CHAPTER III

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Life style and social pattern of a society is the direct result of the accumulated heritage of ages past. It differs from one community to another. The culture of a community is also the result of accumulated activities carried out in day to day social life. Hence, culture reflects the life style of a nation or community. With perspective and analytical study the researcher has observed the mode of social and cultural life of the Char area people of Barpeta district. The socio-cultural life of these people can be discussed as follows:

**Agro-based society**

As stated earlier, the ancestors of present-day Assam's Char area people were considerably encouraged by the British Colonial Government as well as some of the Assamese people to come to Assam for agriculture. Hence, the Char area Muslim people are basically agriculturists. As an agriculturist group, these people always prefer to live in the alluvial riverine area. Ninety five percent of these people are directly attached to agriculture. The rest are in business, service and other occupations. Since agriculture is the main source of livelihood of the Char area Muslims so, the Char area Muslim society is agro-based society.

**Dewani or Matabbor dominated Society**

Char area Muslim society of Assam is largely dominated by *Matabbor* or *Dewani* (influential persons). Those persons who generally possess more agricultural land and other properties in society are respected as *Matabbor* or *Dewani*. According to Jagannath Bujarbaruah, the then Sub-Deputy Collector of Barpeta Sub-Division (1924-1928), the Assamese people of Barpeta sold waste land to immigrant Muslim farmers and earned
money. The farmers who gradually became rich by possessing more land and producing various crops therein were regarded as Matabbor or Dewani.3

The villagers are interested in social unity and integrity. Nobody wants to live in isolation. There are some units in each society locally called Somaj.4 Some Somaj are big and some small in size. In big Somaj there are 150 to 200 families each. While the small Somaj consists of 20 to 50 families. There is no hard and fast rule with regard to the size of a Somaj. Every Somaj is guided and regulated by Dewani or Matabbor. The Dewani or Matabbor regulates the activities of Somaj as per traditional rules. No villager generally refuses the orders of the Dewani or Matabbor. Matabbors are respected persons in society. Everybody obeys them in every aspect of social life. The dominance of Dewani or Matabbor is such that everybody is bound to act and behave in the manner the former expects. Now-a-days, Dewani's absolute dominance over anybody is diminishing due to expansion of modern education.

Traditional Joint Family

The people of Char area of Barpeta district have their traditional joint families. Grand father, grand mother, parents, children and other blood related persons live in the same court-yard in a joint family. Monogamy is the desirable system but there are people who are polygamous. It is generally found that the first wife in a polygamous family enjoys greater economic right and shares bigger family responsibility while the youngest one is preferred by the husband in love and affection. Since the society is agrarian, the co-wives generally work for an efficient team through mutual understanding. There was a time, when more than one wife was desirable not only to get rid of sexual monotony but also for more children who could provide greater number of working hands in the land.5 But with the changing economic condition, fragmentation of land due to the growth of
population in an enormous scale and the spread of modern education, polygamy is rapidly declining in this area.

The villagers after marriage, stay with the parents as long as economically possible and otherwise compatible. When the couples have a good number of children and the parents cannot bear the burden or when the adjustment is no longer considered possible or pleasant, they separate. The responsibility of the girls is lessened after their marriage.

**Traditional Dress and ornament**

Men-folk of this area usually wear Lungi and long shirt of different colours. The women folks usually wear blue or green coloured Saris. Young girls usually wear Ghagri (locally called) and blouse.

Kan phool, Nak Phool, Mala, Tarahar, Golkharu, Patamal, Batphool, Sitapati are some traditional ornaments of the women folks of these area. Except Nakphool all other ornaments are made of silver. Nakphool is made of gold. Now-a-days, well to do people wear ornaments made of gold.

**Settlement and House-type**

Worth mentioning is that there is scarcity of habitable land in the Char areas as the height of the Char is normally not above the highest flood level. Moreover, except a few semi permanent Chars, most of the Chars are temporary in nature. The semi permanent Chars are densely inhabited and the temporary Chars are thinly inhabited. As the Chars in their entirety get submerged during high floods, no alternative is left for the inhabitants than to raise earthen heaps for building their houses. It is observed that the Muslims and the Bengali Hindus living in Char areas prefer to raise earthen heaps for building their dwellings. The Nepalis on the other hand prefer *Chang Ghar* (tall house over wooden posts) instead of raising earthen heaps. In the semi permanent Chars the people settle down in row and in the temporary Chars they settle down here and there in the midst of
the agricultural land forming chaotic type of settlement. Moreover, the serpentine foot-paths and the narrow zig-zag Katcha roads act as the axes to which many of the households are found to cling.

The Char dwellers depend on agriculture directly. Being agriculturists, their economic condition is not good. Almost all the people live in below poverty line. So, they cannot build permanent houses. The poor villagers generally build temporary houses. Moreover, they are to change their settlement sites mainly due to heavy and unpredictable bank erosion of the Brahmaputra river. It is because of environmental uncertainty and poverty, they rather have to be content with small and temporary huts and sheds made of locally available building materials to accommodate the family and the domesticated birds and animals. Bamboo and thatch are used as building materials. They use dried jute stalk to make walls of the house. Generally the roofs are made arched following the traditional land of their origin. They generally like to construct their houses on four sides of the court-yard. In the absence of thatch a tall grass locally known as Kaicha is used as roofing materials. Many a time, the poorest people use Kaicha in building walls of the houses. They use jute rope in constructing houses. Many of the houses located in the peripheries of the Char area however, are damaged by floods every year completely or partially. They therefore, dismantle most of the houses in this zone before the arrival of the flood and erect them temporarily over the embankments or the raised platforms built by the state Government. Sometimes, they have to stay over the country boats or banana rafts for days together along with the animals during the time of floods.

Now-a-days, some well to do people of semi permanent Char area construct Assam Type Pacca Houses. As for example, a few Assam type Pacca houses are seen in Alopati, Baghmara and Majarchar of Barpeta district of Assam. Pacca houses are also found in other Char areas which are permanent in nature.
Ethnographic Profile

Ethnology is the study of contemporary culture. An anthologist usually studies a particular society with a special interest in the family lives and social environment of members of the society. Modern ethnology has tried to be systematic in satisfying man's curiosity about how people with different cultural traditions organize their lives and view the different worlds in which they live.

With this background we may discuss the people and their cultural aspects of the people of Char areas. As it has been mentioned in the preceding chapter that the ancestors of the Char dwellers migrated to Assam from erstwhile East Bengal in the early twentieth century, thus, the ethnographic profile of these people can be traced by studying the ethnography of the people of East Bengal (now Bangladesh).

There are different opinions about the origin of the people of Bangladesh. Risley, the British anthropologist who worked for long time in India, considered the people of Bangladesh as belonging to Mongoloid-Dravidian groups, while Ramprasad Chando opined that the people of Alpine race has influenced the shaping of their constitution. Biroza Shankar Guha came forward with yet another set of arguments that the Proto-Austric groups of people also have a great influence over Bangladesh's people. Thus, it is obvious that the Bengali nation is a mixed one and has a variegated culture.

