CHAPTER 5
MATERIAL CULTURE
Material culture is an aesthetic composition of men’s social heritage and man made part of the environment. It is a different entity in the spectrum of folklore in contrast to verbal art or oral folklore. In folklore studies, the subject of material culture is – to study the living and non-living, methods, techniques and styles of hand made items. It studies not only the artifacts and technology of the folk, it also embraces art and crafts of varied colour, light, shape, mass volume, beauty that are the products of man’s imaginative faculty. These evidences are the strongest evidences of the basic unity of mankind.

According to Dorson, ‘Material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art. How men and women in tradition oriented societies build their homes, make their clothes, prepare their food, farm and fish, process the earth’s bounty, fashion their tools and implements and design their furniture and utensils are questions that concern the student of material culture.’ (Dorson R.M. 1982, pp. 2-3)

Considering all the above mentioned contents, the folklorists have classified the material culture in some subdivisions. They are,

(i) Folk Craft.
(ii) Folk Art.
(iii) Folk Architecture.
(iv) Folk Costume.
(v) Folk cookery and farming and fishing.
These are termed as the Physical life of a society. Therefore inorder to get a complete picture of a traditional society it is very much essential to study and analyze their physical life.

Although the Bengali Community in Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza are comparatively a new migrant, they have carried some material culture with them which are still in a traditional form. Taking into account the above subgenre some of these are briefly mentioned below:

5.1 Folk Art and Crafts

Folk art is the product of human will and action from natural events to artificial. It is a symbol of social life. The tradition and customs of a community perfectly mirrored through the beauty, shape, colours of thing used in the daily life. It is seen that folk crafts are hereditary in nature and the craftsmen utilized their spare time which are also their occupation for living. The tools and implements which are essential parts for daily workers are also the subject of folk craft study, which include the hunting and fishing articles, agricultural tools, musical instruments, sacrificial implements and tools for various craft activities.

Folklorists defines folk art and crafts from their different point of views: R.K. Mukherjee describes on the art as follows:

"Though the epochs of man's history are not only reveals man's intense emotional relations to the world that he sees around him but also supplies the formal symbols, patterns or designs for various activities that behind him to fellow men ......"

'Art is not only the ending glory of the individual and the imperishable records of culture but it is also its principal impulsion.'

He also said, 'All that humanity dreams, strives and suffers for stands behind art, giving man peace, peace with self, with society and with the universe.' (p. xxxi)
D.N. Pathy observes, 'In the folk art nothing is accidental, experimental and freakish. Every detail has a meaning and every symbol has a significance. Though some of this may have been forgotten, much of it is ritualistic and religious. It is difficult to trace the original folk art but it can be guessed from the prevalent tradition that folk art or rural art in the development phase of primitive art in general.' (D.N., Vol. 3, p. 164)

In materialistic culture folk art means the hereditary monopolistic decorative work of the artisans which reflect their skill and available resources of the geographical area. These artifacts give pleasure and serve some practical, social and economic ends.

M.K. Pal said, 'The world of craft is as valuable as the world of science, philosophy or ethics. Craft reflects the state of human society through the individual who has to him, in small or big portion, what mankind as a whole process. Craft treasurers gives us a glimpse into the core of collective mind and societies through the mirror of the individual mind that creates them. As the crafts are the indigenous creation of the ordinary people of villages and small towns, they reveal the innate artistic taste of masses and their desire to combine utility with beauty. The people’s instincts for the beautiful have been expressed by the craftsmen in an infinite variety of traditional forms which remain unchanged or unaffected over generations.' (Pal M.K., 1975, p. 320)

The Bengali community of Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza has different traditional art and crafts used in different purposes of their life. Some of these are as follows:

5.1.1 Musical Instruments

Music plays a very significant role in the socio-cultural life of the folk. The musical instruments mainly consist of wood, brass and iron strings. Flute, drums, bells are the products of some simple craft activities of the music lovers.
The people of the Bengali Community use different types of musical instrument in various occasions. Some of these are:-

a. Dhak

Dhak is a popular membranophonic folk instrument among this community. It is generally used in Charak puja, Kali puja, Manasha puja, Durga puja etc. It is like a big drum of which the two sides are covered by the skin. The diameter of the both side is equal but only one side is used to produce the sound and the other side helps to produce the sound pleasing only. Sometimes it is kept vertically on a plain surface and the drummer produce the sound by beating on it with two dram sticks and sometimes the drummer hang the dhak on his left shoulder and produce the sound by beating on the downward front side of the dhak. The sound of dhak can give a dancing spirit and sometimes it creates a magical atmosphere among the people.

