CHAPTER - VI

URBANISATION, OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY
AND SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG THE
SONOWAL KACHARIS

This chapter presents an integrated discussion on three inter-related issues under study, that is, urbanisation, occupational mobility and changing social structure of a tribal community. The tribal community here is referred to Sonowal Kacharis who have been inhabiting largely in the two districts of upper Assam. Since time in memorial. Urbanisation solely cannot be considered here as independent condition responsible entirely for creation a condition of mobility of the people, but the occupational achievement of the less developed communities of society that can be taken into consideration to a greater extent which determine individuals to be more mobile in lifetime. Sometimes both the issues i.e. urbanisation and occupational mobility are seen to be concommittant in the process of overall growth of society. Social structure under such circumstances has been a subject of interest and analysis, that provides an input for understanding social change.

The tribal social structure in Indian context has undergone a considerable change as a result of industrialisation and urbanisation particularly, after independence. During second half of the last century a number of studies were made available by social anthropologists and several studies were conducted in the
newly industrialised regions of Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. Some industrial establishments were not basically set up at the tribal belt, but however, they effected largely the tribal population, if examined the issues like migration of labour force, recruitment of workers etc. availably found at a cheaper rate in those tribal pockets. Studies conducted in those industrial and urbanised areas inhabited by tribals are some such sources of early information relating to how the tribals are undergoing transformation, due to the growth of industrialised occupations and new process of adjustment with urban surroundings. B.C. Roy interpreted such changes and underlined that in a society there are changes in social life and it is more so in a progressive society because of the conditions, action and reaction of different forces and factors both internal and external (Roy 1990; XI)

Bhandari (1980 : 53-81) narrated details about the process of adjustments of the tribals in a situation of industrial urban environment while dealing with tribal situation in India in the context of industrialisation and urbanisation. Describing socio-cultural transformation of tribal societies, again, some other studies (Prasad, 1980) emphasized the role of urbanisation as a great channel for bringing the tribals into the recent history of mankind development and the new elements of modernity and development, to the tribal societies have been chiefly introduced by urbanisation.

The tribal population of Assam since generations have been practising agriculture as primary source of livelihood. Since agriculture has been the major sources of livelihood, the tribals, since generations have confined to traditional
social organization -- village economy, polity, religion, culture as well as morality. Socio-cultural norms and values under such circumstances have largely determined not only the ethos and sentiments, but also regulated the social order, change and development processes of such communities.

However, tribal social organization of the north eastern region has not always remain static. The advent of Hinduism and its resultant emergence of caste system have given rise to new features in social life and culture, sometimes leading to the division of society or sometimes new rise of economic classes and stratification. There is spread of education and opportunities for occupation specially, after the inactment of the provisions of the government rules. Similarly, the impact of christianity has pushed to a great length on the socio-economic and educational change on the hill tribes of north eastern states.

From various accounts social, educational, economic, locational as well as cultural, the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam have occupied a position of advantage from the point of urban influence. The history of settlements of this tribal community reveals that like other plains tribes of Assam, the Sonowal Kacharis have been inhabiting not in the river banks, but with a permanent living habitations and cultivable lands and also with population of mixed culture. These dimensions have added comparatively better advantages to the community such as - regular and constant interaction with the non-tribals, exposure to developed communication, comparatively better marketing facilities, awareness to the schemes and programmes of development introduced by the government etc.
As discussed earlier, opportunities for education, occupations and economic choices among the Sonowal Kachari villages are in a quicker pace. A sizeable number of qualified people with modern education both in general and professional fields have emerged among the Sonowal Kacharis. In the field of politics also, there are considerable number of political personalities among the community people exhibiting their enlightened roles right from the grassroots level to the state or national level. These dimensions of development enshrined the Sonowal Kacharis since early times and can be projected to have some important avenues of social change among the community people.

The aim of this chapter is to understand the extent and nature of changes occurred among this tribal community taking evidences from the responses of 656 respondents collected from six villages. The responses are mostly concerned with the aspects of socio-cultural and attitudinal change of the people.

For a systematic presentation, the major heads of discussion are arranged as follows - opinion towards social institutions like - family and marriage, tribe - caste interaction, beliefs in supernatural power, nature of relationship with native places and families, choices for education and occupation for children and development of secondary relationship among the tribals dwelling in urban environment.

**Opinion towards family system**

Irrespective of the levels of development, society takes into account that family and marriage are two vital social institutions that fulfill the functions of
education, socialization, moral sanctions as well as development. Under the impact of modern education, occupational changes and urbanisation, it has become imperative to study the changing aspects of these important social institutions. With the growth of urbanization and its continuous impact on surrounding social environment there also seems to develop enlightened opinion that the traditional ethos and findings attached to social institutions are losing its strength. There are a number of classic sociological studies dealing with these issues (Gore 1968; Desai 1966, Abbi 1969). These studies have focused, among many other things, about family in the context of urbanisation, social change and development.

