.

#### H.E. Schools :

There are 20 Nos of Govt. Aided H.E. schools, 2 Nos. of Ad hoc grant H.E. schools, one venture H.E. school and one Departmental H.E. school (Forest Department's)



approachable from the sample villages. Out of these 9 Nos. of H.E.schools are at a distance of 0-2 km, 10 Nos.at a distance of 3-5 kms, 2 Nos. at a distance of 6-10 kms and 3 Nos.at a distance of 11-15 kms from the tribal forest villages. Like the M.E.schools, the H.E.schools also attract a sizable tribal students from the forest villages which is testified from the enrolment position shown below in a tabular form. Out of the total 437 students attending H.E.schools from the tribal forest villages,as many as 392 (89.70%) belong to the tribal communities.

Table - XVI

showing the enrolment position of the H E schools

No.of H.E. schools	Distance from the villages	No.of students attending H.E. schools from tribal forest villages			No.of tribal students attending H.E.schools from the tribal forest villages		
		Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
9	0-2 km	437	251	186	392	225	167
10	3-5 "						
2	6-10 "		57.43%	42.57%	89.70%	89.64%	89.78%
3	11-15 "						

24

It has been observed that the tribal students prefer Govt. Aided H.E.schools to Venture and departmentally managed H.E.schools as the later schools are not equipped with minimum requirements. Thus we find only 5 students from these villages in one H.E.school run by the Forest Department and 4 students in one Venture H.E. school.

### Higher Education

Higher education facilities are not easily available in these villages. We find only 2 Nos. of villages within 0-2 kms distance from the colleges and one number within 6-10 kms from the nearest seat of higher education.

Contd.26.



Another 2 Nos. of villages have the nearest college at a distance of 11-15 kms. Three numbers of tribal forest villages have the nearest college at a distance of 16-20 kms, while the distance from the nearest colleges to another nine villages ranged from 21-30 kms. The distance factor along with the poor economic condition have compelled many students to end their educational career, after High School Leaving Certificate Examination. It has been reported that due to non availability of cheaper and regular means of transport, most of the students have to discontinue their studies. In spite of the constraints we found 119 Nos. of tribal students prosecuting studies in colleges. The Madhupur Deori forest village under Dibrugarh Forest Division has the highest number of college going boys and girls being 34 at the time of the Survey followed by Singimari tribal forest village under Nagaon Sub Division with 15 Nos. of college going boys and girls. Although the general economic condition of the people of these tribal forest villages is not sound enough yet there are a few households in both the villages which are affluent enough to spend money on higher education of their sons and daughters. In as many as 9 Nos. of tribal forest villages there are no college going boys and girls and only 6 Nos. of villages had one college going student each. Number of girl students are just half due to the constraints of lack of cheap means of transport as well as necessary resources. The table below shows the position of college education among the tribal forest dwellers of sample villages

Table - XVII

Showing the distance of colleges from the tribal forest villages and the enrolment position

Number of villages	Distance from the nearest college	Number of students from the tribal forest village			No. of tribal students from the tribal forest village		
		Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
2	0- 5 kms	120	80	40	119	79	40
1	6-10 "		66.66%	33.33%	99.1%	99.1%	100%
2	11-15 "						
3	16-20 "						
9	21-30 "						
6	31-40 "						
1	41 above "						



Regarding students undergoing other studies from the sample villages the position is very disappointing. We find only seven students in all studying in medical, technical, agricultural and veterinary institutions and interestingly all hail from the Deori tribe of Madhupur Deori forest village of Dibrugarh Forest Division. The only girl medical student also hails from this village.

Table - XVIII

Showing the number of tribal students undergoing studies in Medicals, Agricultural, Technical and Veterinary Institutions

No. of villages	Medical			Technical			Agricultural			Vety.			Total		
	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G
24	1	-	1	5	1	4	1	1	-	nil	1	-	7	2	5

#### Employment :

The study reveals that there are 129 Nos. of employed persons in the sample villages and Madhupur Deori village has the largest number i.e. 45 Nos. of employees. It is followed by Anguri (D. Block) of Digboi Forest Division with 22 Nos. of employees while Alokjar forest village under Kasugaon Forest Division has 13 Nos. of employed persons. Tribewise Madhupur Deori village is inhabited by the Deoris, Anguri 'D' Block by Sonowal Kacharis and Alokjar by the Boro Kacharis. Out of 45 Nos. of employed persons of Madhupur Deori forest village as many as 8 persons hold gazetted posts. Besides there is one college teacher and 4 Nos. of High school teachers. The table below shows the employment position in the sample tribal forest village.

Contd.28.



Table - XIX

Showing the employment position of the sample tribal forest villages

<u>Category of Posts</u>	<u>Numbers</u>
Gazetted Service (State)	8
College teacher	1
High school teacher	9
(Graduates and under graduates)	
Upper Divn./Lower Division clerks	46
Middle English school teacher	9
Statistical Assistant	1
Lower Primary school teachers	13
Post Master	2
Farm Manager	1
Veterinary Compounder	1
Driver	1
Contractors	3
Mahaldar	1
Gram Sevak	1
Police Constable	3
Chowkidar	3
Forester	1
Forest Guard	4
Fourth Grade Employee (Railway)	2
Workshop Helper	6
A.S.E.B. Lineman	1
Mohorir	1
Military Sepoy	1
Fourth Grade in State Govt./State Govt. under taking	10
T O T A L :	129

It is seen that employment figures in respect of Third and Fourth Grade jobs predominate and only in one tribal forest village namely Madhupur Deori Forest Village

Contd.29



we have found class I and class II <sup>posts holders</sup> totalling 18 Nos. Four villages have not even a Fourth grade employee. Although these villages are directly under the control of the Forest Department, the employment under Forest Department is also not encouraging. There are only one Upper Divn. Assistant, one Forester and 4 Nos. of Forest Guards employed under the Forest Department.

Educational Status :

Data are collected in respect of educational status of the people and it is observed that there are quite a good number of High School Leaving Certificate passed students in these villages who could not go for higher study in the colleges or left the college midway because of the pecuniary situation. Girls' education is much behind in these villages and poor economic condition of the parents coupled with distance factor to the seat of higher education from the villages contributed largely for this condition. Out of 167 Nos. of H.S.L.C. passed students, 34 Nos. (20.35%) are girls. It is seen that out of 167 students only 55 (32.93%) could prosecute higher studies and out of 55 students only 9 Nos. (16.36%) belong to the womenfolk. Going further up in the ladder, the number of students decreases and in the degree standard there are only 21 students and in post-graduate level only 4 Nos. are prosecuting studies. There are only four numbers of persons in the 'Other Category' which includes Engineering, Medical, Veterinary and all are male students hailing from a village inhabited by the Deoris (Madhupur Deori Forest Village). The position is shown in the tabular form below.

Contd.30.



Table - XX

Showing the educational status of the sample forest villages inhabited by tribals

Number of tribal forest villages	HSLC Passed			Pre-University passed			B.A.B.Sc. B.Com			M.A.M.Sc. M.Com			Other Category		
	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G
24	167	133	34	55	46	9	21	16	5	4	2	2	4	4	-
		79.6 %	20.4 %		83.6 %	16.4 %		76.1 %	23.9 %		50 %	50 %		100 %	

It may be noted that 5 Nos. of tribal forest villages have not even H.S.L.C. passed students and these belonged to Boro Kachari 2 Nos., Rabhas 1 No, Karbis 1 No and Miri (Mishing) 1 No. These villages are lying in inaccessible areas of Kachugaon Forest Division, Kamrup West Forest Division, Karbi Anglong East Forest Division and Lakhimpur Forest Division.

As mentioned earlier the economic condition of most of the tribal forest villagers is so pitiable that they can hardly meet the educational expenses of their sons and daughters. Besides every household prefers to get assistance from their sons and daughters in their agricultural pursuits as soon as the children come up in ages. Thus education gets secondary importance and in certain cases no importance at all. For this state of affair, the poor villagers, of course, cannot be blamed. The people, by and large, realise the importance of educating their children but prevailing economic condition compels them to behave in a different way. The dropout figures are therefore, more applicable in their cases and the following table testifies this.

Contd.31.



Table - XXI

Showing dropout position from the educational institutions of the sample tribal forest villages

No. of tribal forest villages	Drop out in Lower Primary standard			Drop out in Middle English Standard			Drop out in H.E. school standard			Drop out in College level		
	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G
24	182	107	75	91	56	35	88	62	26	11	8	3
		58.79%	41.21%		61.53%	38.47%		70.45%	29.55%		72.72%	27.28%

It is seen from the above table that drop out figures are more in the lower primary standard which itself is an indicator of the most pitiable economic condition of the people. Another reason of drop out at this stage is the adverse situation of the tribal forest villages. During field investigation we have observed that due to fear from wild elephants most of the children stay back at home particularly during summer season. Again during flood and rainy season the roads become muddy and there is no atmosphere of study in the schools. The children prefer to stay with their parents. Besides, most of the forest dwellers require the assistance of their sons and daughters in agricultural and allied activities. Thus lack of consciousness coupled with economic backwardness led to increase of drop-out figures.

#### Drinking Water Supply :

As regards drinking water supply most of the villages depend upon ring wells and katcha wells which cause great health hazard. In the sample villages we find that 21 Nos. of villages, out of 24 Nos. under survey, depend upon ring wells for their water supply. Ten numbers of villages get water

Contd.32.



from ring wells and tube wells and in one tribal forest village (Madhupur Deori Forest Village) we find as many as 40 Nos. of tube wells where as another nine villages have altogether 40 Nos. of tube wells. Four villages have one tube well each while Amguri (D Block) Forest Village under Digboi Forest Division has seven numbers of tube wells. Only 2 Nos. of villages are depending upon tanks/ponds for their water supply. One of these villages possesses a tube well but the people cannot depend upon it. Two numbers of villages depend upon river for the water supply and one of them (Madhuram Terang Basti of Karbi Anglong Division) possesses a ring well as additional source of water. Pipe water scheme of Public Health Engineering Department is almost non existent except in one village which, too, is not functioning till November 1987.

The effort made by the Forest Department in this regard is not satisfactory. Till the commissioning of the Forest Village Development Scheme, 1984 very little was done for the welfare of the tribal forest villages. Under this Scheme 3 Nos. of sample villages have been supplied with 2 ring wells each. In one village 2 Nos. of water pumps have been installed while one ring well is sanctioned for another tribal forest village.

#### Marketing :

As regards marketing facility the villagers mainly depend upon the weekly hats which are in most cases located at a considerable distance from the villages. For example, the distance from the Madhupur Deori forest village of Dibrugarh Forest division, to the nearest Barbarua weekly 'hat' is 18 km and to Dibrugarh town daily bazar 28 km. Similarly Cherelia Forest Villagers under Darrang East Forest Division have to trek the distance of 15 kms to the Borgang weekly hat. Urahilaga forest villagers under Darrang West

Contd.33.



Forest Division walk the 9 km distance to the Borjuli Tea Estate Sunday hat. The distance of Amguri forest village under Digboi Forest Division to the nearest marketing centre i.e. Tingrai is 40 km and to Digboi daily bazar 16 kms. Where there is no weekly hat within walking distance, the Forest Department provides one. For example, for the convenience of the forest dwellers of Jaleswari forest village, a weekly hat is provided on Wednesday by the Forest Department. The common people exchange their local produce like bananas, betel leaves and nuts, arums, Rabi crops for daily necessities like kerosine oil, salt, yarn, gur, chada, rice-beer jars, books, pencils, daos etc. It may be mentioned that the weekly get-together at the 'hats' provides the villagers with information about events that take place in the outside world as news papers are rare in these far flung areas and the younger sections are not very eager to hear the news in the transistor sets unless something sensational happens.

