

THE SONOWAL KACHARIS OF ASSAM



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THE SONOWAL KACHARIS OF ASSAM a monograph
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PREFACE

DEDICATION

*This monograph is dedicated to my respected
parents : Sri Sasadhar Baruah and Smit. Hemlata Baruah.*

Binita (Manjoo)

PREFACE

The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati under the aegis of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (erstwhile Ministry of Welfare) have been providing grants-in-aid to authors for publication of books written on different aspects of tribals and scheduled castes. The scheme is basically known as 'Grants-in-Aid for Literary Works for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes'. The Scheme receives very good response from different authors. In fact, it is difficult to accommodate all the authors under the scheme. As a part of this popular scheme, the book on "**The Sonowal Kacharies of Assam** by **Binita Barooah**" has been sponsored by the Institute for publication. It is expected that the readers will receive the book with pleasure. We look forward for comments and suggestions from the readers.

I am thankful to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for providing financial assistance for the scheme. I am also thankful to the Government of Assam, department of WPT & BC for giving financial assistance for the scheme. Finally, I like to thank M/S. Bohniman Printers, Guwahati for their help and co-operation for bringing out the book.

Dated Guwahati
the 16th February, 1999

R. Zaman
Director
Assam Institute of Research
for Tribals and Scheduled Castes
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Binita Barooah

FOREWORD

12 HASSORI PARTY

Assam the land of red river and blue hills also the land known to be abode of various ethnic groups. Sonowal-Kacharis are one of such groups who are mostly concentrated in Upper Assam. Barring few differences which is distinctly noticeable, the economic, cultural and religious life of Sonowal-Kacharis is almost similar to that of other non-tribals. Their dress, food habits, festival and economic activities, living style are so similar to that of other non-tribals that there remains very little to make any study on their life and to find out their distinct characteristic.

Marriage between Sonowal Kacharis and Ahom and Chutia are very common now a days. By religion the Sonowal-Kacharis are Hindu and disciple of Gossai of Auniati Satra of Majuli. In each village one comes across the Namghar where people assemble on religious occasion and recites Nam-ghosa of Madhab Deva and Kirtan of Sankar Deva. Though they have embraced Vaishnaism they continue to worship their traditional religious God and Goddess. It is in this respect where Sonowals differ from other communities and have been retaining their tribal characteristic. The influence of traditional God "Gojai" is overwhelming. Till today he is occupying a unique position in the religious life of the Sonowals. On a particular day during the Assamese Calender month of "Jeth" all the menfolk of a Sonowal village assemble on the bank of a river where Gojai is worshipped followed by a feast. Besides other Puja Upasars during the Puja the God "Gojai" is offered with rice, mod (rice-beer), meat of fowl and duck. It is only after the Gojai Puja in the month of Jeth, thus the Sonowals go for paddy cultivation in their fields.

Siva, the Khiring Raja or Baithow and Kechaikhaiti Gosani

of Sadiya also occupies a very unique place in the religious life of Sonowals. Even during Rangali Bihu time while Hussori Party visits and sings Hussori songs in a household the names of Siva, the Khiring Raja and Goddess Kechaikhaiti are uttered by the Sonowals with devotion.

The economic position of the Sonowal stands equal almost with other non-tribals, unlike the tribals of other parts of the country they are not dependant on forest and forest produces.

Mrs. Barooah has made a commendable job by bringing the various aspect of Sonowal-Kacharis life to light in her book "The Sonowal-Kacharis of Assam". She has closely studied this aspect for which she has been able to make finer observation with regards to customs followed by the Sonowals in their marriage. She has observed that the marriage is not different from other people and there is no particular custom which is strictly followed by them. She has rightly concluded this by mentioning the following phrase/words generally uttered by Sonowals :

Ahomar Chaklong

Hindur Bey

Kacharis JeiSei

The book "The Sonowal Kacharis of Assam" will be of immense value to the Researchers. General readers will also find the book very interesting as it contains numerous information regarding the life of Sonowals.

HARISH SONOWAL, IAS

*Commissioner & Secy. to the Govt. of
Assam Forest and Veterinary Department
Dispur.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Sonowal Kacharis are one of the scheduled Bodo tribes (plains) of Assam. They are concentrated mostly in the districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat. Their population is estimated around 2 Lakh. This figure includes other Kacharis such as the 'Thengal Kacharis' in the Jorhat District.

Different scholars express their opinions differently about the 'Thengal Kacharis'. Some scholars believe that those 'Bodo' people who live in Upper Assam during the reign of the Ahom Kings had to accept Assamese language like the Ahoms, because the Bodos were minority people in that region. They were called in accordance with their occupations. So those Kacharis who collected gold in the 'Subansiri' River were called Sonowal and the other Bodo people who served the Ahom kings in different offices and had to put on long shirts or 'thenga shirt' touching their heels are called 'Thengal Kachari'. The Thengal Kacharis were also engaged for silver works. So it is clear that "Thengal Kachari" is also a branch of Bodo group of Kacharis. Therefore there is no restrictions in getting marriage between them.

It is worth mentioning that the Kacharis had no written records or history in their languages and references of them can be had only in the Buranjis (Histories) of Assam. The

origin of the term 'Kachari' is very difficult to trace and the term seems to be unknown to the people themselves. The Sonowal Kacharis are a branch of Bodo Kacharis of Assam. It is said that during the reign of the Ahom King some of the Kacharis were engaged in washing gold particles from the sands of river and therefore the prefix 'Sonowal' (Gold washer), was added to signify them. According to an anecdote, the Kacharis of Upper Assam who became the disciple of 'Gossian' (a religious head) named 'Kechaideo' were considered to have super-natural power of offering a certain quantity of gold in a bamboo tube while the Ahom king Godadhar Singha was on the throne. And these people came to be known as Sonowal Kacharis.

They believe that they were the descendants of great BhaskarBarman, Norakasur, Ban, Bhagadutta, Hirimba, Ghototkas, Bhim, Prohlad and Bali. Although it is not definitely known about the origin of Sonowal Kacharis, yet it can be assumed that their ancestors were 'Manik-Mukuta'. Late Sarbananda Rajkumar¹ who studies the Sonowal Kacharis reveals - "Sadiya Anchalat Thaka Tamreswari Mandir, Kecaikhati Gossain Mondir Aru Nadi Bilakor Namor Pora Chutiya Sakalor Agote Tat Kochari Rajya Asil Buli Anuman Korib. Pari " Meaning - The Tamreswari temple, the temple of Kesaikhati and the name of the river at Sadiya justify the existence of a Kachari Kingdom at Sadiya before the Chutiya ". Late Dr. Lila Gogoi² opines that at Sadiya Kachari king named Manik ruled at Sadiya sometime in 11th /12th century A.D. Folklores of the Sonowal Kacharis have ample references of Manik. The tale runs as follows:

Obtaining the blessing of the 'Khiring Raja' (Mohadeo),

the wife of a Kachari named Manik gave birth to a cat. The cat was put inside a mustard loaded bamboo basket (Sariyaha Duli) and surprisingly the ordinary cat was turned into a golden cat. Due to his heavenly gift Manik could become the king of Sadiya (Halali). Later on he bequeathed the Kingdom to his son-in-law 'Mukuta'. Even to-day the members of 'Manikial' and 'Muktal' clans refer to their glorious ancestors.

The origin of the Kacharis and for that matter the Sonowal Kacharis is shrouded in uncertainties. Even Endle³, who spent some years with the Kacharis and published a monograph entitled "The Kacharis" as early as 1911, could not give us exact information in this regard. The origin of the Kachari race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and influence in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history -- it is possible that there were at least two great immigrations from the North and North East into the rich valley of the Brahmaputra i.e. one entering North East Bengal and Western Assam through the valley of the Tista, Dharla, Sonkash, etc. and founding there what was formerly the powerful kingdom of Kamrupa and other making its way through the Subonsiri, Dibang, and Dihang Valley into Eastern Assam where a branch of the widespread Kachari race, known as 'Chutiyas' undoubtedly held sway for a lengthened period. It is quite probable that the latter immigration might include the Sonowal Kacharis. The 'Saranias' referred to by Endle might include also the Sonowals.

The Sonowal Kacharis have seven clans called 'Khel'. The clans are exogamous. They are, 'Balikhitiari', 'Chiripuria', 'Amarabamiya', 'Dhulial', 'Ujani-Kuchiya',

'Namoni-Kuchiya' and 'Tipamiya'. These clans are again subdivided into fourteen sub-clans. They are 'Hagral', 'Muktal', 'Madan', 'Manikiyal', 'Ahmal', 'Formal', 'Borttajoal', 'Saru Hajowal', 'Kumral', 'Dhekial', 'Oingial', 'Lothial', 'Dangral', and 'Chetial'. These are again branches of these sub-clans, viz. 'Mokrari', 'Dapulari', 'Nezkatari', 'Daimari', 'Khakalari' etc.

Since the clans and sub-clans are exogamous, marriages among the same clans are strictly prohibited. Monogamy is the prevailing tradition, although there is no social bar against having more than one wives. But consent of the first wife is necessary to marry second time. Polygamy is absent and widow remarriage can be made effective if the parties so desire.

The Sonowals were offered non-tribal titles like Hazarika, Saikia, Bora, in their process of assimilation with the non-tribal people, specially during the Ahom rule..

The people at present have no dialect of their own. All the people speak Assamese language. They have forgotten their own dialect due to assimilation with the Assamese speaking people, but still they use some tribal names such as 'Khiring Raja', 'Kechaideo', 'Gossain', 'Baitha', 'Gojai' etc.

1. Rajkumar, Sarbananda - Chutiya jati -- Assam Sahitya Sabha Patrika 20th year . vol. I.

2. Gogoi, Lila - Assam Sahitya Sabha Patrika, 20th Year vol. III

3. Endle, S- The Kacharis- 1910 p. 4



AGRICULTURE, ECONOMY AND HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Sonowal Kacharis. They are mostly cultivators. Every family has sufficient land for agriculture. At least one granary is seen in every house. They practise both Ahu and Sali paddy. Besides paddy, they raise mustard seeds, pulses, potatoes, ginger, brinjals, sweetgourds, chillies, pumpkins, water-melons, beans, cucumbers etc. They are also good horticulturists. They cultivate banana, pine-apple, guava, lemon etc., which are their major horticultural products. They sell these articles in the weekly Hats (Market).

Though they are cultivators yet the modern methods of agriculture is resorted to by a few families only. A large majority have taken the traditional system of cultivation. They use cow-dung as manure.

At the time of harvesting paddy, the villagers work collectively in the field of each family by turn. The womenfolk also assist their menfolk in producing all sorts of crops. They take an active part in the rearing of crops, transplanting the paddy-seedlings and reaping the harvest when it is ripe.

