CHAPTER – II
METHODOLOGY

A sound methodology is an integral part of any systematic study. Therefore, the researcher depends upon the well-knit research design in accordance with the pre-set objectives and hypotheses of the study. The process of research setting and techniques used make a great difference in the quality of the collected data, interpretation and thereby reaching conclusions. This chapter deals with the methods and procedures used to complete the whole study and so, the methodology of the present study consists of the following broad steps.

- Selection of the research topic
- Selection of the field of study
- Sampling design and techniques
- Techniques of data collection
- Methods of data analysis
- Chapter plan.

Selection of the Research Topic

The topic of present study is “Urbanisation, Occupational mobility and Changing tribal social structure: A case study of the Sonowal Kacharis of upper Assam”. In the chapter- I, we have discussed broadly about the significance behind the selection of the present study. At that stage, the significance has been discussed at theoretical level keeping in view the three important sociological issues. The
theoretical understanding need to be examined in the light of empirical reality. Therefore, this topic has been selected for study for the following reasons.

(a) The impact of urbanisation on the tribal communities of northeast India is differently observed when we consider the nature and magnitudes of urbanisation between the hills and the plains regions. The impact is again noticeable differently when observed the variations from one tribal community to another. Unlike other tribal groups living in upper Assam, the Sonowal Kachari villages located nearer to urban centres and industrial establishments, comparatively higher exposed than those of other plains tribal communities.

(b) Over the decades the Sonowal Kacharis of upper Assam districts have been witnessing changes in the sphere of education, occupational achievement, economic as well as political life. Simultaneously, shifting of residences from village to towns, changes in the mode of life, growth of entrepreneurs among the community people leading to the change of economic positions and consumption behaviour are quite noticeable among the community people.

Since occupational mobility is considered as most determinant factor to exert influence on other changes in social system, the present topic has been undertaken for study covering all these aspects of life of the Sonowal Kacharis inhabitating in the upper part of Assam.
(c) Over the years, a significant change in occupational structure as well as tendencies for cityward migration has been noticed among the Sonowal Kachari families, particularly the occupationally mobile families. An apparent observation reveals that there are some influencing factors which might have played its role behind such changes. This topic has been selected for study to investigate those causes and to identify the factors responsible for such changes.

(d) The Sonowal Kacharis of upper Assam can be identified as one rapidly urbanised community in comparison to other tribal groups living in the region. Sociological interest goes to the extent of analysing issues of transformation putting special interest on occupational change and mobility.

These are some of the considerations which have attracted the present researcher to undertake this study.

**The Field of Study**

This study has been carried out in six Sonowal Kachari villages located in two districts of Assam namely- Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. The total population of the Sonowal Kacharis in Assam has been estimated in varying numbers by various organisations. According to 2001 census, there are about 5 lakhs Sonowal Kachari population in Assam and their inhabitated villages district-wise are shown as below --
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Lakhimpur  | 72
| Dhemaji   | 83
| Dibrugarh | 231
| Tinsukia  | 128
| Sivasagar | 12
| Golaghat  | 51
| Jorhat    | 48
| **Total** | **625** |

**Census of India – 2001.**

Thus, the 2001 census estimated a total of 625 villages inhabited by the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam, indicating two most preferred homeland districts that is, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. These two districts may be called homeland districts of the Sonowal Kachari community because of the fact of history of migration and their consequent settlement patterns as narrated by the historians of Assam as well as the accounts left by scholars of the community themselves.\(^1\)

Therefore, to determine an objective representation of this community people, it

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1 The prominent accounts in this context are E.A. Gait – A History of Assam, Thaker Spink & Co, Calcutta, 1933.
has been decided to select these two districts as universe of the present study. Besides, there are some other considerations behind the selection of these two districts which were thought to be significant in consonance with the topic of study. These are mentioned below --

(1) As history goes, the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts are the earliest places of habitation of the Sonowal Kacharis and so, these districts represent the highest concentration of population of the community. Most of the villages inhabited by the Sonowal Kachari population are single dominated by their community people, and some villages can be identified as large pockets of their own community people.

(2) There are several tribal groups in these two districts of Assam viz. the Deoris, the Mishings, the Tai Phakes, the Singhphos and few other small tribal communities in addition to the Sonowal Kacharis. It is interesting to note that, unlike the other tribal communities, the Sonowal Kacharis used to reside in the locations sufficient agricultural lands with permanent residence. Since ancient times, the people of this community and their habitations are mostly in the plains areas, not in the river banks as some other tribal communities do. Thus, the nature of habitation and frequencies of contact with other communities historically placed the Sonowal Kachari population in a comparatively advantageous position than those of the other tribals who used to select their habitations near the bank of
rivers thereby featuring the characteristics of isolation, geographical seperateness and distinctiveness.

