CHAPTER V
Religion and rituals are the important regulators of human behaviour. Religion enters human social life as a very strong but silent inspiration. Emile Durkheim explains 'religion' through its practical implication, for which he rejected 'Animism' of Tylor and Spencer and 'Naturism' of Max Muller. His scientific explanation of religion is - 'clan cult' or 'Totemism' - the basic form of religion, not only for the Arunta tribe of Australia, but for the religious world. In his formulation the social role of religion gets prominence. From sociological point of view, religion is found to be a great and strong unifying social force. Religion helps the society to integrate and perpetuate the social order in two ways:

(i) It provides a moral guidance in the form of doctrine, dogma and myth. Koranic doctrine combines religion with individual and social life very closely. When a man takes food, he needs to remember God. He is supposed to make a distinction between Haram (proscribed) and Halal (prescribed). A man does so because religion says so. Religion asks him to share his food with a hungry man.
is significant to note that, the little religious gesture makes him remember a supernatural force, which ultimately makes him morally and spiritually disciplined. Similarly, when his food is shared, it makes the brotherhood feeling stronger.

(ii) The rites, that is ceremonial actions and ritual prescriptions e.g., occasional congregations for religious prayers, help in bringing or restrengthening integrity. Similarly, there are religious taboos, e.g., females in Islam are not supposed to offer prayers in the mosque together with the men. This taboo ultimately restrengthen the division of labour and social well being. In Islam, sacred and profane are one and the same. Sacred guides the profane and the profane exists within the sacred.

For this study, data were collected at two levels—viz., (a) at the individual personal level and (b) at the societal level.

Analysing the tradition and root of Islam in the village Dakaidol, it is learnt that, till the end of the nineteenth century, Islam could not gain ground. There were more munafic (bad) than momin (good) Muslims. People were
Muslims in name and not in deed. Casteism in those societies is the best evidence of instability of Islam. It was due to the fact that the majority of Muslims were local converts. The literati did not percolate the message of Islam in its original form, because their interest was concentrated in gaining popularity in the newly created society.

In order to go further in this discussion we hark back to the literature, to clearly understand the present as a product of the past. The information, as supplied by the respondents synchronised well with what had already been said by W.W. Hunter in 1879. About the Muslims of Goalpara he says,

The religion of Islam does not appear to be making any further advance among the people ... For large numbers of Muhammadan soldiery who remained behind after the invasion of Assam, accounts for the considerable Musalmán population in the District ... they are not so fanatical as in Eastern Bengal. In the interior of the District, a great many have adopted idolatrous practices similar to the Hindus; and the Deputy-Commissioner states that their processions and ceremonies, as well as their worship of village divinities and saints, show that they have practically renounced Islam.¹

Towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the present century large scale immigration of Bengali Muslim peasants took place. Seeing the present religiosity of the Bengali Muslims in the other two hamlets, it appears that, possibly this is one of the important reasons, which has gradually influenced the religiosity of the Assamese Muslims in Dikaidol. The Bengali Muslims are known as the orthodox followers of Islam, about whom Ellickson comments, "Muslims of the rural areas of Bangladesh are concerned with being good Muslims". 2

Towards the beginning of the present century situations were favourable. It is written in the Provincial Gazetteer of Assam: "The Assam Valley was invaded by the Muhammadans on several occasions, and one general is said to have penetrated as far as Sadiya; but Goalpara was the only District which they held for any length of time, and the influences of the faith were not largely felt at the eastern end of the valley". 3 It is necessary that a good

Muslim has knowledge of Koran and Hadith. His acts should be in conformity with the knowledge of Islam.

In the Census Report for 1881, the Muhammadan peasantry of Assam are described as being extremely ignorant of all that concerned their faith, some of them never even having heard of Muhammad, and others imagining that he corresponded to the Hindu Rama; but during the last twenty years considerable advances have been made, and ignorance as complete as this is no longer common.4

Effort of the local leaders to stabilize Islam and spread in the knowledge of Koran help in this direction. Religion as the regulator of human behaviour is a means of social control. 'Islam' and 'Shariat' explain the continuous process of the life cycle, cultural norms, values, social institutions and social solidarity. In their everyday conversation, the Muslims in the area of study take the name of 'Allah', 'Rasul', 'Khoda', 'Malik' and so on. While referring to their future plan, they say 'Inse-Allah' i.e., by the will of God or if God permits. Before getting down in the early morning, before going out, before taking food, before going to bed, it is almost necessary for them to remember Allah and Prophet. By uttering their names step by step, they feel blessed and secure. For whatever they do they say, "Bismillah-hir-Rahmanir-Rahim" i.e. beginning in

the name of God. It is so often pronounced that sometimes they say only 'Bismillah'-rest implied. The villagers do it, because it is said in the Koran that, e.g., those who take food without remembering God - He who grants everything, then Devil has a share over that food. The mosque has been playing a significant role in the social formation. It is written by A. Rahman that, - Mosque has always been a locus in the spread of Islam. A holy mosque has been not only a place of worship of Allah, but an educational institution, assembly and court.

Percentage of the performance of prayer is tabulated below:

Table No.I FREQUENCY OF THE PERFORMANCE OF PRAYER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>How many times a day the respondent prays</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Once/twice a day</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Five times a day</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Sometimes only</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table informs us that, prayer is considered very important in Dakaidol. The majority of the respondents i.e., 80 percent in the village perform prayers five times a day and fulfil their duties. A question was put to the male respondents about their frequency of performing prayer in the mosque.