Language

Language forms the basis of every culture. The study of languages thus, is considered by anthropologists as one of the four main branches along with physical anthropology, archaeology and ethnology. Language is the principal means of communication and cultural transmission among human beings. Bangladesh is a monolingual country with the language Bengali, which has a few not much distinct dialects, as the only means of communication. The phoneme or morpheme of Bengali language has some characteristics similar to those of English and Hindi language. But
ethnologists, folklorists and folk etymologists provide an interesting study as to how the knowledge and experience of the folk helped to construct new words by mixing foreign and native words. Portuguese 'Annanus' becomes 'Anarosh' (Portuguese anna Bengali rosh). English 'Hospital' changes into Bengali 'Haspatal' (English hos+Bengalee 'patal')

The people of Char area do not use standard Bengali language while talking with each other. They generally use colloquial language having similarity with the language of Pabna and Rangpur of Bangladesh. A few sentences of the people of Char area of Barpeta district have been mentioned for example-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Bengali language</th>
<th>Language of Barpeta district Char people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apne Khothay jan</td>
<td>Apne kane jan, (Baghmara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apne kuti jahai (Majarchar)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apne kahane jan (Alopati)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ami Jaitech or jucchi</td>
<td>Ami jaitachi (Baghmara)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ami jawon darchi (Majarchar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ami bhat khacchi or khaitechi</td>
<td>Ami bat khaitachi (Baghmara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ami bat khawon darchi (Majarchar)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above mentioned sentences it is clear that the dialect used by the Char dwellers of Barpeta district vary from place to place. This happens because of their ancestral different places of origin in present Bangladesh.

**Festivals**

Festivals are the external expression of the social behaviour of people. Scholars like Jacob Grimm, Max Muller, Andrew Long, James Frazer and so on have made attempts to link primitive beliefs and magical rituals with the modern festivals. We can
assume that the tradition of modern festivals is emanated from the beliefs and magical rituals of the ancient communities.

Festivals form an essential aspects of all culture of the world. Most of the societies, whether primitive or folk or elite or modern, have their own festivals and celebrate them at proper time. Some festivals are exclusively religious. Like other communities the Muslim of Char areas of Assam celebrate some festivals. These festivals are entirely religious festivals. Maharrum, Fateha -E-Dowaz-Daham, Idd-Ul-Fitre, Idd-Uz-Zaha, Sab-E-Barat, Sab-E-Qadr are some religious festivals of this area.

**Idd-Ul-Fitre**

Idd-Ul-Fitre is the most important festival of the people of Char area. Idd-Ul-Fiter is celebrated after observing Roza (fasting) for a period of one month in the month of Romzan. Idd-Uz-Zaha is also celebrated in the Islamic lunar month of Jil Hajj, two months and eleven days after the observance of Idd-Ul-Fitre. People wear new clothes and go to Mosque or 'Idgah' (Place of payer) for performing 'Namaz' (Prayer). In Idd festivals people exchange love and affection and eat various foods with friends and relatives.

**Maharrum**

'Maharrum' is celebrated in the Islamic Lunar month of Maharrum. 'Lathi Khel' is arranged in Maharrum. Some people go from house to house and show 'Lathi Khel' . People offer rice, money and other things to them. After this, they arrange a feast where the villagers take part.

**Fateha-e-Dowaz-Daham**

Fateha -E-Dowaz-Daham is celebrated on the day of birth anniversary of the prophet Mahammad. In Fateha-E-Dowaz-Daham discussions relating to the life and activities of the prophet are held in the Char area Muslim society.
Sab-E-Barat

Sab-e-Barat (Sab means the night, barat means luck) means 'Night of Luck'. It is believed that fortunes for the coming year can be moulded in the night of Sab-e-Barat by performing Namaz (Prayer) and other religious rites with devotion. Allah may be satisfied with one's prayer and he or she may be blessed by Allah. Sab-e-Barat is held on in the night of 15th Saban (Islamic month). Ruti, Pitha (Cake made of rice powder) and Suji-Halwa (sweet meals) are prepared in Sab-e-Barat and are distributed to friends and relatives. In Sab-e-Barat special Namaz is performed in Mosques. Some persons spend whole night performing Namaz to get Almighty's blessings for future good fortune and better life.

The preparation of Ruti and Halwa on the occasion of Sab-e-Barat is regarded as Tawa in Char areas. Suji or halwa is prepared with sugar, milk and various condiments like badam (almond), kismis (raisin), elachi (cardamam) lang (clove) etc. Recital of Quran and observance of Milad (prayer for the remembrance of prophet Mahammad) are important on the occasion of Sab-e-Barat.

Sab-e-Qadr

Sab-e-Qadr or Lailatul-Qadr falls on the 27th night of the Ramzan month. Sab-e-Qadr means valuable night. As per holy Quran Sab-e-Qadr is better than normal thousand nights. In the night of Sab-e-Qadr every Muslim wants to stay awaking the whole night performing 'Nafl Namaz' (voluntary prayer) for the satisfaction of Allah. Reading of Quran and recital of Sura (Quranic verses) in the night of Sab-e-Qadr are considered as Punna (religious merit).

In Char area Sab-e-Qadr is celebrated with great importance performing Namaz in local mosque. The fundamentalist Muslims of Char area eagerly await for Sab-e-Qadr from the last 20th of Ramzan.
Akika

Akika is an important religious rite of the Muslims to be performed by the parents after the birth of a child. Akika is a Sunnat (one of the activities performed by the prophet Mahmmad) and can be performed at any time during life-time of a child as there is no fixed time for its performance. According to Islamic principle two goats for a son and one goat for a daughter or one cow for a son and one cow for seven daughters are sacrificed in the name of Allah partially cutting the throats of the animals. Killing an animal partially cutting the throat is called Jabe in Islamic word. The sacrificial animal must be not less than one year old. The animal should be perfect (not to be blind, lame or otherwise stained) physically. The flesh of the sacrificed animals is distributed to neighbours, friends and relatives. Sometimes a feast is arranged and invited persons are fed with the flesh of the sacrificed animal. Akika is considered as an act of Punna (religious merit) and savior of the child for the whole life.

In Char Areas Akika is performed by well to do people. Generally, the poor people don't perform Akika for their children. However, it is not a sin if the parents don't perform Akika owing to poverty.

Milad-Sharif

Milad-Sharif is very popular religious rite among the Muslims. Before any earthly important work the Muslims generally prefer to holding a Milad-Sharif. It is a means for offering Monajat (prayer) to Prophet Mahammad who is the last savior after the worldly life. It is believed that if Monajat is done for Mahammad holding Milad-Sharif, Almighty Allah is satisfied and any kind of sins committed by a person is acquitted by Him.

In Milad-Sharif the Moulavi or Munchi (Persons well versed in religion) recite some Suras (Quranic verses) along with persons assembled on the occasion of Milad. After the Milad, Suji, Halwa, Polaw etc. are offered to the persons.
Circumcision

Circumcision or Sunnat is one of the important rites of the Muslims which is otherwise called Musalmani. This rite should be performed from the age of seven to the age of fourteen. This is act of compulsion for the boy. The circumcision is performed by a Hazam (barber) in the morning of winter season. Now-a-days, this is also done by a qualified doctor.