(3) It is to mention that several villages inhabited by Sonowal Kachari population in upper Assam are near adjusant to some very important industrial establishments like the tea industries (one oldest industry in Assam), Railways, Indian Oil Corporation, Oil India Ltd. Fertilizer Corporations, Hindustan Levers Ltd., Thermal Power Station etc. Of late, the establishment of several small and medium industries and manufacturing factories in both districts have enormous impact on the changing occupational set up of the nearby tribal villages. The establishment of the Brahmaputra Crackers and Polymers Ltd. (BCPL) at Dibrugarh district has significant effect on the increasing growth of new occupational avenues and urban infrastructural facilities. The increasing urban expansion in these two districts, apart from many other things, has determining effects on the Sonowal Kachari population and their villages. Therefore, keeping in view the nature of urban influence, and increasing exposure to urban contacts we have decided to study occupational change among the Sonowal Kachari villages which are considered vital to undersand overall changes in the social structure of the community.

**Sampling Design and Techniques**

To understand the location of the villages and to ascertain the nature of urban impact, we have adopted few steps for the selection of the villages
necessarily relevant to the present study. First of all, it was the preliminary field
visit and conversation with some prominent persons of the Sonowal Kachari
community. At the second stage, it was the consultation of the related documents
relating to the history and location of the tribal villages. Thirdly, the personnel
working is municipal administration and in the town committees and the related
official maps and documents were consulted to locate the Sonowal Kachari
villages in both districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. These three stages of survey
were very crucial as because, besides clarifying many confusions relating to the
topic considered for study, some very concrete ideas were developed with regard to
the available literature of the community of both published and unpublished,
identifying the knowledgeable persons of the community as well as the locations
and numbers of Sonowal Kachari adjustment to the cities/towns villages in Assam.
Finally, we have sorted out the villages inhabited by the Sonowal Kacharis which
could be identified as gradually urbanised villages or with rapid contact with urban
influence. We could accordingly, list the villages and the distribution of the
villages in the two districts is as follows --

(1) Mankota, Tepor gaon and Dainijan villages in Dibrugarh district,
and

(2) Akomimoria, Natun Gaon (Sonali Gaon) and Gobindapur in
Tinsukia district.

The detail of the villages is presented in the next chapter.
**Sampling Procedure**

The names of villages so identified, the household totals and the sample households are shown in the table 2.1 below--

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Districts</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Total Households</th>
<th>Samples Selected 70%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
<td>Mankota</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teporgaon</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dainijan</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinsukia</td>
<td>Akonimoria</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natun Gaon (Sonali gaon)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Govindapur</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Households</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>927</strong></td>
<td><strong>656</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Office of the Panchayats and Municipality, Dibrugarh and Tinsikia districts.*

These six villages are considered gradually urbanised tribal villages inhabited mostly by the Sonowal Kacharis in upper Assam. Geographically, these villages are located nearer to the district headquarter towns ranging between 2 to 7 kilometres either from the National Highway No. 37 or from the towns.

**Sampling Techniques**

In social science research, since there is no standard rules with regard to the size of samples, we therefore, keeping in view the principles of representation decided to study 70% households from five moderate size villages and a total study (100%) of one small village. Accordingly, we have prepared separate list for each
of the moderate size villages and picked up the required number of sample houses (i.e. 70%) by using lottery method of sampling from each of the list. The village Sonali gaon in Tinsukia district is a small village comprised of 45 households and it was studied in total.

Thus, the sampling techniques adopted in this study are simple random sampling with the help of lottery system and purposive sampling. The head of each selected household is the respondent for the present study.

**Techniques of Data Collection**

Social data are by nature very complex. Such complexity therefore, automatically paves the way of scopes to innovate the devices for data collection. Further, social research needs innumerable data of both primary and secondary nature. From the very beginning, this research worker has been engaging in adopting a number of techniques to collect information. Primarily, the following techniques were adopted more fruitfully to complete to entire process of data collection. They are (a) Interview schedule of both structured and unstructured questions. (b) Intensive field visit and observation and (c) Formal and informal conversation with the people wherever and whenever thought to be necessary.

**(a) Interview Schedule**

Interview schedule has been considered as a major tool for collection of data in this research. Our topic of study has been subdivided into four major sub-themes namely -- Social background of the respondents, family system, occupation,
economy and mobility and lastly social change. There are a total 43 questions covering all the four sub-themes. The questions are both structured and open ended in nature. Some questions are developed in tabular forms, some are in preferential order and some questions are in ‘yes- no’ type answer.

