CHAPTER V
CHAPTER V

ECONOMIC BASES OF THE COMMUNITY

Agriculture dominates the economy of the state of Assam. It is the principal source of livelihood for the overwhelming majority of the people in the largely rural state of Assam. According to the census of 1971, 76.68 per cent of the total workers of the state are engaged in agriculture and allied activities such as cultivation, labouring jobs in agriculture, livestock rearing, forestry, fishing, hunting, orchard raising, etc.

Assam falls within the assured rainfall zone. An average rainfall of over 2000 mm. and a low rate of evaporation from the rich alluvial soil of the riverine plains of the state provide an ideal condition for growing a variety of crops.

A large number of crops\(^1\) are grown in the state, of which rice is the principal foodgrain crop. It is

\(^1\) Such as maize, millet, pulses, sugarcane, sesame, mustard, jute, tobacco, chilli, ginger, turmeric, etc.
grown extensively in all the districts of the state following mainly the traditional methods of cultivation. The area under paddy is 68 per cent of the gross cropped area. Though Assam is traditionally a rice growing region, yet the average yield of rice in this state as also in North-East India is much lower than many other areas of India.

The district of Nagaon, like other districts of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, is an alluvial plain. Agriculture is the primary occupation of 64.15 per cent of the population of Nagaon district. Again, 13.22 per cent of the population of this district are agricultural labourers. Besides paddy, some other crops like jute and sugarcane are also grown in the district.

2 The Brahmaputra valley is an alluvial plain, 725 km. long and about 8 km. broad on the average and consists of an area of 56,339 sq.km. which represents 72 per cent of the total area of the state.

3 "A person who works in another person's land for wages in money, kind or share is regarded as an agricultural labourer. He has no risk in the cultivation, but he merely works in another person's land for wages. The labourer could have no right of lease or contract on land on which he works" (Census of India, 1971, Series 3, Assam, p. IX).
Like many other villages of Assam, at Barkola also the economic life of the overwhelming majority of the villagers is agriculture based. As pointed out in Chapter IV, Barkola is inhabited by the Assamese Sikhs, six caste groups and the Tiwas. In the village context the Sikhs, different caste groups and Tiwas are primarily agriculturists. However, in terms of land holdings, there is considerable variation among the different groups of the village. Within the village, the Koches own highest amount of agricultural land compared to other villagers. The land holding pattern also varies among the Sikhs themselves.

At Barkola village, people make distinction between two classes of land: (i) **basti-mati** (homestead land) and (ii) **kheti-mati** (cultivable land). The cultivable land is again categorised into (a) **da-mati** (wet paddy land) and (b) **bam-mati** or **phiringati** (high land for dry crops like mustard, potato, sugarcane, etc., and bamboo). A plot of high land on which houses are constructed is generally known as **basti-mati**. However, sometimes wet land is also converted into **basti-mati** by
raising the level of the soil and constructing houses thereon.

The Assamese Sikhs of Barkola possess both homestead land and cultivable land of varying sizes. There are also two households among the Assamese Sikhs who do not possess even small plots of cultivable land. The members of these households earn their livelihood by share cropping basis with other Sikh and non-Sikh villagers who have large holdings or those who do not undertake cultivation by themselves.

The agricultural fields of the villagers of Barkola are to be found in all directions of the village. A few patches of small agricultural fields are also to be found within the village. The agricultural fields, owned by both the Sikh and non-Sikh villagers of Barkola, are to be found situated adjacent to one another. There is a vast tract of agricultural field on the north of the village, which is known as Singh Gaon Pather. In this field also both the Sikhs and non-Sikhs own

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4 Share cropping, locally known as adhi, literally means 'half'. The landlord gets half the grain from his tenant. The landlord provides only land and the tenant provides plough, bullocks, labour and all the costs of cultivation.
cultivable land of varying sizes.

Table 13 shows the agricultural land holding pattern of the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola.