In the Char areas of Barpeta district the Hazam circumcises the male child. Before the circumcision the boy is bathed in the manner of a ceremonial bath. On the seventh day after the circumcision the parents arrange a feast which is known as Musalmani Khawan. Friends, relatives and neighbours are invited to the feast and they are served with Nasta (food prepared with rice, milk and sugar etc) Pitha (Cakes prepared form rice powder) Curd, Meat etc. The relatives, friends and all other invited guests provide the boy with clothes and other articles as gifts.

Recital of Scriptures

There is a tradition of recital of scriptures in Char area Muslim society. There are some elderly persons who are skilled in reciting melodiously. Generally, the interested villagers assemble in a certain court-yard at night and listen to the recital of scriptures melodiously done by the skilled persons. The scriptures which are usually read are related to life history of Abu Hanifa, Badiuz-Zaman, Gafur Badshah and so on.

The recital or reading is generally held in the evening of the harvest. Sometime, this is held in day time also in the rainy season at the rests.

Agriculture and Associated Culture

As an agriculturist group of people the Char area Muslims depend directly on agriculture for livelihood. Hence, the farmers of this area are the custodians of some traditional culture associated with agriculture.
A pair of cows, a plough, a yoke, a plot of land are the minimum asset every cultivator needs. A spade, a sickle, a harrow and a weeding tool are also essential for agriculture.

The cultivators of the Char area of Barpeta district, like others, have been using ploughs made of wood. Every cultivator either by himself or with the help of others make a plough for tilling land. A yoke is made of either wood or bamboo. A bamboo yoke is more comfortable than the wooden one. All essential agro-tools are generally made by the farmers themselves or get them made by others skilled in making them. Cultivator who gets agro-tools made by others is required to do some works in the house of the maker. Now-a-days all agro-tools can be purchased in market.

The farmers of Barpeta Char area keep themselves busy in agriculture almost the whole year. Various crops are produced throughout the year. But the main season of agriculture of this area begins from 'Fagun' (February-March). This season in known as Dhan-Pater Mosum (season of paddy and jute). Cultivators become very serious for producing Ausdhan and Pat (Paddy and jute) which are considered to be the main crops of the year. If the cultivator cannot produce more crops in this season, they will have to suffer for the whole year. So, all the cultivators prepare themselves with cows, ploughs and other agro-tools in the month of Fagun. There is a proverb among the people of this area regarding agriculture. The proverb is - Jar pushena hale Tar pushena konokale.

The meaning of the proverb is that one who is not self-sufficient with agriculture, he will never be self-sufficient in life.

Every farmer gets up from bed before dawn with the cock's crow. They feed their cows with grass and straws and gets ready for ploughing. They go to the fields with plough and yoke on shoulders, sticks in hands and the pairs of cows. The farmers of this area use cows and bullocks for tilling. They tie the pair of cows to the yoke and start ploughing from early morning to mid-day. Two or more farmers generally plough
together in the field of one farmer and the other day that of the other. This mutual arrangement of ploughing is called *Gata*. Now-a-days, this tradition of *Gata* is diminishing gradually. As the farmers work hard in the agricultural field from early morning to mid-day, there is custom of supplying them tiffin in the field itself. This is termed by somebody as *Nahul* and some as *Nasta*. Son, daughter, wife or any relative of the farmer takes *Nahul* or *Nasta* to the field. This *Nahul* or *Nasta* consists of rice or other food.

The farmers prepare their fields with hard labour and utmost care for paddy and jute. After the field is well prepared, the farmers sow paddy or jute seeds in the field. There is a popular custom as regards sowing seeds. Friday is considered as the best day of the week by the farmers and they start sowing from Friday. Generally, they sow paddy seeds at first. The vessel used for carrying seeds is kept on *Macha* after the sowing is over. *Macha* is a high place inside the house built by bamboo or wood to keep essential goods of the house-hold. The folk belief behind this is that if the vessel is kept on ground after sowing, *Lakhsmi* (Goddess of fortune) goes away and crops wither away.

All farmers usually are optimistic about more product from crops and thus they keep themselves engaged in nursing crops from the very beginning. They work hard to weed out the field by removing unwanted grasses grown along with the crops. For weeding, every farmer uses *Naingla* (Weed-too) in the field to make crops thin. They use traditional *Pachun* (tool) to weed grasses grown in the field. Weeding crops is called *Nirani*. A widely prevalent custom associated with *Nirani* is *Chata*. *Chata* means a group of farmers mutually united to carry out *Nirani*. This *Chata* works in the field of every member forming the *Chata* one after another. All members of the *Chata* are provided with meal twice on the day (noon and night) by the owner on whose field they weed on that day. This *Chata* is also a means of co-operation and interdependence among the villagers of the Char area of Barpeta district. There are many farmers in this area who
own vast area of agricultural field. This well-to-do farmers cannot weed their whole crop fields with the help of *Chata*. Their crops are generally weeded by *Magna kamla* or *Magun kamla*.\(^3^3\) *Magna-Kamla* means the crowd of villagers that help *Dewani* or *Matabbar* and other rich farmers to get their vast field weeded in a day. On such occasion, all villagers come out of their homes early morning with *Pachun* (weeding tool) in their hands and assemble in home of the person who wants *Magna-Kamla*. They go to the field and begin *Nirani*. They work whole day in the field with joy and merriment. This joy and merriment become more joyful with dance and songs. The person who sings and dances is called *Boyati*.\(^3^4\) The songs the *Boyati* sings are called *Jarigan*.\(^3^5\) The *Boyati* keeps engaged the *Magna kamla* work in the field in a row. *Boyati* takes his position in front of the row. He also takes an umbrella or some time a *Gamochya* (Towel) in his hands.

*Magna-Kamla* is fed with light food in the forenoon and a simple lunch at midday. They are also provided food at night. Milk, fish, meat and various kinds of *pithas* (cakes made of rice powder) are items of food offered at night.\(^3^6\)

Now-a-days, the tradition of *Chata* and *Magna-Kamla* are diminishing. The farmers get their crop-fields weeded by paid labourers.

Since the whole process of agricultural production depends on rainfall and sun, there remains the possibility of damage, destruction or low production every year. Too much rain and drought are bad for the crops. When it rains continuously for several days, crops begin to wither and farmers cannot go to agricultural field to nurse crops. Such an inclement weather is a matter of concern for the farmers. There are some beliefs among the people, especially the elderly women that the raining weather goes away if stars are symbolically bound together by singing folk songs.\(^3^7\) So the women folk sing as follows at night:
EK tara dui tara
Tarara hoilo tin bai
Baindahalai dui bai
Kalikar raide burir matha
Futum futum kare-
The meaning of the song -
One star two star
Stars have three brothers
We do tie two brothers
Tomorrow will be suny
And old women's head
Would shatter of sun rays.

Drought is not only bad for crops but also a matter of concern for all domesticated animals. When a long drought occurs, all farmers get frightened of sure damage of their crops and animals. Hence, they want rain to save crops and animals from drought-damage. The farmers and the children sing some songs and pray to Allah (God) for rain. They sing-

Allah megh de pani de
Chaya de re tui Allah
Ashman hoilo kala kala
Mati Hoilo fata
Allah Megh de ..........
The meaning of the song -
Oh, Allah, give rain, give rain
Give shadow, oh, Allah
Sky has become dark
Earth has become shattered
Allah, give rain-

When paddy is ripe, a farmer cuts a few stalks of the paddy and ties them on a post of his house. This is called *Ag Dhan Kata* (Cutting early paddy stalk). The belief behind this is bringing Lakshmi to house. The farmers of this area bring their harvests home carrying them on heads. Paddy is separated from straw by *Malan*. *Malan* means spreading a heap of paddy in the court-yard and getting it thrashed with cows. After this, the grains are kept in *Dol* (Containers made of bamboo). The people of Char area do not eat rice without feeding *Munchi* (man who performs religious activities) at first. This feeding is known as *Munchi Khayan*.