#### Fair Price Shops :

Only 3 Nos. of villages have fair price shops and the stock position even in these shops is not satisfactory. The essential items of day to day life of the people are not available. Even if certain items are available, the villagers cannot purchase those as their purchasing capacity is very limited and the owner of fair price shop hesitates to give small quantities, say 100 grams of sugar, 200 gms dal, etc. to the villagers. Other shops like grocery & shops, pan guntis etc. are very few. There are altogether 8 Nos. of such shops spread over seven villages.

Data were also collected regarding civic amenities provided to the forest villagers by the Forest Department. Health care is urgently felt by the villagers as the forest areas are Malaria infested. Water borne diseases are also

contd.34.



common. But not much has been done by the Forest Department in this regard. In the sample villages we come across only one State dispensary at E Block of Lakhipathar Forest Village (Amguri Forest Village) but that, too, is not functioning at the time of survey/

#### Co-operative Societies :

Co-operative societies are not established in any of these forest villages and the nearest Co-operative Societies also are at a considerable distance from these villages. For example, the Larua Gaon Panchayat Samabai Samiti (G.P.S.S.) is situated at a distance of 10 kms. from Madhupur Deori Forest Village. The Balipara G.P.S.S. is located at a distance of about 10 kms from Urohilaga Forest Village. The Tingrai G.P.S.S. situated at a distance of about 10 kms from Amguri Forest Village (D Block) can hardly cater to the needs of the tribal forest villagers. The nearest G.P.S.S. for Belaipur Forest Village is at a distance of 15 kms. Similarly the Sarupathar G.P.S.S. situated at a distance of 7 kms from Madhuram Terang Basti a Karbi village without regular transport facility cannot meet the needs of the forest village. Some G.P.S.S. are, however, situated near the village but the tribal people do not get the required items at the time of need. The Charaibeel G.P.S.S. is only 2 kms from Mojati Forest Village and Laokhoa G.P.S.S. is only 1 and 1/2 kms from Singimari Forest Village. These societies have their own opening and closing timings which is unsuitable for the tribal forest villagers. Besides, the purchasing power of the poor forest dwellers is very limited and they feel shy to go to the Co-operative societies to purchase small quantities. Naturally the Mahajans of the grocery shops are reaping the benefits. The situation of the tea garden labourers and the forest villagers is almost similar. The tea garden management establishes Co-operative Societies within the

Contd.35.



campus of tea gardens and the labourers are greatly benefited from such Co-operative societies. The Forest Department could establish co-operative societies in the Forest Village areas or in the Range headquarters for the benefit of the forest villagers. But the study reveals a total negative picture in this respect.

### Socio-Cultural Organisations :

Socio cultural organisations and voluntary institutions could play decisive role so far as solution of social problems of the people are concerned. There are social problems like excessive drinking habit, gambling etc. which could be checked by the local Mahila Samitis and Youth Clubs. The latter organisation could also help sort out many local problems prevalent on individual as well as community basis. But our survey in the sample villages revealed that such socio-cultural organisations are almost non-existent in these villages. Only one 'Sangha' (club) has been found at Bogdoba village under Kamrup West Forest Division. Another youth club is reportedly existing in Anguri Forest Village under Digboi Forest Division but there is no house to accommodate the club. The Dhulia Party of Mojati Forest Village under Kasugaon Forest Division is a very useful organisation among the Boro Kacharis of the village. In Garufella Forest Village under the same Forest Division there are two welfare organisations viz. one Mahila Samiti and one 'Kristi Party'. Except these above mentioned organisations, no other social organisation worth the name exists in rest of the villages.

### Cottage and Small Scale Industry :

The Tribes of the Forest Villages, like other tribal people possess skills in small scale industries and due mainly to acculturation process, the small scale industries are fast disappearing so far as the commercial



aspect is concerned. Whatever cottage industry or small industry is available, the same is only on individual plane. We have seen that almost every tribal household possesses a loom and the womenfolk weave clothes not only for their use but for the use of all the members of the family. Five numbers of families produce bamboo articles of daily use. These families could sell these products but the income is negligible and irregular. Piggery is accepted as an industry by 6 Nos. of families only. Altogether 90 Nos. of families are found rearing Endi cocoons. The products are used locally. Poultry farming is a lucrative undertaking for a two households only. Majority of the households possess poultries. Two numbers of families are maintaining fisheries in a small scale but the income is negligible. The tribal villagers possess skill in carpentry but it is found that only 3 members of two families are accepting carpentry as secondary source of income. Cane products like 'Murha' and chairs are produced only in Belaipur tribal forest village under Cachar district. Here also due to non availability of raw materials at subsidised rate the tribal villagers are adopting it as leisure time avocation.

As regards raw materials, bamboos are locally available in the forests. The people collect yarn from local market. The Endi rearing families of Madhupur Deori forest village get the 'Keseru' leaves and Endi cocoons locally. Hence there is potentiality of further growth of the industry. The forest villagers of Bogdoba under Kamrup West Forest Division have to purchase the cocoons from Borduar Sericulture Farm situated at a distance of 3 kms from the village. It may be mentioned here that the purchasing power of the forest villagers is very low and in spite of the skill they possess, most of the villagers are not in a position to produce Endi clothes regularly. It has been observed that only the people of two villages could sell the products of household industry in the weekly hats and these constituted, mostly bamboo products like 'Dala', 'Kharahi', 'Bisani' and weaving

Contd.37.



implements etc. Persons of four villages are in a position to sell one or two pieces of clothes in a week. They sell those in the village itself. The villagers consider the cottage industry as subsidiary occupation because they prefer to engage themselves mostly in agricultural activities. The raw materials are becoming scarce day by day as the facilities provided by the Forest Department to the tribal forest dwellers have been drastically curtailed. Thus engaging themselves in the cottage industry as wholetime occupation appears to be unproductive. Neither the people have necessary resources to purchase the required raw materials.

To our query whether such subsidiary sources of income could improve their living standard, 10 Nos. of families replied in affirmative. These belonged to the womenfolk who commented that by weaving clothes they have contributed largely towards relieving the menfolk of the economic strain. The people of another 10 Nos. of villages replied that they are not benefitted from the household industries. Out of the ten villages which replied in affirmative the members of these numbers of forest villages opine that the cottage industries particularly handloom provide resources for social visits, education of the children, dresses and annual household worships.

#### General Information of Tribal Forest Villages :

Out of 24 Nos. of tribal forest villages, two numbers of villages completed 100 years as forest village. The lot of the poor villagers during these years did not change for better. Four numbers of villages had completed more than 70 years while 5 Nos. of villages served the Forest Department for 50 years and above. Eight numbers of forest villages were established during 1950-53. Most of the villages were established in the pre Independence days. Thus Singimari Forest Village was established in 1940.

Contd.38.



Another three numbers of forest villages are more than 40 years old. Only the members of one tribal forest village could not tell the exact date of the establishment of the village which came under 'not known' category. These villages had their original place in the neighbouring tribal inhabited areas and they came to the forest in search of cultivable land and jobs under the Forest Department. However, under 'not known' category we find four numbers of villages. But it is certain that they came from neighbouring tribal areas as the tribal people of these forest villages are found to be maintaining intimate relations with the neighbouring tribal people.

Out of 24 Nos. of tribal forest villages, 5 Nos. expressed happiness in their present condition while the rest 19 Nos. expressed unhappiness. The reason for unhappiness is that in comparison with the lot of the fellow tribal villages living outside the reserved forests, the condition of the the forest villagers is going from bad to worse over the years. Besides, of late the Forest Department has imposed restrictions on the forest villagers in respect of use ~~fructu~~ <sup>fructu</sup> ary rights over the forest products. Non availability of sufficient cultivable land is the biggest problem and although the villagers are directly under the control of the Forest Department, the same authority has not done anything to ameliorate the poor economic condition arising out of the insufficiency of cultivable land.

All the tribal forest villagers are reluctant to change their present occupation. They argue that they are living in the forests for such a long time and are developing symbiotic relation with the forests. The trees are like their own off-springs. They have sentimental attachment to the forests. Hence they are willing to improve their economic condition by serving in the Forest Department. They want that the Forest Department should sympathetically consider

Contd.39.



their cases. Today they do not maintain any connection with their place of origin. They, however, do not mind if certain forest labourers are employed from outside provided the sons and daughters of the tribal forest villagers who are willing to serve the Department get employment first.

Major Problem of the Forest Villages :

The major problem of all the sample forest villages is the insufficiency of cultivable land, lack of transport and communication facilities, lack of drinking water and health facilities. The needs, however, differ from village to village. For example Gomotha tribal forest village is situated in such a place which has no road linking the village with the nearest growth centre. Health and Veterinary facilities are also totally inadequate. A fair price shop inside or near the village is urgently necessary. On the other hand the problems of Madhupur Deori village are different. Flood Water causes havoc in the village. This is a comparatively advanced tribal forest village and the students of the village face problems in procuring income certificate from the S.D.Cs. The villagers want that such certificates should be issued by the Divisional Forest Officer who knows the socio-economic condition of the forest villagers better. Another constraint is that facilities available for tribals in various Government Departments are not extended to the forest villagers unless a report is received from the concerned forest officer. The principle appears to be sound but problem arises when the required report from the forest office is not sent in time. The simple tribal-folk do not take to return empty handed when they come to an office spending hard earned money and their valuable time. But in practice such things happen. Perhaps he is <sup>e</sup>last concerned with the expenses incurred but he is fed up with curt replies and superior attitude of the officials.

Contd.40.



The problem is different with Garufella forest villagers where erosion of Garufella river causes heavy damage to the cultivable land of the villagers. Individual household lands are already insufficient and the erosion causes further damage to their economy. Due to erosion there is no road connecting the village with Jaleswari, a growth centre. The L.P school in the village is yet to be provincialised and the teacher's pay is paid by the contributions of the villagers.

Non availability of sufficient cultivable land is also problem No.1 in Madharam Terang Basti.

The Singimari Forest Village is almost cut off from Nagaon, the district headquarter because there is no road worth the name connecting the village with Nagaon or other growth centres. Here also the villagers want that the Lower Primary school situated inside the village should be provincialised with provision for two teachers.

Every forest village under study complained that due to non receipt of revenue village status the villagers have been deprived of many facilities as development activities through Panchayats are not undertaken in these villages.

Contd.41.



P A R T    +    B  
C H A P T E R    -    I I I

In the part II data in respect of 94 households covering wide ranging sub heads such as demographic information, occupational structure, employment position, land use pattern, marketing, household industry, household assets, condition of houses, income and expenditure, indebtedness, felt needs of the villagers, facilities provided by the Forest Department, awareness of constitutional provisions, religious life, changes in socio-cultural life if any, etc. have been incorporated.

