CHAPTER – 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

The present study focuses on the impact of flood on the Mishing society in Dhemaji District. Dhemaji District was selected as it happens to be the the worst affected district by flood in Assam year after year. Atleast three to five episodes of flood cycle is annually experience by the people of Dhemaji district particularly the tribal people as the proportopn of Scheduled Tribe population is quite high in the District. Among these ST communities Mishings happens to be numerically the strongest community here. Majority of Mishing the Mishing villages have been living in the flood prone areas in many the districts of Upper Assam including Dhemaji. It is observed that most Mishings villages are situated very close to the river banks of Brahmaputra or some other tributaries. This may be due partly to their tradition and partly because they have nowhere to go. Being living very close to the river banks, they have been constantly facing problems arising out of recurrent annula flood. Their normal life gets affected during and flood aftermath. The recent severities of flood in state have been causing problems for the Mishing people in most of their dwelling places. There have been studies conducted on the probem of flood in Assam from geological, geographical sociological and journalistic points of view. But no studies have been conducted specifically on the impact of flood on a particular tribal community and their culture from an anthropological perspective. Therefore in the present study an attempt has been made to find out the effects of flood on the Mishing people of Dhemaji District of Assam The title of the research has been entitled as “Impact of Flood on the Mishings of Dhemaji District, Assam: An Anthropological Study”
Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study are to know the impact of flood on

1. Find out the impact of flood on the settlement pattern of the study villages
2. Shifting and migration of families due to flood
3. Know about the changing economy and occupational pattern of the people of the study villages
4. Know about the impact of flood on family and some other aspects of social and cultural life.
5. To know about their coping strategy before, during and after flood including the role of kinship network.

Methods Adopted:

The study has been carried out in three Mishing villages selected carefully after a pilot study. Of the three study villages selected for indepth study, two villages namely Bahir Tapit and Sunarigaon is highly affected by regular annual flood. The other village called Akajan, on the otherhand, happens to be one of those small numbers of villages in Dhemaji District which has not been affected by flood for a long time as remembered and reported by the senior members of the village. Akajan was selected as a reference village for comparision.

Standard ethnographic methods like household survey, observation method (including participant and non-participant methods), case study, interview, schedules are used for collection of data. Two schedules are used: one for collecting household data and the other for detailed flood related data. The primary data was collected by using observation (participant and non-participant method), household survey schedule, interview (both individual as well as group interview method), case study, genealogical method, photographic and cartographic methods.
The relationship between habitat and culture has been the focus of Anthropological studies since 19th century onwards. Chapter one consider flood, as one of the significant factor affecting the habitat or environment or a geographical area of a people in general giving more stress to flood in Assam and Dhemaji District. Here, it has also been particularly tried to focus why the Mishings of Dhemaji are very badly affected by flood annually. This chapter also accommodate statement of the problems of the research work under taken for the present study. Various theories and studies related to environmental issues in anthropology has been part of the review of literatue along with. Further, it also describes the methods adopted during the course of study under taken highlighting with sub headings such as selection of the two villages, collection of background information from the four Revenue circles, library work done in different places, tools of data collection and period of field work taken for the research study followed by the presentation of the thesis.

Chapter 2 has been divided into two parts, Part-A and Part-B. Part A is concerned with ethnographic note on the Mishing tribe chosen for the study. It highlights the origin, migration, present population composition of the tribe and various social, cultural and economic aspects of the Mishing people has been described under varies sub headings. Part B tries to find out reference of flood in folklore, art, music and other aspects of socio-cultural life of the Mishing community at large.

Chapter 3 three describes geographical location of the study area under taken. It describes mainly the geographical situation, demography of Dhemaji District along with a brief introduction to the three study villages.

Chapter 4 Part A gives the detailed description of each of the three study villages on by one while Part B focuses on the demographic characteristics of the three villages with tabulation and discussion. In Part A the three villages are being described with various sub headings like:- geographical location of the villages, origin and naming of the villages, neighbouring communities, transportation, market places, land area, house type,
sanitation, sources of water, educational institution, health care system, public places and cremation ground. Part B, deals with demographic data of the three villages. It mainly analyse the total numbers of families of the villages, total populations, age and sex distribution of the population, marital status of the population of the three villages, literacy and educational status.

Sofar as educational status is concerned, it has been found in the studied flood affected villages that during flood most of the schools remain close for nearly four to five months or depending on the situation of the flood every year. Therefore, the educational levels of the flood affected villages are quite lower than the non-flood affected village.