b. Dhol

It is a berral type instrument. There is similarity between Dhak and Dhol, but, it is much smaller then the Dhak. The drummer hang the Dhol with a rope around his neck in such a way so that it reach the waist in an equilibrium position. The drummer produce the sound by beating a dram stick on the right skin and be using the fingers and the palm on the left skin. This musical instrument is used in various folk songs like holi git, loka git etc.

c. Khol

Like the Dhak and Dhol, the Khol is also a membranophonic folk instrument which is used in singing the Kirtan, Sankirtan, Bhajan etc. The body of the Khol is made of soil. The middle part of the Khol is bigger than the two sides. The diameter of the left side is also bigger than the right side and both the side in covered by the skin. The sweet sound in produced by using the fingers and palm on both sides.
d. Dotara

Dotara is the most important and popular folk instrument in singing the Bengali folk song. It is used to keep the tal (musical time and to produce the musical tune also.

There are two parts of a Dotara, (i) Danda and (ii) Khol. Danda is made of a piece of hard wood and Khol is a hole, which is covered by a skin. The word Dotara means, the two strings. But although it is called a Dolara, actually there are four cords or strings of nilon, parachute or silk. In the upper portion of the danda there are four keys (two in each side) to adjust the cords. Just above the skin there is a small piece of wood or bone to lift the cords from the skin. The another side of the cords are fixed in the lower portion of the danda. The upper end of the danda is decorated by the beautiful art like – peacock, the face of crocodile, magar etc. The pressure of the left fingers on the upper portion of the cord, and at the same time the friction of the stroke in the cords of lower portion by the right fingers, creates a melodious tune.

e. Kartal

Kartal is a very small musical instrument which is made of bell metal. It looks like a pair of small convex plate. In the middle of each plates there is a small hole with two ropes. The ropes are warped by the fingers and sounds are produced by striking the plates. Kartal is used along with the Khol and Harmonium while singing the Bhajan, Kirtan and some other folk songs.

f. Khunjari

Khunjari is a small membranophonic folk musical instrument. The round from of the Khunjari is made of wood. One side of the Khunjari is covered by the skin and another side is open. The diameter of the skin is generally 8''-10'' and there are four small tals fixed in the wooden body. It is taken by the left hand and given the slight pressure on the skin from inside by the fingers. The sound is produced by knocking on the skin from out side by using the forefinger, middle finger and the ring finger.
g. Banshi

Banshi is an widely used aerophonic instrument. It is the lightest and simplest instrument compared to the other musical instrument. According to the size and designs it has different names viz., Benu, Muruli etc. one or both the side of the Banshi may be open. A Banshi contains 5-8 finger-holes according to its length. The tunes of the Banshi is produced on putting pressure by the fingers in its holes and by letting to pass the air from the mouth through one end of the pipe.

5.1.2 Pottery

Pottery is one of the oldest crafts in the world. Like some other traditional crafts of India, Pottery is also confined within some particular casts which are known as Kumar, Hira and Paul. It is found that the population of this casts are very poor in the study area but still they are keeping their tradition is an original form. The traditional method of Pottery is mention below:

a. Traditional Method of Pottery

Clay is the only raw material used for making the earthen wares, which is collected from the river bank. It is a kind of sticky soil which is locally known as Athila mati or Kumar mati. Firstly, the clay is purified by removing the dirts or grits and struck heavily and repeatedly with a wooden hammer called Pitna. Then water is poured very slowly and carefully in it and prodded heavily with the feet, so that it became like a past. After that some big lumps are made from the paste and these are kept in a wooden pan or in a clean surface. Then required quantity of water is added for smoothing and softening it to make various types of earthen wares. These are made by taking a required quantity of clay from the big lump and shaped by using the chak or with the help of dices. The raw articles are then kept in the sun heat to dry. Finally, the wares are burnt by firing dry cowdung, dry straw, dry leaves of various plants, firewood etc. in an open ground in front of the houses. The
earthen wares are arranged in some circular rows and placed on the bed. Then they set fire around the bed. When the fire blazes completely in the bed they gradually cover the heap with dry straw, leaves, cowdung etc. It takes about one day to burn the earthen wares completely. After removing from the ash these are stored in a shade or in open place for sale. They also art and colour some decorative articles. Any person of the family either male or female of any age, who are skilled became engaged in this work. Various articles made by these people can be divided into three types: (1) Ornamental and Non-ornamental articles (2) Play materials and (3) Idols.

b. Ornamental and Non-ornamental Articles

Charu, Hari, Saki, Khuti, Tekeli; Ghat, Dhuna dani or Dhuna bati, Tub, Kalash etc.

