CHAPTER- VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter finally is an attempt to conclude the whole study- a study basically was designed to investigate the changing parameters of tribal social life. Throughout the study our chief attention was focused presuming relationship between three inter-related issues viz. urbanization, occupational mobility and social structure of a tribal community. It is often repeated in our foregoing discussion that these issues are of special sociological interest, particularly in the context of newly urbanized or modernized society like ours. It is pertinent to state that Indian society is a mixture of great diversities characterized by castes, tribes, regional affiliations, languages, religion and host of socio-cultural background. Thus, social structure of Indian society is a plurality of its multitude of constituent elements and so, change occurs in any one aspect of social structure certainly manifests its concurrent effect on others. This study is concerned with few such areas such as- urbanization, occupational mobility and changing social structure. The study was conducted in a tribal community here called the Sonowal Kacharis, a scheduled tribe community of Assam.

For a systematic presentation of the study this chapter is divided into several sections.
I

Objectives of study

The objectives of the study were framed as below-

(i) To study the traditional social structure of the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam, an important tribal community of northeast India.

(ii) To study the nature of exposure to urban contact of this tribal community with special emphasis in the districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia of upper Assam.

(iii) To examine the nature of urban impact on the Sonowal Kacharis specially in the sphere of occupational mobility and to identify the factors behind such mobility.

(iv) To examine the relationship between urbanization, occupational mobility and changing social structure of the tribal community under study. Keeping in view the theme of study, the following hypothetical assumptions were developed to examine the depth of the objectives.

The research questions originally developed were put into examination in various phases, and the explanations in this connection are presented in the subsequent pages.

II

The universe of the present study comprised of the Sonowal Kachari population inhabiting in the urban fringe areas of two prominent towns of upper
Assam i.e. Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. These two towns are the headquarter towns of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts respectively.

As per information received from municipal administration and land revenue offices, there are about 20-25 Sonowal Kachari villages which are near adjacent to the city’s administration and recipient of other urban infrastructural facilities. These villages are considered as gradually urbanizing villages, as because these villages are located within the distance of near geographical location from the city.

**Methodological Design**

Considering the facts of urban influence, occupational change and mobility, a total of six villages from the two districts, three from each district have been selected for the purpose of present study. These villages are inhabited by large majority of tribal population i.e. the Sonowal Kacharis. The selected villages are Mankota, Teporgaon, and Dainijan in Dibrugarh district and Akanimoria, Sonaligaon and Gobindapur in Tinsukia district.

The preliminary survey of the villages gives the idea that the size of population and households are varying in numbers ranging from 45 households at Sonoligaon to 284 households at Mankota. It was therefore, decided to adopt both simple random and purposive sampling methods to determine a representative sample size of the study. Thus, a total of 656 households were studied taking 70% of its households from five villages and study of 45 households from Sonaligaon in totality.
Both primary and secondary data have been collected for the study. The primary data were collected with the help of interview schedule made with both structured and unstructured questions, personal field visit, face-to-face interview, observation and many sorts of formal and informal conversation. The interview schedule contains a total of 43 questions of varying type of questions such as simple “Yes/No” type, structured with various alternative responses and questions of preferential choices. In addition to the above, a number of persons of the community who wrote extensively about the people and culture of the Sonowal Kacharis were contacted and noted detail interviews with them. Those persons are considered to be the persons of reputations and resource among the community people.

For the collection of the secondary data, a varied sources have been explored. The central library of the Dibrugarh University, Census offices of different districts, Sonowal Kachari autonomous council, District statistical office, Land Revenue department of the government of Assam, youth clubs, Cooperative societies, women organizations etc. were the major sources of secondary data for the study. The entire process of field work for primary data was completed in various phases, starting from the last part of 2010 to the month of November-December 2012.

A series of steps have been undertaken to handle the collected data. The filled up interview schedules were checked and rechecked with careful editing and appropriate classification has been made to develop data tables. The classified data
were arranged into number of tables. Calculation of percentages has been done to analyse the data not only in its simple distribution, but to observe the trend of the data so collected, the observation of the empirical data and its applicability in the wider context is also suitably verified with the findings of other similar studies conducted in other situation.