**Folk Games**

In every society there are same traditional games and sports. These games and sports are the sources of genuine enjoyment of the people. Like other societies, there are some traditional games and sports in the Char area of Barpeta district which are sources of enjoyment of the people, particularly of the youths. Traditional popular games of this area are *Hadudu, Gollah, Bauchouchi, Dang-Guti, Lathikel, Naukhel, Monpachar* etc.

**Hadudu**

*Hadudu* is one of the interesting games of the Char area. This game is played by young boys. Generally, the girl folks do not play this game. *Hadudu* is played in the afternoon in the summer season. *Hadudu* has similarity with the *Kabadi*. Two teams consisting of seven players each play this game in a small field divided into two parts by a line in the middle. One party takes its position in one part of the field and the other party that of the other part of the field. Now, a player of a party enters the court of the opposite party and tries to touch one of the players. On the other hand, the players of the opposite party try to catch him. In this process, if the attacking player touches any player of the opposite party and returns to his own court without being caught, the player who is
touched first is considered to be killed. If the attacking player is caught and kept by the opposite party in their side, the attacking player is considered to be killed. In this way, when a party succeeds in killing all seven players of the opposite party, it wins a game.

**Gollah**

*Gollah* is another traditional folk game of this locality. Two teams consisting of equal number of players play this game in a spacious field. On one side of the field there is a starting point from which the players of one party start running to reach the destination on the opposite side. All players of *Gollah* party try to reach the destination on the opposite side. The player who steps on the starting point and around whom all players of his party revolve is called *Gollah*. All players of *Gollah* party try to reach the destination but the players of the opposite party try to touch them. When somebody is touched by the players of the opposite party, he is regarded to be killed. If *Gollah* succeeds to reach the destination but the players of the opposite party try to touch them. When somebody is touched by the players of the opposite party, he is regarded to be killed. If *Gollah* succeeds to reach the destination without being touched by any player of the opposite party, he wins a game. But if *Gollah* is touched by any player of the opposite party, his party loses and the opposite party comes to the starting point. This party also tries to win game in the similar process.

**Dang-Guti**

This *Dang-Guti* is another folk game of this area. Dang is a stick of about one miter length. Guti means a small stick of five to six inches length. The *Dang* and *Guti* are made of either bamboo or wood. *Dang-Guti* is played between two parties. There is no limit of number of the players. There is starting point from which a player sticks the *Guti* and *Dang*. The player of the opposite party tries to touch the *Guti* with sticks in hands. If the player of the opposite party touches the *Guti* the player who strikes with *Guti* is considered to be dead.
Bouchouchi

This game is played in an open field. There is no limit of number of players of this game. Like Gollah in this game, there is one starting point and one ending point. The player who takes his position in the starting point is known as Bou. Bou always tries to reach the ending point of the field to win the game. The players of his or her party try to keep the players to the opposite party away by touching them while uttering the word Chi as a cant. On the other hand, the players of the opposite party always try to touch the Bou while she or he runs to touch the ending point. If the Bou reaches players, he or she wins a game. If the Bou is touched by the opposite players while he or she runs to reach the ending point he or she is considered to be killed. The opposite party now comes to the starting point and tries to win the game in the same way.

Monpachra

Two Rajas and some players are required to play this game. Raja is leader of his party. Both Rajas sit on a place near to each other. The players are required to close their eyes by pressing their hands upon the eyes by each other. Then one of the Rajas, throws Guti (a small piece of thing ade of paper or torn cloth) in the midst of the players and say the Guti has been sent to rose garden, mango garden, water-melon garden etc. Now the players open there eyes and begin to search the Guti. One who finds the Guti first, tries to submit it to the hands of his respective Raja. But he is defended by the opposite players. They also try to submit the Guti to the hands of their Raja by snatching it from the hands of the holder. In this way, a tussle goes on among the players of both the parties. In the long run, the player who come out successful in submitting the Guti to his Raja, wins a game.
Lathikhel

*Lathikhel* is a popular game of Char area Muslim society. This game is played in the Islamic Lunar month of Maharrum. Moreover, *Lathikhel* is also played in weeding ceremony. All the *Laithals* (Players) get themselves ready for the play with sticks made of bamboo, *Dao* (big knife), Sword (specially made for the play) and *Dhal* (a kind of defending tool made of slender wild bamboo). They also tie *Ghugura* (a small tinkling bell) around legs, handkerchief in hands and wrap their waists with clothes. They attack and defend each other with sticks and *Dhals* in a dramatic way while playing the game. The *Sardar* (leader) sings songs at the beginning and also in the midst of the play which inspires the players a great extent. *Lathikhel*-songs are sang collectively by some supporters along with the *Sardar*. The following is one of the *Lathikhel* songs prevalent in Char area of Barpeta district.

Ore asilam baluchare
Uthlam nai
Bajailam khat-khati
Ja kare khodai re............

The meaning of the song-

That we were in sandy land
Have sailed in boat
Have started tussle
What does Khoda (God) do, oh.....

Nau-Khel

*Nau khel* (boat-race) is another source of joy and merriment of the Char dwellers. *Nau-Khel* is held in summer when rivers are overflowed with water. This game gets festivity among the *Char*-dwellers in every year after the harvests. Mandia, Baghbor,
Alopati, Bahari are some places where *Nau-Khel* is arranged for enjoyment. Thousands of people assemble together during leisure and celebrate *Nau-Khel* as a festival. The *Nau* (boat, made especially for playing) is decorated with attractive colours before the game. Since the playing boat is much longer it requires a large number of oarsmen to play with. The *Boyati* (a person who sings songs) standing in the mid-boat sings and the oarsmen also sing the same for strength and encouragement. *Nagera* (a small kettle drum) and *Tal* (basin like musical instrument) are played while dancing and singing is performed by the *Boyati*. The audience feel delighted listening to the songs sang in melodious tunes. The following is one of the *Nau-Khel* songs-

Baicha tan dio re

Jobo korno khashi

Tarabarir hate jaia

Kinbo dater meshi

Baicha tan dio re........

The meaning of the song -

Oarsmen play oars

Shall kill crusted goat

Going to market Tarabari

Shall buy tooth powder

Oarsmen play oars .................

Of late *Nau-Khel* is gradually diminishing its prior traditional festivity.

**Folk Songs**

*Life without recreation and enjoyment outside the family environment is full of monotony and drudgery. Towns and cities have modern amenities and facilities for recreation, such as cinema, theatre, musical performances etc. But the major modes of entertainment that a villager would find is in folklore. Almost in every village, there are*
people who can sing well and these people during the early hours of the night, twice or thrice a week, assemble together and sing before their admiring listeners. Folk songs are so dear to the people that almost in every part of folklore such as tales, dramas, proverbs and songs take a predominant position. Songs provide a constant enjoyment to the people at labour in the fields, rivers and roads.

