Chapter-V

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE OF TRIBAL COMMUNITY IN BARAK VALLEY.

ROLE OF CLAN IN THE SOCIETY:

The most important element of the Barman's social structure is the clan. In the Barman society both patriclan and matriclan system are prevalent. There are forty clans to which males belong and forty two clans to which females belong. The male clan is known as 'Sengfong' and female clan as 'Jaddi' or 'Zulu'. The male child belongs to his father’s clan, while the female child belongs to mother's. For example, when a male of the 'Hasungsa' clan marries a female of the 'Sagaodis' clan, the male issue of the couple will be a 'Hasungsa', while the female issue, a 'Sagaodis'. This is an unique system as very few tribes present the example of double descent. The example of double descent is found in six areas namely Melanesia, Polynesia, West Africa, Bantuspeaking South Africa, Australia and India. In India, besides the Barman's in Cachar and Dimasas in North Cachar, Todas of Nilgiris provide the example of double descent.

There are forty Sengfong and forty two Zulu clans now, but when they were living in Dimapur and also before that period, the clans were fewer in number. It is known from the census of India, 1931; that in the pre-Dimapur days there

were only seven Sengfongs. These Sengfongs were (i) Bodosa (Former Royal), (ii) The Thaosangsa (Ruling clan at that time), (iii) Hasyungsa (The Royal Collaterals but not ruling), (iv) Langtasa, (v) Jigidingsa, (vi) Haflong Phongsan and (vii) Shengjungsa.

It is also learnt from the same Census Report that when the Kacharis ruled in Dimapur, there were thirteen Zulus among the females. Some of these are: (i) Sagaodi (the clan of Raja's mother), (ii) Phraidi (the clan of Prime Minister's wife), (iii) Male Bangyabsa (the Royal Cooks), (iv) Mobidasa (the professional Hunter), (v) Female Saidima (the hereditary washers of Royal Rice), (vi) Anujiva (the hereditary Ayahs of Royalty), (vii) Ngablaisa (Fishermen of Royalty).

The number of clans increased after the Kacharis had left Dimapur. Perhaps during the reign of Krishna Chandra many new clans were created and received royal recognition in return to payment of money to the Royal Exchequer.

It is learnt that the Sengfongs and the Zulus were first created on the basis of division of labour just like the division took place in the Vedic Aryan Society in the past. There were washermen, barbars, goldsmiths etc. among them. We are given to know that the people of the Parbatcha Sengfong were occupationally blacksmiths, people of Jaharisa Sengfong were barbars and the people of Daola-Gupusa worked also as blacksmiths. But, at present, we do not find barbars, blacksmiths, goldsmiths etc. among them.

The names of forty sengfong are given below:

1. Adaosa.
2. Bader Bagiasa.
3. Batarisa or Bodosa.
4. Daodunglangthasa.
5. Daolagajaosa.
6. Daolagupusa.
7. Dibragadesa.
8. Difusa.
10. Girisa.
13. Hapilasa.
15. Hasengsa
17. Joharisa.
18. Jramba.
20. Kharigapsa.
22. Laobangdisa.
23. Langthasa.
24. Langthadaogasa.
25. Lapthaisa.
27. Maibangsa.
29. Mitherphangsa.
30. Nabensa.
31. Naidingsa.
32. Nunisa or Londisa.
33. Parbatsa.
34. Phonglosa.
35. Purusa or Warisa.
36. Rajyungsa or Lampusa.
37. Sarangphangsa.
38. Singyungsa.
39. Thaosensa.
40. Zigdungsa.

It is interesting to note that a researcher now finds difficulty in knowing the exact 'Zulu' which a female really descended from. This is because the women, in general, are not willing to reveal the names of their 'Zulu' to an outsider. However, there is no difference of opinion in regard to the total number
of "Zulus" recognised by the then Rajas. It is also disclosed by the Barmans that originally fortytwo women belonging to their society were earmarked for fortytwo different "Zulus" by the ancient Rajas. It is not known whether there were any "Zulus" besides the abovementioned number. The detailed description, according to one opinion, about the fortytwo "Zulus" designated as mentioned above, is displayed below :-

**Table 5.1**

**LIST OF WOMEN RECEIVING ROYAL RECOGNITION AS ZULUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name of the woman receiving royal recognition as Zulus</th>
<th>Name of the Zulu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Kunja Barmanee</td>
<td>Saikudi Zuludi, Chagaudi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Omra Barmanee</td>
<td>Fachaidi Gedeba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Guyaing Chaodi Barmanee</td>
<td>Naireng Gedebecham Dechaga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Thailudi Barmanee</td>
<td>Chaidima Gedeba, chagao changa farai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Ambhika Barmanee</td>
<td>Naireng Bhanglaima Gedeba. contd...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Yashamati Barmanee.</td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Praichang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Dechaidi Barmanee.</td>
<td>Mireng Mirong Ma-gedeba.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Anjana Barmanee.</td>
<td>Mireng Bhanglama Kacheba.</td>
<td>contd....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oyai Chundi Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>Maimandi Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jaludi Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thangjadi Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jhaludi Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chandrabali Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td>Julaidi Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td>Samdi Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td>Subhangdi Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kanchandi Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yashada Barmanee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Kacheba.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Saidima Kacheba.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Kacheba.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Ma-Gedeba.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Dziungma.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Saidima Kacheba.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Kacheba.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Kacheba.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Mairong Kacheba.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Kumbhading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maireng Bairengcha.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the number of Zulus is taken into consideration, it is apparent from the above stated list that the number will be less than fortytwo because on certain occasions, same Zulu was awarded to two or more than two women. For example, "Maireng Mireng Kacheba" was given to the women in the serial number 40, 36, 21, 34; "Maireng Mireng Kacheba" was given to the women in the serial number 32, 30; and "Maireng Mireng Ma-Gedebs" was given to the women in the serial number 39, 31, and 27. As regards the position of the Zulus, it is noticed that there is no unanimity among the Barmans regarding the social status.
order of the Zulus, though the status is believed to be different for different Zulus.

