CHAPTER VI

CHANGES IN LIFE CYCLE

In this chapter an attempt has been made to observe the changes in the socio-cultural life of the Tiwas of the study villages. This has been approached mainly through their life-cycle rituals.

6.1: The birth, marriage and death rituals of the Tiwas:

Among them, the traditional system of customs and beliefs is known as *bedang* system which is prevalent generation after generation. But due to the close contact with the caste Hindus many of them have accepted the caste Hindu customs, giving up their traditional system, that type of new custom is called by them as *ved*-system. These customs and beliefs are reflected in the performance of different rituals associated with different stages of life cycle like birth, marriage, death etc.

6.1.1: Occasion of Birth in Traditional system

A child is generally born in his/her father’s house since they are patrilineal by descent and patrilocal by residence. In the past generations, as revealed by older respondents, during the child birth the expectant mother was assisted by two or three females of the village who were expert in such works (mid-wives). They were known as *ojani*. After the birth of the baby the mid-wife cuts the umbilical chord with a thin and sharp bamboo slice. Iron blades or knives were never used for this purpose, perhaps due to fear of infections. From the day of birth, the child becomes the member of his/her father’s descent and clan.

Earlier, during the pregnancy, the expectant mother had to observe certain taboos in the day to day activities of life such as loitering in the abandoned areas, crossing of the river, pond, marsh etc. But these taboos are not seriously taken
into consideration at present days. Now-a-days the pregnant woman seeks the advices from the doctors for easy and healthy child birth. From the present study, it may be seen that at present, quite a few births have taken place in hospitals.

6.1.2: Taking Care of the New Born

The newly born baby is kept in a room inside the main house. The room is warmed with a fire of husks *tuh-jui*. That fire is not allowed to extinguish till the day on which the baby is taken out of the room for the purification and name giving ceremony. The four corners of the house where the new-born is kept is tied with the spiked branches of *jujube* (*Ziziphus jujuba*) tree (*bagari-thani*) with the belief that the evil spirits cannot cause any harm to him/her.

The impurities of child birth continue for five days. During these days the child is not generally taken outside the house and the mother observes the ritual impurities and does not take part in the usual domestic activities and she is not allowed to mix up freely with other members of the family and neighbours as well. The purification ceremony is observed generally on the fifth day of child birth. On that day the friends and relatives of the family (descent) and the *khel* members attend the ceremony. The presence of these members is very much of expectation for the host family. It is generally seen that the presence of at least one member of each families of the same lineage and one member of each family of the *khel* is compulsory. But it may vary village to village as the fixed rule of each village is not the same.

In the villages under study, in the purification ceremony of the child birth, the descent members of the concerned family and their *khel* members attend the ceremony. In Markangkuchi village it is celebrated on the 5th day of the child’s birth and for those days the mother and the child are not allowed to come out of the village. On the 5th day, the purification ceremony is performed which is attended by the descent, clan and the *khel* members who are entertained by the family of the child birth. By performance of this ceremony the mother and the
child are considered ritually pure and allowed to come out side the house and mix up with others and on the same day the child is given the name by the attendants of the ceremony and considered as the member of the family of birth, decent and clan.

The celebration of this ceremony could be postponed up to one year, if other families of the same descent have new born babies within this time period and the ceremony is observed together within the year.

In Natun-Kumuraguri village the impurities (sua) of child birth is continued for 3-4 weeks. During this period of impurity, the mother and the child is considered as polluted and as such they usually do not touch others. On the day of purification ceremony a nam-prasanga (devotional singing) is organized by the family, which is performed by the women of the khel and the village. They are entertained by the concerned family with light food like tea, snacks etc. and mah-prasads. Some families of this village perform this ceremony on 21th day of the birth and some families do it on the completion of the month.

In Kalbari-Bagariguri village the families which follow their traditional rituals observe this ceremony like the villagers of Markangkuchi village. On the other hand the families which have taken the rituals of of the Caste-Hindu communities of Assam (Vaishnavism) observe this ceremony as it is observed by the villagers of Natun-Kumuraguri village.

6.1.3: The Traditional System of Celebrating the Purification Ceremony of Birth

To conduct the ceremony for this occasion, it is customary that two persons are selected from the khel, one male and one female. They are known as giyati. The male giyati is known as sajati and the female giyati is known as the hujuni. In this ceremony two fowls, one cock and one hen, are sacrificed by the sajati at the door step of the main house of the host. The meat of these fowls is cooked with arum and hot chilies for the guests attending the occasion who are also
treated with rice beer or *mod*. The rice beer is distributed among the guests with a piped wooden container known as *daran*.

During the old days the guests drank the rice beer in bamboo vessels (*bahar-sunga*) and a container made from bark of plantain tree (*kol-dona*) known as *khola*. But at present steel bowls (*bati*) and glass tumblers are used for the purpose. Now-a-days the guests are also treated with tea and snacks.

In the mean time the female *giyati*—the *hujuni* takes the baby out of the house and massages it with mustard oil and declares a name for the baby in front of the guests. In the early days the name of the baby was given according to the incidents, day, month, time, stories etc. related with the birth of the child. But now-a-days these factors are not much considered any more. At present, the parents choose a name which they think attractive or popular at a particular time in the society.

Both *giyaties* selected for the ritual of this purification ceremony must be the member of the *khel* but never from the descent group of the host because the whole descent group is considered to be polluted by the impurities of birth and until and unless the celebration of the purification ceremony is performed they cannot officiate in any ritualistic activity of the society.

When a child is born into a family all the related families of the descent become polluted by the impurities of child birth. The purification of the family and the descent group has to be observed within one month to one year, because sometimes this ceremony is observed for the children born to the descent group together within the year.

On the day of purification ceremony there must be two fowls - one male and one female for each child, if the ceremony is observed for several children born in the descent group during the period. The number of fowl is twice that of the number of children of which half are cocks and half are hens.
The male giyati-the sajati sacrifices the fowls in the name of god, praying for the welfare of the children and the meat is given to the female giyati-the hujuni for cooking. The female giyati-the hujuni cooks the meat of the sacrificed fowls with tender edible part of plaintain tree (posola). In cooking, the hujuni is assisted by other women of their khel. They also prepare another curry of small fishes and dried jute leaves (sukuta). The guests present at the occasion are treated with these two curries and rice beer. If the hosts are economically sound they can offer the guests rice along with these two curries. But usually the guests are treated with these two curries and rice beer.

The guests are seated in the courtyard of the host family and the hujuni of the day distributes the rice beer among them one after another. She distributes the rice beer with a wooden container called daran. The guests drink it in steel bowls or in a khola, the container made from bark of the plaintain tree (kal-dona). When the hajuni distributes rice beer she has to do it serially one after another towards right direction. The rice beer is offered first to the chief person of that occasion who is known as jela then offered to the person sitting to his right side and offered to all present there accordingly. If the hajuni commits any mistake in distributing the rice beer she has to pay a fine to the society (khel). The guests attending the occasion have to behave in accordance to the cultural norms. Any un-expected behavior and utterance of vulgar language is considered as a crime and the person is fined by the society (khel). The fine amount ranges from a pair of betel leaves and nut to cash amounting Rs 20- Rs 30. The amount is deposited in the fund of the society for developmental and social functions.

After the refreshment is over, the new born baby/babies for whom the celebration was performed are brought to the guests for their blessings. At that moment the jela starts the song of the occasion and all other present there sing together and a few of them dance to the song taking the new born baby or babies. During that period, the name of baby is declared in front of the people present.
there for introduction. After some songs and dances, the ceremony comes to an end and the guest leave for home giving blessings to baby or babies.

This ceremony is performed on the 5th day of birth of the baby in individual case. But sometimes this ceremony is celebrated lately, of course within the year in which all the newly born babies of the descent group are purified and given names for their recognition as a member of the family and as well as the member of the descent group.