Table No.II PERFORMANCE OF THE PRAYER IN THE MOSQUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>When do they go to the mosque for prayer</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>For daily prayer</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>For special Friday prayer</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>For the prayer in the day of Idqah</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, it is recorded that, their participation cannot be accurately tabulated in percentage. Those who do not usually go to the mosque for prayer, do so if they want to go, But prayers in the month of Ramadan are usually performed in the mosque by all the male residents. Friday prayer is attended by the male residents. But, so far the serial number 3 is concerned it is learnt that, prayers are performed either in the mosque or in the Idqah (field). Anyway, cent percent of the respondents participate in the
congregation and thereby renew their 'we-feeling'. Those who are engaged in business, sometimes miss the prayer, due to non-availability of mosque in the nearby area while on travel.

Special emphasis is laid on the performance of [Namaj or Salat (Prayer)] because it is to be performed by everyone - male and female (five times a day), except minors. It is [Farj (compulsory)] for everyone. When someone due to his work, cannot perform his prayer right on time, he is allowed to perform the same prayer known as [Kaza Namaj (delayed prayer)] as soon as he is free from his work. Thus, when need arises Islam gives more importance to work than prayer. Concession is also given to the physically weak and sick persons to sit down or lie down and pray. Prayer is a must. Frederick Mathewson Denny summarises thus,

Muslims are required to perform the Salat five times daily: early morning (salāt al-ṣa'r), noon (salāt al-duhr), mid-afternoon (salāt al-'asr), sunset (salāt al-maghrib), and evening (salāt al-'isha). In addition, the Friday congregational service (salat al-Jum'a), which features a sermon (khutba), and the salats of funeral and the two eclipses (ṣun or woon) are also required. Required practices in Islam are known either by fard or wajib, the performance of which is rewarded and its neglect is punished.7

It is the duty of the parents to impart religious knowledge and train their children to act according to the Islamic way of life. Majority of the children are taught to read the Koran and to perform the Namaj.

The locality possesses its mosque within. Each prayer begins as soon as Adhan or Ajan is recited in the mosque. It is recited five times daily. Ajan means - 'call to prayer'. It has already been said that, Islam has borrowed much of its ideas from the Jews and Christians. Christians ring the bell in the Church before the prayer starts or they beat a drum to achieve the same. The purpose of all these acts are one and the same - call to prayer. We quote Denny once again, who summarizes it as follows:

As the time for the salat begins, the adhān, "call to prayer", is recited in a loud, clear voice by the mu'adhdhin ("muezzin") from atop a mineret or mosque roof or any appropriate place that will allow the call to carry. The call to prayer is as follows, first in Arabic and then in translation:

1. Allāhu akbar ("God is most grace") four times
2. Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā allāh ("I testify that there is no god but God"), twice.
3. asshadu anna muhammadan rasūl allāh ("I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God"), twice.
4. hayya ' alā al salāt ("Hurry to prayer"), twice
5. hayya 'alā-falāh ("Hurry to success
sometimes translated as "salvation") twice

6. Only before the early morning salat: al-salāt
khayrun minal - naum ("Prayer is better than
sleep"), twice ...

Prayer is performed not necessarily in the mosque,
but also at home, out of doors, at school, and even in the
warfield. It is necessary for prayer that the person
should be clean and pray facing west i.e. = qaba in Mecca.
He must clean himself through minor ablution called -
Wudu. Each villager completes Wudu before standing for
prayer. It is completed according to the directions given
in the Koran. It is thus:

"... When ye rise up for prayer, wash your
faces. and your hands up to the elbows, and lightly rub
your heads and (wash) your feet up to the ankles. And if
ye are unclean, purify yourselves ...." (Surah: V:6).

Besides congregational prayer during Idd, weekly
congregational prayer takes place every Friday - known as
Jumma. Every adult villager tries his best to attend the

**Jumma Namaj.** However, this prayer is not prescribed to women. It is found that even those who due to idleness neglect daily prayers, assemble in the mosque on Friday for the special prayer. It is because, prayer and assembly are equally important. The month of **Ramadan** i.e., the month of fasting is very dear to the respondents. They consider this month, as the month for earning more **suab** i.e. **punya**, through more religious performance - special prayer, fasting dawn till dusk, alm giving etc.

The Muslims follow the lunar calendar and cycle of the moon is the measure of time. The Muslim Lunar year has twelve months which begins with, **Muharram**, followed by **Safar**, **Rabi'u al - Awwal**, **Rabi'ul - Ākhir**, **Jumāda al-uluā**, **Jumāda al-ukhrā**, **Rajab**, **Shabān**, **Ramadan**, **Shawwāl**, **Dhū al-qada**, and **Dhū al-Hijja**. Five of them, **Muharram**, **Rajab**, **Ramadan**, **Dhū al qada**, and **Dhū al-Hijja** are the sacred months. **Ramadan**, is the ninth month in the Islamic Lunar year. In this month, day-long fasting is observed not only by adult male and females but children except minors also do it. Besides this, fasting is prescribed any six days in **Shawwal** and the ninth, tenth and eleventh of **Muharram**. However, fasting during the two **Idd** days is a taboo.

* **Suab** or **Punya**: Reward from God.
Besides these, when there is a crisis in family, people fast for rapid recovery.