Table 13
Agricultural Land holding Pattern of the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola*
Area in bigha (1 acre = 3.025 bighas)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of land</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 20</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>53.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 - 40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>41 - 50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 60</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 - 70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 - 80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81 - above</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>98</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.99</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Two Assamese Sikh households do not possess any agricultural land.
It is evident from table 13 that of the total 100 Assamese Sikh households of Barkola, 98 households own agricultural land of varying sizes. The Sikhs who do not possess agricultural land earn their livelihood by share cropping basis. All the Sikh households of the village own homestead land of varying sizes from 0.6 to 5 bighas. It is evident from table 13 that majority of the Assamese Sikh households (53.06%) own agricultural land varying between 11 and 20 bighas. Again, a little above 28 per cent of the Sikh households own land varying between 21 and 30 bighas. Next to these households, there are 12 households, who own agricultural land varying between 31 and 40 bighas. There are only 4 Sikh households in the village who own agricultural land varying between 41 and above 80 bighas. Broadly, the land holding pattern of the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola is comparable to that of the other non-Sikh villagers of Barkola.

The Sikhs and non-Sikhs of Barkola consider it shameful to sell land. Generally, a villager in the event of purchasing a plot of land give preference to a plot of cultivable land on which winter paddy can be cultivated. The villagers consider the plots of cultivable land situated adjacent to homestead more valuable compared to those situated away from homestead land. This is because
of the fact that the cultivable land situated adjacent to homestead, due to its proximity, can be better looked after by family members.

(a) Agriculture

The Sikhs in their home state of Punjab make an acre yield four to five times more than an acre yields elsewhere. The land in Punjab is considered to be the best in India. In other parts of India where the Sikhs have migrated to and settled down, they have turned the abandoned and weed and swampy land into most productive fields. The Sikh farmers are more hard-working and are more enterprising. They have in their home state of Punjab adopted various modern methods of agriculture.

The year in Assam is divided into four agricultural seasons: (i) pre-monsoon (March-April; second half of Phagun to first half of Bohag); (ii) monsoon (June-September; second half of Jeth to first half of Ahin); (iii) retreating monsoon (September-November; second half of Bhada to first half of Aghon); and (iv) dry winter (November-December; second half of Kati to first half of Puh). These climatic seasons have a great bearing on the agricultural cycle of the state. The monsoon is the most important period for agricultural
activities of the Assamese peasants, since in this season winter paddy is grown. During the pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons summer paddy is cultivated. In the retreating monsoon period, kharif crops are grown by the Assamese peasants.

1. Crops

Rice is the staple food of the villagers of Barkola. Both the Sikh and non-Sikh villagers of Barkola raise three local varieties of paddy during the year. These are ahu (summer paddy), bao (deep water summer paddy) and sall (winter paddy). The village households at Barkola sell excess paddy after harvesting. The money obtained from selling of paddy generally gets spent over constructing houses and performing household ceremonies including marriage. Some may go in for purchasing transistor radio, bicycles, wrist watches, etc.

5 See Appendix III for the English months and the corresponding Assamese months.

6 Wheat (gam) and millet (juar) are the two major crops cultivated by the Sikhs in their home state of Punjab. Wheat and millet are also their staple food. But none of the Sikhs of Barkola cultivate either of these crops. Neither wheat is the staple food of the Assamese Sikhs, nor the cultivable land around Barkola is suitable for the cultivation of this crop.
Sugar cane (kuhlar) is another important crop grown by the villagers of Barkola. The cultivation of sugar cane is undertaken in the month of Chot (March–April) in the high land of the village. The harvesting of sugar cane is done in Magh (January–February). Both the Sikhs and non-Sikhs of Barkola prepare molasses (gur) from sugar cane juice. It is a costly commodity of high demand in the local markets.

The cultivation of jute (marapat), another important crop, is undertaken in small quantity by some Sikh and non-Sikh villagers of Barkola. This crop is cultivated in the month of Bohag (April–May) and in the month of Saon (July–August) harvesting is done. This crop is cultivated in low land of the village. Since most of the arable low land is utilized for the cultivation of sali paddy, only a few plots are available for jute cultivation.