Occupationally mobile and urbanite tribals of the Sonowal Kachari community under study have also indicated varied sort of information with regard to their attitudes toward family system. We have already stated earlier that traditionally, the Sonowal Kacharis were much attached to the fold of joint family system. That way, the system of agriculture and holding of land property have been jointly handled by the common authority of joint family. Such principles of living together is by and large noticeable phenomenon not only among the ruralities, but to some extent considerably visible among the urban dwellers also. However, with the change of occupations and urban influence, change is visible towards family system. The table 6.1 below provides such information.
Table – 6.1

Opinion towards family system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family system</th>
<th>Dainijan N-83</th>
<th>Teporgaon N = 90</th>
<th>Mankota N=198</th>
<th>Akonimoria N=90</th>
<th>Sonaligaon N=45</th>
<th>Gobindapur N-150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Favour able</td>
<td>Un favour able</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>Favour able</td>
<td>Un favour able</td>
<td>No opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Family</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.71</td>
<td>56.62</td>
<td>15.67</td>
<td>14.44</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>5.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Family</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.53</td>
<td>44.58</td>
<td>22.89</td>
<td>78.88</td>
<td>13.33</td>
<td>7.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypo : Increasing urban exposure leads to declining choice towards traditional family system.
It is seen that the joint family as an important social institution in the agricultural set up of Indian society is gradually loosing its place among the tribal urbanites. But this trend is not immediate as because, the respondents under study, to a sizeable section or in some context larger section have opined their favorable opinion towards holding of joint family. When asked question in the structured sets of responses such as ‘favorable', 'unfavorable' or 'No opinion' etc., opinions differ to a considerable context from one section of respondents to another.

Significantly, majority of the respondents from all six villages expressed their opinion as "unfavorable" opinion towards joint family system. It is 56.62% for Dainijan, 80.00% for Teporgaon, 71.21% for Mankota, 63.33% for Akonimoria, 57.77% for Sonaligaon and 86.66% for Gobindapur. This kind of response at the same time cannot be taken into granted equally that they favour nuclear family at the same proportion. This is reflected when their choices for nuclear family system are taken into account. As because, larger number of respondents from few villages expressed attitudes of dislikeness for nuclear family set up also (44.58% for Dainijan, 24.74% for Mankota, 52.22% for Akonimoria and 20% for Sonaligaon respondents). This shows that for a significant number of tribal population, even after education and occupational achievement and in urban living, the inclination towards joint family system is still stronger.

A considerable number of respondents have opted their 'no opinion' responses. In fact, it was understood from very informal talks in field setting and
from personal observation that the attachment to traditionalism vis-à-vis joint family system prevailed in the traditional social organization, have remained as an inseparable link even in the context of urbanized living.

But at the same time, favourable opinion for nuclear family system for a larger section of respondents is also an emerging phenomenon among them. It is evident in case of the respondents of Teporgaon (78.88%). Mankota (70.71%) Sonaligaon (68.88%) and Gobindapur (84.66%).

An overall observation reveals some interesting as well as diametrically opposite notions with regard to the preference for family system. In fact it is difficult to derive a concrete opinion about the choice for family system on the part of the respondents, whether any type of family is clearly accepted or out of their choices. Agriculture as a chief occupation for the Sonowal Kacharis is still considered a practice for many families living in the urbanised villages. It is evidently observed that families have practiced a number agricultural and allied activities like domestication of bird and animals, horticultural gardens, fish ponds and possessed sizeable areas of bamboo and forest land in addition to a small plot of land for paddy cultivation. Thus, it can be observed that the tribals of this community are in the midst of two systems life patterns i.e. holding non-agricultural or industrial occupations as primary source of income and at the same time maintain linkages to traditional agricultural systems and norms. This may be refereed to the position of structural dualities faced by the tribals in the context of urbanity and modernity.
Opinion towards family size

In the proceeding pages we have seen that nuclear family system is acceptable for a considerable majority of respondents. The respondents who have achieved better educational positions and at the sometimes enjoyed occupational mobility in life are seemed to be more exposed to modernity as well as willing to accept change readily. These characteristics are usually seen visible in case of all section of people of the tribal community who are educationally and occupationally placed in better position. Respondents’ opinion were sought with regard to the desired number of children in a family in changing context. The table 6.2 below provides the opinion in response to such question village-wise.

