CHAPTER V

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN THE UNI-CASTE VILLAGE

Chakalibaria gaon - A uni-caste village

The basic point in regard to the uni-caste village is to examine how the predominance of a single caste, namely, the Ahoms shapes social relations within their community and with the other two groups, namely, the Chutiyas and the Muslims. The Chutiyas are a middle caste, whereas the Muslims are outside the castefold. The Ahoms were a tribe, but today they are recognised as a caste. They have adopted the Hindu ways of life style through a process of Hinduisation or sanskritisation. Therefore, we have considered Ahoms as a caste. They are today enlisted as a "More Other Backward Community" by the Assam government. However, the Ahoms have not been able to forgo completely their past. Even in the multica caste village, besides the Ahoms, the Koches and the Chutiyas, have their tribal heritage inspite of the fact that they have accepted Hindu pantheon and culture. The Sonowals have accepted Hinduism as the way of their life though they are listed as a scheduled tribe. The Chutiyas are found in all the three villages. The caste distinctions are, however, not very sharp in the three villages. For example, the Koches, Chutiyas, Keota, Katanis and Ahoms have intercaste marriages in the multica caste village. The Ahoms and the Chutiyas have connubial relations in the uni-caste village, and the Sonowals and the Ahoms in the tribal village. Therefore, distinction between the villages on the basis of caste / tribe and economy is very thin and vague also. In fact, distinction between caste and tribe itself is not very clear. Only, the Brahmanas, Kayasthas and Kalitas can be clearly distinguished from each other and also from other groups, namely, the Ahoms and the Hinduised tribe such as the Sonowals. In view of such a situation, our main emphasis is on the comparative analysis of the nature of social composition of the three villages. Multiplicity of groups, Hinduisation of the tribes, and the presence
of non-Assamese groups are the bases of the present study.

THE CASTE STRUCTURE

The total population of Chakalibaria comprises 465 persons distributed over 63 households. The Ahoms are numerically dominant group consisting 57 households with 440 persons. Therefore, Chakalibaria has been considered as a single-caste village; although there are a few Chutiyas and Muslims living in the village. The Chutiyas have only 3 households with 14 persons and the Muslims have 3 households with 11 persons. The following table gives the distribution of castes of the village.

Table 1: 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Castes</th>
<th>No. of household</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahom</td>
<td>57 (90.4)</td>
<td>440 (94.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chutiya</td>
<td>3 (4.7)</td>
<td>14 (3.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>3 (4.7)</td>
<td>11 (2.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>465 (100.00)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have already discussed about the Ahoms and their position in the caste system in the chapter on Hatkhola village. The Ahoms of Chakalibaria live mainly on agriculture. They are devotees (bhakatas) of different satras of the Kala Samhati sect of Vaisnavism. Although these satras are headed by the Kayastha gosains of Sri Aniruddhadeva's line, the Ahoms of Chakalibaria are locally known as Bamunias. It has been mentioned earlier that, to the Mayamarias or the Mataks, the followers of the Brahma Samhati, the Kala Samhati and the Purusha Samhati are commonly known as Bamunias. However, we shall discuss here about the Kala Samhati sect of Vaisnavism. Social structure of the uni-caste village is different
in many respects from that of the multi-caste village as the former mainly comprises the Kala Samhati sect, and the people of the latter village are followers of the Matak and the Brahma Samhati sects of Vaisnabism. The followers of the Kala Samhati sect are liberal in observing the principles of the caste system such as commensality and endogamy. The internal institutional structure of the Kala Samhati is also different from that of the Matak and the Bamunia sects which has some differential impact on the behaviour of the people in day-to-day relations.

The social organisation of the two sects, namely, the Mayamaria or the Matak and the Brahma Samhati (Bamunia) has been discussed in the chapter on Hatkhola village. The Mayamaria or the Matak is an offshoot of the Kala Samhati. As there are some differences in the internal organisation of the Kala Samhati and the Mayamaria we intend here to discuss the internal organisation of the Kala Samhati sect. The satra belonging to the Kala Samhati sect are headed by the Kayastha gosains, and most of the disciples who belong to this sect are Ahoms. Besides, a few tribal people also are disciples of this sect. The followers of the Kala Samhati are predominantly found in three districts of upper Assam, namely, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar.

Internal organisation of the Kala Samhati satra differs in many respects from that of the Brahma Samhati. The satras of the Kala Samhati are headed by the gosains known as satradhikar. For imparting religious ideas and activities in the village there is one namghar headed by the medhi similar to that of the Brahma Samhati. There are devotees, namely, sarania, bhajania and sadhu under the namghar1. The Ahoms of Chakalibaria have two namghars; the old namghar has three medhis and the new namghar has only one. The medhis are religious heads of the village who function as links between the satra and the namghar. The Ahoms undergo initiation into saran and bhajan under the gosains. A few of them also undergo

the process of becoming sadhu. As a sadhu one has to observe many restrictions, therefore, a few of the devotees enter into this stage. There is one sadhu in each of the two namghars of Chakalibaria.

The Chutiyas of Chakalibaria are disciples of the Auniati satra of the Brahma Samhati. They do not have namghar in the village.

There are 33 households in the old namghar and in the new namghar there are 24 households. The households belonging to the two namghars perform many socio-religious rituals in their respective namghars. The namghars of Chakalibaria refrain from factional politics. The Chutiyas do not participate in the namghars of the Ahoms. They have their own namghar in a neighbouring village. Thus, the institution of namghar plays an important role in keeping the caste groups segregated from each other. Socio-religious activities like the Bahag-bihu, Magh-bihu, Nakhowa, Lakshmipuja, etc. which are performed in the namghars reflect intra-caste solidarity and inter-caste distinctions within the village community. The Ahoms and the Chutiyas observe all these festivals independently in their respective namghars according to their customs of the Kala Samhati and the Brahma Samhati².

The Ahoms

The Ahoms do not have any clear conception of the Hindu varna system although they are today regarded by others as one of the clean Hindu castes. The concept of purity - pollution is also fairly less among them. If an Ahom is asked: who are Sudras? The answer is, in most of the cases, the Brahmanas, the Kalitas, the Ahoms, etc. Their ignorance in this respect is an indication of their tribal origin and less acquaintance with the Hindu varna system. They frequently mention their glorious ruling regime of 600 years, and thus, they think themselves superior to other castes.

except the Brahmanas whom they regard as highest in the caste hierarchy. They also believe that the Koches, the Chutiyas and the Sonowals-Kacharis, who had once ruled different parts of Assam, are superior to other castes. This idea of superiority is, therefore, derived from the traditional domination of a community over the others, i.e., power is the criterion of superiority rather than the ritual purity.

