CHAPTER - II
THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

The Land

The present study as noted earlier has been proposed to be carried out among the Sonowal Kacharis of Dibrugarh district, Assam. Dibrugarh is one of the important districts of Assam, which is situated in the eastern most part of the state.

Assam is one of the 29 states of the Republic of India, located in the Northeastern part of the Country between $89^\circ5'/96^\circ1'/24^\circ3'/27^\circ6'$ East Longitude and $24^\circ3'/27^\circ6'$ North Latitude. Assam comprises the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak River Valley with Bohag Bihu an area 78,438 square KM. It is bounded by the Kingdom of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh to the North, to the east by the states of Nagaland and Manipur, the states of Mizoram and Tripura to the south and by the state of Meghalaya, Bangladesh and the state of West Bengal to the west. Assam is famous for its rich bio-diversity and multi-ethnic population groups with distinct physical, linguistic and cultural characteristics. As per the 2011 Census, the total population of Assam is 31,169,272, where the total scheduled tribe population is 3,884,371 accounting for 12.4% of the total population of the state.

Dibrugarh, known as “Dibru” in earlier time was ruled by the Chutias and later by the Ahoms in the early medieval period. In 1839, towards the end of the Ahom rule, Dibrugarh became a part of the Matak country. The British Government took over the reign of the Matak King in the following year (1840). At that time,
Dibrugarh was the head quarters of Lakhimpur district which then it included the present district of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. In 1971, Lakhimpur district was bifurcated into Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh. Again in 1990, Tinsukia was separated from Dibrugarh district thereby dividing Dibrugarh into two separate districts, i.e. Dibrugarh and Tinsukia.

At present, the area of Dibrugarh district is 3381 Square Km. and is surrounded by Demaji district and a part of North Lakhimpur district in the north, part of Sivasagar district and Arunachal Pradesh in the south, Tinsukia district in east, and Sivasagar district in the west.

The place Dibrugarh itself bears a manifold significance. The undivided Dibrugarh district holds its importance for various aspects. The British discovered tea in Chabua near Dibrugarh for the first time in 1823. Coal was discovered in 1876 at Ledo and Margerita. In 1889 oil was discovered in Digboi (first in the country) and established the first Oil Refinery in 1901. The Dibru-Sadia Railway, the first of its kind in the province of Assam was opened in 1882. (cited in Gohain, et al 2012).

One of the most important aspects of Dibrugarh is the establishment of the first health-education institution in the province of Assam in the form of Barry White Medical School in 1901 which was later on in 1947 upgraded to Assam Medical College and Hospital. In the field of general education also Dibrugarh was pioneer in many respects. The first Girls’ School of Assam was established in Dibrugarh in 1885. Dibrugarh Hanumanbux Surajmal Kanoi College which was previously known as Dibrugarh College was established in 1945. Later on several
other colleges like Dibrugarh Hanumanbux Surajmal Kanoi Commerce College, Kanoi Law College and Manohari Devi Kanoi Girls’ College were established. Dibrugarh University, which is the second University of Assam, was established in 1965. The territorial jurisdiction of Dibrugarh University covers the seven districts of Upper Assam. The presence of Biraj Aashram (at one time it was used for Sanskrit study and research) and its library, District Library, Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaroa Bhawan and Amulapatty Natya Mandir etc. at Dibrugarh bear the evidence of rich history in the area of literature and drama for study and research. At present, there are a good number of schools and colleges in Dibrugarh which contribute a lot for the society.

The first English weekly of Assam, “The Times of Assam” was published from Dibrugarh in 1888. “The Assam Tribune” an English daily of national repute, was initially published from Dibrugarh in August 1939 as an English weekly, the office of which was later shifted to Guwahati in 1946, when it was converted to an English Daily. So we can consider Dibrugarh as the pioneer of journalism too.