III

The primary theme of this study was to investigate the relationship between three important issues of sociological interest. These are - urbanization, occupational mobility and social structure of a tribal community of Assam. For the purpose of studying mobility among the tribals, we took note of various dimensions of social life and culture of the community which includes their history, their origin, traditional occupation, economic patterns, village organization and variety of factors which are in operation in bringing about changes in overall social structure. Thus, the profile of the tribal community under study provides a necessary background to ascertain the persistence of tradition as well as the changing directions of occupational mobility (Chapter- III).

Study of social background of any individual or group or community necessarily reflects both past and present situation of people. Social background can be understood as a condition or situation that to a certain extent can be taken into account as determinant for moulding social structure. This study took note of wide aspects of social and cultural background of 656 respondents covering age, sex, marital status, place of birth, education, occupation, income, nature and size of
family. There are 88.41% male and 11.59% female respondents and larger groups of respondents are found in three age groups i.e. 22.41% between 45 to 50 years, 17.68% in 41 to 45 years and 16.01% in 51 to 55 years of ages. Hence, majority of the respondents i.e. 56.10% belong to the category of middle ages.

As regards the information about the place of origin of the respondents we found that 73.93% are of rural origin, 23.47% semi-urban origin and only 2.60% are of urban origin (Table 4.4). Semi-urban here refers to small urban centres surrounded by rural hinterland or villages located adjustment to national highways. The information relating to place of origin indicates that the newly emerging urban areas or the city fringe areas are inhabited by the population coming from interior villages. This phenomenon can be explained from the viewpoint of rural-urban migration. Most of the towns and cities of Assam more particularly the district headquarter town and its population composition is characterized by rural migrants.

Education and occupation are two strong bases of identity of any social group or community. Among all the scheduled tribe communities of Assam, the populations of the Sonowal Kachari community occupy the highest ranking position in terms of literacy. The census of 2001 reveals the fact. Their literacy rate in estimated at 81.4% which is above all other tribal communities of Assam. The same census also recorded the fact that among the school going children between the age group of 8 to 14 years, it is again the Sonowal Kachari population whose position is also ranked top among the scheduled tribe community of the state.
This illustration gives an idea about the educational advancement among the Kachari (Sonowal) population in Assam. There are schools of both primary and middle education in every village under study and a good number of educated tribals from among the Sonowal Kachari Community are engaged as school teacher (Table 4.6). Similarly, there are retired school teachers and they are sizeable in numbers whose children are now working either as government officials or in professional service like medical practitioners and engineering.

The study of social background of the tribals under investigation provides sufficient information with regard to the educational profile of the whole community. Out of six hundred and fifty six respondents under study, educationally, there are 29.42% graduates followed by 21.95% undergraduates, 21.95% have read upto twelve standard and 14.33% have read up to the level of matriculations. Further, post graduate degree holders and professional trainers are 60 in numbers. This indicates a growing trend of educational development among the tribals and the Sonowal Kacharis have achieved a significant lead in this direction. Advancement in the field of education as well as in occupation among the people of the community is encouraging since a considerable number of educated Sonowal Kacharis are found to be employed in government departments, schools and educational institutions, private companies etc.

Traditionally, the Sonowal Kacharis were agriculturists. Agriculture has been considered as prime source of economy for most of the people and even today this occupation has been practising very attentively by majority of their population in the villages. But there seems to be a quick shift of occupation and among the
educated ones we find an increasing number of people who are in substantial numbers engaged in non-agricultural occupations. Some of such popular sectors of employment are government officials at various ranks and hierarchies, teachings, trade and business activities, company service etc. It is equally important to mention that there are number of professionals like doctors, engineers, nurses, officials in private organizations like hotels and restaurants, small and medium size private enterprises etc.