The Ahoms generally practise endogamy. Inter-caste marriages by elopement (gandharba-biya) are also not uncommon. Sometimes marriage by negotiation takes place with the Chutiyas who are commonly known as Ahom-Chutiyas. In regard to connubial relations, the Ahoms of Chakalibaria are more liberal in outlook than their counterpart of Hatkhola village. It is noted that out of 57 Ahom families in the village, 15 cases of intercaste marriage were found and these couples were socially accepted by the villagers. Out of the 15 intercaste marriages, 8 exogamous unions took place with the Chutiyas, 3 with the Sonowals, 3 with the Kalitas and 1 with the Matak Ahoms. Thus, endogamy is not adhered strictly in practice.

Although the Ahoms have been undergoing the process of Hinduisation since the 17th century, they have still retained many of their traditional cultural features. But they have not yet adopted the Vedic rites and rituals. The marriage by elopement is still prevalent among them. Practice of widow marriage is still in vogue; sometimes it is practised in the form of levirate. The death rites are performed according to the Vaisnabite rules. However, a few of them have still retained some of their traditional customs. Out of 57 households of Chakalibaria, 20 households still practise their traditional customs of burial whereas the rest of the households cremate the dead bodies. The rituals related to the rites de passage are also performed according to Vaisnabism. In regard to rituals related to the rites de passage, services of the Vaisnabite medhics and bhakatas are considered inevitable. Services of the Brahmana priest are not required to perform these rites.
The socio-religious life of the Ahoms represents an admixture of both tribalism and Vaisnabism. The Hindu rituals, which are being observed by them under the process of Vaisnabisation, help to understand their cultural transformation. The Ahoms of Chakalibaria, as Vaisnabas, observe the *janmaasthami* and birth anniversary of Sri Sankardeva and Sri Madhabadeva—the two great Vaisnaba preceptors. Besides, they worship Lakshmi, Vishnu and Indra. The *Bar-Sava* is one of the biggest rituals in which Vishnu and Indra are propitiated. As it is a highly expensive ritual only three well-to-do families of Chakalibaria afford to perform it regularly. However, according to the Vaisnabite norms these rituals are observed in the village *namghar*. Like other Hindu caste groups, they perform social festivals like the *Kati-bihu, Magh-bihu, Bahag-bihu, Nakhowa*, etc. Along with these Hindu rituals, the Ahoms perform some traditional rituals which are part of their tribal culture. Some of these traditional rituals which they perform are known as *Shalita-Sakam, Bar-Sewa, Dangaria-Sakam*, etc. These rituals are observed according to the tribal norms by offering liquor and chicken to the ancestral spirits. Their belief in *kechaikati-gosani* and acceptance of services of the priest belonging to the Deori tribe for the worship of the goddess also indicate persistence of tribalism. The Ahoms never accept the services of the Brahmana priest. However, their peculiar cultural characteristics consisting some of the traits of Hinduism and tribalism, have created much ambiguity in identifying their position in the local caste hierarchy. The Ahoms have occupied the position of one of the Sudras in the Assamese caste system.

**The Chutiyas:**

The Chutiyas have only 3 households in Chakalibaria village. Their principal occupation is agriculture. They are locally known as Hindu-Chutiyas and are disciples of the Auniati *satra* of the Brahma Samhati sect. Like the Chutiyas of the Mata ak sect of Hatchola, the Chutiyas of Chakalibaria do not practise endogamy in true sense.
of the term. Although both of these groups occupy the same position in the caste hierarchy, each of them claim superiority over other. The two segments of the Chutiyas, namely, the Ahom-Chutiyas and the Hindu-Chutiyas today practise exogamy with each other. Today, marriage between the Hindu-Chutiyas and the Ahoms is possible by negotiation. Among the three families of Chakalibaria four cases of such marriage were reported. The Chutiyas of Chakalibaria frequently establish affinal relations with the Kalitas and the Koches of the Brahma Samhati sect. But such exogamy was not practised in the traditional society. Two cases of marriage by negotiation between the Chutiyas and the Kalitas are also reported from a neighbouring village. Marital relations with the Sonowals are not permissible. But if there is any such marriage the couple may be socially accepted in the Chutiya society. However, marriage with the Kaibartas is strictly prohibited. The Chutiyas of Chakalibaria do not have affinal relations with any caste belonging to the Matak sect.

The Chutiyas of Chakalibaria are culturally more akin to the higher Hindu castes of the region like the Kalitas, Koches, etc. Unlike the Ahoms they cremate the corpse. But like the Ahoms they practise widow marriage. They strictly follow the Vedic rites and rituals at the occasion of marriage and death. For performing such rituals the services of Brahmana priest are essential.

The study of the different sects of Vaisnabism is of immense importance for understanding the Assamese caste system as well as rules of marriage and commensal relations. The followers of the Kala Samhati sect are more liberal in outlook pertaining to commensal and marital relations than those of the Mayamaria or the Matak and the Brahma Samhati sects. This reflects differences in social structures of the multicaste village (i.e., of the Mataks) and the unicaaste village (i.e., of the Bamnias). The Ahoms of Chakalibaria are followers of the Kala Samhati sect. The Ahoms, inspite of being devotees, commonly use liquor, pork, chicken, etc. In fact, liquor (home-made rice-beer known as sanj-pani or rash) and chicken are offered at many of their rituals. Even the gosains
of the Kala Samhati satras do not hesitate to accept liquor and chicken. On the other hand, the Chutiyas of Chakalibaria being followers of the Brahma Samhati sect do not accept such items.

The non-devotees and the sarania devotees of the Ahoms accept both Kecha and pokha food from all castes, namely, the Brahmanas, Kayasthas, Kalitas, Koches, Chutiyas, Katanis, etc. and even from the Sonowal tribe. The bhajania devotees of the Ahoms generally decline to take cooked rice from these castes, but accept other pokha food. But most of them today accept all sorts of food from them. However, the Ahoms feel that as these castes do not accept food from them, they too should refuse food from them. Otherwise, commensality, in fact, is not ritually prohibited according to their caste norms. In regard to the commensal relations with the Kaibartas, there are some restrictions. Only water can be taken from the Kaibartas. But in the traditional society, the Kaibartas were not allowed to take water from the wells used by the Ahoms. Even they were not allowed to enter into the latter's house. Today, some of the educated Ahoms accept Kecha and pokha food from the Kaibartas.

Since the Chutiyas belong to the Auniati satra of the Brahma Samhati sect, the bhajania devotees generally decline to accept cooked rice from the Ahoms, although they commonly establish marital alliances with each other. Only the non-devotees and the sarania devotees of the Chutiyas accept food from the Ahoms.