(i) Charu: It looks like a big earthen dish. The bottom of the Charu is slightly concave. It is used for preparing cakes and to frig rice etc.

(ii) Ghat: It is a kind of small jar. The mouth of the Ghat is narrow and the neck is also narrow and long. It is used in some ritualistic purposes.

(iii) Tekeli: There is much similarity between Ghat and Tekeli. These are of different sizes. The neck of the Tekeli is narrow than the mouth. These multipurpose earthen waves are used in ritualistic purposes, as container or as small savings pot etc.

(iv) Hari: It is a large size vessel. It is used for storage purpose of paddy and pulses. It is also used for preparation of rice bear (a kind of country liqueur).

(v) Khuti: A kind of very small pitcher like Ghat. The neck of the Khuti is short. Generally it is used for the purpose of worshipping the deity and to keep the cards.

(vi) Saki: An earthen lamp. It is used for worshipping the deity.

(vii) Kalash: A kind of jar of different sizes. The pitcher or Kalash is used to store water.

(vii) Tub: An open vessel. It is used to plant flowers for decorative purpose.
(ix) Dhunadani or Dhuna bati: A vessel with a short stand and a handle, used for burning resin.

(x) Dhupdani: A small earthen pot with some small holes. It is used for burning incense.

c. Play Materials

Forms of elephant, horse, ox, mango, papaya, pumpkin, jack fruit, gass cylinder etc. Most of these articles are used as small savings pot.

d. Idol

Like art and crafts, sculpture is also an attractive part of the material culture. According to S.K. Chetarji, 'Painting, sculpture and architecture were considered by the ancient Hindus as Science (Vidya) on the same footing as geometry, grammar or logic. The term art (Kala) was reserved for the minor arts and handicrafts.

The tradition of making idol of God, and goddess, various mythological images etc. are still confined within the pauls, hiras or kumars.

e. Equipments used by the Potters

(i) Chak: Potter's wheel.
(ii) Baila: An wooden stick used as hammer to make compact the soil.
(iii) Pitna: A rectangular wooden vessel where earth is kneaded for making pots.
(iv) Bhata: An oven to bum the earthen pots.
(v) Dies: A stamp for impressing the earthen articles.
(vi) Athila mati: A kind of sticky soil, the Potter's clay.

5.1.3 Folk Ornaments

The Ornaments made by the smith of the Bengali community is an example of their expression of dexterity and artistic mind. The cast which is engaged in making the ornaments with gold or silver is known as Karmakar. It is observed that like the Kumars, Hiras, Pauls or some other castes a very small section of the Bengali society of the study area are engaged in this
tradition who are still holding their folk art and crafts through their wonderful work. Although the majority of these ornaments are similar to those worn by the other parts of the state many of them have different names and uses which are mentioned below:

(i) **Ornament Worn on the Forehead of Women**: Sinthi, Tikly, Mukut, these are specially used in marriage ceremony.

(ii) **Nose Ornaments**: Nath, Apel, Nak phul.

(iii) **Head Ornaments**: Chiruni, Kanta.

(iv) **Neckless**: Sita har, Goga, har, Kathi har, Piece har, Jura har, Tayra, Chick, Balk tayra, Modi har, Beby har, Setting har, Gol chain, Meti chain etc.

(v) **Wrist Ornaments**: Ratan chur, chur, Sankha, pola, Sakha bandano, Churi, Bala, Motor dana, Ayasthi, Bauty, Kangan, Padak, Bracelet, Polish pat, Arm’lat etc.

(vi) **Waist Ornaments**: Japta, Key ring.

(vii) **Ear Ornaments**: Pasa, Jub, Jumka, Dul, Jumka Pasa, Makri, Kanbala, Keru, Ring, Pan ring, Bel dul, Chain dul, Box dul, Pat Pasa, Setting Pasa, Bel tub, Sitta dul, Bali etc.

(viii) **Foot Ornaments**: Nupur, Payel, Angthi.

(ix) **Waist Ornaments Worn by the Baby**: Tora bisa, Kamar bisa.