The town Dibrugarh is well connected with other places of the country through road, railway and air. National Highway no.37 runs through the Dibrugarh town. Two Railway stations are there in Dibrugarh, one is situated at the heart of the Dibrugarh town and the other is in Banipur, about 5 Kilometer away from the town. The civil Airport Mohanbari is 19 kilometers away from Dibrugarh town. There is a military Airport about 30 kilometers away from the town at Naiduwa. The work of the project Road-cum-Railway Bogibeel, Bridge over the river Brahmaputra is going on from April 2002, in Bogibeel about 20 kilometers away
from the town. The bridge is proposed to connect Bogibeel at south bank and Kulajan in the north (Dhemaji district) which will provide the surface and Railway communication network between the two banks (south and north) of the river Brahmaputra in Upper Assam. Another major project “Assam Gas Cracker Project” is going on in Lepetkata near Dibrugarh town. It is a mega project and is expected to change the face of Dibrugarh town as well as the Upper Assam and eventually the entire state.

The district Dibrugarh is very rich in its flora and fauna. Varieties of fishes, birds, animals, plants and trees are abundant in its wetlands, rivers and forest areas. The rainforest Dihing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary of North East India which is placed in the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh covers a part of Dibrugarh district. The Sanctuary is also significant for existence of Hollock Gibbon (smallest ape).

According to India’s Population Census 2011, the total population of Dibrugarh is around 1,326,335, which consists of different caste and tribal groups like Ahom, Chutia, Koch, Kalita, Kaibarta, Sonowal Kachari, Matak, Deori, Mishing, Phakial, etc. besides other populations groups migrated to the district from different parts of India time to time. Thus, the population of Dibrugarh is heterogeneous and very rich in its diversity.

The Sonowal Kacharis cover a major part of the tribal population groups of Dibrugarh district, which basically is scattered in the villages and the towns as well.
The People

The Sonowal Kachari is one of the most well known plains tribes of Assam; it is the third largest population among the schedule tribes of Assam. The Sonowal Kacharis are considered as one of the sub groups of the Kachari community. Bodo, Dimasa, Thengal, Mech etc. are some of the other sub groups of this tribe. The Sonowal Kacharis mainly live in the seven districts of upper Assam i.e. Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji. They are distributed in 538 villages in these districts, out of which maximum villages, i.e. 222 are found in Dibrugarh district. According to the 2011 Census of India, the total Sonowal Kachari population is 2,35,881 which is 7.1% of the total schedule tribes of Assam.

The Sonowal Kachari belongs to the Mongoloid racial group. Their physical features in very brief can be summarized as: yellow or yellowish brown skin colour, straight hair with coarse texture, colour of hair is black, the hair on body and face is scanty, the face is broad and flat with prominent cheek bones, usually brachycephalic head, the nasal root low, nasal bridge is low to medium, nasal profile is usually concave or straight, eyes are obliquely set with narrow slit opening, commonly epicanthic fold is present, the stature is medium (Das, 2007).

Linguistically the Sonowal Kacharis are of Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. They inhabit mainly the villages far from the towns and generally near the rivers which help in their agricultural works. Cultivating paddy and growing vegetables and animal husbandry are their major sources of livelihood.
**Occupation:** As mentioned earlier, the Sonowal Kacharis are paddy cultivators; cultivating paddy is their main source of livelihood. They use to grow various types of herbs and shrubs, plants and trees in the gardens fulfill the necessities of their day to day life. Plants like bamboo, betel nut and banana are common in the campus of their houses. Animal husbandry is an integrated part of their life; cow, ox, goat, pig, dog, hen, duck, swan, pigeon are some of the animal and birds, they keep in their houses.