The song sung at the occasion is as:

“Hajore ghatote
Moira Pani Khale
Goshai Baikunthaloi jai”
“Leheli lolaiya lai
Lainu dhemelia lai
Deuri, hatari mindai pujaya
Maloni jogali phul”
“Hajore ghatote
Moira pani khale
Goshai Baikunthaloi jai”
“Ainumu sarasa
Bhainu mu sarasa
Goshai lo sarasa jia
Kharamot thuranglo
Ahusi ramaga
Sanlo segune dia”……..

The meaning of the song in Assamese is like, “hajor ghatat mora sarai pani khale, goshai Baikunthaloi jai... Lai, Lehelik Deuri, hatariye puja korote Maliniye phul diye...aiye saraja, Bhaiye saraja, Goshaiye saraja jibo, Ashujar utsavat mala (alonkar) dia…. ”.
This purification ceremony of the descent group has to be observed within one month to one year but before the annual celebration of the *Lao-puja* which is observed by villagers commonly, otherwise the families of the descent group cannot participate in the *Lao-puja*.

6.1.4: Changing Trend Regarding Birth

Now-a-days, the children are born in hospitals. The scheme of the government to pay the mother with remuneration encourages the mother and the other family members to admit the expectant mother to give birth in the hospitals. The Asha workers of the health department motivate them to take the advice of the doctors during the pregnancy period and during child birth. But this awareness of giving child birth in hospitals is very much recent.

Earlier children were born at home itself. In that case the expectant mother was assisted during the child birth by some experienced aged females of the neighbourhood. In that case sometimes mother is attacked by certain kind of illness called pre-eclampsia, which is called by them as *bagh-bayu* or *baghini-prosuta* and she becomes unconscious. In that case she is cured by the treatment of the woman present there to assist her in child birth. This type of illness is very dangerous and it may cause death to the concerned woman sometimes. When the mother of the child born is attacked by pre-eclampsia, she roars like a tiger and falls unconscious and sometimes the victim may die due to this. The Tiwas have a belief that if a broken stick of hand loom (*rahar-kathi*) is inserted in the hair lock of the expectant mother then she is not attacked by the pre-eclampsia after child birth. According to informant Mr. Padmeswar Pator, now-a-days the child is born usually in the hospital and in such cases too a small piece of broken handloom stick is kept in the hair lock of the expectant mother which is done secretly from the doctors.
6.1.5: Changing Trend of Taking Care of the New Born

The room in which the new born baby is kept a fire is lighted to burn for the days of the ritual impurities. Nobody directly enters into that room when coming from outside. To enter into the room he/she has to touch the fire first in the front room and then only can enter into the baby’s room. This rule is very strictly obeyed when some one comes from outside at night time. During these days if fish or meat are brought for dinner that night it cannot be taken inside the house. These are generally kept outside the house and after following some ritualistic rules these can be taken into the house. They believe that along with the fish/meat brought at night the malevolent spirit might have come along with these which can cause harm to the new born baby.

6.1.6: The Changing System of Celebrating the Purification Ceremony of Birth

Birth is considered as the social impurity of the family of child birth. The purification ceremony of the birth is observed on the 21st or 30th day of the child birth. For that occasion, the relatives of the family and the neighbouring families of the same khel are invited. The khel people (men) attend the occasion and they are known Bhakatas (devotee). They read the Holy religious book -the Kirtan Puthi and recite the devotional prayer called Nam. They pray before God for the betterment of the new-born child. On that day the child is given a name by the astrologer (Ganak). The first seeing of the new-born baby by the relatives of the family is initiated by the gifting of a pair of new dress items to the child. If the relative does not prepare earlier to see the child then he/she may offer money as a gift for first looking of child and then take the child in his/ her lap on giving the gift to the child.

6.2: Puberty

Adolescence is the stage between childhood and youth. During this stage of adolescence children go through the physical as well as behavioral changes in
life. During this stage of life there is no ritualistic observation performed in case of boys. But in case of girls certain rituals and customs are observed when a girl experiences the first menstruation which is known as santi-hoa or dangor-hoa. This stage of life phenomenon is observed by the girl for 7 days. During these seven days the girl is not allowed to meet any boy, specially the male persons. The girl cannot consume the normal food as the other family members. She is given fruits, gram, pulses, milk, etc. for these days. On the seventh day the family observes the ritualistic ceremony of the puberty called santi-bia.

On that day the girl is bathed by the mother along with other women and girls of the village khel under a plantain sapling planted for the purpose of this bathing in the backyard of the house. The mother of the girl and other female relatives and village women bathed the girl by observing particular rituals and the women present on the occasion sing the marriage songs (bia-nam). Then after bathing, the girl is taken inside the house and dressed in new dress items like a bride ready for marriage. She is adorned with different cosmetics. Some families employ the beautician to adorn the girl as a bride for that day. The girl also has to apply the vermilion on her forehead like a bride in a real marriage. Since the girl is considered as a bride for that day the observation of the ceremony is called santi-bia because it is believed that after passing this stage of life the girl acquires maturity in her behavior giving up the immature childish nature of childhood. This is also called tulani-bia because they believe that after attainment of puberty, the girl gets the maturity to enter into the marital bond, that means the girl is brought up to marriageable stage through the tulani-bia.

The observation and celebration of puberty is generally a women’s affair. But with the passage of time at present the males also attend the feast given by the parents of the girl. The puberty ritual is not observed in the traditional Tiwa custom or among those who follow the bedang system of tradition. It is only observed by that section who has accepted the Hindu customs and traditions due to influence of the other Hindu-caste communities of the neighbourhood.
The ritual of puberty is observed in Natun-Kumuraguri village and by the *uddhar-hoa* families of Kalbari-Bagariguri village, of the villages under study. Since most of the families of the first village and a few families of the second village have adapted the caste Hindu customs Assamese *Vaishnavism*.

In the other village, Markangkuchi the villagers follow their traditional custom. According to their traditional system there is no ritualistic performance during the attainment of adolescence or puberty and as such the villagers of Markangkuchi do not observe rituals related to puberty.

### 6.3: Marriage

“Marriage is nothing else than a more or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the offspring” (Westwmarrck, 1891:19)

Marriage is a socially approved union between a man and a woman among the Tiwas. Clan endogamy is strictly prohibited it is considered as incestuous union which is socially disapproved. Such a relation is never socially sanctioned at any condition. The average age of marriage among them is 21 to 30 years for boys and 15 to 25 years for girls. The following table shows the age at marriage in three of the study villages