The clans regulate marital ties of the Barmans. They follow the rule of clan exogamy. At the time of marriage, a boy can not marry a girl of his mother's matriclan and father's patriclan. However, after marriage, the girl is dissociated from the patriclan of her father and get associated with her husband's patriclan. But the matriclan of the girl is never changed.

In the Barman society, there are a few women who do not belong to the 42 Zulus. In the past, this group of women were illtreated and they had to remain unmarried. Still today most of the unmarried spinters within the 42 "Zulus" do not use the belongings of the above mentioned clanless women.

It should be mentioned here that the mother tongue of both the Barmans in Cachar and the Dimasas in North Cachar is Dimasa. Both the tribes have the concept of Sengfong and Zulu. But in North Cachar Hills, every Dimasa writes down his/her surname as per one's patriclan. But in the Barak Valley every 'Dimasa speaking Tribal' writes 'Barman' as their surname.

**BIRTH RITES** :

In regard to the birth rite of the Barmans, it is made known by them that before one or two months of the birth

of a child, they offer puja known as 'Gishimtiya Modal'. The priest, known as Hojai, and his assistant, known as 'Barua', are engaged for the performance of the said puja. A kind of liquor made of rice which is known as 'Zu' and poured down into a dried gourd known as 'Laothai' is dedicated to Sibrai — their traditional God. In the puja, a pair of pigeon and a drake are sacrificed to the God. The priest has to conclude the puja by the moon.

On the day of the birth of the child, a pair of dove is dedicated to the 'Sun God' through the Midwife of their society, known as "Hojai zo". After the birth of the child, the mothers are kept interned in the room till the nerve centre of the child is dried up fully. The mother of the new born child remains 'foul or unholy' for a month. On the ninth day of the birth, a ceremony is observed which is known as 'Nineth birth day ceremony'. On that day the hair of the new born child is shaven by the barber. Within the period of one year, according to their advantage, the Hojai zo and Barua are given cloths and/or money and a ceremony is observed wherein bigwigs of the village and other villagers are invited to grace the occasion. This function is known as 'Nanabesheng Jiriba' or 'Nanadao Sathaiba'. 'Naming Ceremony' is done according to Hinduism. During the post-independence period, there has not emerged any change regarding the birth rites among them.

MARRIAGE:

Different types of marriage prevailing among the Tribal communities has already been explained in Chapter I.
So far the marriage of the Kacharis is concerned, it is learnt from the Census of Assam, 1891 that "Marriage is by purchase or servitude and sometimes also by capture. The action of our Courts tends to discourage the latter form and it is now much less resorted to than formerly. But even now it is by no means uncommon in cases where the parents of the girl are averse to the match or demand which is too high a price for her. When this happens, the lover lies in wait for his sweetheart and carries her off with a show of force to his own house, after which negotiations with the parents are resumed, and an amicable settlement is usually arrived at. There is no special religious ceremony at marriage, a feast to the villagers being the most important part of the performance. When purchases resorted to, the price paid usually varies from Rs. 60 to Rs. 100, but these limits are by no means fixed, and much larger sums are occasionally paid. When the would-be-bridegroom is too poor to pay the sum demanded, he frequently enters the parent's house and works for them three or four years just as Jacob is said to have worked for Rachel.

The present system of marriage has, however, undergone a radical transformation. In the present practice, the usual system of marriage is the negotiated marriage. Whenever the parents of a bridegroom get information of a prospective bride and wish to get the marriage between them solemnised, they would go to the house of the girl with a Chotopan (Small Pan) along with

elderly kinsmen. They bow down to the parents and elderly superiors of the girl and offer Chotapan to them. After the marriage proposal properly discussed, they fix the date for Boro Pan (Big Pan), another ritual performance, amount of Kalti (Bride price) to be paid and the date of marriage.

On the day of 'Boropan', the boy's father or guardian visits the house of the girl with Boropan and one or two 'Laothai' (Container of 'Zu', a kind of wine. The container is made of dried gourd) full of 'Zu'. He bows down to the parents and elderly persons present at that time and offers the articles to them. This function is known as 'Laothailangba'.