The cultivation of mustard (sariyeh) is undertaken by the villagers in the month of Ahin (September–October) and the harvesting is done in the month of Magh (January–February). The villagers of Barkola also cultivate pulses like black-gram (mati-mah), pigeon-pea (rahar-mah) in the fields.
During the monsoon, the Sikh and non-Sikh villagers undertake cultivation of a number of vegetables. These vegetables include lady's finger (bhendi), brinjal (bengena), chilli (jalakia), potato (alu), cucumber (tiovah), country-bean (lechera-mah), ribbed gourd (jike), sponge-gourd (bhoh), bitter-gourd (tit-e-kerela), ash-gourd (komore), snake-gourd (dhunduli), pumpkin (rangalau), etc. The cultivation of such vegetables is usually undertaken on the kitchen gardens as well as on the small plots of land in the fields. In the same manner, the villagers also cultivate a number of vegetables during the retreating-monsoon period. The vegetables mainly grown in this period by the villagers are bottle-gourd (pani-lau), tomato (bilahi), cabbage (bandha-kabi), cauliflower (phul-kabi), radish (mula), coriander (dhania), turnip (chalgesom), knolakhoh (ol-kabi) and a number of leafy vegetables (sak).

11. Horticulture

In almost every household at Dorkola there are groves of betel nut⁷(tamol), betel leaf (pen), coconut

⁷Betel nut and betel leaves are chewed to a considerable extent in day-to-day life by the Assamese people. The guests are received with betel nuts. In socio-religious functions, betel nuts and betel leaves are indispensable. In the same manner, betel nuts and betel leaves play an important role in the life of the Assamese Sikhs.
(narikal), plantain (kal) and various cytrus fruits, which are generally grown adjacent to homestead. The Assamese Sikhs and the other villagers of Barkola use betel nut and betel leaf for home consumption. Part of it is also sold.

There is an Assamese proverb concerning the fortune. It says:

ati bhagyabale putrovati nari,
ati bhagyabale tamol penar bari.

(only with great fortune one can have a wife, who may give birth to a male-child and likewise a blossoming garden of betel nut and betel leaf) This proverb was referred to by a number of Assamese Sikhs to this investigator during the course of field work.

Within many homestead compounds at Barkola belonging to the Sikhs and non-Sikhs, one comes across coconut palm trees. The coconut is consumed in home in different forms. It is also sold in the markets.

iii. Agricultural Implements

The implements used in agriculture by the Assamese Sikhs and other villagers are alike. The most indispensable agricultural implements are wooden plough
(nangal) with iron share (fal) and bamboo yoke (juanli). The plough is harnessed by a pair of bullocks. The other agricultural implements are harrow (moi) for levelling the soil, rake (jabaka) for combing the weeds, weed-hook (okhon) for separating the straw from the threshed grain, spade (kor/kodal) for cutting soil, sickle (kanoli) for reaping grain, machete (da) for harvesting sugarcane and jute and cutting bamboo and small trees and trowel (khanti) for weeding and cleaning the base of the plants. Fig. 13 shows some agricultural implements commonly used by the villagers of Barkola.

While the plough and the yoke are generally made by the villagers themselves, the share of the plough is bought from markets and fitted into the plough. In the same manner, blades of spade, sickle, machete, trowel, etc., are also bought from markets. Such articles are generally purchased by the villagers in the weekly markets held at Dakshinpat and Kampur.

In the rural Assamese society, the husking lever is part and parcel of day-to-day life. In husking lever, paddy is mainly husked. Rice is also grinded by husking lever. Various cakes (pitha) are prepared out of rice flour (pithaguri). Flat rice (chira), soft rice
1 Clod-crusher (dalimari)
2 Axe (kuthar)
3 Weed-hook (okhon)
4 Grain-spreader (raina)
5 Rake (jabaka)
6 Plough (nangal)
7 Yoke (juanli)

Fig. 13. Some agricultural tools and implements used by the villagers of Barkola
(konal chaul), etc., are also prepared in the husking lever. At Barkola almost all the village households possess husking levers.

The villagers of Barkola extract sugarcane juice in a wooden crusher (kuhiar pera sal). Nowadays many affluent villagers of Barkola, both Sikhs and non-Sikhs, use iron crushers. Among the Assamese Sikhs twenty five households possess iron crushers.

iv. Methods of Cultivation

The traditional method of cultivation in rural Assam is with the plough and a pair of bullocks. Like the other cultivators of Barkola, the Assamese Sikhs also undertake cultivation in traditional method.