Like other societies, the people of the Barpeta Char area also sing some folksongs for recreation and enjoyment. Bhatiali, Polligeet, Dhuwagan, Murchidi, Jarigan, Nabitatta, Dehatatta, Biyargeet, Baromashi, Kabigan etc. are some important folk songs of the people of the area. Folk songs prevalent among the Char dwellers are not the creation of famous poets, singers or any other learned men. These songs are the composition of folk singer and have been transmitted orally from generation to generation. Folk songs are famous creation of anonymous creators. Emotions, passions, sorrows, happiness, desires and all other emotive aspects of folk society are associated with folk songs.

Dhuwagan

Barpeta district Char area is not different from other Char areas. The agriculturist people of this area are hard-working. They work in scorching sun in the month of Bohag and Jeth (April, May). During these two months the cultivators keep themselves engaged in Nirani. To forget fatigue and scorching heat of the sun, they sing Dhuwagan. Dhuwagan is a kind of work song. The following is an example of this song:

Amra karma kari
Moner shuke bai
Allah rasul sahai tai
Karma bale jibon danya hoy.....

The meaning of the song-
We work for the satisfaction of mind, oh, brothers. Allah and Rasul (God and Prophet) are helpers. Life is worth with work.

**Bhatiali**

Bhatiali song is one of the popular folk songs of the people of this *Char* area. This song is generally sang at the time of flood. During flood boat-sailing becomes main means of transport and communications of most of the people of this area. They row their boats while going somewhere and sing Bhatiali songs for merriment. Sometimes winds blow in great speed and river becomes dreadful with high waves. In such terrible circumstances, people are required to cross the rivers on boat. They sing in the name of Allah and thus feel courageous.

Naye badam tuila de bai
Allah Rasul boila
Ami bhabo nodi pari dibo
Moulajir nam loiya............

The meaning of the song-

Set sail on the boat, oh ! brother
In the name of Allah and Rasul
We would cross world river
Taking the name of the lord.........

**Polligeet**

Polligeet is very popular among the Char area Muslims society. This song is sang at any time for recreation and enjoyment, Polligeet is sang in the cultural functions of schools as well. We find the name of Allah and Rasul and their various admirations and commendations in Polligeet. The following is an example of the polligeet.

Ekbar dile mukhe lou Allar nam
Oi nam sakal kajer kaji re
Oi nam maran kaler salti re..

The meaning of the song-

Chant the name Allah from your heart for once. That name is omnipotent. That name stands as companion at the time of death.

Baromashi

Baromashi is a kind of song that depicts the state of the mind from month to month, usually of a young wife when her husband keeps himself away. With the coming of a spring, when new leaves appear on the trees, cuckoos sings on the tree-tops, nature becomes really attractive and enjoyable. On seeing this beautiful scene, there springs up a sense of love in the heart of newly married woman as her husband stays away to earn money. She feels lonely and sorrow overtakes her heart. The wife wants her husband closer to herself to exchange love. And the love-thirsty wife sings -

Seet gelo basanto ailo
Aina falgun mashe
Abaginir rup jouban
Jolse diki diki....... 

The meaning of the song-

Winter is gone,
Spring has come
And this is the month of Fagun.
Beauty and youth of unlucky wife
Spark deemly.

A deep belief among the women of this area is that when a cuckoo sings on the tree, the deer and near one of a woman comes. This belief is expressed through songs. One of such song is -

Gaser dale kokile dake
Bandhu Bandhu boile
Amar praner manush buji
Ashbe amar ghare....
The meaning of the song is -
The cuckoo sings on the tree,
Friend, oh, friend!
Perhaps the man of my heart
Will come to my home.

Nabitatta
This variety of song usually contains description *Nabi* (prophet). His life history, activities, manners and behaviors are expressed nicely through this song. Sometime, sorrows, miseries and unhappiness of *Nabi* are also expressed through such song, for example -

Makkar nishan Madinar chan
Gelo re kothai
Nabir mathar upar kob marilo
Rakte badan bheshe jay.....
The meaning of the song-
The flag of Mecca and the moon of Madina,
Whether has gone!
Somebody has striken on the head of *Nabi*
And has become drenched with blood.

Biyargeet
Marriage song is called *Biyargeet*. In Char area of Barpeta district, *Biyargeet* is widely prevalent among the women folk. Marriage is on of the established customs of the
society. All parents want to give their daughters in marriage with a good groom. The parents of Char area also want this. There is a tendency of child marriage in this area. To be specific, early marriage is held in this area. Though marriage is normal social custom, yet parents feel pain while giving away their daughters in marriage. The parents' pain and sorrow are generally expressed in some Biyargeet. One of the such songs is as follows:

Mainare biya biya
Ghar karlam khalire Maina
Age jodi jantam re Maina
Maina tare nibo pare re Maina
Dui charan bundhiya rakhtam
Mathar kero diya re Maina

The meaning of the song:

Giving away Maina in marriage home has been made empty. Oh, Maina! If I know earlier, you would be taken away by others, Oh, Maina! I would have tightened your two feet with the hairs of head, Oh, Maina!

Through this song extremes sorrow has been expressed by the parents for having to give away daughter, Maina, in marriage. The sorrow of the parents is so unbearable, that had they known it they would not have given their daughter in marriage.

Ornaments are very essential for marriage. In this area silver ornaments are more prevalent than the gold ornaments. Only a few rich people use gold ornaments in marriage. Various ornaments like Mala, Kanpasha (used in ear), Nakfool (used on nose), Batfool (use in nose), Patamol (used on feet), Tarahar (used on waist), Golkharu (used on feet); Shakha (used on hands) etc are used by women folks of this area. Name of some ornaments are expressed through Biyargeet. The following is an example-

Daman tar ki dese patamal nai
Ase patamal ani nai........
Meaning of the song is -

Daughter-in-law, is there no patamol in your area?

There is patamol (in our area), but I have not brought.

Kabigan

Kabigan originated in Bengal is very popular among the Muslims of Char area of Barpeta district. This song has similarity with the Assamese Ojapali songs. Kabigan is sung by two Sarkars (the person who leads kabigan) with the support of Dohars (supporter in the band of Kabigan) in the course of Kabigan. Generally, Harmonium, Dhol (a kind of drum) and Tal (basin like musical instrument) are used as musical instruments in Kabigan. Some religious stories along with other relevant contemporary sub-stories are told in melodious tune by the Sarkars. The Dohars help the Sarkar in Kabigan singing the same song the Sarkar sings.

One Sarkar of the two parties starts singing and addressing the audience sat around the Dohars as follows:

Pubete bandana kori puber banusar
Ek dige udoi banu choudige rosany.............

The meaning of the song-

I salute the sun in the east

The sun rises in one side shining all sides.

After salutation the Sarkar starts singing and dancing accompanied by a religious story. The story told in melodious tune is enjoyed very much by the audience. The Sarkar continues singing and dancing for sometime. Then, he leaves the stage putting some questions to be answered by the next Sarkar to come to stage latter on.