The poultry is a popular practice among the Sonowal Kacharis. They rear hens and ducks. Cattle rearing is also an another important practice among them. They rear cows, goats etc. One of the main motives of undertaking such practice is to meet the family requirement. Animals and birds in excess to their requirements are sold to the needy

villagers and also sold in the weekly markets.

'Dheki' (an instrument for husking paddy) is used by the women for husking paddy to prepare "Jalpan" (tiffin) such as "chira", "Hurung", "komol chaul" etc.

Drinking of locally prepared rice-beer is common among them and its preparation is required for the performance of all social festivals and religious rites and for the entertainment of guests also. Today, however the consumption of the rice-beer is restricted and educated section takes it occasionally. They prefer tea to rice-beer.

Weaving is an important household industry for every family. Not a single family is found without a loom. Grown up girls and women are very expert weavers and most of the domestic requirements such as bed-cover, mekhala, chadar, gamocha etc. are met from the family looms.

Girls are taught the methods of spinning and weaving since their very childhood. Rearing of Endi, a kind of silk worm is also another important household industry of the womenfolk. They produce Endi scarfs also in their family looms. A few families sell these articles to the needy people and earn money. But it is noticed that due to the lack of interest and competition, their economic activities are not commercialised at all. So they couldnot contribute anything significant to their economy.

However besides agriculture, some of the people have been engaged in service and in different kinds of business. They are also advanced in professional education like medical, engineering, law etc. Many of them are self-employed in trade and commerce, although the number is negligible.

VILLAGE LIFE, VILLAGE COUNCIL AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Demographically the Sonowal Kacharis form the third largest plains tribal group of Assam and are mainly found in the district of undivided Dibrugarh. They are very simple and so they can mix up easily with the people of other communities without any hesitation. Their life-style is also simple.

The Sonowal Kachari community enjoys the mixture of both the traditional and modern system of living, because they are influenced by the other communities in regards of their standard of living, style of cooking, style of dresses etc. The people have accepted the modern customs and conventions but also at the same time, preferred to adhere to their traditional customs and conventions.

Housing pattern :

The design of the house of the Sonowal Kachari people are like non-tribal house in rural areas of Assam. Generally their houses are made of some materials like bamboo, wood etc. Almost all the families have some extra land where different kinds of trees and vegetables are available. The rooms of the houses are generally known as drawing room, guest-room, bed-room etc. No attached kitchen is seen in their houses. There is a separate prayer room to pray to God. The granary is generally constructed in a corner in front of the house. They are fond of pet animals. So they construct separate sheds for cattle and poultry.

Food habit :

Rice is the staple food of the Sonowal Kacharis. Their

delicious food is fish , mutton and chicken. All kinds of vegetables and pulses are included in their daily food. They use rice-beer occasionally . They know how to prepare wine from rice, fruits and molasses. Formerly they offered rice beer to the guests as a mark of honour. But now-a-days tea is offered to the guests. Besides tea, betel -leaves and nut are common items which precede or follow the cup of tea. They use special variety of rice (komal-Chaul and Bora Chaul) for their tiffin.

Social life :

Co- operatin is the salient feature of their social life. Whether in case of harvesting paddy or making construction or renovation of a house of any individual family, all the villagers readily co- operate. Both male and female are hard workers and they work in the paddy field to gain more crops. The Sonowal Kacharis have also a very also a very interesting system of mutual help and co-operation called 'HWART'. When a particular family finds it difficult to cultivate its land to transplant paddy-seedlings or to harvest paddy in the fields in time and also to store them due to some unavoidable reasons, the head of the family concerned approaches the village headman for help to be extended through the youths of the village to do the job. This system is called 'HAWART'. The youths of the village do the assigned job on a date already fixed for this purpose. Such a system helps the widows, childless couples and the individuals of the village. The concerned family, of course, has to entertain the youths with food and drink. Both men and women are expert in their respective field. Menfolk are experts not only in agriculture but also in other household chores like house building, gardening etc.

Wmenfolk are also expert in their own field. They help their menfolk in the paddy -field, weave clothes and prepare meal for all the members of the family.

They are expert in the case of medical treatment also. They use some home-made medicines which they prepare from some leaves and roots of the trees, locally available.

In the matter of hunting and fishing also, they have shown their extraordinary skill. They know some tricks of hunting and fishing also.

Generally the campus of the house is very clear and there is a spacious courtyard in every family which they use for threshing and processing paddies. The well-to-do people construct pacca house of R.C.C. and C.I. sheet structure.

Dress habit :

Like other rural Assamese men and women the Sonowal Kacharis also prefer to use their trditional dress , which are woven by the womenfolk in their looms. They are expert in weaving and every house possesses a loom. Knowledge of weaving is considered as a qualification for the brides. The women feel ashamed of if they donot know the art of weaving. It is compulsory that in the marriage of a girl, the parents should give a loom to their daughters as a gift. The man generally wears a dhuti and a kurta. The young generation now-a- days wears trousers and shirts. The married women as a customary practice used three pieces of clothes -Mekhela¹, Riha² and Chadar³. There is no restriction of dresses in case of unmarried girls and they are found to have used modern dresses.

Ornaments :

The women are very fond of ornaments and they still

put on their traditional ornaments like Gamkharu, Keru, Thuria, Dugdugi, Biri, Kankong etc. Moreover, the ornaments used by the other women of different communities have also influenced them, specially the younger generation, to some extent.

Village Council :

Every society whether primitive or modern has a system of Government of its own. Each people has its own system of social control.

Like all other societies, the Sonowal Kachari society also has its own administrative system to run the society properly.

They are very polite and law-abiding people. The rural social system and rural judiciary system among them are quite healthy and powerful.

The Gaonbura or the village headman plays the most important role in administering law and justice and in the performance of all socio-religious functions in the village. The Goanbura and the village elders constitute the village council. This council tries cases, settle disputes like divorce, quarrel, theft etc. and delivers judgement. The Namghar is also the centre of solving disputes of the villagers. The offenders are punished with fines in cash. The amount goes to the public fund. In extreme cases, the offenders are punished with excommunication ('Khutimara'). The main aim of the village council is to maintain peace and harmony in the village.

Social Structure :

There are some similarities in the social structure of the Sonowal Kacharis with that of any other non tribal communities of other villages. To run the administration of the

villages, besides Gaonbra, there are some office bearers to assist him. They are known as 'Barik' and 'Pathek', 'Asirbadia Bura', 'Gitghai', 'Medhi', 'Tamuli', and 'Randhani'. Some functions are entrusted to the office bearers. Thus the function of the 'Barik' is to look after the Namghar. He also acts as the treasurer of the public fund. The function of the 'Pathek' is to read the religious scripts in public or private function. 'Asirbadia Bura' showers blessings at the end of the religious ceremonies. The 'Gitghai' is an expert in 'Husorigeet' and in other religious songs. The 'Medhi' is known as the chief in all religious functions. He presides over any religious ritual. The 'Bayan' is also known as the special instructor and his function is to impart training to others in the art of 'Gayan Bayan'. 'Gayan Bayan' is a religious dance which is propounded by Vaisnava saint Sri Sankardeva. The main function of the 'Tamuli' is to supply betlenuts and leaves to those audience who take part in religious functions. 'Bilania's' function is to distribute food to the people in a feast. The function of the 'Randhani' is to cook food in the feast.

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1. *Mekhala* - A petticoat. It is to be worn extending from the breast.
 2. *Riha* - A piece of cloth about 2ft. wide and 9 ft. long used as wrapper to cover the body.
 3. *Chadar* - a pice of cloth about 3 ft. wide and 6 ft. long used as wrapper to cover the body.

BIRTH AND DEATH RITES AND OTHER CEREMONIES

Birth

In every human society the birth of a child, be it a male or a female, is an occasion of joy for the family. The Sonowal Kacharis perform certain rites and rituals at the birth of a child. No ritual is held during the period of pregnancy.

At the time of delivery, the expectant mother has to remain inside the house up to the fourth day since the date of delivery. The pregnant woman is considered to be a victim of malevolent spirits for which a knife is given to her to protect herself from the evil influence of spirits. Elderly women of the community having the experience of midwifery help the woman at the child birth. The mother and the baby are separated from the other family members till the naval cord falls and after that the purification ceremony is performed. A fire is kept burning continuously for a few days to protect her from the evil spirit. The period of chuwa (period of uncleanness) in case of a female baby extends to thirty days, while in the case of a male baby it extends to twenty one days. On the day of the purification of the mother and the child, the elderly women and sometimes elderly men also are to be entertained with a moderate feast and the women helping at the time of delivery are to be offered some presents by the father of the child.

Generally, two rituals are held on the birth of a child. They are -(1) 'Bajuliwa' (the new born baby taken out ceremoniously to show the sun) (2) 'Sudhi sabah' (ceremony

of purification).

'Bajuliwa' :

When the naval cord falls the ritual of the 'bajuliwa' is held and a few male devotees are invited to whom 'Mah-Prasads'¹ are offered. The mother then makes salutation and the devotees shower blessings wishing all good to both the mother and the child.

'Sudhi-sabah'

The Sudhi Sabah ritual is held after twenty one days in case of male baby and thirtydays in case of a female baby. On this day the child's head is to be shaved by the father and the hair that are cut have to be preserved ceremoniously.

On the occasion of sudhi sabah, a few devotees are invited to hold Namkirtan (religious songs). The baby is blessed by the devotees so that the little one from that day becomes a real Kachari.

Death :

In every human society death is regarded as a natural process from which none can escape. The Sonowals believe that the soul is immortal.

They cremate the dead bodies. Dead bodies of children below the age of five , of pregnant women and of epidemic cases are buried. Dying inside the house is not considered as ominous.

Purificatory ceremonies are almost similar to those of the neighbouring non-tribals with the exception that the Kacharis generally do not employ a Brahmin to preside over the purificatory ceremony. The 'Medhi' presides over all the functions relating to death. They observe a three tier purificatory ceremony; namely, (1) 'Tiloni' on the third day, (2) 'Dahdinia Daha' on the tenth day and (3) 'Kuridinia

Kaj on the twentieth day. Ancestor-worship is also prevalent among them. 'Namkirtan' and a general feast for the villagers are held in the purificatory ceremony.

1. Tiloni :

'Tiloni' ritual is very simple and it is observed on the third day of the death of the person and all who attended the funeral are invited. For observing formalities a few 'bhaktas' are also invited. 'Til' (a kind of black sesame) seed is mixed with water which each member of the bereaved family should touch in presence of all. There is no practice of holding 'Namkirtan' but 'Mah-Prasads' are offered and earthen light is lengthened. There is a taboo to use fire and water of the family required for holding the ritual as there is 'Chuwa' (uncleanliness) in the family. All the members of the family make salutations who are given permission by the 'Bhakats' to have a single meal just before sunset.