Demography (Details)

Twenty four numbers of forest villages inhabited by tribals from 14 Nos. of Forest Divisions covering both hills and plains of Assam have been selected for the present study. These selected villages (except one in Silchar) have 50% or more tribal population each. Kamrup West Forest Division has the highest number of tribal forest villages (58 Nos) followed by Kachugaon Forest Division with 51 Nos. of tribal forest villages. Out of the sample 24 Nos. of villages, 11 Nos. i.e. 6 Nos. from Kamrup West Forest Division and 5 Nos. from Kachugaon Forest Division are taken for the survey. Twelve numbers of tribal forest villages have been selected from 11 Nos. of Forest Divisions. In the hills districts there are only 4 Nos. of tribal forest villages and for the present study only one village has been selected.

Out of 955 households in the sample tribal forest villages, 951 (99.58%) households belonged to tribals. Similarly out of 7458 persons in the sample villages 6603 (88.53%) persons belonged to Scheduled tribes of various

Contd. 42.



ethnic groups. The plains tribes dominate the scene as they are found in 22 Nos. of villages while Karbis are found in 2 Nos. of villages in hills district and the other in the plains district. Among the plains tribes Boro Kacharis are found in 10 Nos. of villages with a total population of 3823 constituting 57.89% of the total scheduled tribe population of the sample villages. Incidentally largest number of tribal forest villages are found in Boro inhabited areas. The Rabhas with a total population of 678 constitute the second largest plains tribal group. Their percentage to the total scheduled tribe population of the forest villages is 10.26. There are two villages each inhabited by the Miris (Mishings) and the Karbis with population of 639 and 228 respectively. The percentages of these two groups are 9.6 and 3.4 respectively of the total scheduled tribe population of the sample villages. The Deoris, Barmans of Cachar and Sonowal Kacharis have one village each and the percentages to the total scheduled tribe populations of sample villages are 8.4, 2.6 and 4.4. respectively. There is only one mixed tribal village which is inhabited by Boro Kacharis and Rabhas with a total population of 208 constituting 3.15% of the total scheduled tribe population of the sample villages. The table below shows the tribe-wise break-up of tribal forest villages.

Table XXII

Showing tribe wise break up of sample tribal forest villages with population and percentages

Sl. No.	Name of the tribe	Population			No. of villages	P.C. to total ST Population	P.C. to total population
		Total	M	F			
1.	Boro Kachari	3823	1959	1864	10	57.89	51.26
2.	Rabha	678	331	347	6	10.27	9.09
3.	Miri (Mishings)	639	266	373	2	9.68	8.56
4.	Deori	555	272	283	1	8.40	7.44
5.	Sonowal Kachari	297	152	145	1	4.49	3.98
6.	Karbi	228	123	105	2	3.46	3.05
7.	Barmans of Cachar	175	95	80	1	2.66	2.34
8.	Boro Kachari Rabha	208	109	99	1	3.15	2.78
T O T A L		6603	3307	3296	24	100%	

Contd. 43.



It is well known that the tribal villages in the plains districts of Assam are interspersed with non-tribal villages and even in the tribal villages non-tribal residents are also found. In the sample, tribal forest villages non-tribals constituted various non-scheduled communities like the Koches, ex-tea garden labourers (Santals, Mundas and Oraons, Kurmis, Koiris mainly), Nepalis and Biharis. In Cachar district a few households of Namasudras (a scheduled caste community of Assam) are also found. The Table below shows the non-tribal populations in the forest villages.

Table - XXIII

Showing non-tribal populations in the sample tribal forest villages

Sl. No.	Name of the non-tribal communities	Population			No. of villages	P.C. to total population
		Total	Male	Female		
1.	Koch	5	3	2	1	0.06
2.	Ex-tea garden labourers (Munda & Oraon)	138	77	61	2	1.85
3.	Ex-tea garden labourers (Santals)	320	171	149	2	4.29
4.	Ex-tea garden labourers (Santal) and Nepali	162	86	76	1	2.17
5.	Ex-tea garden labourer (Kurmi and Koiri) Hindusthani and Namasudra	230	121	109	1	3.08
T O T A L :		855	458	397	7	11.45

From the above table it is seen that only 5 Nos. of villages have non-tribals who constitute only 11.45 percent of the total population in the sample forest villages. Ex-tea garden labourers are the major non-tribal communities and they are found in 4 Nos. of villages. It may be pointed out that among the non-tribals, indigenous Assamese population

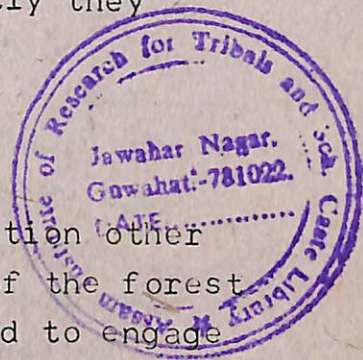
Contd. 44.



are very few and only in one village one Koch family having 5 members is traced. These extea garden labourers were originally engaged as day labourers but subsequently they managed to occupy forest land.

Economy :

Data have been collected regarding occupation other than forest employment undertaken by the youths of the forest villages and only 42 Nos. of persons have been found to engage themselves in occupation mentioned above. These occupations vary from service under State Government as Gazetted Officers, 3rd and 4th Grade, employees and M.B.B.S. doctors, to Day Labourers, Contractors in private sectors. It is interesting to note that in the Madhupur Deori forest village there are as many as 13 persons engaged in occupations other than forest employment. These include 2 M.B.B.S. doctors, one State Government Gazetted Officer, 2 Nos. of Graduate Upper Division Assistants, 3 Nos. of Lower Division Assistants, one Pharmacist, one Police A.S.I., one Sectional Officer, one L.I.C. Agent and one Railway Fourth Grade employee. The Amguri forest village under Digboi Forest Division has as many as 22 Nos. of persons engaged in occupations other than forest employment. Among these there are 5 Nos. of graduates who are employed as Assistants in Central Excise Department, State Bank of India, Bank of Boroda, Punjab National Bank and Education Department of Government of Assam. There are 15 fourth grade employees in the village serving under both Central and State Government organisations. Two teachers from the village are serving in the local Lower Primary school. In contrast best of the 2 villages have only 7 Nos. of persons whose occupations have no link with the forest. Among these two are Lower Primary School teachers, one Weaving Instructor, one petty contractor, one Hospital Attendant and 3 Nos. of day Labourers.



Contd.45.



Economic affluence has much to do with improvement of standard of living and in the instant case the living standard of the two families, one from Deori and the other from Sonowal Kachari communities, is sufficiently high. In the Deori village 4 Nos. of families possessing 30 Bighas of cultivable land each have 13 Nos. of service holders while in Amguri one household possesses the entire 20 Nos. of service holders including the graduates and another 2 Nos. of families possess one L.P. School teacher and one Hospital Attendant. The former cultivates 31 Bighas of land while the latter 2 Nos. of families cultivate 10 Bighas of land each. The heads of 6 Nos. of families depend solely on day labour and they do not possess cultivable land. Rest 81 Nos. of households do not possess any service holder and on an average each of these families has 8 Bighas of cultivable land. Thus persons holding occupations other than forest employment are very few and a sound self-sufficient economy largely depends upon employment as a subsidiary source of income.

There are 140 Nos. (17.90%) earners and 83 (10.61%) earning dependents while 559 (71.48%) non earners constitute mostly of students and persons above the age of 60. Thus over-whelming persons depend upon a small section of earners and naturally the economy of the forest villagers is far from healthy.

There are 49 Nos. of unemployed youths in all the 24 Nos. of sample villages and they are mostly extra hands in their respective families in the sense that agricultural land in these families are not sufficient to employ them profitably. One such unemployed youth belongs to the Deori tribe while the Rabhas have 7 Nos. of unemployed youths. As many as 30 unemployed youths are found among the Boro Kacharis and

Contd. 46.



all are either unsuccessful High School Leaving Certificate Examination students or drop outs in high school levels. All the said unemployed youths are male. The main reason for this state of affair is lack of suitable employment opportunity. The position of Amguri forest village is different which is inhabited by the Sonowal Kacharis and the village has 11 Nos of unemployed youths including 6 Nos. of girls who are mostly High School Leaving Certificate passed students or college drop outs. In this case also the reason for unemployment is lack of suitable employment opportunities.

#### Land and Forest :

The forest villagers enjoy only usufructuary rights over their land allotted under Forest Lease and ownership right of land is limited to this criteria of people. The right of transfer and sale is not given to the forest villagers although the forest authorities on humanitarian ground have agreed to the mutual transfer of the originally allotted land to the sons after the death of the allottee and in this way the forest dwellers inside the reserved forests are enjoying the forest lands for generations. Most of the villagers are occupying the forest lands from fore Independence days. Over the years the populations are increasing but the lands remain the same. Encroachment of forest land is becoming a problem for the authorities as well as to the original forest villagers. In our sample study we find two (2.12%) informants without any land and they eke out their livelihood by resorting to the profession of day labourers in the households of fellow villagers. It is revealed that casual employment under the Forest Department is difficult to obtain and in some cases non forest dwellers are trespassing into the forest employment area. There are 2 (2.12%) families which possess 0-2 Bighas of land each and their economic condition is pitiable. Nine (9.58%) families are having 2-5 Bighas



of land each while 19 (20.22% Nos. of families <sup>possess</sup> 5-10 Bighas of land each. Majority of the families i.e. 25 Nos. (26.60%) however possess 10-15 Bighas of land each. There are 16 Nos. (17.02%) of families which possess 15-20 Bighas of land each. Ten (10.64%) numbers of families are in a comfortable position so far as possession of landed property is concerned as they possess 20-30 Bighas of land each. Another 11 Nos. (11.70%) of families are sufficiently well off as they possess 30 Bighas and more lands each.

The above pen picture in respect of possession of land by individual families may appear to be a rosy one but if one goes deep into the real situation one will find a disheartening picture. In most of the cases it is found that the land per family shown above was allotted to an individual in decades back and the same lands are further divided among the sons while in official record the amount of land remains the same. Besides the yield per Bigha is very low due to various factors like depredations of wild elephants, old method of cultivation, etc.

The Table below shows the land holding position of the sample families of the surveyed tribal forest villages.

Table - XXIV

Showing the land holding position of the sample families

Size of land (in Bighas)	No. of families possessing land	P.C. to total families under survey
Landless	2	2.12
0 - 2	2	2.12
+ 2 - 5	9	9.58
+ 5 - 10	19	20.22
+ 10 - 15	23	26.60
+ 15 - 20	16	17.02
+ 20 - 30	10	10.64
+ 30 - above	11	11.70
<b>T O T A L</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100%</b>



As regards homestead land the position is more or less similar to that prevailing in the general areas. Here again it may be noted that the homestead lands shown per family as per forest record no longer remain the same in the practical field because the original allottee has distributed the peice of land to his sons. Thus 59 Nos. (62.77%) of the families have 0-2 Bighas of homestead land each while 4 Nos. (4.26%) of families do not possess even the homestead lands. These families are allowed to construct their mini dwelling thatched cottages in the corners of the homestead lands of some benevolent fellow villagers. Fifteen (15.95%) numbers of families have 2-5 Bighas of homestead land each while another 16 Nos. (17.02%) of families possess 5-10 Bighas each. The following table shows the land holding pattern (homestead land) of the sample households.

Table - XXV

Showing land holding pattern in respect of homestead land of the sample households

<u>Size of land</u> <u>(in Bighas)</u>	<u>No. of families</u> <u>possessing land</u>	<u>P.C. to the</u> <u>total families</u>
Landless	4	4.26
0- 2	59	62.77
+ 2- 5	15	15.95
+ 5-10	16	17.02
<u>T O T A L :</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>100%</u>

There was a time <sup>when</sup> the tribal forest villagers did not feel the scarcity of cultivable land as lands in those days were sufficient to feed the families and wants were limited. But over the years the position has undergone tangible changes. The families of forest villagers increased as time passed and today agricultural land is considered as the most important felt need of the forest villagers.