The empirical facts reveal that the largest groups of respondents are govt. officials (32.62%) who are employees in both central and state government departments like Post and Telegraph, railways, income tax department, sale tax and excise, telecommunication, banks, defence service, state police service etc. Business and trade activities are pursued by 22.71% whereas 11.89% are engaged in teaching professions. The newly emerged private companies in and around Tinsukia commercial city has become another important avenues for appointment for most of the tribals inhabiting in these two districts. This is indeed an observable phenomenon in several parts of the country. In a study in the Chotanagpur area of Bihar, Shalina Mehta (1992) observed similar situation and stated that industrialisation in a tribal belt has terrible impact in creating new job opportunities leading to development and social change among the backward communities of the region.

A look on the industrial map in upper Assam districts in the recent decades bears evidence as to how once isolated tribal villages and the population, now have
become an important catching area of industrial development and expansion. The establishment of tea industries, construction of railway lines, establishment of oil India headquarter at Duliajan, Namrup Fertilizer factory, Hindustan Lever limited, Indian oil corporation, Thermal power station at Namrup, Northeast India Coalfield at Ledo and hundreds of small and medium ancillary industries centering around the big industries are some evidences how the local population specially, the able and skilled tribals became the active forces of manpower recruitment in the region. It is not only the recruitment process, but a large number of local tribals were appointed in those industries on compensation ground as a result of land acquisition by the industries.

All these directly or indirectly helped the tribals of the villages to acquire new job opportunities. In fact, the educated skill youths of the local area of the industrial belts have been significantly benefitted due to the establishment of those industries. One can find that at least one adult member of each household of such villages is an employee in those industrial establishment.

Occupation and income are two important criteria which indicate individual’s social position vis-a-vis social status. We have already stated earlier that the Kacharis are traditionally agriculturists, virtually rich agriculturists, possessed sufficient land property for cultivation and other purposes. The family income has thus has generated from two vital sources-agriculture as well as non-agricultural. With regard to monthly income the findings reveal that larger number of respondents are in the category of Rs. 11,000/- to Rs. 30,000/- per month.
Maximum number of families are found within this income range, that is 62.64% in Dainijan, 43.32% in Teporgaon, 68.18% in Mankota, 63.32% in Akonimoria, 39.99% in Sonaligaon and 38.66% in Gobindapur village. There are 15 families in the sample whose monthly income falls within Rs. 61,000/- and above (Table- 4.7).

Family, as the basic social institution of society has possessed some fundamental characteristics, which also determines the nature of social change. The traditional Indian society is mostly characterised by village organisation, caste system and joint family system. Any alteration in these structural aspects can be taken as indicator of social change of society. Significantly, we find certain trend in family organisation among the respondents under study.

The nuclear family pattern with family members ranging from one to three children has been an accepted ideal family system among the Sonowal Kacharis. About 83% respondents from all six studied villages indicated in favour of such attitude. Accordingly, small family norm comprising two to three children in a family was favoured by about 54.57% respondents. This reflects a changing attitudes towards basic institutional values and culture which may be the outcome of modern education and occupations of the tribals under study.

The description relating to socio-economic background of the 656 respondents under study are reflexive on many dimensions of social structure of the tribal society. Some of such aspects of social structure of the studied tribal community are summarized in the pages to follow. A point of considerable
significance in this connection is that occupational change and mobility (both spatial and social) have affected the common living of the members of the joint families in all sorts of occupations. A sizeable section of respondents simultaneously belong to both joint and nuclear families. In the towns or in the places of their employment, a good number of respondents are living in nuclear families, but at the same time they have not ceased contact with their joint families living in villages or other places.

IV

One major objective of this study was to investigate the nature of urban impact in the tribal social life especially in the sphere of occupational mobility. Meanwhile in the foregoing pages on the basis of our major findings we have seen that the Sonowal Kacharis of upper Assam districts are in the process of significant alteration in certain basic sphere of work, occupation and earnings.