2. 'Doha' :

The word 'Doha' comes from the Assamese counting number 'Dah' or 'ten'. Doha begins with the offering of Pinda or cakes by the 'Kiriyadhara' on a river side with the help of 'Medhi'. This is done in Brahmanical way. Like a Brahmin priest 'Medhi' also accepts gifts offered in the name of the spirit of the deceased. The sons have to shave off their heads on this day on the death of their parents.

But it is noticed that like other Hindus, the Sonowals instead of counting on the tenth day, they count it from the day of Tiloni, so it actually falls on the fourteenth day of one's death.

3. 'Kaaj' :

'Kaaj' which follows Doha, may be held at any time according to the convenience of the family. All functions

of the Kaaj are performed by the Medhi or Brahmin. He presides over some of the obsequious rites in the morning hours including the Pinda to be offered in a river. After finishing the functions of the Medhi, Bhaktas then hold Namkirtan according to 'Namdharma' way. A feast is held to delight the people. All the members of the family and their near relatives make salutation.

There is practice of washing the feet of everyone who comes to attend the obsequious rites. It is done at the outer gate to express utmost loyalty. In case of the death of the parents, it is preferably done by the eldest son. Besides other traditional practices, 'Namkirtan' is also held in quite 'Namdharma' way on the concluding day of the 'Kaaj' ceremony.²

1. Mah-Prasad- Mah - Rice mixed with moong; gram etc. and offered in the name of God and then to the devotees.

2. Medhi, P. - Religion among the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam. P. 135 - A Sociological study.

A thesis submitted to the Dibrugarh University for the Degree of Philosophy, Dibrugarh, Assam, 1989.

MARRIAGE AND MARITAL RITES AND CEREMONIES

Marriage is an institution which admits men and women to family life. It is a stable relationship in which a man and a woman are socially permitted to have children. Edward Westermarck defined marriage as "the more or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of off-springs. "According to Harton and Hunt "marriage is the approved social pattern where by two or more persons established a family". According to John Levy and Ruth Munroe "people get married because of the feeling that being in family is the only proper, indeed the only possible way to live "In almost all the societies one or the other forms of marriage exists. The marriage is exogamous and monogamy is the general practice among the people.

Sonowal Kacharis considered marriage as indispensable for the adult boys and girls. Marriageable age for girl is 18-20 years., while the marriageable age for boy is 22-25 years. Marriage ceremony takes place at the girl's house. Monogamy is the most popular form of marriage but acquiring more than one wives is permissible if the first wife gives her consent to it due to some reasons. Polygamy is unknown and the practice of widow remarriage and divorces in the Sonowal Kacharis society is very rare. Widow remarriage can be made effective if the parties so desire.

The practice of inter-caste marriage is not rare. Though this system of marriage is generally not supported by the

parents yet it is seen that there is no hard and fast rule regarding this matter. In case, a Sonowal Kachari girl marries a boy of other caste then their society accepted them easily.

Every girl in a tribal setting is considered an asset in the family to which she belongs. Therefore some compensation has to be given to the family of the girl in terms of payment of money by the boy. Such payment is known as bride-price. Now-a-days bride-price is charged only in 'Gandharba' form of marriage. There is no fixed bride-price. It may vary according to the status of the groom and the goodwill of the girl's parents towards the groom's family.

In the present day society, five type of marriages are performed among the Sonowal Kacharis. These are - 1. 'Santi Biya', 2. 'Nowa Dhowa' or 'Borbiya', 3. 'Hom Diya Biya', 4. 'Gandharba Biya', 5. 'Churchuria' or 'Rabha Sarakai Diya Biya'.

1. *Santi Biya* :

The attaining of puberty is also an important event for a girl, because it is the indication of the child bearing age. In this period a marriage is celebrated with much fanfare which is known as Santi Biya. Only women are allowed to take part in this marriage.

Some formalities are observed in this marriage. The girl is not given any solid food for four days and she is allowed to have vegetarian meal for one time a day till seventh or ninth day when the final bathing ceremony takes place. The first bathing ceremony takes place on the fourth day, when some village girls bring water from a river or a pond in earthen pot to give a ceremonial bathing to the girl.

On the final bathing day also the water is collected in the same way. She has to apply Mah-Haladhi-bata¹ before her bath. After the girl is given a bath, she wears new clothes and ornaments.

Namkirtan is also held by the Bhaktas on that day in the evening in a Namdharm way and Mah-Prasads are offered. The girl makes salutation while the Bhaktas bless her.

2. Noa Dhoa or Borbiya :

This system of marriage is performed by the Sonowal Kacharis by observing some formalities and is usually arranged by the parents of the respective couple. Generally non-tribal influence is noticed in its system of marriage.

People are invited by the bride's side and a feast is held for the invitees. The couple then arrive accompanied by some persons who are well received. Bhaktas hold Namkirtan in Nam dharm way to shower blessings wishing them a happy conjugal life. Couple then make salutation to the Bhaktas. The couple is thus socially recognised to live as husband and wife.

3. Hom Diya Biya :

This system of marriage is arranged by the parents and people of both parties on mutual understanding. Brahmin priest takes important part in this system of marriage.

4. Gandharba Biya :

Traditionally Sonowal Kachari marriages are held under this system and this system therefore entails no social stigma. The main reasons to support such system of marriage are to avoid some formalities of formal marriage and to incur comparatively lesser expenditure than that of formal marriage. A nominal bride-price is charged in this

system of marriage. There is no fixed bride-price.

5 Churchuria or Rabha Sarakai Diya Biya :

This system of marriage is also popular type of marriage, where the runaway couple is formally recognised as married couple, with an unceremonious feast to a few village elders. Generally, it is seen that when a boy likes to marry a girl and if the boy is uncertain about the acceptance of the marriage proposal from the parents of the girl as well as his own parents, then one night he takes away the girl to his residence with the help of his friends. After three days of the incident, information must be sent to the parents of the girls which is called 'Jananidiya' or 'Chordekhadiya'. The boy is required to bear the expenses of a sumptuous feast culminating the marriage.



1. Mah- Haladhi bata- Unguents prepared by grinding turmeric and gram.

FESTIVALS.

Bihu is the main festival of the Sonowal Kacharis. Like other Assamese people, the Sonowals also consider Bihu as their traditional community festival. There are three Bihus in a year. They are Bohag or Rangali Bihu, Magh or Bhogali Bihu, Kati or Kangali Bihu.

1. *Bohag or Rangali Bihu :*

The most enjoyable Bihu is Bohag Bihu. It occurs on the last of the Assamese month, 'Chot' (mid-April) and is celebrated for seven days. The Sonowals, too, consider the Rangali Bihu as their traditional community festival. The main trait of this Bihu is the dance of young boys and girls in separate groups along with beating of drums and pipes. On the eve of the Bihu the womenfolk clean the clothes and prepare special Bihu delicacies like 'Chira' (beaten rice), 'Pitha' (cake) etc. The manfolk remain busy in collecting necessary items such as 'Tara-pagha' (ropes for the cattle prepared out of slices of 'Tara' - an indigenous plant and vegetables such as raw turmeric, bringal, gourd etc. for the next day's 'Goru Bihu').

The first day of the Bihu is called the 'Coru Bihu' (the bihu for the cattle), as cows and bullocks provide them with means of livelihood. On this day, men and women rise early in the morning and take a bath. Cattle are also ceremonially bathed in the river or tank and cut pieces of the said vegetables are thrown to them. In the evening they are entertained with cakes specially prepared for them. The young boys and girls wear new clothes on this day and after enjoying the special preparations of food for the Bihu, spend

the time in egg-fight (Koni-juj).

Next day is the Manuh Bihu (bihu for the people). On this day 'Gamocha' (bath-towel) woven by women are presented to friends and relatives. People spend the whole day in prayers and worship. Purification of body and mind is considered a necessary part of Bihu festival. Holy Books are read in the Namghar. (an institution for holding public prayer). That day people do not eat boiled rice. Instead of that they take beaten-rice, curd and different kinds of cakes. On this day the 'Bihu-Husori' is formally inaugurated at the Namghar. Only after the formal inauguration, the 'Husori' party can visit the households. During these bihu days the entire village is stirred with joy and merry-making has no bounds.

The Sonowals have a folk belief regarding the origin of the Bohag Bihu. It is believed that during Bohag Bihu the demon king Bali who was consigned to the Hell (Sutal) along with the demons, returns to the earth on the 'Bisuva Sangkranti' Day after completing a year and the Sonowals therefore rejoice on the advent of the demon king.¹

2. *Magh or Bhogali Bihu :*

It comes off on the last day of the Assamese month of 'Puh' (mid-January). It is in fact a harvest festival. Crops are already harvested and the cultivators get some days for rest and recreation. The preceding day of the Magh Bihu is known as 'Uruka'. On that day the young boys stay in the fields making some cottages with straw and bamboo and make merry. They also arrange feasts there and make some 'Mejis'² which are put on fire the next morning. Burning of 'Mejis' is one form of fire worship.

3. Kati or Kangali Bihu :

The Kati Bihu comes off on the last day of the Assamese month of 'Ahin' (mid-October). No mirth and merriment in this Bihu is observed. It is the time of hardship and want. That is why this Bihu is also known as 'Kangali Bihu'. Tulsi plants are planted on the eastern side of the courtyards and oil lamps made of earthen vessels are put near those plants. This continues the whole month of Kati (Kartick). In the evening of the day of the Bihu, paddy fields are also illuminated with oil lamps. In this way goddess Lakhimi is propitiated for more production.

The Sonowal Kacharis celebrate these Bihus with much fanfare. They attend Namghar and hold Namkirtan on these occasions. The Sonowal Kacharis, however, unlike other Assamese Hindus, perform some traditional worship to different deities in place like paddy granary, front entrance door, dhekishal³ etc. They also hold ancestor worship on the occasion of each Bihu. Youths play active role in the smooth running of the individual or community festivals or religious ceremonies. Thus Sonowal Kacharis like to observe some common national social festivals.



1. Goswami. P. - *Essays on the Folklore and Culture of North Eastern India*. 1983. p. 2-3
2. 'Mejis' Stack of fire-wood to be burnt.
3. 'Dhekisal' A wooden padal for husking paddy etc.

RELIGIOUS RITES, RITUALS AND DEITIES

Man's search for ultimate meaning is the underlying theme for the social institution of religion. There is great diversity in world's religions. Not all religions worship one God or even several gods. Some worship animals, ethical principles or geographical features. This frame will show that inspite of vast differences among religions the various forms appear to share four basic elements : recognition of the sacred ritual, a system of beliefs and organisation.

The social institution of religion is defined as the system of norms guiding behaviour related to man's search for ultimate meaning. A concern with ultimate meaning — a search for explanation for the meaning of life, death and other difficult things to explain events — is the basic theme in religious behaviour.