It may be mentioned that the data on occupational pattern, income level of the families, religious composition, house types, and household settlement pattern/location of settlement and possession of land by the people of the villages have been presented in Chapter 5 along with the major findings related to the different objectives of the study.

Chapter 5 reflects the main findings of the study under various heads. It has been divided into seven parts in accordance with the objectives

The findings reflect the impact of flood on various aspects of the Mishings as per the objectives of the study.

Part A deals with the impact of flood on village settlement pattern, part B focuses on shifting/migrating of families due to flood, part C discuss the impact of flood on occupational pattern and economy of the villages. Part D is devoted on the impact of flood on family size and family type. Part E deals on impact of flood on material culture, part F focuses on impact of flood on religious practices of the villages and the last part, part G highlights some strategies adopted by the peoples of Bahir Tapit and Sunarigaon villages to cope with prevailing flood situation.

Part A dealing with impact of flood on the settlement pattern reveals that Bahir Tapit and Sunarigaon shows changes in its settlement pattern due to regular flood in the
villages. The practice of settlement in the old broken embankments or new embankments and nearby highland areas was recorded. The settlement pattern in the two flood affected villages was not found to be systematic. Most of the household families are scattered here and there in order to cope or get rid of prevailing flood situation in the villages. But, in case of the non-flood affected village Akajan no such drastic changes was observed.

In Part - B it was observed that permanent and temporary shifting of household families occurred before, during and after flood was found to be prevalent in the two-floods affected village Bahir Tapit and Sunarigaon. It was further recorded that individuals and groups migrated of the village people for source of income to different cities and towns of Assam and other Indian states. It was found that between 1999 to 2013, total 9 families have shifted permanently from Bahir Tapit to safer areas like Jagun, Jonai and Dibrugarh. The numbers of such families from Sunarigaon come to 17 families. Whereas, no such type of shifting of families was found in the non-flood affected village Akajan.

It has been found in Part C that the Mishings villages in general and the study villages in particular have been traditionally depended on agriculture for their livelihood. But, dependency on agriculture as their primary occupation was found to be lower in both the flood affected villages 7.74 % in Bahir Tapit and 6.53 % in Sunarigaon compared to the non-flood affected village Akajan (42.33%). Comparatively, people of the affected villages (Bahir Tapit and Sunarigaon) have taken up various new occupational practices in order to adapt themselves to changing situation created by flood. In Akajan, the proportion of non-fam or non-agricultural occupations are found to be lower. In the flood affected villages, family become landless due to river bank soil erosion and sand deposition/sand casting in their agricultural fields. Now, these families work as day labourer within the village and outside the villages. In Akajan, the non-flood affected village, no day laboureres were observed while in Bahir Tapit and Sunarigaon recorded 7.07% and 5.84% respectively. The villagers once who lived on agriculture have, in order to adapt themselves to the prevailing situation of flood in the villages, taken up
various occupations like petty business (small/mini shops), cattle rearing, poultry farms, fishing, firewood business, weaving, selling of rice –beer selling etc. Thus a major shift away from agriculture and farm occupations could be observed from the findings.

As part of the findings on impact of flood on economic and occupational life in the study villages, the role of Self Help Group (SHG) has been increasingly felt in all the three study villages to tide over emergencies that include problems during flood.

Part D deals with the impact of flood on material culture of the study villages. So far as material culture is concerned, impact of recurrent flood have been observed in the construction of their houses, use of water transport like boats and raft, agricultural implements, fishing implements and others. In flood affected villages of Sunarigaon 63.64% followed by Bahir Tapit with 46.15% residential houses are platform houses made of bamboo thatch and wood as compared to non-flood affected Akajan village with 19.23%. RCC and Assam Type houses with Tin roof are seen only in Akajan.

Use of boat and banana raft is used in day today life of the flood affected villages during flood. However these items of material culture are absent in the non-flood affected village.

Part E describes the impact of flood on some aspects of family and community life. With reference to family, two aspects like family size and family type has been considered. For example, it was observed that the proportion of very small sized families are more in Bahir Tapit (46.15%) followed by small families (28.84%) while only 5.77% are very big families. Interviews with informants revealed that it is mainly due to flood that they are forced to live in small families as the big traditional joint families have broken up. Similar results have been observed in Sunarigaon.