**Table 6.3.a. Age at Marriage of the People of the Villages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Natun-Kumuraguri</th>
<th>Kalbari-Bagariguri</th>
<th>Markangkuchi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>Total (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below-15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>02 (3.0)</td>
<td>34 (40.0)</td>
<td>36 (23.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>16 (23.9)</td>
<td>30 (35.3)</td>
<td>46 (30.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.3.a. indicates the age at marriage. The maximum age at marriage is 41 years for the males only found in Natun-Kumuraguri and Kalbari-Bagariguri village. The maximum number of males 31(46.3%) got married at the age between (26-30) years in Natun-Kumuraguri village. In Kalbari-Bagariguri village 41(63.0%) and in Markangkuchi village 36(51.4%) maximum males got married at age (21-25). Thus the average age at marriage for males in these two villages is (21-25) years and in Natun-Kumuraguri village it is (26-30). If the average age at marriage is seen for males in all the three villages, it will be (21-30) years. At the age of (31-40) years males married in Natun-Kumuraguri village, Kalbari-Bagariguri village and Markangkuchi village is 16(23.9%), 9(13.8%) and 13(18.6%) respectively. At the age of (15-20) years 2(3.0%), 4(6.2%) and 7(10.0%) males got married in Natun-Kumuraguri village, Kalbari-Bagariguri village and Markangkuchi village respectively. The maximum women got married in all the three villages of Natun-Kumuraguri (75.3%), Kalbari-Bagariguri (82.9%) and Makangkuhi (80.6%) at the age of (15-25) years. At the age of (26-35) 21(18.8%), 8(10.5%) and 11(17.7%) women got married in Natun-Kumuraguri village, Kalbari-Bagariguri village and Markangkuchi village respectively. There is only 1(1.6%) woman who got married at age of (36-40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Natun-Kumuraguri</th>
<th>Kalbari-Bagariguri</th>
<th>Markangkuchi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>31 (46.3%)</td>
<td>16 (18.8%)</td>
<td>47 (30.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>11 (16.4%)</td>
<td>05 (5.9%)</td>
<td>16 (10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>05 (7.4%)</td>
<td>05 (3.3%)</td>
<td>02 (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-above</td>
<td>02 (3.0%)</td>
<td>02 (1.3%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67 (100%)</td>
<td>85 (100%)</td>
<td>152 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65 (100%)</td>
<td>02 (1.3%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>07 (10.8%)</td>
<td>09 (6.4%)</td>
<td>11 (17.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>02 (2.6%)</td>
<td>08 (11.4%)</td>
<td>76 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>01 (1.6%)</td>
<td>141 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>70 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>62 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>06 (7.9%)</td>
<td>09 (7.1%)</td>
<td>132 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17 (12.1%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 (17.2%)</td>
<td>01 (1.6%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 (16.1%)</td>
<td>06 (4.6%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 (16.7%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figs. in brackets indicate percentage
years in Markangkuchi village and 5(6.6%) women got married at the age below 15 years in Kalbari-Bagariguri village.

Clan exogamy rule is strictly observed and breach of this type of marital relation is considered as incestuous marriage which is prohibited. If the situation arises for marriage within the same clan then the problem tried to be solved conditionally by the *khel*. In such situation the boy has to bear the fine enforced by the *khel*, in the form of a feast, cash in money etc. and he has to go through the purifying (*porasit*) ceremony.

To solve this situation either the boy or the girl is raised into the clan of his/her maternal uncle, if the mother of either the boy or girl has not performed ritual of *kul-singa* during time of her marriage. If she had performed the ritual of *kul-singa* at her marriage or later on, then boy or the girl can’t be raised into the clan of the maternal uncle of either. In such a situation, either the boy or the girl is raised into the other clan of related family. Otherwise the marriage of the boy and the girl can’t take place socially. In spite of this if the boy and the girl enter into marriage then the couple is driven away from the village without keeping any relation thereafter.

If their marriage takes place by raising either of them in the clan of the maternal uncle or any relative of other clan, then too the couple (generally the boy) can’t get rid of the fine fixed by the *khel*, he must pay the fine amount and give a feast to his descent group (*khuta*) and *khel* members and go through the ritual of purification (*porasit hoa*).

If he fails to do so, the boy loses his father’s clan, as a result of which he loses the right to claim the inheritance of his father’s property. In such a case, he is considered as the member of the adoptive clan and at his death his dead body has to be cremated in the cremation ground (*hatham*) of that clan, not in the *hatham* of his father’s clan.
“As traditional residence is uxorilocal, a man after marriage does not usually leave the village of his birth. There is no preferential form of marriage in the Lalung society. A man is free to choose his wife from another village also but such an occasion does not arise mainly for two reasons.

A young man does not find ample opportunity to meet girls of other villages. His life is regulated in an organised way in the dormitory. He normally comes into contact with the girls of his own village only and it is usual for him to marry one of them.

The other reason is that a man even after his marriage has to discharge some social duties towards the family of his birth. If any dispute on division of land or other property arises among his sisters, he is called upon to arbitrate. A sister cannot dispose off any land of the family without consulting or taking permission from her mother or mother's brother or in their absence her own brother.” (Syamchaudhury & Das: 71, 72)

Thus in past, the Tiwas were matrilineal and the boy after marriage went to live in his wife’s parental house without any right on property as it was inherited through the female line from mother to daughter, he only held the authority to look after the property of his wife. He might or not accepted the clan of his wife, but his children were affiliated into descent and clan of their mother.

But at present Tiwas living in the plain districts of Assam including Morigaon district follow the patriarchal and patrilineal system. The children are affiliated to their father’s clan, girls accept the clan of their husbands after marriage. To be affiliated in the clan of the husband the girl has to break the affiliation of her father’s clan through the performance of ritual of kul-singa at the time of marriage.
The Kul-singa literally means severing ties with natal clan. A girl belongs to her natal (father’s / mother’s) clan till her marriage. At this point, she may choose to stay back at her father’s ancestral home and her husband joins her as a resident son in law. In such a case, it is not obligatory to severe ties with her natal clan by performing the kul-singa ritual. After kul-singa ritual, the girl becomes a member of her husband’s clan.

For this ritual of kul-singa on the marriage day the boy’s party comprising of the boy’s seniors (parents) and junior members of the family, the jela (priest) and the hari-kunwari (female priest) of the descent group, the jela of the khel and other senior and junior members of the society go to the girl’s house. They take with them one basket of rice, one packet of small rice cakes (anguli-pitha), one basket of fried rice powder (sandah), two gourd shells (lao) containing rice beer (mod), one big pot (kalah) containing rice beer, areca nuts in 5, 7 or 9 in number and betel leaves respectively with same amount of rupees as the number of nuts arranged in two shoulder loads (bhar). The respectable members of descent group and the khel of the girl accept the contents of these two bhars and the boy and girl are given blessings for their happy and long durability of marital life. Then the jela of the barghar of the girl’s descent group sacrifices the a few fowls in the presence of the girl praying before the gods and goddesses and ancestors for the welfare of the girl and thus the affiliation of the girl to her father’s clan is broken and from that time she accepts the clan of her husband.

In the earlier days on the day of kul-singa the parents of the girl demanded the bride price (ga-dhan) of their daughter, but now-a-days this custom is not practiced.

Monogamy marriage is the socially and legally accepted form of marriage, though polygyny marriage is not unknown in their society. Thus monogamy is the widely preferred form of marriage prevalent among them. The marriage of a widow with her deceased husband’s brother (either elder or younger) is not
practiced, but the marriage of a widower with his deceased wife’s sister (usually with the younger sister) is practiced very rarely, but marriage with deceased wife’s elder sister is not permitted. Widow re-marriage is permitted only with the widower. The case of divorce is very rare in their society.

In all the three villages under study the patriarchal and patrilineal systems are prevalent. The residence after marriage is patrilocal, the bride comes to live in the parental house of the groom. The wife takes the clan of her husband after marriage and the children born out of the marital tie are affiliated into the clan of the father.

In all these three villages inter tribe-caste (inter community) marriages are found, in every case of such exogamous marriage the patrilineal system is followed. The girl entering the inter tribal or tribe-caste marriage accepts the clan, descent etc. of the boy. For example, in Natun-Kumuraguri village, a girl named Mukuli Deka of Patidaya village, belonging to Koch caste married to a Tiwa boy named Haren Konwar of Natun-Kumuraguri village belonging to Melang clan. She was incorporated into the clan and descent of her husband and came to live in the parental house of the boy.

Similarly a Tiwa girl of Natun-Kumuraguri village, named Jan Konwar gets married to a non-Tiwa boy, and she has gone to live in her husband’s house accepting his descent group and clan.