Thus, the rules of commensality are not very important in regard to the Ahoms of the Kala Samhati. Even in the traditional society, commensality did not bear much socio-religious significance for them. Today, this is also reflected in their attitudes and commensal behaviour with other caste groups. Such a wide range of commensal relations with most of the caste groups does not permit any sharp commensal hierarchy as well as hierarchy of relative exclusiveness of caste groups. This does not fully agree with the Dumont's view that in commensal hierarchy exclusiveness is the organising principle.

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Thus, social structure of the uni-caste village is different in many respects from that of the multi-caste village. Though the Ahoms of both the villages are Vaisnabites, yet they largely adhere to tribalism. Their tribal origin is reflected through several of their customs. Their affiliation to the Kala Samhati sect has made them much more equalitarian in outlook regarding norms of caste and intercaste relations. Therefore, exclusiveness is not the most distinctive feature of caste in Chakalibaria as it is mentioned by some scholars.4

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4. Dumont, L., ibid., See also Miller, D.B. From Hierarchy to Stratification, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1975, p. 79.
The approaches to the study of agrarian organisation and class structure have been discussed in the chapter on Hatkhola village. We shall analyse data about Chakalibaria village in view of those approaches.

Like Hatkhola village, economy of Chakalibaria is also based primarily on agriculture. All the households depend upon land either directly or indirectly. However, the emergence of modern occupations has brought some impact on the village economy, but the land has remained as the principal source of income for the villagers. There is no clear-cut dividing line in regard to relationship between caste/community and occupations, traditional and modern ones. Agriculture is accompanied with service, trade and manual labour, etc. The following table 21 shows traditional and modern occupations.

Table: 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Present Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahom</td>
<td>Agriculture, Service, trading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chutiya</td>
<td>Agriculture, Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Agriculture, Labour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Agrarian Organisation

Chakalibaria consists of one settlement with the agricultural land around it. The land lies in low areas. The topography of the land necessitate the villagers to practise only wet-rice cultivation. The nearby river causes damage to the crops as the low paddy land is inundated almost every year. Because of the topography of

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1. Both "Interactional" and "attributional" approaches are discussed in the chapter IV (pages from 109 - 10).
the land it is difficult for the villagers to raise other crops. There is neither any irrigation facility nor they themselves are aware of it. They fully depend upon the natural resources and climate for raising the crops. But in the cultivation of the winter crops villagers do not take care of irrigating the land, although it becomes necessary sometimes. The similar situation is also noticed in Hatkhola village.

The Hali and Lahi, the two varieties of local paddy, are cultivated as summer crops by all the households of Chakalibaria. The paddy land of Chakalibaria is comparatively more fertile than that of Hatkhola. Thus, production of paddy is about 840 Kg. per acre. The mode of agricultural operations is not mechanised. They use iron-blade plough, spade, sickle, and bullock for agricultural operations. But, unlike Hatkhola, agriculture is affected by mechanisation in a very limited way. A big landowner of Chakalibaria purchased a power-tiller in 1976, and about three years ago two other cultivators tilled their land by hiring tractors from a neighbouring village, although they discontinued it in the next season. Agricultural operations are carried out both by the family members as well as by the hired labourers as it is found in Hatkhola. The cultivation of summer crops requires a large number of labourers. Thus, during the peak agricultural seasons the family labour alone is insufficient to complete the operations. Therefore, it becomes necessary to engage hired labourers on the land. These labourers are recruited from the village as well as from outside the village. The agricultural labourers who are hired from outside belong mostly to the non-Assamese communities and the Muslims. Thus, the agricultural economy of Chakalibaria differs from that of Hatkhola in respect of labour supply from outside, as the latter village is self-sufficient in this respect.

The second paddy crop is grown in winter. All the peasant families of Chakalibaria have adopted high yielding varieties of paddy like IRS and Jaya which are grown as winter crops. Besides, Ahu, a local variety of paddy, is also cultivated. This change has been noticed since last twenty years or so. As the winter crop is cultivated on a small scale by every peasant family, there is no
demand for hired labourers for carrying out agricultural operations. Therefore, the agricultural labourers generally remain unemployed during this season. The yield of IR8 paddy is quite higher than the summer crop being 1440 Kg per acre. But as the villagers did not use any inputs like chemical fertilizer, and did not irrigate their land, the yield could not be increased. However, the poor peasant families generally raise the winter crop for their family consumption, but the well-to-do peasants produce the surplus paddy for cash income.

Besides paddy, no other crops are grown by the villagers. However, they grow Tamul and Pan. To some extent, these two crops provide additional income to them.

The Agrarian Class Structure

In the productive organisation of the single-caste village there are three broad agrarian classes, such as, the landowner, the share-cropper and the agricultural labourer which are similar to that of the multi-caste village. These classes are, however, again divided into nine subdivisions whereas in the multicaste village there are thirteen subdivisions (see tables: 22, 23 and 24).
### Agrarian classes and landholdings of Chakalibaria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Sub-divisions</th>
<th>No. of households</th>
<th>No. of landless households</th>
<th>Average landholding (in acre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landowner</td>
<td>(a) Supervisory cultivator - service holder</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Cultivator</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Cultivator - service holder/trader</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share-cropper</td>
<td>(a) Share cropper - cultivator</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural labourer</td>
<td>(a) Agricultural labourer - share cropper - cultivator</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Agricultural labourer - cultivator</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Agricultural labourer - trader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(d) Agricultural labourer - share cropper</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(c) Agricultural labourer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table: 23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Castes</th>
<th>No. of household</th>
<th>No. of landless household</th>
<th>Average landholding (in acre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahom</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chutiya</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 63 6 -
Table : 24

Castes and agrarian classes in Chakalibaria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Castes</th>
<th>Supervisory cultivator</th>
<th>Cultivator</th>
<th>Cultivator-service holder/trader</th>
<th>Share cropper-cultivator</th>
<th>Agricultural labourer</th>
<th>Agricultural labourer-cultivator</th>
<th>Agricultural labourer-share cropper</th>
<th>Agricultural labourer-share cropper-cultivator</th>
<th>Agricultural labourer-trader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chutiya</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table: 25

Distribution of caste and class in Chakalibaria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>No. of households of landowner</th>
<th>No. of households of share-cropper</th>
<th>No. of households of Agricultural labourer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahom</td>
<td>26 (45.6)</td>
<td>7 (12.2)</td>
<td>24 (42.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chutiya</td>
<td>2 (66.5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Landowners:

Like Hatkhola village, the landowners of Chakalibaria could also be divided into a few subgroups on the basis of their diverse economic interests. The sub-divisions are: (a) the supervisory cultivator-service holder, (b) the cultivator and (c) the cultivator-service holder/trader. The total number of households of the landowners in Chakalibaria is 28. Unlike Hatkhola, there is no household belonging to the class of absentee landowner.

