CHAPTER V

KINSHIP NETWORK IN DOBOK AND GUWAHATI

This Chapter deals with the findings on the size and nature of kinship network among the Assamese Hindus in both Dobok and Guwahati. The study has focused on the following aspects namely: Kin groups and kin composition of neighbourhood, kin knowledge about kin universe, geographical proximity, kin interaction, kinship network in times of crisis rites and matrilateral asymmetry.

PART A

5.1 Kin Groups and Kin Composition of Neighborhoods

Family: Neighborhood composition in both Guwahati and Dobok is the ghar (household) which is a primary residential unit or the smallest kin group. The people in both the study areas use the terms ghar and pariyal (family) which refer to the same residential unit. The members of a ghar essentially share a common kitchen while the members of a pariyal may or may not share a common kitchen.

Lineage: However, in respect of kin composition of a particular hamlet, it is seen that in Dobok village, all the heads of the households of a particular chupa (hamlet) claim their descent from one common ancestor and thus a particular hamlet maintains the lineage homogenity. They belong to the same bamsa (lineage) and are agnatically related to each other. The agnatically related members are known as bhagi. The formation of such agnatic group in the same locality is due to lack of geographical mobility of the members till recent times. It is found that in the earlier days the bamsa members had a close affinity among them but at present the relationship have become more flexible, still the lineage solidarity persists among the agnates living in a particular
hamlet within the village. The lineage solidarity becomes vivid at the time of any occasions like puja (rituals) and bihu (Assamese traditional festival) and also during the time of crisis rites such as birth, marriage, death etc. The group solidarity is also reflected in times of any need. This is a characteristic feature of every hamlet. The interaction is mostly carried on by the womenfolk especially those who are housewives or the elderly widows of a hamlet. But according to Mr. T. Sarma, an informant of the village “now a day’s everyone is busy with their own works other than the agricultural activities and as such they do not find enough time to indulge themselves fully in order to offer helping hand to their patrilineal kinsmen even though residing in the same hamlet”.

These chupa (hamlet) are exogamous in nature and that no marriages take place inside the same chupa. The bride receiving and bride taking generally occurs outside the village, mainly with the nearby villages. This phenomenon is very rarely seen in Guwahati where a particular locality is inhabited by heterogeneous groups of people where the sense of group solidarity based on kinship ties is absent, except a few older localities where the kinsmen have settled down in a particular neighborhood or locality as for example in the study areas as Silpukhuri and Zoo road. The process of kin-clustering in such locality is more or less the same. Breakdown of large joint families takes place at first by separate eating and separate living and finally by the division of the joint property. But the kins living in the same locality are found to offer helping hand in times of crisis rites and also assist in certain activities as child care/babysitting etc.

Mr. Nayan Bora 40 years, lives in Silpukhuri area of Guwahati. His agnatic kins are also residing in the same area but in separate households. He said that the kin networks still exist in between these families. At the time of marriage of Mr. Nayan Bora, some of his agnatic kins took over the whole responsibilities of marketing of the required items of marriage. Even the kins use to visit each other’s house without any occasion.
Mrs. Krishna Deka is a working woman and stays in a flat in Uzanbazar area of Guwahati with her husband and the only daughter who is 7 years old. Luckily her husband’s younger brother’s family also stays in the same flat. But his wife is not a working woman. Therefore at the absence of Mrs. K. Deka, her child is looked after by her husband’s younger brother’s wife.

Mr. Sanju Barua, 38 years has been living in the Panbazar area of Guwahati. His family is one of the oldest families of Guwahati with his agnatic kins sprawling in the same locality. On asking him about the depth of his kin knowledge, he takes no time to recall the names of his fore fathers names upto the third generations.

### 5.2 Depth of Kin- Knowledge

#### Vertical Range

Maximum people of Dobok village can trace their links to five generations but cannot go beyond that. Only a few Brahmin families have their written genealogies which cover the total 9 generations. In Guwahati it is found that a very few families have their written genealogies. Some of the elderly people both male and female can hardly remember the names of their great grandparents.