During the time of crisis and sickness, religion is the first and last resort. When asked the question about the relation of crisis with religion, the respondents emphasised on its importance and they said, "in times of sickness both Dua and Dawa play an important role and during crisis Dua is the resort." It is significant to note that Dua gets prominence over Dawa. In Dakaidol together with Dua and due to unavailability of medical practitioner or hospital in nearby areas, the villagers take resort to some herbal medicine traditionally known as Kabiraji Dawa. Two ladies in the village sell those herbal medicine at a cheaper rate. While interviewing the ladies, it was found that their knowledge of medicine is acquired mainly for professional interest and on the basis of trial and error method; so no scientific value is involved in them.

Every Muslim has a desire to participate once in the worldwide congregational prayer at Mecca, known as Hajj—the third pillar of Islam. Pilgrimage is prescribed to a

* Dua = Prayer (religious) for blessing.

Dawa = Medicine.
man or woman only when he/she completes the worldly duties.
For example, a man who is yet to get his sons or daughters married off is not asked to go for hajj. A man who is financially poor, hajj is not jāf (necessary) for him. Because hajj means, as Waddy puts it:

The spirit of Hajj is the spirit of total sacrifice: sacrifice of personal comforts, worldly pleasures, acquisition of wealth, companionship of relatives and friends, vanities of dress and personal appearance, pride relating to birth, national origin, accomplishments, work or social status.... "Hajj" also signifies the brotherhood of all Muslims, demonstrated in this greatest of all international assemblies...\(^{10}\)

The Kaba is the navel of the earth where Muslims of the world meet.

In Dakaidol, no one is a Hajji (one who has completed hajj). This is due to the weak economic condition of the people. There is a touching evidence of this, as reported by some of the villagers. It is observed that the foundation of the mosque is very delicate and it is just a simple hut. A villager reported that the structure of the mosque even today remains standing only because of the contributions made by an old lady. The lady had saved money

to go once to Mecca for hajj. But she could not fulfil her wishes due to problems including shortage of money. So contributed the little amount which she had saved, for the repair of the mosque.

The last and most important pillar of Islam is Zakat i.e. alm giving either in cash or in kind. Together with this, it has to be taken into account that beggary is forbidden in Islam. Thus, only those persons have a haque or claim over Zakat who are either disabled or poor, and not for those who are idle and poor. According to Islam, work is a virtue and everyone must attain this virtue. Zakat is not possible for the Dakaidol Muslims. Moreover, Zakat and the amount is very much determined by one's amount of property and capability to pay. Thus, Islamic doctrine helps and promotes 'we-feeling' among the believers. This is what religion means to Muslims. Asghar Ali Engineer writes, "Religion according to its Latin origin religio mens conscience and piety on one hand, and to tie, or to bind, on other. Religion, in other words, can be defined as a set of spiritual and metaphysical doctrines binding together all those who subscribe
to them..." Social integration is the language of Islamic doctrine.

THE LOCAL SHRINE

The Dakaidol dargah (shrine) plays an important role in religio-social life of the residents. Whoever faces a serious crisis, either a male or a female, goes to the dargah, meditate there and can get the wishes fulfilled. Thus, the shrine stands as a witness and support to them in times of distress. Because of its significance and spiritual power associated with it, both Muslim and Hindu devotees go there and contribute (sacrifice) either in cash or in kind and get their honest wishes fulfilled.

The hut of the shrine possesses a donation box where people contribute generously. However, not a single poor villager dares to lift money from the box. The management of the shrine is in the hand of the village committee. No outsider needs to take any permission to enter the shrine. When asked about it, the care-taker said, "Pak Panjatan do not belong to the people of

Dakaidol only, but they belong to the Muslims of the world. As every Muslim has the right to pray to Allah, similarly every Muslim has the right to enter the dargah and pray to Allah and the Pak Panjatan. It needs no permission. "This statement takes us to another issue - i.e., to the role of Syeds. Once, the Syeds were like the Brahmins in the Hindu society. Thus, they acted as mediators between man and God. This goes against Islamic principle. Today, Islam and Muslim society is stabilized in Dakaidol. Man communicates with God directly - as prescribed in the religion.

In the village, among the youth, there are a few insane persons. No modern scientific treatment is given to them. It is believed by the villagers that they suffer because of the witchcraft. The witches are capable of causing physical sufferings of every sort, including death. Medical treatment yields to no fruitful result. Only witch doctors can cure such patients. Besides this, the society is superstition - ridden. Almost every person, including children and old persons is seen to wear thread tied in their arms or in their waist, where a Table i.e. small amulets (one or more) are tied. It is considered as essential as food and drink. Amulets are used for many purposes e.g., to cure diseases, to make fruit trees give
their food, to make husband obey his wife, to cast out
devils, to remove fear, to pass in examination and in many
such other situations.

RITUALS AT BIRTH

Whenever a male child is born, Azan is recited, but
this is not done in case of birth of a female baby. It was
felt that in this patrilineal society male child is
preferred to female child. Females are always considered as
the property of others. Girls to some extent are burden to
their parents. About such tendency and preference Ja'far
Sharif's view fits well in the present study. He says,
"Though the desire for male offspring does not influence
Musalmāns to the same extent as Hindus, who believe that it
is only a son who can perform the funeral rites which admit
the spirit of his father into the company of his sainted
ancestors, still among Musalmāns the craving for a male
heir is often intense."  