The sali paddy is cultivated both by broadcasting and transplanting methods. There are two varieties of sali paddy. Locally the coarse variety of sali paddy is known as bardhan and the fine variety of sali paddy is known as lahidhan. Ploughing for sali cultivation starts in the month of Ahar (June-July). The land is prepared by ploughing and cross ploughing. The levelling of the land is done after the completion of ploughing. The seeds are kept immersed in water for
about two days and then it is taken out of water and is spread over the courtyard for two days before broadcasting. In the fertile soil of nursery bed the seeds germinate within ten to fifteen days. During this period water is allowed to remain in the nursery bed. When the seedlings are ready, they are transplanted in the field. The harvesting of this paddy is undertaken in the month of Aghon (November-December).

The cultivation of *ahu* paddy is done only by broadcasting method. Ploughing for *ahu* paddy starts in the month of Chot (March-April). The seeds of *ahu* paddy are sown in the month of Bohag (April-May). By the month of Bhada (August-September) reaping of this crop is undertaken.

The time for ploughing, broadcasting and harvesting varies depending on late and early varieties of crops. The first step of harvesting is to cut the paddy plant with about half of the stalks and to make them into bundles (*dangari*) which are carried away for home either in bullock carts or by carrying poles (*holonga-mari*).

The cultivators of Barkola undertake a number of agricultural works throughout the year. In this regard, there is no distinction between the Assamese Sikh cultivators and other cultivators of the village. Fig. 14
shows the annual production cycle and related agricultural activities undertaken by the Assamese Sikhs and other cultivators of Barkola.

If we consider the agricultural activities in relation to the Gregorian calendar, we see that, the Barkola villagers have less pressure of agricultural works from January to March. The less pressure of agricultural works and the favourable weather provide the people with opportunities to perform marriage, religious functions, etc. Friendly visits to kinsfolk living in neighbouring villages are also undertaken during this period. Annual repairing of houses, building of new houses and other non-agricultural tasks are also usually attended during these months. Thus it is evident that the agricultural mode of livelihood of Barkola has to a considerable extent determined the annual cycle of activities of the villagers including the Sikhs.

From the later part of March, the cultivators start their agricultural operations which involve ploughing, levelling, weeding for cultivation of ahu paddy, followed by sali paddy. April to May is a slack agricultural period.
1 Sowing of ahu, bao and jute; cultivation of summer vegetables.
2 Transplantation of bao; weeding of jute and vegetables.
3 Ploughing for sali; sowing of pigeon pea and sesame.
4 Sowing of sali; harvesting of ahu; cultivation of winter vegetables; harvesting of bao and jute.
5 Transplantation of sali; harvesting of ahu; cultivation of winter vegetables.
6 Ploughing and sowing of black gram and mustard; cultivation of potato and onion.
7 Sowing of mustard and black gram.
8 Harvesting of sali.
9 Harvesting of pigeon pea.
10 Harvesting of sugarcane, mustard and black gram.
11 Harvesting of potato and onion.
12 Ploughing for ahu, bao and jute; sugarcane plantation; cultivation of summer vegetables.

Fig. 14. Annual production cycle and agricultural activities of the Barkola villagers.
The cultivators, both Sikhs and non-Sikhs use cowdung and excreta of goat and poultry as manure in the fields. In terms of the degree of awareness and extent of use of improved agricultural practices, such as the use of chemical fertilizers, improved plough, pesticides and cultivation of high yielding varieties of paddy, there is little difference between the Sikhs and other cultivators of Barkola. All of them are more inclined towards traditional method of cultivation. During the 1960s, the people of Barkola undertook the cultivation of a varieties of high yielding crops. But all of them undertook cultivation of such crops by traditional methods. Hence the result was not encouraging. Even to this date, both the Sikhs and non-Sikhs of Barkola have been cultivating a number of high yielding varieties of paddy by traditional methods. Hence the yield has never been upto the expectation.

(b) Livestock

In the agricultural economy cattle occupy an important position. At Barkola almost all the cultivators possess one or more than one pair of bullocks which they use for cultivation and in threshing. In addition to these tasks, the villagers also use the bullocks for pulling
the carts. In so far as the Assamese Sikhs are concerned, except two households\(^8\), all the Sikh households have bullocks for cultivation, harvesting and drawing the carts. Like the other villagers, the Sikhs also own cows and goats\(^9\). The milk of cow is primarily consumed and only in a few cases the excess amount is sold to a needy villager.