During the field work, data relating to the rate of inter community marriages during the preceding three years was collected. It is seen that out of 51 such cases, 24 (47%) were inter community marriages. These were then compared with similar data collected from different older respondents about cases of marriage involving them as well as their relatives. A total of 184 cases were collected out of which 38 (21%) cases involved inter community marriages.
Present generation: 47% (last 3 years)

Past generation: 21% (parental generation)

Thus the cases of inter community marriages were not uncommon in the past but the rate of such marriages is higher in recent times as compared to the past. Following table shows the inter community marriages in the studied villages:

**Table 6.3.b. Inter-Community Marriages (Boys) in the Villages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the villages</th>
<th>No. of marriage of Tiwa boys</th>
<th>Communities of brides of inter-community marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natun-Kumuraguri</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Bodo, Adivashi, Jogi, koch, keot, Kalita.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalbari-Bagariguri</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>Bodo, karbi, Hajong, Koch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markangkuchi</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Bodo, Karbi, Adivashi, Nepali, Koch, Kalita.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3.b. shows that maximum inter-community marriages have taken place in between Tiwa boys and other community girls like Bodo, Adivashi, Jugi, koch, Keot and Kalita in Natun Kumuraguri village, because the village is neighboured by the villages inhabited by these communities. The Tiwa boys and girls of these communities attracted toward each other and fall in love and as a result this tie, the boy brings the girl to his house through the process of elopement marriage. In Markangkuchi village and Kalbari-Bagariguri village also the inter-community marriages are the result of love between the boys and the girls of different communities.

**Case 6.1**

In Natun Kumuraguri village a Tiwa girl named Jan Konwar of about 22 years of age fell in love with a Koch boy of the neighbouring village (Koch Kumuraguri). When the parents of both the boy and the girl came to know about their of love affairs, they decided to solve it by arranging their marriage according to social norms. Since the boy and the girl belong to two different communities – Koch boy and Tiwa (uddhar-hoa) girl the marriage was held
through the Vaishnava procedure of Hindu marriage through reading of Holy book ‘Bhagabat-Gita’ in the courtyard of the girl’s house by the ‘Bhakats’.

Case Study 6.2

Sri Bhugeswar Konwar of Natun Kumuraguri village informed that his younger daughter had love affair with a Kalita boy of the neighbouring hamlet of the same village. When he came to know the matter in his family he talked to the parent of the boy and after discussion his family and the family of boy arrived at solution of the matter by arranging the marriage between the boy and the girl. As such the marriage was solemnized according to Assamese Caste-Hindu procedure of marriage. Since the boy belongs to the Kalita community the marriage was performed through Vedic procedure of burning holy-fire of ‘hom-agni’ (hom puri hoa biya) in the courtyard of his house by the Brahmin priest (Bamun).

He said ‘I have only given my daughter and the courtyard to solemnise the marriage. They (boy’s party) solemnised the marriage according to their own procedure. My family just entertained the guests who came as the groom’s party with a feast of reception and now the son-in-law and his family members are considered as our kin.’

The following table shows the breakup of inter-community marriage in details.

Table 6.3.c. Marriage of Brides From Outside the Tribe in the villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group (caste/tribe/community)</th>
<th>Natun-Kumuraguri</th>
<th>Markangkuchi</th>
<th>Kalbari-Bagariguri</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karbi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boro</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nath-jogi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koet</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalita</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adivashi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hajong</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Table- 6.3.c. shows the number of brides belonging to different communities married to the Tiwa boys of the three villages. In Natun Kumuraguri village maximum 6 Koch girls married to Tiwa boys. There are 4 Boro girls and 4 Jogi girls entered into marriage with Tiwa boys of the village. There are 2 Keot girls and one girl each from Kalita caste and Adivashi community married to the Tiwa boys of Natun-Kumuraguri village. Thus there are all together 18 inter-community marriages held in this village and out of these except 4 brides of Boro tribe and 1 bride of adivashi community remaining 13 are belonging to the Assamese caste Hindu communities like Koch, Keot, Jogi and Kalita caste.

In Kalbari-Bagariguri village there are 5 cases of inter-community marriages. There are 2 Koch girls married to the Tiwa boys of the village. There is one bride each from the Karbi tribe, the Boro tribe and the Hajong tribe entered into marriage with Tiwa boys of the village.

In Markangkuchi village maximum 6 brides belong to the Karbi tribe, followed by 5 brides of Boro tribe. There are one bride each of the Kalita, Koch, Nepali and Adivashi communities.

They have different systems of marriage such as Sowali dhari ani kora biya or marriage by capture or marriage by kidnap, Gobhia Rakha-biya or the marriage in which the groom comes to live in the bride’s house as resident-husband, Poluai Ana-biya or marriage by elopement, Bor-biya or Sudhan-biya or marriage by negotiation and Joron-biya or marriage by giving dresses and ornaments to the bride which are described below.

6.3.1: Sowali Dhari Ani Kora Biya or Marriage by Capture

The marriage by capture or kidnap or Sowali dhari ani kora biya is no more in existence. During earlier days when a boy liked a girl he sought her consent through a third person as a messenger. If the girl did not give her positive consent, the boy forcefully took her to his house and sent the message to her parents and then the family of the girl called the meeting of the village elders for justification.
of the matters. The jury of the villagers took the consent of the girl and when she
gave her consensus then the villagers tried to construct good matrimonial relation
between the two families and the jury of the villagers posed a fine on the boy’s
party for the offence of forcefully taking the girl. Then the boy’s family offered
areca nuts and betel leaves with the fine amount in cash in a sarai (stand-disc) and
bowed before the villagers. To get the positive consent of the girl some of the
boy’s party took assistance of the magicians. The marriage ceremony was
performed according to the convenience of the boy’s family later on as Burha-
biya. (Gogoi)

This type of marriage is not in prevalence at present, as forcefully taking
some one is considered as a crime of kidnapping, resulting in extinction of custom
of the marriage by capture or Sowali dhari ani kora biya. In all the study villages
this type of marriage has not been found. According to the aged persons of these
villages who have informed that they have not experienced the occurrence of this
type of marriage in their villages, they only heard about this type of marriage
occurred during early years of 2-3 generations back.

6.3.2: Gobhia Rakha Biya or Resident Husband Mrriage

The marriage by keeping resident husband or Gobhia rokha biya is a form
of traditional marriage in which the boy comes closer to the girl according to the
willingness of the girl and starts living in her house after marriage accepting the
clan of the girl, which is the custom of the matriliny.

In such situation the boy is known as gobhia. The Tiwas living in the Plains
are patriarchal and patrilineal people and as such the resident after marriage is
patrilocal. A boy brings his wife to his father’s house after marriage, which is their
usual socio-cultural norm in Morigaon district of Assam. Yet a very negligible
link with the old tradition of matriliny is reflected through the Gobhia rokha biya,
which is very rarely prevalent among those who are still following their traditional
custom of bedang system.
In this system of marriage, the boy may or may not accept the clan of his wife. When in such a marriage the boy accepts the clan of his wife, he has to do this through the ritual of *kul-singa*. If he has performed the ritual of *kul-singa* he would not be cremated in the *hatham* (cremation ground) of his clan of birth and he can not claim his share of paternal property, but if he has not performed the ritual of *kul-singa*, he may be cremated in the *hatham* of his clan of his birth. The ritual of *kul-singa* in *Gobhia rokha biya* is seldom performed.

The *Gobhia rokha biya* or marriage by keeping resident husband indicates that the Tiwas were matrilineal in past. But at present they patrilineal people and the girls after marriage accept the clans of their husbands and the inheritance of property is patrilineal, where the sons inherit the properties of their father and the girls go to live in her husband’s family after marriage. But those couples having only single daughter without any son issue want to marry a boy to their daughter and keep him in their house as a *gobhia* or resident husband of their daughter.

The formality of this marriage is not so elaborate. The parents of the girl give a small feast to the khel-members and co-villagers without any ceremony, in which the elderly villagers are invited. After the feast is over the boy and the girl entering the marriage are taken inside the *barghar* of the girl’s clan to bow before the divine power and then the couple bow before the elderly villagers present in the occasion for their blessing and from then the boy and the girl are recognized as husband and wife and the boy starts living in the house of his wife’s parent as a member of their family.