For forty days after the birth of the child the
mother and the child are considered unclean. The village

12. Ja'far Sharif. Islam in India. (Curzon Press, 1921,
midwife comes to attend delivery cases. Usually, at the completion of one month, hair cutting ceremony of the new born baby takes place. The neighbours, who come to see the new born are supposed to present gifts to it. If a male child is born, happiness of the family is most marked. The procedure of Azan recitation follows thus, as Sharif puts it, "After the child is washed and swaddled he is presented to the friends. The Azan or Bang, the call to prayer, is uttered into his right ear and the Kalima or Creed in his left". The child is called by a name with a good meaning. There is hardly any name giving ceremony organized. Amulet is tied to his/her body almost since the day the baby comes to the world. The baby is always spotted with black Kazal (mascara) on his forehead in order to cast evil eyes.

Another ritual follows in case of a male child, usually before 10 years of age when he is circumcised. This is known as Sunnat or Musalmani. A milad (congregation) is organized, where the villagers under the leadership of a religious head pray to Allah and wish health of the particular child. This is followed by a feast. All those, who attend the prayer and feast present gifts to the child. In the village, only the obligatory part is performed and

they spend less in the feast which follows the rituals. Another ceremony performed for sons and daughters — is Akika—sacrifice for their well-being. Thus, we see that economy determines one's performance of rituals. As money does not permit, so the villagers perform only the most obligatory part of each ceremony.

RITUALS AT MARRIAGE

Wedding ceremonies can be divided into two aspects—Religious and non-Religious. Religious aspect of marriage is done according to the Islamic principle. An auspicious marriage day is fixed according to the Islamic calendar, known as 'Panjika'. The Maulavi or the Kazi presides over the 'Nikah'. Marriage is a social contract. The girl's consent over the bond and the amount of Mehr are fixed in the presence of invitees, who thenceforward remain as witness to the contract. No Hindu ritual is followed in the Nikah. The amount of the Mehr is not to be paid immediately.

Marriage is known as Byah, which includes both Nikah and rejoicing accompanying the Nikah. Before the Nikah, several rites take place. One of these is the ring ceremony known as magni or angathi pindhua. Sometimes, this
is done one year or six months before the wedding. Another ceremony which takes place just before the wedding is Aqchuldia where groom's relatives present mirror, hair oil, clothes etc., to the girl. One day prior to the wedding, the bride and the groom in their respective households are anointed with Haldi (turmeric) and mustard oil. Not only the bride and the groom but the other members present in the house, mainly the womenfolk, rub the paste to one another as a playful activity. In the merry-making the feeling of oneness gets restrengthened.

The bride and groom are anointed with mehendi (henna). Right here, it should be mentioned that all these except taking mehendi - are folk customs. These are nowhere mentioned in the religious script of Islam. This is found not only in the study area but in other parts of the country too. While writing about Muslims of South, Ja'far Sharif writes, "The second day is known as Mehendi or HinnabandI, 'the henna day', ... This rubbing with henna, saffron, or turmeric seems to be, partly a form of initiation, partly protective and stimulating or fertilizing, and when the codiment used by one of the pair is sent to be used to anointing the other it is a charm to promote union". Citing writers like, L.A. Anantha Krishna 14. Ibid., pp.65-66.
Iyer, he writes, "It is a common rite among the Hindus from whom it was probably borrowed by the Indo-Musalmans". 15

A milad is a must to the wedding. Where a Fatiha is said in the name of the Prophet, members of the Muslim community in general, for all who predeceased and members of that family in particular.

The non-religious aspect of the wedding takes an indigenous flavour. Merry-making, organizing feast for the kith and kin, a tea party for neighbours and friends are almost same in the Hindu and Muslim communities. Marriage is a social contract. Scholars have mentioned that the practice of signing the Nikahnama exists in the Lower Assam region. However, I.Ali who conducted a study in some of the Lower Brahmaputra Valley districts (other than Goalpara) writes, "The practice of signing a legal document (nikahnama) to solemnize a marriage is becoming obsolete among the Assamese Muslims". 16 Such situations could not be located in the village. The custom of Ath mongla is also observed by the Muslims. At this occasion, the bride goes back to her natal home and stays there for eight days. And the groom

15. Ibid., p.66.
fetch her to his home. When asked questions about the origin or relevance of many of the non-Islamic practices, the villager could not give any satisfactory answer to these nor could they relate those to Islamic tradition, but relied on indigenous civilization. The indigenous civilization on the other hand is a product of Islamic Great tradition and Indo-Islamic Little tradition.

In the village, marriage is the only ceremony or occasion when friends - Hindus, Garos, Rajbangshis etc., are invited for tea. On other occasions they invite Muslims only. In cases of second marriage i.e., in the cases of widowers remarriages only those which are obligatory (Nikah) are done. Rejoicings are less in such occasions. Among the Muslims, marriage is the basis of society. whereby human race can be perpetuated only through the procreation of legitimate children. Marriage is a contract and at the same time it is a sacred bond too. Legally, marriage is a contract, rather than a sacrament. Consent of both bride and groom are most important.

While writing about the social aspect of Muslim marriage Charles Waddy points out,
"(i) Islamic law gives to the woman a definitely high status after marriage.

(ii) Restrictions are placed upon the unlimited polygamy of pre-Islamic times.