Durkheim defined religion "as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church by all those who adhere to them". Like other social institutions, religion exhibits certain cultural universals and variations and performs functions relative to personalities and societies.

The Sonowal Kacharis have great faith in religion. They are the devout followers of "Mohapurushia Baisnav Dharma". All the Sonowals are the disciples of "Auniati Satra" with the only exception of a few Sonowal Kacharis of Lakhimpur district who owe allegiance to the 'Checha'

Satra'. Among the villagers there are two broad religious divisions namely 'Sarania' and 'Bhajania'. All the Sonowal Kacharis above the age of sixteen may be regarded as 'Sarantias' and those who are on the other side of the fifties follow the strict rules of 'Dharma', thus upgrading themselves in the socio-religious ladder. They are known as 'Bhakats'. These 'Bhakats' have various grades and seniors are known as 'Medhi'

The Sonowal Kacharis accepted dual religious systems. They are 'Kirata dharama' and 'New-Vaisnavism' or 'Ek Saran Namdharma'. But there is vast difference between the system of the two religions in terms of beliefs and practices. Though they have faith in Namdharma which is against the worship of any other god or goddess with or without sacrifice, yet they cannot completely abolish their traditional religious systems. So they still continue to hold sacrificial worship to their traditional deities. They have traditional beliefs regarding some animals, trees and birds. They worship them for the welfare of the people.

'Kirata' Religious practices.

There are two kinds of worship — community and household. The people worship a large number of deities. To maintain peace in the family they held household deities and community worship for the welfare of the villagers. come of the community worship are 'Baitha', 'Bagh puja', 'Gajoi Bhoj', 'Bator Sabah', 'Lakhimi tola sabah', 'Gyati guri sabah', 'Gupini sabah', 'Chengeli machar Bhoj', 'Bahoor Utowa', 'Kechaikhati', etc. Some of the household rituals are like 'Ancestors Worship', 'Apeswara Sabah', 'Lakhimi mota', 'Swaragdeo puja', 'Jalasa Dangoria' etc. Again among them there are some rituals which are held as

both household and community worship such as 'Aai Sakam', 'Garakhia Sabah' etc.

Community worship :

'Baitha Worship'

'Baitha' who is identified with Siva, is worshipped by the Sonowal Kacharis in a befitting manner. There are some fables in connection with the origin of this 'Baitha puja'.

'Baitha puja' that precedes two weeks of 'Bohag Bihu' is held in a 'Baitha Than' at Borpothar, a village situated at a distance of 8 k.m. away from Sarudhadum village. This puja has to be started on a Sunday evening and continued up to the next Tuesday. During these days no worship is held during day time. A priest designated as 'Baithori' from amongst the people conducts this puja and as such the priesthood is not hereditary although a 'Baithori' is generally a descendant of the 'Baithori' family. 'Mantras' have no place in this puja and the worship is primarily ritualistic.

The residence of the 'Baithori' which lies within the 'Than' campus occupies a very important place because the beginning and concluding ceremonies of this puja have to be held in the residence.

'Baitha Puja' is held in 'Baitha Than' once a year. As this 'Baitha Than' is the only 'Than' for the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam, so the Sonowals from all parts of Assam attend 'Baitha puja' at this 'Than'. 'Haidang', which is folk song of the Sonowals that describes the origin of the universe is an essential part of the 'Baitha puja'. Such musical instruments as small cymbals, flute, bamboo clappers, feathers of peacock and a big size of dagger to be used to cut the neck of the sacrificial birds are held in high esteem. The above mentioned musical instruments are kept on a raised platform

in the 'Baithori's' house, while the dagger is kept at a specially made place adjacent to the 'Than'.

At the beginning, people gather at the residence of the Baithori' on Sunday evening for some ritual to bring down the musical instruments and the dagger which are to be taken to the 'Than' for future worship. In this ritual, which is called 'Deo Nomowa', a cock is sacrificed and cooked and everyone present is given a share of it with rice -beer as 'prasad'. Before giving this 'prasad', people present there have to answer questions relating to origin of the universe, the migration and origin of the Kacharis, their clans and sub-clans etc. At least one person from amongst the group is to answer the questions. Otherwise the elderly person who is also the questioner, has to provide the answer. This ritual comes to an end with the keeping of the musical instruments and the dagger in their proper place in 'Baithori's' house.

The main function begins on next Monday evening when people in large number come with fowls for individual sacrifice. This function begins at the altar of the 'Baitha' which is nothing but a pillar of 'Jamuka' (a kind of tree) that symbolizes 'Baitha Devota'. The pillar is higher by a few feet than the roof of the 'Than' to help the deities, as the devotees' belief, to descend from heaven. They offer betel nuts and leaves, rice-beer, salt, unboiled rice etc. The sacrifice is performed in three stages (i) for the people in general (ii) for the individual village and (iii) for the individual persons-to protect men and cattle in the coming Assamese New Year day (generally falls on 13th, 14th April).

After the main puja of the 'Baitha Than' is over, another

'puja' is held at 'Bhuruli Sal' ('Bhuruli is another name of Parvoti, the wife of Lord Siva. 'Sal' known as the sacred place to hold sacrificial worship) in the campus of the 'Than' where a stone pillar, symbolizing 'Bhuruli Sal' is seen. In this 'Puja' a big fire is made and the devotees offer things to please such gods and goddesses as 'Bura-Buri', 'Balia-Baba', 'Saraswati' 'Barambahoo' etc. and it comes to an end with the sacrifice of a pair of pigs. Two persons called 'Deodhari' and 'Saikia' performed the ritual at the 'Bhuruli Sal'.

After a few hours of this prayer the people again assemble at the 'Than' to sing 'Haidang' song in which they use 'toka' (bamboo clapper), 'Bahi' (flute) and 'Khutital' (Cymbal of small size) . One person , generally a girl in earlier days, pretends to dance like a peacock by holding peacock feathers in both the hands. After completing this ritual , the people go in procession by singing 'Haidang' song to 'Baithori's' house to keep the instruments used in the 'Baitha puja' ceremoniously.

At the later period , some Hindu gods and goddesses like 'Saraswati', 'Barun' 'Lakhimi', 'Bayu' etc are also worshipped by the people.

The main reason to perform 'Baitha puja' is to satisfy 'Baitha' and other deities which are associated to the god 'Baitha' to get their favour for the welfare of the people and for raising good harvest.

Bagh puja or Tiger worship :

Tiger is worshipped by the Sonowals since the primitive days immediately after the 'Baitha puja' is over on Tuesday. So Tiger worship is held on next Wednesday in a forest.

For the worship, a portrait of a tiger is drawn on the

ground and for giving it a natural colour, the mixture of some articles such as powdered rice, ashes of burning straw, juice of raw turmeric etc. are applied. Wine and fowl sacrifice are offered in the name of tiger-god and a public feast is held for this worship.

The Sonowal Kacharis believe that propitiation to evil forces is necessary for secured life of men and cattle. As the people had to go to the paddy field, so their cattle are found to become the victim of tiger's attack. Most probably, tiger worship is held for this purpose.

'Gojai Bhoj'

'Gojai' is a household name among the Sonowals. He is also known as 'Guru' or preceptor who gave company to the Sonowals when they migrated towards eastward and who is also believed to be an upholder of the religious belief of 'Kirata'. As 'Gojai Guru' is popular in the socio-religious life of the Sonowals, so he is respected by them and every Sonowal village, therefore worship him once in a year.

'Gojai Bhoj' is held in the forest by the adults of villages in the Assamese month 'Jeth' (May/June). This respective 'bhoj' is held four times in a year in the oldest 'Gojai Than' at Laina village near Dangori of Tinsukia District.

It is a simple ritual. In the name of 'Gojai' a red cock is sacrificed by putting it into fire. After that a feast is prepared with the sacrificial bird when the first share is offered to 'Gojai' and remaining others are kept for the devotees. Rice beer drinking is must during the feast. The people then make salutation to 'Gojai'.

The main purpose of performing 'Gojai' worship is to make sure of producing good crops and to cure the cattle of disease by means of which people will be able to finish the

work of cultivation without any obstacle. The name of 'Gojai Guru' is thus related with the agricultural economy of the people.

Bator Sabah or Worship to the Road God.

'Bator Sabah' worship is held annually by the females in the village outskirts where the road gets a thoroughfare into the boundary of the village. The main purpose of this worship is to protect the village from all sorts of natural and supernatural evils.

According to the Sonowals, the world is full of spirits and their existence is felt everywhere. The people consider the spirit of malevolence as the root for all kinds of evils of the village people and their cattle which enter into the village through the village road. Only the 'Bator devota' or the road-God can prevent its entry which would protect the villagers and their cattle. Fowls or ducks are sacrificed for this ritual and a public feast is held with the meat of the sacrificial birds. Devotees take 'prasad' after offering a share of it to the 'Bator devota'.

'Lakhimi tola Sabah'

❶ 'Lakhimi tola sabah' is a common worship among the Sonowals and almost all people held this worship in the village 'Namghar' and the river bank in the month of October. As people have to depend upon agriculture, so mainly they cultivate 'Sali' paddy in low lying land with water deposit. The people feel guilty for having left 'Lakhimi' in such dirty places.

The ritual begins with the 'Bhagawata thapana' (the act of placing the 'Bhagawata', the religious book on a platter as a symbol of worship and as an object for prayer) and the offerings of 'Mah Prasads'. To carry 'Lakhimi' from the river

to the 'Namghar'; a procession is arranged and people go to a nearby river by singing verses accompanied by 'Gayan-Bayan'.

On the river bank, before actual lifting of Lakhimi (paddy) takes place, a number of traditional deities is worshipped. Some of them are - 'Haloi Bura-Buri', 'Kuber', 'Na-bhani Lakhimi' (nine sisters of Lakhimi), 'Gojoi', 'Batarowa' (passer-by), 'Garakhia' (cowherd boys), 'Carai-cirikoti' (birds etc.) 'Pok-Parowa' (insects etc.)

This ritual is participated by both men and women by holding 'Namkirton' (chanting of verses in praise of Vishnu). Thus they carry 'Lakhimi' to the 'Namghar' and distribute among all the families of the village.

Gyati-guri Sabah or worship of the Kinship's Deity.

'Gyati-guri Sabah' is held by the Sonowal Kachari people at least once in a year in the forest to protect the village from all kinds of evils.

The villager considers each other as 'Gyati' or 'kinsman'. The main aim of this ritual is to strengthen the tie of kinship among the people of the village. They believe that welfare of the village depends on the welfare of all and so co-operation is necessary among the villagers to solve all problems of the village. Moreover they believe that all over the people there is a supreme deity who is known as village god or 'Gyati guri devota' and it is necessary to worship the deity for the welfare of the villagers.