The open ended questions are adequately taken care off. The respondents are allowed to answer freely or to react on the need of the situation. This facilitated the researcher to enter into the depth of the social situation, issues and people’s response. Thus, sufficient field notes emerged out of the interview were developed and recorded properly.

Few number of interview schedules were distributed to some educated respondents with proper instruction and they were found to be happy and felt free to express their opinions at personal level.

The structured questions were made with appropriate alternative responses designed and developed after careful readings of the theoretical and conceptual ideas relating to the topic under study. But while in the field situation and during interview such pre-assumed responses were further modified and redesigned. Thus, interview schedule as a technique of data collection was flexible in nature and sufficient care has been taken to maintain its objectivity.

Face-to-face interview with the respondents were carried out in most of the time and situation wherever and whenever the researcher got opportunities to meet with them. Chiefly, the respondents were contacted by visiting each individual’s
households. Many officials, businessmen, school teachers, members of organisations (Sonowal Kachari ethnic bodies) and old persons of the villages were contacted and interviewed them according to their time and convenience. They personally helped the researcher to meet with the people and narrated details about the Sonowal Kachari community in general and the nature of changes of their community fellows in particular.

Thus, the interview schedule as a technique of data collection served two-fold objectives. It helped in recording not only the information obtained from face-to-face contact, but the technique has been used to explore a great variety of opinion going beyond the purview of recording the quantitative facts.

**Field visit and observation**

Undoubtedly, field visit carries a great significance in collecting first hand data is social research. In fact, the events like visiting the field, meeting and talking with the respondents, observing and recording the things go together, which are considered core component in empirical research.

The opinion expressed and facts revealed by the respondents as well as the general people were considered having high relevance to the present study. All the conversations were noted in the researcher’s field diary. The notes so recorded were usefully utilised while verifying the quantitative facts with regard to the changing parameters of socio-economic changes and all other spheres of social mobility in the life cycles of the Sonowal Kachari families, particularly in urbanised localities.
The researcher prepared some detail plans to visit the six villages, met the people in various set of their work places like markets, Namghars (religious congregational place of the Assamese people) marriage ceremonies, rituals and on many other occasions. Educated women and women of specific educational and occupational profiles, women entrepreneurs, women NGO’s as well as panchayat women leaders of the community were of specific sources of information with regard to the issues of social mobility and change in the community people. The researcher spent quite longer time with those people in discussing the issues relevant to economy, occupation, social change etc. These occasions not only provided first hand idea with regard to empirical facts and reality, but also extended wider opportunities to explore facts of sociological interest that remained unattended and unaddressed so far by the social researchers.

Observation technique has been carefully and systematically utilised in this study. The plains tribal communities of Assam are undergoing changes rather very rapidly, and this is specially noticeable among the tribals living in the Brahmaputra valley who are in constant urban and industrial influence. We could get clarified a number of doubtful facts and quantitative information revealed by the respondents while filling up the interview schedules. This includes the sources of income and expenditure habits, possession of properties of both movable and immovable, family structure, acceptance of modern amenities like daily transport, facilities of running water and electricity, modern furniture, dress and dietary habits, manners of consumption etc. Thus, personal field observation entails opportunities to gather
vast experiences and to collect data on the life of the people, persistence of traditional values and culture, problems of values etc.

The Secondary Data

Scientific assessment of social phenomena needs both first hand observation as well as investigation of secondary sources. We attempted to search out varied information and sources to know about the Sonowal Kachari villages, their location and habitations, population, migration patterns, residential changes etc.

A detail survey of literature from the libraries has been carried out at the time of preparing the proposal. It has been noticed that several classical literature relating to the history, origin, culture and tradition of this community are scatteredly lying with many of those who are living in different parts of Assam. A careful plan was made to contact those individuals, and also the prominent ethnic organisations and associations of the Sonowal Kachari community.

It was, however, not smooth process to collect the required data about the population and the villages under study. For long historical reasons, the tribal areas of northeast region have been remaining isolated from or unidentified by the concerned administration, and due to such reasons these societies have long felt the sense of isolateness, remoteness and seperation. Hence, the field workers in social science research, have to overcome those hurdles to acquire proper and authentic facts with regard to their habitations. The field workers had to approach a number of persons, offices, institutions as well as newly emerging literary and other bodies
and voluntary associations. When approached for data collection, the officials and the persons belonging to certain institutions felt awkward or reluctant to provide the required informations. However, the panchayat officials, gaonburahs (village headman), Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council and the students’ organisations have supplied useful information whenever and wherever we approached. It is noteworthy to mention that some scholars belonging to older generation of the community living in various parts of upper Assam districts have supplied available unrecorded information as and when we approached to them.