On the day of wedding, when the bridegroom reaches bride's house, the Barman priest, "Hojai", performs the traditional rite, 'Mayofa Gerba'. The priest sacrifices one drake and Zu is also offered at that time. This function is observed as a preparatory to the safe journey of the couple. This Gerba is done because they believe that the evil spirits cannot follow the couple on their way and harm them. In the Barak Valley, this rite is going to be out of practice gradually.

The most important feature of the Barman marriage is the payment of Kalti. The parents of the bridegroom have to pay some money to the parents of bride. The amount of Kalti paid during the beginning of the present Century was up to Rs.125/- depending upon the status of the Zulu.  

In the Barak Valley, at present, the Barman society fixes different amounts of Kalti in different Zones. However, it

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ranges from Rs.101 to Rs.305. But, besides Kalti, most of
the parents of Bride groom have to pay some money in the
form of 'help' to the parents of bride. As a result of the
efforts initiated by some leaders of the community, the
amount of money to be paid as 'Kalti' has become fixed, but
thereafter, a new custom of rendering monetary help to the
bride's parents has come in to being. The main intention of
the leaders of the society was to prevent the parents of the
bride from demanding a high bride price but their efforts
have not achieved much of a success.

The spread of education among the boys and girls in
the community has brought about a change in respect of the
system of payment of 'Kalti' to the Bride's parents. In the
villages Dalu, Bijoypur, Ganga Nagar etc., some parents of
the educated girls revealed that at present instead of taking
'Kalti', they have to pay dowri to the parents of the bride
groom. This is because, they said, the number of highly
educated Barman Boys in the Barak Valley is very small.

The Barmans of Cachar perform their wedding cerem-
mony in a Brahmanical way. The traditional Bengali priest
is required to conduct the nuptial rites. In this connection,
it should be mentioned here that the Kachari King Krishna
Chandra invited twelve Brahmins for performing religious rites.
The heirs of these twelve Brahmins are now the priests of the
Barmans.

Around half a century ago, the wedding ceremony of
the Barmans was short and simple. The ceremony was performed
in a day. But at present, perhaps, as a result of imitation of
Carriage ceremony of the Bengalee Hindus, the snob-appeal of the ceremony has gained greater attention and, now, there is almost no difference between the manners in which the wedding ceremony in the Bengalee Hindu society and Barman society is observed. Thus the wedding ceremony of the Barmans which took only one day to complete, requires now even more than four days to perform. The observation of wedding rites and the entertainment of the invited people are becoming increasingly costlier. In the past, around four decades from now, the people invited to the marriage feast were generally served with only two items of food besides rice. These two items were 'Kalai' pulses and tortoise meat. The pulses were prepared with 'Khar' which also happens to be a popular food item in the Assamese Communities. Khar is a food item of salty and alkaline nature and is prepared by burning the roots of Pechha Bamboo or bulk of Banana tree or the roots of Kalai pulses. It is a substitute of salt. But now these two items are no longer served in a marriage festival. Instead, many other items of food are now served at the feast. These items never failed to include, fish and Masur-Dal.

In the contemporary early days, the Bengalees and the Barmans were not invited to each other's wedding feasts. But now-a-days, they invite each other, and the invitations are respectfully accepted in both the Camps.

From this, it may be said that with the passage of time, the social relationship between the Bengalee Hindus and the Barmans has become closer and the observation of the wedding
ceremonies is becoming more and more expensive. Most of the parents having their children of marriageable age have now to run in debts or to sell out some of their lands or other assets to enable themselves to meet the expenses of their children's wedding.

The so-called love marriage is not uncommon. When a boy and a girl fall in love and determine to get married but their parents refuse to consent to the proposal, they may run away from their home to some other village in order to get married there. There they inform the Khunang (Headman) of their purpose. The Khunang will then send words to the parents of both the boy and the girl, requesting them to come and meet him. The Khunang holds a meeting with other elderly people of his village and also the parents of the boy and the girl. Generally, after long discussion, they reach an amicable settlement. The couple is permitted socially to live as husband and wife. A nominal fine is normally imposed upon them. The amount of fine in case of boy is double the amount the girl pays. The parents of the bride groom present a he-goat and the parents of bride offer a 'Jar of Zu'. The meat of the he-goat and the Zu have to be dedicated to 'Sibrai', a deity, before the elderly persons present and served with these. The unmarried boys and girls and children are not allowed into this meet, possibly because the older members want to discourage the younger members of their community from indulging in breaking their social rules and customs. No Brahmin priest is engaged in such type of marriage.
There is, for the poor members of the community a simplified kind of wedding known as 'Zukudima' and the rite is called 'Mayofa' which is performed on many occasions other than marriage, too.

In the Barman society the widower who wishes to marry finds an unmarried spinster. So, he has no other alternative but to marry a widow.

There are a few women who do not belong to any of the fortytwo clans. The young men within 42 Zulus generally do not want to marry such alienless women. So, generally marriage takes place between the boys and girls belonging to these families. So, in respect of marriage, they form another group among the Barmans.