Of all the cattle, the rearing of bullocks is given much importance by all the villagers because of its various uses. The cattle are normally allowed to graze in and around the village where there are grazing fields.

In Assamese society, one's social status is often indicated by a proverb in terms of not owning cows. The proverb says:

\[
\text{ja\ r\ nai\ garu,}
\]
\[
\text{si\ sabatokol\ garu.}
\]

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\(^8\) These two households do not possess any cultivable land. Another Sikh who owns cultivable land, could not cultivate his land by himself because one of the bullocks of the pair died. This Sikh cultivator had to lease his land out to a Koch villager since he could not afford to purchase a bullock.

\(^9\) While most of the villagers of Barkola rear ducks, only the Sikhs and Tiwas rear fowls. It is gathered that many years back, the rearing of fowl was not common among the Assamese Sikhs. The orthodox Hindus also do not rear fowls.
One of the Assamese Sikh cultivators of Barkola, who possesses a few cattle, referred to this proverb while this investigator enquired about his possession of bullocks and cows.

(c) Food

For the Assamese, boiled rice is the staple food. So is the case of the Assamese Sikhs. In Assamese society "Boiled rice (bhata) is not only the staple food, but is regarded as the only food as food itself, and hence as life which is dependent on food (suru). "To exhaust one's rice" is a synonym for dying" (Cantlie 1984: 183).

The Sikhs in their home state of Punjab eat roti or chapati (a circular cake made of wheat or millet flour, baked or fried in ghee) in day-to-day life with vegetable curry, dal, curd, ghee, etc.

The Assamese Sikhs are not habituated to taking roti or chapati as meals instead of boiled rice. Rice is eaten twice a day. The Sikhs of Barkola are non-vegetarian. They take mutton, chicken, fish and egg.

The Assamese Sikhs generally consider pork eating as a religious taboo. This may be due to the influence of...
the neighbouring Hindus who also do not eat pork. Eating pork, drinking liquor or smoking are generally looked down upon by the Assamese Sikh villagers. Such acts are also considered as disgraceful.

Drinking tea is a part of the food habit of Assamese culture. The Assamese Sikhs also take tea regularly at least four times a day. They also offer tea to the visitors and guests. Tea is generally taken with home made cakes or biscuits purchased from the village shops or from the markets. The Assamese Sikhs, like other villagers of Barkola, prepare a number of cakes from rice flour (pithaguri) like ghila pitha (small, thick circular cake), pani pitha (big, thin, circular cake), til pitha (baked cake with sweetened sesame powder or coconut granules inside), tekeli mukhat dia pitha (steamed cake with or without pepper, sugar or coconut granules), etc. Uncooked (kechha pithaguri) or fried (bhoja pithaguri) rice flour is also taken. From paddy chira (flat rice), komal chaul (soft rice), akhoi (parched rice), korai (fried rice), etc., are prepared. Sweet and salted balls (laru) are prepared from rice flour and coconut granules. Apart from paddy and rice, they also prepare a few snacks from wheat flour (ata or moida). Among these, luchi or roti
(both are fried circular cakes) are common. They also prepare halua, an item prepared from frying ohuji (the coarsest flour of wheat) sweetened by adding sugar. All the items generally taken with or without tea are commonly termed as jalpan (lancheon). Most of the home made cakes are usually prepared from lahi (soft) variety of sali paddy.

OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN

Though most of the villagers of Barkola are cultivators, many among them have also taken up various non-agricultural based wage earning occupations and salaried jobs. However, among the Chamars and Hiras of Barkola, there is not a single salaried job holder.

The majority of the service holders of Barkola belong to both the Assamese Sikhs and Koches. Those persons who have taken up various jobs, join hands in agricultural works with other members of their respective households. Some job holders who live outside the village come to their village on weekdays and holidays. Generally, the salaried job holders among the Sikhs who live outside the village leave behind other members of their respective families in the village.
Their children attend to schools and colleges from their houses in the village. Some Sikhs live in the village but work outside the village. There are also a few instances in the village of taking up cultivation by persons who have retired from service.