The practice of this marriage is very rarely found among the Tiwas of the plains by those couples without son so that their family does not cease after their death and to secure the life of their daughter after marriage so that she does not have to face any hardship if she would be married to another family. The consensus of the parents of the boy is necessary for this type of marriage, the lack of which may cause bitterness between the families of the boy and the girl.
During the study it is found that four men in the Kalbari-Bagariguri village and four men in Markangkuchi village came to live in the house of their wives as gobhia who are of old generation, but none in Natun Kumuraguri village.

6.3.3: Poluai Ana Biya or Marriage by Elopement

Traditionally they preferred the marriage by elopement or Poluai ana biya and marriage by capture or marriage by kidnap or “Sowali dhari ani kora biya” (already mentioned about marriage by capture). In the marriage by elopement or Poluai ana biya when the boy and the girl fall in love with each other, the boy brings the girl to his house with or without the consent of the parents of the girl. In such cases the family of the boy sends a delegation of messengers (sajati) to the family of the girl to give the information of going of their girl to the boy’s house with him. In this type of marriage both the boy and the girl agree but in some cases the parents of the girl disagree which leads to unpleasant relationship between the two families.

After bringing the girl to his house the boy and his family informs the matter to the girl’s family, then after the family of the boy solemnises their marriage on a day convenient to them. It may be performed just after one week of the bringing of the girl or later on at any time convenient to them in the old age. As such the solemnisation of this marriage is known as Burha-biya or old-age marriage. But it is customary to solemnise the Burha-biya even at very old-age, otherwise the children born out of them are not considered as legal offspring of the couple as their marriage was not socially approved.

The children of such couple cannot enter into wed lock through Bor-biya or marriage by negotiation, which is an arranged marriage until their parents have not entered into the marriage relation socially.

According to them, if the daughter of a couple who have not solemnised their Burha-biya after elopement, runs away with a boy to establish coupled life and her children attain the age of marriage, they can not enter into coupled life
through *Bor-biya* or arrange marriage until their parent and parent of their mother solemnise the *Burha-biya*. In such cases, *Bura-biya* will have to be performed first by the mother’s parents (grand-parents), followed by their parents and subsequently they get the social allowance to organise their arranged marriage.

### 6.3.4: Changing Trend of Poluai Ana Biya or Marriage by Elopement

This is a love marriage. When a boy and a girl fall in love with one another and the parent of either party are not satisfied with the selection of their son’s or daughter’s would be wife or husband, then the boy and the girl run away to start the coupled life, as the result of which the parents of both boy and the girl are compelled to organise their marriage which is socially approved.

When the boy and the girl run away, the boy brings the girl to his parental house. As the boy and the girl reach the boy’s house it becomes the responsibility of the family members of boy to provide information to the family of the girl as soon as possible. For that purpose the family of the boy sends a team of some responsible persons including descent members and khel members as the delegates to the girl’s house. This team of boy’s side which goes to give information to the girl’s house is called *sajati*. The *sajati* take with them areca nuts and betel leaves, fruits, curd, sweets and other such edibles to the girl’s family. The *sajati* team on reaching the girl’s house explains the purpose of their arrival in their house, by saying that the girl of this family (girl’s family) has gone to their family (boy’s family) and she is living there right now. That is why they have come to meet and inform this to the family of the girl taking with them the items edible and appeal to whole heartedly accept these items edible. According to their custom the acceptance of these edibles taken by the *sajati* of the boy’s family by the members of the girl’s family (especially the girl’s father) signifies that the boy with whom the girl has flew away is accepted as the son-in-law of the girl’s family.
There after the family of the girl invites the boy and the girl for athmangala ceremony on a convenient day. On the day of athmangala ceremony the family members (descent members) present at the occasion to introduce themselves to the boy and his family members, attending the ceremony. Both the parties of the boy and the girl exchange gifts to one another as a symbol of love and honour. The family and other relatives of the girl give the marriage gifts (usarga) to the girl. This athmangala plays a vital role in the introduction of both the families and as such it is also called gharsina ceremony. On this occasion the family of the girl treats the guests present in the ceremony with a feast.

6.3.5: Performance of Burha-Biya or Old Age Marriage

The old-age marriage or Burha-biya is organized by the family of the boy. In this occasion all the khel members and the co-villagers are invited. On that occasion the boy (groom) sits in the court yard along with the other members of the society in extreme east direction, and the girl (bride) offers him areca nuts and betel leaves in a bota (plate on a stand used in socio-religious offering) and a garland is put on his neck accepting him as her husband and thus their marriage is solemnised in the presence of the members of the society, then both of them bow before the members of the society to gain their blessings and are recognized as husband and wife there after. The guests are entertained by the family of the boy (groom) with a feast and rice-beer (mod) by the followers of the traditional system.

Among those who have accepted the Hindu customs, perform the Burha-biya according to the Hindu system of marriage, especially through the Vaishnavite system with the recitation of the Holi books, Bhagabata or Kirtana by the bhakatas of the khel as well as of the village or from the other neighbouring villages. In the ceremony of Burha-biya the guests and relatives of the boy’s family are invited and treated with a feast.
6.3.6: Bor-Biya or Negotiation Marriage

*Bor-biya* is a type of negotiation marriage arranged by the parents of the bride and groom, which has entered into their custom lately by the influences of other neighbouring communities. This type of marriage is also known as *Sudhan-biya*. In the earlier days they preferred marriage by capture (*Sowali dhari ani kora biya*) and marriage by elopement (*Poluai ana biya*) as boys and girls of marriageable age preferred to choose his or her life mates own selves.

The economy also compels them to prefer the *Poluai ana biya* or marriage by elopement instead of *bor-biya*, because of very high expenses of the *bor-biya* as basically most of them are economically not sound enough.

For the performance of this type of marriage, the first proposal goes from the boy’s family to the girl’s parents. For that purpose an aged man of the boy’s family along with the knowledgeable men of the *khel* give the first visit to the girl’s parents. In that visit they take with them *laos* (gourds shell containing rice beer), two *botas* (plate on a stand used in socio-religious offering) containing seven betel leaves and seven areca nuts in each *bota*, another *bota* of five betel leaves and five areca nuts. On reaching the girl’s parents’ house after introduction they offer the *bota* with five areca nuts and betel leaves first and then after the other two *botas* with seven areca nuts and betel leaves are also offered. Then the persons present at girl’s home ask them their purpose of visit with such preparation. Then in reply they describe their aim of visit that they have brought the proposal of marriage for the girl of that family to their boy. Then the girl’s parents or any other such person present of the girl’s side asks about the clan (*kul*) of the boy’s family, because marriage within the same clan is impossible. Even to the other clans to whom the girl is given marriage, a boy of that clan cannot marry from that clan though the clans are not the same. If the clan is within the marriageable range then the parents of the girl give consent of marriage of their daughter after detail introduction of the boy’s family. On agreement of
marriage the rice beer in *loas* (goard shell) taken by boy’s *sajati* members offer to the girls parents and they then later accept it.

The acceptance of the *laos* containing rice beer indicates the positive consent of the girl’s parents towards the proposal of marriage. Then the persons present there drink the rice beer all together. Then the girl’s family may also treat them as guests with rice beer and other food items. The person who acts as the go between of the boy’s side and the girl’s side is called *jela*, who is a very knowledgeable person and plays an important role in the marriage. On the first introductory visit the positive response of the girl’s parents to the marriage proposal taken by the boy’s parents settles the agreement of the marriage and they fix a day for the formal meeting of the boy and the girl for introducing each other which is called *Soa-sui*. When the boy goes to introduce himself to the girl he takes with him dress items for the girl as the gifts. The girl also gifts him with traditional towel (*gamucha*), handkerchief (*rumal*), *seleng-chadar* etc. If the boy and girls choose each other as the life partner then the marriage takes place. Without the consent of the boy and the girl the marriage cannot take place. After the boy’s visit to the girl’s house and his consent of marrying the girl and consent of the girl as well, there comes the turn of family and relatives of the girl to see the boy’s house and as such on a fixed date they make the visit. This team includes the parent’s of the girl and relatives and a few aged persons (men and women) of the same *khel*. On this day they introduce themselves with other relatives and neighbours of the boy’s family and at the same time the tentative date of marriage is fixed.