The ritual is performed at the presence of the male adults only. A feast is also held with the meat of the sacrificial birds which are sacrificed in the name of the 'Gyati guri devota', Rice-beer is also offered in this worship. Devotees take 'prasad' after offering a share of it to the 'Gyati guri

devota'.

Gopini Sabah or Ritual held by the female devotees.

The role played by females in the field of cultivation is very important. So they are conscious about the safe and successful harvesting. As the insects during the period from August to September spoil the immature paddy plants which displease the goddess Lakhimi., so the gopinis hold 'Gopini sabah' in the paddy field. They offered 'mah-prasad', betel nuts and leaves in this worship. Gopinis take prasad after offering a share of it to the goddess Lakhimi. The ritual comes to an end after a salutation.

Chengeli machsr bhoj or feast with chengeli

After finishing the cultivation, the people get rest and for relaxation a feast is held with the Chengeli fish (a kind of fish) which is easily available at this time than other kinds of fishes. In this feast no formal prayer is held. At the end of the ritual people make salutation to Lakhimi.

Bhoor Utowa Sabah or Raft-floating Ritual.

Bhoor Utowa Sabah' is an annual ritual which is held by the Sonowal Kachari people by the side of a river in the Assamese month of Bohag (April/May). mah prasad are offered and from religious books hymns are recited.

It also known as 'Bighini atarawa' (to drive away the obstacle) ritual. The Sonowals consider 'Bighini Devota' as placing obstacle in their work that cause them miseries. They think that people and their cattle would enjoy a happy life if the Bighini Devota' is propitiated at the beginning of the Assamese new year (April) and bighinis are given farewell on a floating raft.

A raft is made with the sheaths of plantain tree and some offerings are made in the name of 'Bighini Devota'

and his association. The number of such offerings are almost 64 in number which consist of burning wick, powdered rice, betel nuts and leaves etc. The Asirbadia showers blessings to the devotees while they make salutation to the god. Then the raft is allowed to float in the river. And after which 'mah-prasad' are distributed.

Public feast is held in this ritual and duck meat is required for the feast. The devotees take food after offering a share of it to the 'Bighini Devota'.

Kechaikhati or Eater of raw flesh :

'**Kechaikhati**' worship is performed by the Sonowal Kacharis. It is very popular among them. Different scholars express their views differently about the goddess 'Kechaikhati'. According to Kakoti¹; 'kechaikhati' is also known as 'Tamreswari Devi'. "The people who brought this goddess to awful prominence were the Chutiyas, a Mongolian tribe who were reigning at Sadiya at the beginning of the 13th century, she was enshrined in a copper temple and called Tamreswari Devi (the goddess of the copper temple). This temple became so famous that it was at that time looked upon as a centre of worship for all the hill tribes on the north-eastern frontier."

The goddess was popularly referred to as 'Kechaikhati' (eater of raw flesh) because of the annual human sacrifice². The practice of human sacrifice was discontinued earlier during the reign of king Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795) when the Chutiya priests harried by the Burmese invaders abandoned their ancient possessions in the vicinity of the temple³. The 'Tamreswari' temple was now in ruins.⁴ The people of Sadiya had, however, set up a 'Kechaikhati Than' in later years.

'**Kechaikhati Than**' also came into being at Shaikhowa which is in the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra and 'Kechaikhati' was also worshipped in other places of Assam like Silchar.

The worship of Kechaikhati which originated in Sadiya is said to be worshipped by the Sonowals. This worship is held four times in a year i.e. Assamese months of Bohag (Apri/May), Kati (Oct./Nov.) Aghon (Nov/Dec.) and Magh (Jan/Feb.)

Animals like goats of either white or black colour, male ducks and pigeons of either white or variegated colour are necessary to sacrifice for the worship. Rice-beer and cooked rice along with the meat of the sacrificial birds and animals without salt are also offered.

To perform the worship, there are four categories of priests. They are - 'Bordeori', 'Sarudeori', 'Borbharali' and 'Sarubharali'. The 'Bordeori' is known as the Head priest. Besides them two other persons of Sonowal Kachari community are appointed as functionaries to assist the priests at the time of sacrificing birds or animals. They are known as 'Tikadhara' and 'Da-dhora'. The function of the 'Tikadhara' is to hold the buttock of the victim and the 'Da-dhora' is to use a sharp dagger to cut the neck of the victims.

At the end of the puja devotees take their prasad. The door of the 'Than' remained closed for other days.

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1. Kakati B.C.- *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, (Lawyers Book stall, Guwahati, reprinted in 1967; p.61.
 2. Gohain, B.C.- *Human Sacrifice and Head Hunting in North Eastern India* (Lawyer Book Stall, Guwahati, 1977)
 - Deori, D. *Deori Sanskriti*, 1964 p.p. 66-72
 3. *Ibid* Kakati- p.63
 4. Chakraborty L.N- *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal* (Research Dept., Shillong, 1973; p.107)

Household worship :

Ancestors worship :

The Sonowal Kachari community held ancestors-worship because they believe that the welfare of living depend upon the welfare of the dead. It is the duty of every family to honour the dead ancestors to protect the members of the family from the influence of the evil spirits. Those who neglect to worship the dead ancestors will never become free from the evil spirits. So for the welfare of the members of the family and the prosperity in their life, it is necessary to worship the dead ancestors. The ancestor-worship has five forms, such as 'Nadit pinda diya' (offering of cakes in the river), 'Pirdiya', 'Marakdiya', 'bura pooha' and 'Chaul khowa'.

Nadit pinda diya :

On the tenth day of the death of a person, pinda (cakes) are offered in the name of the spirit of the dead person in the river. A religious function is performed which is presided over by the Medhi.

'Pir diya' and 'Marak diya'

The Sonowal Kachari people believe that on certain occasions offering of some food items to the spirits are necessary to satisfy them for the welfare of the people. It is sometimes referred to as 'Pir diya' and sometimes as 'Marak diya' depending on the nature of food items. When Kecha pitha (powdered rice) mixed with sugar, milk and banana is offered, it is called 'pir diya' and when food items like rice-beer, rice, vegetables, chicken meat etc. are offered, it is called 'Marak diya'. Though such offerings are made

outside the home, yet a corner of the family kitchen is used sometimes for such offerings. The proper time of making such offerings is just after the sunset.

Generally every Sonowal Kachari family followed the practice of offering either 'Marak diya' or 'Pir diya' on certain occasions like the offerings made in the three 'Bihus', 'Goja lawa' (Ceremonious starting of paddy seedling plantation) and 'No-Khowa' (taking of new rice cremoniously.)

'Bura pooha' and Chaul khowa'

Annual ritual is performed to satisfy the spirits of the ancestors. The people practising 'Marak diya' hold 'Bura pooha' (entertainment to the old with the fowl meat and wine.) function while the people practising 'pir diya' hold 'Chaul khowa' (entertainment to the old without fowl meat and wine) function.

'Bura pooha' function is held by a few aged persons. One red cock is burnt alive and with its meat meal is prepared. Nine shares of food along with rice-beer are offered outside the home by means of which the bhaktas are entertained.

In 'Chaul khowa' ritual, meal is prepared with fish or duck meat but not with the meat of fowls. The offerings are not made to spirits. The bhaktas are entertained with food.

Apeswara Sabah or Fairy worship :

The Himdu god Indra is supposed to have many beautiful dancing girls in his court. These girls are known as 'Apeswara' or fairies. Their shadows fall in the earth while roaming about the sky and people became victims of the fairy's anger whoever tread on it.

This worship is held in the family courtyard in the midday on any Sunday. In the beginning of the worship, it

is necessary to make a circle on the ground where seven limes have to be drawn within it and as in a rainbow, seven colours have to be applied on it. At the centre of the circle some other articles like an earthen pot with water, a small leafy mango branch and a coin has to be placed. Near it, a 'japi' (a flat bamboo umbrella) is hung from a bamboo stick. The offerings of this worship are betel-nuts and leaves, 'mah-prasad' etc. Earthen lamp is also lighted. The function gets start with the salutation by the female head.

Indication of the 'Apeswara's anger can be marked when a child is often ill and if a girl has failed to attain puberty in proper time etc. So the people believe that to protect the people from such evils it is necessary to satisfy her by offering 'puja' in her name. The devotees sing songs in praise of 'Apeswara'. At the end of the worship the 'prasads' are distributed and devotees take it after offering first share of it to the 'Apeswara'. At the end of the puja, Gopinis shower blessings and pray to God on behalf of the patient for the recovery and the patient makes salutation to them.

Lakhimi mota or ceremonial inviting to Lakhimi :

Paddy is always referred to as 'Lakhimi' or goddess of wealth. So it is necessary to satisfy her by offering 'puja' in her name for good cultivation. It is noticed that though the 'dawanis' (woman reapers) try to collect paddy together, yet some paddy is left out in the field, which is realized to be an offence against the goddess. So 'Lakhimi mota' sobah is held in the Assamese month of Magh (Jan./Feb.) in presence of some 'Gopinis' (female devotees) by each family.

It is a very simple household ritual and female dominating in nature. For this purpose, the female head

along with other Gopinis goes to the paddy field by taking an earthen pot containing full of water, a handful of rice and a small bunch of mango tree to find out those left-out paddy which are to be ceremoniously put into the pot to carry home. Gopinis sing song in the praise of Likhmi. At the end of the ritual all the members of family salute to the goddess. Though it is a sacrificial worship yet a few people perform it by offering 'mah-prasades' alone.

Swaragadeo puja or the worship of the Sun-God :

Among the important households worships of the Sonowals, one is the 'Swaragadeo puja' (the worship of the Sun-God). The 'Sun-God' is held in high reverence in all ages because of being the sources of light and life of all living beings and plants. The purpose of performing this worship is to obtain good harvest and help men and cattle to remain free from diseases. Moreover a large number of traditional deities like 'Lakhimi' (goddess of wealth), 'Kutooni' (Spirit of ancestors and some of the Hindu gods such as 'Kuber' (god of treasure), 'Barun' (god of rain), 'Bayu' (god of wind) etc. are also worshipped at the same time with offerings.

Besides the Sun-God, and other traditional deities one 'Betu Konwar' and an old couple known as 'Hatoi Bura-Buri² also occupy an important place in the ritual. It is believed that to live with 'Hatoi Bura-Buri' he had come down from the heaven. According to their faith 'Betu konwar' holds the sharp weapon 'thunderbolt' and his mother the 'Lighting' remain with 'thunderbolt'.

The worship is generally held after the harvesting season and it is held by the head of the family with the help of an aged person who is regarded as the priest.

The offerings consist of rice-beer, cakes of different varieties, boiled rice, boiled unripe banana, egg, a black hen, wine, dry fish etc.