While studying occupational mobility of the respondents we undertook few dimensions of occupation which are commonly applied and investigated in sociological research. Some issues like places of origin and migration, avenues for increased sources for earning, inter-generational changes in terms of education and occupation, nature of acquiring jobs, assessment of one’s social status, patterns of consumption and a host of other related issues are taken into consideration in understanding mobility perspectives. These perspectives cover both horizontal and vertical mobility in society.

Our studied universe comprised of population living in urban periphery or near adjustment to city administration. These areas were primarily the villages
existed long before city’s expansion. These villages are now under the gradual influence of industrialisation and urban development. Our data reveal that 86.28% respondents are native and 13.71% are migrants. Two types of migration i.e. migration from villages to city’s sub-urban localities within the same district and secondly, migration from distant localities of other districts. The former being the intra-district and the later may be categorized as inter-district migration. The primary causes of such migration are the shifting of residences during father’s generation, nearer to the place of work, children’s education of better accessibility to urban infra-structural facilities (Table-5.2).

Contact with urban centres opens up varied sources for economic opportunities. This facilitates new life chances and better living standard. Thus, possession of land property at city or town, possession of rented house and additional sources of earnings of the respondents were also viewed as another cause for rural to urban migration for most of the people under study. It was found that 14% respondents have land property at town and about 9% have their rented houses (Table-5.3).

Inter-generational educational and occupational mobility has been most frequently adopted criteria for mobility studies in sociological research. The findings of this study reveal very significant data in this context. Change in educational levels among three generations i.e. grandfather, father and self indicates that it was mass illiteracy during the days of grandfather (91.46%), and reducing illiteracy at a significant rate during father’s generations (43.75%).
During fathers’ generation, attainment of formal education is quite improved which was found to be 23.01% below matriculation, 17.88% matriculates, 1051% are Higher Secondary passed and 4.87% are graduates. This shows that intergenerational mobility in education among the Sonowal Kacharis has improved significantly and consistently across generations. Similar observation was also noteworthy to mention in this context. In the contemporary India more than ever before, acquiring a college education has become key to gaining entry to the most dynamic segments of employment. Significant upward mobility in contemporary India is, by and large, contingent upon having or obtaining a college degree (Mohanty 2006 : 3777).

Between the generations of fathers and respondents, there is again a marked difference in terms of educational achievement among the population of this tribal community. In the respondents’ generation baring 21 of them, we find 29.42% graduates, 4.72% post graduates and 4.42% are technical diploma holders like engineering, industrial training, telecom diploma, veterinary and nursing (Table-4.5 and 5.5). It is to note that achievement of such technical education among the tribal people has helped a lot in acquiring jobs in various government departments, companies and other institute in due course of time.

Similarly, study of inter-generational occupational mobility of this tribal community presents interesting findings. The change of primary occupation from the grandfather’s generation to the present generation and differentiation thereof is phenomenal. Cultivation has been the principal occupation during grandfather’s
generation (91.15%) and such practice of occupation has been substantially reduced during father’s generation (71.79%). During father’s time, some other occupations were emerged such as teaching (4.42%), business, trade and commercial activities (12.80%), white collar occupations (10.36%), and few of them were company service holders (0.60%). The most striking changes in occupation was visible during respondent’s generation. In the respondent’s generation agriculture as primary occupation has been minimal (17.37%), whereas other non-agricultural occupations such as govt. service, business and trade activities, employment in private companies, teaching, entrepreneurial activities has emerged.

It is to mention that larger numbers of respondents of this study were found in the government service category (32.62%), 22.71% are business entrepreneurs, 11.89% are teachers and 7.16% are company service holders.

The finding with regards to inter-generational occupational mobility reveal that change of occupations from one generation to the next among the educated tribals of the plains valley of Assam is phenomenal.

This study also reveals some information with regard to the nature of acquiring jobs. Besides formal interview education, merit and competition, a number of other criteria were also found effective behind the process of job attainment. It has expressed that 56.34% have acquired job through open competition, educational qualification and merit, 36.54% have got through
reservation quota as laid down in the rules of government and 6.34% stated compensationate ground (Table-5.7).