In as many as 24 Sikh households, there are cultivators and at least one member in each of these households pursue occupations other than cultivation. Again in the case of another 28 Sikh households, besides the cultivators there are more than one person in each of these households who pursue occupations other than cultivation.

In the village context there exists a difference between the Sikhs and non-Sikhs in terms of pursuing at least one category of occupation. Most of the persons from Barkola, who have taken up jobs in army, belong to the Assamese Sikhs. It is pertinent to note here that the Sikhs in Indian context have had the reputation of being the best soldiers. From more than a century the Sikhs have formed a substantial part of the army of India and have been awarded for gallantry on the battle fields.
Table 14 summarises the occupational pattern of the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola above 15 years of age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self employed:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivator</td>
<td>141</td>
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<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. contractor</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small trader</td>
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<td>Agricultural labourer</td>
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<td><strong>Salaried job holder:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bus driver (ASTC)</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
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<td>Doctor (G.M. College)</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Foreman (Railway)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Govt. officer</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jawan (Indian Territorial Army)</td>
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<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor &amp; scooter mechanic</td>
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Contd......
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Occupation</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police officer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office assistant</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school teacher</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Wireless operator</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indisposed and too old to work</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>484</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from table 14 that there are as many as 141 cultivators and 18 agricultural labourers among the Assamese Sikhs. Of the total population above 15 years of age among the Sikhs, 153 males and 6 females are fully engaged in agriculture.

There are altogether 18 agricultural labourers among the Sikhs. Of the total labourers, 12 are males and 6 are females. Five of these labourers (3 males, 2 females) belong to the two households who do not own
any cultivable land. Of the remaining 13 agricultural labourers, 9 are males and 4 are females. The 13 labourers do not even own marginally sufficient paddy cultivable land. All these Sikh agricultural labourers work in other’s land belonging to both Sikhs and non-Sikhs for wages in money. Generally, a male agricultural labourer gets Rs. 12.00 and a female gets Rs. 8.00 for a day’s work.

All the 6 carpenters of Barkola are Sikhs. They belong to the age-group of 40-60 years. The age-group of the carpenters clearly indicates that none of the Sikhs belonging to the younger generation has undertaken carpentry as an occupation. The Sikh carpenter have learned the craft from their fathers and forefathers, who had the reputation of being expert carpenters. The present day Sikh carpenters of Barkola usually make bedstead, pira (a low stool), bench, table, etc. They also undertake repairing of the houses and furniture within and in neighbouring villages. The villagers of Barkola, whether Sikhs or non-Sikhs, engage these carpenters to construct granaries, poultry pen and also some agricultural implements. During the peak agricultural season, these Sikh carpenters lend a helping hand to agricultural works.
There are 3 government contractors among the Sikhs of Barkola. They undertake contracts for the construction of wooden and bamboo bridges, repairing of roads and construction and repairing of government quarters.

There are as many as 12 small traders among the Sikhs of Barkola. All these traders are engaged in buying and selling of different crops. They buy from the villagers mainly crops like paddy, mustard, jute, arecanut and coconut at a lower price and store these articles in their respective homes. When the price of these commodities rise in the market, they sell these to outside traders at a higher price. These small traders also lend money to co-villagers at a substantial interest. If a borrower can not repay the loan, the debt is redeemed by paying paddy worth the loan.

At Barkola there are 7 shops. All these shops mainly sale groceries like pulses, wheat flour, yarn for weaving, hair oil, mustard and kerosene oil, small mirrors, chocolates, etc. Of these shops, 5 are owned by the Koched and 2 are owned by 2 middle aged Assamese Sikhs. The buyers of all these shops are mainly the Barkola villagers.
There are as many as 58 adult Assamese Sikhs of Barkola who are employed in various government departments and educational institutions.

The 6 Sikh bus conductors are employed in the Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC). They belong to the age-group of 25 to 45 years. All of them live in the village itself. They go to work from the village in the morning and return at night.

There are 7 drivers among the Sikhs of Barkola who also work in the Assam State Transport Corporation. All of them are middle aged. Like the bus conductors they also live in the village and attend to their duties from home.