#### Table 5.3 Kinship universe (data of 60 heads of households from the age 55 onwards)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinship universe</th>
<th>Dobok (%)</th>
<th>Guwahati (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-150</td>
<td>40 (67)</td>
<td>26 (64)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It has been observed that, in Dobok around (67%) male heads had sufficient knowledge about their kins and trace their links to more than 150 kinsmen both consanguinal and affinal. However, around (64%) of the female heads can trace their links to more than 150 kinsmen. In Guwahati, it is seen that only (62%) male heads had knowledge about their kins which does not cover more than 150 kinsmen. Similarly (58%) women have the kin knowledge of 100-150 kinsmen. It is appeared that age of the heads is an important factor for effective kin knowledge both in Dobok and Guwahati. Even the senior most women of a household have also enough knowledge about the kin universe. It is found that from the age 55 onwards a person has enough knowledge about the kin universe.

Among the respondents of Dobok kin knowledge appears to be more than in Guwahati.

5.4 Significant Kins

It is found both in Dobok and Guwahati that though they can list out their kins yet the numbers of the ‘significant kins’ are limited. The significant kins referred by them are the father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, grand father, grand mother, father’s sister, father’s brother, mother’s sister, mother’s brother, father in law, son in law, brother in law. These kins are found to have much interaction among them and help
each other in times of need. These significant kins are selected on the ground of cultural bond, affection, age, common geographical area and equal status.

However in selection of kins, some kins receive the first preference while the others receive the second preference. The first preferred kins are those who belong to the family of orientation or procreation, while the second preferred kins are the other members of a family or are the extended kins. The first preferred kins in Dobok are the father, mother, brothers, sisters, son, daughter, daughter in law, grand father, grand mother. On the other hand the second preferred kins mentioned by them are the father’s brother, father’s sister, mother’s brother, mother’s sister and brother in law. In Guwahati the first preferred kins are father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, son in law, daughter in law. Similarly the second preferred kins are the father’s sister, father’s brothers’ mother’s sister’ mother’s brother, grand parents, brother in law and sister in law.

In Dobok, it is found that the kinship relation is maintained on the ground of geographical proximity and cultural obligation. Living in a common geographical area forces the people particularly the kins to oblige to the cultural norms. In rural area generally in a particular geographical area, close kins are inhabited. The Assamese Hindu society is a patrilineal one and the girls generally go outside the village after her marriage. These kins generally maintain a close tie. In the household rituals it is their obligation to assemble together. In case of the death of a person, it is the son who performs the mukha agni (fire given to the deceased face by his or her son or close male kin). It is evident that these rites have some economic, social and religious duties which unite the people of a particular geographical area and this relation is very close when the inhabitants are the kith and kins.

On the other hand kin relation in Guwahati is much dependant on the equal status and common geographical area rather than the cultural obligation. Cultural obligation is of course found in the areas where the patrilineal kins dwell in the same locality. From the present study it is also found that most of the people both in the rural and the urban area have replied that they want to select kins or maintain their relationship with the people who are equal to their status. It is also found that people visit more to those who belong to the same economic group. It is also revealed that that
some of the city dwellers are reluctant to visit their relatives who reside in their village counterpart. In this context we can state Goode’s explanation that the relative high level of social mobility tends to weaken kinship ties (Goode 1963, pp.124-7).

5.5 Spatial Distribution of Kins

Change in kinship organization is not only due to urban living. It is associated with number of factors, education leads to occupational mobility which ultimately leads to geographical mobility and neolocal residence. The urban life in India does not encourage all the kins to settle together and as result dispersion takes place. Therefore norms governing kin interaction do not depend upon the normative principle and it becomes more a matter of choice than binding obligation (Ramu 2000, pp. 215,216). For the people of Dobok, it is easy to maintain close interaction with not only with their agnatic kin’s as they use to reside in the same neighborhood but also with their affinal kins. It is because of the occurrence of short distance marriages. In many cases, marriage distance of the brides of Dobok generally ranges between 1 km to 3 km. Similarly most daughters are married to nearby villages. However, it does not mean that all the marriages happen to take place within a short distance and even the consanguinal relatives also stay apart from the village but they use to make occasional visits. The distant kins if cannot visit their natal home in different occasions or rituals but manage to come during the death of their close kins. Therefore it is seen that the people of the village have more frequent contacts with their near relatives while the distant relatives are seen to make only the occasional visits. In Guwahati, it is noticed that in the seasonal occasions like puja and bihu most of the people at least pays visit to their close relatives within the same area. In Guwahati it is found that as the anonymity increases among the people, there is a growing tendency of help seeking among the selected kins though these relatives may not reside within a close distance.