To make the matter worse trespassing on the cultivable forest land has taken place. In every village that we visited; the villagers complained about insufficiency of cultivable land. Three numbers (3.20%) of the families have been found to be without any cultivable land and they maintain their families by serving in the households of the fellow villagers as day labourers. Thirteen numbers (13.82%) of families having + 2 - 5 Bighas of land are below the poverty line. A sizeable number (31 Nos 32.98%) of the families have cultivable lands in the range of + 10-15 Bighas and these families are comparatively well off. In the category of + 30 Bighas each, there are 7 Nos. (7.45%) of families and an equal number of families are possessing + 15 - 20 Bighas of cultivable land each. Nine families (9.58%) possess + 20 - 30 Bighas of land each. The latter families having + 10 to + 30 Bighas of land each may appear to be wealthy but in fact they are not in view of the division of land among the heirs. The overall economy of the 22 Nos (23.40%) of the families having + 5 - 10 Bighas of land each cannot be considered as sound as the families have to bear all the expenses of the families out of the income of agricultural products. The following table indicates the land holding pattern in respect of cultivable land of the sample households.

Table - XXVI

Showing the size of cultivable land possessed by the sample households

Size of land in Bigha	No. of households possessing lands	P.C. to the total sample households
Landless	3	3.20
0 - 2	2	2.12
+ 2 - 5	13	13.82
+ 5 - 10	22	23.40
+ 10 - 15	31	32.98
+ 15 - 20	7	7.45
+ 20 - 30	9	9.58
+ 30 - above	7	7.45
T O T A L	94	100%



### Income and Expenditure

While determining income and expenditure in a tribal setting, the investigators are generally beset with a big problem as the tribal people and for that matter almost all the rural people do not generally keep account of income and expenditure. Except the few ~~sa~~alaried group the income of general cultivators is highly variable, so also the expenditure. Sometimes social obligations compel fellow villagers to meet certain expenditures even though a family is hardly capable to do so. Besides, the income of the forest villagers now-a days is restricted as earning through casual employment in the forests has been curtailed. The villagers have to meet multifarious family expenditures by selling paddy although most of the families are hardly able to sell paddy after meeting the annual requirement. Some families, however, earn good amount from Rabi crops, betel leaves and nuts etc. The people cultivate their own lands and share cropping is almost nil.

In the sample villages under study we find that most of the families i.e. 39 (41.48%) fall within the annual income range of Rs.2000/- to Rs.4000/- each which is below the poverty line. To be specific 19 Nos.(20.21%) of families earn Rs.2000/- to Rs.3000/- each annually while the annual earning from all sources of 20 Nos (21.28%) of families falls within the range of Rs.3000/- to Rs.4000/- each. There is only one family the annual income of which is below Rs.1000/- and this family depends mainly on begging and day labouring for its sustenance. There are 13 Nos.(13.83%) of families in the income range of Rs.4000/- to Rs.5000/- while similar numbers of families are also found in the income range of Rs.5000/- to Rs.6000/-. Four numbers of families fall within the annual income range of Rs.6000/- to Rs.7000/-. Upto this income level the overall economy of the families is by and large, pitiable specially in the context of growing family members.

Contd.51.



increased cost of living and lesser scope of additional earning. We have observed that families earning Rs.7000/-to Rs.8000/- per annum each have some what better living standard and in our study we find 5(5.32%) Nos.of such families. The affluent families numbering 19 (20.22%) within the income range of Rs.8000/- to Rs.15000/- and above each, mostly belong to the families having at least one employed person each or enjoying facilities of loan from D.R.D.A. or I.R.D.P. or special Forest Village Development Scheme. In Amguri (D Block) Forest Village one household having 20 members has an approximate annual income of Rs.66000/-. This family has employed persons besides the cultivable lands. Similarly a Deori household of Madhupur Deori Forest Village has an annual income Rs of Rs.26400/-. This family too has a few employed persons. The following table shows the income pattern of the Sample households in the surveyed villages.

Table - XXVII

Showing annual income by households alongwith percentage distribution

Income group in Rupees P.A.	No.of households	P.C.
Below 1000/-	1	1.06
1000/- to 2000/-	NIL	
2000/- to 3000/-	19	20.22
3000/- to 4000/-	20	21.28
4000/- to 5000/-	13	13.83
5000/- to 6000/-	13	13.83
6000/- to 7000/-	4	4.25
7000/- to 8000/-	5	5.32
8000/- to 10000/-	6	6.38
10000/- to 15000/-	6	6.38
15000/- and above	7	7.45
	94	100.00

Contd.52.



The majority of the families (88.3%) depend wholly upon agriculture which is considered as primary occupation. It is seen that 11 Nos.(11.7%) of households do not depend upon agriculture as they do not possess the minimum agricultural land. These families earn their livelihood by serving as day labourers. Similarly there are only 11 Nos.(11.7%) of households which has subsidiary source of income.

In the tribal milieu cottage industry has vast potentiality as the tribal people generally are experts in Eri cocoon rearing and weaving. All the tribal women weave clothes in their looms and thus the womenfolk contribute largely towards a self-sufficient family economy. Traditionally each household possesses a loom and clothes are woven in these looms for all the members of a family. However, in our sample study we find 67 (71.27%) Nos. of households are poverty stricken and they are not in a position to maintain looms.

Bee keeping is considered as a good subsidiary income in a rural setting. In case of tribal forest villages we have a depressing experience as we find only one household having bee keeping as an additional source of income.

The forest villagers depend upon cash crops as additional source of income. Mustard seeds, jute, betel leaves and nuts, winter vegetables are sold in the village or in the weekly hats. As mentioned elsewhere, homestead lands are not enough in most families under survey, the earning from Cash Crops is restricted to limited numbers of families. Thus we have only 19(20.2%) households having surplus agricultural products. Only 11 Nos.(11.7%) of households use local weekly or bi-weekly hats to sell their surplus agricultural products to the Deswalli and Bengali traders in the villages.



### Expenditure Pattern :

As in the case of income, the villagers generally do not keep any record of their expenditures and the data incorporated here are based mainly on disclosures made by the informants. Twenty four (25.95%) numbers of families spend Rs.3000/-, Rs.4000/- each per annum and the corresponding figure of families in the income group is only 20 Nos.(21.27%). Same is the case with families spending Rs.4000/- ,Rs.5000/- per annum. In this category we have 17 Nos.(18.08%) of families but the number of families in the corresponding income slab is 13 ( 13.82%). In the annual income slab of Rs.5000/- ,Rs.6000/- we have 13 Nos. of families while in the same annual expenditure slab the number of families is only 10. Such families are in a position to save money. But no such family having bank account has been traced. ~~Some~~ The families have utilised the savings in giving loans to fellow villagers at nominal interest. Same is the case in the income expenditure slab of Rs.6000/- to Rs.7000/-,Rs.10,000/- to 15,000/- and Rs.15,000/- and above.

In the expenditure slab of Rs.7000/- to Rs.8000/- and Rs.8000/- to Rs.10,000/- we find excess expenditures. In the former category there are 7 Nos, of households although there are only 5 Nos. of households in the income slab. Similarly there are 8 Nos. of families whose expenditure slab is Rs.8000/- to 10,000/- whereas the figure in the same slab in the income side is 6. The position is shown in a tabular form below.

Contd.54.



Table - XXVIII

Showing the approximate annual expenditures of the sample households

Expenditure Range	No. of households	P.C. to total households
Rs.1000/- to 2000/-	1	1.06
Rs.2000/- to 3000/-	15	15.96
Rs.3000/- to 4000/-	24	25.53
Rs.4000/- to 5000/-	17	18.08
Rs.5000/- to 6000/-	10	10.64
Rs.6000/- to 7000/-	3	3.19
Rs.7000/- to 8000/-	7	7.45
Rs.8000/- to 10000/-	8	8.52
Rs.10000/- to 15000/-	5	5.32
Rs.15000/- above	4	4.25
Total :	94	100.00

For the majority of the villagers saving is an unthinkable proposition. As most of the tribal forest villagers live from hand to mouth, large chunk of the expenditure goes to purchase of food items. A sizeable number of families i.e. 33 (35.10%) out of 94 Nos. of sample families spend 70 to 80 percent of the income on food items. Another 24 Nos. (25.54%) of families spend 60 to 70 percent of the income on food items. Fifteen number (15.95%) of families spend 80 to 90 percent of the income on food while 11 Nos. (11.71%) of families spend 50 to 60 percent of the income on food alone. Thus 83 Nos. (88.29%) of families out of 94 sample families spend 50 - 90 percent of the annual income on food. This amply shows the pitiable economic condition of the tribal forest villagers. The position is shown in a tabular form below :

Contd.53



Table - XXIX

Showing the pattern of expenditure - family basis

No. of families	P.c. to total families	P.C. of the annual income spent on food items
N I L	. . .	0 - 10
1	1.06	+ 10 - 20
N I L	. . .	+ 20 - 30
1	1.06	+ 30 - 40
9	9.58	+ 40 - 50
11	11.71	+ 50 - 60
24	25.54	+ 60 - 70
33	35.10	+ 70 - 80
15	15.95	+ 80 - 90
94	100.00	

#### Expenditure Pattern on Education :

The percentage of literacy among the scheduled tribes of Assam is 26.02 (male 34.62 and female 17.16) as per 1971 Census. <sup>including the tribes</sup> This overall percentage of literacy, however, cannot give a true picture of the literacy standard of the tribal forest villagers in as much as 34 Nos. of sample families (36.18%) cannot spend a single paise on education in a year. It is not that these families do not possess school going boys and girls but the utter helpless economic condition deters these families from spending anything worthwhile in education, the need of which has not been appreciated. Thus 31 Nos. (32.98%) of families are in a position to spend 0-2% of the annual income on education. Similarly the number of families spending + 2 - 4% of the annual income on education is only 20 (21.28%). Very negligible number of families i.e. 5 (5.32%) spend some

Contd.56



amount on education while only 3 Nos.(3.19%) of families are in a position to spend + 6 to 15% of the annual income on education. The lone exception is a family which has a very sound economy that could spend 25% and above of the annual income on education. This variable, however does not give a true picture as the common villagers are in a very vulnerable position in the economic sense. The picture is shown in a tabular form below :

Table - XXX

Showing the expenditure pattern on education in the sample families

No.of families	Percentage	P.C.of the annual income spent on Education
34	36.18	NIL
31	32.98	0-2
20	21.28	+2 - 4
5	5.32	+4 - 6
1	1.06	+6 - 8
NIL	- - -	+8 - 10
2	2.12	+10 - 15
NIL	- - -	+15 - 20
1	1.06	+20 - above
94	100.00	

#### Expenditure on Dress ?

So far as expenditure on dress item is concerned, even the poorest of the poor cannot but spend certain amount on dress items under compulsion. It has been observed that 44 (46.81%) Nos.of families are in a position to spend 5 - 10% of the income on dress items each. Three (3.19%) numbers of families can spare only 0-5% of the annual income on dress each while 27 Nos.(28.73%) of the families are able to spend 10-15% of the income on dress each. Only 7 Nos.(7.44%) of families are in a position to spend 20-25% of the income on dress each. It may be

Contd.57.



mentioned here that most of the families spend the above mentioned percentage of income on summer dress items alone and the people, by and large, cannot afford to buy warm clothes except some coarse and cheaper variety of winter clothes and wrappers. The table below shows the annual expenditure pattern under dress items in the sample villages.