(iii) The Prophet, both by example and precept, encouraged the status of marriage. He positively enjoined marriage for all those who could afford it". 17

RITUALS AT DEATH

This is the last crisis in the life of a human being. Like the Assamese Hindus, when someone dies in a Muslim family, the kitchen remains closed for three days. The members and paternal relatives of the family of the deceased are forbidden to take non-vegetarian diet. They are supported by the neighbours and affinal relatives with very simple vegetarian diet. They are not allowed to sit on high seats. Following the Hindu custom, they are made to sit on the floor. The widow of the deceased is asked to take off her bangles, necklace, rings and so on. This is a typical local system which has percolated to the Muslim society. They are not even allowed to comb and oil their

17. Waddy Charis. op.cit., p.63.
hair. All these (which are done by Muslims) are done by Assamese Hindus, among other reasons, as a mark of respect of the departed soul. Since, these non-Islamic customs are borrowed from Hindus, so these are now in the process of wane and every knowledgeable Muslim questions such acts.

The deceased is buried in the nearby graveyard. Burying is locally known as gor. Whenever, there is a case of death in the village, it becomes an obligation of every villager to immediately reach the spot. Because, according to the Islamic social life, an individual is responsible to his family, the family is responsible to the group and the community. Thus, an individual belongs to the community and the community belongs to the individual.

After bathing the deceased, the rituals follow thus: If the husband dies leaving his widow behind, the widow is asked in the presence of the villagers to excuse the deceased from the mehr (which was fixed at the time of wedlock). If she does not excuse him, the gár (the burial) cannot take place. Normally, this never happens.

Similarly, if the wife dies, the widow is asked to excuse her, if she has misbehaved with him in any case. Giving alms to the poor, regular recitation of the Holy Koran for forty days, performing special namaj for the peace of the departed soul follow.
After forty days jiafat takes place. A milad is followed by a feast. What is socially significant is that, all the villagers are invited in this jiafat. The males, young and old sit separately and women young and old sit separately. The ritual starts with the recitation of verses from the holy Koran and this is followed by a Munajat, where everyone present, raises the uplifted hands and pray for peace of the departed soul. It is not without significance that, the congregation prays for all Murda (dead) Muslims - known and unknown, near and distant, friends and foe. Then, the feast follows. No Hindu or non-Muslim is invited to this milad and feast.

Khusbo (otto) has an important place in all the rites de passages. It is almost necessary for the bride and groom, to get it sprayed over the body. In case of death, after bathing, the deceased is sprayed with Khusbo water. Similarly, kazal (mascara) is used by ladies, young boys and girls and used for deceased. The deceased is buried in white clothes.
RELIGION AT THE SOCIETAL LEVEL

Besides their individual performance of namaj, keeping fast etc., some festivals are communally celebrated. These are Muharram, Akhir-e-chahar Shamba, Milad-e-Nabi, Laylatul-i-Miraj, Shab-e-Barat, Bakar-Idd, Idu-ul-fitr.

Muharram: Muharram is celebrated on the tenth day in the month of Muharram. Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad was put to death in the dry Karbala on this day. He was not given food to eat and water to drink by the enemies. Thus, Muharram is observed in honour of the martyrs. Taja, model made of paper is taken out in procession. Inside the model lumps of clay are kept, imagining that as the tomb of the martyr. Usually Sunni Muslims do not play sticks and do not bring out the Taja in a procession. But it could be gathered that among the youths there is a tendency to participate in the procession. The procession is taken out by the Bengali Muslims from the other hamlets, which passes through this particular hamlet, where the Assamese youths join them. Thus, the occasion is marked by the remembrance of the sad story of the Jehad (war) where Hazarat Ali met with a tragic end. Similarly, communal prayer, marks the occasion of 'Akhir-e-Chahar Shamba', Milad-e-Nabi (Prophet's birthday), 'Laylatul-i-Miraj', and 'Shab-e-Barat'.


Shabe Miraj: On the twenty-sixth day of Rajub, accompanied by an angel, Muhammad is believed to have visited the seven heavens and hell. Later it is said that he had an audience with Allah himself. To celebrate this event, this day is expected to be spent in meditation and prayer. If possible people keep awake for the whole night saying prayers and asking for Allah's blessings.  

Shabe-Barat is celebrated on the night of the fourteenth day of Shaban, remembering Prophet's hideout in the Mount Hira. Halua (sweet) and Bread are distributed among the believers remembering Bibi Fatima, who took these food to her father in the hideout in the Mount Hira.

Id Ul Fitr: This is locally known as Ramadan Idd, because this follows as soon as the month of Ramadan ends. The significance of this Idd is in the practice of honesty, sincerity, self-control and helping the poor and needy. Title of the Idd is self-explanatory. Fitr means alms giving. Fitr is different from Zakat in the sense that Zakat is determined by the amount of property but fitr is a must for all the persons. It is commonly believed that if fitr is not contributed, Allah does not accept the

prayers and fast performed in the month of Ramadan. However, fitr is to be given to only the poor and needy. The fitr is meant for the disabled, physically handicapped and the destitutes. Thus, it is the duty of every Muslim to find out the really needy person and give him the amount; the amount of which is fixed in the mosque in the last Friday before the Id, according to the current price rate. So, the amount varies from time to time. Fitr can be given once in a year, but Zakat can be given at any time. Zakat means a poor tax. The essence of these acts is the sharing of one's possession with the fellow members.