A very short description of some above mentioned ornaments are given below:

a. **Sinthi**: This ornament contains three chains. The main chain runs along the parting in the hair and the other chains are pricked in the hair above the ears with hooks. It is worn by the bride only on the occasion of marriage ceremony.

b. **Pola**: This ornament is worn by the married women whose husband is living. It is a coral based gold plated bracelet. Instead of coral is kind of red plastic ring is also used as the base.
c. **Sankha**:- A kind of anklet made up of cunch. Sankha is worn by the married women only.

d. **Nakphul**:- A top like ornament with a small stem worn on one side of the nose.

e. **Kanphul**:- An ornament worn by the women on both the ear lob.

f. **Bali**:- A thin ring used as an ornament and for preaching the ear lob of small children.

g. **Bauti**:- A kind of bangle worn on the waist.

h. **Chiruni**:- A decorative ornament of hair. This ornament is used by the women in their cue or in braided hair.

i. **Nupur and Payel**:- A tinkling ornament for feet.

j. **Angthi**:- A small hoop worn in finger by men and women. A finger ring.

k. **Har**:- Sita har, Goga har, Kathi har, jura har, mody har, beli har etc. are very heavy neckless with intricate and elaborated designs. Bisa har, either bias or Kamar bisa are a kind of flat and wide chain. The possession of gold ornament is generally confined to the rich few.

### 5.1.4 Agricultural Implements

Although the major portion of the Bengali Community in the study area generally belongs to the fishing community, in fact a good number of people are found in engaged in agricultural sector also. The implements used by these people are:

a. **Jual or Juaila**: An wooden frame used to join two bullocks in a plough. A yoke.

b. **Languila**: An instrument for tilling the soil. A plough made of some hard wood, having a bent body with the handle on one side and the plough share or the other.

c. **Changa or Moi**: A wooden or iron frame for smoothing land and breaking clods earth. A harrow.
d. **Baika**: A pole for carrying a burden on the shoulder.

e. **Ita magur**: A long handled wooden mallet used in breaking clods.

f. **Saka pat or Sapor pat**: A wooden implement like a long handled hoe, used to heap or to draw the grain.

g. **Rish or Ish**: A plough shaft. It connects the plough and the yoke.

h. **Jute**: A string for tying tow bullocks together with a yoke.

i. **Nari or Chari**: A small flexible twig.

j. **Nakta and Ghora nakta**: A mask used to shut up the mouth of the bullocks at the time of thrashing.

k. **Kanshi**: A slim, curved knife with teeth. It is used for cutting grain, a sickle.

### 5.1.5 Equipments made by the Blacksmith

The study reveals that a very small portion of the total Bengali population in the area is engaged in the blacksmith activities. They are known as Kamar. Primarily they were engaged in fishing or other primary activities but due to the shortage of income in fishing sector they have to shift their occupation to the blacksmith activities. Various implements made by these people are found something different then other parts of the state in respect of sizes, shapes, names and their uses. Some of these equipments are as follows:

a. **Dao**: A large knife.

b. **Kural**: An axe

c. **Pachan**: A spade with a handle of wood or buffalo horn.

d. **Khanta**: A spade like instrument used for frying food items.

e. **Khanta or Siprang**: A long iron instrument for digging earth.

f. **Hata**: A large spoon for lifting out liquid. A ladle.

g. **Bothi**: A curved knife inserted in a stock and used in dressing fish, meat, vegetables etc.

h. **Katari**: A knife.

i. **Kodal**: An instrument for digging earth, A hoe.
Some implements used in smithy are:

l. Saraish: An implement to hold the hot iron.
n. Nei: An iron block upon which metals are hammered.

5.1.6 Fishing Implements

It is observed that there a very high concentration of Bengali population (30%) in Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza and most of these people are belongs to the Scheduled cost community. The community mainly consists of Jalos, Malos and Namsudras. Making the fishing implements and catching the fish is their main profession. The equipments used by these people for fishing have some peculiarity in form, structure, sizes etc. These equipments reflects the art, skill and the creativity of this group of people. According to the nature of the fish and fisheries the fishermen uses varieties of equipments and various methods to catch the fish. Widely these equipments are divided into three different types on the basis of the materials used to make these.

(i) Traps: (made of bamboo).
(ii) Nets: (made of thread).
(iii) Angle, lance etc.: (made of iron).