The offices of the Census department, Government of Assam, district office of Economics and Statistics, Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council, Cooperative societies, Namghar committees, Youth clubs and Women’s Association were very important sources of secondary information. These organisations and associations used to preserve old documents, literature, unpublished writings, art and crafts which bear the tradition and glory of the Sonowal Kacharis and many other tribal group of Assam. As indicated earlier, these were virtually remained uninvestigated or undiscussed at any intellectual circles or made available as writings of systematic study.

Duration of Fieldwork

The entire process of fieldwork for this study has been completed in several phases. The first phase was the period during the last part of the year 2010, when the research proposal was prepared and finalised.

During February and March 2011, we made an extensive field trip to the villages of Sonowal Kachari habitations mainly in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts
and on the spot observation has been made to study the patterns of habitation, communication to the villages (mainly roads and transport), distance to the nearer towns and industrial locations and several other dimensions of the villages were studied during this period. Some prominent persons, gaon burahs (village headmen), office bearers of the respective panchayats, few political leaders, businessmen, entrepreneurs were contacted and discussed the spheres of changes of the tribal population specially the Sonowal Kacharis. This phase of field visit was mainly important as because, we could collect a lot of literature dealing with the Sonowal Kacharis life, culture and history as well as their present distribution in the state of Assam. It is to be noted that such literature have remained unfocussed for long years not to speak of publication, for several generations of the community. It is important enough to mention that the old and educated persons of the Sonowal Kacharis wrote extensively in local language (Assamese) about the community and such writings were occasionally published in school magazines, local Sahitya Sabha conventions and in the souvenirs published on the occasion of Baitho Puja (one important religious- ethnic festival of the community). What is still more important to mention that persons irrespective of age and sex, educated or uneducated have expressed satisfaction and offered ready support to such academic exercise carried out by us.

The third important phase of field visit was during the month of October to December 2012. This was the period of data collection from the respondents. Interview schedules were prepared and a pilot survey was made. After the pilot
survey, the schedule has been finalised. Face-to-face interview with the respondents in all six selected villages were conducted. Some schedules were distributed to the educationally qualified respondents and they in fact, showed interest to fill up the schedules by themselves. Those respondents were properly instructed to supply the facts without any hesitation and doubts. To facilitate this, we also enclosed one covering letter along with the interview schedule which speaks for itself about the very purpose of this study (Annexure-I).

Normally, we spent about forty to forty-five minutes with each respondent to complete one interview. In certain cases we devoted much longer time while dealing with several issues concerning to our subject of inquiry.

Conducting face-to-face interview opens up various wider scopes to study on the spot. Besides clarifying the terms and concepts, the face-to-face interaction with people enables the field workers to record the dimensions of subjective aspects of the people. Thus, it became helpful in observing the actual situation of living patterns, household environment, consumption behaviour besides understanding the attitudes, opinion and psychology of the people.

Changing behaviour structure and nature of participation of the respondents in relation to urban living were the prime areas of observation of our study. We could record all unquestioned and undetected issues of tribal change with the help of personal interview with the people. Sometimes, this compelled us to restructure or to add many questions in the pre-structured interview schedule.
Analysis of Data

In the process of data analysis, we adopted series of techniques. The filled up schedules were checked and rechecked and the doubtful responses so recorded in the presence of the respondents, were corrected to make it suitable for appropriate classification and tabulation. After proper classification, a systematic plan for tabulation has been undertaken.

We also took help of the map of each village under study to present a full detail of its location, areas and situational positions to understand the location of the village and its connectivity to urban centres.

The tabulated data were put into various forms and arrangement in accordance with the independent and dependent variables. Beside observing the data on simple frequency distributions, the collected field data were interpreted and analysed in the light of our intensive field observation.

The chapters

This report is presented into seven chapters. The chapter-I titled Introduction and Theoretical Framework deals with the discussion of few important sections such as significance of study, theoretical framework, review of related literature, objectives of study and hypotheses formulated in the study.

The chapter - II outlines the detail Methodological steps followed in this study.
The chapter - III is Profile of Tribal Community in Transition : The Sonowal Kacharis of Assam. The chapter-IV presents socio-economic background information of the respondents and is titled as The Respondents and their Background.

The chapter-V is Occupational Mobility Among the Sonowal Kacharis. In this chapter we present the empirical findings on the study of occupational mobility among the Sonowal Kacharis. After a detail discussion an attempt has been made to identify the factors of social mobility and those factors are highlighted in the chapter.

The chapter – VI titled “Urbanisation, Occupational Mobility and Social change Among the Sonowal Kacharis” presents an integrated discussion on the three issues under study. Finally, the Summary and Conclusion are presented in the chapter - VII.