Table 6.2
Opinion Towards Family size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Dainijan N= 83</th>
<th>Teporgaon N=90</th>
<th>Mankota N=198</th>
<th>Akonimoria N=90</th>
<th>Sonaligaon N=45</th>
<th>Gobindapur N=150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F PC. F PC.</td>
<td>F PC. F PC.</td>
<td>F PC. F PC.</td>
<td>F PC. F PC.</td>
<td>F PC. F PC.</td>
<td>F PC. F PC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Child</td>
<td>38 45.78</td>
<td>23 25.55</td>
<td>58 29.29</td>
<td>20 22.22</td>
<td>13 20.89</td>
<td>23 15.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Child</td>
<td>32 38.55</td>
<td>46 51.11</td>
<td>91 45.96</td>
<td>32 35.55</td>
<td>15 33.33</td>
<td>91 60.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Child</td>
<td>09 10.84</td>
<td>14 15.55</td>
<td>33 16.66</td>
<td>16 17.77</td>
<td>10 22.22</td>
<td>31 20.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Child</td>
<td>04 4.83</td>
<td>07 7.79</td>
<td>16 8.09</td>
<td>22 24.46</td>
<td>07 23.56</td>
<td>05 3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In discussing social background of the respondents (chapter IV), we undertook a question relating to the family size. The findings of those query revealed that quite a substantial number of respondents in all six villages under study have their family size with numbers ranging from 7 to 12 members. It can
also be stated that the traditional family systems of the tribals are joint family system with agriculture as chief occupation. Thus, larger size of family where manpower was primarily a required condition to run all economic activities, and to maintain group solidarity has been the feature of traditional family system of the tribals. This feature may be found applicable in most of the tribals living in the plains districts of Assam.

This aspect of family among them will gradually be strained along with the emergence of number of modern socio-economic factors. This is evident from the responses derived from the enlightened and mobile tribal elites who opined that small family norm consisting of two or three members in a family has been the accepted condition of present day family system.

A significant section of respondents would like to prefer two children in their family (38.35% in Dainijan, 51.11% in Teporgaon, 45.35% in Mankota, 35.55% in Akonimoria, 32.33% in Sonaligaon and 60.66% in Gobindapur villages). On the other hand, there are sizeable number of respondents who expressed their choices for only ‘one child norm' as standard size of family.

The above findings reveal some vital aspects of changing attitudes of the tribals towards social institutions. Firstly, it reflects an attitudes showing a generation gap between their parents and self. Secondly, several respondents put forward arguments like problems of manageability of a bigger size family. Thirdly, though not expressed openly, informal conversation with the respondents revealed
that land fragmentation among the members in the traditional joint family system and its effect may cause for disintegration of family has become inherent in the future to come. Thus, the overall scenario reveals that urban influence with increased occupational and educational mobility, there is visible effect on the traditional institutions like family and marriage. Claude S. Fischer also observed that with the rise of education and with the influence of urbanism, the norms for family size in significantly effected which may be seen applicable among most of people in society (Fischer 1975: 421-431).

**Preference for children’s Education**

The preferential choice for children’s education and occupation is one of the strong indicators not only for individuals’ achievement and development, but equally a sign of occupational mobility and change over generations. Thus, in the new situations, the occupationally mobile society tend to create an environment to make their sons and daughters educationally and occupationally competent in the wider context of opportunity structure. This may be widely applicable to all levels of society marching towards development. But here lies the importance to know the changing aptitudes of educated tribals with regard to their next generation of children.

In this context of wider scenario of development of our country it was commonly held the view that the Scheduled tribes, Scheduled castes and some other marginal groups and communities have been lagging behind in various
spheres of their achievement. What is apparently important to state that there was a substantial growth in literacy among all those over the past few years. Similar is the fact of employment opportunities in various public and private sectors which has perhaps induced equally as a result of quick implementation of the provisions for employment as per rules laid down in the constitutions.

So, urbanisation, occupational mobility and change in society can also be understood through attitudinal change of the elites in society. With this perspective in mind, we wanted to understand about the choice for education for children and the responses of such query are presented in the table 6.3 below.

**Table 6.3**

**Respondents’ choice for education for their children**

*(What type of education you prefer for your children?)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Education</th>
<th>Medical Education</th>
<th>Engineering</th>
<th>Civil Service Edu.</th>
<th>Agriculture &amp; Vety Edu.</th>
<th>Legal Education</th>
<th>Management Education</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>202</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.79</td>
<td>25.76</td>
<td>17.83</td>
<td>12.04</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It seems that the educated parents have their wide range of choices for education for children. It is indeed a subject of much interest while series of discussions with the respondents were opened during informal talks in field visit. Several respondents who are employeeed in industrial establishments and other corporate sectors have opted professional/technical, and management education for
their children. Equally important to state that choice for general education is gradually loosing its importance among the educated tribals.

Satish Saberwal while studying aptitudes for higher education of the students in view of parents’ socio-economic background remarked that there is actually no single criterion of occupation that can be made universally applicable to determine particular choices for children’s education (Saberwal 1976). This inquiry also did not adopt all the classificatory categorisation of educational choice as well as occupation while framing the structured interview schedule. It is the field settings and divergent talks, of both formal and informal, with the respondents which compelled us to add or to delete many of our predesigned alternative responses.