The Sikh doctor, belonging to Barkola, is an unmarried person of 30 years of age. He studied in Guwahati Medical College (GMC) and after the completion of the course, he was appointed house surgeon in the same medical college.

The only Sikh foreman is employed in the North Eastern Railway and is posted at Jorhat. He is around 45 years of age. He frequently visits his wife and children who stay in the village.
There are as many as seven different categories of government officers among the Sikhs of Barkola. One of the officers is a geologist in the Geological Survey of India; 1 is an inspector of supply in the Department of Supply; 3 are auditors in different government departments; 1 is an officer in the Khadi and Gramodyog Department; 1 is a fishery inspector in the Fishery Department; 1 is an inspector in the Weight and Measures Department and 1 is a school inspector in the Department of Secondary Education.

All the 6 Sikh jawans (soldiers) of Barkola, who are in the Indian Territorial Army, belong to the age of 20 to 30 years. These jawans have served in different parts of India, like Agartala, Aizawl, Delhi, Gurdaspur, etc. Generally, once in a year they visit their homes in the village. It has been observed that these jawans have been able to generate interest among the younger Sikhs of Barkola to go for a job in the territorial army. Many younger Sikhs of Barkola have been appearing from time to time in different recruitment tests for the territorial army.

Of the total 10 lower division office assistants among the Sikhs, 8 are males and 2 are females.
While 1 of the male Sikh works as an office assistant in a higher secondary school, the remaining persons are employed in different state government departments mainly located in Nagaon town and in a few nearby townships. Both the female office assistants work in two different offices situated in Nagaon.

The 2 Sikh police officers of Barkola are in the rank of sub-inspector. Though both of them stay outside the village, they frequently visit their homes in the village. There are also 2 Sikhs employed as police constables from Barkola. Like the police officers, they also live outside the village but frequently visit their homes.

There are 6 primary school teachers among the Sikhs of Barkola, of which 3 are males and 3 are females. All these primary teachers teach in different primary schools situated within the village.

Of the 2 higher secondary male school teachers, 1 is a science graduate and the other is an arts graduate. The science graduate teacher teaches in the higher secondary school situated within the village. The other teacher teaches in Dakshinpat Higher Secondary School situated in the vicinity of the village.
There are 3 Sikh wireless operators at Barkola. All these wireless operators are employed in the police department. All of them have undergone training in wireless operation in the training centre situated in Guwahati. The operators are posted in different parts of the state, but their family members live in the village.

There are altogether 5 Sikh mechanics in the village, of which 3 are motor mechanics and 2 are scooter mechanics. All of them are employed in different private garages in Nagaon. They belong to the age group of 25 to 40 years. All of them have gained firsthand training in repairing works while they worked as apprentices in different garages in Nagaon town.

In the total population above 15 years of age the students constitute almost 6.20 per cent. As pointed out in Chapter III, the Sikh students of Barkola study in the schools situated within Barkola and at Dakshinpat.

Generally, persons who have attained 60 years do not undertake strenuous agricultural works in the field. However, they help other members of their respective families in such tasks as threshing, crushing sugarcane, repairing agricultural implements, constructing bamboo fencing, etc. Of the 9 persons shown as indisposed and too old to work in table 14, 5 Sikh males and 3
females belong to the age group of 60 to 75 years. The remaining male is a 52 years old person and he has been suffering from paralysis.

It is evident from table 14 that there are 16 unemployed Sikh youths in the village. They are categorised as unemployed because during the time of field work these boys sat idle in their respective homes but were in search of jobs. Only 2 among them studied in pre-degree in college but did not complete the course and 7 among them read upto class X. Three among the unemployed youths have some preliminary training as motor and scooter mechanics who worked as apprentices in garages for sometime in Nagaon town.

The Sikh women above 15 years of age are primarily household workers. Only a few among them lend a helping hand to agricultural works such as transplantation and harvesting. The household chores of womenfolk include cooking, husking, looking after the children and also the cattle and poultry, cleaning of houses and utensils, serving meals, fetching water and collecting firewood, weaving, washing clothes, etc.