5.6 Geographical Proximity and Maintenance of Effective Kin Relationship

Though the kin relationship within the bamsa may goes back to 7 to 9 generations in Assamese society, in practice the kinship network is active only within a limited circle of relatives which sometimes depend upon geographical closeness, the
pattern which is similar both in the rural and urban areas. It is observed in the present study that among the younger generation there are certain cases where they have to think about the names of their grand parents, not to speak about their great grand parents. The kinship network is much reflected through descent solidarity in Dobok in case of birth or death of a member of a particular bansa when all the members of the bansa become ritually impure. In the village Dobok as the families of a particular bansa live in the same hamlet within the village boundary they still adhere to the traditional norm of ritual impurity. The people of the village except the Brahmins trace their descent link up to 7 generations, but in case of Brahmins they trace the descent linkages up to 9 generations.

The ritual impurity period covers 10 days in case of Brahmins and 15 days in case of non Brahmins. In these days the bansa members use to take boiled foods. They do not cut their hairs or nails. Even all the agricultural activities are postponed during these days. The members of the deceased bansa cannot marry within the period of impurity. But it has been revealed in both the study areas that the girls can be given to marry within the period of impurity and that the marriage ceremony is conducted by any senior patrilineal kin

Mr. Naren Saloi aged 70 years, has said that those who live outside the village, it depends upon their own wish whether to follow the traditional rule of impurity.

However, it is observed that in Guwahati, many respondents, both male and female have confided that it is not possible to maintain the traditional rule of ritual impurity very strictly. Mostly they observe taboo in case of death of their close relatives or bansa members but it does not exceed beyond three generations. Here Cantlie’s observation can be proved that “the proximity of the soul becomes flexible beyond three generations. However it varies from family to family. Regarding marriage on the other hand the people follow the custom of ritual impurity and generally people do not conduct the marriage ceremony within the period of ritual impurity.
Mr. Gauri Das 56 years of age is a govt employee living in ZooRoad area of Guwahati. His family is a nuclear one. Some of his relatives stay in Sibsagar District of Assam. He said that recently one of their agnatic kins died in their original village after prolonged illness, but his family did not receive any kind of information in this regard. According to him this is natural and previously also they did not receive any kind of information of birth or death of their distant bamsa members and therefore not to speak about the maintenance of taboo.

Therefore it can be summed up that kinship network is only effective in maintenance of traditional concept of ritual impurity on the ground, when the members of a bamsa live in a geographical proximity. But the kinship network is overtly reflected in arranging marriage alliance which is not a subject of geographical proximity or non-proximity.

Other than the actual kins, the villagers refer the other members of the village by kinship terms which vary according to age and gender. But this trend is not widely found in Guwahati where the younger generations refer the persons other than the actual kins by the terms ‘uncle and unty’. One worth mentioning feature in the village as reported by the villagers is that about 50 years back there was the prevalence of fictitious kinship through the system known as mita pata (arranging friendship), the custom that is obsolete now. According to this custom, the friendly relation between two males was recognized socially by organizing a ceremonial function. Thus the two families were tied up by the bond of fictitious kin relationship and marriage alliances could not take place in between these two groups. Now the vestigial part of it seen only in the marriage ceremony in both Dobok and Guwahati, where the groom is accompanied by his mita (friend) while conducting the marriage rituals.
PART B

KINSHIP NETWORK AS REFLECTED IN CRISIS RITES

In Chapter II a broad outline of Assamese Hindu society and culture has been presented. Here, an attempt has been made to describe the crisis rites as observed by the Assamese Hindu people of Dobok and Guwahati in order to find out the roles of different kinsmen. It was attempted to observe if there is some traditionally assigned significant ritual role for some particular relatives.

All the caste groups perform the following rituals except a few rituals which are confined only to Brahmin families of the study areas. According to the people of the study areas, there are certain great rituals and certain small rituals. Marriage and shraddha (vedic rituals) of the deceased are the great rituals where the presence of all the close kins are expected while the rituals related to birth, puberty and sacred thread ceremony are regarded as small rituals.