Table - XXXI

Showing the expenditure under dress items in the sample families

No. of families	Percentage	P.C. of the annual income spent on dress
3	3.19	0 - 5
44	46.81	+ 5 - 10
27	28.73	+10 - 15
13	13.83	+15 - 20
7	7.44	+20 - above
94	100.00	

Expenditure on Festivals and Socio-Religious Occasions:

Another major source of expenditure of the tribal forest villagers is the festivals including socio-religious occasions like marriage, death, name giving ceremonies etc. These are unavoidable expenditures as the observance of these occasions increases the social cohesion and mutuality. But it is also a fact that many families are becoming poorer due to excess spending in some occasions which is done mainly to maintain the social status in the society. The educated sections are realising the evil effects of such excesses but they are yet to make any tangible *effort* in this regard. We have seen that only 2 Nos. (2.12%) of families are not spending anything on socio-religious occasions and these are extremely poverty stricken cases. Fifty two (55.32%) numbers of families spend +5 - 10% of the income each in

Contd.58.



festivals while 22 Nos.(23.41%) of the sample families spend +10 - 15% of the income each in festive occasions. Although we find 6 Nos.(6.39%) of families spending +15 - 20% and 2 Nos.(2.12%) of families spending +20-25% of the income in festivals, other income categories have also similar desire to spend in festivals but for their pitiable economic condition. The few extravagant families which spend freely in festivals cause unwholesome effect on the rest of the families who spend more than their assets support thereby escalating the social imbalance. Table below shows the expenditures incurred in festivals and other socio-religious occasions.

Table - XXXII

Showing the annual expenditure under festivals and socio religious occasions (family basis )

No. of families	Percentage	P.C. of income spent in festivals etc.
2	2.12	NIL
10	10.64	0- 5
52	55.32	+ 5 -10
22	23.41	+10 -15
6	6.39	+15- 20
2	2.12	+20-above
94	100.00	

Expenditures on Other Social Obligations :

Same is the case in respect of expenditures on 'Other Social Obligations' - A sizable section (24 Nos of families) of the families of tribal forest village is not in a position to spend 0-5 p.c. each of the annual income under this head while 25 Nos. of families can spend +5 -10% each of the income under this head of expenditure. There are only 4 Nos. of families which are in a position to spend +10-15% each of the income

Contd.59.



in other social obligations. A negligible 2 Nos. of families spend +15 - 20% each of the annual income on this item. The above analysis pin points the overall frustration of a overwhelming section of the families because when a family fails to attend a relatives marriage or death ceremony one can imagine the tension of the family suffers from, which ,however, is subdued because of the socio-psychological situation the family has been placed into. These frustrations lead ultimately to family disintegration and social conflict. The position has been shown in the tabular form below .

Table - XXXIII

Showing the annual expenditure under other social obligations - Family Basis

No. of families	Percentage	P.C. of income spent under other social obligations
24	25.54	N I L
39	41.49	0 - 5
25	26.59	+ 5 - 10
4	4.26	+10 - 15
2	2.12	+15 - 20
94	100.00	

### Expenditure on Health :

At a glance the expenditure pattern under the head health shows a picture which belies the actual situation prevailing. It has been seen that 4 Nos. of families are not in a position to spend anything on health. Casually one may form an opinion that these families do not have health problems. But the actual field situation shows a different picture. Actually these families need medical attention most but their economic condition is such that they can hardly

Contd.60.



afford the medical expenses. Naturally they resort to indigenous treatment of the diseases and in many cases the patients die. The villages are generally not linked up with the P.W.D. road with good roads and due to lack of transport facilities the poor tribal families cannot bring the patients to the nearest dispensary. The very forest environment in which these people live make them vulnerable. The people are economically backward and even though they desire to bring a doctor in case of serious ailments, the cost factor - deters them from doing so. Thus we find only 2 families which spend 0-1 percent each of the annual income on health care. Twenty five numbers of families are in a position to spend + 3 - 4 per cent each of the annual income on health. One family spends +8 - 10 per cent and another family spends + 10 - 12 per cent on health care. These families maintain a sound economic standard. The following table shows the position of health care in the sample tribal forest villages.

Table - XXXIV

Showing the annual expenditure on health care  
- Family Basis

No. of families	Percentage	P.C. of the annual income spent under health care
4	4.26	NIL
2	2.12	0 - 1
22	23.41	+ 1 - 2
17	18.09	+ 2 - 3
25	26.59	+ 3 - 4
9	9.58	+ 4 - 5
13	13.83	+ 5 - 8
1	1.06	+ 8 - 10
1	1.06	+10- 12
94	100.00	

Contd.61.



Savings :

The savings habit of the people is not reckonable. Only 5 (5.31%) Nos. of households have some savings each but do not possess any savings account in post office or bank. Three (3.19%) families can save some amount and they have savings back account also. Another three families are in a position to save regularly. The savings ranged from Rs.100.00 to Rs.4,500.00 annually. Out of these eleven numbers of families there is one (1.06%) family which can save Rs.100.00 only in the year under survey. The savings of 2 Nos. (2.12%) of families in a year each are Rs.700.00. Another 2 Nos. of families save Rs.600.00 each in a year. One family saves Rs.400.00 annually. Rest five numbers of households save in four figures ranging from Rs.1000.00 to Rs.4500.00 each in a year. It may, however be noted that savings are not inform all along and there may be saving in a particular year in a family while the same family may experience severe hardship in the next year due to illness in the family or bad weather conditions in the peak agricultural season. Thus savings especially in a tribal setting do not always indicate ~~present~~ a sound economy.

Excess Expenditures :

There are 16 Nos. (17.02%) cases of excess expenditure and the excess in two cases exceeded more than one thousand each. These excess expenditures are mainly due to illness in the family. These are 6 (6.38%) Nos. of households which are spending more than the annual income. Each of these families is spending Rs.200.00 excess. One family spends Rs.100.00 in excess while another 7 Nos. of families spend Rs.350.00 to Rs.900.00 each in excess.

Contd.62.



Indebtedness :

Tribal indebtedness cuts at the root of the tribal economy and it is the single factor which is by and large, responsible for the pitiable economic condition of the tribal forest villagers. The incidence of indebtedness prevails for a long time and most of the tribals are perpetually indebted to the Mahajans or middlemen. It is to be noted that the villagers generally hesitate to reveal the loan position and therefore the data presented here have been based on half hearted replies of the unwilling tribal forest villagers. Much persuasion is necessary to collect data on income, savings and indebtedness from the tribal forest villagers. It has been found that 15 Nos. (15.95%) of the households have outstanding loan amounting to Rs.100.00 - 200.00 each at the time of survey. Eight (8.51%) households have loan ranging from Rs.400.00 - 600.00 each; one (1.06%) household has loan outstanding amounting to Rs.700.00; 2 (2.12%) households have outstanding loan amounting to Rs.800.00 - 1000.00 each; another 2 (2.12%) households have an outstanding loan ranging from Rs.1000.00 - 1500.00 each and one household has outstanding loan in the range of Rs.1500.00 - 2000.00. Thus out of 94 households 33 (35.10%) Nos. of households have outstanding loans in cash. The position is shown in tabular form below :

Table - XXXV

Showing outstanding loan in cash on the date of Survey  
- Family Basis

<u>No. of house-holds</u>	<u>P.C.</u>	<u>Loan in Cash</u>
15	15.95	100.00 - 200.00
8	8.51	+ 200.00 - 400.00
4	4.26	+ 400.00 - 600.00
1	1.06	+ 600.00 - 800.00
2	2.12	+ 800.00 - 1000.00
2	2.12	+ 1000.00 - 1500.00
1	1.06	+ 1500.00 - 2000.00
33	35.10	

Contd. 63.



Besides the above loanes, there are small loaness who take small loans below Rs.100.00 from fellow villagers and these are repaid generally just after the harvesting operation. Loans in kind are generally taken from fellow villagers and these are repaid with interest after the harvesting season. There is one such case in a family which borrowed 10 mounds of paddy with interest payable at the rate of 2 mounds for every mound of paddy borrowed, after the harvesting season.

#### Sources of Loan :

The villagers take the small loans from the Marowari businessmen who maintain grocery shops near the forest villages. Bengali Mahajans also give loans to the forest villagers. The forest villagers take loans from other sources like fellow villagers, Deshwali traders, local Mahajans etc. In our sample villages we find that 15 Nos. (15.95%) of households take loans from Marowari Mahajans at variable rates of interest. One such household has to pay 25% half yearly interest, another household pays 12% interest per month, 12 Nos. of households pay 10% interest per month while only one household gets loan by paying 9% interest per month. There are 8 Nos. (8.51%) of households which take loan from Bengali Mahajans by paying 8% interest p.m. The fellow villagers also give loans to the needy persons and in our sample study we find 6 Nos. of such families. Out of these 6 Nos, 4 Nos. get the loans without paying any interest, one family pays 10% interest per month, while another family is required to pay 3 mounds of paddy in lieu of Rs.100.00 borrowed in the lean months. The amount of paddy has to be paid just after the harvesting operation. Two households are indebted to Deshwalli (Bihari) traders but the borrowers have not to pay any interest. There are two households which are taking loans from local Mahajan who are mostly



owners of grocery shops. One household pays 20% interest per month for the petty loans while another pays 2 and 1/2 mounds of paddy as interest against cash loan of Rs.100.00. Incidentally it may be mentioned that most of the above mentioned loanees are permanently indebted to the traders and Mahajans because they have to meet the family requirements for which flow of cash is not regular. The loans taken by 33 Nos. of households have been utilised for multifarious purposes like daughter's marriage ( 1 No of household), performing death rites ( 2 Nos. of households), meeting expenses in connection with visiting distant relatives and meeting social obligations ( 2 Nos. of households), treatment of diseases ( 5 Nos. of households), marriage of a relation ( 1 No. of household), performing religious occasion ( 1 No. of household). Majority of the indebted households i.e. 21 Nos. take loans to meet the day to day expenses.

#### Repayment of Loans :

As regards repayment, 11 Nos. of households have not repaid the loan on the date of survey. Nine households have repaid 30% to 50% of the loans each while 8 Nos. of households are in a position to repay only 30% of the loan each at the time of the survey. There are 3 Nos. of households which could repay 50% of the loans each and only 2 Nos. of households are in a position to repay the entire amount of the loans.

The above pen picture indicates a disheartening situation of the tribal economy in the tribal inhabited forest villages which requires attention from the Authorities concerned.

Contd.65.



### Industrial and Other Loans :

The tribal forest villagers are eager to receive industrial loan but except 3 Nos. of households others are not getting industrial loan. The main constraint in this respect is the non possession of transferable right of lands which are under occupation of the tribal forest dwellers. Further a few villagers are getting loans from various sources for starting small scale industries. Two families of Amguri Forest Village under Digboi Forest Division are getting loans from Life Insurance Corporation of India, Block Development Authorities and Fishery Department amounting to Rs.20,000.00 for business purposes, Rs.7,400.00 for a pumpset and Rs.12,000.00 for development of fisheries respectively. Similarly one very enlightened Deori family of Madhupur Deori Forest Village of Dibrugarh Forest Division has been able to obtain various kinds of loans by mortgaging 15 Bighas of forest land for a period of seven years.

