CONCLUSION

The South Kamrup Tribal Belt initially comprised of major portion of Guwahati prior to the shifting of the capital to Dispur. The existence of a protected belt or block depended fully or partially upon the policies of the state government. As a result the belts and blocks have been de-constituted a number of times. Major de-notification of the belt took place in the year 1969. This was to facilitate the establishment of the state capital at Dispur, State Zoo, Guwahati Refinery, military cantonment and to expand the Guwahati city. The Government Order Number RSD.26/64/Pt/38 dated 30th July, 1969 excluded many villages from the purview of Chapter X. These excluded villages have been described earlier. This measure of the government uprooted many tribes from their native places. Many of them lacked documentary evidence of their rights over their ancestral lands. Moreover many of the tribal did not possess such documents, being unaware of the necessity to do so. At the same time many of the tribal people settling in many areas have not been able to acquire the land *Patta* (deeds) as they are not in the position to pay the premium fixed by the government for acquiring the *Patta*. Illegal selling of land at lucrative prices has taken place in recent times. Moreover de-constitution of the belt severely deprived many of the tribes of their land which were their source of subsistence.

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The letters 'NC' (non-cadastral) are tagged to many villages. This implies that these villages have not yet been surveyed. This in turn means that villagers have no land *Patta*. The government land records label these villages as 'waste land' and ALRR (Assam Land And Revenue Regulation) Act of 1886 defines ‘waste land’ as government land; thus all the occupants of such lands, however long the period of occupation, may automatically turn unauthorized that is, encroacher. When these lands are acquired for any projects the occupants are often evicted without adequate compensation. Although such eviction were not observed in the study area but at the time of the construction of the ongoing four lane National Highway it was found that the affected villages of the Tribal Belt were not adequately compensated.

This study was undertaken with the hypothesis that the social life of the tribes has been influenced by the non-tribes. This has been found to be borne out by the data collected. Maintenance of traditional rites and rituals were observed to a certain extent. But at the same time the social life of almost all the tribes residing in the study area has undergone a lot of changes. Most of the traditional Assamese cultural elements have made inroads into the culture of the various tribes residing in the study area. These changing trends have gained momentum during the last decades. The adoption of the Hindu way of life is a distinct feature in the study area. This is particularly more prominent among the Rabhas. In the study area only Pati Rabhas were seen to have completely adopted the Hindu way of life. Performance of all the ceremonies connected with life cycle, like birth, marriage and death were seen observed according to Hindu customs. It was also seen that no Pati Rabha women was
allowed to enter the kitchen without taking a bath. Women were seen abstaining from cooking during the monthly periods and during the time of the pollution period of birth of a child. Moreover in all the ceremonial functions and the worshipping of the deities, use of incense sticks, conch shell, flower, milk, banana etc were frequently offered, similar to the practice of their Hindu neighbours. But the worship was conducted by the tribal priests and not a Brahmin priest.

As the survey was conducted in three revenue circles under the belt not much variation was observed. Sonapur had the highest concentration of tribes. Even in the maintenance of rites and rituals difference was not observed except for few local variations. Development wise all the three revenue circles under the belt was found to be in low stage of growth.

The conversion to Christianity by a section of the tribes especially the Garos, Karbis and the Tea Tribes in the study area is a phenomenon which was found to be impacting the continuation or preservation of traditional ethnic socio-religious rituals and traits. The reason cited for their conversion to Christianity was varied: relief from social and economic oppression, sense of security, selfless service rendered by the Christian missionaries in the matters of health and education. Further they believe that Christianity had taught them a sense of equality, that all are equal. They are also saved from heavy expenses on sacrifices. Christianity was viewed as an option to better their socio-economic lives. Thus a combination of social and economic factors has been cited as the reasons for conversions. All aspects of their culture related to traditional religion, feasts, festivals, music, dancing, etc were found
to be abandoned by the converts. Traditional music was found to be replaced by the Christians hymns, folk community dances by western dances, use of rice beer by tea and coffee and sacrifice for curing of disease by modern medicine. At the same time the social systems of the converted tribes have also undergone a lot of changes like erection of memorial stones in memory of the dead by the Garos and Karbis was seen no longer practiced by the Christian converts. This was seen replaced by digging of grave for the dead. However the practice of clan exogamy in case of marriage was retained by the Garos, Tea Tribes and the Karbis. But the Christian converts were regarded with contempt by their earlier co-religionists.