Out of 28 households of the landowners, 2 belong to the sub-group of the supervisory cultivator-service holders. They are from among the Ahoms and the Chutiyas. The average landholding of the supervisory cultivator-service holders is 19.8 acres per family. The Ahom supervisory cultivator is the biggest landowner of the village having about 34 acres of land. Professionally he is a medical practitioner and practise in the village itself. His eldest son is an M.D. and a Commissioned Officer in the Defence Services. The second son is a student of law. The third son is a graduate who teaches in a high school, and the youngest son is
also a graduate who works in a Bank at Dibrugarh. The biggest
landowner has purchased a large amount of paddy land from the
villagers. The land is not cultivated by himself. About 16 acres
of land is cultivated by the agricultural labourers under his
direct supervision, and the remaining land is cultivated by the
share-croppers of his village. In 1976 when the land ceiling act
was introduced to fix landholding at about 16.6 acres (50 bighas),
he withdrew a large amount of land from the share-croppers, and
distributed among all the members of his family to escape from
the ceiling legislation. He has purchased a power tiller to cul-
tivate his land by himself, and employed one of his relatives to
look after the farm. He lives in a brick-built house, and has
recently built up a house in Dibrugarh town too. He possesses
considerable political power particularly based on his strong
economic position.

The other supervisory cultivating family belonging to the
Chutiya community possesses 5.6 acres of land. The head of this
family is a graduate and teaches in a high school. His land is
cultivated by the agricultural labourers under his direct super-
vision. A few years ago he cultivated his land by tractor on hire
basis, but later on he discontinued it. Although the Ahoms and the
Chutiyas are not traditionally prohibited to work on their land,
these two supervisory cultivators do not work on their farms as
they primarily engaged in other activities. Bulk of their earnings
comes from the land, but they devote much time to their respective
professions.

In Chakalibaria, there are 12 households of the cultivators,
of which 11 belong to the Ahoms and 1 to the Chutiyas. Their average
landholding is 3.8 acres per household, but the landholdings of the
individual households vary from 1.3 to 7 acres. Thus, both marginal
and well-to-do families belong to this group. The marginal cultiva-
tors having considerably less land can somehow maintain their families
and employ only own family labour in agricultural operations. They
cannot afford to hire agricultural labourers, however, sometimes the
same is required for certain agricultural operations. The well-to-do
families of the cultivators store food grains and sell at appropriate time for having cash income. They cultivate their land themselves and also employ agricultural labourers. Therefore, families belonging to the class of the cultivators do not have the same control over land and resources. Some of them are employer - cultivators and some are self - cultivators without employing labourers. Such a situation explains lack of homogeneity in economic relations within the given class. The condition of the marginal cultivators, living on bare subsistence, is not much better than that of the share-croppers and the agricultural labourers having some amount of land of their own. On the other hand, the marginal cultivators generally compete with the share-croppers for getting the share-cropping land from the well off landowners. Therefore, absence of sharp class differences as well as consequent overlapping of economic interests retard emergence of class consciousness.

Besides, in the class of landowner, there are the cultivator-service holders/traders. In Chakalibaria, 14 households of the Ahoms belong to this category. Their average landholding is 3.9 acres per family. These families have taken up modern occupations and have diverse economic interests. Six of these families depend upon income from teaching in the primary and high schools, 5 depend upon clerical jobs, 2 depend upon petty business, and 1 depends upon technical job as an electrician. However, land is the primary source of livelihood of many of these families. However, they do not cultivate land on the share-cropping basis. Thus, they are a distinct class compared to the cultivators and the share-croppers. However, they overlap with each other in the local situation. Their average landholding is more or less equal to that of the cultivators, but their economic condition is better than that of the latter due to their income from various modern occupations. These families are self-sufficient in regard to food like the cultivators, but their income from the modern occupations has enabled them to have better education and standard of living than those of the cultivating class.
The Share-Croppers:

In Chakalibaria, the class of the share-croppers does not have sub-divisions. The households belonging to this group are actually share cropper-cultivators. But in the multicastr village the share-croppers are much more differentiated as some of them are engaged in service, trade, etc. also. In Chakalibaria, there are 7 households of the Ahoms who are share cropper-cultivators having 2.8 acres of land per family on an average. Their landholdings vary from 1.3 to 4.6 acres. Therefore, some of them are marginal cultivators and some are well-to-do cultivators, but they also depend upon the income from the land owned by others. This land is cultivated by them on the basis of share-cropping. The share-cropping land is only available from their own caste of Chakalibaria. The sharecropper-cultivators primarily depend upon the family labour. However, a few of them having better economic status employ agricultural labourers on their farms.

Like Hatkhola, the households of the share-cropper-cultivators of Chakalibaria also overlap with the classes of the agricultural labourer-cultivators as well as with the cultivators. For some years, land for share-cropping has not been sufficiently available to them, consequently, families with marginal landholdings have taken up works of the agricultural labourers and this has reduced their status. Broadly speaking, such a situation could be considered as downward mobility... This also refers to differentiation of interests within a given class or sub-class.

The system of share-cropping is similar to that of Hatkhola village. But in Chakalibaria contract for share-cropping is made on the basis of the pother-adhi and the guti-adhi. The two systems of contract are already discussed in Hatkhola. The availability of land for share-cropping is very limited in Chakalibaria as there is only one big landowner. Besides, a few Muslim landowners of a neighbouring village provide land to the share-croppers of Chakalibari. However, the share-croppers of Chakalibaria are in a better position than their counterpart at Hatkhola, as they, in most of the cases, receive contract from their own caste group. In the changing situation, due to the impact of recent land regulations,
it has become difficult to identify the share-croppers as they try to conceal their class position to the outsiders due to the fear of the landowners. Since the landowners and the share-croppers belong to the same caste of the Ahoms, economic conflict is effectively resolved due to caste primordiality. But in the multicaste village, of Hatkhola, sometimes, economic conflicts transform into caste conflicts as landowners and share-croppers belong to different castes. Therefore, it is necessary to have a caste analysis of class structure, and a class analysis of caste structure.

The Agricultural Labourers

In Chakalibaria, there are 28 households of the agricultural labourers. These households could also be divided into following sub-divisions: (a) the agricultural labourer-sharecropper-cultivator, (b) the agricultural labourer-cultivator, (c) the agricultural labourer-trader, (d) the agricultural labourer-sharecropper and (c) the agricultural labourer. The agricultural labourers principally depend upon daily wages. However, some of them as shown in the above classification have secondary sources of income consisting of their land, share-cropping, and petty trading. Most of the agricultural labourers are available from the villagers of Chakalibaria, but a considerable number of them belong to the non-Assamese communities of neighbouring villages. Therefore, unlike Hatkhola, Chakalibaria is not self-sufficient in labour-supply needed in the agricultural sector.