### Livestock :

The tribal forest villagers are not possessing sufficient livestock although the villagers are primarily farmers. It is found that there are 20 (21.27%) households having 2 bullocks each, 3 (3.19%) households having 3 bullocks each, 15 (15.95%) households having 4 bullocks each and 1 (1.06%) household having one bullock in the surveyed villages. Cows are not reared in sufficient numbers and it is found that 9 Nos. (9.57%) of households have one cow each, 4 (4.25%) Nos. of households have 2 cows each and another 4 Nos. of households have 3 cows each. Similarly buffalo rearing is also not common among the tribal forest villagers. Only 12 (12.76%) Nos. of households possess one buffalo each and 7 Nos. (7.44%) of households are maintaining 2 buffaloes each. More than 60% of the

Contd.66.



households possess poultries on an average of 3 poultries per family. The pigs have socio-religious significance among the tribes and most of the tribal families desire to rear pigs. But due to financial difficulties many families are not in a position to rear pigs. We find 12 (12.76%) Nos. of families having one pig each, 8 (8.47%) Nos. of families having 3 pigs each, 11 Nos. (11.70%) of families having 2 pigs each and 2 (2.12%) of families having 4 pigs each. Duck rearing is not very popular and only 15 Nos. (15.95%) of families have been found to be possessing 3 ducks each in the sample households.

#### Household properties :

As mentioned earlier, the tribal forest villagers are a depressed lot of people and they are living under acute poverty condition. The pitiable economic condition of the villagers has been reflected in their living condition and items of material culture. Out of 94 Nos. of households 17 Nos. (18.08%) have 3 units thatched house each, 32 Nos. (34.04%) of households have 2 units thatched house each, 6 Nos. (6.35%) of households have one unit thatched house each, 4 Nos. (4.25%) have 2 units thatched kachcha Assam type house each, 6 Nos. have one unit Thatched Kachcha Assam Type house each, 25 (26.59%) Nos. have 2 units Kachcha Assam Type and Thatched house each, 2 Nos. have Pucca Assam Type house each while one household has 4 Units Thatched house and another household has 5 Units Thatched house in the sample villages.

The Forest Department, of late prohibits the forest villagers from using the house building materials without getting prior written order from the appropriate authorities. The villagers, however, may collect the required house building materials like thatch, bamboo, Ikra etc. on application to the local Divisional Forest Officer/Range Forest Officer. *It has also been observed that the forest*



villagers are procuring the available house building materials and firewood inspite of the restriction and the Forest Department shows liberal attitude in this regard in view of the prevailing pitiable economic condition of the forest villagers. However, 53.19% of the households replied in affirmative to our query whether the Forest Department has provided house building materials free of cost to the forest villagers. Remaining 46.80% of the households replied in negative. Perhaps Forest Department had to stop supplying house building materials free of cost in view of illegal felling of trees and unauthorised occupation of forest waste lands.

As regards movable properties the tribal forest villagers have very little properties worth the name. We tried to elicit information regarding possession of wrist watches, bicycles, transistor radio sets, bullock carts, fishing implements etc. by the people and it is found that 63 Nos. (67.02%) of households possess one bicycle each, 4 Nos. (4.25%) of households possess 2 bicycles each, 2 Nos. (2.12%) possess 3 bicycles each. Forty six (48.93%) numbers of household have one transistor radio sets each. Similarly 50 Nos. (53.19%) of households have one wrist watch each, 7 Nos. (7.44%) of households have 2 wrist watches each while one (1.06%) household possesses 4 Nos. of wrist watches.

Bullock carts are <sup>an</sup> essential mode of transport in the tribal setting. Bullock carts are also used to carry fire-wood, cowdung etc. In the sample villages we find only 33 Nos. (35.10%) of households possessing one bullock cart each. In the tribal setting plough is also considered as a movable property. We find 61 Nos. (64.89%) of households possessing one plough each, 18 Nos. (19.14%) of households possessing 2 plough each, 3 Nos. (3.19%) possessing 3 ploughs each, 2 Nos. (2.12%) possessing 4 ploughs each and one number (1.06%) possessing 5 Nos. of ploughs each. Nine families do not possess plough.



Similarly fishing net is also considered as a property in the context of the tribal forest village situation and it is found that 27 Nos.(28.72%) of households possess one fishing net each, 8 (8.51%) Nos. of households possess 2 fishing nets each, and 37 Nos.(39.36%) of households possess one fishing net and one 'Jakoi' (an indigenous fishing implement used in shallow waters) each. Twenty two (23.40%) do not possess any fishing implement.

In the any other category we find the following items in the sample tribal forest villages. Three (3.19%) households possess one 'Thela' with bicycle wheels, 3 Nos. of households possess Threshing Machines, one (1.06%) household possess one shallow tube well for irrigation purpose, one household possesses a water pump and another household possesses a Huller Machine.

#### Felt Needs :

Majority of the households under survey i.e. 39 Nos.(41.49%) felt the acute shortage of cultivable land. As mentioned elsewhere the original land allotted to the families had been further fragmented among the sons and no further allotment of land is made or can be made against the off-springs.

The forest villagers compare their lot with that of the neighbouring co-villagers outside the reserved forests who have improved their economic condition by availing themselves of the Departmental loan and subsidy. The forest villagers are deprived of such facilities. Hence they demand such facilities and in the sample villages 20 (21.28%) Nos. of households felt such needs for improvement of their economic condition.

Contd.69.



While dealing with infrastructural facilities mention has been made about the inadequacy of health facilities in the tribal forest villages. Although only 4 (4.25%) Nos. of families expressed about the inadequacy of health facilities, in fact all the [redacted] prefer suitable medical facilities in or near the villages.

Another important felt need of the forest villagers is the all weather roads and marketing facilities. Perhaps this particular felt need deserves prime importance as all other development activities are possible only when there are good all weather roads. In this case also only 10 (10.64%) Nos. of households felt the need which, however, is not the indicator of satisfactory road condition for the rest of the tribal forest villagers.

The forest villagers have to walk long distances to the nearest weekly hats. The villagers want that the Forest Authorities should arrange weekly hats near the forest villages.

We find only 6 (6.38%) Nos. of households who are demanding good drinking water facilities. It does not indicate, however, that there are good drinking water facilities in rest of the households. The villagers are so much hard pressed about the basic needs like food and shelter that they very often forget about other needs like potable water or medical centre near the villages. They want house building materials free of cost from the forests. Five households (5.32%) felt the need of such facilities, although this is the general demand of all the forest villagers. Most of the forest villagers, however, are procuring the house building materials from the reserved forests and the Authorities take lenient view.

Contd. 70



The tribal forest villages lying in the foot hill areas have the problem of elephant menace as the elephants destroy the paddy crops. The villagers demand suitable measures to remove this menace.

Creation of employment opportunities to the unemployed youths is urgently needed as the unemployed youths appear to be burden in the families. They cannot be gainfully employed in agricultural activities as cultivable plots of land are diminishing per households.

We have already mentioned about the educational backwardness of the tribal forest dwellers. The people want better educational facilities near the forest villages.

#### Facilities Provided by the Forest Department

Enquiries have been made about the facilities extended by the Forest Department and we have a mixed response in this regard. Twenty seven (28.72%) Nos. of families expressed satisfaction over the Forest Department's help to the forest villagers. They opine that the Department allows them to procure the required house-building materials and fire wood. Another 15 (15.95%) Nos. of households are not happy as the Forest Department allegedly does not allow the villagers to collect the house building materials. They, however, manage to collect some of the house building materials from the forests. Fifty two (55.31%) Nos. of families are not happy with the Forest Authorities as they have been debarred from collecting anything from the forests. They, even cannot bring the fire wood from the reserved forests, where they are living for two or three generations.

Contd. 71.



### Awareness Towards Government Welfare Measures :

It has been observed that most of the tribal forest villagers are unaware of the welfare measures adopted by Government for the welfare of the forest villagers or general tribal people. As many as 59 (62.76%) Nos. of households do not know about the welfare measures while 35 (37.23%) Nos. of families have heard about one or two such agencies Viz. Assam Plains Tribes Development Corporation or Integrated Tribal Development Project. In fact the tribal forest villagers are not getting any benefit from these agencies as development of forest village is the responsibility of the Forest Department.

### Changing Trend of Socio-Religious Life :

"Change is the constant of culture" and no people can escape from the change. The money economy, Government's welfare activities including extension of infra-structural benefits to the far flung tribal villages have definite impact on the socio-cultural fabric of any society. But inspite of this the tribes, whether they live in far flung forest areas or in urban or semi urban setting, generally prefer to maintain their socio-religious beliefs and practices while bringing certain superfluous changes into the culture. By and large, the core remains unaffected. In the present survey we find that an overwhelming majority (87.23%) of the families maintain the traditional religious beliefs. Eleven (11.70%) families profess Saktaism which, however, has similarity with the tribal religions of most of the plains tribes, while only one family professes Vaisnavism.

Regarding other traits of culture such as food habits, dress and house pattern, marriage system, death rites etc. the tribes scrupulously follow the traditional system although superfluous changes, here and there cannot be ruled-out.



### Findings and Conclusion :

Much has been discussed about the socio-economic condition of tribals, both hills and plains of Assam, but no study of the socio-economic condition of the scheduled tribes living within the reserved forests has yet been made. Decades have passed in the dense jungles and the people could not get any opportunity to reveal their living condition to the outside world.

The tribes under the reserved forests belong to various ethnic groups such as Boro-Kachari, Rabha, Miri (Mishing), Lalung (Tiwa), Deori, Sonowal Kachari, Barmans of Cachar and Karbis. Major Reserved forests lie in the plains areas of Assam and naturally plains tribes are found in sizable numbers in the reserved forests. They are governed under the Rules for establishment of forest villages and overall provision of the Assam Forest Regulation 1891 (Vol-I). Because of this peculiar position, the tribal forest villages do not come under the purview of the Panchayat Raj Act or the Tribal Sub Plan. Result is that these villages remained under the control of the Forest Department since inception. After the formation of the reserved forests the Authorities felt the acute shortage of man power to work as labourers in the forests. Hence whoever volunteered to come as day labourers, the Authorities provided the minimum basic needs by establishing forest villages within the forest compound. In this way some of the hard working tribal villagers of the surrounding areas of the reserved forests came to live permanently in the reserved forests as forest labourers. As regards development of the forest villages specially in the context of post independence Planned Development efforts of the Government, not much was done. Only in 1984-85 a Forest Village Development Scheme was initiated only to be abandoned in the midway. Of late the tribal people in the forest villages are unhappy with the existing status



as they find the overall economic condition of their brethren living outside the reserved forests much better due to the implementation of various tribal welfare schemes.

As mentioned above, the tribal forest villagers are not in a position to get the benefits of Tribal Sub Plan. ~~The~~ Integrated Tribal Development Projects also do not extend the benefits to these people. Thus most of the villagers are living in a deplorable condition. A good number of villages are not having easy communication facilities. Although majority ( 16 Nos.) of the tribal forest villages under survey lie within 0 - 1 k.m. from the nearest all weather roads, yet the condition of these roads is such that for only four or five months in a year these roads become actually all weather. As regards village road a very disheartening picture emerges as 14 Nos. of tribal forest villages out of the 24 Nos. of surveyed have only fair weather Katcha roads the condition of which during summer can be felt rather than described. Three villages have only foot tracks inside the villages.