Id-uz-Zuha: This is locally known as Bakri Id or Kurbani Id. The 'Kurbani' (sacrifice of beast—either cow or goat) has a social significance. Most important aspect of the sacrifice is—distribution of the meat among all the villagers, friends and relatives. The principle is that more people should get little share of the sacrificial beast rather than few people getting the lot. When more people can be covered through the distribution more Suab (Punya) a person gets. Such religious prescription simply helps in restrengthening solidarity and promoting community feeling. Whatever the reason may be, non-Muslims (when a goat is slaughtered) are not given a share of it. Among Muslims, rich and poor, near and distant are given a share
of it. A domestic and dear animal (pet) is expected to be slain. Sacrifice of this nature is important. Thus, social significance of religion, in the form of unity, cohesiveness and tolerance is most marked in Islam.

Virtues include Farj and Sunnat. Farj is compulsory. It is always believed that in both the Idd days participating in the congregational prayer is Sunnat (virtue of second category) whereas meeting relatives, kith and kin, non-kin and to exchange best wishes are considered as Farj - this leads to social solidarity. Other participating events or village level festivals are the 'urs'- celebrated in the dargah. This is saint day or saint worship.

Out of the five foundation pillars of Islam Ibadat (worship) Namaj (Prayer), Roja (Fasting) Haji (Pilgrimage) Zakat (alm giving), Muslims of Dakaidol can go for the first three only. Their economic condition does not permit them to fulfil the fourth and fifth pillars or requirement. Whatever it is, they are in the process of being 'good Muslims'. Religion, at the personal level inculcates self-discipline, fear of God and society. Thus, it acts as a strong means of controlling individuals in the society whereby the village social system stands balanced.
Sociologically, this functional aspect of religion is significant.

AUTHORITY STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Stability of a social structure and its dynamics can be understood with the analysis of the forces which are responsible for the maintenance of stability and change. Regarding the importance of social control and orderly management of the social system, MacIver and Page write,

...social control is meant the way in which the entire social order coheres and maintains itself—how it operates as a whole, as a changing equilibrium ... the relation of the social order and the individual being, the relation of the unit and the whole. To study social control we must seek out the ways in which society patterns and regulates individual behaviour and, at the same time, the ways in which patterned and standardized behaviour in turn serves to maintain the social organization.19

Society is controlled, stability is maintained and orderly social mutation is possible to achieve, broadly through the following means: (a) Established and sanctioned forms of customs, mores, religion which influence man from

the cemette to the grave. These values are injected to him actively but slowly and steadily, through the socialization process. Thus, he is taught in an informal manner—group cohesiveness and necessary requirements of being an unit in the whole. He is taught his rights and duties. (b) Secondly, society is controlled through state and Government in a formal way, with deliberate creation of law.

Both these means are inevitable for maintaining social stability. It is the elder generation who socializes the children where submission to religion and social norms is stressed on. In the village, the local shrine has been playing a significant role. An accused is taken either to the mosque or to the shrine for a swearing.

In the early existence of the village, 'Power', 'Authority', 'Influence' and 'Leadership' were intertwined. The Syeds who had a charismatic leadership were landowners too. Power to control the villagers was monopolised by them. The local converts submitted to them. Thus, they had the authority to exert considerable influence in the rural scene. Being the literati in Islamic script and due to the 'foreign blood running in their veins' they acted as leaders. This was more possible because in the economic hierarchy, the non-Syeds were in leased-in land belonging to the Syeds.
Today, due to the growth of population, spread of the knowledge of the Koran to the non-Syeds, knowledge regarding the principles of equality and individual achievement prescribed, increasing socio-economic differentiation—power, authority, influence and leadership are no longer intertwined. Thus, we see that traditional authority structure attempted to derive sanctions from religion. Because, the PirS could claim dominance. Max Weber writes, "Authority may be based on rational grounds and anchored in impersonal rules that have been largely enacted or contractually established — charismatic authority, finally, rests on the appeal of their extraordinary virtuosity, whether ethical, heroic, or religious". Weber used the Greek word charisma, meaning a special gift of power restricted to a selected few, they are divinely inspired and directed in their public undertakings.

In Islam, no one is superior by birth. With the spread and consolidation of Islam, the Koranic version of equality before law became well known to the non-Syeds. The non-Syeds started to show an indifferent attitude

towards the claimed superiority of the Syeds. Gradually, the Syeds could not continue their livelihood as priests. Changes occurred side by side with the British annexation. The changing conviction of the non-Syeds towards the power of the Syeds got a support when Law Court and legal administration were established during the British rule. Land-alienation had a serious repercussion on the economic life of the whole community.