Impact of flood may also be observed in case of family type. Nuclear families are more in the flood affected villages 82.69% in Bahir Tapit and 81.81% in Sunarigaon compared with the non-flood affected Akajan village with 45.83% nuclear families.
The community life of the flood affected villages show significant impact of regular flood. These villagers have come united in times of flood to perform various individual and other tasks on community level such as repairing of embankment, construction and use of artificial mud platforms for domestic animals, collection and distribution of flood relief materials etc.

Although it has to be admitted that impact of flood has not been able to alter the basic natures and character of Mishing kinship and social structure and culture in general and kinship pattern in particular, it has been observed that strong bonds of kinship network of the Mishing people could be observed during and after the flood havoc. Kinship bond has been helping many families who have become landless due to erosion and flood

In Part F data religious practices also reveal that flood has not been able to effect a drastic change in the traditional Mishing religion. Only effect of flood could be observed in shortening or deferring of certain life-cycle and other community rituals and festivals. However, in the flood affected villages a few families have been converted to Christianity and a few others have taken up Bhagabati Dharma.

Part G describes the coping strategies adopted by the people. Some of these have come up along with consideration of other objectives of the study like material culture economy and community life. Here special mention may be made to a few significant aspects:

a. They construct Chang ghars (Platform houses) with specially made platforms at different levels so that they can shift to these higher platforms as and the water level rises and submerge the lower levels. In BahirTapit, houses with three to four platforms are seen. These platforms are used for cooking, sleeping and even weaving activities too.
b. Drying of fish and storing of comparatively durable items like pumpkins and paddy happens to be another significant coping strategy of these people during flood.

c. Camp life: During heavy flood, the villagers of Bahir Tapit and Sunarigaon

CONCLUSION

The relationship between habitat and culture has been the focus of Anthropological studies since its beginning as an academic discipline.

The findings of the study reveal impact of flood on different aspects of the Mishing community of Dhemaji District, Assam.

Finally, it may be mentioned that regular flood in the area have severely changed the village topography and settlement pattern of the flood affected villages beyond recognition. Flood along with sand deposition in farm lands and erosion have forced many agricultural families to take up non-agricultural occupations. Thus, a major shift away from agriculture and farm occupation could be observed from the findings due to flood.

Recurrent flood in Bahir Tapit and Sunarigaon have affected the literacy and educational level of the villagers. Many families and individuals of flood affected have temporarily shifted or even permanently migrated to other areas to avoid flood havoc.

Small sized nuclear families have become more common in flood affected villages. But community effort is being strongly felt before, during and after each flood.
episode. Although, it has to be admitted that, impact of flood has not been able to change the basic character of Mishing religion and social-organisation. Some modification like deferring or abbreviating rituals during flood or living in camp life has been adopted by the people.

The people in the flood affected villages have evolved certain strategies to cope with the flood situation using both traditional and non-traditional means.

On the whole, the present study reveals that impact of flood is more visible in aspects of village settlement pattern, material culture and occupational pattern. In non-material aspects like religion and social life also, there has been a gradual change. But the basic religious and social organisation of the Mishings has remained relatively unchanged.

To certain extent the finding is in tune with the cultural lag theory of Ogburn (1922) which states that material culture changes at a faster rate than non-material culture. Economic changes in the areas with dwindling of agriculture in the perennially flood affected villages also accompanied by falling in educational attainment qualification in these villages have led to the growth of unplanned low paying informal sector in the area.

Such a sorry state of affairs may lead to further changes in the economy which in turn affect the other aspects of the Mishing society and culture in future.
Scope for further studies

While conducting the present study it was felt that a few studies could be taken up in future.

- Detailed studies of Mishing technology and material culture (for example building of high mud platforms) may be taken up in order to know the details of traditional technology and its findings could be applied to other areas like wildlife sanctuaries to protect wildlife.

- Study on indigenous knowledge system of the Mishings and other communities living with flood may also be worthwhile to find out how the traditional knowledge have been able to guide in times disaster including flood disaster.

Suggested Measures:

- Boat Clinics may be used by the Government and non-governmental agencies to cope with the various illness and epidemic that break out during and after flood more particularly in the relief camps.

- Measure to be taken up to prevent deforestation and unplanned earth cutting of highlands. Policies should be framed for remedial teaching for students and training for skill development for different categories of people. Seminars, workshops and other awareness generation programmes should be taken up for disaster mitigation and preparedness among all concerned.

- Recurrent flood has hampered the educational progress of the students. Therefore, there is an urgent need to take up courses or bridge courses at different educational level so that the students can cope up and continue with their higher studies.