Now, the second Sarkar comes to stage. First of all he tries to answer the questions put by the former Sarkar. This second Sarkar also sings and dances in the same manner as the former does. After singing and dancing for a while he also leaves the stage
putting some questions to be answered by the former Sarkar. The questioning and answering by both the Sarkars is a source of enjoyment of the audience.

**Role of riddles in Char area**

There is a great role of riddles in the social system of the people of Char area in Barpeta district. Riddles are used by the illiterate elderly persons oftener than the literate persons. It is observed that riddles are mostly used in marriages to judge the intelligence of the grooms rather than conferree them. On the day of marriage, some riddles are written and pasted against the gate which is arranged for marriage. When groom's party arrives at the house of the bride, the relatives of the bride welcome the party in front of the gate. Here, the groom is asked to answer the riddles pasted in the gate. Generally, the relatives of the groom answer these riddles if the groom cannot answer them. Besides this, people of all use riddles during discussion, gossip and day to day activities. Some important riddles have been quoted below for illustration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Riddle:</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Khal bil sukhaiya gelo, gaser agai pani roilo</td>
<td>Coconut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponds and swamps have dried, but there is still water at the tree-tops.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ek are dui nai</td>
<td>Allah (God)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is one, but not two.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Boda boga Saheber Kala kata tupi</td>
<td>Matches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ek guta maira dile rage jai jole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The white gentle men wears black hat,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If he is skriken once, becomes very much angry.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Aeije gelo aeise ailo  
Eyes  
Meaning -  
It has gone just and has come just.

5. Attir dat maiyurer pakh jo na kobar  
Radish  
dare se gather jot.  
Meaning -  
The tusk of elephant and peacock’s feather,  
one who cannot say he belongs to the species of ass.

6. Eta tukku dori gochte gochte mori  
Road  
Meaning-  
A piece of short rope but one dies  
while collecting it.

7. Kala murgiye anda pare ke kato gunte pare  
Stars  
Meaning-  
The black hen lays egg, who can count  
them as much as.

8. Ghorer tale ghar, tar tale shiya par  
Mosquito net  
Meaning-  
There is a house under a house  
lie in that house.

**Proverb**

A proverb is a mini sentence consisting of maximum thought. Proverb may be regarded as quintessence of accumulated wisdom or experience of a particular group of people or society. R.D. Abraham writes that Proverbs are one of the most easily observed and collected genetics of traditional expression. Proverbs are sententious, witty and is used to wisdom. Cratehin writes “The proverb is the product of the faculty of
generalization of getting at the principles of influence and discrimination, combined with
the gift of graphic and concise expression.

In every society or community proverbs have significant roles in day-to-day
activities and behaviors of the people. Like the people of other societies, the people of
Char area also use proverbs in their day-to-day activities and behaviors. There are
innumerable proverbs as used by the innocent agriculturists of Char areas of Barpeta
district. In this study it will not be possible to enumerate all those proverbs at length.
Only a few of them will be cited here as examples:

   Meaning -
   One who goes to Lanka become Ravenna. The internal meaning of this proverb -
one who gets opportunity, become evil.

2. Jar nai garu se saber saru.
   Meaning -
   One who has not cows is the lowest of all.

3. Sagale ki khaina, pagole ki koyna.
   Meaning -
   What goat does not eat and what does not a mad man say.

4. Khiday bhat, piyashe pani ta na holi hoy peresani.
   Meaning -
   Rice is at the time of hanger and water at the time of thirst.
   without these two one become exhausted.

5. Jar pushena hale, tar pushena kono kale.
   Meaning -
One who is not sufficient with agriculture he will never be self-sufficient in his life.


Meaning -
One who weeds near home takes rest again and again.
Internal meaning of this proverb - One who gets comfort he wants more comfort.

7. Bogoler Fakire bhikha paina.

Meaning -
Nearby beggars do not get alms.
Internal meaning of this proverb is nearby person whatever he is, he is not respected by nearby person.

8. Din thakte haita jaio,

Sombal thakte raika khaio.

Meaning -
Walk till it is day, save while you have.
Internal meaning of this proverb - Whenever you have wealth, preserve it.

Social Problems

There are many social problems in the Char area of Barpeta district. The main problem are as follows:

i. Educational Backwardness:

Educationally, the Muslims of Char areas of Assam are more backward. It is the main cause of many of the social and economic problems of the community. To ascertain the educational scenario of the Char area Muslims latest available census report is analyzed below:
According to 1991 census report total literacy rate of Assam is 52.89% out of which Muslims’ literacy is 28.43. The literacy of the Muslims dominated districts, like Barpeta and Dhubri are 13.2 and 11.1 respectively. As per 2001 census report total literacy of Assam is 64.28 out of which the literacy of Char area of Assam is 37.8 only. Literacy rate of Barpeta district Char area according to 2001 census is 17.63 percent.

The following table based on the survey conducted by the Directorate of Char Area Development, Assam, 2001-02, shows the literacy scenario of the Char area of Assam.

Table -3.1

District wise Char area and related information in Assam, 2001-02

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No. of Char Village</th>
<th>Total Area in Sq.K.M</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>2838</td>
<td>689909</td>
<td>14.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bongaigaon</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>2510</td>
<td>135809</td>
<td>12.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>186826</td>
<td>13.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barpeta</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>3245</td>
<td>268344</td>
<td>17.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nalbari</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2257</td>
<td>83602</td>
<td>16.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>4345</td>
<td>154508</td>
<td>15.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darang</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>4381</td>
<td>142405</td>
<td>12.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonitpur</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>5324</td>
<td>145729</td>
<td>16.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakhimpur</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>2277</td>
<td>143255</td>
<td>18.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhemaji</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>3237</td>
<td>91230</td>
<td>15.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nogaon</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3831</td>
<td>89903</td>
<td>17.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morigaon</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1704</td>
<td>19324</td>
<td>18.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorhat</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>2851</td>
<td>215095</td>
<td>60.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsukia</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>3790</td>
<td>52605</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2251</td>
<td>784378</td>
<td>2490397</td>
<td>19.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A glance cover the above scenario clearly shows a dark picture of illiteracy among the Char area Muslims.

Female literacy in Muslim society particularly, in the Char area of Assam is much lower i.e. 32.5 percent according to 2001 census. The reason of the low literacy is superstitious attitude of the society towards the female folks. It is a general assumption that education not to be imparted to girls because they go to father-in-laws' home after their marriages. So, education is not necessary for the girls. Another assumption is that a girl would go out of home for education which is against shariat (religious principle).

The female folks of Char area Muslim society are kept confined to household activities like cooking, clearing of cow-sheds, caring of domestic animals, supplying of tiffin to male folk working in the fields, managing of fire-woods, rearing of children etc. from dawn to dusk.