In the study area the sex ratio was found to be skewed in favour of the male. The sex ratio stood at 939 female per thousand males which was found to be in favour of the male. The traditional belief that the position of women is high in tribal society was not found to be true in the South Kamrup Tribal Belt. Lower income category households are found with low intake of highly nutritious food. And whatever food was available, men apparently received preference. Moreover early marriage of women among some of the tribes, and the resultant ill effects on health was also found to be one of the factors for skewed female-male sex ratio.

Involvement of women was seen in every sphere of labour. In fact women were found to work harder than male. Almost all the women do every household chore from cooking to attending to the needs of a sick person. They also help the male in cultivation, collection of fuel wood from the forest and distance place etc. Despite this restriction were seen to be placed upon women. It was considered as a taboo for a
Karbi women to take food along with the male in the community feasts. Although in family matters like education of the children or the marriage women are consulted but the ultimate decision rests with the male. The female literacy level was also found to be less than that of the male as dropout rate was higher in their case. This is primarily due to their engagement in the household and agricultural field. Certain economic activities were undertaken earned solely by women from brewing of liquor, keeping of pigs and poultry, weaving etc. But income generated from these activities is spent on children’s education and the household needs, not upon the women’s personal needs.

Even among the matrilineal group their position was found to be inferior. In case of Garo women she is only the vehicle through which property passed on from one generation to the other. Even when other aspects of the Garo life are studied it is clearly seen that women do not wield any power in the economic and social fields. One new aspect that is conspicuous in the Garo life is the replacement of matriliney with patriliney. It is a fashion among the Garo male who marries the non-inheriting daughter to bring the daughter-in-law to the groom’s house. This is also the case if a Garo male marries women of another tribe. Moreover many Garo men shy away from residing in the house of their wives. The traditional arrangement of transferring the property to the youngest daughter is no longer seen among the Garos in the study area. Rather the daughter who was capable of looking after the parents inherits the property.

In other aspects of social life it was found that wearing of traditional dress was found to be discarded by the tribes. Wearing of traditional dress even at the time of marriage was not observed. Only a small section of the tribes was found to be
wearing traditional dress in public functions and ceremonies. This is particularly more visible among the educated middle class who are on the way of asserting their identity. Detribalization which was a dominant feature a few years ago is now slowly being replaced by a wave of retribalization. Further, constitutional safeguards have encouraged them to go for retribalization for the sake of economic, social and political uplift. Considerable change has taken place in the dress of not only the male but also the female. The art of dyeing which was a community secret of the tribes especially among the Bodos is fading away. The same story is also applicable to the wearing of traditional ornaments by the women.

Marked changes are also seen in the food habits as discussed earlier\textsuperscript{231}. The majority of the tribes no longer gather food from the forests. Many are engaged in the agricultural sector.\textsuperscript{232} Almost all the surveyed households possess a homestead garden of their own where vegetables are grown. This homestead garden was seen managed by women. Its produce supplements the requirement of domestic need the majority of which is met by the retail outlets. Drinking milk was a taboo earlier among the tribes but now they do take milk. Moreover as the tribes reside in close proximity to the non-tribal Assamese people the Assamese food habits have abundant influence upon their cuisine. At the same time hospitality was seen to extend to the visitors among all the tribes in the study area irrespective of their religion or ethnic affinities. A visitor is never allowed to go away without partaking of a cup of tea in case of elite sections and tamul pan (betel leaf and areca nut) in case of weaker sections.

\textsuperscript{231} Supra, pp 147 ff
\textsuperscript{232} Supra, pp 173 ff
Language is one of the main factors of acculturation process. The increasing use of Assamese language among the tribes in the South Kamrup Tribal Belt indicates increasing assimilation with the non-tribal Assamese community. The Assamese language has become part and parcel of the daily communication of the majority of the respondents. It is also noteworthy that the low income households felt proud that they can speak Assamese and have adopted the Assamese way of life. Assimilation with the greater non-tribal life was also seen. Participation of all the tribes in the state festivals like the Rongali, Kati and Magh Bihu is seen among the tribes in the study area. Bihu has acquired the place of honour and attention even more than their traditional tribal festivals.