The Barmans in Cachar, like all other tribes, do not allow to break the rule of endogamy. We do not know of any marriage which took place before independence between a Barman and a non-Barman who is not a Dimasa. The marriage between the Barman and the Dimasa is permissible because both of them share a common origin, having the concept of Zulus and Sengongs. It is reported that in the post-independence days and more particularly since seventies, some Barmans are getting married to people belonging to the other communities even non-tribals. For example, seven girls from Bilaipur, Six from Gonganagar I and another Six from Bijoypur of the Barmian Community are married to non-Barmian grooms. These girls are educated and mostly Service holders. Their husbands belong to different
communities namely, the Bengalee, the Miri, the Mizo, the Punjabi and the Tipra. One or two instances of such type of marriage are found in some other villages. However, it should be mentioned here that all but two of these girls were not outside the fortytwo Zulus.

However, three Barman boys of the sample villages were found to have married non-Barman girls, but they were excommunicated from the society. The rule of endogamy is observed in the community. Any violation of this social rule is considered to be a threat to the purity, social solidarity, identity and discipline of the tribe.

In the past, the bride-groom after marriage had to live in wife's house for a few years. Even now, in the North Cachar Hills a section of the Dimasa live in their father-in-law's house after marriage for one year. But in the Barak Valley, no such custom is observed. The bride begins to live in the house of the bride groom after marriage.

As far as divorce is concerned, only one instance is found among the sample households. Divorce is permitted on the ground of adultery, Lunacy, impotency and barrenness etc. If a wife wishes to divorce her husband without showing any cause, she has to return the Kalti to her husband. But if the husband does so, he can not claim the return of bride price from his wife.
REMARRIAGE:

The younger brother is allowed to marry the widow of his elder brother, but he is not allowed to marry the widow of his younger brother. A widower may marry younger sister of his wife but he is not allowed to marry the elder sister of his wife.

Marital status:

The marriageable age, as in vogue in society, ranges from 27 years to 36 years in case of males and from 20 years to 33 years in case of females. The early marriage is not in practice among them. In the pre-independence days also, the marriage between the boy and the girl did not take place until both the parties are of ripe years. This is strikingly different from most of the tribal communities.

It has been calculated by the author from the Census Report of 1961 that 40.9 percent of the total Barman population was married, 54.6 percent unmarried, 4.3 percent widowed and 0.2 percent divorced. Again, from the sample survey of 1985, it has been found that 33.3 percent of the total Burman population was married, 60.8 percent unmarried, 5.8 percent widowed, 0.09 percent divorced and 0.09 percent unspecified. Thus the


ratio of married persons to total population is showing a decreasing trend, whereas the proportion of unmarried and widowed is on the increase.

The author has calculated from the Census Report of 1961 and Survey of 1985, the percentage of married, unmarried, Divorced and unspecified persons in the age group 0-14, 15-44, and 45 and above, separately for both the sexes which are shown in Table No. 5.2 and 5.3.

Table 5.2

AGE GROUP WISE PROPORTION OF MARRIED, UNMARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED PERSONS IN 1961.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>0-14</th>
<th>15-44</th>
<th>45 and above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>77.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>99.93</td>
<td>99.8</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5.3

**AGE GROUP WISE PROPORTION OF MARRIED, UNMARRIED, WIDOWED AND DIVORCED BARMANS IN 1985**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>0 - 14</th>
<th>15 - 44</th>
<th>45 and above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing table 5.2 with 5.3, the following characteristics are found:

1. There is no married person in the age group 0-14 in 1985 among both the sexes. In 1961, the percentage of married persons in this age group was also negligible.

2. In the age group 15-44, the percentage of married persons is decreasing whereas the percentage of unmarried persons is increasing and that of widows shows a slightly falling trend.
(iii) Another striking feature is that there was no unmarried female in the age group 45 and above in 1961, but in 1985, there were 2.9 percent unmarried females. The percentage of male unmarried has also increased.

(iv) Percentage of married females in the age group 45 and above has fallen by the time, whereas that of widows has increased by 10 percent.

Now, sexwise percentage distribution of marital status of the Barmans in 1961 and in 1985 is shown in the Table No. 5.4.

Table 5.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Married M</th>
<th>Married F</th>
<th>Unmarried M</th>
<th>Unmarried F</th>
<th>Widowed M</th>
<th>Widowed F</th>
<th>Divorced M</th>
<th>Divorced F</th>
<th>Unspecified M</th>
<th>Unspecified F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>37.56</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>60.05</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>31.12</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Table reveals that there is a decreasing trend in the percentage of married persons, whereas percentage of unmarried persons shows an increasing trend among both the sexes and the same for widows has increased by 3 percent.
FUNERAL SYSTEM:

When a man dies, all the Barman households in the village are informed immediately. The dead body is bathed and laid down on the ground in front of the house. They put silver coins on the eyes, hands, chest, forehead and on the mouth. They do it with the inherited belief that, had the dead man been indeb during his life time, the coins so given on the dead body would make the departed soul free from the debt. Then the sons and close relatives of the deceased carry the corpse to crematory ground near the stream of the village. The end of a white cotton thread is kept tied with a tree or a post inside the house of the dead and one of the persons joining funeral procession would go on holding the reel of thread until he touches the crematory ground. Some women would accompany him throwing paddy and cotton on all sides. A pyre of twelve layers of woods is constructed in the crematory ground. The widows or girls make an umbrella with the help of bamboo stick and coloured thread on the crematory spot. This is known as "Bakarihoba". Then the member of the family ( generally the eldest son ) after moving round the pyres breaks an egg on the head of the deceased. Then they set fire to the pyres. After the corpse is burnt, the ashes are thrown in to the stream. The other funeral rites are performed in conformity with the Brahmanical ways of the Hindu Community. The Barmans perform the "Shradha" ceremony on the 13th day of the death. So long as "Shradha" ceremony is not performed, every day the Barmans offer meat, fish and a kind of leaf "Khanaringma" to the departed soul. But the members of the
Plant-leaf 'Khanaringma', a special item in the post funeral meal offered to the departed soul.

Goat-shed of the Barman Tribals.
household and his relatives take vegetarian diet. It is known that 20/30 years ago, in the Shradha ceremony, the Kirtan of Lord Krishna composed by Raja Govinda Chandra was sung by the villagers. But now this tradition is out of practice in most of the villages.

In one of the sample villages, Ganganagar-I, it was found that some villagers celebrated the Shradha ceremony in the form of a 'common prayer' following the advice of a religious saint named Swami Swarupananda. They do not engage Brahmin priest in the ceremony. So, the culture regarding Shradha ceremony has changed to a great extent in that Village.

FAMILY SYSTEM:

On the basis of marital ties, the Barman society provides an example of monogamous family. The instance of polygamy is found only one of the sample household. One person of Lakhinagar forest Village-I is found to have three wives. But this is an exceptional case. On the basis of authority, the family provides an example of patriarchal family. Now on the basis of composition, the Barman families may be grouped under the following heads:

(i) Nuclear family:

Families usually consisting of spouses and their unmarried children are considered as nuclear. Murdock (1949: 1-27) has stated, "the first and most basic form (of family organisation) called herewith the nuclear family consists typically of a married man and woman and with their offspring,"
although in individual cases one or more additional persons may reside with them. The nuclear family is the universal human grouping. Either as a whole prevailing form of family, or as the basic unit from which more complex familial forms are compounded, it exists as a distinct and strong functional group in every known society." In the Barman Society, about 75 percent families provide an example of nuclear family.

(ii) Joint family:

When a few nuclear families of close blood ties live together, it is known as Joint family. According to Mrs. Karve, "a joint family is a group of people, who generally live under roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold properly in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred." According to Madan's definition the term Joint family should be used to mean more than one nuclear families having a common house and joint property rights and obligations to fulfill.

In the Barak valley, at present about fifteen percent families are joint as per Madan's definition. The other ten percent are of some extraordinary type.

In the pre-independence days, the Barmans were also monogamous in martial ties. It is learnt that about seventy percent households were nuclear in that period also. When a son got married, he set up his own house after 6/7 years. But now, within 2/3 years of the marriage, the boy establishes his own house. Thus the joint family breaks up within a very short period, whereas, in the past, it lasted for a few more years than today. There are various reasons for breakage of the joint family system. Of these, paucity of means in the face of multiplying needs due to a change in the very concept of happy life is perhaps the most important one.

In the family, economic or social responsibility is shared by both husband and wife. Sometimes they work jointly when required. In the agricultural season, the Barman males and females are found busy with agricultural activities like transplanting, threshing, harvesting etc. It is also noted in the census of 1881, that "the family relations among the Kacharis are on the whole sound and pure, much more so, perhaps, than in more civilized communities." 13

RELIGION:

It is learnt from the census report of India 1881 that the religion of the Kacharis was one not of love but of fear. They worshipped many deities bearing various names. These

deities were alike looked upon as generally hostile to human well-being. To propitiate the deities, meat, rice and other eatable things were offered so that their furies were not translated into social harms. 14 "When the Kacharis adopted Hinduism, they adopted the rites of Kali in their traditional form and identified her (Kali) with their own female demon Ranchandis." 15 Still Kali is their reverend Goddess worshipped individually as well as communally. Again, it is learnt from the report of B.C. Allen that when the British took possession of the district in 1830, there was "a religious establishment of Kachari Barmans, to perform sacrifices for the health of the King and safety of the people. These sacrifices were handed from primitive times and could only be performed by the descendants of the native Kachari priests. Among them was a human sacrifice for the Raja, celebrated on certain great occasions." 16 By enforcing laws, the British Government had done away with the practice of human sacrifice.

At present all the Barmans perform the religious rites in the Brahmanical ways. They also perform some Pujas like the Bengalee Hindus, e.g. Saraswati Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Kali Puja etc. Their traditional Bengalee priests performed the religious rites. However, they also perform some of the festivals in their traditional methods.

The Barmans now treat some of their traditional deities as the Hindu Gods and Goddesses. For example, they now consider their traditional deity 'Sibrai' as 'Siva' and 'Gamadi' as 'Durga'.