Few important aspects of social mobility and social change were also investigated in this study. These are nature of assessment of social status and secondly, the changing consumption behaviour of the educated tribals because of urban influence. In response to a question “whether their present occupational status is superior to their forefathers’ status”? To such query 65.09% respondents revealed that it is “superior”, 26.21% stated as “equal”, 2.90% replied “inferior” and 5.80% could not ascertain their opinion in this context. Such uncertainty has been due to several reasons detected during intensive field observation and close talk with the people. A good section of the Sonowal Kacharis were traditionally well off people. It was observed that the notion of status attainment process sometimes lacks precision on the part of the respondents. The answers received from the respondents seem to have been influenced by number of considerations such as – comparatively higher economic status in their traditional family occupation, higher possession of wealth and law by their parents and feelings of security in the midst of traditional living environment. Therefore it was, in many cases, the respondents were seemed to be inconsistent in correctly evaluating their social status even in contemporary urban situation.

V

As this stage we will now try to present the views, expression and opinion of the respondents emerged as a result of experience of mobility in life. These
opinions were sought and a host of questions were introduced to the respondents. Our basic objectives pre-supposed that the mobile and urbanized tribals, due to their educational and occupational changes have varied sort of attitude and behaviour structure that could throw light on the prevailing social life and culture of the tribals.

To examine such issues questions were raised to the respondents covering views on wide areas of social life such as - attitudes towards social institutions, changing attitudes to marriage and religion, nature of relationship with native families and kin members, impact of secondary set of relationship and choice for children’s education and occupations.

Traditionally, as an agricultural community, this tribal community was, and even today, is much attached to joint family system. To the views of the larger number of people it was found that joint family system is still considered a support base for the continuity of social integrity and holistic community life of the tribals. With the change of agricultural occupation viz. change in occupation over generations, the traditional stronghold of joint family system, among the Sonowal Kacharis is in the process of strain. Higher number of respondents from each village under study, have expressed “unfavourable” attitude towards joint family. But at same time, acceptance of nuclear family was also considered “unfavourable” by sizeable number of them. Thus, this implies that the joint family as social institution which finds integrity in the traditional social structure of the tribals is not losing ground among the urbanite tribals. In some villages, the
favourable attitudes towards nuclear family system was found to be more stronger among the respondents (Teporgaon 78.88%, Mankota 70.71%, Sonaligaon 68.88% and Gobindapur 84.66%). Similar is the opinion towards ideal family size. Large numbers of respondents like to prefer small family size consisting two children (Table-6.2). These findings invite some illustration that seem to be relevant in this context. Family as basic social institution in society has been effected as a result of various social forces. Teporgaon and Mankotta villages in the vicinity of Dibrugarh town are developed areas in terms of urban infrastructure and have experienced quicker process of spatial change as a result of gradual merging with municipal administration. This has witnessed, apart from extension of urban infrastructural facilities, there is a rapid increase of land value, mass transfer of agricultural land to non-agricultural purposes, establishment of various governmental and non-governmental institutions in the locality, extension of commercial network, increase of population concentration etc. Similar is the case with the Sonaligaon and Gobindapur villages in Tinsukia. Thus, it is possible to draw some conclusions that urban growth has been the prime factor for change of attitude towards family system.

Traditionally, the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam have been practicing some typical marriage rules with regard to selection of marriage partners. Such practices to some extent are still prevalent among them (chapter- III). Many respondents were of the opinion that those social sanctions and bindings are undergoing considerable changes, since couple’s choice for selecting marriage partners has
occupied a place of importance now-a-days (47.25%). But 46.65% respondents want that marriage for their sons and daughters should be settled though the consent of parents and 6.10% are in favour of traditional tribal customs, which must be followed in the process of marriage settlement.