Bachelors’ dormitory is a common institution among the tribes. The Karbis call it Terang, the Garos Nokpante and the Tiwas Samadhi. But dormitory system is not prevalent among the Tea Tribes, Rabhas and Bodos. These dormitories were not only educational institutions but also acted as co-operative societies which have survived for centuries. These dormitories also serve as law courts where cases were decided. Besides it also undertook developmental activities meant for the uplift of the village. But these dormitories are gradually dying out among the Garos and partially among the Karbis. The bachelor dormitory was initially built on stilts and known as Terang. Nowadays it stands on the ground itself and called a Lungleterang. It has failed to withstand the onslaughts of the rapid changes brought about by developmental activities. It still does exist among the Tiwas. Moreover among the
Tiwa and Karbi dominated areas there exits Khels system organised on the lines of clans among the Tiwas and village wise among the Karbis.

Incidents of witch hunting were also reported among the tribes. Initially incidents were limited to tribes meting out punishments at the public get together to those charged with practicing black magic. But slowly witch hunting cases often relate to personal rivalry, grabbing property or other such diverse issues apart from mere superstitions. But the practice of witch hunting is absent among the Christian converts. The low socio-economic status of the tribes and communities is one of the major reasons for the tribes to continue with the practice of witch craft.

The backwardness of the tribes is also seen in the field of education. Although the benefits of education were widely recognized, the high percentage of illiterates was found in the study area. School going children, especially the girls were often taken out of school to work in the fields. Moreover children can enrol themselves only in the existing Assamese medium schools even in those areas where the people speak their own tribal language. The absence of schools imparting education in the local tribal languages is thus, a major hurdle to the overall literacy rate of the entire belt. The rate of female literacy is also low compared to that of male. One of the reasons for low literacy rate of women is due to their active engagement in agriculture and household chores like cooking, cleaning, fetching water and caring for younger siblings while parents work.
The national policy of education introduced in 1986 has made special provision to improve the educational status of the scheduled tribes. Moreover the provision of universal and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 has been given top priority by incorporating it in article 45 of the Indian Constitution. The Sarba Sikha Abhiyan was launched in 2001 to ensure all children in the age group of 6 to 14 attend school and complete 8 years of schooling by 2010. But it has failed to make any headway among the tribes in the study area. Another measure to attract children to schools is the mid day meals programme launched in 1995. But in spite of it literacy has failed to make headway among the tribes. The programmes for formal education and adult literacy have also failed to achieve their goals.

The poor economic status of the people has come in the way observing socio religious festivals. At times festivals have become a burden to them because of low income. Again low income has become a factor for the change of religion. They receive basic health and education facilities and help from Christian missionaries for their needs. Conversion to Christianity by a section of tribes has remarkably changed their lives. This influence is more in the lives of women. It has also promoted education and health care facilities among them.

Another noteworthy observation was that a single tribe inhabiting in a single village was not observed. Rather the different tribes in a village tend to live in clusters hence a feeling of harmony among them, is seen. The villagers as well as the clan members co-operate with each other in their different economic as well as social
activities in order to maintain village cohesion and cooperation. Inter tribe marriage is also widely prevalent.

The hypothesis that the area is economically underdeveloped was proved right. Though the area is hardly 30 kilometres away from Guwahati city the gateway to the north east, the South Kamrup Tribal Belt is still economically underdeveloped. The primary reason for this underdevelopment is ignorance of developmental programmes and illiteracy and lack of initiative on the part of the local residents and implementing authorities alike.

The economy of the belt is agrarian and a sizeable population is engaged in agricultural activities. But it is neither remunerative nor does it generate substantial employment throughout the entire year. Increase of population has resulted in the fragmentation of land. As a consequence the size of the land holdings have been reduced. The population increase has not corresponded with the increase of employment avenues. This has resulted in the incidence of unemployment. Moreover non-tribals are acquiring land through various means such as mortgage, lease agreements, marriage to tribal women etc. Thus they were left with little opportunity and without social and educational skill to adjust with the changing situation.