The inadequacy of transport facility can be gauged from the situation found in 14 Nos. of villages where even in this late 20th Century bullock cart is used as sole means of conveyance. Similarly health care facilities are far from adequate. Three numbers of villages do not get health facilities easily as the villagers have to go beyond 6 kms and upto 10 kms to receive such facilities. Another 2 Nos. of villages are situated at a distance of 11-15 kms from the nearest state dispensaries and the villagers hardly get any medical facility from these dispensaries.

The position in respect of veterinary dispensary is no better. Only 9 Nos. out of 24 Nos. of surveyed villages are in a position to get such facilities within 0-2 kms from



the villages. Fifty per cent of the surveyed villages are not served by suitable veterinary centres within a reasonable distance from the villages.

People now-a-days depend mostly on private medical practitioners but for the forest dwellers they are not within easy reach. Within 0-2 km distance from the villages no private medical practitioner has been found. The distance of the villages from the place of private medical practitioners of 21 Nos. of tribal forest villages ranges from 11 to 45 kms.

Pre primary educational facilities are not adequate in these villages as only 5 Nos. of schools have been located in the 24 Nos. of surveyed tribal forest villages. The brighter aspect of pre-primary educational standard of these schools cannot be under estimated. The percentage of tribal students in these schools is quite satisfactory which is 93.07%. So far as lower primary schools (L.P. schools) are concerned, the position outwardly appears to be satisfactory as all the surveyed villages have L.P. schools. The condition of most of these schools, however, is not at all satisfactory. The Forest Department runs two numbers of schools and the rest are managed by the State Elementary Education Directorate. The percentage of tribal students in these schools is sufficiently high. Out of 1481 students, 1326 (89.53%) belong to tribal communities. A good number of students are attending middle schools, the percentage being 84.53. The position of girl students attending middle schools is also encouraging in as much as 85.38% of the tribal girl students are attending middle schools. As regards secondary education the tribal students of the surveyed villages are faring well. Out of 437 Nos. of students attending H.E. schools from the tribal forest villages as many as 392 (89.70%) belong to tribal communities. Higher education facilities are not easily available. The colleges lie at an average distance of 15 kms

Cont. 75.



from the villages. The distance factor along with the poor economic condition have compelled many students to cut short their educational career. Due to non availability of cheaper and regular means of transport, most of the students have to discontinue their studies. In 9 Nos. of villages there are no college going boys and girls and only 6 Nos. of villages have only one college going student each. Number of girl students are just half of the total students attending from these villages.

Regarding students undergoing other studies from the sample villages, the position is not at all satisfactory. We find only seven students in all studying in Medical, Technical, Agricultural and Veterinary institutions and interestingly all hail from one Deori village of Dibrugarh Forest Division. The only girl medical student also hails from this village.

Although there are 129 Nos. of employed persons in the sample villages, most of the jobs are of third and fourth grades. Only in one tribal forest village namely Madhupur Deori Forest Village Class I and Class II employees totalling 18 Nos. have been found. Four villages have not even a Fourth Grade employee. Employment under Forest Department is also not reckonable although these villages are within Reserved Forests and Forest Department remains in all overall change of the development activities in these villages.

There are quite a good number of H.S.L.C. passed students in the sample villages who either could not go for higher study in colleges or left the college after admission because of the pitiable economic condition. Girls' education is much behind. Poor economy coupled with distance factor to the educational centres from the villages contribute largely for this condition. Five numbers of villages do not possess even H.S.L.C. passed students. The economic



condition of most of the tribal forest villagers is such that the guardians can hardly meet the educational expenses of their sons and daughters. Besides, every household prefers to get assistance from the sons and daughters in agricultural pursuits as soon as the children come up in ages. Thus education gets secondary importance and in certain cases no importance at all.

The dropout figures are more in the lower primary standard which itself is an indicator of the most pitiable economic condition of the people. Another reason of dropout is the adverse situation of the tribal forest villages. Flood, fear from wild elephants, lack of transport and communication are the causes of educational backwardness. Lack of consciousness coupled with poverty condition have led to increase of drop out figures.

As regards drinking water most of the villages depend upon ring wells and katcha wells which cause great health hazard. Tanks and rivers are also used as the sources of water. Pipe water scheme is almost non-existent except in one village which, too, is not functioning till the time of our survey, November (1987). The efforts made by the Forest Department in this regard is not satisfactory. Only under the Forest Village Development Scheme, 1984, 3 Nos. of sample villages have been supplied with 2 ringwells each. In one village 2 Nos. of water pumps have been installed while one ring well is sanctioned for another tribal forest village.

As regards marketing facility the villagers mainly depend upon the weekly 'hats' which are in most cases, located at a considerable distance from the villages.

Only 3 Nos. of villages have fair price shops and the stock position in these shops is not satisfactory. The essential items of day to day life of the people are not available in these shops. Even if certain items are available, *The villagers are not in a position to purchase these as*



their purchasing capacity is limited and the owners of fair price shops do not like to sell smaller ~~quantities~~. The grocery shops maintained by other people in the neighbourhood are the only source of day to day essential articles.

Co-operative societies are not established in any of these forest villages. The nearest Co-operative Societies too, ~~are~~ are at a considerable distance from the villages. Some Gaon Panchayat Samabai Samitis are situated near the villages but the tribal people do not get the required items at the time of need.

The scheduled tribal communities of the tribal forest villages, like their brethren outside the forest areas, also possess required skills in small scale industries but due to non availability of raw materials and due mainly to acculturation process the small scale and cottage industries are fast disappearing so far as the commercial aspect is concerned. Whatever cottage industry is available, the same is found only on individual plane. Almost every tribal household possesses a loom and the womenfolk weave clothes not only for their use but for use of all members of a family. It has been observed that the purchasing power of the tribal forest villagers is very low and in spite of the indigenous skill they possess, most of the villagers are not in a position to produce handi clothes regularly. Only the people of two numbers of villages are in a position to sell the products of household industry in the weekly hats and these constituted mostly bamboo products like 'Dalā', 'Kharāhi', 'Bisani', weaving implements etc.

The villagers consider the cottage industry as subsidiary occupation. The raw materials are becoming scarce day by day as the facilities provided by the Forest Department have been drastically curtailed. However, the additional income helped the forest villagers to meet some expenses incurred in social visits, education, some dresses, annual household worships etc.



The major problem of all the sample villages is the insufficiency of cultivable land, lack of transport and communication facilities and lack of drinking water and health facilities. The needs, however, differ from area to area. Some forest villages may be flood prone like the Madhupur Deori Forest Village under Dibrugarh Forest Division while the Gomotha Forest Village under Sibsagar Forest Division badly needs a linking road. Health and Veterinary facilities are totally inadequate in this village. The problem again is different in Garufella Tribal Forest Village under Kachujalon Forest Division where Garufella river causes heavy damage to the cultivable lands. Individual household lands are already insufficient and the erosion causes further damage to their economy. Due to erosion there is no connecting road with Jaleswari, a growth centre. The L.P. school in the village is yet to be provincialised and the single teacher's nominal pay is given out of the house to house contributions of the villagers.

Unemployment situation prevailing in the tribal forest villages has worsened the economy. As many as 81 Nos. of households out of 94 Nos. of sample households do not possess any service holder and on an average each of these households possess 8 Bighas of cultivable land. Thus persons holding occupation other than forest employment are very few. There are 49 Nos. of unemployed youths in all the 24 Nos. of sample villages and they are mostly extra hands in their respective families in the sense that agricultural lands in these families are not sufficient to employ them profitably. As many as 30 Nos. of unemployed youths are found among the Boro Kacharijs in the surveyed villages and all are either unsuccessful High School Leaving Certificate Examination students or dropouts in high school levels. The main reason for this state of affair is lack of suitable employment opportunity.

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The Forest Villagers enjoy only usufructuary rights over their lands allotted under Forest Lease. The right of transfer and sale is not given although the Authorities on humanitarian ground have agreed to the mutual transfer of the originally allotted land to the sons after the death of the allottee and in this way the forest dwellers under the Reserved Forests are enjoying the forest lands for generations. Over the years the populations are increasing but the lands remain the same. Encroachment of forest land is becoming a problem for the Authorities as well as to the original forest villagers. The records in the Forest Range Offices give us a bright picture so far as allotment of land to certain head of household is concerned. But if one goes deep into the real situation one will find a disheartening picture. In most of the cases it is found that the land per family shown above was allotted to a number of a household in decades back and the same lands are further divided among the sons. Besides the yield per Bigha is sufficiently low due to various factors like flood, depredation of wild animals (monkey and elephants), old method of cultivation etc.

As regards homestead land the position is more or less similar to that prevailing in the general areas. Here again homestead lands shown per family as per Range Office Record no longer remain the same in the practical field as the original allottee has distributed the piece of land to the sons. Thus 59 Nos. (62.77%) of families possess 0-2 Bighas of homestead land each while 4 Nos. (4.26%) of families do not possess even the homestead lands.

There was a time when the tribal forest villagers did not feel the scarcity of cultivable land as lands in those days were sufficient to feed the families and wants were limited. But over the years the position has undergone tangible changes. The families increased and today cultivable land is considered as the most important felt need of



the forest villagers. To make the matter worse trespassing on the cultivable ~~forest land has taken place~~. Three families have been found to be without any cultivable land and the elderly members of these families have to maintain their respective families by serving as day labourers in the households of the fellow villagers.

Most of the families i.e. 39 (41.48%) Nos. fall within the approximate annual income range of Rs.2000/- to Rs.4000/- each which is below the poverty line. Annual income of one household is below Rs.1000/- while the annual income range of 30 Nos. of households is within Rs.4000/- to Rs.7000/- each.

Majority of the families (88.3%) depend wholly upon agriculture which is considered as primary occupation. Eleven (11.7%) ~~of The~~ households do not depend upon agriculture as they do not possess the minimum agricultural land. These families earn their livelihood by serving as day labourers.

Sixty seven (71.27%) Nos. of households possess looms and womenfolk weave clothes not only for themselves but also for all the members of the family. Rest 27 Nos. of households are poverty stricken and they are not in a position to maintain looms.

As in the case of income, the villagers generally do not keep any record of expenditures. Food items constitute the major source of expenditure. Seventy two Nos. of families spend 60 to 90 per cent of the income on food each. Very less amount is spent on health care. Only Seventy three Nos. of families out of 94 Nos. surveyed are in a position to spend 1 to 5 per cent of the annual income on health care each.

Similarly 34 Nos. (36.18%) of families are not in a position to spend even one rupee each for education of their wards. This shows the pitiable socio-economic backwardness of the tribal ~~forest villagers~~. Fifty six numbers



of families spend a nominal 1 to 6 percent each of the annual income on education while only 4 Nos. of families are in position to spend 7 to 20 per cent each.

So far as expenditure on dress items is concerned, even the poorest of the poor cannot but spend certain amount in dress under compulsion. As many as 71 Nos. out of 94 Nos. of families spend 5 to 15 percent of the annual income each under this head.

Another major source of expenditure of the tribal forest villagers is the festivals including socio-religious occasions like marriage, death, name giving ceremonies etc. These are unavoidable expenditures as the observance of these occasions increases the social cohesion and mutuality. It is also a fact that many families are becoming poorer due to excess spending in such occasions which is done mainly to maintain the social status in the society.