Agricultural product is their main source of economic life. Both male and female members of a family equally participate in their agricultural work. Ploughing is done by the male with wooden plough yoked to a pair of bullock. Ploughing usually starts in the months of May and June. There are two methods of paddy cultivation that are popular among them. In one method moistened seeds grow to their full stature without transplanting the seedlings. The other method is by transplanting the seedling. For the first method they first moisten the seeds water and keep covered till it shoots. Thereafter they cast these seeds in the prepared muddy field. Whereas in the second method, they prepare seed bed and grow seedlings which they later pull up gently and carefully by hand and then transplant them with hand in the wet and muddy fields, where these grow to their full stature. Preparing of seed bed and muddy wet fields with the help of plough, casting of seeds is done by males and pulling up of seedlings and its transplantation is done by females. Harvesting generally starts from November to December. Both male and female take part in it.
The Sonowal Kachari women are good weaver; they use to make their daily used clothes in their hand looms. Domestication of Eri and Silk worm for clothes widely practised by the Sonowal Kacharis in early period. But now a days, such type of practice is hardly seen among them because of different reasons. This practice is now confined to some selected places and families only.

The Sonowal Kachari males are expert in handicraft. Various types of agricultural implements and baskets, different kinds of fishing equipments, parts of hand loom etc are made by the male members using bamboo, cane and wood. They are also proficient in constructing their houses with these naturally available materials.

To provide an instant overview of a traditional Sonowal Kachari village in terms of its economic contents etc, it may be highlighted that it is very much self-sufficient. The people fulfill their prime necessities i.e. food, shelter and clothes etc., with the available resources in their surroundings. However, their economy continues to be of subsistence type. Most of the people living in the villages near town areas are also engaged in paddy cultivation, besides their government services and businesses. A few people of the villages are service holders and some are engaged in business.

**Family:** The Sonowal Kachari families are of patriarchal type; father is the head of the family and the inheritance of property is through male line. Generally male takes part in the decision making process. They generally prefer joint families, but existence of nuclear families can not be ignored.
Each and every family of the tribe bears a particular name which they term as “hos” on the basis of which they are grouped into a specific clan out of their fourteen different clan groups. These clans are made up of four to ten different hos (family name) which are believed to be the descendant of the same ancestor. The members of these families are believed to be related to one another through blood ties; and marring between them is prohibited.

**Marriage:** Monogamy is widely and frequently practised by the Sonowal Kacharis. But in earlier time, some wealthy persons used to marry a second wife. Tribe endogamy and clan exogamy is the traditional practice among the people. But, however, with the inroad of western education and modernization, the tribe endogamy practice is not always very strictly adhered to.

Among the Sonowal Kacharis, marriage among the cousins of both the sides i.e. mother and father sides is strictly prohibited.

Both courtship marriage and arranged marriages are common among them. Most of the parents prefer arranged marriage, so there is a tradition to go for giving the proposal of marriage for a girl by the elderly persons of the boy’s family to the girl’s home after having known their love affairs. So in this form of marriage all go through as arrange marriage. But most of the time it is found that the boy and the girl get married without the consent of their parents or simply the girl may flee with the boy to his home. In this case, it is the responsibility of the boy’s family to give the information to the girl’s family and accordingly they have to go to the girl’s home; it is known as *chur dekha dia*. It’s after that the newly married couple comes to the bride’s house and elderly persons of the family and also the villagers
come for blessing them. The bride’s parents organize a feast for all on the day. Such type of marriage is common in the villages; however arranged marriage is also not uncommon among them.

**Food habit:** Boiled rice is a common food among the Assamese people. It is not exceptional among the Sonowal Kacharis. Different types of food items made from rice are their favorite food; steamed rice, rice cooked in bamboo tube, various kinds of cake made of rice flour, are some of them. With different kinds of vegetables they use to have some indigenous herbs and shrubs grow in their gardens as their special food items. One of the special kinds of fish items they use to keep in their houses known as *hukati* is very popular among them. It is prepared by grinding dry fishes with a specific arum leaf and kept in bamboo tubes. Chrysalises of eri and silk caterpillars, bamboo shoots, alkali prepared from a kind of pulse (*Phaseolus radiatus*) and also from the peel of a kind of banana etc, are included in their traditional food.