Now-a-days, education for female folks in Char area is gradually starting. But the number of school going girls in Muslim society is very small. The percentage of school going girls is only fifteen. In case of higher education female's percentage is negligible.

ii. Child Marriage:

According to general rule of the land marriageable age of a girl is 18 years and a boy 21 years. This general marriage rule is not obeyed by Char area Muslims. Most of the illiterate parents give their sons and daughters in marriage at minor age. They think that if sons and daughters are not married at minor age, it would be a curse and the family would suffer from misfortune. From a survey conducted by the researcher in Alopati, Majarchar and Baghmara in Baghbar constituency, Barpeta district, it is found that out of 20 newly married couples 15 couples are minor aged at the time of marriage. Percentage of child marriage is 75.

iii. Uncontrolled Birth:

Uncontrolled birth is rampantly prevailing in Char area Muslim society. During the time of field survey the researcher has observed that the poor illiterate parents are
procreating more children than the educated parents. To them, children are gifts of Allah. So, to control procreation by adopting artificial means is a gross violation of the 'will' of Almighty Allah. Munshi and Maulavi (religious persons) exert religious impact on illiterate mass by giving 'Fotowah' (religious rule) regarding procreation. To them, birth control is a kind of sin and the controller would go to 'Jahannam' \(^{91}\) (hell).

iv. Indifferent attitude to general education:

The people of Char area prefer religious education to general education. The illiterate parents do not want to send their children to schools for general education. They send their children to Muktab or Madrassa for religious education.\(^{65}\) To them, this earthly-world is very temporary; the world after death is permanent. So, education for temporary world is not necessary. The only necessity is the religious education which would come to fruitfulness in *Kabor*\(^{66}\) (grave). Moreover, they think that general education makes men evil instead of making good. Therefore, imparting general education at the cost of money is meaningless.

Now-a-days, this religious superstition in regards general education is diminishing day by day and general education is being imparted to the children of Muslim society.

vi. Lack of Communication facility:

There is practically no transport and communication facilities in the entire Char area of Assam. Buses do not run through the vast Char areas although many places inhabited densely. The Char area people move about either on foot or bicycles. During flood time, people generally use boats as a means of conveyance. Except village roads there is no P.W.D. road in whole Char area of Barpeta district.

Bullock-carts and buffalo carts are also used as a means of conveyance. The people of Char area use Bullock and Buffalo carts as communication during weddings. Due to lack of modern transport facilities in Char area, *thela* is used to carry patients for treatment.
The Brahmaputra river with its numerous tributaries provides necessary facilities for island water transport of various forms to link Char areas with the mainland. Traditionally, the Char dwellers have been availing these facilities by means of their small country boats. During summer, it becomes almost impossible to move out from home without a boat as the houses remain marooned for days together. The mobility of the dwellers in this season solely depends upon the availability of the country boats. During high flood, many of the families have to move to safer places like embankments and river-banks high roads etc. for which boats are indispensable. Moreover, boats are the only means of transport to cross the network of channels within the islands and the master stream as well. This is adequately reflected in the weekly markets within and outside the island where a large number of country boats of various sizes carry goods and people from one place to another place. In fishing and carrying riparian grasses for cattles also boats are invariably used. Thus, the country boats are an integral part of life in the Char areas of the Brahmaputra valley. Now-a-days, however, privately owned motor boats, locally called "Bhutbhuti" play regularly through river to connect islands with the river banks urban and market centers.

vii. Lack of Medical Facility and Public Health:

Medical facility is a matter of concern in the entire Char area of Assam. Before sixties, the whole Char area suffered from lack of medical facilities as a result of which people died of cholera, dysentery, typhoid, malaria and other contagious diseases. Till to-day, there are many Chars where there is no medical facility. Char dwellers cannot get treatment by qualified doctors when they are ill. Many people often die due to lack of proper treatment. Generally, most of the people are accustomed to the use of traditional folk medicine for treatment. Some village doctors called Kabiraj usually treat patients with folk medicine.
During seventies, few state dispensaries and family welfare sub-centres were set up here and there. For example, State Dispensary at Kachumara Char and a mini PHC at Alopati Char in the district of Barpeta were set up. But the service of the doctors and the staff are not regular. Because, qualified doctors and other health workers generally do not want to go to the Char areas. The Assam Government does not take initiative for sending doctors and health workers to remote Char areas. The patients of Char area have to go for town hospitals for necessary treatment. Many a times, the poor Char dwellers cannot take treatment in town hospital and die untimely.

The people are unaware of the community measures to be taken for healthy living. Most of them drink contaminated water, take contaminated foods, walk bare footed and spent most of the time in unclean and unhygienic environment. Moreover, almost all people of the Char areas ease their bowels in open field as they do not know the process of spread of communicable diseases.

viii. Lack of Market Place:

The Char area people produce various crops and vegetables with hard labour during the year. But there is no suitable market where these produces can be sold at reasonable price. The markets are locally called Hat. There are small markets like Andabhang hat, Alopati-Kalardia hat in the Char area of Barpeta district. These markets meet the minimum needs of the people.

Cultural Assimilation:

The culture of a community or a country is subject to the influence of the culture of the other country or community. All the culture have to some extent the quality of integration, adaption and assimilation. If we study the last hundred year's history of the assimilation of the Muslims, it becomes clear that like the indigenous Assamese Muslims, the Char area Muslims are also in the process of assimilation with the traditional customs, behaviours, manners and beliefs of the Assamese society. The Char area Muslims
migrating from East Bengal, have settled in Assam and have accepted Assamese culture to a great extent. Due to long association with Assamese culture, the Char area Muslims have to some extent given up some of their traditional culture. Their traditional language now has been transformed to a new colloquial language with the association and influence of Assamese language. Traditional name of birds and trees are in the process of abandonment and Assamese names are being used by the Char area Muslims in their day-to-day social parlance. Even in the social activities they use such language whose verbal expressions have similarity with Assamese language. Observing these, Bishnu Rabha said- "Whoever thou art, thou art Assamese, we are all Assamese."

It has already been stated that the ancestors of the people of Char area of Barpeta district, originally belonged to Pabna and Rangpur of present Bangladesh. So, the dialects they used had similarity with the dialect of Pubna and Rangpur, Now-a-days, the dialects of the people of this area have taken a changed form. The following are some of such words that have undergone changed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Dialect</th>
<th>Dialect of Barpeta Char area</th>
<th>Assamese Dialect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khaibo or Khabo</td>
<td>Khamu/ Kham</td>
<td>Kham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaibo or Jabo</td>
<td>Jaibo or Jabo</td>
<td>Jam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korbo</td>
<td>Kortam/ Karmu</td>
<td>Korim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khelbo</td>
<td>Kheltam/ Khelamu</td>
<td>Khelim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most important is that the Char area Muslims of Assam has abandoned their own language and has accepted Assamese language as medium of instructions. Now-a-days, education is imparted through Assamese language in Char area Muslim society. There is not a single school or college in Char area, where education is imparted through Bengali language. Assamese language is not only the medium of instruction in Char area
but also the language of formal occasions. Proceedings, resolutions of the meetings are also written in Assamese language.79