5.7 Crisis Rites in the Study Areas

(i) Birth

Every society has its own way of performing the auspicious occasion of the birth of a child. In both the study areas it is found that at the birth of a baby boy fish is distributed among the kins. It is observed in Dobok that along with the fish a home made spice paste jala bota is also distributed among the kins. While in case of the birth of a baby girl sweets are distributed among the kins. Ganani (name giving ceremony) is an important occasion for a baby in an Assamese society. This is performed from 10th-12th day of the birth of a child by determining an auspicious day. In both Dobok and Guwahati generally the name giving ceremony is performed at the 11th day of the birth of a child. It has been also observed that among the Brahmins of Dobok and among the Brahmin families of lower Assam origin of Guwahati the father has a special ritual role in the name giving ceremony. It is the father who keeps the name of a child. The second important function of a child is known as annaprasana i.e, feeding the baby with the first spoon of rice which is celebrated at six to eight months of a baby. In Dobok it is found that the maternal uncle makes the first feed to the baby both in case of the
Brahmins and the non Brahmins. But in Guwahati, it is found among some of the Brahmin families of Lower Assam origin that the first spoon of rice is offered by the father, then by the mother and then by the maternal uncle. The role of maternal uncle is important in this occasion especially among the non Brahmins in both the study areas.

(ii) Puberty

Puberty ceremony is celebrated in Dobok among all the caste groups when the first mensural cycle of a girl starts. During the first three days she is kept in a separate room and the male members are debarred from seeing her. Even the father and the brothers are also not allowed to see her. On the fourth day after bathing the girl, she is dressed in a bridal wear. The celebration is done by inviting many guests. The gifts from the maternal uncle are generally valuable. But in Guwahati all the Brahmins families do not celebrate the occasion with such festivity.

(iii) Marriage

Kinship network is clearly visible in certain ritualistic performances of marriage in both the study areas.

In Assamese society, a marriage undergoes various stages as mentioned in the Chapter ii. In some of the customs the kinship network is easily visible. I will try to elaborate those customs where the kinship network can be easily understandable.

It is found that in both Dobok and Guwahati, matching of horoscope is an important event especially among some caste groups before fixing the date of marriage. Among the Brahmins, the horoscope is generally given to the groom’s family by any relatives from the bride’s side. If the horoscope matches properly then the groom’s family members specially the elderly person along with the groom’s parents visit the bride’s house. In case of non Brahmin proposal for marriage generally initiated from the boy’s side. It is found in Dobok that when the groom’s family members visit the bride’s house with some gifts then it is regarded that the marriage is fixed. This pattern is also observed in Guwahati. When the groom’s family members visit the bride’s house with sweets and gifts then it is regarded as a good sign which indicates a positive gesture from the part of the groom’s side. Among some families both in Dobok and Guwahati
*anguthi pindhowa* (ring ceremony) is performed before marriage and regarded as an auspicious occasion which fosters a mutual bond between two affinal kin groups. But it is not a compulsion in any of the study areas. In Dobok before 5 or 7 days of marriage both in the bride and in the groom’s family there is a custom called *jatrar sandah khunda* i.e, custom of grinding rice or flattened rice. The Brahmins use to grind *sira* (flattened rice) while the people belonging to other castes use to grind *bora saul* (a variety of rice). People generally select an odd date for such an occasion. Grinding is customarily done by the married women of the family. Married women from both the paternal and the maternal side can take part but widows are debarred from their participation. This is an occasion of merry makings where the women sing *biya nam* (traditional marriage songs). Before grinding they put vermillion spots on the *dheki* (husking lever). The grinding products are served to groom in the bride’s house soon after marriage rituals and it is served to the bride after she enters the groom’s house. In case of Guwahati, it is observed that as *dheki* is not available in exception of few families and the kinsmen are also not readily available, people generally manage to grind the rice somewhere else even by their distant patrilineal kins.

Before one or two days of marriage a celebration is held at the bride’s house. The people of upper Assam in Guwahati termed the occasion as *juron* (a custom before one or two days of marriage in the bride’s house) while among the people of lower Assam it are known as *telar bhar*. But at present the later term is rarely used by the people of both the study areas. On this special day many relatives from the groom’s side visit the bride’s house. They carry with them some useful materials for the bride. These are hair oil, vermillion, cloths, mirror, comb along with bananas, coconuts, betelnuts, fish and a gourd. Besides three vessels full of rice, mustard oil and milk are also taken along with them. The significance of this day is that either the groom’s mother or the groom’s brother’s wife use to put vermillion to the bride’s forehead and parting. This process is similar both in Dobok and Guwahati.