The agricultural labourer-sharecropper-cultivators are highest in number among the agricultural labourers. There are 12 households, of which 11 households are of the Ahoms, and 1 is of the Chutiyas. Their economic condition is better among all the labourers of the village having landholding on an average of 1.6 acres per family. Income from land is not sufficient enough to live on, therefore, members of these households work on daily wages to support their families. They also cultivate land on share-cropping. Thus, with income from these three sources they earn their livelihood. Therefore, on the one hand, they compete among themselves and
on the other, compete with the class of the share - cropper for getting land from the landowners on share-cropping basis. Those who are economically well off among them, employ hired labourers on their own land also.

Seven households of the Ahoms belong to the agricultural labourer - cultivator category, and possess landholding on an average 1.2 acre per family. Their meagre landholding is not sufficient enough to subsist on. Therefore, members of their families seek work in agricultural sector as wage labourers.

Only 1 household of the agricultural labourer - traders is from among the Muslims having only .3 acre of land. Members of this family work as agricultural labourers and have an additional source of income by running a small shop.

There are 3 households of the Ahoms in the category of the agricultural labourer - share croppers having landholding on an average 2.2 acres per household, and 2 households of them are landless. They depend mainly upon daily wages for livelihood and cultivate small plot of land on share - cropping basis.

Only 5 households of Chakalibaria belong to the category of the agricultural labourers. Their average landholding is .06 acre per household. Four families do not have any land and only 1 family possesses .3 acre of land. Of the 5 households, 3 belong to the Ahoms and 2 to the Muslims. The agricultural labourers do not get employment regularly in the village. However, a few of them manage to get work in neighbouring villages.

The labourers are also divided into the halowas (ploughmen), roynias (transplanter), daonis (harvesters), etc. who are also found in Chakalibaria like Batkhola village. Their wages vary according to the nature of agricultural operations. A halowa without plough and bullock is paid Rs. 3.00 per day; but, if he works with his plough and bullock, he gets Rs.6.00, or in case if he provides buffalo and plough of his own, he is paid Rs.10.00 as daily wage. The roynia and daoni receive Rs. 3.00. Besides, the daily wages, they are offered jalpan (breakfast) also.
The halowas of Chakalibaria are of two types, namely, (a) halowas - who are hired for a period of few months during the agricultural season, and (b) hazira halowas - who are hired on daily wages. There are hazira roynis and hazira daonis who are employed on daily wages for transplantation and harvesting purposes respectively. In Chakalibaria, generally the landowners, who have considerable landholdings, employ halowas on their land. In 1976-77, about 8 halowas were employed by them, 3 of whom were Ahoms of Chakalibaria and 5 were from the non-Assamese communities of neighbouring villages. Their wages vary from year to year and from person to person depending on the bargaining capacity of both the parties. Generally, a halowa is paid Rs.80.00 to Rs.100.00 in cash, along with daily meals and clothes.

Thus, the agricultural labourers do not form a homogeneous group as they are not homogeneous in economic interests, and even some of them may emerge as employers when under certain circumstances, they employ wage-labourers on their land. However, the five categories of the agricultural labourers overlap with each other and sometimes even with the other classes.

In Chakalibaria, due to the prevalence of the haori system, demand of the agricultural labourers is comparatively lower than that of Hatkhola village. The haori system involves voluntary exchange of labours between the cultivating families without involving any remuneration either in cash or in kind. Such a reciprocal adjustment minimizes to a greater extent the existing labour crisis in the village community. This arrangement can perhaps be attributed to the traditional tribal custom of mutual co-operation which existed between the village communities for carrying out agricultural operations. However, the system, in the traditional society, was based on egalitarian principles for helping kinmen in the economic field; but today it has become an exploitative mechanism. The rich cultivators exploit the poor ones. Today, where the growth of the agricultural labourers is rapid, the prevalence of the haori system curbs their employment in the agricultural sector, and ultimately hampers their interests. They are left with no bargaining power for improving the rates of daily wages. Moreover, as the haori
system meets the demands of the agricultural labourers to a great extent, many of them remain unemployed even during the peak agricultural seasons. Generally, in carrying out certain operations such as ploughing and transplantation, the haori labourers are employed by the cultivators. Also when certain agricultural operations are to be completed within a very short period the haori labourers are employed. A haori labourer who ploughs the land is known as haori halowa; likewise, haori labourers who perform transplantation and harvesting are known as haori roynis and haori daonis respectively. However, haori labour is rarely employed for harvesting purpose. The haori system is the characteristic feature of the tribal economy of the region, and it could also be found in the societies which have transformed from tribe to caste. Therefore, it is found among the Ahoms of the uni-caste village and among the Sonowals of the tribal village. It is not found in the multicaste village where agrarian economy is influenced much by the caste societies. Although, the haori system today appears as an exploitative mechanism, but in principle it largely coincides with the egalitarian nature of the tribal economy.

Most of the agricultural labourers of Chakalibaria are found to be in indebtedness. The common practice of extending loan is in kind, i.e., paddy is loaned. In Chakalibaria, the agricultural labourers generally borrow paddy from the landowners during the lean agricultural seasons, and it is repaid by working on the owner's farm during the harvesting season. The system of paying back the loan through work is known as halicha. Although in this system, payment of interest is not involved directly to the lenders, the borrower becomes looser as he has to work more on the lender's land. Thus, the system is favourable to the landowner as he avails the borrower's services on lesser wages. In this situation, the condition of the agricultural labourers is more or less similar to that of Hatkhola village. In Chakalibaria, the agricultural labourers, who are borrowers, remain bonded with the well-to-do landowners as tenurial labourers earn less wages than the current wage rates.
A few points are concluded from the above discussion of the uni-caste village. There are three classes— the landowner, the share-cropper and the agricultural labourer similar to that of the multicaaste village. The classes are distributed only among the Ahoms. The proportions of the landowners and the agricultural labourers are more or less equal being 45.6 per cent and 42.2 per cent respectively. The percentage of the share-croppers is 12.2. Therefore, the Ahoms are "dominant landowners" as well as "dominant agricultural labourers" in the uni-caste village. The situation is, therefore, quite different from that of the multicaaste village.

Here through the haori and halicha systems the big landowners of the Ahoms exploit their own caste fellows who are agricultural labourers and share-croppers. Relation between caste and class is ambiguous. This feature is not new to the Assamese society as it was also in the traditional system. There is no inter-village and inter-caste economic interaction to a significant extent. Therefore, jajmani system is not found in the village as there is no multicaaste groups on the one hand, and as there is no inter-village economic dependence on the other. However, in spite of presence of inter-caste economic interactions jajmani system is also not found in the multicaaste village. Therefore, caste system cannot always be linked up with the jajmani system. Miller also expresses similar ideas.