Rice beer is their favorite drink; almost all the families use to prepare it on every occasion, especially in the traditional festivals and marriage ceremonies etc. With other food items they use to offer rice beer in the reception of guests. The Sonowal Kacharis use areca nut and betel leaf after having their food and also to welcome their guests.

**House Type:** The Sonowal Kacharis live in the thatched houses made of bamboo, cane, wood and mud. They use paddy straw or reeds for thatching, bamboo splits and laths or reeds for wall and wood for pillar. For plastering the walls they use mud. However now a days, the lack of these natural resources and also the
recurring high repairing cost have led them to build permanent houses of brick, cement, iron or steel sheet, rod etc, in the villages also.

The traditional houses are generally made facing the east, i.e. the main door of the house is always in the east direction. The houses consist of three to four rooms each of which bears a particular name for them. The fireplace is the common place used by all the family members especially in the winters which they keep in a room near the kitchen. All the acts of eating and drinking from breakfast to dinner are done in this room. They use to make a raised bamboo platform above the fireplace. It is used for various purposes like, keeping the pieces of fire wood, for drying the fishes, for keeping the unused earthen jars and pitchers in which they preserve the seeds of vegetables etc.

Usually a courtyard or an open plain space is found in front of the houses; a granary of paddy is placed in east side of the house near this open place. Some people use to keep their domestic animals under the raised platform of granary. Some others build a shed in the southern side of the house. In the west of the house they make the coop-cum-pen for hen, duck, and goat. A few people keep pig by making a pigsty far away from their houses. Most of the houses posses a kitchen garden and they use to grow banana, betel nut and bamboo like plants and trees in their campus and boundaries. The boundaries of houses are demarcated by bamboo splits. One of the peculiarities of the Sonowal Kachari houses of the villages is that the nearest houses are connected with each other by small gateways which are meant only for household uses.
**Dress and ornaments:** Now a days most of the young Sonowal Kachari males and females adopt the dresses used by other contemporary Assamese people. The elderly persons of the villages have a tradition and particular style of wearing their dresses. The females wear a *mekhela* a kind of lower garment wear round the waist by other Assamese women but elderly Sonowal Kachari women wear it on their chest above the *blouse or shirt* and then they twist a cloth on their waist which comes up to just below their knee, this cloth is known as *ekathia* among them. They use to put on a *gamusha* which is a traditional towel on their head; it is called *takaya* by them. The elderly males wear *dhuti*, a long white cloth on their waist and *kamij* or shirt on body; they also put on *gamusha*, the traditional towel on their shoulders during the festivals and participation in other rituals. Putting on a turban by males is also seen among them.

The Sonowal Kachari females are good weavers, they use to make their daily used clothes in their hand looms. They basically weave the clothes of cotton, *eri* and *muga* (both of the later two are obtained from cocoon of white silkworm and muga worm respectively). *Borkapur* (made of eri yarn), *chelengkapur* (made of eri yarn), *mugar mekha- chadors are* some of their traditional garments which they make in their weaving looms. *Borkapur* is a very long and broad cloth made of eri yarn; it is so long that it can be used only by giving it two to three folds. Usually these are used in bed in the winter season. *Chelengkapur* is also used in the winters but these are for attire. In earlier days there was a tradition among the Sonowal Kacharis that a woman immediately after her marriage had to weave a *borkapur* in her in-laws’
house and accordingly the bride brought a hand loom from her mother’s home at the time of marriage.

The Sonowal Kachari weavers use a kind of natural colour in the *eri* clothes; the colour is prepared from the peel of a fruit known as *rabab tenga* (the shaddock fruits) among them.

Traditional ornaments of Sonowal Kachari include different kinds of jewellery made of gold, silver and copper. *Junbiri, madoli* (both are worn on neck), *gammkharu* (worn as bracelet), *keru, thuria* (both are worn on ears) are some of the ornaments worn by the females.