In the day time of the marriage day, *sraddha* (a Hindu ritual of offerings to nine forefathers) is performed both in the bride’s and the groom’s house. Here the mother along with some other married women both from paternal and maternal side of the bride go to the bank of river or pond to fetch water which is regarded as holy water.
and the water is used to bath the bride and the groom along with a homemade turmeric paste. The bride and the groom are taken near to banana saplings by the sister’s husband or maternal uncle or by the elder brother in their respective houses. At the night time of marriage, the groom comes to the bride’s house along with his friends and relatives Among the people of Dobok, the groom’s feet is washed by the bride’s sister at the entrance of the bride’s house and at the absence of one’s own sister; a cousin sister can perform the task. In return she is gifted with some items especially cloths by the groom or the elder sister’s husband which is regarded as the token of love. It is found among some of the families that the groom’s feet are also washed by the bride’s father in a religious way. In Guwahati also the same trend is found only with some exception of a few Brahmin families where the bride’s father greets the groom at the entrance in a very religious way. Here he is assisted by a priest to perform certain rituals. It is said that on that day the groom is considered as a symbol of Lord Vishnu (Hindu God). After that the groom is taken to the homar guri i.e, the place where marriage rituals are conducted. This process is known as bar bori niya (religious welcoming of the groom) among the people belonging to lower Assam origin of Guwahati with some variations. Those people of upper Assam origin residing in Guwahati, the process is known as dara adora (religious welcoming of the groom). In some cases the groom is lifted up to the lap of a kin’s from the bride’s side and taken up to the homar guri. Among the people of Dobok this process of welcoming the groom is known as bar bori niya. It is found that in Dobok the groom is generally lifted up at the lap of bride’s kinsman especially by the bride’s elder brother or the bride’s elder sister’s husband up to the homar guri in order to perform the marriage rituals. The kanyadan i.e ritually gifted the daughter at the hands’ of the groom is performed by the bride’s father with the help of a priest. There is a custom to offer some brass utensils (dish, bowl, glass) by the father to the groom while gifting his daughter to the groom. The bride’s younger brother has a special role where he has to offer akhoi (parched rice) to his sister and showers his blessings to his beloved sister. The boy is gifted by the bridegroom. This trend is observed both in Dobok and Guwahati.
(iv) Death

Kinship network can also be visible among the Assamese Hindus in case of death. Specific kins have specific roles and the customs that vary from society to society.

At the death of parents, it is a custom found both in Dobok and Guwahati that the funeral pyre is conducted by the eldest son. In case if the eldest son is unable to perform it, then the task is performed by any other son of the family. But at the absence of sons in a family the task is performed by any patrilateral kin. But in Guwahati, it is observed that in a few cases the daughters also conduct the funeral pyre of her parents. But such exception is not observed in Dobok. Regarding the death of parents, the sons, daughter in laws and the unmarried daughters have to maintain certain taboos. Traditionally in the first four days the sons, daughter-in laws and the unmarried daughters have to observe complete fasting; even water is not allowed to drink. But from the fourth day they are allowed to take water and in the evening time they can take *jaha chaul* (joha rice) with vegetables and ghee. Within these days they can’t even sleep on bed. The sons have to lie on ground over a cot. They are even debarred from combing and wearing sandals. In Dobok, the people are also debarred from engaging in any agricultural activities. They have to wear a particular white cloth *dhoti* (a piece of white cloth wears by the Assamese men folk) and cannot change it for 10 days. They have to put on the wet dhoti even after bathing. However it is found that at present among many families both in the rural and the urban setting, water is allowed to drink. The married daughters are not obliged to follow these norms. Mention may be made that for one year the sons are to observe the taboo of taking meal anywhere outside except in their paternal or maternal families. This rule is observed both in case of the people of Dobok and Guwahati with little variation. It is found both in Dobok and Guwahati that upto 10 days many kins and non kins used to visit the deceased house to express their respect to the departed soul and offer *jasa* i.e, some edible food items that are to be taken during this period. These food items include fruits, peas, rice, milk, ghee, brinjals, potatoes etc. On the 10th day a ritual is performed and the sons have to shave their heads. The barber who performs the task is offered with a *bhojani* (special offerings). The cloths that used by the sons during these 9 days are offered to the barber.
The Brahmins of both Dobok and Guwahati perform the _shraddha i.e_ religious performances to show obeisance to the departed soul; ceremony on the 11\textsuperscript{th} day and people are invited on this occasion. This ritual is performed generally by eldest son who performs the funeral pyre of the father or the mother. In case the eldest son is unable to perform, then any other son can perform it. Again in case of absence of sons in a family, in that case the ritual is performed by any patrilateral male kins. In Guwahati in a few cases the unmarried daughter is also found to perform the ritual. In case of non Brahmins in Guwahati, previously many families have conducted the ceremony on the 13\textsuperscript{th} day, but it is observed that at present some of the non Brahmin families perform the _shraddha_ ceremony on the 11\textsuperscript{th} day. Regarding the celebration of the _shraddha_ ceremony, the non Brahmins of Dobok perform it on the 14\textsuperscript{th} day from the death of the deceased. On the same day they perform the _sapinda_. While the Brahmins perform _sapinda_ on the 12\textsuperscript{th} day. On the night time maximum of the non Brahmin families arrange the _bhoj_ (feast) where all the agnates are invited. But the same is also performed at the 15\textsuperscript{th} day by some families according to their own possibilities. The main specialty of the feast is the meat and fish.