In this section, we shall examine how power is distributed among the people of the uni-caste village. Therefore, instead of looking at the distribution of power among the various caste groups it is to be examined how power is shared by the members of a single caste group, namely, the Ahoms. We are interested to know who enjoys how much power, how and why? In this regard, the gaon-panchayat, traditional authority, informal leaders and political parties are discussed in the present context. Our understanding of "power" and "authority" has been discussed in the previous chapter. In the context of Chakalibaria village we have tried to understand "power" and "authority" according to Weberian point of view.

Gaon Panchayat

Two-tier Panchayati Raj system was introduced in Assam, in 1974. The Tengakhat gaon-panchayat is one of the 24 gaon-panchayats of Dibrugarh subdivision. There are altogether 15 samasthis in the Tengakhat gaon-panchayat, and 15 representatives are elected from the samasthis to constitute the gaon-panchayat. Three villages, namely, Chakalibaria, Saru-Abhypuria and Kapahua constitute one of these samasthis. The first two villages are inhabited by castes whereas the last one is predominantly inhabited by tribal people. However, the samasthi is represented by the scheduled tribe candidate in the Tengakhat gaon-panchayat. Hence it is relevant to study the power structure of Chakalibaria village before the introduction of Panchayati Raj in 1974.

In the 1952, 1956, 1960, 1964 and 1968 panchayat elections, Chakalibaria was under the Hatibandha gaon-panchayat. In order to understand the nature of power relations in Chakalibaria we shall discuss these past panchayat elections. Altogether 7 Ahoms represented Chakalibaria village in the panchayat, the Chutiyas and the Muslims of the village kept themselves away from the village politics. The table shows the caste and class backgrounds of the

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1. See chapter IV, pages from 136-138.
panchayat office - bearers. These panchayat members hold positions of authority, the legitimacy of which is based on the government. This is "legal authority" in Weberian term. Therefore, they are not traditional in nature; they have newly emerged under the statutory panchayat.

Table: 26
Caste and class background of the Panchayat office-bearers of Chakalibaria (1952-1974)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>No. of office bearers/other</th>
<th>Class background</th>
<th>Landholding (acre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahom</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Landowner</td>
<td>1.3 -5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agricultural labourer</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Share-cropper</td>
<td>1.3 -2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(including 1 gaonbura)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A middle aged Ahom who held the office twice in the panchayat was elected unopposed from Chakalibaria. He is school educated. Although he does not belong to a well off family, he is quite popular in the village due to some of his personal qualities, capacity of articulation and good behaviour. He has undertaken some welfare works for the villagers like digging of three tube-wells, construction of village roads, etc. Since 1956 he is a member of the Dibrugarh district organisation of the C.P.I. party, and therefore, he has gained considerable popularity among the agricultural labourers of the region.

The president of the present panchayat is a middle aged Ahom who is one of the most prominent persons of the region. He belongs to a cultivating family and owns 5 acres of land only. He is also

school educated, but due to his political linkages and connections with the Congress party, he enjoys considerable power and prestige in the region. Being a member of the district organisation of the Congress party he could get considerable financial help from the government for educational programmes in the region. He is also one of the pioneers to introduce modern means of agriculture among the villagers. He holds a position in the governing body of Tengakhat College. Besides, he is a member of the managing committees of some schools in the region.

An Ahom, who was the president in the gaon-panchayat, was elected unopposed. He is educated upto high school standard. Although he is a cultivator having 3.6 acres of land, he is able to exert considerable influence in the region because of his intimacy with the local M.P.

Another middle aged Ahom, who did not have higher education and sound economic background, was elected as member in the 1952 and 1968 panchayat. In 1968, he held the office of the president in the Tengakhat Gaon-panchayat. Another Ahom, who represented Chakalibaria in the 1960 panchayat, was an illiterate person. However, both of these representatives hailed from agricultural labourer families.

A middle aged Ahom of Chakalibaria was a clerk in the office of the the 1974 panchayat who was paid a salary of Rs.200.00 per month. He is educated upto high school standard, and does not have sound economic background as he owns only 1.3 acres of land. He hails from a respectable family as his father was the gaon-bura (village headman) of the village. However, due to his family background as well as formal position in the panchayat he enjoys considerable prestige in the village.

In 1952, a 52 years old Ahom of Chakalibaria was the secretary of the Hatibandha gaon-panchayat. He is educated upto primary school standard and is a share-cropper. But he could acquire considerable power due to his formal position in the panchayat and leadership qualities.
Besides the offices of the panchayat, the office of the gaon-bura is also an important source of formal power and prestige. The gaon-bura of Chakalibaria is an Ahom of 55 years old who has education up to high school standard. After the death of his father he succeeded the office in 1947. Though he hails from a share-cropper family, yet he enjoys considerable power and prestige due to his formal office of the gaon-bura in the village. However, before introduction of the Panchayati Raj institution, the gaon-bura used to be the most powerful person in the village. He had great say in settling the village disputes. Even today he continues to be an influential person in the village affairs.

The above discussion reveals that the Ahoms enjoyed formal power positions in the panchayat to a considerable extent from 1952 to 1968. But since 1974, after the inclusion of the village in the scheduled tribe reserved area, the Ahoms of Chakalibaria have no representative in the local panchayat. The Chutiyas and the Muslims too could not represent themselves in the panchayat. However, as Chakalibaria is a single-caste village dominated by the Ahoms it is not futile to see the relations between caste and power. However, in regard to the relations between class and power it is revealed that power is distributed among the households of all the classes. The households belonging to the landowners, share-croppers and agricultural labourers represent themselves more or less equally in the village polity as it is evident from the panchayat elections from 1952 to 1968. Out of 8 representatives of the panchayat and the office of the gaon-bura, 4 belong to the class of the landowners whose landholdings vary from 1.3 to 5 acres, 2 belong to the class of the share-croppers who possess landholdings from 1.3 to 2 acres and 2 belong to the class of the agricultural labourers having landholdings only of 6 acre of each.