On the marriage day both the *khels* of the boy’s and the girl’s family select the mother for the boy and the girl, from their *khel* respectively. This *khel-mother* must not be from the same clan of the boy and girl respectively. This *khel-mother* of the boy bathes him and similarly the *khel-mother* of girls bathes her for marriage on the marriage day. During the day time feasting and merry-making go on both in the boy’s family and in the girl’s family. In the evening the boy along
with his friends and relatives goes to the girl’s house as the groom to marry the
girl as his bride. On reaching the bride’s courtyard the groom and his party are
welcomed by the bride’s family members and seat them in the courtyard readily
prepared for solemnisation of the marriage. The groom and his party sit there in
front of the villagers of the girl’s village. Both parties exchange and offer each
other areca-nuts and betel-leaves and rice beer carried in guard shells. After the
introduction of both the parties the bride is taken out to the courtyard and seated
by the side of the groom. Then both the bride and the groom bow before the
villagers of both sides present on the occasion and seek blessing of the elders for
their future coupled life. This way marriage is considered to be solemnised. After
the completion of the marriage ceremony the bride and the groom along with their
friends and relatives get ready to leave the bride’s house. On leaving the house of
the bride the bride’s father advises the bride and groom as: “Fa tanegra, khala
ajagang nage, tanegra khala nagat asagang, salon faron lang seg ai peg bharosa
dilo aro”. The meaning of which in Assamese language is like “Baba ajirpara tok
suwali sodhalo, agaloi samajar logot nije mili juli thakib”. In English the
meaning of this is “I have given my daughter to you, live in harmony with
yourselves and with the society in future” Thus at dawn the bride and bride groom
leave the bride’s house and on leaving the parental house the bride throws a
handful of rice in her parental house saying that “Aji moi olaiso sangsar kariboloi
buli’, ai lakh muthi chatiyai, agoloi ahile lakh amuthi jate pao” meaning “by
throwing the handful of rice, I have leave to start coupled life, expecting that in
future when I visit will get the same” and then leaves for the groom house. On
reaching the groom’s house both bride and the groom bow before the parents of
the groom and other aged relatives present there and entered into the house.

The first visit of the bride and the groom to the bride’s parent’s house after
marriage is the celebration of the post marriage introduction ceremony, generally
called as gharsina parba, (athmangala in Assamese language). The date of the
ceremony is announced on the marriage day by the family of the bride. On that
occasion the bride and the groom along with the groom’s younger relatives (boys and girls) go to the bride’s parental house. The groom on that day is introduced as the son-in-law of that house for the first time. The relatives of the bride’s family gift the couple, generally the groom with different material items. The groom gifts the relatives and family members of the bride as a symbol of love and respect. In the evening the bride and the groom along with their party of this occasion return to the groom’s house and start living as husband and wife thereafter.

After few weeks the parents of the bride visit the groom’s house as the affinal relatives of the family. On the first visit they bring with them gourd shell full of rice beers and other edibles like cake of rice-powder (*pitha*), sweets, biscuits etc. Similarly the parents of the groom too visit the bride’s house in their convenient time. They also take with them the items as the bride’s parents bring to them. The day of bride’s first visit to her parental house after marriage is set by the parents of both bride and groom with the convenience to both the families. There after the process of relation between both the families as relatives go on with the casual occasional visit by the members of both the families.

### 6.3.7: Changing Trend in Borbia or Negotiation Marriage

*Bor*-biya is a marriage, solemnised by the negotiation of the parents of both the bride and the groom. Sometimes the boy and the girl themselves choose each other as the marriage partner and subsequently take the permission of their parents of both sides. As the parents of the boy and the girl give the positive consent, the other activities of the marriage go on according to the social procedure of the community.

Those who have given up their traditional system (*bedang*) and have accepted the Vedic system of ritual, perform the marriage according to the Vedic or Vaishnavite procedure.
The proposal of marriage is sent to the parents of the girl from the parents of a boy through a marriage mediator (*ghatak*). The *ghatak* (male/female) plays the role to establish communication between the two families. He/she may be a person of the same clan or same *khel* or the same village. Sometimes persons of other village may also play this role who is a known person to both the families. He/she arranges the meeting of both the parties in the house of either the boy or the girl. Generally girl’s house is selected for the first meeting place of both parties where the boy’s parents and other elderly persons of the clan or descent group along with the mediator pay a visit. In this visit the boy’s party takes some gifts and edibles (sweet etc) and betel leaves and areca nuts to be presented before the parents and family members of the girl as a symbol of respect.

The traditional system of them who have been following the *bedang* system of rituals, it becomes compulsory to offer *lao* (gourd shell) full of rice beer. But those who have given up this tradition do not take the rice beer (gourd shell) in this occasion. The preparation of rice beer among the followers of Vedic or Vaishnavite system is tabooed.

On the day of first meeting of both parties subjecting marriage proposal the information of positive or negative consent is sent through the mediator by both the parties. If both parties agree with the proposal than another day is fixed on which the boy visits the girl’s house with his one or two friends. The boy brings with him the gifts for the girl which include usually dress items or ornament. The girl comes to introduce herself with the boy and gifts the boy with *gamusa* or *seleng-chadar* and bowed before the boy. This meeting of the boy and the girl is called *sua-sui*.

After the introduction of the boy and the girl with the positive consent of the both, the relatives of the girl go to see the house of the boy. There after the visiting of persons of both families occasionally go on till the marriage. In the mean time marriage engagement take place in which on a stipulated date, the
boy’s parents and a few old men and women and few young boys and girls go to the girl’s house. They take with them two batas full of betel leaves and areca nuts and other edibles like rice-cake, sweets etc. The parents of the boy present a ring (usually a gold ring) to the girl. The family of girl also invites their relatives, friends and members of the khel for the occasion. The girl on that day bows before the elders to take blessing from them. Then the boy’s parent gives her the ring which she wears in front of all the guests present at the occasion. This ceremonial occasion is called ring-ceremony or kharumoni-pindhoa.

In some cases this is done on the day before marriage day on which the girl is presented the marriage dresses and ornaments and other items of adornment of the bride which is known as joron-dia.

After the ring-ceremony the time of marriage comes. On a stipulated day elderly members of both the families meet to fix the date for marriage. On meeting, both parties hold discussion about the process of solemnisation of the marriage. The girl’s party informs the boy’s party about the fees to be paid to different organizations of the village on the marriage day by the groom’s party. After discussion of both the parties the date of marriage is fixed on a convenient day following the almanac (panjika) of the year. On this day the boy’s party takes a bhar (shoulder load) containing rice-cake, sweets and other edibles along with betel leaves and areca nuts. On this day the marriage mediator or ghatak is also present in the occasion.

On the date fixed by both the parties the marriage ceremony takes place. The ceremony of joron is performed on the day before the marriage day or in some cases on the same day of marriage which is also fixed on the day when the date of marriage is fixed. In the joron ceremony the groom’s party comes to the bride’s home. They include the parents of the boy and other elderly relatives of both sexes and a few members of the khel (aged and younger). The joron party brings with them betel leaves and areca nuts, pan-masala (guwamuri) to be
presented to the bride’s party on reaching of their house of marriage. They also take with them a pot filled with curd, a pot filled with water a bunch of areca nuts and betel leaves and a pair of coconut, a suitcase containing dresses, ornaments and other cosmetic items for the bride, turmeric and black-gram and items of edibles especially sweets.