Mr Atma. Das has said that previously among the non Brahmins of Dobok the _shraddha_ was held on the 30\textsuperscript{th} day from the death of the deceased, but as the people of the whole lineage of the deceased person become ritually impure for these days, no person from other lineages take food in their house. For these reason probably the _chuwa_ (impurity) period was relaxed to 14 days.

The Brahmins of both the study areas arrange the _matsya sparsha or bhoj_ (feast) on the 13\textsuperscript{th} day. This feast is termed as _matsya sparsha_ generally by the people belonging to Upper Assam of Guwahati but with variations. From this day all the descent members can take the non vegetarian food. In Guwahati at present many of the non Brahmin families are also found to organize this feast on the 13\textsuperscript{th} day.

During this _chuwa_ (impurity) period of death, both in Dobok and Guwahati; the sons cannot marry. But the daughters can be given to marry. In such cases, the marriage ceremony is conducted by the maternal or the paternal uncle of the bride. The sons can marry only after one year from the death of their parents. This period of one year is termed as _anga ahuj_.

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(v) Tonsuring and Sacred Thread Ceremony

These ceremonies are conducted by the Brahmin families of both the study areas with traditional customs that are associated with these ceremonies. In both these ceremonies the father and the mother have the special roles.

PART C

MATRILATERAL ASYMMETRY

Many studies in Western societies have shown the growing tendency of matrilateral asymmetry in western families. This trend is observed in the newly industrialized societies which are predominantly patrilineal or patrilocal in nature. The term matrilateral asymmetry is used to mean the increase interaction between the married daughters with her parental house which broadens the role of wife’s kin’s which is traditionally confined to be the role of husband’s kins. Thus there is a change in behavioral roles. (Sweetser 1963, 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970) Researches in American and European societies revealed the fact. Studies conducted by Habenstein and Coulter (1965), Ishwaran (1959), Poggie and Pelto (1969), Susman (1965), Townsend (1957), Young and Wilmot (1957) are worth mentioning. Matrilateral asymmetry can be observed in the pattern of aid provided, frequency of interaction, and feelings of closeness. According to Sweetser, this tendency is associated with man’s decreasing role with his parents or brothers in joint enterprise. (Vatuk, 1971; 287-307). Vatuk (1971) in her study of kinship system in North India also found the same trend. There is an increasing bond between wife’s kin’s, which is recognized and gradually accepted in society. Brown has found that both the paternal and maternal kins are universally recognized as a child is attached to both his father’s and mother’s family (Brown 1929, p 52).

With this idea at the backdrop of mind, number of visits to the wife’s parental house and help or aid received by a couple is considered in the present study.
Table 5.8 Visits within six months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dobok(%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Guwahati(%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of women visited</td>
<td>Number of women visited</td>
<td>Number of women visited</td>
<td>Number of women visited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband,s relatives</td>
<td>Her parental relatives</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Husband’s relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92(46)</td>
<td>36(18)</td>
<td>72(36)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table it is clear that the percentage of married women visiting her parental relatives is much more in the urban area (62%) than in the rural area (18%) which shows a trend of matrilateral asymmetry in the urban area. This can be related to the fact that as the numbers of nuclear families are higher in Guwahati, the women can make their own choice freely to visit their parental house. The other cause can be stated that as most of the marriages are happened to be in the city itself, it becomes accessible to make frequent visits. But in Dobok, it is found that even though living in nuclear families, the married women do not frequently visit their parental house. It is because all the agnatic kins reside in the same area and as such they often make derogatory remarks.