The influence of Assamese proverbs on Char area is another important matter. Some proverbs used in Assamese have similarly with the proverbs prevalent in Char area Muslim society of Assam. The following proverbs are some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assamese proverbs</th>
<th>Proverbs prevalent in Char Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ghah nohuwa garu, toli nohuwa charu</td>
<td>Ghas chara garu, toli chara charu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning: A cow without grass and a vessel without bottom</td>
<td>Meaning: A cow without grass and a vessel without bottom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Chagaliye nakhay ki, pagale nakay ki</td>
<td>Chagale ki khaina, pagole ki kayna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning: What a goat does not eat What a mad does not speak</td>
<td>Meaning: What a goat does not eat What a mad does not speak</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Duroit beti, ocharat mati</td>
<td>Durer pathe beti, barir bogole mati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning: Daughter married to distance and land is nearby home</td>
<td>Meaning: Daughter married to distance and land is nearby home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Jar nai dhan, tar nai man</td>
<td>Jar nai dhan, tar nai man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning: One who has not paddy, he has no honour.</td>
<td>Meaning: One who has not paddy, he has no honour.</td>
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In respect of faith, similarities are also found among the Assamese and the Char area Muslims. For example, *Bandurga* of Assamese Hindu is regarded as *Banbibi* by the Muslim in Char area of Assam. *Satyanarayan* of the Assamese Hindu is regarded as *Satyapeer* by the Char area Muslims.80
Bihu is the national festival of Assam. The Bihu festivals are celebrated in different seasons of the year. Bohag Bihu or Rangali Bihu is celebrated in spring season, in the month of April, Magh Bihu or Bhagali Bihu is celebrated in the month of January and Kati Bihu is celebrated in the month of mid-October. From the agricultural point of view, Bohag Bihu comes at seed time just after the first rains. Magh Bihu is connected with the winter harvest and Kati Bihu is meant for the welfare of the traditional winter crops.

Generally, Bihu is not traditional festivals of the people of Char areas of Assam. However, the Char area people of Barpeta district celebrate some festivals which are related to Assamese Bihu festivals. The Muslims of this area celebrate Gaswi-Rat during Kati Bihu. Like the Assamese people, they also keep mustard, coconut, gram, sugarcane, cord, turmeric and other things on the court-yard at night on the day of Gaswi-Rat. They believe that if they eat these things or take bath in the water mixed with these items, certain diseases are cured. Another popular belief of the people of this area is that, if they cut slightly those trees which do not give fruits, give fruits cutting at night on the day of Gaswi-Rat. Hence, the youth (boys and girls) take lamp and axe in hands and go to cut slightly those trees which do not give fruits. As soon as one begins cutting, the other defends and utters, "Don't cut, it will give fruits next year."

Magh Bihu is a festival of enjoyment. It marks the gathering of harvest. The people of Char area observe Magh Bihu as Pushura. On the day of Pushura, they bathe their cattle and decorate their horns with oil. Pithas (a kind of pan-cake prepared from rice powder) are prepared, they eat them and also distribute to friends and relatives. The people of this area also catch fishes in the nearby ponds and Beel collectively. This collective fishing is called Boyatnama or Boyatmara. In Assamese society also collective fishing is carried out during Magh Bihu.
Bhekuli-Biya (Marriage of frog) is a well known folk ritual prevalent in Assamese society. Although, this ceremony is not exactly related to a Vrata-type, ritual, it has elements of Vrata. It is performed by the women folks only. When, there is a long drought, the women folk of a village or an area arrange this Bhekuli-Biya in order to bring rain. This Bhekuli-Biya has resemblance with real marriage.

The observance of Bhekuli-Biya is also present among the Char dwellers of this area. The peasants of this area depend on agriculture throughout the year. Agricultural crops are sometimes damaged or destroyed by long spell of drought. There is a belief among the women of this area that the observance of Beng-Biya (as called in this area) brings rain and thus crops are saved. So, the women-folks of Barpeta District Char area perform Beng-Biya which has similarity with Assamese Bhekuli-Biya.\(^8^5\)

At the time of marriage, the bride and groom are bathed with gram and turmeric. This is a very popular custom in the Assamese society. This custom is also prevalent among the Muslims of Char area. They also bathe the bride-groom on the day of marriage with gram and turmeric.\(^8^6\)

Polligeet, bhatiali, dhuwa, nabitatta, kabigan etc. are popular traditional folk-songs of Char area. These songs can be considered as the pulses of the people of Char area. However, now-a-days, besides these traditional songs, other songs are also sung by the people. When annual functions are held in the educational institutions, Assamese modern songs, Bargeet, Kamrupi-Lokageet, Goalparia-Lokageet, Jyoti Sangeet, Rabha-Sangeet are also equally preferred. The educated present-day generation of the Char dwellers are more accustomed to Assamese songs rather than their ancestral traditional songs.

Dresses are the indications of a community or nation. Every community or nation has its own traditional dresses through which cultural distinctness is expressed. The Assamese community has its own distinctive traditional dresses. The men folks of Assam
wear Dhoti and Panjabi and the women folks wear Mekhala and Chadar which has slowly entered among the women-folks of Char area of Assam. Now-a-days, the college and the school going Char area girls prefer Mekhala-Chadar to Saris. Moreover, educated women of this area also wear Mekhala-Chadar when they attend wedding ceremony and other social functions. 87

In Assamese society, there is a popular custom to felicitate somebody by offering Gamocha (Towel) and Sarai. This custom of felicitation has also entered among the Char area Muslim society. They also felicitate a guest of honour or other distinguished persons by Gamocha and Sarai.

Miah, Mymenshingia, Bhatia and Bhaital:

The indigenous Assamese Hindus and the indigenous Assamese Muslims use the words Miah, Mymenshingia, Bhatia, Bhaital etc. to mean the Bengali speaking Muslims living in Char areas of Assam. 88 The usages of these ridiculous words vary from place to place. The word Mymenshingia is used in different districts of upper and middle Assam. Nowgaon, Morigaon, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar are the districts, where Mymenshingia word is used to mean the Bengali speaking Muslims of Char areas. The Word Miah is used in Kamrup District, Bhatia or Bhaital in Goalpara, Barpeta, Bongaigaon and Dhuburi Districts. The words Miah and Pamua were tremendously used after the census report of 1911. 89

The Char area Muslims are generally regarded as immigrant Muslims since they came to Assam from East Bengal in the last part of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century. In ancient times, the Aryans were also regarded as immigrants. 90 The ancestors of Srimanta Sankardev and other fourteen Brahmin families were brought to Assam by the king Kameswar Darlab Narayan from Gaur of Bengal and the king settled them in Hazo area. These people were also called immigrants at that time. 91
Among the Char dwellers, the word 'Miah', is a respectable word rather than a ridiculous word. They use this word with great honour to address those persons, who have higher social status in all respects. Thus, they use *Miah-Saheb* or *Miahji* with the names of those respected person. They also use the word *Miah* with the name of Allali (God). They call *Allah-Miah* to express deep faith in Allah.

The Muslims of Char areas of Assam have been living in Assam for a long time. Now, they consider themselves to be Assamese people as they have adopted Assamese language as medium of instruction. Moreover, they are born and brought up in Assam. The adaptation of Assamese language by the Char dwellers is a generous contribution to the growth of Assamese language. Though they adopt their ancestral traditional culture yet the influence of Assamese culture on their culture is apparent. Of course, there may be hostility between the Char area people and the Assamese Hindus. But cultural interchange is even possible in hostile nature of culture. "It may be pointed out that even when the contact situation is of hostile nature, cultural interchange is not ruled out. Again, in situation of most intimate contact, mutual borrowing may be minimum and selective with or without external pressure, or there may be almost complete acceptance of the ways of another people. Here is the most interesting field of culture contact involving such progress as diffusion and acculturation". 
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