Indian society is characterized by the prevalence of innumerable castes, tribes, races, regional groups, linguistics and religious affiliations. Thus interaction between social groups and communities and its resulting outcome has been the continuous subject of discussion as well as sociological research in Indian context. Our inquiry was simple to the fact that whether the respondents prefer inter-caste and inter-tribe marriages for their sons and daughters. The findings reveals that 34.15% prefer marriage within their own tribes, 35.82% prefer with other tribes and 30.03% have been found to be liberal i.e. inter-tribe or tribe-caste marriages may be acceptable for them.

Traditionally, tribal social life and organisation is predominantly characterised by the prevalence of larger religious belief, faith and practices. They are in fact, worshipers of large numbers of deities, gods and goddesses (Chapter- III). The Sonowal Kacharis of Assam, are also no exception. They worship gods and goddesses and so, perform various rituals and festivals throughout the calendar year. Maximum numbers of festivals are celebrated centering around agriculture, family’s welbeing, protection of family and village deities and a host of such occasions relating to birth, death and marriages. Our respondents stated that 31.25% of them celebrate such festivals and rituals twice in
a year, 30.18% thrice in a year, 21.48% four times in a year while 9.60% perform such festivals more than four times in a year (Table-6.8). Similarly, 61.28% do maintain regular habit of praying to God, 20.43% are frequent worshippers and 10.29% are occasional worshippers.

Rural-urban relationship can be focussed on the study of social contact and relationship between the town dwellers and kin members at native places. This is specially important from the perspective of rural-urban continuum relationship. Out of total 90 migrant families, majority are occasional visitors to their rural counterparts (55.55%), while 33.33% are frequent visitors and 11.12% are regular visitors. The differential natures of such visit have been caused by number of factors. Many of urban dwellers have possessed land property at village and this make them obligatory to visit their native family members (6.57%), for some, keeping contact with relatives in matters of decision making (10.97%) and offering advice in troubles (15.39%).

Urbanites are found to be associated with various voluntary bodies and associations in their occupational and professional life cycles. There are some ethnic or community-based associations in which each and every adult member of the Sonowal Kachari community have the membership of such bodies. Apart from these, many of them are members of some professional organisations and other local associations like- Namghar committees, School boards, Village clubs and Libraries, Business committees, cultural bodies etc. (Table 6.11)

One important aspect of modern urbanised family is the increasing expectation and desire for novel achievement in education and occupation for their
children. Respondents have offered a wide variety of choices while asked about such issues. Mostly, the desired choice for education for their children is ‘general education’ (30.79%), followed by medical education (25.76%), engineering (17.83%) and civil service education (12.04%). Respondents are found to be quite conscious while putting forward their opinion towards choice for education of their children. Legal education, management education, agriculture and veterinary sciences and a host of other professional training and courses are their favourable choices for which, they like to desire for their children (Table 6.3).

Similarly, the educated tribals are of the opinion that there are increasing avenue for occupation and jobs as they expressed (table 6.4). But with regard to the choice of occupation for their sons and daughters, they like to put higher choice for engineering (21.04%) occupations, followed by teaching job in college/university (12.95%), civil service (11.89%), government services (11.73%), medical practioners (11.13%) and independent business establishment (9.60%). They indicated wide number of other options for occupation and education which are discussed in the context of the table 6.4, chapter VI. Thus, the findings presented in the preceeding pages can be taken as important bases for analysis with regard to the tribal society mainly on two dimensions such as - contiuity of socio-cultural ethos and the changing life situation.

VI

At the final stage of our concluding remark we again move to highlight some of the very vital findings and analysis presented in the proceeding pages. The
presumed idea of the study was to examine the relationship between three variables of sociological interest i.e. urbanization, occupational mobility and social structure of the tribals. We have emphasized this aspect also that sociological investigation in such area is of special interest keeping in view the change and development of the tribals of northeast India.