5.9 Maintenance of Kinship Relations by Men / Women

Variation is observed on direction of maintaining relationship by a married man and married woman.

Regarding the maintenance of kinship relations by married men, it is observed in the study that almost all men irrespective of rural/urban puts emphasis on maintaining relationship with his own primary and secondary kin’s. They feel contend if the wife also do the same. Most married men feel it only as obligation to maintain relationship with his wife’s family. They use to visit only on occasions or at times of need. But here a difference is found according to the habitational context. In Guwahati,
the son-in-laws use to visit his parent-in-laws house irrespective of any occasions though he gives more emphasis upon his own relationships. In certain cases in Guwahati, if a couple lives in the wife’s ancestral land or dwelling house, in that particular case it seems a reverse pattern where the direction of maintaining relationship is more with his wife’s family. Therefore it can be assumed that the pattern of inheritance also shapes the kinship network. However this phenomenon is not observed in Dobok. In Dobok a son-in-law rarely makes frequent visits to his parent-in-law’s family. As the marriage distance is not much longer there is no question of residing in one’s parent-in-law’s family only in some exceptions. It is regarded as a matter of shame if he pays frequent visits and perhaps for this reason that a married person in Dobok, has formal contact with his wife’s family. Vatuk in his study in the rural north Indian kinship pattern noticed that there is a patrilateral emphasis, both structurally and normatively. Men are expected to have most intimate and lasting ties with agnates (Vatuk 1971, p. 235).

Regarding the maintenance of kinship relations by married women, similarly it is noticed both in the Dobok and Guwahati that the wives give more importance upon maintaining relationship with her own parental family. Both in Dobok and Guwahati, the younger women after marriage try to remain in touch with her natal home. It is found that they visit their father’s house at least twice a year if at distant and often frequently if at nearest. But in this regard I have found that in rural area they have to take prior permission of their husband or the mother-in-law. In Guwahati too, those living in joint families use to take permission of their mother in law, but those living in the nuclear families have more or less, little freedom than those living in joint families. The educated working women both in Dobok and Guwahati are also found to be the helping hands of their parents in times of need. In case of working women they have replied that they can take their own decision regarding visit or offering help to their parents but they think it as their duty to inform their husbands or in laws.

A noteworthy feature is that the visits to wife’s parental house decreases with the death of her parents. This is a characteristic feature of both Dobok and Guwahati.
Mrs. Devika Nath is an M.A, and she is a service holder. She lives with her husband and children in Dobok. Once her father was seriously ill and hospitalized. As soon as she received the information she decided to visit her father and paid a part of the cost of his treatment although her brothers are constantly with her father. In taking her decision she did not feel it necessary to take permission of her husband but she obviously discussed the matter with her husband. 

Mrs. Rumi Sarma aged 49 years is a school teacher in Dobok living in a nuclear family. Her parental house is 15 km away from the village. At the death of her mother she immediately visited her parental house and remained in her parental house upto thirteen days when all the performances were over. She also paid an amount of the total expenditure in the shradha ceremony at her own wish, but she had informed her husband in this regard.

Mrs. Bora aged 39 years of Guwahati is a doctor by profession. Her parental house is also located in Guwahati. Accidentally her parental house was damaged by flood. Her widow mother stayed alone in the house. She therefore decided to construct a new house in the same compound along with her sister who is also employed and thus shifted her mother to the newly constructed house.

Some older women of Dobok were interviewed and they replied that 20 or 50 years ago they rarely could visit their parental house.

Mrs. Rita Saloi 62 years of age is a housewife living in joint family in Dobok. She was married at her early childhood days. She recalled that in those days she too longed to visit her parental house, but could not speak up her mind before her mother in law as she was a very dominant lady. As such she used to visit her parental house only whenever her mother in law permitted to go.
Mrs. Leela Das aged 70 years, a widow living in joint family in Dobok. She was married at a very early age. She said that there is much difference in between the past and the present society. In those days they could not visit their parental house frequently. They had to obey all the orders of their in laws and had to take permission regarding their movements. According to her the communication system of the village was not good which also stood as the barrier for moving out.