Unlike the other tribal groups in the North-east India, the Dimasa and the Barman remain static in their religious beliefs. Though in the neighbouring areas like those of Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur and even N.C.Hills, the Christian Missioneris succeeded to alter the religious beliefs of most of the tribes, they failed to alter the religious beliefs of the Barmans and the Dimasas. Very recently, a Christian Missionary has started their work to set up a Church at Doloicherra under Tribal sub-plan area. 2/3 Barmans have been converted into Christianity in the recent times.

FESTIVALS :

The principal function of the Barman community is the "Gaddi-sainjara." This function is celebrated on the day of "Karthik Sankranti". On that day, the members of each household at dawn offer a dish of meal containing meat, egg, fish, Zu and a kind of leaf, known as 'Khanaringma' in Dimasa language, to the spirits of their ancestors. So, this function is a form of ancestor worship. On that day, any person invited or uninvited who visits one's house is entertained with a hearty meal. According to some aged Barmans, Gaddi-Sainjara is said to be a function pertaining to the Jhum harvest. Once Barmans practised Jhum Cultivation. In the village Chailata-cherra, Kumacherra,
Gorervitor, Kachari Gaon, Dhanipur etc., the villagers informed the author that they practised Jhum cultivation before independence. Still a few Barman households in some villages are found practising Jhum in the land far from their home. In the North Cachar Hills, the kinsman of the Barmans, known as Dimasas, practise Jhum as a primary occupation. The Gaddi Sainjara is observed in every house.

The second important communal function is known as *Gerba*. This function is held in the month of Magh or Phalgun (according to the Indian calendar) once in a year. The Garba is observed for the welfare of the entire village. The village Headman known as *Khunang*, with the consultation of his assistant and other elderly persons, fixes the date of *Gerba* and the amount of subscription to be paid by each household of the village. The puja continues for two nights and a day. It is held in the boundary of the extremity of the village. During the day of Gerba, the important paths of the village are closed with some bamboo posts. No person from outside even if/she happens to be their close relative or kinsman, is allowed to enter the village. Similarly, no person from inside the village is allowed to go out of it. There are many deities worshipped during the Gerba. But after investigating different villages, it is learnt that the numbers and the names of the deities differ from village to village.

The Barman *Hojai* performs various rites of Gerba. In Gerba puja, two Hojaís and one assistant of the Hojai, known
as 'Barua', are engaged there.

During the day of Gerba, he-goats, drakes, eggs etc., are sacrificed. Zu is dedicated in the name of deity. The village remains calm and quiet in that day. Any sort of nuisance, as for example walking, playing musical instruments, singing and any work e.g. cutting bamboos, husking rice with husking instrument that makes a noise is forbidden.

In two of the sample villages, the author was informed that the Hojai in the second night of the function moves round the boundary of the village in nacket form with a cock and in that state, he tears it apart. But there is no information of the observance of this ritual in other villages.

In the village Harinagar, the beliefs of the inhabitants are, however, different. According to them, benevolent spirits would find no entrance into the village performing this kind of practice. In the village, Kachari Gaon (chandrapur) the author was informed that in Gerba puja (i) no metal utensil is used. The materials for worship of the deity are offered on the leaves of trees and water is kept reserved in a bamboo jar. (ii) In the final day, they light a fire by rubbing two pieces of dry woods in the place of worship and everybody takes this fire home and with the help of this fire they light their earthen stoves. They treat this fire as a 'holy thing'. But in other villages this custom is out of practice.

In the puja in most of the villages, women are not allowed to attend the spot, but in some villages, at day time they are allowed to take part in it. In this connection, it will not be irrelevant to say here that women are forbidden in the Shyamabri of Thaligram and Kalimandir of Laburbond.
The Gerba of the Barman community is almost similar to the Kerpuja of the Jhumias of Tripuras. The description of Ker Puja is as follows:

"An area is notified for the purpose of the puja. The occurrence of birth and death within this area during the hours of worship is regarded as a bad omen. For this reason, all expecting women and ailing aged are taken out of the boundaries or Ker as a precautionary measure. Neither man nor domestic animals can go out of the boundary during the puja; also no outsider can enter it. Wearing of shoes and turbans, using umbrella or making of noise of any kind are strictly prohibited. Puja continues for one day and two nights. It is believed that the prosperity of the following year depends on successful performance of the Ker puja."

The time of observance of Gerba and Ker Puja in the Barak Valley and Tripura are different. The Gerba is celebrated in the month of Magh or Phalgun, whereas Ker Puja is celebrated in the month of Ashar. The observance of Gerba aims at attainment of the well-being of the village people. This function is celebrated in the month of Spring when Cholera, Small Pox, Influenza etc. breaks out in the villages. The Barmans are generally afraid of any type of disease. Most of them still believe that these diseases are due to influence of some evil spirits. So, in order to pacify them Gerba is done. Most of the deity worshipped in the time of Gerba are believed to be of evil nature.

similarity of Ker Puja of the Tiperrahs and Gerba of the Barmans prompts one to think that they might have originated from the same stock. However, these festivals served the purpose of get-together, exchange of good will and maintenance of the close relation among themselves.