(i) Traps

These are multi shaped cases of bamboo sticks, having slit line mouth where fish can enter but cannot go out. Traps are of different shapes and sizes, such as cylindrical, sub cylindrical, rectangular and conical provided with detachable trap door. Generally most of these are found in operation during the monsoon and autumn season setting in running water like streams, rivulets, irrigation canals and in paddy fields etc. Some equipment used by the Bengali people in study areas are described below:
a. Darki

Darki is made of bamboo strings. The rectangular box shaped trap has two semi circular trap-doors at the bottom of each side. Along the whole length of the middle of one face runs a narrow vertical trap door. The wall of the trap is folded diverting inward at the openings. This wicker-work contraption is placed in small streams running near the fields.

ii. Nets

The following are the different types of nets used by the Bengali community for fishing.

a. Jata Jal

It is a fixed type triangular dip net made of nylon thread, of which the two sides are fastened to two bamboos, joined at the apex. A little below, in their junction the bamboos are fastened to two stout posts, on which they work on a pivot. It posses a large bag behind it. The base of the net is allowed to sink into the water and pressure is then applied to the vertex which raises the net and its contents. Generally the net is lifted at the interval of 20-30 minutes. It is also known as Khora jal.

b. Langi Jal

This wall like nets are hung from the crossed bamboos and lowered from above into the water. The nets with floats attached to the head rope and sinkers are fixed to the foot rope. The nets are made of nylon threads with different sizes of meshes. The langi jals are slats in a traverse direction of the migrating fishes. These nets are known with various names like, Koilangi jal, Puthi langi jal etc.

c. Phanshi Jal

There is much similarity between Langi jal and Phanshi jal, but letter is much thinner than the former. Unlike langi jal the foot rope is devoid of sinkers. These rectangular nets are made of nylon threads with various sizes and meshes.
d. Toni Jal

It is a rectangular frame net or dip net, which is operated by a single man. The frame of the net is made of bamboo. Two hollow pieces of bamboo, measuring 0.5 – 5.0 meter are tied crosswise at the tip of a strong supporting bamboo pole. In the four ends of these hollow bamboos, four pieces of tender bamboo shoots, measuring 10-16 cm are inserted which acts like waits to sink the net into water. The lintel ends of the tender bamboo shoots are tied at the tip of the supporting pole. The mesh size of the net varies from 10-12 cm.

e. Changla Jal

This type of net is used to catch the Hillsa fish in fresh and dip water of rivers. The net looks like a triangular beg with the mouth open. The net is operated very skillfully by fixing on the boat and moving against current. The fishes that confined in the nets are caught singly or more in one operation.

f. Kheuli or Khewali Jal

The net is cast almost throughout the year. It is a con shaped net with strong cord through the principal meshes with lead or iron sinkers and of various sizes of length and periphery. Keeping the long rope in his hand the fishermen throw the net skillfully on the surface water in shallower area in which the fishes of that area are entrapped and get collect in pockets. This cast net is locally known as Kheuli or Khewali jal, Ashra jal etc. To catch all types of fishes of river and ponds these nets are used by the fishermen.

g. Mashari Jal or Mahari Jal

It is a rectangular scoop net which is made by joining 3-5 pieces of nylon nets. The sizes of the meshes of this net is very small, generally 1-1.2 mm and the length and width of each net is varies from 20-30 meter and 6-8 meter respectively. All the nets tied together by nylon threads. The upper margin of the net is attached with a stout jute rope which is known as head rope. Likewise, the lower margin is also tied with another jute rope known as ground rope or foot rope. There are some floats in the nets. On another side of
the net there is a long rope. The fishermen submerged the net in water and lift it by holding the ropes. The fishermen catch the fishes and swarms by these nets.

h. Ber Jal or Bera Jal

Ber jal is made of cotton threads. It is rectangular in shape and the length depends upon the width of the water area to be hauled. The usual size of this sieve net is 15 meter in length and 6 meter in breadth. The size of mesh is 6 mm to 20 mm. According to the depth profundity the nets may vary with more width but the width of such nets should be at least twice of the depth of ponds water. The huge size nets are called the Ber jal or Bera jal.

d. Harhari Jal

The method of operating this net is almost similar to the Changla net. The fishermen plunge the net under water by propelling the boat towards the deep water and catch the fishes by drawing back the net from the edge of river. Two people are needed to perform the act.

j. Thela Jal or Ghoka jal

These nets are fixed in a triangular bamboo frame with a short handle at the apex. The nets are dipped into the water by holding the handle and drawn forward and then lifted up with a jerk. Fry, snails, crabs etc. are caught by these nets.

iii. Angle

The equipment made up of rod and line consisting of tampering bamboo at the tip of which a strong twine is fixed ending with a hook is called an angle. Locally the angles are called Barashi. Hooks are made up of iron in various sizes. A float which is commonly made of jube stem is attached a little above the hook. Either natural or artificial baits are used in hook to attract the fishes to the fishing area. The fish bites or shallow the bait and the float started to tremble and then the fishermen lift the angle immediately out of water in one draught and catch the fish. The angles are of following types -
a. Ship Barashi