The findings of this study revealed some new empirical facts with regard to tribal society. The six villages under study are the villages largely inhabited by the tribals, mostly by the Sonowal Kacharis and these are actually the ancient inhabited area of the community and some villages have developed as a result of new migrants settled down in the area. Those migrants are new settlers after they got recruitment in government departments, private companies or in industrial establishments. In fact large number of tribal villages located in the present Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts are now within the ambit of industrialized areas. The major industrial organizations are - Tea industry, Indian Oil Corporation, Oil India Limited, North Eastern Coalfields, Fertilizer Corporation, Thermal Power Limited and a host of other associated small and medium sized industries. Establishment of these industries during the last four- five decades, more particularly after independence of the country, to many extent has changed not only the ecological and physical landscape of the area, but has greatly encouraged the shift of population leading to the change of residence and occupational mobility. The tribals residing in this geographical part may be seen as one of the important beneficieries.
One major tribal community in this part of upper Assam is the Sonowal Kacharis. Recent estimate shows that there are about 5 lakhs Sonowal Kachari population in Assam, spread over 625 villages and having higher concentration in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. The neighbouring villages that surrounded the two district headquarter towns are inhabited by tribal community more particularly by the Sonowal Kacharis and these villages are becoming increasingly subject to the impact of urban influences.

The six villages under study are urbanized villages, or in other sense the areas covered by these villages may be termed as urban in - built localities. In the record of the city’s municipal administration, the localities are, still identified as villages. On the other hand, a casual visit to these localities proves that these areas are almost within the jurisdiction of urban administration, with increasing urban infra-structural facilities like easy accessibility of transport, nearer to city centres and commercial establishments, public mode of transport to the places of work, educational institutions, and frequent exposure to wider mixed and composite population.

The occupationally mobile tribals of the Sonowal Kacharis are of varied occupational categories of non-agricultural types showing a remarkable shift of occupational transformation from their forefather’s generations. The emergence of new occupational structure has been due to number of factors. This study has identified some of such factors exclusively applicable in case of the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam.
An investigation into the history of migration, habitation and the occupational patterns of this tribal community gives an idea that the Sonowal Kacharis were not totally an isolated tribal community away from the greater mainstream of the Assamese society. Like many other plains tribals since ancient times, they practiced agriculture and settled cultivation, established permanent village and developed social order. Thus, stability in social structure provided a persistence as well as continuity wherein inactment of any development policies like introduction of educational institutions, building infrastructure and imitation to the processes of social change become possible. It is believed that some other tribal communities who have been settling down in river bank or geographically cut-off localities since generations remained less developed in terms of several developmental aspects. This is one important fact which historically made possible for the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam to acquire comparatively higher rank and position in the field of education; occupational achievement leading is quick contact and exposure to urban influence. The study of socio-cultural background of the community people also substantiated the fact.

The Sonowals have achieved a rapid progress in educational sphere which made them capable of getting jobs in the government departments, institutions and various other private companies and sectors. In fact, mobility experience for the Sonowal Kachari is much quicker in comparison to other tribal counterparts of the region. Thus, the mobile and urbanite Sonowal Kacharis have developed a way of life that seem to be dissimilar what they practiced in traditional village life and
organisation. The migrant people with new occupations in urban environment
developed a tendency to purchase urban land and to construct houses at city
keeping in view the future of their children’s educations and health facilities. This
sort of tendency is also visible among other migrant to the town of hill areas of
north east India also (Shrutikar 2007, 399-415).

One very significant aspect of tribal social structure is its change and
dynamics. The study of tribal change particularly, gained momentum when the
country has achieved large scale industrialization leading to the growth of urban
centres, introducing forces of change in the social structure of primitive tribal
communities. Studies have also identified such forces coming from both outside
and within (Mann and Mann 1989, Shashi 1995, Advani 2009).

Conclusion

The study of six hundred and fifty families from among the Sonowal
Kachari community, may be here treated as specific empirical representation that
illustrates ample evidence of social transformation of tribal society. Undoubtedly,
the tribals of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, over the last few decades, have
been experiencing change in various aspects of their life patterns. The inducing
factors of such change may be both endogenous as well as exogenous. The
endogenous forces have been the result of century-long experiences endowed with
the process of formation of Assamese social structure. It can be rightly mentioned
that the social structure of the contemporary Assamese society has emerged out of
the synthesis and age-old process of socio-cultural interaction among various linguistic, ethnic, castes, religious and regional groups (Dubey, 1978).