In the pre-independence days, the communal function Gerba was performed in every village. But now-a-days Gerba is not in vogue in some villages. Since the Gerba festival is traditionally an expensive religious occasion and since general poverty in the community due to increased inequality is on the rise, the community is fast doing away with this festival. At present, they solemnise Kalipuja in their respective villages instead of Gerba.

Moreover, the Barmans observe 'Magh Sainjara' analogous to 'Magh Bihu' observed among the Assamese. Feast is the main attraction of this festival. Za is also taken liberally. Besides these festivals, the Barmans worship the other Gods or Goddesses. These Gods and Goddesses are Ranachandi, Kali, Lakshmi, Durga, Saraswati etc. But the maximum number of the Barmans worship the Goddess Kali either individually or communally. These worships are done in a Brahmanical way. In one of the Barman households of Kacharigoan village Basanti Puja is celebrated every year. Every Barman household, as per their ability, willfully contribute to the observance of this ceremony in a befitting manner.
SUPERNATURAL BELIEFS:

The Barmansof the Barak Valley believe that the whole world is the abode of spirits. There are two kinds of spirits; (i) Benevolent and (ii) Malevolent. It is the Malevolent spirits which are responsible for various diseases. In the village Chailtacherra, the author has been informed that three malevolent spirits namely, Fainsnidhi, Fainhua and Sugathai cause various diseases in the village. The existence of some other types of evil deities in a number of other villages is also acknowledged. Some of these are Dakincha (the spirit of Jhumland), Sekainzu (the spirit of plains land), etc.

In most of the villages, there are a few Hojais who can detect the responsible deities. They are believed to be endowed with the power to channelise or control these evil spirits by sacrificing the objects desired by the spirits. These sacrificial objects are generally eggs, he-goats and cocks. It is important to note that the Hojais do not demand any benefit against their services.

So, when a member of the family becomes ill, they think that illness is caused by an evil spirit. So, they call in Hojai once or a number of times to specify the evil spirit and secure remedy. In the exercise, they have to spend a lot of money. During the first quarter of present century, most of the Barmans seldom took medicine for the cure of the disease. They called in Hojai and sacrificed a hen, tortoise, etc, to propitiate the evil spirits. But at present

the Barmans do not rely only on the activities of the Hojai but also take medicine simultaneously. The author has found some persons who are sceptic about the activities of the Hojais. This is because when \(\frac{2}{3}\) Hojais are consulted for a particular disease, they detect different responsible deities and prescribe different measures. However, they have not been able to give up their age-old prejudices fully. Among the educated persons, most of them today do not call in Hojai when anybody falls ill. In the village Dalu, when the author asked a person in the presence of other members of the family about the existence of such evil spirits in the village, they burst into laughing as if they had never any faith in the existence of such apparitions. As for an eighty year old gentlemen Mr. Ramesh Barman of Ganganagar-I, for example, he has no faith in the power of the Hojai. According to him, it is foolish to go to the Hojai instead of going to a doctor when one is ill, as most of the Hojais are illiterate and ignorant. He cited examples of Late Lamdhung Barman, and Late Sibcharan Barman who had no future generations. The act of the Hojai is Tantra-oriented, he added. Leaving the question whether Tantra is good or bad and whether the Hojais are really Tantric or not, it can be simply said that it is the education that enable them to get rid of their age-old prejudices and superstitions. It is possible that the teaching and the conduct of the saints visiting the temple of Lord Siva at Bhuban near their village have
Rigu, a skirt like Mekhela.

Rishamphai, a traditional garment for the Barman women.
enlightened them to a great extent. In most of the houses, it is seen that the pictures of Swami Swarupananda, Swami Pranabananda of Bharat Sevasram Sangha are hung on the wall. However, many Barmans till now believe that the low fertility of the soil, low production of crops, thunder etc. are also the work of evil spirits.

Again, if the peace of the family is disturbed for any reason, then the married couple of the household engages Hojai for performing 'Naiju Khilimba'. At dawn in the open field this rite is performed.

Dress and ornaments:

The Barman women are good weavers. In the past, they weaved their own cloths. The Barman woman wear "Rigu", a skirt like Mekhla, covering her chest to the feet. She wears also a belt of twisted cloth called "Rijamphai" around her waist. She wears a shorter Rigu covering her body from waist down to the feet, when she wears another garment something like a blouse. Over this garment, again she may wear a piece of cloth like chaddar called "Rikaosa". The Barman women at home wear their traditional garments but school-goers, office-goers and other young girls have taken to different modern fashionable dresses outside the village.

The traditional dress of the male is "Risha". The "Risha" is like a napkin about 3 - 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet in breadth. They used Risha as a Dhuti and covered the upper part of the body with a chaddar known as "Rimsao". About three decades ago, the
A Barmen man with his traditional dress 'nicha' and 'nimat'.

A view of the traditional outdated ornaments of the Barmans.
Barman male was found to have turban on their head. But now-a-days nobody is seen with turban. The aged man uses Khana or Rimsae at home. But when they go out they use Bhuti and or punjabi. The young boys use shirts and trousers or shorat when they go out of the village.