This query therefore, explored several new information with regard to increasing avenues of education for children revealed by the respondents. General education for children was preferred by larger number of respondents (30.79%) while the rest have indicated variety of choices, which did not find its place in the process of tabulating the data. It is not the purpose to ignore those choices but it has been clubbed under few broad categories. For example - education and training for nursing, secretarial practices etc. are included in the broad categories like medical education and in management services.

It is seen that apart from general education the most preferential choices for children's education are medical (25.76%), Engineering (17.83%), and Civil
Service education (12.04%). During the filed work, indeed, it was found that sons and daughters of several families have been pursuing medical and engineering education in the state or in outside. Not only that, in few families some children have already passed out and are serving as doctors or as engineers in various govt. departments as well as private companies.

The choice for children's education was further studied when preferences have been expressed for the opportunities for jobs like - agricultural and vetenary science (4.72%), legal education (3.65%), management education and its allied branches (5.18%) etc. Thus, it may be analysed that in the context of rapid expansion of education and industrialisation in India since independence, the people of lower strata in society who were not in better educational position and employment, now in extended opportunities mainly because of the increased opportunities in the fields of occupation and education.

**Choice for occupation (Table 6.4)**

Preferences for education and occupation and expression of opinion towards such aspects in life is also an indication to another important dimension of changing social life. In the contemporary situation, the tribal social structure of India in general and northeastern region in particular, witnessed mainfold changes in their socio-cultural and economic life chances. Studies have revealed and indentified a number of causes for such changes. Large scale spread of mass media, telecommunication technology, availability of printing technology,
globalised culture etc. have created a wide ranging opportunities for the young educated youths of present generation of children. This is no way exception for the educated youths of the tribals of the plains areas of Assam also. The table 6.4 below reveals such information.

Table 6.4
Choice for children’s occupation of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice for occupations</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Pc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture related</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Business</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>9.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>21.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. service (Official)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>11.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/University Teaching</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>12.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil service</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>11.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal service</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence service</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management service</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study of the changing attitudes, particularly in the areas of education and occupation of the educated urbanites provides very interesting sources of information with regard to increased opportunities for job and services. It has been stated earlier that a number of sons and daughters of the respondents have ben pursuing professional educations or have placed in such engagements. For most of the people of the community under study, those children are ideal examples for the grown up children, and so, preferences for occupation for their children are seemed to be influenced and shaped by the acheivements of their elders.
The empirical data (table 6.4) indicate that engineering occupation is the first choice for their children (21.04%), followed by 12.85% percent who preferred to choose teaching professions in colleges or in universities for their sons and daughters. Almost equal number of respondents prefer to choose occupations for their children in three areas of jobs - they are 11.13% for doctors, 11.73% for govt. officials and 11.89% for civil service.

It is not only the preference for children’s occupation, one can understand the changing mindset of the educated tribal elites when they talk about the increasing job opportunities alongwith the expansion of education. They often talk about jobs of agriculture-related and veterinary sciences, management services, independent business activities based on available agricultural and forest-based resources like – bamboos, woods and wood products, tea nurseries, small tea-gardens etc. Thus, we can understand an increasing deviations from the so-called 'agriculture' as means of livelihood to 'agriculture related activities'. (6.10% agriculture related activities and 9.60% prefer for independent business).

A smaller percentage of respondents have opted legal service (2.62%) and defence service (5.18%) as occupations for their children. There are 3.50% respondents who could not give their definite choices for occupation for their children.

Thus, the Sonowal Kacharis with urban influence and jobs in city and towns show a divergence of opinions with regard to their children's education and occupations i.e. agriculture. Firstly, it represents a consistent departure from their
traditional occupation. Secondly, the choices for occupation have emerged in tune with the references of prevailing ideal examples of achievements of other sons and daughters.

**Preference for Children’s Marriage (Table 6.5)**

Marriage is a social institution and the social sanctity of this institution has preserved and protected throughout Indian social structure. Various castes, religious group, ethnic and racial groups have been maintaining their age-old tradition and customs through the institution of marriage.

The institution of marriage, as time passes is also undergoing changes in its various dimensions. Like many other tribals and ethnic groups, the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam have also their own systems of marriage followed and practised by the community people since long tradition. The traditional systems of marriage of the community has been discussed in our proceeding Chapter III.

In this part we will understand the changing aspect of marriage and its adaptive nature with the passing of time. As such, any change or the nature and extent of change in social institutions is one important dimension of change in social structure.