In a traditional patriarchal society though descent, inheritance and succession is traced through the paternal side yet it is found that there is a growing tendency to maintain relationships with the maternal side both in Dobok and Guwahati. But matrilateral asymmetry is more focused in Guwahati. In the rural area the normative principle still exists in its structural basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dobok (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Guwahati (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From husband’s relatives</td>
<td>From wife’s relatives</td>
<td>From husband’s relatives</td>
<td>From wife’s relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104 (52%)</td>
<td>96 (48%)</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>16 (26.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table 5.10, it is found that percentage of families receiving help from wife’s kins is more in Guwahati (73.4%) than in Dobok (48%). In Dobok those who receive help from the wife’s kins are found to reside in the nuclear families.
PART D

KIN INTERACTION

The pattern of interaction between the kins has been investigated on two levels – one is the help received in form of monetary help, physical help and .mutual aid and the other is the kin visiting pattern.

Table 5.11 Help received from the consanguinal kins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Help</th>
<th>Number of families (Dobok)</th>
<th>Number of families (Guwahati)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monetary help (%)</td>
<td>42 (21)</td>
<td>191 (95.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical help (%)</td>
<td>12 (20)</td>
<td>56 (93.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data have been collected from the heads of the households of 200 families in Dobok and 60 families in Guwahati. The table shows that in both the study areas all the families have received help from their consanguinal kins in form of advice followed by physical help.

Families both in Dobok and Guwahati, have received help from their kins in times of birth, death, marriage and in times of any need. Help ranges from physical help to financial help and help in form of mutual aid and advice but people are more ready to help physically than financially. Besides important advice are said to be given by the close relatives. It is found in both the study areas that monetary help is not generally received from the affinal kins except in few cases and that the help between the consanguinal kins is based upon affection and institutional obligation.

On the basis of interview carried out among 50 families both in Dobok and Guwahati, it is found that those who have received help, from either of the relatives have replied that help received from the relatives in times of need or during the crisis period provides much mental support to cope up with the stress of inevitable life events.
Researches on social and cultural factors in mental health have been conducted in the recent years. It has been found that exposure to life events and chronic stressors increases an individual’s risk to mental illness, and that the adoptive coping styles and access to social support reduces the risk of mental illness. (Perlin et. al.1981, Aneshensel and Stone 1982). Studies on the families in the western societies also underline the supportive role of bilateral extended kins in providing material aid, advice and service in everyday life and on special occasion.

**Table 5.12 Kin visiting pattern among 50 respondents (head of the household)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relatives visited by the respondent</th>
<th>Number of visits(Dobok)</th>
<th>Number of visits(Guwahati)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brothers</td>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s sister</td>
<td>Occasional</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s brother</td>
<td>Occasional</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s brother</td>
<td>Twice a year</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s sister</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father in law</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>Twice a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Several times a year</td>
<td>Several times in a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son in law</td>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>Several times in a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>Once or twice in a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother in law</td>
<td>Occasional</td>
<td>Once in a year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above table shows that the visits to some of the relatives are more than the others both in Dobok and Guwahati. These relatives are those who are referred to as the significant kins. The frequent visits also depend upon a common locality or the residence in a common geographical area and cultural obligation.

The striking difference between the rural and urban area in terms of social visit is that the number of visit to the son in law’s house is less in Dobok than in Guwahati. This is because of the concept that the married daughters are no longer regarded as the member of the family of orientation.

### 5.13 Marriage Distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Numbers of marriages Dobok (%)</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Numbers of marriages Guwahati (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inside the Rangia subdivision</td>
<td>173 (86.5)</td>
<td>Inside Guwahati</td>
<td>39 (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside the Rangia subdivision</td>
<td>27 (13.5)</td>
<td>Outside Guwahati</td>
<td>21 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 5.2 Marriage Distance of Dobok  
Fig 5.3 Marriage Distance of Guwahati
Regarding the distance of marriage it is observed that maximum (65%) of the marriages have taken place within Guwahati though longer distance marriage is also noticed among the urban people. Same is the case with Dobok where the marriage within the subdivision is higher (86.5%) than the inter districts marriages. As such the interaction between the two affinal groups becomes more accessible in both the study areas. A study conducted by Barua (2000) in Guwahati city also found that much of the marriages among the Assamese Hindus have taken place within Guwahati itself.