The Mel and the Religious Authority

Like Hatkhola, in Chakalibaria still there exists the caste council known as mel along with the statutory panchayat. About
40 years ago the mel consisting of the village elders particularly who held different religious offices in the Vaisnabite institution of satra and namghar used to play important role in the village affairs. It is already mentioned that the office holders of the Brahma Samhati and the Kala Samhati are different in many respects from those of the Mayamaria sect. The offices of the former two sects are the sadhu, medhi, pathaki, radhuni, bora, etc. who are still found to play dominant role in the village affairs. Today the functions of these offices are curbed to a certain extent due to the emergence of secular bases of power like the statutory panchayat, political parties, and other factors such as education, modern occupations, etc. Today, they still play vital role in the village community. The young elites also take part in the mel along with the traditional leaders. Nonetheless, mel in the uni-caste village is still an important body of social control for maintaining caste solidarity. But the multi-caste village today depends more on the formal power structure of the panchayat for regulating the behaviour of its members.

The institution of namghar among the Ahoms is also a source of formal power. The various offices of the institution are the sadhu, medhi, pathaki, radhuni, bora, etc. The functions of the offices have been discussed earlier in regard to the Ahom caste of Hathkola village. The Ahoms of Chakalibaria have two namghars headed by 12 office-holders. Their economic bases are given in the table : 27. Of the 12 office holders, 3 are from the landowning class having landholding 3.3 to 5 acres, 4 are share-croppers who have land from 2 to 4.6 acres, and 5 are agricultural labourers having 1 to 4.6 acres of cultivable land. Therefore, economic position of an individual is not the sole determinant of his position in the institution of namghar. The details of the institution of namghar are already discussed in the chapter on the multicaaste village. However, in the single-caste village, though the institution has certain amount of formal characters, its way of functioning in the community is largely informal in nature. The religious office holders of the Vaisnabite institution of namghar hold positions of authority. Its
legitimacy is based on Vaisnabite religious tradition. In Weber's term this is "traditional authority".

Table: 27

The ritual office - holders of the namghars of Chakalibaria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of office holders</th>
<th>Class background</th>
<th>Landholding (in acre)</th>
<th>Other offices held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Landowner</td>
<td>3.3 - 5</td>
<td>Member of panchayat - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Share-cropper</td>
<td>2 - 4.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Agricultural labourer</td>
<td>1 - 4.6</td>
<td>Gaonbura - 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are differences between the authority of the namghar and the mel. Since Chakalibaria is an Ahom village, there is no intercaste mel. Generally, mel is organised by the Ahoms of Chakalibaria at the level of the two namghars where minor cases are normally settled by the villagers. However, influential persons belonging to a namghar, if necessary, are requested to attend the mel held by other namghar. Alternatively, mel is held at the village level where persons belonging to both of the namghars sit together to settle disputes. The complex cases which cannot be settled by the mel at the level of the namghar are judged by the village mel. But at present, the functions of the village mel are curbed to a considerable extent as most of the complex cases are now referred directly to the gaon-panchayat or to the police. Today, role of the gaon-bura (village headman) in the meetings of the mel has acquired considerable importance. Like Hatkhola village, when mel is held in Chakalibaria, the case is first referred to the gaon-bura who then informs the respectable persons of the namghar or a meeting is held

by inviting the members of the entire village. These respectable persons of the mel include both traditional as well as modern Ahom leaders. As the gaon-bura holds a formal position in the government office he presides over the meetings of the mel as a president. In the traditional mel, when there was no position of the gaon-bura in the village, the meeting was usually presided over by the persons having highest position in the traditional hierarchy in the village, but this functions have been taken up by the gaon-bura today.

The mel is gradually loosing its importance due to the emergence of panchayat and other influential leaders in the village. Today, both the traditional and the new leaders participate in the proceedings of the mel. In the traditional society, mel was the principal body for social control which used to decide all types of cases in the village. Even inter-village conflicts were settled by the mel organised at inter-village level. In case of failure, the cases were usually referred to the mauzadar (revenue - officer). Along with the collection of the revenue of a mauza the mauzadar was vested in power and authority to decide the complicated disputes. However, since the introduction of the Panchayati Raj, power of the mauzadar is reduced to a considerable extent.

The Informal Leaders

The Ahoms of Chakalibaria are divided into two groups under the two namghars. The divisions are only on the basis of the institution of namghar which does not have much effective role in the local politics. In addition to namghar and gaon-panchayat from which people draw authority and power, there are other bases of power such as education, white-collar jobs, well off economic position, personal qualities, etc. The latter sources of power are largely informal in nature; therefore, the people who possess them enjoy power which is essentially informal in nature. Thus such leaders of Chakalibaria do not have any formal power and authority
similar to that of the members of the gaon-panchayat and the namghar institution. In Chakalibaria, there are a few such influential leaders who are only from among the Ahoms. The Chutiyas and the Muslims do not have such leaders. Therefore, the situation in the uni-caste village is different from that of the multi-caste one, because in the former village a single caste group is influential whereas in the latter village, a group of castes share power and influence in the locality.

One of the most influential persons of the village is one doctor. After the retirement from the Assam Medical Service, he started practising in the village. He wields considerable power and influence in the area due to his professional status, education, well off economic position and respectable family background. The doctor is the biggest landowner of the village. A considerable portion of his land is cultivated by the share-croppers of Chakalibaria. Therefore, a large number of families of the village depend upon him for land on share-cropping contract. Although he does not take part in the village politics and does not possess formal power and authority, his opinion is much regarded by the villagers. He has four sons who are highly educated and have taken up modern occupations. Two of them have acquired considerable power and influence in the village due to their political linkages with the local leaders.

Another young influential leader of Chakalibaria who is a school teacher belongs to a cultivating family having 12 acres of land. His father is a clerk in a plantation. He has become influential persons in the village due to his education, modern occupation and well off economic position.

A middle aged Ahom of the village, who hails from a small cultivator's family, has become influential due to his personal qualities. His brother, who has received college education, is employed in the state government. He has been able to wield considerable power and influence in the area due to his education, personal qualities and connections with the government officers.
However, a middle aged Chutiya of the same village is also an influential person. He is a B.A., B.T., and teaches in a high school. Although he does not have much command over the Ahoms of Chakalibaria, he commands respect among his caste fellows of the neighbouring village.

**Networks and Political Power**

Penetration of political parties and their ideologies into the village polity throws some light on the distribution of power in the countryside. In this connection we shall give an account of the general elections of 1972 to evaluate the role of the political parties in the village power politics. The political leaders of the village provide much wider dimension of distribution of power as it extends over a large number of neighbouring villages. This enables us to assess one's control over a wider area.

In the general elections of 1972, Chakalibaria was under the Hatibandha Assembly constituency. Four political parties, namely, the Congress (R), the CPI, the Socialist and the Janasangh contested the elections in the Hatibandha constituency. Comparatively, the villagers of Chakalibaria are more politicised than those of Hathkola which is evident from their activities at the time of the elections of 1972. Members of both old and young, who actively participated in the elections, acquired considerable power and prestige as a result of their affiliation with these political parties and their bosses. However, Congress has strongest roots in the region since the time of pre-Independence National Movement. The Congress party was able to return its candidate from this constituency in all the previous elections.