1. Betu Konwar : Hatoi Buri, an old woman found an egg which was kept in a small bamboo basket while she was sweeping her courtyard. But after a few days to her surprise, she heard a cry of a baby who was lying in the basket whom the old lady later on brought him up and named him as Betu Konwar.

2. Hatoi Bura-Buri : There was a man and a woman. They both met each other in a market or hat. Later they both were tied in the wedlock. So they were known as Hatoi Bura-Buri.



Jalsai Dangaria or water god :

The presence of water-god in water is believed by the Sonowals. This water god is known as 'Jalsai Dangaria' who finds fault with the women on their childhood Possession of 'Jalsai devota' is seen if a young girl develops a habit of eating up soil or take too much water or unable to walk in the proper age etc. So it is necessary to satisfy her by offering puja for the recovery of the girl from such problems.

This worship is held by the female devotees at the river bank. While worshipping water-god, kacha pitha (powdered rice mixed with water or milk and sugar), ripe banana, betel nuts and leaves etc. are offered. A 'Kaldona' which is prepared by sheath of plantain tree to put the offering is allowed to float in a river.

At the end of the 'puja' Gopinis shower blessings and pray to god on behalf of the girl for the recovery and the girl makes salutation to them.

Both household and community worships :

There are some worships which are held as both community and household. Among them some important worships are given below.

'Aai sakam' or worship to the goddess of pox :

The goddess of pox is known as Aai (mother). 'Aai sakam' is specially performed when pox appears in the village. Pox is a dreaded disease; so people are afraid of it. People believe that to get rid of this disease, it is necessary to satisfy the goddess of pox. So for this purpose 'Aai Sakam' is performed by the villagers. Only female takes part in the

community worship, while the participation of both male and female are required in the household worship.

As a household worship it is held annually by every family in the Assamese month of Bohag or Jeth (April/May). It may be held at any time after the recovery of pox patient. All members of the family participate in this worship. Main offerings of this worship is 'Bhog' (rice boiled in milk) or 'mah-prasads': At the end of the worship, a feast is also held and meat of the white duck is required for this worship.

As a community worship it is held only after finishing the household worship by every family. It is held annually in the village 'Namghar' (prayer hall) in the Assamese month of Bohag or Jeth (April/May). 'mah-prasads' and 'bhog' are offered to the goddess of pox and prayer songs are sung by the 'Gopinis' (female devotees) for the satisfaction of the goddess of pox. A public feast is also held in the village 'Namghar' and a white duck is required for this purpose. At the end of the worship devotees take their prasada after offering to the goddess of pox.

'Gorakhia Sabah' or Cowherd worship :

'Gorakhia Sabah' or Cowherd worship is held by the Sonowal Kacharis for the welfare of the cattle.

As a community ritual, it is performed in the forest and as a household ritual it is held in the family cowshed.

The cowherd boys are known as 'Gorakhias' and this ritual is called as the cowherd worship or 'Gorakhis Sabah'; This ritual is held in the name of cattle-god and the participation of the cowherd-boys are necessary because the whole responsibility of the cattle remains on the cowherd-boys. Though the boys are able to tend them, yet

its safety depends on the mercy of cattle-god who has therefore to be worshipped in the presence of the Cowherd boys.

The ritual is simple. In a fixed date, all the cowherd-boys set out for a nearby forest with a few persons including the 'Asirbadia'. In the name of cattle-god, betel nuts and leaves and earthen lamps are offered. A red cock is sacrificed by putting it into fire and then a feast is prepared with the meat of the cock and all take a share of it after offering a share of prasada to the cattle-god under a tree.

Unlike the community worship, offering of articles is not made in the household worship.

Namdharma :

The founder of 'Namdharma' is a Vaishnava saint Mahapurush Sankaradeva. 'New vaishnavism', is known as the 'Ek Sarana Namdharma'. According to 'Namdharma', there is only one god known as Vishnu.

In 'Namdharma' all are equal in the eyes of God. No distinction is made between high caste and low caste.

Sankaradeva wrote a religious book named 'Kirtan' where he expressed his views and declared that except Vishnu, there is no other god to worship. He opposed the worship of the idols of different gods except Vishnu. He also opposed the entry into the temples of other gods. In so doing bhakti would be violated.

He propagated Namdharma all over the country with the help of his disciple Madhavadeva.

'Namdharma' Rituals :

Sonowal Kachari people accepted the 'Neo-vaishnavism' or 'Ek Sarana Namdharma' long ago and began to follow the principles of the 'Namdharma'.

'Namghar' (prayer hall) is religious institution where public prayer is held. In the individual household private prayer is performed.

There are many 'Namdharma' rituals which are held in 'Namghar'. They are given below-
Janmastami :

It is the birth anniversary of Lord 'Krishna'. On this occasion people gather in the 'Namghar' to celebrate the function. 'Nam-Kirtan' (religious songs) are sung by the devotees of Lord Krishna. 'Mah-Prasads', 'Kacha-pitha', 'poka mithoi laru' (a kind of round sweets made by mixture of rice powder, milk and sugar) etc. are offered in this ritual.

Tithis of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva :

It is the death anniversaries of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. On these occasions, devotees gather in the 'Namghar' and held 'Namkirtan'. 'Mah-prasads' are required for these tithis and are distributed among the devotees at the end of the function.

There are some 'Namdharma' rituals which are held in the individual household. They are given below :

Palnam :

It is an important household ritual. In this ritual 'Nam-kirtan' is held continuously for a few days. The main purpose of holding this ritual is the welfare of the members of the whole family. 'Mah-prasads', 'payas' (rice boiled with milk and sugar) etc. are offered in this ritual. At the end of the function, 'Bhaktas' make salutation and 'prasads' are distributed among them.

Baserekia Nam :

Every family holds 'Nam-kirtan' as annual function

which is called as Baserekia Nam. The main purpose of holding this ritual is for the welfare of all the members of the family throughout the year. 'Mah-prasads', 'payas' etc. are offered in this ritual which are also distributed among the 'Bhaktas'.

Besides these 'Namdharma' rituals, if the family members want to hold 'Nam-kirtan' at any time, they can hold it without any restriction. For the performance of the household prayers the presence of the village people along with some 'Bhaktas' is needed. Thus for holding any 'Namdharma' religious function the presence of a group of people is required.

FOLKLORES AND FOLKSONGS

Sonowal Kacharis have a very rich stream of culture which flourished through generations. They have a lot of folklores and folksongs which are associated with their rites and customs, social systems, religious faith etc. These folklores and folk songs are mainly divided into two categories. The songs presented by men are called 'Geet' and the songs presented by women are called 'Nam'. Prominent 'Geets' of the Sonowal Kacharis are given below:

Haidang geet :

The oldest and the first folk-song of the Sonowal Kacharis is 'Haidang Geet'. In this song we find about the creation of the Universe and it is divided into eleven sections. In the first section, we find the earth, the sky, fire, air, water, land etc. were created. In the second section, mystery of the creation of the creatures is discussed. In the

third section, there is a comparative account of gods and devils and how they were worshipped by the primitive people is discussed in this section. In the fourth section, how the lineage of the Snowal Kacharis with seven divisions and fourteen lineages was created is discussed. From fifth to eighth sections how and whom 'Khiring' god (another name of Siva) married is described elaborately. In the ninth and tenth sections, a description of worshipping different gods along with 'Lakhimi' (goddess of wealth) is found. In the eleventh section, the prayer is offered to god 'Baitha' to pardon the people for any sort of omissions committed by them while worshipping different gods.

'Haidang Geet'

"Haiyah,	Dangor	Dangor	Kun	Dangor?
Haiyah,	Devor	Dangor	Kun	Dangor?
Haiyah,	Devor	Dangor	Khiring Raja Je,	
Haiyah,	Devir	Dangor	Kun Dangor?	
Haiyah,	Devir	Dangor	Bhuruli Habuki	

Je'etc.

Meaning :

Sonowal Kachari people worship many gods and goddesses. Among these gods, 'Khiring Raja' is the greatest and among the goddesses 'Bhuruli Habuki' is great.

'Husori Geet' :

Bihu is a traditional community festival of the Sonowal Kacharis. During the period of Bihu 'Husori Geet' (Bihu song) is sung both by the yong boys and girls in every household of the village. Aged people also take part by dancing merrily with them. To show respect to the 'Husori party', every household had to offer betelnut and leaves

and an amount of money according to their ability. They also offer 'Gamocha' or 'Chaddar' in a 'sarai' and in return, the party blesses all the members of the household for a prosperous new year.

'Husori Geet' :

"Hanali Ooi Lalou Lalou Lays
Sadiya Rajore Mabira pasala
Sadiya Rajoloi Monote parile
Dunai Kumolia Home Kina
Sadiya Rajore Lakhora Dekati
Bhangile Amare Gange Kina"

Meaning :

Sadiya area of Hemali Rajaya is sometimes overflowed with the water of Mabira and Pasala. This area is full of natural resosurces and beautiful natural scenes. when I remember that place which I already left, I like to dance like a young man.

Prominent 'Nams' of the Sonowal Kacharis are given below:-

'Dhai Nam'

Every mother loves her child. When a baby cries, then mother of the baby tries to stop the cry by singing different songs. Such songs are known as the 'Dhai Nam'

'Dhai Nam' :

"Titiki Tita pat
Borosun Dile pisol Bat
Rod Dile Jhilika-Jhilika Dhai,
Aboi Ghoroloi Jaang
Abali Bela Tabali Bela
Bupair Ghoroloi Jaang
Abali Bela Abali Bela Dhai"

Meaning :

There is leaf which tastes bitter. The rain makes the roads slippery. The sun rises with her bright dazzling colour. We go to 'grandma' and 'grandpa's place at any time, specially in the evening.

'Biaa Nam (marriage song) :

The Sonowals do not have their own marriage ritual. Those who live with the Ahoms follow the rituals of the Ahoms while those who live with Hindus follow the rituals of Hindu. In fine, the Sonowals perform their marriage ceremony like the general Assamese people. They sing marriage songs in their marriages. One such song is :

"Ahomar Chaklong

Hindur Bei

Kacharir ja bola sai"

It means -

Marriage system of the Ahoms is called 'Chaklong' while that of Hindu is called 'Bei' and of the sonowals you may call it but whatever name it is called.

'Gossain Nam' :

Being afraid of the Ahom king Godadhar Singha, the Satradhikar of the Auniati Satra Sri Sri Keshab Deb Mahanta fled to Sadiya with eight of his disciples. Here he spread Vaishnav cult among the Sonowals. Some Kacharis giving up their own religion, accepted Vaishnav cult and in this case women were more attracted towards this new religion and they sang songs by praising Sri Sri Keshab Deb Mahanta which are known as Gossain Nam (Prayer song). One such hymn is given below-

*"Kaihute Katari bhagile probhudeo
Silato gajile ghun*

*Prani salok mayajale bandhile
Jonzal ba guchaba kone ?"*

It means-

If all people are engaged in worldly peace, then who will solve the problems of others by praying to God.