On reaching the bride’s house the joron party is wel-comed by the mother of the girl with friends and relatives. The mother of the boy and mother of the girl, three times exchange the sarai (a peculiar Assamese stand-disc with cover) filled with betel leaves and areca nuts and other pan masalas. Then the boy’s mother and other females of the joron party (aiyatis) are seated on mats already arranged in the marriage hall robha near the maral (mandap). The males of the party sit on the chairs arranged in the other side of maral. Then the girl is taken out by the female relatives and seated on the mat readily prepared for the purpose, in front of the maral. Then the boy’s mother along other female members of the joron party open the suitcase and the items such as ornaments, hair-oil, mirror, combs, dresses, handkerchief etc. are taken out and offered to the girl on a sarai. Then the mother of the boy and other female relatives give these items one by one to the girl to be put on. After that ceremony the girl becomes the bride and she bows before the maral to get the blessing of God and then bows before the elderly persons present there expecting blessing from them. On this day the family of the boy gives a pair of dress (sadar-mekehela) called lao-kapoor to the bride’s mother and the bride’s family sends a set of dhoti, gamusa etc to the boy known as nowani-kapur through the joron party. The joron party is treated with good foods by the bride’s family and after this reception the joron party return to the boy’s house in the evening.

In the evening of the joron day the mother of the bride with other women aiyatis (relatives and neighbour) goes to collect water (pani-tola) from near by river, pond or other sources of water. The water is collected in pot (ghot) either earthen or brass made. Before collection of the water, in the source it is cut (cross
marking) with knife and then filled in the pot by three times sub-merging it into water and then return home. During this occasion the women sing songs (biyana-nam) related to marriage, ululate (uruli) which is considered as the symbol of holiness. On reaching home the mother of the bride sprinkles water on the roof of the houses, there after the bride is taken for bathing. The place of bathing is prepared with four banana saplings which is called bei. Then at first takes seven revolutions around the bei, led by the mother. During the revolutions a young girl sprinkles water mixed with curd at the bride in each revolution. After seven revolutions the bride is seated inside the bei on a stool called pira. Then she is bathed by massaging a paste of black-gram and turmeric (mah-haladhi) which is sent by the groom’s family through the joron party. This bathing of the bride is known as nuowa. After bathing (nuon) the bride is lifted in arms by a male relative (maternal uncle, elder brother, brother-in-law etc.) and take to robha-tol (marriage hall) and seated in front of the maral (mandap) of marriage, where she bowed down and takes the blessings of God. On this day the bride, her mother and the elder male person (normally the father) who conducts the rituals of sampradan or kanya-dan have to keep fasting throughout the day and in the evening only take boiled rice called habis. The ritualistic performance of this evening is known as adhibash. Similar activities are performed in the groom’s house also.

On the marriage day in the very morning the bride is seated on a wooden stool (pira) near the threshold of the main house and the mother in presence of other female relatives massages the bride with betel leaves sunk in a mixer of curd and sesamum from head to feet for three times. This ritual is called daiyan-dia. After this ritual in the morning the worship of the ancestors called na-purusar sraddha is performed at noon. The ancestor worship is done by the father of the bride or other aged man of the father’s generation of the same descent. The ancestor worship is performed according to the Vedic rules conducted by the Brahman-Priest (Bamun). The same type of ancestor worship na-purusar sraddha is also performed in the groom’s house. After the completion of the ancestor
worship the reception of the invitee and guests go on for the whole day long in both the families of bride and the groom.

On that day the bride and the groom have to take bath twice with the water collected two times by the mothers and other women (aiyatis) in their houses respectively. The collection of water is done in the same manner as on the previous evening for adhibash. The bride baths two times on the day of marriage. The first bath takes at noon and the second bath before the arrival of the groom and his party for the purpose of marriage. In the same way the groom takes his first bath at noon of the day and second bath before getting ready to start the journey to the bride’s house with his friends, relatives and co-villagers for marriage.

The groom before starting his journey to bride’s house bows before his parents and elderly persons present there and in the family prayer house (goshai-ghar) and then starts the journey. On the arrival of the groom and his party at the gate of the robha (marriage hall) of the bride’s house the women (aiyatis) present there ululate (uruli) and sing marriage songs (biya-nam). The groom and his party is welcomed by the aged responsible persons of bride’s family. In the gate of the robha the groom has to stand on a wooden stool (pira) and his feet are washed by the younger sister of the bride and there after the groom and his party enter into the robha and the groom is seated on a low wooden stool (bor-pira) already prepared for him in the mandap of marriage and the other members of his party sit on the chairs arranged inside the robha. After the sitting of the groom and his party inside the robha in the court-yard of the bride’s house the marriage rituals are started by the priest who has come with the groom’s party. The priest performs the marriage rituals according to the Vedic tradition. When the actual time marriage (bibah-lagna) comes the bride is called to come into the mandap for marital tie with the groom. On arrival of the bride at the marriage mandap, with the recital of Vedic hymns by the priest in the witness of hom-agni the marriage lock (lagun-gathi) is tied by some of the female relatives present there from either
bride’s side or groom’s side. After completion of these rituals bride bows before the groom and both of them are considered as husband and wife.

After completion of the marriage ceremony the bride and the groom are taken inside the house and the groom performs certain rituals of gift giving (*mandhora*) to the family members of the bride and takes some light food and at that time the bride gets ready to leave her parental house with the groom. After completion of the rituals inside the house the bride and groom leave the bride’s house and start the return journey, the groom taking the bride to his home. On the arrival of the married couple in the gate of groom’s house the mother of the groom welcomes them inside the *robra* of their house and seats the bride and the groom on mats and the friends and relatives of the groom, to make merry start the game of ring-hiding inside rice (*anguthi-lukowa-khel*), in which only the couple can take part. As this game and fun is ends the bride is taken inside the house in which she starts her new life. After taking some rest the bride gifts (*mandhora*) to the elderly persons of the groom’s family and are introduced with one another. On the second night the *bhakats* (persons who perform devotional functions) are called to recite the book called *khoba-khobi* and advice the couple to live a good and happy married life and give them blessings.

Usually on the eighth day of the marriage the groom and the bride go to the bride’s house in which they are treated with eight varieties of foods. This occasion is called as *atmangala or’gharsina*. Though it is performed on the eighth day of marriage, yet it is usually performed with the convenience of the bride’s family on some day just after marriage.

Though the Vedic system of marriage is performed by the Brahman priests among the caste Hindus, yet according to Padmeswar Pator, an informant, those people of the Tiwa community who follow the *ved-system*, earlier invited the Brahman Priests to solemnise the marriage, but the demands of the priest for money and other gifts (*dan-dakshina*) made them vulnerable to be exploited by
the Brahman caste. So they have trained some persons of their own community to perform the rituals of marriage according to the Vedic system. But the priests of their own community too started demanding the same amount of remuneration and food items (manani-bhujani) from the clients (hosts), which lead many of them to accept the Vaishnavite system of marriage through the recitation of the holy books Bhagavata and Kirtana by the bhakats.

In the marriage through the Vaishnavite system the other activities are the same except the Brahman Priest performing the Vedic rituals of marriage. In this system the bhakats perform the marriage rituals by the recitation of either Bhagavata or Kirtana with the performance of the devotional prayers (nam-prasanga) and through the rules of the Bhakatia marriage system following the book Biya Sakamor Acharan Bidhi.