Most of the tribes in the study area have practice single cropping that is cultivation of *Sali Dhan* (Kharif crop). The Kharif crop is raised during the monsoon season. The primary reason for resorting to single crop farming is the lack of
irrigational facilities that prevents the farmer to raise two crops. Water crisis is also prevalent in case of dry weather spell. The use of fertilizer is also low. Incessant rainfall during the summer season accompanied by heavy humidity create favourable environment for a wide range of pests, disease and weeds. Dearth of proper technology has limited agricultural production. Moreover the mortgage of land (Bandhaki) for small amount of money in times of need have further aggravated the problem of the farmers.

Another reason for the backwardness of the area is the lack of infrastructure facilities like communication, power etc which have further pushed the area into backwardness. The entire belt has access to drinking water. The availability of safe drinking water has also significant bearing upon the lives of the people. It has significant bearing upon the health of the women as it is the wives and the daughters who carry the water from the different sources to their homes. However, only a few number of household have domestic tap water connection. Other use tube wells as well as mud and ring wells. The survey revealed that only few households have electricity connection that too limited to the rich and the elite section. The rest use lanterns and earthen lamps as the only source of lighting. The use of cooking gas is also absent among majority of the tribes. Only a few families, limited to the rich and the elite section of the tribes use LPG (Liquified Petroleum Gas) as the medium of cooking. The rest of the tribes of the study area use fuel wood as the medium of cooking. Thus they lag behind in environmentally friendly energy consumption. The
majority of the households have their own house with individual homestead garden of its own. But most of them live in Kutcha houses.

An effective PDS (Public Distribution System) is seen as one of the primary requirements in making the people food secure. A problem faced by the tribes is the location of the PDS shops. The majority of the respondents said that PDS shops did not exist within the village and they had to travel approximately thirty minute to an hour to reach the shops. Delivery of PDS rice to the ultimate destination is not found to be regular. The interior parts of the area are inaccessible and have very limited connectivity. Moreover people belonging to below poverty line was found having APL (Above poverty line) ration cards thereby making their lives difficult. Similarly, access to medical facilities of the people of these areas is also limited although each of the revenue circles has a PHC (Public Health Centre) but the traditional village medicine men still plays a great role in curing diseases.

There exists lack of awareness among the socially backward classes about the various developmental programmes launched by the Government of India and the State Government. They are deprived of the benefits of many schemes, largely due to their own ignorance coupled with apathy of the enforcing agencies. Only the rich and the elite among the tribes reap the benefits of various schemes launched by the government. Even schemes implemented do not have follow up actions. Moreover social habits like drinking alcohol which is excessive among the majority of tribesman are responsible for their backwardness. The intake of rice beer is excessive among a few individuals which make them lazy, idle and unproductive.
Thus South Kamrup Tribal Belt an area in close proximity to Guwahati city is an under developed area. The society as observed in the study areas reflects the traits of tribal society as well as the changes that have come taken over the times as a result of the influence of the neighbouring Assamese society. This is because of long contact with the Assamese society and culture. Assimilation with their non-tribal counterpart has resulted in the evolution of many new ceremonies which were earlier non-existent among them. Religious practices have also undergone many changes. From the very early times they were attracted towards Hinduism. Variations were also observed in the performance of certain rituals among members of the same tribe in different revenue circles. For instance, the observance of *Bir Kulit* the purificatory rite observed among the Karbis in Sonapur was absent among the Karbis of Chandrapur revenue circle. Food habits have also undergone many changes. The list of food items has undergone many changes with packed food like noodles and bread making way to the list. Christianity also has brought many changes in the life of the converted tribes of the South Kamrup Tribal Belt. The rites relating to birth, marriage and death are performed according to the tenets of Christianity. The main reason cited for conversion was health and education facilities provided by the Church.

The economy of the South Kamrup Tribal Belt is primarily agrarian with the households resorting to single crops mostly. Large scale fragmentation of lands has taken place due to increase of population and as a result the size of the land holdings has been reduced. This in turn, has affected the economy of the tribes and has forced them to look for alternative source of employment. The educated few have improved
their economic status but the rest of the population is still lagging behind in economic development. Developmental activities, as discussed in the preceding chapter were not found to be satisfactory. The benefits of the developmental programmes aimed at socio-economic uplift were reaped by the educated few thereby leaving the rest in a state of despair.