In respect of expenditures on other social obligations, a sizable section of the tribal forest villagers is not in a position to spend anything under this head. An overall frustration looms large because when a family fails to attend a relative's marriage or death ceremony one can imagine the tension the family suffers from which, however, is subdued because of the socio-psychological situation the families have been placed into. These frustration lead ultimately to family disintegration and social conflict.

The savings habit of the people is not reckonable as 5.31% of the households have some insignificant savings but do not possess any savings account in post office or bank.

There are 16 Nos. of households which incur excess expenditure and the excess in 2 Nos. of cases exceeded more than one thousand each in a year. These expenditures occur mainly due to illness of family members.

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Tribal indebtedness cuts at the root of the tribal economy and it is the single factor which, by and large, is responsible for the pitiable economic condition of the tribal forest villagers. Out of 94 Nos. of households as many as 33 Nos. of households have outstanding loans in cash ranging from Rs.100.00 to Rs.2000.00. Petty loans (Rs.100.00 to Rs.200.00) are taken from fellow villagers and these are repaid generally in kind just after the harvesting operation. Small loans are also taken from local Mahajans, Marowari and Bengali traders at variable interest. Generally interests are charged at 10% p.m. Most of the loanees are permanently indebted to the traders and Mahajans because they have to meet the family requirements for which flow of cash is not regular. Loans are taken for multifarious purposes like daughter's marriage, death rites, visiting distant relatives, religious occasion and day to day expenditures etc.

Some of the tribal forest villagers are eager to receive industrial loan but except 3 Nos. of households others are not getting such loans. The main constraint in this respect is the non possession of transferable rights over their lands. However one family of Madhupur Deori Forest Village under Dibrugarh Forest Division manages to get various kinds of loans by mortgaging the forest land for a period of seven years.

The tribal forest villagers are a depressed lot of people and most of them are living under acute poverty condition. They are not possessing even the required amount of livestock although agriculture is their primary avocation. Most of the people live in Katcha Assam Type Thatched houses having 2/3 small units. The Forest Department prohibits collection of house building materials without prior approval from the appropriate authorities. The villagers, however, may collect the required house building materials like thatch, bamboo, Ikra etc. on application to the local Divisional

*Forest Officer/Range Forest Officer*



Fifty three per cent of the tribal forest villagers replied in affirmative to the query regarding the Forest Department's assistance to the forest villagers. Rest of the villagers replied negative owing to Forest Department's recent prohibition imposed upon the tribal forest villagers in respect of collection of house building materials. The Department has been constrained to take such measure in view of large scale felling of trees and unauthorised occupation of forest lands.

The most important felt need of majority of the households is the cultivable land, as lands originally allotted to the families had been fragmented in order to distribute among the sons. Under the Rules the Forest Department is not in a position to allot land to the offsprings. Of late the forest villagers have developed the tendency to compare their lot with that of the neighbouring villagers outside the reserved forests who have improved their economic condition by availing themselves of the facilities extended under Tribal Sub Plan and allied welfare schemes.

Infra-structural facilities especially health care, communication etc. are grossly inadequate in these villages.

The villagers want that the old concessions granted to them by the Forest Department should be continued as the villagers are poverty stricken people and income from any other source is almost nil to the majority people. The people cannot think of keeping aloof from forests.

The villagers also want that revenue village status should be given to the forest villagers including the tribal forest villagers enabling them to get loans offered by various financial institutions.



Conclusion :

In Assam there are 524 Nos. of forest villages (including 60 Nos. of Tangia Villages) with a total population of 164261 comprising 20,694 families, covering 52,950 hectares of forest land and spreading in all the districts. More than 3 percent of the areas under Reserved Forests are in occupation of the forest villagers. Out of 524 Nos. of forest villages, 233 Nos. have been identified as tribal forest villages i.e. forest villages having 50% or more tribal population. They constitute 44.5% of the total forest villages. The tribes living in these villages are scheduled tribes of Assam, both plains and hills such as Boro Kacharis, Rabhas, Deoris, Miris (Mishings), Sonowal Kacharis, Barmans of Cachar and Karbis.

The forest villagers enjoy only usufructuary rights over their lands allotted under Forest Lease. The right of transfer and sale of land is not given to the forest villagers. The major problem of the tribal forest villagers today, is the insufficiency of cultivable land as no additional allotment of land is made in the name of sons of original forest villagers and fragmentation of land is almost at the optimum level. As these villagers have had been deprived of basic infrastructural facilities which their brethren living outside the reserved forests are enjoying, they deserve a fair deal from the Forest Department. The Forest Preservation Act of 1980 of Government of India should not stand in the way, if necessary the Act may be amended.

In this context it may be mentioned that the Forest Department of late, prohibits the villagers from collecting forest produce like thatch, bamboo Ikra etc. without prior approval from the authorities and perhaps it is the *root cause of illegal* felling of trees by smugglers. *ff*

Contd. 33.



It has been reported that truck loads of valuable trees under the reserved forests are carried by illegal traders under the cover of darkness and tribal people in the forests remain mute witness. Sometimes the forest villagers themselves enter into the unfair business in collusion with forest officials or unscrupulous traders. They argue that instead of allowing the illegal traders to continue the shady business, the forest villagers should enjoy the benefit as they are the custodians in the true sense. In fact they are allegedly doing this. Perhaps it will not be out of context to mention about such unholy alliance of forest villagers of Diroi Reserved Forest which appeared in the Dainik Janambhumi (a widely published language daily) on 18th July 1989: "Ukta Bananchalat Samprati Chaudhka Khan Ban Gaon (Forest Village) Aase. Ei Gaon Samuhar Ekaangsa Lokei Biseshkoi Kaathar Choraang Byabasaai Kare" (In the said forest, at present there are 14 Nos of forest villages. Certain persons of these villages engage themselves in timber smuggling business). Although it is difficult to generalise the trend of things at the forest villages from this single experience yet it is a truism that such things are happening owing to the piled up frustrations among the forest villagers.

The Forest Department of Assam may extend the experiment of allowing 25% reservation of auction of forest coups to the co-operatives of tribal youths of the forest villages of Guma (Guma Bananchal Kaath Vyabasaayi Sangha) under Dhubri Forest Division to other tribal forest villages of various Forest Divisions. This will, besides improving the socio-economic condition of the tribal forest villagers, help the Forest Department in minimising illegal felling of valuable trees. Further more the forest villagers will develop a sense of belongingness. Although the 'Chamber' (constituting 8 Nos, of forest villages) in the name of Guma Forest Timber Traders Association enters into the trade, *everything is not rosy. Even then the effort should not be slackened.*



The bulk of the tribal forest villages being pocket settlements inside the remote jungles, the infrastructural facilities are far from *adequate*.

The absence of basic amenities like communication, marketing, health care, education etc. accentuated the backwardness. The land allocation having been reached a saturation point in respect of *productivity* even the crops raised by the villagers are not sufficient to sustain themselves. Thus an adverse situation prevails. In spite of the privileges granted to the tribal forest villagers, devastation of adjoining forest areas in pursuit of alternative avenues for livelihood became imminent. The process effected largely the Forest Department's stress factors generated to improve the economic condition of the forest villagers.

However, the Forest Department embarked upon a Centrally Sponsored Scheme entitled 'Improvement of Forest Villages' during 1984-85 with an outlay of Rs.266.00 lakhs for undertaking schemes like Community Development and Welfare Programmes, Educational Facilities, Improvement of Communication, Animal Husbandry, *Veterinary, Medical and Health Care* etc. These well meaning schemes allegedly *did not* bear the desired fruit due to various reasons best known to the Forest Department. Perhaps there is no alternative but to continue the Centrally Sponsored Scheme, otherwise the lot of the tribal forest villagers will never change for better.

Government of Assam put the required emphasis to remove the age old backwardness of the forest dwellers. A New Forest Policy 1988 has been announced. Under Rule 10 of the said Forest Policy, the forest villages have been proposed to be rearranged enabling the villagers to get settlement of land with the allied facilities except the right of transfer of the allotted forest land. This will go a long way to fulfil a major demand of the forest villagers. *The villagers will be able to obtain loan and other financial*



assistance from the financial institutions hitherto refused.

The Forest villagers have a distinctive role to play by assisting Government in the Forest Department by detecting the illegal timber traders who are creating havoc to the ~~flora~~ <sup>flora</sup> and Fauna.

The Forest Department on its part should instil the idea among the forest villagers to treat the forests as their ~~friend~~ <sup>friend</sup> and sustainer. The Department should make available the cultivable waste land inside the reserved forests to the bonafide tribal forest villagers.

The Forest Department should chalk out special employment programme in order to absorb unemployed youths of the tribal forest villagers.

Most of the tribal forest villagers are not in a position to purchase house building materials. The Forest Department may relax the existing rules in this regard so that the poor villagers can collect at least the fire-wood and minimum requirement of house building materials. The tribal forest villagers are traditionally attached to the forests and therefore detachment of the tribes from the forests should not be ventured. Besides considering the depredations caused due to illegal felling, collection of bare minimum of the forest produce by the poor forest villagers may be allowed as a lesser evil.

Oftentimes the officials entrusted to protect and preserve the forests face difficulties to tackle problems arising out of tribal behaviour vis-a-vis forest produce owing to lack of sufficient knowledge of the socio-cultural life of the tribals. To our considered opinion the said officials from Forest Guard onward to conservator of Forests or Divisional Forest Officers should be allowed to compulsorily attend Tribal Orientation Training Courses organised by the

Contd. 88.



Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati when organised.

The newly formulated Assam Forest Policy 1988 rightly emphasises (Rule 24) on the formation of co-operatives and the tribal youths of the forest villages will surely be benefitted from this well *meaning* scheme.

Last but not least a special scheme for the welfare of tribal forest villagers in the line of TSP/SCP may be chalked out within the ambit of the Forest sector of T.S.P. earmarking certain amount exclusively for the development of the tribal forest villagers.

Perhaps Government of Assam in the Forest Department can emulate the welfare activities of Government of Gujarat towards 194 forest village colonies. The Forest Department of Gujarat has created a separate unit under the direct control of the Chief Conservator of Forests in order to pay special attention of the forest village colonies of the State. All out efforts have been made to provide these poor tribal villagers with fruits of development and to bring them above the poverty line by undertaking individual beneficiary schemes such as providing agricultural tools and oil engines, digging of wells, purchase of cattle, land development, crop conservation and poultry farming. In 1985-86 an amount of Rs. 74.36 lakhs were spent.

The Gujarat Government also undertakes a Social Defence Scheme to provide employment to the Adivasi families on a permanent basis in forestry. Each beneficiary is allotted 1.5 hectares of land every year on which they undertake afforestation as per instruction of the Forest Department. This way the youths have been assured 25 days employment in a month. The beneficiaries are regarded as participants of this programme. They get 20 percent of the net



profit from tree cutting. 311 families were benefitted during 1985-86.

Besides, the Adivasi families in the forests are given timber wood for their household use at 20% of the market value.

Not only that the Forest Department has undertaken a scheme for awarding prizes to those individual who are helping the authorities to detect the forest criminals. Thus tribal welfare and environmental improvement go together.

The above schemes for welfare of tribals living in the forests proved very useful in creating an atmosphere of co-operation and harmony.

(Source - Sponsored Feature - Gujarat Marches Towards Progress - Special Attentions for Forests and Tribal Welfare - The Times of India, July 5, 1986).

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