**Religion, Taboos, Beliefs, faiths and rituals:** Originally the Sonowal Kacharis are devotees of Lord Shiva who is known as *khring khring bathow* among them. They have particular religious venues or *shal* (temple) for worshiping Lord Shiva which are known as *bathow mondir or bathow shal*. They also worship numbers of gods and goddesses like, *Kechaikhatee, Tamreswaree, Balia baba, Phul konwar, Luhit konwar, Lokhimi, Burdha-burdhi etc.* who are believed to have their own assigned duties for the living organisms on the Earth. At the time of worshiping *khring khring bathow* the people pray to Lord Shiva for all the organisms like living being in air, water and land (both plants and animals). They also worship their religious teacher “*guru Gojai*”. They believe in the dead forefathers as the protectors of their house and family, and practise to worship in every festival or occasion; each and every family offers the first share of each food item prepared
on the festival to their dead forefathers (whom they call as *ghar dangaria* means honorable persons of house). They also practise to worship in their wooden garden (known as *dangaria mata*) and paddy fields (known as *pani mata*).

With the introduction and expansion of *New Vaishnavism* in Assam, most of the people have become the followers of it and they have a *Namghar* (it is the place of praise and prayer offered to Vishnu by the Vaishnavas of Assam) in their villages. The Sonowal Kacharis are the disciple of *Aoniati Satra*. But it must be mentioned here that though they have accepted Vaisnavism they have not given up their age old practices. And as a result, now-a-days they practise both Vaisnavism and their traditional rituals etc. simultaneously.

There are a good number of taboos, belief and practices among the people. As an illustration, mention may be made of the prohibition of eating arum plants after *bathow puja*, but permission to take young banana plants instead; and prohibition of cut bamboo on Tuesday and Saturday etc. Paddy seeds and rice, *eri silk*, and cattle etc. are sign of prosperity for the population and these are the means for their livelihood. As such there are some taboos related to these, e.g. they never give paddy seeds and rice to others on Thursday. It is prohibited to give paddy seeds for plantation to the married daughter’s family or to daughter’s in-laws family of origin. Violation of this prohibition is believed to make the donor family poor. Aversion to and/or irritating of silk worm, cow-dung etc., are prohibited as they believe these are considered to be part and parcel of Lakhami (the Goddess of wealth and prosperity). They even believe that disregard of any form towards cow-
dung sometimes may result in disease of neck in the form of swelling and pain etc. The main basket of rice should be kept near the main fire place; and it should never be empty. While going for a long distance travel, the members of the family bow down before the main rice basket with a pair of betel nut and leaf for their overall safety and welfare. They use to organize toad marriage, play a kind of instrument known as *bagh dhenu* which is made of bamboo and sometimes build dam like structures on dry land etc. in the arid season, for inviting rain. Again in the days of heavy rain they usually stick up a broom of bamboo on land attaching lemon and chilli to it.

There are some prohibitions for a woman at the time of pregnancy among the people. They are not allowed to go to the places like cremation ground; they have to carry a small knife with them while walking out. Cutting of fishes by a woman, killing of birds or animals like, hens, pigs etc. by the husband, eating of much sour and chili items by a woman are also prohibited.

At the time of on set of puberty (onset of first menstruation) of a girl, her parent has to perform a ceremonial function. Only females participate in such functions and they practise some rituals which actually mean to teach the girl for her future mother life.

The Sonowal Kacharis observe some rituals related to the birth and death. After the birth of a baby a family has to perform ceremony in first one month for removing pollution of the family. They believe that the soul of the new born baby may have come from somewhere else or it may not be human in its former birth, so it is necessary to make the baby clean to live in society. The people observe the
death ceremony of a person in three stages. On the third day from the death, the family has to observe a ceremony known as tiloni. Generally the elderly persons participate in this ceremony; from that night the boys and girls of the village come to the deceased person’s house to spend the night at least up to ten days. On the tenth day doh dinia doha and after twenty days or more than that, the last ceremony is observed. They practise a good number of rituals on these ceremonies for satisfying and releasing the soul of the deceased person.