The Barman women are now coming into the contact with the Bengalee and the Manipuri women etc. This contact which is on rapid increase has influenced them to a very great extent in the matter of wearing ornaments of precious metals and stones of such designs, types and kinds as were not worn by them before such contact.

**INHERITANCE**:

In the Barman society, after the death of the father, the landed property and Cash money are equally distributed amongst his sons. The daughters have no claim over their father's property. Maternal property which are mainly hand-made cloths ("Rigü, Rijamphai. Bed cover etc."), looms and jewelleries are inherited through daughter's line. The other properties like Cattle, Household utensils etc. are shared or distributed among the members of the family.

**TRADITIONAL SONGS AND DANCE**:

All the villages except some tribal and predominantly tribal villages, the people no longer know their traditional tribal songs and dances. Out of the sample villages, Kumacherra, Dharmanagar, Dhanipur, Sailtacherra, Lakhinagar etc.
The elderly persons fix up the date and duration of dance, the rate of subscription etc. In the harvesting season (January - February), the young boys and girls and other enthusiastic elderly persons participate in dancing. This dance generally continues for one day and one night. However, sometimes this function continues for three days and three nights. In the Dimasa language, this function is known as 'Bishugiva'. The Musical instruments used in this dance are Kharamdima (Drum) and Morima (Flute).

VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

In every Barman village the adult male members from each household elect Khunang (Headman) for a tenure of one year. The main qualification of the Khunang is that he should be an honest, courageous, noble and intelligent man. The authority of the Khunang is absolute in the Barman village and he is respected by all. Generally, the person in the age group 45 - 70 is elected as Khunang in the Barak Valley. But nowadays, in some villages, in addition to the seniority and qualities already mentioned, the ability to speak to the outsiders has also become a necessary qualification for the Khunang. Though at present there is a Gaon Panchayat Office consisting of a few revenue villages where presidents and members are empowered to settle disputes of any kind, yet the Barmans generally settle their trifling matters in their traditional village organisation. They do not want to disclose their internal disputes to the persons outside their community. However, they caste their votes in Gaon Panchayat election and elect their
representatives. For the observation of communal festivals in the village, the Khunang with the co-operation of village elderly persons and his assistants fixes the rate of subscription, the date of festival and prepares budget in order to celebrate it. The collected money is kept reserved in the custody of the Khunang and the expenditure is also made through him. No report is obtained that the villagers in a body have done such kinds of welfare activities like construction of school, road, well and tank-digging etc. The Khunang generally settles petty cases. The Barmans are a mild people. They are not quarrelsome. No report is obtained about a Barman who is accused of theft, arson, dacoity etc. Their past record is also clean. W.W. Hunter in 1879 wrote, "The people of the Hill Tribes residing within the settled portion of the district are seldom charged with crimes of the grower sort." 19

Dilek:

In the Barak Valley, 'Dilek' (Dulu) occupies the position next to the Khunang. He may be said to be the assistant to the Khunang. Like Khunang, he is also elected by the village adult male members for a tenure of one year.

HABAISGAO:

A 'Habaisgaor' is also elected by the village male adult for a tenure of one year. His main function is to carry-out the order of the Khunang or Dilek. He collects the subscription of each

household during the time of communal festivals. He carries the message of the Khunang to any person the letter may want him to deliver.

**PHYSIQUE:**

From the report of E.T. Dalton, it is learnt that the Kacharis had a strong and stout physique. U.C. Guha also held the same view. According to him, the Barmans would fall ill rarely and would come round within a short period. But at present, most of them suffer from mal-nutrition. The author has found about 4/5 blind and a few T.B. patients among the sample households.

**LANGUAGE:**

There have emerged many changes in the spoken language of the Barmans among themselves. It is known that Dimasa is the mother tongue of the Barmans. But at present, we find the use of many Bengali words at the time of conversation among themselves in their language. It is also found that they cannot recollect the Dimasa words for the equivalent Bengali words which they now use even while speaking their own language.

**LITERATURE:**

At present "Kholongma" is the only monthly News-review in Dimasa language in the Barak valley or elsewhere. Its first


issue was published in August 1984. Many Dimasa-speaking Tribals from different parts of Assam e.g. N.C. Hills, Cachar, Karbi Anglong, Nowgong districts of Assam, and Dhansiripar area of Nagaland have been sending articles for publishing in this news-reviews. However, it is learnt that some efforts were also made in the past for the publication of some magazines or news-reviews in the Barak Valley and N.C. Hills. The "Dimasa" — an yearly magazine, was published in the Barak valley for ten years. Its publication stopped in 1974. A few issues of the other magazines in Dimasa language viz. "Gwdaing Khurang" (1972-73) and "Wai-Mijing" (1978) from N.C. Hills, Herembha Kurang (1982) from Lanka, and Demalu (1973) from Silchar were published from time to time, but they could not continue for various reasons.

It is learnt that Jamia Barman who was a very renowned piper wrote some songs in Dimasa language during 1920's. His son Dighijay Barman wrote some poems in the Dimasa language during 1940's. At present some of them have started to write in the Dimasa language in order to publish the articles in the "Kholongma".