Hunter writes, "In 1824 there was but one magisterial and one civil Court in the whole District; in 1850 the number had increased to three magisterial and seven civil and revenue Courts... There are two convenated European officers stationed in the District in 1860, and one in 1870 ... The regular police was first formed in 1861".22 The Syeds no longer remained as a dominant group. To Srinivas, "For a caste to be dominant, it should own a sizable amount of the arable land locally available, have strength of numbers, and occupy a high place in the local hierarchy. When a caste has all the attributes of dominance, it may be said to enjoy decisive dominance".23

THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

The study of group formation and leadership pattern get prominence in order to know the functioning of the village social organization. Because, these help in conflict and tension management for strengthening group cohesiveness. While writing about the importance of group formation in his study of Rampur, Oscar Lewis comments, "The study of these small groups takes us to the very heart of village life. It provides us with a key to the communications channels of the society and also reflects many of the values of the people".24

Factions and factionalism rule the Indian village organizations. The landownership pattern and caste provided the basis for factions. The village Dakaidol gives us a slightly different picture. It is a faction-free social organization. Conflict gives rise to factionalism. Khadija Gupta, in her study of Ranipur started with the assumptions, regarding the probable causes of the growth of factions. These are as follows: "Conflict between leaders could arise over such important matters as land, women and seeking

influence with officials. An ambitious leader, in the course of enlarging the size of his farm, hurt several persons' interests, and one of the latter could seek the aid of a rival leader to get the wrong righted. Again, two leaders might want the same widow or divorcee...  

In Indian villages 'caste' remains an important criterion for the growth of factions. In the history of Dakaidol, the Syeds (social group) undoubtedly had a considerable influence in the local politics. Gradually, land alienation during the British period occurred, but it did not create factions within the village. As the land was Inam land, so the loss was meant for the whole village. Similarly, the influence of 'caste' gradually faded away. It has already been said that widow remarriage is rare in the village (due to the fear of Iddat). In such a situation, there cannot be conflict over widows. Occupational caste has been non-existent. Each member of the family are trained in all the activities of life. Thus, patron-client relations in the form of Jaimani relation was unknown.

Conflict arises when there is differentiations, higher aspirations and competition. Mobilization of the masses takes place, when different leaders try to form their groups, in order to achieve a goal. In the country, we have political parties – 'Congress', 'Janata', 'Communist Party of India', 'Lok Dal' and few others and pressure groups too. These parties are formed on the basis of ideology, favouritism and leadership and aspiration to achieve the goal.

Thus, when the goal is clear and aspirants are relatively free from their everyday burden, they think for political participation. But, in the village such a goal is not clear. They are under heavy pressure of their everyday earning and consumption. So, participation in politics has no bearing for them; and thus active participation is rare. However, the main political actor of Dakaidol is located within the framework of the village panchayat. Certain influential persons in the village are located and the base of their influence are traced. These are discussed below.

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT

With the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in 1957, three-tier Panchayati Raj systems was introduced in Assam. Assam was the first state in India to
introduce it in all her plains districts. Under Assam Panchayat Act 1959, the three tiers were - Mohakuma Parishad, Anchalic Panchayat, and Gaon Panchayat. "The Anchalik Panchayat was the main agency responsible for the overall development of the area under its jurisdiction."

The act of 1959 was amended in 1961, 1962, 1964 and 1972. It was reduced to a two tier system by Assam Panchayat Act 1972 (Act No.XI of 1973). The most important office of the Anchalik Panchayat which was the intermediary between Government and the villagers was replaced by a Committee. The Act of 1972, thus widen the gap between Government and the villagers, defeating the aims of Panchayati Raj and Community Development Programmes.

The Gaon Panchayat covers a population of fifteen thousand to twenty thousand. The term of the Gaon Panchayat is for four years and consists of elected members not more than 15. The President of the Gaon Panchayat is elected by the voters within the Panchayat. The Vice-President is elected by the elected members (Peoples' Representatives) of the Panchayat.

The village Dakaidol with a population of 1127 (three hamlets) falls under the Shri Surya Giri Village Panchayat. The Panchayat includes 37 villages within 15 constituencies with a strength of 21805 souls²⁷ (Map No.III). This Panchayat includes not only the Assamese Muslim village of Dakaidol but many more villages, inhabited by the Hindus, Tribals and settled immigrants. The villagers are conscious of their rights, and they are aware of the modern democratic form of government. This situation minimises the traditional role of the Syeds. Data were collected on their nature of participation in politics; responses recorded are tabulated below:

Table No.III POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Nature of participation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Participation for membership</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Participation as voters</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Join a caucus and canvass</td>
<td>10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 10% of the respondents canvass for as well as participate as voters

During the field work, out of the 6 percent participants only 2 percent could win the election. K. Ahmed of Dakaidol (middle hamlet) was selected as Vice-President and he had enjoyed the office for four years (During the field work, Panchayat was dissolved for the next election). The females seem to have less interest in these matters. It was realised that the Bengali Muslims join together with the Assamese Muslims to elect a Muslim member. Thus, the Assamese Muslims get support of the immigrant Muslims. This strengthens the inter-group relationship between the two communities.

The respondents were asked to identify five influential persons in the village, and they were asked, why they consider them as influential. The criteria of selection were offered to them. The five persons were influential because of the following qualities. Names of the five persons are given below:
Table No. IV BASES OF INFLUENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria of selection</th>
<th>(A) Syed K. Ahmed</th>
<th>(B) Syed Talib Ali</th>
<th>(C) Rahmat Ali</th>
<th>(D) Syed Islam Shah</th>
<th>(E) Syed Samsuddin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rich economic background</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Political actor</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Age</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Honesty</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Knowledgeable</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. High Caste</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Others</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'A' was selected because, through him the villagers could ventilate their grievances. He was accepted as a person having socio-political interest and the qualities of spokesmanship. Mr. 'B' was liked because of his honesty. He was the care-taker of the local shrine, a knowledgeable person. Similarly, C, D, and E were selected for being honest, aged and knowledgeable.