**Festivals:** Like all the other ethnic groups of Assam, the Sonowal kacharis also practise the three bihu festivals; kati bihu, magh bihu and bohag bihu. Besides these one of the most significant traditions of them is worshiping bathow which they call as khring khring bathow puja. It is practised in the bathow shal (temple) on the second Monday after the Shivaratri (it is the day for worshiping lord Shiva by the other Hindus of India; which is generally practised on a particular day in the month of February or March) each year. The preparations and functions related to this worship programme go on for four days; each day is assigned for different rituals. In this festival the people generally sacrifice cock, hen and pig for satisfying different gods and goddesses. Different types of daily used household and agricultural implements are also worshiped there. They generally perform their folk song and dance which is known as Haidang huchari (performed by the males only) in these days. All these as a matter of fact herald the coming Bohag Bihu (which is celebrated in the month of April on the eve of Assamese New Year). The rituals of bathow puja and the songs of Haidang huchari reflect on their socio-
cultural life as well as on their origin and history. Some of these songs are also related to their belief about the creation of earth, sky and life by lord Shiva or bathow.

The Assamese New Year begins in the middle of April and it is the month of festivity. On the first day of the year the Bohag Bihu is celebrated by the community which continues for seven days. The ouruka is the day before the first day on which different types of preparation for bihu is done by the people. The first day is known as garu bihu on which day cows and other domestic animals of the family like bullock, buffalos are given special care; in the early morning these are brought to the pond or river bank or some time it may be the open paddy field having water to clean their body with paste of turmeric and a kind of pulse (Phaseolus radiatus). In the evening new ropes are used to bind the cattle and offer them cake, made of rice flour. The next day is called manuh bihu (the first day of the year). On this occasion the young ones of the family use to bow down on their knees in front of the elders offering a pair of betel nuts and leaf and receive blessings from them. Offering gamucha (a specially designed traditional towel) to the elders on this festive occasion is a tradition. The boys and elder males of the village go house to house for Haidang Huchari after performing it in the Namghar (it is the place of praise and prayer offered to Vishnu by the Vaishnavas of Assam) of the village. This continues for seven days within which they cover all the house of the village and along with this the Huchari is ended for the year till the next bathow puja. Bahua nritya is a traditional dance form
performed in certain villages within the month after bihu. It is also related to their mythological faith in Lord Shiva.

In the month of October in the beginning of Assamese month Kati the Sonowal Kacharis practise Kati Bihu like all other Assamese people. They use to lighten earthen light in their paddy fields and also in different places of the house such as main entrance, the front of the granary, the cow shed etc for welcoming Lakhimi, and the goddess of prosperity. They also plant holy tulsi in front of the house and lighten the same on this occasion.

Magh Bihu is another festival of the people which is celebrated in the middle of the month of January and the beginning of the Assamese month magh. For this festival the villagers prepare varities of food items on the eve of the bihu. The boys of the villages generally make meji (a pyramid like structure made of fire wood and in some places from paddy straw) and bhela ghar (hut made of paddy straw). On the day of ouruka (the day before the first day of bihu) the people practise a tradition to bind the pillar of the house, granary, cow shed and all the plants at household garden with ropes made of paddy straw; they believe that it will protect their houses from storm and the production of the plants will increase. In the evening of that day, the boys arrange a feast of rice, varieties of fishes and meat etc. near the meji they have made and enjoy it with folk songs and dance. Some time it may continue throughout the whole night and in the very early morning the boys go to have their bath and get burn the meji and the bhela ghar. Eating different types of food like mah-korai, til, kath-aalu, mitha-aalu, kachu-
aalu, kumal chaul etc. is a tradition. They believe that people who don’t take these foods specially the kath-aalu, mitha-aalu and kachu-aalu will take birth as pig in his next birth on earth. This festival goes on for two- three days.