A detail study of some leaders of the village would show the nature of power and influence enjoyed by them due to their contact with the political parties. In Chakalibaria, there are three Ahoms who are well-known as workers of the Congress party. Ghana Gogoi is one of them who is 50 years old and is educated upto high school standard. He belongs to a cultivator's family. During school days, he participated in the National Movement. Due
to his long political career and as a member of the Congress organisation of Dibrugarh district since 1949, he has acquired considerable power and prestige in the region. He inclined to contest in the general elections of 1972, but due to some flaw his nomination was rejected. However, due to his connections with the party, he enjoys certain positions in different local organisations. He is a member of the managing committees of three schools and of a college. For many years, he was secretary of the co-operative society of Tengakhat.

Phani Gogoi, a 60 years old doctor of Chakalibaria, was an active worker of the Congress party. Due to his charming personality, education, well off economic position and connections with the Congress party, he has influence in a number of villages. It was only due to his influence, a large number of people of his caste in the area voted in favour of the Congress party in the general elections of 1972. His earnest effort to establish Tengakhat College and Tengakhat High School is well-known to the people of the region. This was possible for him due to his connections with the bosses of the Congress party. He is still a member of the managing committees of the college and of a few schools of the area.

Another active worker of the Congress party is Narayan Fukan who is also a member of the district organisation. Although he is moderately educated and does not have sound economic background, he has become influential due to his connections with the party. Due to the active support of these three leaders the Congress candidate named Manik Das received a large number of votes in Chakalibaria. Das was returned from this constituency as an M.L.A. consecutively in the first three general elections. In the general elections of 1972 they actively supported the Congress (R) candidate Indreswar Khaund, who for the first time was returned from this constituency.

Besides the Congress party, the CPI is also very popular among the villagers. Among the active workers of the CPI Rupeswar Gogoi is important one who has been a member of the district
organisation of the party since 1956. Gogoi is educated up to high school standard, and he hails from a small cultivator's family. But due to personal qualities and connections with the political party, he is very popular among the agricultural labourers of the area. As a party functionary once he toured all over Assam. He was one of the organisers of the Assam Language Movement in 1972 who could successfully mobilise a large number of people of the Tengakhat area. He also took active part in organising the Assam Oil Refinery Movement for which he was arrested. Besides, there are three other leaders in Chakalibaria from among the Ahomas who are also active supporters of the CPI. But they are comparatively less influential than Gogoi. However, due to the active support of these leaders the CPI candidate could draw a large number of votes from Chakalibaria as well as from the neighbouring villages in the general elections of 1972.

There is another influential leader in Chakalibaria who is an active worker of the Socialist party. But in the first two general elections he was a supporter of the CPI candidate. In the last two general elections, he supported the Socialist party as its candidate happened to be his intimate friend. Although he comes from a family of agricultural labourer and is educated up to primary standard only, yet he has become quite an influential in the village due to his personal qualities and political affiliation. In the 1952 and 1968 gaon-panchayats, he represented Chakalibaria village.

Due to increasing politicisation, division of the people into different political parties has become a reality of village life. However, political activities in Chakalibaria shows that this village is much more politicised than Hatkhola.

Indreswar Khaund of the Congress (R) was elected as an M.L.A. from this constituency. He is a graduate and is an Ahom of the Matak sect. Although the Ahoms of Chakalibaria are followers of the Bamunia sect, they cast their votes in favour of Khaund. This was possible perhaps due to some of the leaders of Chakalibaria who favoured Khaund, and he could draw about 50 per cent
of the votes of the village. Among these leaders Ghana Gogoi and Narayan Fukan worked hard for the Congress (R) candidate. As the constituency is predominantly inhabited by the followers of the Brahma Samhati Khaund who is a Matak Ahom tried to impress upon by attending their socio-religious festivals. The approach enabled him to draw a large number of votes of the Bamunia Ahoms of the area in his favour.

Tilok Gogoi hails from a Bamunia Ahom family. He contested in the last two general elections as a CPI candidate, but was defeated by his Congress rival. The result of the 1972 general elections shows that the CPI is increasingly getting popularity among the villagers, particularly, those who belong to the families of the agricultural labourers, share-croppers and small cultivators. In regard to the poll, the CPI was nearest to the Congress rival. Gogoi received about 50 per cent of the votes from among the villagers of Chakalibaria. Jatin Hazarika, an Ahom of the Bamunia sect, contested in the general elections of 1972 as a Socialist candidate. He could fetch a very few votes. The Janasangh candidate did not get support from the village. Although there is rivalry between the followers of the two sects, namely, the Bamunia and the Matak, however, it did not reflect in the voting patterns of the electorate. The Congress (R) candidate, who belonged to the Matak sect, received full supports from the followers of the Bamunia sect. The popularity of the Congress (R) party in the area could be the main reason.

In the foregoing pages we have given an account of the distribution of power in Chakalibaria. The distribution of power is highly dynamic today. In considering the relation between caste and power it is found that in the uni-caste village power is distributed only among the members of the Ahom caste. This feature of the power distribution distinguishes the uni-caste village from the multi-caste one.

The concept of "dominant caste" is inapplicable in the uni-caste village. Firstly, Chakalibaria is inhabited by a caste, namely, the Ahoms. Therefore, dominance of the Ahoms over the other caste groups of the village is not possible in reality. By and large, the

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concept, in evaluating the distribution of power in the village, is not useful. Secondly, not all the Ahoms are "dominant" as a large number of households belong to the "non-dominant group". However, dominance in the present context is shared by a group of families of the same caste. But inter-village dominance of a caste group is possible particularly due to the recent changes in the power structure. Since the 1974 panchayat when Chakalibaria was included under the "scheduled tribe reserved area" along with the other two villages, namely, Saru-Abhaypuria and Kapahua, it has been dominating by the Sonowals of the latter village. Thus, dominance of the Sonowal tribe extends beyond the village. This we shall discuss in some details in the next chapter on the tribal village. Therefore, the study of dominance of a caste group which extends over a wider area can provide an important dimension of the distribution of power in the rural society. In this respect dominance of a caste over a number of villages can be called as "regional dominance" of that caste whereas the caste can be called as "regional dominant caste". In this way more than one caste group may be "regional dominant castes". But we conclude here that there is nothing like "dominant caste" in Chakalibaria. It is actually a group of individuals who hold dominant position in all aspects of the village life. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use the term "dominant individuals".6

In regard to the relation between power and class Chakalibaria shows a highly dynamic feature. Landownership is not the decisive criterion to wield power and influence as individuals belonging to the classes of the share-croppers and the agricultural labourers equally share power in the village community.