Lakhimi Nam (Hymn to goddess of wealth) :

Main livelihood of the Sonowals is agriculture. So while worshipping, their own gods, they specially worship goddess of wealth in various ways and at different times of the year.

When they harvest summer rice (Sali rice) and bring it to their homes for the last time, the womenfolk recite the following-

"Thaie muchi dia pate pari dia

Lakhimi aai ahake buli

Rangoli rongapan gua kati dia

Gua bhale kari dia.

Kubarak kathia khojagai Mohadeo

Sagarak Khojagoi Mati

Aaponar thanaloi aaha oi Lakhimi aai

Sikhili Konthate uti". etc. etc.

It means :

Gopinis sing song in the praise of Lakhimi. It is necessary to clean the floor with water to welcome the goddess Lakhimi. To her satisfaction betelnuts and leaves, some land and seedling of paddy are required.

'Aai Nam' :

Aai Sabah is performed when pox appears in the village. Gopinis sing Aai Nam to satisfy Aai Gossani in this way-

"Aai Durga Aahe Ga Ghalai

Aai Durga Aahe Lahari Paya Chola

Durga Devi Aai Ooi Bhogloi Aoika Matu Tuti Kari

Durga Devi Aai Ooi Barmugi Aoika Matu Tuti Kari"

It means :

The Aai Durga comes by folding the parts of her body. She is also seen to be coming in a maidly way. We call her with great devotion with our prasads in our hands. She is also known as 'Aai Barmugi' who is prayed with great devotion.

'Apeswara Nam'

To get rid of the people from the evils of spirits, females hold Nam kirton to satisfy those spirits. They sing hymns in praise of spirits in this way :

"Iswaror Gopini Ahise Aapuni

Bohi Hori Nam Loi,

Hatot Mora-Pakhi Loi Choupase Gopini

Bohise Samaj pati" etc.

It means :

The female devotees singing religious songs have come with peacock's feather in their hands. All the devotees sat at a place to sing songs in praise of Apeswara.

Dance of the Sonowal Kacharis :

Though Bihu dance is the main dance of the Sonowal Kacharis, yet they have some remarkable traditional dances. These are 'Hugra dance', 'Bohuwa dance', 'Kula-Burhir dance', 'Haidang dance'.

'Hugra dance' :

The word 'Hogra' means pig. For Barboli of Baith (Baithow) Puja people go to the forest for hunting pig to sacrifice it in the Baitha puja. During the period of pig hunting, hunters have to face many problems. These problems are expressed through dances and such dances are called 'Hugra dance'.

'Bohuwa dance' :

Generally Bohuwa dance is observed to drive away the evils from the village. The Sonowals celebrate Sat Bihu after the seven days of the Bohag Bihu. Competitions are held during the Sat Bihu. After the end of the competition "Bohuwa" comes out. Two members including one male and one female wearing the barks of trees dance to the tune of Mridong. This dance is known as Bohuwa dance.

'Kula- Burhir dance' :

On 'Gathiyan Khunda Day' of Nowai Toloni Biya, the bride is brought to the pandal where seven girls, placing the bride before them, with sticks in their hands to which they tie Betel-nut and pan leaf in a 'Gamocha' and put Kula on their heads with Betel-nut pan leaf and a bundle of straw. They dance one after another and this dance is called 'Kula-Burhir dance'.

'Haidang dance'

When Haidang song is presented then a Nortoki (Dancer) putting on Jema Tongali and taking feathers of peacock in her hand dances to the tune of Flute, Khuti-Tal and Bahor-Taka. This 'Haidang' dance is the symbol of production and Haidang song narrates the creation.



STATUS OF MEN AND WOMEN

'Status' in its most general sense refers to a person's relative position in a total system, defined in terms of rights and obligations. Every individual has the status or position in relation to other individuals. This status or position is determined only in relevance and relationship with other. Without this element of relevance or relationship there shall be no status. It is also clear that the status is not one. A person has different status and each status has a role attached to it.

Man and woman develop together in human society. But the status of man and woman differs in different societies.

The Sonowal Kachari Society is also a patriarchal society. The status of man is higher in such society. So the oldest male member of the house is highly regarded and his orders are not violated. Their system of inheritance is patrimonial. The land belongs to the family and the head of the family is the owner of the land. After the death of the father, the land is divided equally among the sons and generally, the eldest son becomes the owner of the house. Every house has its movable property in the form of utensils, ornaments, radio etc. which are owned by individuals.

But it is true that, though the status of man is higher yet in some respects women also occupy equal position along with men. It is a fact that the women are in key positions in social as well as family life of this community. Though male is still the head of the family, yet husbands are seen to consult their wives in taking all important decisions of the family like marriage of their children, selling

or purchasing of property etc. The house-wife bears all domestic responsibilities. In the absence of a male head, she has to look after all matters of the household. She is engaged in cooking, cleaning the house, washing clothes, rearing the children etc. In every walk of life a woman helps her husband and a husband also respects the duties of his wife.

Regarding agricultural activities, the women are able to achieve equal status with men. The womenfolk render their help to their menfolk in the agricultural activities, such as sowing seeds, harvesting crops, pounding paddy etc.

The women are also able to occupy equal status in the field of economy. Besides doing all household work, they earn additional income for their family by means of rearing of birds and cattle. Generally they rear birds like hen, duck and cattle like goat, cow etc. They sell these birds and cattle to the needy villagers and sometime in the market. As they are expert in weaving, they weave all kinds of clothes which are necessary for the family. They even sell some of them to the villagers. In this way they earn money.

In respect of religion also, more or less both men and women have equal rights. But woman cannot become a priest. She can perform religious rites or worship. There are certain worships and ceremonies which are meant exclusively for women. In most of the purification ceremonies concerning child birth, attaining puberty in case of girls etc, only women are allowed to take part. A few worships like 'Aai Sabah', 'Gopini Sabah', 'Apeswra Sabah' etc. are reserved for the women. But women cannot sacrifice animals for any puja. They are not allowed to participate in some traditional worship which are held in forests or during

night hours to satisfy some gods and goddesses for the welfare of the people.

A female head gives all kinds of training, which are related to the women, to their daughters particularly. Again she is alone in charge of the family kitchen and as such work in the kitchen is directed by her. No other lady members of the family are allowed to touch the main 'Bhatar Saru' ¹ without her permission. As a female head, she is in charge of the paddy granary and so her permission is required to bring out paddy from granary for consumption or any other purpose.

In the field of politics, though status of women are less than men, yet it is seen that they are interested to attend the meetings of the village council.

Though women equally enjoy the status with men in respect of agriculture, religion, social functions etc. yet it cannot be denied that being unable to maintain their status with men, their position in society is less than men because though women like to live freely to enjoy equal status with men, yet due to some feelings of the society, they are bound to obey some traditional rules and customs of their community. This is because nobody can live without a society.



1. Bhatar saru - The Pot where rice is cooked.

MODERNIZATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

By the term modernization, we mean the process of socio cultural change whereby less developed societies acquire characteristics common to more developed societies. It is the process of social changes in the economic aspect as well as in the cultural aspect which are the very basic themes of modernization.

Culture is also dynamism. Change is a basic tenent and the process of change never ends. Time, idea, way of life, society and social circumstance change. This means everything is subject to change.

It is true that the human society is changeable. Like all other communities, some remarkable changes have taken place in the Sonowal Kachari society also. This change is generally seen in the field of social, economic, political and socio-cultural systems.

After independence, community development and tribal welfare programmes which have been undertaken by the government have made rapid change in their lives. Rapid industrial development and acquisition of new political rights have also made prominent impact in their life.

One aspect of social changes of Sonowal Kachari society in the contemporary period is the change in role and status of men and women. Under the changing political, economic, educational and socio-cultural systems, they are also gradually coming out of their traditional role in different spheres of life and accordingly their status has also been undergoing changes.

In the patriarchal society, the position of women is low. But on the other hand in matriarchal society they enjoy the higher status. But some changes are also noticed regarding the status of women in their society. Because now-a-days women are conscious about the status. They donot like to keep themselves within the four walls of the house. They like to take equal parts along with the men in all types of work. In the paddy fields, the participation of women is remarkable. Women spend more time in transplanting and harvesting crops. Like men, they earn money by means of weaving, rearing of birds and cattle and selling them to the needy villagers and other persons. In this way, they are able to maintain economic status in the society. Moreover now-a-days women are consulted in taking decision on important family matters, viz. settlement of marriage, purchasing and selling of land, improvement and construction of house etc. though the decision of the elderly male members is accepted.

Changes are also noticed in the material culture including dress and food habits. The people prefer to build modern Assam type houses. They have given up wearing their traditional dresses and ornaments. The young boys like to wear pant-shirt, trouser, kurta, coats etc. Girls like to wear Salwar-Kamij, pant-shirt etc.

Habit of rice-beer drinking is fast disappearing from the people of educated sections. Only on festive occasions, rice-beer is prepared.

Regarding religion also some changes are noticed. They have accepted Vaishnavism long ago. But they do not completely give up their traditional religion. They also

worship some of their traditional gods and goddesses. Thus they have developed dual system of religion.

Changes have also been noticed in the village administration. The Gaonburah, as the village headman, plays the most important role in administering law and justice. But with the introduction of panchayat system, their influence has been gradually decreasing.

They have forgotten their own language and have therefore accepted Assamese as their mother tongue.

Changes are also noticed in the family pattern of the Sonowal Kacharis. The traditional family pattern is the joint-family system. But gradually due to the spread of education, growth of population, the system of joint-family has disappeared. Younger generation prefers to a small family to a big family. At present the system of family planning is common among them and as such giving birth to two or three children is found among the younger generations. But due to the lack of family planning facilities or lack of knowledge of family planning, women in early age gave birth to the highest number of children.

In the case of the marriage system also changes are marked. Though widow remarriage and divorce system are not common in this society, yet younger generation accepted it without any hesitation.

Regarding household work also changes can be seen. Husking was also done by the most rural women in the past. But with the introduction of the rice-mill in the rural area, they have almost given up husking with the help of 'dheki' (wooden husking instrument with the help of feet).

Like earlier days, women do not like to keep themselves busy in weaving and other household work such as rearing

of cattle, gardening etc. because at present due to spread of education, the life style of the women also has changed. They prefer to go outside of their homes to engage themselves in different activities. In the recent years, embroidery, knitting, cutting etc. have made a room among the girls of the community.

In the field of politics also, educated Sonowal girl is accepting the challenging task or representing the community in the present-day Assam Legislative Assembly also. But in the traditional society, women were not allowed to join formally in the 'Mel' (village council).

Due to modernization, some changes are noticed among the young generation. Though their main occupation is agriculture with modern methods for the good production of crops, yet they are interested towards other salaried jobs.