The rod of the ship barashi is made up of Bijuli Bansh, a kind of thin bamboo. It is called the ship barashi because the long, thin and tapering bamboo in which a 5-8 feet long nylon rope or cotton twine is tied with a hook is called the ship. Generally a small section of earth warm, grass hopper, egg of wasp etc. are used as a bait to attract the fishes.

b. Nal Barashi

It is called a nal barashi because instead the long rod there is a short handle of about 12-20 cm. It is tied centrally with a hook which can float freely at the right angle to the nal. In this type of barashi earth warm is used as bait.

d. Tyeti and Juiti

These lance like equipments are made of iron with a bamboo rod. There is a slight difference between Tyeti and Juity. Only difference is that, Tyeti-consists of some plain lances and the Juity consists of some hooks like lances.

5.1.7 Different Methods of Fishing

According to the size, shape and the nature of the fish and fisheries the fishermen apply different methods of fishing:

i. Filtering Method

In filtering method different types of nets like, dip nets, cast nets, and drag nets are used. The dip nets are operated by keeping the net submerged in water and wandering fishes are lifted out from rapid operation of the act. The cast nets are thrown on the surface water in shallower area in which the fish of that area are entrapped and get collect in the pockets.

Drag nets are commonly used in beel and ponds fisheries which are dragged through the water as a vertical screen driving the fish into the net and later hauled out of water.
ii. **Floating Method**

This method is applied in beel fisheries and riverine fisheries to catch the fishes of bigger size. It needs at least two fishermen to operate the act. The large net is spread on the surface of the water from a boat. The weighted edges of the net sink together and cover the fishes of that area and when the fishes enter into the pockets of the edges, the fishermen catches the fishes by lifting the net very carefully.

iii. **Bana or Screen Method**

Bana fishing is one of the most important fishing method by which fishes are protected in the beel fisheries, keeping it in the mouth of the river channel of beels. Slender bamboo sticks are woven to form a screen of about 10 meter length and 1-2 meter breadth which is locally known as bana. It acts like a barrier of the fishes. This type of fishing is mostly done at the eve of the main fishing and after the flood season when the water level in the river reduces and flows from the beel towards the river through the connecting channel.

5.1.8 **Bamboo Work**

Throughout history, bamboo has proved to be an immensely important raw material for mankind. Light in weight, durable, easily worked, elastic, smooth to touch, capable of absorbing shock and possessing many other useful qualities, bamboo has served man in astonishing by a wide variety of ways. Therefore some people of the Bengali community produce many indigenous equipment for running of their households and as a means of economic support. Peoples are found making these household articles during their leisure time and sold in weekly market in the nearest towns. Some of these household implements which are required in day to day life are:

**Sagi or Pachi:** A basket for keeping corn.

**Dol:** A large basket in which grains are stored.

**Dhama:** A basket of smaller size used for keeping corn.
Kula: A winnowing fan.
Ber: A big basket to store grains.
Chaluni or Chalni: A strainer.
Dhara: A bamboo mat.

5.1.9 Folk Architecture

India is predominantly a rural country. An overwhelming majority of her people live in countryside bearing typical identity of their traditional life. But it is a fact that no society is static, it is always dynamic. During the past few decades the Indian society is running after the modernization in every aspect of life. But like some other parts of the country in the North East India there are some communities which are still far behind the modernity. The Bengali community of Chamaria and Nagarbera Mouza in Kamrup district of Assam is an example of it, who are still living in a traditional state.

‘Folk architecture may be said to be traditional architecture. It is concerned with all traditional aspects of building; the shapes, sizes, and layouts of buildings of all kinds, such as dwellings, barns, sheds and craft shops, the materials used and the tools and techniques of building. The sites chosen and the placement of various buildings on the site; and the use to which buildings and various parts of buildings were put.’ (Dorson, R.M. 1972, p. 281)

a. Construction of Houses

Since fishing is the main occupation of the major portion of the total population of the Bengali community they are found living in accordance with the availability of the fishing grounds at the beels, swamps, marshes and riverine tracts. But the total scenario of the hamlets including other castes look almost similar to those living in other parts of the state.