6.3.8: Joron-Biya or marriage by giving dresses and ornaments to the bride

This is a form of arranged marriage, but not so much detail and expensive like that of bor-biya. This type of marriage is prefered by the families of low income. For the purpose of the parents or guardians of the boy and the girl discuss the matter. If they arrive at a consensus a date is fixed for the joron ceremony. On that day the groom’s party consisting of elderly relatives proceeds to the bride’s house with dresses and ornaments for the girl and three bhars shoulder loads containing baskets full of edibles like fried rice powder (sandah), rice-cakes (pitha), curd, jagary, betel leaves and nuts and pots of rice beer. The groom’s party offers the dresses and ornaments to the bride’s father and he gives to the bride and asks to accept these in the presence of all. The acceptance of the dresses and ornaments by the bride indicates her consent of marriage. Then the groom and the bride bow before the persons present there for blessing for their happy coupled life. The guests are then entertained by the bride’s father with rice beer. After the entertainment of the guests and villagers the groom’s party returns home along with the bride and the couple starts living as husband and wife there after. Among
the Vaishnavite section this marriage is prevalent, but they do not use rice beer in
the entertainment of the guests and the villagers instead they entertained them with
tea, snacks etc.

6.4: Death Ritual

Among them who follow the bedang system, the dead bodies of adult
persons are cremated in the cremation ground and children are buried in the
ground. The funeral activities require three persons of which two are males and
one is female. They are called giyati. The female giyati performs the activities in
the household of the dead and the male giyatis perform the activities in the
cremation ground. They should be from the other clans than that of the dead. The
female giyati prepares a paste of black grams and turmeric (mah-haldhi) grinding
these ingredients to bath the corpse and she take active part in the bathing
activities of the corpse. She also cooks rice and boils an egg for the dead. Then
she mixes the cooked rice and boiled egg and packs in a banana leaf. This packet
of rice and egg is assumed as the food for the departed soul.

At the same time the two male giyatis with the other members of the
khel/village and relatives of the deceased person prepare the pyre for cremation
of the corpse in the cremation ground. After the preparation of the pyre the packet
of food containing boiled rice and egg is kept in front of the pyre and the dead
body is carried around the pyre and the packet of food with the bier carried by the
sons and relatives. The revolution is done for 7 rounds, if the deceased is a female
and for 9 rounds if the deceased is a male. After this the dead body is kept on the
pyre keeping the head towards south direction. The pyre is constructed in north-
south direction. Then the sons of the deceased circle around the pyre and the dead
body each of them holding a fire flame lighted with dry bundle of bamboo stick
(jur). This is also taken for 7 rounds if the deceased is a female and 9 rounds if
the deceased is a male. After each revolution they touch the pyre with the fire
flame near the mouth portion of the dead body, which is known as mukhagni.
After the completion of the revolution and *mukhagni* the two male *giyatis* light the pyre thoroughly and they take care of the pyre till the end of the cremation. After completion of crematory functions, they come back to the family of the deceased and then the *giyatis* and the other villagers go to their home.

The post mortuary rites for the purification of the death have to be completed within 15 days to one month according to the convenient to the family. But it must be completed within the month. During these days the family members cannot consume any non-vegetarian food, oil, spices etc. They consume these food items after the observance of the death ritual in which the co-villagers and relatives are treated with a feast according to the economic condition of the family.

After one year the annual ceremony is observed which is known as *patlutiwa*. In this occasion two red fowls are sacrificed and the meat is cooked and offered in the name of the deceased on a plantain leaf with cooked rice and other edibles as a meal and keep in an abandoned place, a little distance away from the home. The remaining portion of the meat is eaten by the family members. This ceremony is generally observed by the family members only. No guests and relatives are invited in this function. When food is offered to the deceased the family members pray accordingly; “*Aji tumak bhag-jug dilu; tumar jodi kiba akha-issa asil ai bhag lojia*”. The meaning of which is as “Today you have been offered this share of food. If you had any expectation, please take this share and leave”. This way the mortuary rites are completed. The formal death ritual is celebrated later on altogether with the deceased of the descent group known as *karam*, which has been elaborated in chapter VII.

6.4.1: Changing Trend in Death Ritual

Usually among the Hinduised section of them dead body is creamated. In case of death caused by suicide, drowning and snake-bite etc., the body is not creamated, but buried. The dead body of the child is also buried. Normally when
a person dies the message is spread among the co-villagers and the \textit{khel} members (\textit{bhakats}) by the messenger (now-a-days through mobile phone). Each family has a particular place for cremation in the cremation ground according to their descent group, which is known as \textit{hatham}. The dead body is not taken out of the house just after the death occurs, but it is dressed with new clothes, offering of cooked rice is performed as the means of last food of life. The woman who takes the main part in cooking of rice and its offering to the deceased is called \textit{giyati}. Similarly the male \textit{giyatis}, who are called \textit{kath-giyatis} performed the work of preparation of the pyre in the cremation ground along with the \textit{khel}-members (\textit{bhakats}) and the co-villagers, which is constructed in the north-south direction. After the pyre is ready for cremation, the dead body is brought to the cremation ground on a bier carried by the sons and other relatives. The rice cooked by the female \textit{giyati} is kept in front of the pyre as offering to the deceased. As the bier carriers reached the cremation ground taking the corpse, they circle around the pyre for 9 times in the case of male deceased, 7 times in the case of female deceased and then put the corpse on the pyre keeping the head toward the south direction. After putting the corpse on the pyre the sons of the deceased circle around the pyre and the dead body, each of them holding fire flame lighted with dry bundle of bamboo sticks (\textit{jur}). They circle 7 or 9 times for female deceased or male deceased respectively and in each revolution they touch the pyre with the fire flame near the mouth of dead body, which is called \textit{mukhagni}. After the \textit{mukhagni} the male \textit{giyatis} set the fire in the pyre thoroughly and look after till the end of the cremation. When the cremation is over all men participating in it takes a bath in near by river or pond and take the heat of the fire lighted by the \textit{giyati} and return to their homes. On reaching home each of them has to take bath again at the gate of the campus (\textit{paduli-mukh}) and change the clothes before entering into the house. There after some times all of them get together at the courtyard of the family of the deceased to discuss about the observation of rites regarding the death ceremony.
On the third day of the death the tilani is observed. In tilani the khel members (bhakats) who took part in the cremation of the dead come to attend and they are treated with pitha-guri (rice-powder), milk and bananas. These items of food normally come from the co-villagers. The bhakats recite the devotional prayer (nam-dhara) on the occasion. It is compulsory to observe the ritual pollution till the day of tilani by the family and descent members. During this period of ritual pollution they are restricted to do the day to day activities of life, such as entry into the goshai-ghar, ploughing, using hoe to un-earth the soil, planting and harvesting, entering into the granary, eating non-vegetarian food etc. After the observation of tilani the members of the descent group can do all activities of daily life except entering into goshai-ghar and consuming non-vegetarian foods.

On the tenth day the ceremony of ‘doha’ is observed in which the sons shave their heads and wear new clothes. The female giyati cooks rice and curry in new earthen pot (mola) and the family members offer these to the deceased. The khel members (bhakats) present on the occasion are treated with mah-prasad and fruits, and they recite the holy book (puthi-parhe). The khel members associated with cremation of the deceased become ritually purified from the day of doha ceremony and they can associate themselves with other socio-cultural activities of the khel as well as the village and the society.

The day eleventh is the day of shraddha ceremony. On that occasion the soul of the deceased is offered the cooked foods and respect to the deceased, the family members pray to leave all the expectations of life and depart to the abode of the dead and bless the relatives alive. The bhakats chant the prayer through the means of nam-prasanga. The family members of the deceased treat the guests and the bhakats with mah-prasad and sira (rice-flakes), curd and jagary.

On the twelveth day there is no ritualistic celebration in the day time. From the evening of this day the bhakats recite the orekha recitation (orekha-path) in
which they recite the holy book the Bhagavata throughout the night. They are treated with good food according to the capacity of the concerned family. On the thirteenth day at noon the family of the deceased gives a vegetarian feast called Vaishnava-bhojana to the bhakats, guests and the relatives. After giving this feast, the family members are considered to be purified and they can live a normal socio-cultural life.

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