Now-a-days different institutions like 'Clubs', 'Libraries', 'Mohila Samities' etc. are established almost in each and every village. These institutions play some important roles to help the villagers to develop their social, economic and cultural life.

ENGLISH SYNONYMS OF SOME OF THE SONOWAL KACHARI WORDS

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| 1. Mimdung | : | Corrander leaf |
| 2. Aboi | : | Grand mother. |
| 3. Niling | : | Axel |
| 4. Hadang | : | Near |
| 5. Thumun | : | Hammer |
| 6. Daahi | : | Fiery woman |
| 7. Jamuna | : | Tomato |
| 8. Doka | : | Thick |
| 9. kepong | : | Branch of tree. |
| 10. Lafa | : | Mushroom |
| 11. Thoommora | : | To get ready to fight |
| 12. Dhoina | : | Gate |
| 13. Ghoga Loga | : | To catch cold. |
| 14. Thola | : | Horn. |
| 15. Hooping | : | An instrument for catching fish. |
| 16. Angkunia | : | Bend. |
| 17. Hacktonpar | : | Abusive language used against a person without mentioning his name. |
| 18. Dhera | : | Smooth |
| 19. Khatapitha | : | A kind of cake made with heat of fire. |
| 20. Hiring Hiring | : | Relaxation. |
| 21. Gillbong Gillbong | : | To get rot. |
| 22. Madham madham | : | Sweet fragrance. |
| 23. Lelong pelong | : | Weak. |
| 24. Hakong Kawe | : | To stare with open mouth. |
| 25. Chatai | : | Sharp tongued lady. |
| 26. Kakma | : | Cockroach. |

- | | | |
|------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 27. Kukai | : | Baby |
| 28. Chang patong | : | Thunder. |
| 29. Jumoi Bhat | : | Boiled rice for preparing wine. |
| 30. Khol | : | place. |
| 31. Khum | : | A special prestigious packet. |
| 32. Una | : | Heat. |
| 33. Usuman | : | A little amount. |
| 34. Hopa | : | Broom made of hay. |
| 35. Logote | : | Quickly. |
| 36. Gona | : | Search. |
| 37. Jatoki | : | Totally. |
| 38. Dhadonga | : | Vagabond. |
| 39. Kaitali | : | Plinth. |
| 40. holia hoga | : | Bore |
| 41. Nafoo | : | Mushroom. |
| 42. Akong Ajang | : | At a loss. |
| 43. Bopai | : | Father. |

LIST OF SOME TECHNICAL TERMS

- | | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| 1. Baithow | : | Lord <u>Siva</u> |
| 2. Khring Raja | : | Mohadeo |
| 3. Giyati | : | Kinsman |
| 4. Bhuruli | : | Bhuruli is another name of Parvati. the wife of lord <u>Siva</u> . |
| 5. Gojai | : | Protagonist of traditional <u>Kirata dharma</u> . |
| 6. Keshadeo | : | A religious head |
| 7. Gossain | : | A religious head. |

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AN old MAN of THE SONOWAL KACHARIS
with his GRAND DAUGHTER.



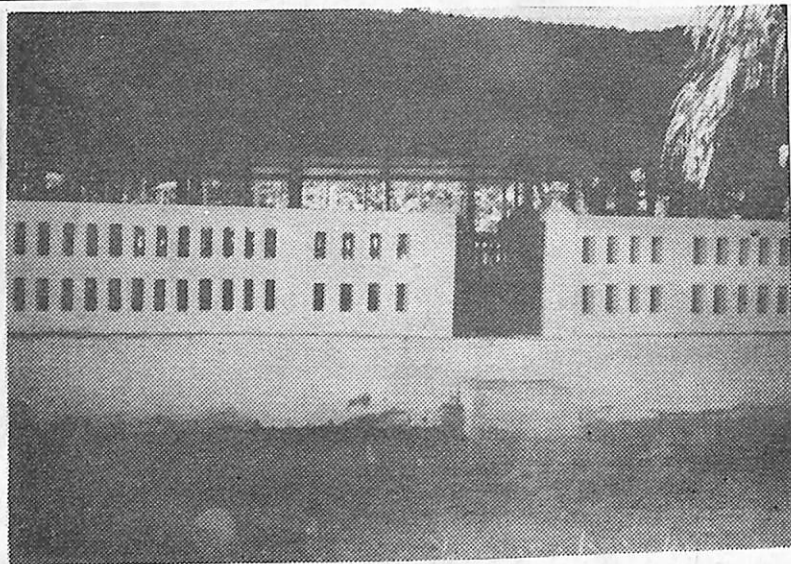
A GROUP of VILLAGE WOMEN of THE SONOWAL KACHARIS
ready to perform 'Aai Sabah'



AN elderly SONOWAL KACHARI WOMAN in her
TRADITIONAL dress in front of the GRANARY.



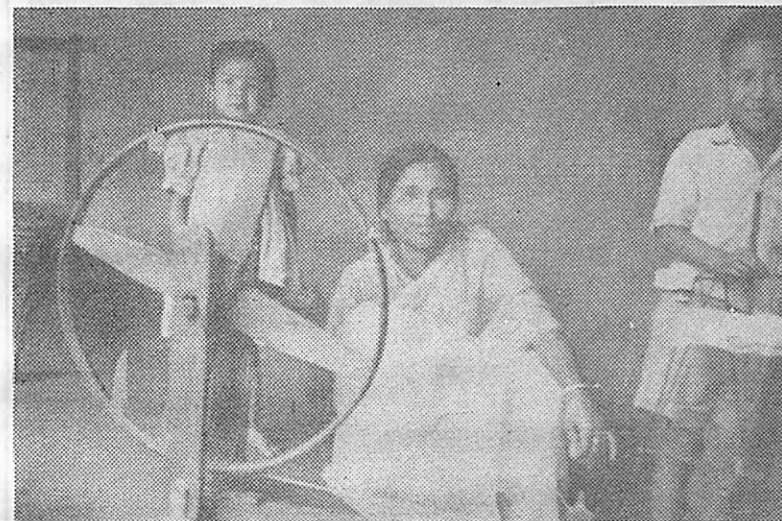
A MODERN SONOWAL KACHARI WOMAN



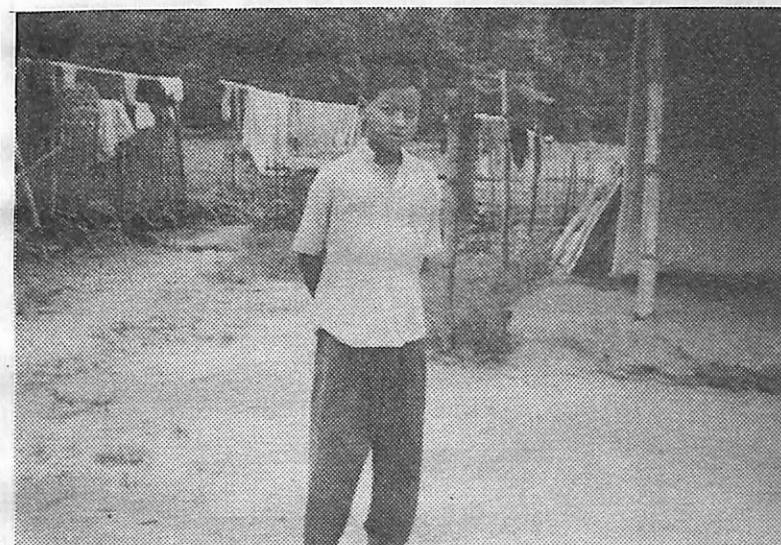
A Village NAMGHAR



AN Elderly SONOWAL KACHARI WOMAN



A WOMAN of SONOWAL KACHARI Spinning
wheel with HER CHILDREN



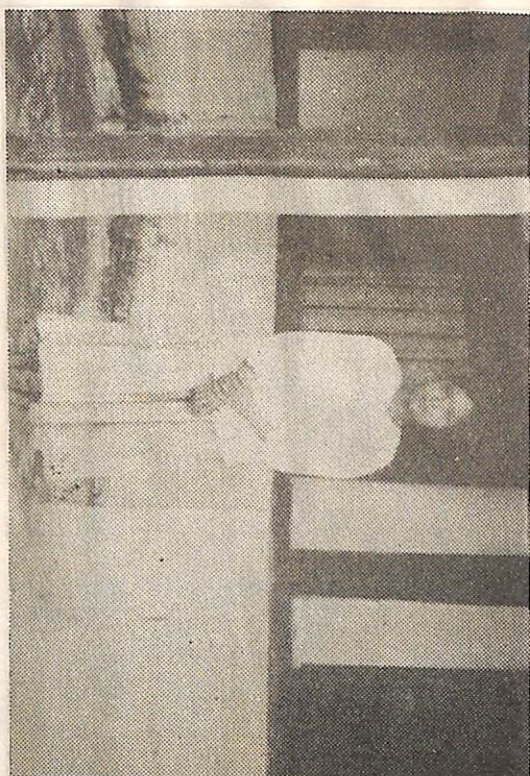
A MODERN SONOWAL KACHARI young Boy.



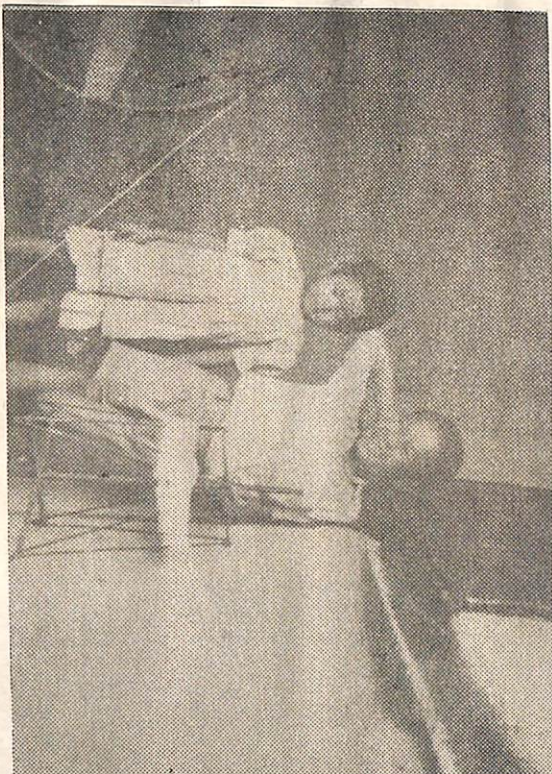
A Rural House of a well-to-do family of Sonowal Kachari with a young girl.



An Old man of Sonowal Kachari in his traditional house.



A rural house of a middle class family of Sonowal Kachari with a girl.



Sonowal Kachari Children.



A SONOWAL KACHARI WOMAN AT THE LOOM.