It is observed that the people built their houses with some low cost materials like thatch, bamboo, wire, jute rope etc. The posts, reflets, walls, doors and windows of the houses are made of bamboo and roofs are made of
The height and width of the houses are generally from 8 feet-10 feet approximately and about 10-25 feet in length. The walls are made of split bamboo and plastered with mud. Most of the houses have only one door, fitted to the door frame. These are firm and durable but the windows are only holes cut into the walls. Just above the hole a bamboo pole is fitted horizontally to hang a sliding-window. Some houses have a small verandah in front side of the houses. The two roofs are generally slopes on either side from the principal ridge. Most of the families have only one or two dwelling-houses, one is used as bed-room and the other is used as kitchen. Those who have only one house without verandah they use a corner as their kitchen.

The people who live on agriculture, they have a cow-shed in their outer court-yard, which is called Goyal Ghar or Gohal ghar.

Almost all the Bengali people built a separate prayer room in their court-yard.

b. Construction of Boundary Wall

Due to the poverty most of the people have not been able to construct the boundary wall around their houses. However, those families who can bear the cost of construction of boundary wall they fances their boundary by split bamboo.

Some essential implements associated with the construction of the houses are:

**Paika or Pair:** A pole or a long inclining piece of timber or bamboo supporting the roof of a house.

**Dhanna:** A beam, a support of a roof.

**Athan dhala:** A long narrow piece of split bamboo used in roof. A bamboo lath.

**Akash pair:** A pair of long bamboo or timber used to connect the two roofs of a house.

5.1.10 Folk Costume
The term costume derives from the Latin root 'consueludo', as custom. It suggests etymologically at its broadest the total range of what is worn.

'The term folk costume can be used to describe the dress of all traditional, regional, ethnic, occupational and sectarian groups, from the Alleghenyfrontiersmen to the Cajun and the cow-boy to the Amishmen. In every case the costume is distinct and identifiable; it identifies the wearer to the outside world as well as his own community; it is prescribed the community and its form is dictated by the communities’ tradition.' (Dorson, 1982, p. 295)

Folk costume like folk custom grows up gradually according to the needs of folk community. It has therefore the same ideal value as custom, indeed it is itself only an expression of custom.

a. Dress

Dress is something much more than a mere protection of body against the weather. It is a form of art on which some of the finest minds of all nations have lavished their attention. It is a symbol, whereby a man’s social structure can be determined.' (Elwin, 1958, pp. 32-33)

The dress worn by the male and female of the Bengali community have much similarity to the other parts of Assam. The male wear a cotton dhuti and a panjabi. The panjabi is locally called as kamij. To wear the dhuti they tie the middle part properly around the waist and then taken the left and behind between the legs and tucked below the back. The other end of the dhuti tucked in front. In home generally they wrap a white or coloured gamocha around the waist which is about 2.5 feet broad and 6.5 feet long. The young boys wear long pent or half pent and half shirt or full shirt with under garments.

The women wear a cheap mill made sari of about 15 feet long and 4 feet broad. Most of the women wear a petticoat as under garment but some old women do not wear either petticoat or blouse. To wear the sari they fastened one end around the waist or tucked it in the petticoat and then
brought forward and tucked below the newel. The rest part of the sari is taken backward and brought over the head and shoulder to cover the body properly. The young girls put on frock or churidar like other girls of the state.

5.1.11 Folk Cookery

Folk cookery can be defined as traditional domestic cookery marked by regional variation. According to Don Yoder, ‘The study of folk cookery includes the study of the foods themselves, their morphology, their preparation, their preservation, their social and psychological function and their ramification into all other aspects of folk culture.’ (Dorson, 1982, p. 325)

There is not much difference in food habit of the Bengali community with the Assamese community. In traditional homestead they have two firewood oven in the kitchen. The shapes and sizes of the ovens are not similar. The big one is used for preparing staple food and the small one is used to prepare light refreshment. In some family have a portable oven which is occasionally used during rainy season, flood or so on. In such oven the chips of wood or coal is used, and it is made on a plain sheet of iron or tin. Besides these oven some family have a big oven made by three pieces of big stone in the corner of the court-yard, which is used for boiling paddy seeds and food stuff of the cows. Of course, these ovens are temporary.

a. Foods

Rice is the principal food of the Bengali community. They consume rice for twice in a day as a principal food with different types of seasonings like Bhaja, Bhatta, Pora, Anja, Torkari etc. They also prepare Chatni of different vegetables.