The exogenous forces on the otherhand, have been in operation after the introduction of English education, establishment of educational institutions, initiation of number of socio-economic welfare measures specially for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, expansion of urbanisation, market centres and rapid change in the occupational structure. From an indepth observation and empirical knowledge it can be stated that the tribal community under study have been influenced by both endogenous and exogenous factors.

From all historical account, the Sonowal Kacharis, a scheduled tribe community of Assam, has been a compact community with its long history, stable village organisation, persistence of tradition and social order. The traditional social structure of the community like many other tribals of Assam is clearly featured by ethnic characters, social institutions, religion and rituals, culture, music and dance, legends, myth and folk tradition. In the situation of village life, these features have been preserved since generations. What is significant to note is that, the traditional social structure, norms and values of the community life is undergoing strain as a result of new forces like new occupational culture and urban influence. In the contemporary period, a phenomenal change has been noticed in the life and culture of the community people. In the social organisation of the village, the Sonowal Kacharis have been maintaining its deep-rooted traditions in all walks of life and have been preserving over generations even after industrial and urban impact.
Attitudes with great mixture of both tradition and modernity are reflected from the views of few sections.

There is apparently a differential sort of views and opinion with regard to changing perception as a result of mobility in occupation and actual life experiences. It was believed that the traditional tribal stability and social organisation which was rested on permanent village organisation has been shaken to a considerable extent. The permanancy of village organisation traditionally maintained by the tribals has been destabilised. The tribals also think that this is as a result of rapid rural – urban migration, displacement and accommodation to urban culture and life style. The issue of marginality and sometimes loneliness due to separation from village social ethos is also visible with emerging symptom of urbanity.

A further investigation on these issues will definitely provide some very useful information and knowledge of changing social life of tribal communities and problems thereof in the context of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation.

It is understood that tribal change in India has gained momentum particularly after independence of the country. Growth of urban centres, small or big, is phenomenal even in the less developed state like Assam. Industrial establishment, increased communication systems, expansion of markets and trade centres etc. have immense effect on the creation of new occupational avenues for all sections of population. Side by side, mobility of both residential, spatial and
geographical have become increasing symptoms of life of the people. All these combined together have generated some new forces of change and affected the existing social order or society. Sometimes, there may be conflicting situation and duality of value system between tribal and modern traditions. Several recent studies (Mann and Mann 1989; Shashi 1995; Advani 2009) have concentrated attention on such issues while studying tribal social structure in the context of urbanisation. Those studies have also focussed attention that the tribals are under great strains of forces of change which have come from both within and outside. The tribal communities of Assam and its continuous changes can also be understood from similar perspectives.

We have already underlined a fact that the Sonowal Kacharis, unlike other tribal communities of Assam, have achieved a comparatively quicker pace of change in the sphere of educational and occupational dynamism with significant mobility experience in their life process. This is reflected in the change of occupations from agricultural to non-agricultural, considerable change in institutional values like-family, marriage and village social life, rethinking and reorganising of traditionalisation like rituals, beliefs and religious practices leading to transformation in attitudes, behaviour and culture.

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One can perceive a host of ideas of contradiction with regard to attitudinal change among the tribals as a result of sudden upsurge of industrialisation and
urbanisation, but a meaningful understanding of structural change and behaviour of the traditionally less advanced communities is academically significant.

This study is an attempt to understand the changing social life and organisation of a tribal community of Assam within the limitation of specified theme i.e. occupational mobility and change. In sociological perspective the study of mobility covers a wide range of issues such as – stratification and mobility, migration and mobility, mobility and class differentiation, marginality, attitudanal change, political participation etc. The present study suffers from several limitations in fulfilling its objectives to achieve a comprehensive study of mobility among the tribal people of Assam in its proper theoretical and methodological perspective. If further progress of research in those issues are made, urbanisation and occupational change in tribal social structure as a sub-discipline within sociology will take a quantum leap forward.

References