Though we have taken into consideration the occupations of the Assamese Sikhs above 15 years of age,
It needs to be stated here that the children from 10 to 14 years including those who are studying, undertake various household and agricultural works. While the girls help their elders in household works, the boys help their elders in various agricultural works in the fields.

It has been observed that of the total Assamese Sikh households of the village only in the case of 5 households women regularly go for agricultural works in the fields. Of these 5 households, 2 households do not possess cultivable land but women from these households work as agricultural labourers in other households — both Sikhs and non-Sikhs. The Assamese Sikh households from which women do not go to agricultural fields, regularly hire women from among the Sikhs and non-Sikhs of Barkola and neighbouring villages.

At Barkola, both the Sikhs and non-Sikhs tend to make a distinction in terms of status between a cultivator and a salaried job holder. Generally, a salaried job has a prestige connotation in the overall village life. Again, a person who undertakes cultivation on plots of land owned by him enjoys a higher status in
the village social context as compared to those who are landless cultivators and who earn their livelihood through share cropping.

For the salaried job holders, both among the Sikhs and non-Sikhs, a higher status in the village social context is determined by the extent to which a salaried job holder gets oneself involved in the day-to-day village affairs. The more a salaried job holder gets oneself involved in village affairs and helps in resolving problems, the higher the status he seems to attain in various social contexts.

Occupational Change through Generations

The foregoing discussion on occupational pattern of the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola has indicated that many Assamese Sikhs have switched over from agricultural-based occupations to wage earning occupations and salaried jobs. Such changes can also be observed in the case of the villagers living in other villages of Assam. Analyses have shown that the occupational pattern of the people of a number of villages of Assam present a changing picture from rural agricultural-based economy to wage occupation and

Among the Sikhs of Barpalo, information was collected about the occupation of the respondent, his father's occupation and his father's father's occupation. Such information was collected from altogether 42 respondents. In no case two siblings were chosen as respondent, since that would lead to the duplication of father's and father's father's occupations. In view of this, the females job holders were not taken into consideration who happened to be siblings of some of the respondents (see table 15).

It is evident from table 15 that in the FF generation 88.10 and in the F generation 71.44 per cent pursued cultivation among the Assamese Sikhs. This shows that changes in the traditional occupation have occurred even in the case of F, FF generations of the Assamese Sikhs. In the case of the respondents, the percentage of cultivator is 52.38. This indicates that the traditional occupation of cultivation has been given up by a large number of respondents among the Assamese Sikhs. The rate of occupational mobility is much higher from F to R generation as compared to from FF to F generation.
### Table 15

Occupations of the Respondents (R), their Fathers' (F) and Fathers Fathers (FF) of the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>R (Occupation)</th>
<th>F (Occupation)</th>
<th>FF (Occupation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultivator</td>
<td>22 (52.38)</td>
<td>30 (71.43)</td>
<td>37 (88.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. contractor</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small trader</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop keeper</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural labourer</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus conductor</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus driver</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreman</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt. officer</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jawan</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor mechanic</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police constable</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police officer</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office assistant</td>
<td>2 (4.76)</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school teacher</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school teacher</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wireless operator</td>
<td>1 (2.38)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This Sikh lawyer stays in Nagaon town.
The preceding analysis implies that the occupational changes have significantly taken place among the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola. The increasing pressure of population on land available for cultivation and search for better economic prospects have primarily resulted in the occupational mobility among the Assamese Sikhs. In this regard, the progress in the field of education, which is one of the important factors for occupational mobility, has also played an important role. The progress in the field of education is modest among the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola. An analysis shows that 81.44 per cent of the Sikhs are literate, amongst whom, majority of the Sikhs can read and write Assamese.

The occupational change among the Assamese Sikhs has to some extent differentiated one another in their social and economic status. This change has also contributed to the emergence of new dimensions in the spheres of social and economic relations. It has been pointed out earlier that the salaried job holders and the wealthier villagers have gained important positions in the village affairs. Thus, a distinct section has emerged at Barkola among the Assamese Sikhs consisting of those people who through education, wage earning
occupations and salaried jobs have become a part of the urban social life. This group of people also tend to differ with regard to their attitudes, outlook and aspirations from those whose economic and social activities are essentially village-based.