Urbanisation and occupational change have its impact on social institutions. Sociological studies reveal many important aspect of such changes, such as - norms regulate the behavior of people with regard to the selection of mates, ethnic or customary bindings that regulate the functions of the institution.
Traditionally, the Sonowal Kacharis were adhered to marriage settlement and it is reported that even today, in many villages such traditional practices are strictly followed. In this stage an attempt is made to examine whether the selection of mates or settlement of marriage among the community people are still maintained in accordance with tradition or changes thereof. The responses are presented in the table 6.5.

Table 6.5
Respondents’ opinion towards children’s Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage should be</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrange by parents</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple’s Choice</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Traditional customs</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information presented in the table 6.5 are an indication towards change in the traditional system of marriage among the tribals under study. The traditional system of marriage, of the community was mostly an ‘arranged marriage’ where the parents and other elder persons take a decisive role and this system is still favorable and approved by 46.65% respondents. Equally important to note is that marriage settled through 'couple choice' is favored by 47.25% respondents.

The Sonowal Kacharis practices clan exogamy form of marriage. Most of the respondents are of the opinion that, the community traditionally followed marriage system with very stick adherence to tradition, social rules and obligations and according to them it was virtually a lengthy social procedure followed by both
the parties of bride and bridegroom families. According to them, these practices are fast losing its stands. Instead, marriage though performed by traditional customs and procedures, yet people of the community now-a-days are less obliged to such marriage practices and minimized the expenses also.

The Sonowal Kacharis of Assam have by and large adopted the system of marriage which are almost similar to the practices followed by other groups and communities of the Assamese society.

**Inter-tribe and tribe -caste Interaction (Table 6.6)**

The traditional social organization of the Assamese society was basically agrarian where agriculture is the main source of livelihood. In addition to recent sociological and anthropological writings, we find various other narrations and descriptions which enlighten us the fact that Assamese social structure is a product of synthesis between diverse linguistic, cultural and folk elements and it has become possible through long social processes and interactions. Since agriculture was, and even today, the back-bone of economy for the people of the north east region, inter-mixing of the tribes and castes has been the normative patterns of life. The major socio-cultural festivals, functions and rituals, both public and private in the broader Assamese society are carried out through mutual help, cooperation and understanding. For such background and perhaps because of many other historical and cultural reasons, the caste system which has been emerging and functioning in several other part of the country, has not found to be active in this region, specially in the sphere of socio-cultural interaction between people.
The patterns of habitations in the village society therefore, egalitarian in nature in most parts of Assam. Even the inter village boundaries in many parts are not clearly discernable. There are multi-caste villages of people of tribes and castes, living together and it is a character commonly seen in the case of Assamese society. One can find some villages, or pockets of villages where the tribals such as - Kacharis, Deoris, Lalungs, Mech, Mishings etc. have been living together with other various caste groups since time immemorial.

The advent of Hinduism in Assam during 15th century has introduced new religious ideologies where many tribal groups have started accommodating with the Hindu fold. The penetration of Hinduism in one form may be the cause for the emergence of caste system but in many ways, this has become a binding force in society.

The Sonowal Kachari villages under study are located surrounded by various non-tribal population, and as history of their geo-ecological habitation goes, this tribal community has been residing not in the river-bank or locationally cut off places. So, the nature and extent of social change experienced by the Sonowal Kachari villages is certainly different from other tribal counterparts. Sociologists believe that in addition to many other socio-historical forces, over the years, under the wave of migration, political changes and natural factors and more particularly with the advent of industrialisation and urbanization, the social structure of the Sonowal Kachari community has been undergoing changes. So, the institutions of family and marriage of the community are under the influences of such changes.
We intended to know the opinion of the respondents with regard to their choices of bride and bridegrooms for the children (Table 6.6 below).

**Table 6.6**

**Opinion of the respondents towards Inter-tribe and tribe-caste marriage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within own Tribe</th>
<th>With other Tribes</th>
<th>With other castes</th>
<th>With other religious groups</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>224</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.15</td>
<td>35.82</td>
<td>30.03</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The empirical data presented in the table delineates opinion of interesting change among the educated urban elites of the Sonowal Kacharis. It was found that 34.15% respondents prefer marriages of their children with in their own tribe, 35.82% expressed opinion for tribal exogamy while 30.03% are of the opinion towards tribe-caste relationship in form of marriage.

The data can be taken for granted or as revealing facts with regard to tribe-caste interaction in the changing scenario of Assamese society. Evidently, one can find a number of marriages are taking place between the Sonowal Kacharis and the other tribes and castes. Most of such marriages are love marriage, that took place during the stages of higher education or in same work places.

The exposure to urban culture, educational achievement and many unexplored factors which may cause for giving rise of inter-caste, inter-tribe or even inter-religious marriages, have been the subject of important sociological
investigation. Commenting on such issues M.S.A. Rao observed 'endogamy is considered one of the most persistent elements of the caste system. However, in the urban context, the caste norms that regulate the behavior of people with regard to the selection of mates, tends to be flexible. Metropolitan cities provide varied opportunities for free mixing of young males and females in colleges, offices and mixed neighborhoods. There are also facilities for getting marriages registered. Hence, it will not be wrong to expect more inter-caste, inter-religious and other non-conventional marriages today than what was expected a generation ago (Rao 1992 : 335).

The field data presented here were derived from six urbanising villages and the villages are within the urban influence of two big cities of upper Assam i.e., Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. The significance of empirical reality of the data lies to the fact that opinion of the people are not the result of metropolitan or cosmopolitan impact, rather, it is the effect of long socio-historical and assimilation processes blended with urban culture. This is one significant development in the sphere of social change among the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam.

Belief in Supernatural power (Tables 6.7 and 6.8)

Religious practices and behavior constitute an integral part of man’s life. Long back Milton Singer observed "The path of ritual observance and path of devotion are two standard paths within Hinduism that led to eternal bliss and salvation. These paths have been interpreted as providing a variety of roads open to an individual depending on his degree of spiritual evolution and type of personality (Singer 1958).
The Sonowal Kacharis are the devout followers of Vaisnavism (a religious ideal introduced by Sri Sri Sankardeva in the 15th century) used to perform and practice a number of rituals and poojas throughout the calendar year of their life cycle. The rituals and the poojas are performed both at individual family level as well as collectively at village or community level. Our first query was about the nature of worship to God, Goddess or any sort of prayer aiming at supernatural belief. The table 6.7 below provides the ideas about this sphere of religious life of the respondents.

Table 6.7
Belief in Supernatural Power (Do you pray to God?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>402</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.28</td>
<td>20.43</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is seen that majority of the respondents (61.28%) are regular worshipper of god and goddesses, 20.48% are frequent worshipers and 10.29% respondents have followed such practices as and when occasions arise. These three distinct categories of worshippers, in terms of frequency of worship, in reality, do not project the views of immediate changing religious behaviors of the community people under study. But the patterns of worship has undergone modification to a considerable extent as a result of changing occupational pursuits and urban influence.

The issue with regard to the nature of worship in terms of frequency needs to be explained. To the expression of most of the respondents, it was understood
that, they spare very little time in their daily life for regular worship to their gods and goddesses owing to routined work in their office, organization and factories. Many have also opined that the housewife or the female members of the households are primarily engaged in performing rituals and religious activities instead of the males.

We have discussed at length about the ritualistic behavior of the Sonowal Kacharis in the proceeding chapter - III. It was also described that a number of god and goddesses are regularly worshipped by the people of the community at individual households or at community or village level. All those ritualistic functions are performed through poojas. Sometimes, poojas are performed by the women-folk alone. Like other non-tribal communities of Assam, the Sonowal Kacharis also celebrate several rituals and common festivals at different seasons in the year, and those are mostly organized in the village Namghar (Assamese religious congregational Hall). In the traditional system of settlement, the Namghar is usually constructed at the centre of the village, thereby providing easy accessibility of the people living at various parts of the village.

**Table 6.8**

*Number of rituals and festivals performed by the respondents at family level (in a calendar year)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of celebration of ritual/Festivals</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>P.C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One time annually</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice in a year</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>31.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrice in a year</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four times in year</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>21.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than four times</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>9.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The information presented in the table 6.8 reveals that the Sonowal Kacharis are one tribal group whose socio-religious life is shrowded with various types of religious rituals, worship and festivals. Performance of death ceremonies of families forefathers, kin relation etc. are regular features, the urbanites usually never forget to attend such rituals when arranged by their native villagers. The family relatives, the sons and near kinsmen residing in city or town also perform rituals of their forefathers annually at their own convenience. On such occasions, usually the village older section of people take part with the required needs as well as services from all kinsmen and fellow villagers.

It is evident from the table 6.8 that the observance of rituals and festivals constitute vital part of the religious life cycles of the people. It was found that, in addition to the communities collective festivals, there are numerous household rituals, and it is reported that more than 60% families perform such festivals/rituals either twice or thrice in a year. For 9.60% families (respondents), such celebrations are arranged regularly and it is reported that these are held more than four times in a year.

Thus, it is seen that the religious life of the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam nevertheless, is marked by various rituals and festivals. It is also to be noted that among the urbanities, many forms of worship of various gods and goddesses has gained less prominence. This is by and large can be attributed due to the fact of urbanised life and culture which has caused by higher attachment to the routined
life with modern occupation. Sarikwal (1972) observed that due to the predominance of occupation, profession, multi-level social milieu, extraordinary mobility in life and multiplicity of social and political culture in the industrial - urban society, the attachment to religious practices and religious institutions are gradually declining.

**Migrants and their contact with Native families (Tables 6.9 and 6.10)**

Industrialisation and urbanisation had an impact on rural areas in many -fold ways. One important feature of Indian urbanisation is its continuous flow of migration of people from village to towns in search of livelihood, higher education and better occupational opportunities. Thus, migration from rural areas to cities or town has been a continuous phenomenon, which has been the cause for overcongestion of population, increased land values, housing problems etc.

Sociological studies have recognized a fact that migration is a social process which sometimes follows the lines of caste, kinship, friendship, village, linguistic and regional ties. The older migrant residents in urban areas usually act as a source of security and sometimes as initiators of fresh migrants into urban way of life. These are spontaneously observed in the process of urbanisation in the less developed regions of India.

Towns and cities located amidst rural surroundings are marked by rural traditional elements in its socio-cultural structures. These are quite often reflected in the ways of life and in the process of adjustment of people in its urban localities.
Quite a number of studies conducted on the socio-economic background of industrial workers in India do reflect the process of such adjustment and characters of social environment.

One significant aspect of urbanisation is the socio-economic linkages of the migrants in urban areas to their native places. In this respect our inquiry was basically two-fold and these are (a) frequency of visit of the migrants to their native families at village and (b) nature of relationship between them with their native kinsmen, and accordingly, the empirical findings are placed in the data tables 6.9 and 6.10 respectively.

**Table 6.9**

*Contact with native places*

*(Do you visit your native village/peoples?)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of contest</th>
<th>Regular visit</th>
<th>Frequent visit</th>
<th>Occasional visit</th>
<th>Never visit</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>55.55</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Total 90 migrant families (Sonaligaon -35, Mankota - 25, Teporgaon - 30)

It is seen that out of the total 90 migrant families, 10.12% respondents keep regular contact with their native people and villages, 33.33% are frequent visitors and 55.55 maintain visits occasionally. In fact these families cannot be said migrant in true demographic sense of the term. They constitute a part of their original families at village and their places of origin are located within the districts of upper Assam i.e. Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and some part of Sivasagar district.
However, these families are, in one sense permanent settlers in the new settlements since they purchased land property, constructed houses and enrolled their children at local educational institutions.

It has been observed that the families have their kith and kin and also near relatives, but they find little spare time to visit them. But they usually visit their native families at village on the occasions like marriage, rituals and also in resolving familial difficulties and crisis.

On an inquiry with regard to the nature and extent of relationship (Table 6.10), it was informed that the migrant families do maintain varied set of socio-economic relationships with the family members at the native places.

**Table 6.10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of relationship</th>
<th>Just visit 130</th>
<th>Help Financial by for education 73</th>
<th>Sharing land property 43</th>
<th>Taking part is decision 72</th>
<th>Advice is time of trouble 101</th>
<th>No response 237</th>
<th>Total 656</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.82</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>10.97</td>
<td>15.39</td>
<td>36.13</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To this question larger number of respondents (36.13%) were found to be in the category of ‘no response’.

An observation on the data presented in the table reveals that there are some sorts of continous relationship and familial network between the respondents and their rural counterparts. It was understood that 11.12% respondents have responded that it is an obligation of their part to visit family members at native
places in terms of offering financial help. Few respondents (6.57%) have possessed cultivable land property at village also which as they reported compel them to take up frequent visit to the village and to look after the properties they possessed. These properties were either purchased by the respondents themselves after acquiring jobs at towns or inherited from parental property. The acquiring of land property at villages has been the cause for constant relationship maintained by a sizeable number of respondents with their native kinsmen.

In case of developing country like ours, it is accepted that growth of towns and cities is an indicator for development as well as initiator for modernity. Similarly, working and living in urban environment are quite often considered to be of refined outlook in many respects. Thus, urbanites are thought to be enlightened, better exposed as well as progressive. With such premises in mind, we paused a question to our respondents "whether your advice is sought by your kinsmen at village in meeting out troubles faced by them?" A total of 101 (15.39%) respondents were of the opinion that, their advice is sought by their family members and 10.97% replied that they have to take important part at the time of decision making with their fellow kinsman at village.

Thus, the foregoing illustration helps us to understand some dimension of relationships maintained by the urbanites with their native places. Such network of relationships between the urbanites and the ruralities is a continued feature so long urbanization is engulfed with rural surroundings or villages which are continuously merged with urban territory. The growth of towns and cities in Assam is markedly featured by such characteristics.
Membership in Voluntary Association/organization (Table 6.11)

Urban life and culture is considerately associated with increasing participation in secondary set of relationships. In fact, urbanity is closely associated with the development of secondary norms, values and relations. The emergence of voluntary groups and associations in cities is on the otherhand, is an extension of social relations that was traditionally bounded by primary group relationships.

There are a number of studies in sociological literature which focussed its central attention on the emergence, nature and functions of voluntary association in society. Apart from many other features of voluntary associations, studies are more concerned about the emerging life and culture of the urbanites which includes extension of rational outlook, development of leisure time behavior, development of urban personality patterns, nature of change and participation etc.