Besides these above mentioned festivals, the Sonowal Kacharis practise some other traditions related to their socio-cultural life, some of these are lakhimi sobah, apeswara sobah, bator sobah, gupini sobah, aayuh tula, bhur utua, saragdeo puja, etc.

**Traditional Knowledge System:** The Sonowal Kacharis have certain distinct ethno-cultural features which have contributed in building up their unique identity. It also noticed that they have certain traditional religious, cultural, agricultural and health practices inherited from their forefathers, which have directly or indirectly as well as knowingly or unknowingly helped in preserving the eco-system and natural resources. Further, in case of diseases and health care practices, there are some very unique but hygienic and scientific practices prevalent amongst the people. Some of the examples of such practices are; the Sonowal Kacharis practise their age old bathow puja in the month of March and from that time eating the arum plant and its root is prohibited among them and they begin to include ferns and young plants of banana in their vegetables only after that puja. If we observe scientifically it is understood that eating arum plants and its root is not healthy in the summers as these become more watery in this season. But the ferns and young banana plants become testy and healthy in summers which are not eatable in winters. In this way fishing in the month of April and May is prohibited among the
people, as it is the breeding season for fishes, so knowingly or unknowingly they help the flourishing of local varieties of fishes. Again during the time of practicing boathow puja, it is observed that they wish blessings for four kinds of life forms which they call as chari muthi jeeva- uran, buran, gajan and gaman. Chari muthi jeeva means four kinds of life which are uran means flying, buran means aquatic, gajan means life that grow up on land i.e. plants and trees and gaman means all the beings that can move on land. (Sonowal, 2007). These types of practices reflect the eco-friendly nature of the population. Lots of ethno-medicinal practices are also found among the Sonowal Kacharis (Sonowal, 2013).

**Traditional Governance:** The people have their own governance system. They have some social rules and regulations for maintaining peace and systematic life of the members of the society. The Namghar (it is the place of praise and prayer offered to Vishnu by the Vaishnavas of Assam) is the basic platform of their organized system. For governing a village or a society there is an organization in each village which includes the gaon burha, borah barik, aarshibadiya, tamuli, randhani, pathak, geetghai, bayan etc. Each of these members is selected by the villagers through a democratic way. The gaon burha is the main functionary of the committee organized for maintaining the law and order of the village. The borah barik is related to the maintenance of the Namghar and village development. He also looks after the different religious festivals organized by the villagers, marriages and ceremonies related to death, etc. In the different religious ceremonies observed in Namghar or in other place the pathak has to be read and
interpret the religious scripture, the *aarshibadiya medhi* prayer for blessings for the people, the *tamuli* takes the responsibility of arranging the betel nut and leaf needed for the function, the *randhani* has to cook and the *gayan-bayan* (it is one of the significant features of Vaishnavism which is a group of singers and instrumental accompanists that perform in religious functions) is performed under the guidance of the *bayan*. The role of the *geetghai* is to guide the *Haidang Huchari* team with different verses and songs. All types of meetings are held in the village *Namghar*, legal decisions related to any kind of violence and crime are also made here. There is a traditional system of cast out of society or social boycott in case of major crime; nobody is allowed to go to such excommunicated family. This tradition is known as *eghariakora* or *khutimora*. Thus the village organization among the Sonowal kacharis is very strong, each one of the society is related to the other through a social binding in the form of social responsibility. Besides the common social functions, each member of the village has some liability towards the personal ceremonies also according to their age and sex.

Among various others, rituals related to death are considered as important collective liability of the society. The people perform the rituals of death in three stages; the last stage is usually a big function followed by a feast which is organized by the family of deceased person with the support of the villagers and as per the convenience of all. Contribution of a nominal fixed of amount of money, rice and vegetables for the feast is compulsory for all the families of the village in order to support the family as well as to ensure the social binding.