It is evident that honesty is most desired. It is not necessary that the leader should have a rich economic background. Significantly out of the five persons, four of
them are called **Syeds**. The responses contradicted with their selections. Because, no one considered someone as influential for being a member of a high 'caste' group. It is because, prefixing the title **Syed** is a new style. Anyone can call himself as **Syed** without facing any resentment.

A probe has shown that A and B can trace their descend from the **Pirs** who came from Islamic country. Traditionally, they have been occupying an important place in social decision. The attitude to hold an office is still strong in their blood. Unlike the others, incidentally these persons try to be leaders. Thus, A is a political actor not because he is a **Syed**, but because he tries to make it. These persons can influence people not because they have 'authority'. Their personal qualities make them leaders.

Now, the functions, fund and expenditure of the Gaon Panchayat will be analysed. The functions of the Gaon Panchayat can be broadly categorized into nine groups. These are: Sanitation and Health, (2) Public Works, (3) Education, (4) Sports and Culture, (5) Self Defence and Village Defence, (6) Administration, (7) Welfare of the people, (8) Agriculture, Forests and Animal Husbandry, (9) Village Industries and other works assigned by the State through the Mahakuma Parishad.
The financial power of the Panchayat is as follows:

(a) A tax on (i) Private hat or market place,
(ii) Supply of Water, sale of fire wood, thatch or bamboo, conservancy, lighting and slaughter house.
(iii) Shops, Pharmacis, Tailoring.
(iv) Cultivable land lying fallen for two conservative years without any valid reason at the rate not exceeding fifty paisa per standard acre for every year being payable jointly or severally by those who are in possession of such land.

(b) A fee on (i) Registration of cattle sold within the Gaon Panchayat area.
(ii) Fishing in the fisheries allotted to the Gaon Panchayat.

(c) Cess or water rate recovering the cost of minor irrigation works taken up within the Gaon Panchayat area and such levy as may be necessary for the purpose of maintenance and repairs of such works.

(d) Licence fee (i) for running tea stalls, hotels, restaurants, sweet meat shops and for collection of hides and bones.
(ii) In respect of cart, carriage, cycles, fairs, confectionary and bakery,
(iii) On private fisheries used for commercial purpose. 

Panchayat Raj was revived to develop rural consciousness and their participation in the country's democracy. Hugh Gray writes, "The main consideration which promoted their introduction seems to have been the need for provoking public co-operation and participation in national construction and development, in view of the slow momentum of economic growth compared with such countries as Israel, Yugoslavia and China". 30

However, in Dakaidol, though there is active implementation of the institution towards decentralizing political power, yet the basic objective of making the rural mass politically conscious towards nation building efforts—still remains a myth. Hugh Gray too observes in his study, "The aim of decentralizing political power has, to a great extent, been achieved. But the twin aim of arousing popular enthusiasm for community development has been less successful". 31

For the general backwardness of the village, the villagers blame the inefficient leaders of the Panchayat

31. Ibid., p.538.
and the State Government. The common feeling is that, due to lack of advocacy the village remains cut off from the Government authorities. In order to have a rapid progress and development the leaders must be far-sighted and enlightened.

In Dakaidol, there are no village level workers. There is no 'gram Sevak' or 'gram Sevika'. As a result of which, there is always a communication gap between the political machinery and the rural masses. With the introduction of the two-tier system, there is only an Advisory Committee at the Block level. Five Gaon Panchayat make the Matia Development Block. These are viz., (1) Shri Surya Giri Gaon Panchayat (2) Dolgoma Gaon Panchayat (3) Sidhabari Gaon Panchayat (4) Jakheli Gaon Panchayat and (5) Krisnai Gaon Panchayat. It consists of 150 villages. Besides these each village is divided into smaller units. It is so wide that, a village is not directly linked with the Block level agency. And here lies the loophole of the Raj. Thus, there is no microscopic understanding of each village in the chain. The village Dakaidol also consists of three hamlets. The villages of the three hamlets are not receiving necessary attention for their development.
So far as the function of sanitation and Health is concerned, we have a poor experience. Their knowledge of health and hygiene is limited. The same river is used for washing clothes, washing animals and as a source of drinking water. Public works has also not made any headway. There is no protected water source and electrification. Education, Sports and Cultural development is insignificant. Nothing has been done for agricultural development and for allied activities. High yielding varieties programme, artificial irrigation etc., do not carry any meaning to them. Similarly, no 'village industry' or agro-based industry is yet planned to be set up.

As per the budget provision of the Mahakuma Parishad is concerned, an amount of ₹5,000/- less or more is allotted for Special Relief of the sub-divisional area. A few villagers in Dakaidol applying (individually) through the President of the Gaon Panchayat receive ₹50/- or ₹100/- for special relief.

Disputes are unavoidable in a community. Dispute over land is most significant. It started during the British rule and the problem reached the peak when land was allotted to the Bengali Muslims in 1953 and 1963. It created
factions within the three hamlets. But, it was tried to solve the dispute with the Government, rather than with the immigrants. Whenever there is a dispute between two persons, it is always tried to solve within the village, by the elderly members. If the disputes are not solved within the village then next possibility is the Goalpara Court. The villagers are not in a position to refer the cases to the Court. Panchayat Act includes a provision for Panchayat Adalat for solving Panchayat level disputes. But unfortunately, this proposal is not implemented.