In the context of rapid urbanization, without going into the detail, development of voluntary associations in society takes root of divergent bases - both traditional and modern. Thus, one important functional role of voluntary association in society is to inculcate habit of changing social behaviour through extention of both formal and informal relationship in urban surrendings.

Under this assumption in view, we made an attempt to understand the nature of participation of the respondents in various voluntary activities or in similar related institutions. Their membership in those associations can be categorically discussed under-sectarian association, professional voluntary associations, and taking part in statutory bodies constituted by institution or organizations. Details are presented in the table 6.11 below.
### Table – 6.11
Memberships in Voluntary Association/Organisation

(Are you member of the following)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voluntary Asso/organisation</th>
<th>Baithow Celebration Committee</th>
<th>Namghar Committee (outside ones own tribes)</th>
<th>School Board Committee</th>
<th>Professional Association</th>
<th>Village Club/Library</th>
<th>Sonowal KachariKalyan Sangha (Ethnic Body)</th>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>Business Committee</th>
<th>Sport/Cultural body</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dainjan N=83</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teporgaon N=90</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankota N=198</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akonimoria N=90</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonaligaon N=45</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gobindapur N=150</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

155
It is seen that respondents during their life span in urban environment are associated with a number of voluntary bodies or associations. Like other ethnic groups of northeast India, the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam have some ethnic or community associations of their own. In the contemporary period, such organisations have gained mass-based popularity among the community people. The Baithow celebration committee, is one such example where majority of the respondents are involved (Dainijan 95.18%, Teporgaon 95.55%, Mankota 94.94%, Akonimoria 100%, Sonaligaon 80.00% and Gobindapur 86.66%).

We have described about this community festival detail in the previous chapter III. However, it can be mentioned that Baithow Puja is a major religious festival of the community and its importance rests on restoring the socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the community. Many scholars and literary persons from among the community believe that Baitho Puja celebration in the recent decades has got its prominence as a result of ethnic revivalism and change of political environment at both local and regional levels.

The Baithow Puja is celebrated centrally in the state of as well as various places locally. Committees are constituted and memberships are driven from every household of the community has their member representative to the committee.

The *Sonowal Kachari Kalyan Sangha* is one very old ethnic organisation, of the people the existence and functioning of which is regarded with honour and reverence by all community people. The primary functions of this Sangha is to
identify the clan name, name of the *Bancha* (familial line) and to formulate the
ethnic rules and principles to be abide by all community people. Thus, the Sonowal
Kachari families irrespective of their habitation and settlements are much obliged
to the norms framed by this ethnic body.

Religion in urban context is undergoing tremendous process of transformation. Under the impact of modern forces of secularization and condition
of urban living, the traditional stronghold of *Namghar* usually based on
community, locality, religious sets etc. has greatly been modified. In the urban
cosmopolitan areas religion has virtually become organised body of mixed
populations. So, one can find many such *Namghars* in a town, and they are situated
according to the convenience and wishes of the people of the locality. Thus,
*Namghar* is being run by committees formed with distinct frame of rules and
procedures. These committees are formally constituted, the memberships of which
are open to all - irrespective of caste, tribe considerations.

The respondents under study, in a good number are found to be members of
such formal bodies of the Namghar. We found people who have memberships to
Namghar committees outside of their own. Respondents were found to be 14.45%
in Dainijan, 16.66% in Teporgaon, 11.11% in Mankota, 13.33% in Akonimoria,
10.00% in Sonaligaon and 10.00% in Gobindapur village who are found to be
associated with Namghar committees outsides of their own community (tribal)
Namghars. Thus, in a midst of urban surrounding and in composite population
structure, the tribals (Sonowal Kcharis) are intimately associated with common
platforms forgetting own ethnic affiliations which once considered primary bond of relationship in village settings. Membership in occupational and professional associations is also another dimension which can also be considered important to enhance secondary relationships as a result of urban culture. However, we found some smaller number of respondents from four villages who have their memberships in few professional bodies and unions. They constitute 2.41% from Dainijan, 2.23% from Teporgaon, 5.54% from Mankota and 2.23% from Gobindapur. The Railway employees Association, Junior Doctors Association etc. are some of such professional associations in which the respondents were found to be involved.

Similarly, the small Tea grower's Association, local literary and cultural bodies, clubs, Youths associations, Library committees are some prominent voluntary associations/organizations in which there are substantial number of respondents were found to be involved.

Recent emergence of Sonowal Kachari Student Union, both at district and local levels, Sonowal Kachari Autonomus Council etc. has opened varied opportunities for the enlighten persons of the community of both males and females to associate with many groups and organizations in various ranks and files.

Thus, the Sonowal Kacharis, an important tribal community of upper Assam, over the years have projected a change in various facts of life and such changes are visible both of the levels of individuals, family and community level.
Reference