1. Bhaja

It is a dip fry. When potato, bringal, fish, meat, cabbage etc. are fried by this process then it is called as alu bhaja, begun bhaja, mash bhaja, mansha bhaja, kabi bhaja accordingly. Although it is a kind of dip fry often they add a
little quantity of water and cover the pan while the frying process is going on. Generally it is done by the poor people to minimize the expenditure.

ii. Bhatta

Some vegetables like potato, bringal, egg etc. boiled in rice and mashed with some cordiments like onion, chilly, dhaniya pat, salt and musterd oil. Then from the lump some small balls are made and this preparation is called the Bhatta or Pitka.

iii. Pora

When some vegetables are directly burnt in fire heat then it is called pora. After removing the vegetable from fire, some seasons like onion, dhaniya pat, chilley, salt, mustered oil etc. are mashed thoroughly and served. Generally potato, tomato, fish, bringle etc. are burnt in this process.

Some other light food prepared from rice like – Chira (flattened rice), muri, (puffed rice), akhoi or khoi (parched paddy) etc. are very much popular among them. Many people take these foods as breakfast.

According to C.C. Sanyal, 'It is interesting to note that vary similar preparations are popular in North Bengal and rest of Assam, particularly lower Assam. In North Bengal even the names of the preparations are identical.' (Sanyal, 1982, p. 48)

In addition to these common preparations some Bengali women prepare some other delicious food items to satisfy their guests and the family members. Some of these are:

iv. Kasundi

Kasundi is a very delicious food prepared by the Bengali community. To prepare Kasundi is a very lengthy process. The ingredients of Kasundi viz. ginger, black pepper, aniseed, cumin, clove, elachi, mithi, temeric, ajowan, black cumin etc. are dried up in sun heat. After one or two days all the ingredients along with the main ingredient in mustered seeds are pulverized in Dheki or Ural (mortar). Some amount of pure water is boiled in a pan for
about twelve hours at a stretch so that the boiled water remain half to that of
the whole quantity. This boiled water is called ‘Madhu’ and the act of boiling
the madhu is called ‘Madhu jal dewa’. After boiling the madhu the pulverized
powder is mixed with it by adding some amount of salt and turmeric and kept
for some time to become cold. This special delicious mixture is called
Kasundi. This well tested Kasunid is used as Chatni with unripped mango,
muri, panta bhat, mashed potato sak bhat etc.

v. Bhetew Naru

This naru is prepared by the ripe seeds of Bhetew, a kind of water lily.
After full bloom of the Behtew in summer season the seeds are collected by
removing the scales of flowers and during winter these are kept in dew and
sun heat continuously for 10-15 days by smearing the ash of husk or dry
cowdung to dry up the slyness. Then these are cleansed thoroughly and fried
by heating the sand in maximum temperature in an earthen pan to blow up
fully. The blown seeds are mixed with thickly boiled jaggery and make some
small balls.

vi. Polo Pitha

The powder of Aroi or Atop chaul is thoroughly mixed with milk,
jaggery and scoop of coconut and boiled in an open iron pan. Some ground
nuts, cardamoms and raisins are also mixed before removing the pan from the
heat to make it testier. Immediately after removing the pan from heat the
mixture is spread over a greased (oil or ghee) plate and cuts into pieces in kite
shape, when it sets.

5.1.12 Other art and crafts

i. Sika

It is observed that in some villages people use an equipment to store
some food items like milk, curds, ghee, jaggery, pitha, naru, fried fish etc.
which is called Sika. These are made of smooth rope of jute in different sizes
and designs. The Sikas are hanged on the rafter of the thatched roof of the
kitchen in such a way so that it can not reach by the cat, dog, ant, or any insects or even small children.

ii. Ghahi or Nati Gobar:

Ghahi is commonly used as fire wood in the women of the study area. The cowdung is softened by squizing with fingers and pasted on the stem of jute, zetroffa etc. and dried up in the sun heat. Although it is very difficult to burn at the beginning but once it catches the fire, it continues for a long time.

iii. Alpana:

Alpana is one of the most beautiful decorative art through which the women folk of the Bengali community expresses their sense of aesthetic. Specially on the occasion of Laxmi puja or in some other rituals like marriage ceremony, anna prasanna etc., they decorates beautifully the floors of their houses, cow-sheds etc. with some matifs like the foot prints of Laxmi, lotus, cunch, owl, paddy seeds with its small branch etc. To draw this symbol they use curved lines, straight lines and circular lines. The Alpana is drawn by the past of rice powder. They prepare the paste by mixing some amount of cold water in rice powders and then draw the designs by plunging the middle finger, ring finger and thumb finger into the paste. To draw fine line they generally use their little finger. Sometimes they draw these art by plunging a small piece of raw colon or a piece of colon cloth in the paste and squeeze it very skillfully.

Reference: