CHAPTER VIII

THE SIKHS AND THE WIDER SOCIETY

This chapter examines the quality and content of social relations between the Assamese Sikhs and their neighbours. However, it may be pointed out that the descriptions of social relations between the Sikhs of Barkola and their neighbours alone can hardly provide a comprehensive picture of the field of social relations of the Assamese Sikhs. Therefore, this chapter also examines the network of social relations that exist between the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola and the wider social context. The expansion of social horizon of the Assamese Sikhs has taken place through religion, kinship network, spread of education, occupational mobility, and so on.

The social situation obtaining among the Assamese Sikhs is broadly similar to that of other
Indian peasant communities. Dube (1969: 201-205) states that the Indian peasant communities are organized in terms of various social groupings and territorial affinities. Dube further states that "The village itself is a part of network of neighbouring villages, the region and the nation" (1969: 201). In this context we may also refer to Mandelbaum (1972: 381) who observes that the Indian villagers, outside the circles of their kin, caste and village, carry on more intermittent social relations that are nevertheless of high importance for the villagers and for the whole social system.

As in the case of Barkola, there are a number of villages in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam where the Assamese Sikhs and Assamese non-Sikhs belonging to various religions and castes live together. Similar situations are also to be found in some of the towns of Assam where besides the Assamese Sikhs and other Assamese people, the non-Assamese Sikhs and other religious communities and linguistic groups live side by side. In such situations, however, one comes across more day-to-day interactions between the Assamese Sikhs and Assamese non-Sikhs compared to the
contact and communication between the Assamese Sikhs and non-Assamese Sikhs. This is primarily due to the sharing of a large area of socio-cultural life in common by the Assamese people, particularly the Hindus and Assamese Sikhs. As pointed out in Chapter 1, besides language there are many other points of socio-cultural identity between the Assamese Sikhs and the Assamese people of the Brahmaputra valley. The indigenous people of Assam including the Sikhs share in common many elements of the wider Assamese culture. This sharing has also facilitated contact and communication between the Assamese Sikhs and the other Assamese people across religious boundaries.

Colson (1953 : 88) observes that when people belonging to different cultures are closely associated in daily life, they understand each others habits, customs, motivations and symbols and show some degree of respect. In such a situation, different cultural groups may be said to share "common definitions of the situations" within which they meet and exhibit similar habits of behaviour. This sharing of a "common culture" results into more contacts and web of social relations; and widens the field of "common definitions". In so far
as the Assamese Sikh situation is concerned, the above observations apply to a considerable extent. The Assamese Sikh and the other Assamese people may also said to share "common definitions of the situations" and a "common culture".

INTER-COMMUNITY RELATIONS AT BARKOLA

There are some areas of social life in which the Assamese Sikh and non-Sikh villagers of Barkola form a corporate group in terms of particular fields of activities and forms of relationships that exist among them. While the Assamese Sikhs and other village communities of Barkola maintain their separate identity largely through their exclusive religious and community organizations, spatial proximity and the sharing of certain common village level institutions and organizations like the schools, recreational centres, markets and economic pursuits provide many opportunities of social contact between the Assamese Sikhs and their neighbours. The meeting grounds of the Assamese Sikhs and their neighbours within the village and its vicinity are many and varied in nature.
In describing the social relations of the Assamese Sikhs with their neighbours it would be convenient to draw a distinction between formal and informal situations. The exchange of greetings between people, visiting one another on the basis of neighbourhood or friendship or other associations in pursuit of some common pleasure, interests and aims are the interactions which may be termed as occurring in informal context. However, the grouping of inter-personal relations into formal and informal categories is at times only a descriptive device because the two are complementary and may exist within the same framework. For example, interactions between people may take place in formal context and the same set of people may interact informally. Thus, the experience of interactions in formal contexts may be carried over to the interactions in various informal contexts. Moreover, even the purely informal inter-personal relations tend to be guided by certain recognized codes of conduct which may not be evident to a casual observer.

(a) Informal Context

The economy of Barkola is predominantly agricultural. The common mode of livelihood based on
agriculture has led to a considerable amount of interdependence between the Assamese Sikhs and other villagers of Barkola. We have already stated in Chapter V that there are some instances of share cropping across community lines. It needs to be mentioned here that many Sikh households have share cropping ties with the non-Sikh villagers from neighbouring villages besides Barkola.

Borrowing of agricultural implements from one another, whenever necessary, is a common feature of Sikh - non-Sikh relations in the village context. Such borrowings are done on the basis of personal friendship and neighbourly relationship. Occasionally such agricultural implements as plough, yoke, leveller, garden-rake and also bullocks may be hired in case the owner is not a close friend of the borrower. In such pursuits like ploughing, levelling, transplantation, weeding, reaping and threshing both the Sikh households and their co-villagers take help of one another. Such tasks are undertaken jointly by the Sikhs and their neighbours either on the basis of personal friendship, neighbourly relationship or on hired basis. In house building activities also help may be extended between
the Sikhs and their neighbours on the above mentioned basis. Of the seven main groceries at Barkola two are owned by Sikhs. These shops are a common meeting place for all the villagers. All the people belonging to Barkola purchase various articles from these shops and when they meet one another at the shops when coming to purchase articles or just for a visit they spent time in chatting and exchanging news and views.

With regard to social contact and visit between the Assamese Sikhs and their neighbours, it may be stated that there are occasions when a Sikh villager visits his non-Sikh neighbours. Such visits are casual and informal in nature, sometimes may also be for a specific purpose. For instance, the Sikh and other villagers visit the two Koch folk medicine men (bej) residing at Ati Gaon hamlet in search of amulets or some indigenous medicine whenever someone suffers from disease or illness. These two folk medicine men are respected by all the villagers of Barkola.

In casual encounters, a Barkola Sikh may address his non-Sikh neighbours by name provided they happen to be close friends. A Sikh may also use a fictitious kinship term to address an elderly non-Sikh
Villager. It is a common practice for the villagers to use kinship terms while addressing one another irrespective of community identity.

Individual friendship across community boundaries is one of the important aspects of Sikh–non-Sikh relations at Barkola. Such friendship further increases familiarity and contact between members of the respective communities. Personal friendship begins during childhood when there are ample opportunities at school and at play to meet and such friendship sometimes continues till to the old age. The friendship between a Sikh and a non-Sikh also exercises an influence on the interpersonal relations between other members of the respective households. The following case illustrates the above point:

Gurelp, a Sikh boy of Barkola, studies B.A. in a college in Nagpur. He has two close friends—Amal, a Koch, and Jairam, a Tiwa who belong to Barkola. Amal and Gurelp study together in college. Jairam has given up his studies due to economic hardship and at present he is a cultivator. Gurelp addresses his Koch and Tiwa friends’ fathers’ brothers as khura—the kinship term which is used by both Amal and Jairam to address their
respective father's brother\(^1\). In the same manner Amal and Jalaram also address the father's brother of Gurdip as khura. In this manner kinship terms are used for all other members of the friends' households. □

(b) Formal Context

Besides the informal context, the Sikh and non-Sikh villagers of Barkola also interact in many formal situations.

On formal social occasions like a wedding, invitations are extended to the people outside one's own community\(^2\). When a non-Sikh villager is invited to a marriage ceremony, the invitee brings a gift such as clothes, money, metal utensils and so on. A Sikh also does the same when invited by a non-Sikh. It should be noted here that on such formal occasions the Sikh and

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1 However, Gurdip uses the kinship term chacha and not khura to address his father's brother in his own home.

2 Such invitations are extended both personally and through invitation letters printed in Assamese. The language of such invitation letters is not different from those of the Assamese Hindus. However, in the case of the Assamese Sikhs in such letters, on the middle top of the letter the first line of the Mool Mantra of the Sikh religion is printed in Gurmukhi and the Sikh religious symbol khanda is printed on both top corners of the letter (Plate 7).
the Hindu villagers also interdine in the wedding feast. In the case of wedding feast or any other feast held in a household of the village to which the villagers are invited, whenever necessary, utensils owned by the village gurdwaras and namghars are borrowed by the villagers for preparing the feasts.

1. Village Institutions and Organizations

We may now take up the pattern of inter-community relations at Barkola at the level of certain institutions like the schools. We have already pointed out in Chapter IV that there are 5 schools situated at different parts of Barkola of which 4 are lower primary schools and of the remaining one is a middle English and higher secondary school. The schools may be regarded as village level institutions at Barkola. In these village schools, all the people take interest whether they are Sikhs, Hindus or tribals. For instance,

3 It has been gathered that till a few years back all the villagers of Barkola, including the villagers from neighbouring villages, used to go for group fishing in various swamy lands (bils) situated around Barkola area. Feasts were arranged following such ventures in which people irrespective of caste and community used to interdine. Such feasts were referred to as baha gavan bhoj (literally 'the feast of the people of twelve villages').
the school managing committee of Barkola Adarsha Prathamik Vidyalaya, which is consisted of 10 members, is a mixed one in which 2 members are Sikhs, 1 is a tribal (Tiwa) and the remaining 7 are Koches. Again, the managing committee of Barkola Higher Secondary School is also a mixed one which is consisted of 10 members. The president of the committee and 3 other members of the committee are Assamese Sikhs. Altogether 5 members of the committee are Koches and only 1 member of the committee is a tribal (Tiwa). Thus, the schools provide a forum for village level cooperation between the Sikhs and their neighbours and a sense of unity results from the joint efforts needed for the maintenance and upkeep of the schools. Village level cooperation between the Sikhs and their neighbours results from the joint efforts needed for the maintenance and upkeep of the schools.

4 In the same manner the students' union of Barkola Middle English and Higher Secondary School is also a mixed one. For example, the students' union body of this school for the year 1983-84 consisted of 9 office bearers including an assistant teacher of the school as chairman. Of the remaining 8 office bearers, 5 were Koch students and 3 were Sikhs of Barkola of which two were girls.

5 Some villagers have personally donated land and money for the construction of the higher secondary school in the village. Late Mangal Singh and Late Atma Singh of Barkola had donated several bighas of land for the construction of the school building. Amar Singh had donated money for the construction of the gate in front of the school. Bhaban Deka, a Koch villager of Barkola, had donated money for the construction of a room of the school.
activities are undertaken through the school managing committees to repair the school buildings. The secretary of a committee informs all the Barkola households a few days ahead about the day of the work to be undertaken and asked to send at least one adult able bodied man from each household to join hands in such tasks.

The Khalsa Club of Barkola may be considered as a village level organisation of the younger boys of the village. This club was established through the efforts of the Sikhs who had also given this name to the club. Most of the younger boys of the village, irrespective of community identity, are the members of the club. The club members occasionally undertake activities to repair lanes and by-lanes at Barkola. This club also organizes football matches, carrom competitions in which teams from neighbouring villages participate. During Ras-Jatra, a festival in honour of Lord Krishna held on the full moon day of Kati (October-November), the Hindu villagers of Barkola perform bhaona (ritual play of Assam) in the village namghars. Many a Sikh girl of Barkola who has the reputation of being good dancer regularly plays different roles in such bhaonas. The Sikh boys, on the other hand, are not casted in such performances because of their having beard. Their
appearance does not suit the roles in the plays. But the Sikhs as a whole go to enjoy the bhagnas and also extend help in organizing such performances.

Guru Nanak Library at Barkola may be considered as another village level forum for the younger people. We have already stated in Chapter VI that this library was established in the latter part of the Seventies through the efforts of Giani Jail Singh, the then chief minister of Punjab and Mr. Surjit Singh Barnala, the then Union agriculture minister. The membership of the present library is confined to the village. There is no membership fee. Most of the members of the library are school and college students. Besides them a few educated villagers also borrow books from the library. The secretary of the library is a Sikh school teacher.

11. Village Development Committee

The Barkola Singh Gaon Unnayan Samiti (village development committee) is another village level organization at Barkola. This committee came into being during the 1950s. The emergence of such a formal organization among the people of Barkola appears to be an impact of the introduction of village-level local
self-government all over the country during the 1950s. On inquiry it was gathered that the elderly villagers of Barkola felt the need of such a formal organization to perform various developmental activities at the village level. The present executive body of the committee is consisted of altogether 20 members which represents the Sikhs and the Hindus of the village. Besides the president and the secretary another 5 members of the executive body are Koches. Of the remaining 13 members of the executive body, 1 is a Jogi and the remaining 12 are Sikhs. Sixteen out of the 20 members of the executive body are cultivators. Of the remaining 4 members of the body, 2 are teachers (1 Sikh, 1 Koch), 1 is an office assistant (Sikh) and the remaining 1 is a shopkeeper.

The village development committee organizes various village improvement activities at Barkola. The primary source of earning of this committee is the fisheries which they have made by cleaning a number of old tanks situated around Barkola. The earnings of the committee from the fisheries are spent in various developmental activities including construction of roads and lanes within the village. Financial assistance
is also provided by the committee to the poor and needy cultivators of the village.

When group activities are taken up through the committee, all the Barkola households are informed by the secretary of the committee one day ahead about the nature and venue of the work. The householders are also asked to send at least one adult able bodied male member from every household.

iii. Socio-Political Organization and the Leaders

As for the village socio-political organization, it should be noted that there is a government appointed headman (gaonburah) for Barkola. The present gaonburah of Barkola is a Sikh cultivator and he is 52 years old. He has very limited formal duties to perform. He keeps records of birth and death in the village. He also keeps the concerned authorities informed about the law and order situation of the village when necessity arises.

Authority, communication and social control among the Barkola villagers are maintained by a system of leadership evolved on hamlet (chuk) basis. Certain men from each hamlet are regarded as informal leaders
of the hamlet. These leaders are called meluos (arbiter) and their verdicts are generally obeyed by the people of the hamlets. All the meluos of different hamlets make up an informal council of elders which functions as a village council. At present there are altogether 23 such recognised meluos belonging to different hamlets of the village. Of the total meluos, 9 are Sikhs, 7 are Koohes, 4 are Tiwas and the remaining 3 are Jogis. The age of the meluos varies between 32 and 79 years. Of the total Sikh meluos, 4 are cultivators, 1 is a teacher in L.P. school, 1 is an office assistant, 1 is a shopkeeper, 1 is a petty businessman and the remaining 1 is the granthi of the old gurdwara. Of the total 7 Koch meluos, only 3 are cultivators, 1 is the headmaster of the M.E. section of the local H.S. school, 2 are school teachers at Barkola and the remaining 1 is also a school teacher in a school situated away from Barkola. All the Tiwa and Jogi meluos are cultivators.

The villagers who possess certain qualities and capabilities are only recognized as meluos. One's personal involvement in the issues relating to his hamlet and the village community as a whole appears to be one of the important factors for which people recognize
him as a meluci. One's reputation for offering sound advice and solution in domestic and public issues and in disputes in the hamlet and in the village is also taken into consideration for recognizing one as a meluci. All the melucis and the elderly villagers are shown respect in various social gatherings held both at the hamlet and village levels. They are usually provided with a chair or a stool when they go to household functions. In the village meetings they are provided seats to seat in front of the gathering.

The village melucis make up an informal council through which issues relating to the hamlets and the village as a whole are taken up for discussion and are resolved. The gathering of the melucis to discuss various issues is referred to as a mel.

We may now discuss the manner in which the council of the melucis deal with conflicts and disputes. When conflicts and disputes arise within a particular group, efforts are made to settle such conflicts and disputes within the group as early as possible. The Sikhs, the Hindu castes and the tribals maintain certain amount of autonomy in their socio-political organization. All these groups exist as discrete social entities within
the village. Matters and activities involving a particular group are usually managed within the group. Various problems and disputes arising within a caste or community are the concern of the respective group only. Yet one group may seek the help of the village meluos to resolve disputes only when a group fails to settle conflicts and disputes through its own efforts. Thus, certain issues become matter of concern for the entire village community of Barkola. The following three cases will give some idea about the kinds of disputes which come before the meluos for settlement.

□ Hari Singh, aged 30 years, is a Sikh cultivator who resides in Singh Gaon hamlet. Hari's father is also a cultivator and their agricultural fields are situated near the village and adjacent to the holdings of some other Sikh villagers. After the completion of the extraction of sugar juice in his field, Hari made arrangements to bring back home the sugarcane - crusher which was a heavy iron implement. So, one day Hari went to field with a bullock cart and loaded the sugarcane - crusher on the cart. Since there was no lane to bring back the cart, Hari made temporary lane from his field through the
fields belonging to some other Sikhs. Hari levelled the earthen boundary (all) demarcations of the plots of land belonging to some Sikh villagers. Having seen the damage after a few days, the Sikhs to whom the land belonged asked Hari to get the earthen boundaries repaired immediately. But Hari turned a deaf ear to the request of the Sikhs. One of the Sikhs on whose lands the earthen boundaries were destroyed was the village headman. The village headman including the other offended Sikhs informed the matter to the fellow Sikhs and also the village meluolies and requested them to settle the dispute. Accordingly the meluolies of the village assembled in the new gurdwara. The meluolies summoned Hari and the Sikhs, whose land boundaries were damaged, to present their versions of what had happened. After the hearing, the meluolies came to the conclusion that Hari was guilty and asked him to get the damaged repaired as early as possible. Accordingly, Hari repaired the earthen boundaries in the fields of the Sikhs.

Niren Deke, aged 42 years, is a Koch cultivator and lives in Singh Gaon hamlet at Barkola. During the transplantation of
paddy in his field, Niren hired a few Koch and Kaibarta women on wage basis. One of the hired women, Parbati, was a Kaibarta and had a son of 5 years of age. During transplantation, Parbati used to take her son to the paddy field and used to make him sleep and keep the child by the side of the field. One day while Parbati was working in the field, her son woke up and without the notice of Parbati walked into the neighbouring jungle. While Parbati came to attend her sleeping son, she found that her son was crying inside the jungle. Parbati went into the forest to take back her son. During that time Niren was also working in the field. Niren, on seeing Parbati entering the forest, quietly followed her and tried to molest her. But Parbati resisted Niren and left the field crying. On reaching home she informed the matter to her husband. Parbati's husband, in turn, informed the matter to the fellow villagers. On hearing the matter, a few elderly villagers of Barkola tried to talk to Niren. But he went on avoiding anyone who wanted to discuss with him the matter. So Parbati's husband informed the matter to the meluosis of the village and requested them to take up the matter. Accordingly, after a few days the meluosis of the village assembled in a room of Guru Nanak Library of the village. On that day the meluosis also summoned Niren. The meluosis cross questioned Niren for a
prolonged period and finally Niren confessed his misdeeds. The medical board decided to impose a fine of Rs. 100.00 on Niren. Out of the total amount of the fine Rs. 50.00 was given to Parbati as compensation and the remaining amount was given to the village higher secondary school fund.

Abhoy Laskar, aged 52 years, is a Koch cultivator and his house is situated in Ujani Chuk hamlet at Barkola. Abhoy had a number of coconut trees in his garden. On one night a few hard coconuts were stolen from Abhoy's garden. Next day morning husks of the stolen coconuts were found lying in front of the house of Kamal Singh, a Sikh villager of Barkola. Having seen the husks of the stolen coconut in front of Kamal Singh's house, Abhoy Laskar and his three grown up sons got furious and held that someone from Kamal Singh's home had stolen the coconuts. After a few days the two sons of Abhoy while working in the field saw one of the grown up sons of Kamal Singh, Mohan, aged 20 years, passing by the side of the field. The two sons of Abhoy all on a sudden attacked Mohan and beat him severely and left the place. On returning home Mohan informed the matter to his family members and other Sikh villagers.
On hearing the incident, a few elderly Sikh villagers including Kamal Singh met Abhoy Laskar. These Sikh villagers had asserted that none of the family member of Kamal Singh had stolen coconuts from Abhoy's garden. Abhoy was also convinced and he apologized to the Sikhs and requested them to settle the matter amicably. But Kamal Singh insisted that the matter be brought to the notice of village meluols. Accordingly, Kamal informed the matter to the village meluols and requested them to settle the matter. As per Kamal's request one day the village meluols assembled inside the community hall of the namghar situated at Ujani Omak hamlet. The meluols summoned Abhoy and his sons and also Kamal and his son Mohan who was beaten by Abhoy's sons in the field. Following cross questioning Abhoy, his sons, Kamal and Mohan, the meluols arrived at the conclusion that it was someone else and not Mohan who had stolen coconuts from Abhoy's garden. Thus, Abhoy's sons were found guilty and the meluols asked Abhoy and his sons to apologize to all the villagers for their misdeeds and also to offer man to the villagers consisting of a big bunch of betel nuts and a bundle of betel leaves. Accordingly, Abhoy and his sons offered betel nuts and betel leaves on a sarai (metal dish on stand) and bowed down before the meluols and the villagers present in the mel.
The above cases give some idea of the nature of disputes which arise at Barkola. These cases have also shown the way how various disputes are settled through the joint efforts of the mehsis belonging to different groups. On such occasions when the mehsis assemble to settle issues many other people, both young and old, also attend the mel. But they are mere observers of the happenings though they pass comments. These people are in no way involved in taking decisions.

It is important to note here that the occasional disputes involving individual Sikh, Hindu and tribal villagers do not affect the overall relationship between the Sikhs and their neighbours. According to the elderly villagers there has not been any major conflict in the past between the Sikh and other villagers. Inter-group antagonism has never occurred in the past in the village context.

The Sikhs and their neighbours of Barkola interact in a variety of situations. In the village context, the areas of interactions between the Sikhs and the non-Sikhs are many and varied in nature. At the same time it is reasonable to expect that when contacts are more there is always scope for dissociative
relations. The social situation of Barkola thus provides examples of both cooperation and occasional conflict between the Sikhs and their neighbours. The sharing of common idioms of rural Assamese culture has facilitated contact and communication across religious boundaries at Barkola. The village of Barkola came into existence more than a century ago. Thus the Sikh and the non-Sikh villagers have had a long period towards achieving mutual adjustment and understanding through interactions in a variety of situations.

SOCIAL RELATIONS BEYOND BARKOLA

(a) Extension of Social Relations through Religion

As already stated in Chapter VI the Sikh villagers of Barkola put emphasis on pilgrimage. The Sikhs of the village frequently visit the gurdwaras at Chaparmukh. In every year during the death anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur, groups of Barkola Sikhs visit the Gurdwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahibji at Dhuri. Such visits of the Sikhs are, however, not confined only to the places of pilgrimage for the Sikhs.
Groups of Sikh villagers have visited Kamakhya, the Hindu temple, situated in Guwahati and Kamalabari—a Vaishnavite satra situated in Jorhat district of Assam. Such visits of the Barkola Sikhs and their interactions with the surrounding populations have resulted in the emergence of a network of inter-group and inter-individual relations. To the Sikhs of Barkola the important religious places beyond the village context are Gurdwara Mataji of Chaparmukh and the gurdwara of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahibji of Dhubri. In Chapter III we have already discussed the historical importance of these two places while describing the historical background of the Sikhs in Assam. To the Sikhs of Barkola, beyond the state, the Golden Temple in Amritsar is the most important of all the places of pilgrimage for the Sikhs. The relations of the Sikhs of Barkola to the gurdwara at Chaparmukh are based on both religious affiliation and social ties. The history of the Barkola Sikhs indicates that their ancestors had migrated from Chaparmukh to Barkola. The Assamese Sikhs living both at Barkola and at Chaparmukh consider themselves to be the descendants of the Sikh soldiers who had migrated to Chaparmukh around the middle of the nineteenth century. The majority of the Assamese Sikhs
of Barkola are interrelated to those of Chaparmukh through a network of affinal kinship resulted from marriage frequently performed between persons belonging to these two localities. Thus, the Sikhs of Barkola have come to be closely interlinked with the Sikhs of Chaparmukh through religion and marital alliances.

On the other hand the Barkola Sikhs are linked with Dhubri only through their religion. Groups of Barkola Sikhs annually visit the gurdwara at Dhubri during the death anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur. They take part in kirtan, procession, akhand path and bhog (the conclusion of an akhand path) held during the ceremony. They stay at Dhubri for one or two days and return to Barkola. The Sikhs of Barkola also visit the gurdwaras situated in different parts in Guwahati. But such visits may be made whenever they come to Guwahati to visit relatives or for some personal works.

The Barkola gurdwaras are village level religious institutions. Each of the gurdwaras at Barkola

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An analysis shows that as many as 28 girls from Chaparmukh have come to Barkola Sikhs through marriage. On the other hand, 9 Sikh girls from Barkola have been married away to the Sikhs living at Chaparmukh.
functions under the supervision of a committee. The village gurdwaras at Barkola appear to be some sort of independent institutions in so far as their functions and management are concerned. These gurdwaras are not affiliated to any other similar regional religious organizations.

The Sikhs of Barkola actively participate in different functions held in the gurdwara at Chaparmukh. Each year, the birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur is celebrated in the gurdwara at Chaparmukh with traditional enthusiasm and gaiety. A reception committee is formed through the initiative of the Sikhs of Chaparmukh to celebrate the function. The reception committee includes Assamese Sikhs from different parts of Assam including Barkola. For example, we may take into consideration the composition of the reception committee constituted to celebrate the 362nd birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chaparmukh gurdwara in 1983. In that year the

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Each year a souvenir is brought out by the reception committee during the celebration of the birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Such souvenirs publish articles on different aspects of the Assamese Sikh community and Sikhism written by both Assamese Sikh and Assamese non-Sikh writers.
reception committee to celebrate the function consisted of 62 members out of which 11 were Barkola Sikhs. Thus, the Sikhs of Barkola have come to be associated with extra-local institutions and organizations through religion.

PARTICIPATION OF THE SIKHS IN VARIOUS SPHERES OF THE WIDER SOCIETY

(a) Educational and Economic Pursuits

Education in general is highly esteemed by the Assamese Sikhs. It has been observed that most of the Sikh parents insist on their children joining school. But some parents despite their insistence on joining school seem to be least interested in the progress of their wards. In many a case in the field situation, it has been observed that many Sikh parents insist on their children going to school only with a view to getting relief from them for the time being. Once their children attain the age fit to help the elders in household and agricultural chores, they encourage their children to take part in such
activities instead of asking them to go to school.

A few Assamese Sikh students belonging to Barkola and elsewhere have come out successfully in different school level examinations. For example, Harinder Singh, son of Surjit Singh, a businessman of Moran in Dibrugarh district, stood first in the higher secondary school leaving certificate examination in 1981. He also secured highest marks in mathematics (97.5%), zoology (80%), chemistry (88%), physics (90%), English (76.5%) and Assamese (71.5%). He was the first Assamese Sikh student to have secured highest mark in Assamese. Later, he studied engineering in the Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur. Avatar Singh, an Assamese Sikh of Barkola, passed high school leaving certificate examination in 1991 securing 5th position among the successful candidates. He secured 'star mark' (average 80.93%) and 'letter marks' (80% or more in a subject) in general mathematics (99%), general science (82%), additional mathematics (85%) and social studies (86.7%). In 1983, Avatar Singh secured 84% in the pre-university examination in science group from Cotton College, Guwahati. He studied undergraduate in Cotton College. Sarada Kaur, sister of Avatar Singh, is the only
Assamese Sikh girl who has shown proficiency in school level final examination. In the high school leaving certificate examination in 1984 Sarada stood 5th among the successful candidates and secured 'star mark' and 'letter marks' in Assamese, general science, additional mathematics, social studies and Sanskrit. It may be mentioned that both Avatar and Sarada are children of Pritam Singh - a college lecturer.

Higher education among the Assamese Sikh women is yet to gain momentum which is also partially true in the case of the Assamese womenfolk. The majority of the Assamese Sikhs are agriculturists and therefore their womenfolk are required to undertake various household and agricultural works. It appears that female education is less emphasized among the rural Assamese Sikh girls generally attend the village primary schools or may continue upto higher classes in high schools. But most of the girls give up studies without completing high school education. They stay at home helping their mothers in domestic chores till they are married off. The rural and urbanized Assamese Sikhs tend to harbour a feeling that after the attainment of puberty, girls should not move about freely and make themselves visible.
to outsiders rather they should stay at home, learn domestic chores and prepare themselves for marriage.

The spread of education and occupational mobility among the Assamese Sikhs have led to the emergence of a small educated and articulate section consisting of educationists, professionals, social workers and businessmen. They have different positions in various formal and informal situations, both within their community and in the wider society. These educated Sikhs have had better facilities of employment, economic advancement and occupational mobility.

As early as 1921 Late Atma Singh of Barkola served as a government servant in Punjab. But he resigned his service and came back to Barkola. Then, he joined as an assistant teacher in Dawsan High School in Nagaon town. Later, he became the headmaster of the same school. Late Rup Singh was an additional deputy commissioner who also belonged to Barkola. After his retirement, he settled in Guwahati where he died. Dhyan Singh, who hails from Barkola is a bachelor's degree holder in arts. He was a superintendent in the income tax department and retired only a few years back. He is now permanently
settled in Guwahati. Late Lal Singh was one of the prominent Assamese Sikh businessmen of Guwahati. He took active interest for the spread of education and also established a school in Guwahati. At present the school is situated at Kharghuli, a locality situated in the eastern part of Guwahati. The name of this school is Lal Singh Academy and the medium of instruction of the school is Assamese. Dr. Thir Narayan Singh, son of Late Lal Singh, is an additional judge in Guwahati. He passed matriculation examination in 1947, graduated from Cotton College, Guwahati and obtained law degree from Gauhati University Law College. Dr. Singh was a government advocate for ten years and a part time lecturer in a local law college in Guwahati. He obtained the master of law degree and got a doctorate from London University.

Joginder Singh, who belongs to Nagon is a practising lawyer of standing in the Dibrugarh labour court.

Jagjit Singh, another Assamese Sikh of Nagon, is a senior magistrate. Dr. Thir Narayan Singh's sister, Iqbal Kaur, is the first master's degree holder Assamese.

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8 Dhyansingh is the president of an association of the Assamese Sikhs called Assamia Sikh Santha. For further details of this association, see pp.302-312.
Sikh woman. Pritam Singh of Barkola is a college lecturer in A.D.P. College in Nagaon. Another Assamese Sikh, Bhupen Singh, who hails from Rampur, is also a college teacher in Pragjyotish College, Guwahati. His sister, Sulochana Kaur is a doctor and is married to an Assamese Hindu. Birendra Singh, another Assamese Sikh of Rampur is an executive engineer. Late Jog Singh Chetri was a reputed advocate of Nagaon town. He originally belonged to Hatipara. He had his early education in Nagaon, college education in Cotton College in Guwahati and Victoria College in Coach Behar. He graduated in law from law college, Calcutta University. He had started his legal practice in Nagaon court and established himself as a civil lawyer of repute. He was a prominent social worker and was instrumental in setting up of the oldest gurdwara in Nagaon town. He was the president of the management committee of the said gurdwara for a decade. He was connected with several social and educational organizations and institutions including Nagaon College in its initial stage. He was also associated with the Nagaon Local Board and Nagaon Municipal Board. He had actively participated in the non-cooperation movement of India.
Late Jog Singh Chetri's first son, Jogendra Lal Chetri, was a judge in the Dibrugarh court. He is now the chairman of the Foreigners' Deportation Committee of Nagaon district. Late Jog Singh Chetri's third son, Jagjit Singh Chetri, is a chief judicial magistrate in Tospur. Kan Singh, who also hails from Barkola, is an AOS (Assam Civil Service) officer and is now the under secretary (general administration). Late Kirpal Singh of Barkola was a circle inspector of Assam police. Another Barkola Sikh, Jagar Singh was a deputy superintendent of police. He has retired recently. Late Kamal Singh of Chaparmukh, popularly known both among the Sikhs and non-Sikhs as barbhai (elder brother), was a prominent businessman and an educationist. He was one of the members of the executive bodies of Marigaon Education Board, Chaparmukh M.E. and High Schools, Raha Higher Secondary School and Raha College. He also played a significant role in the establishment of Raha College. Another prominent Assamese Sikh businessman and social worker was Late Sohan Singh who belonged to Chaparmukh. He took active interest and worked hard for the renovation of the Gurdwara Mataji at Chaparmukh. Atma Singh, another prominent Assamese Sikh businessman,
belongs to Barkola. At present he is a government contractor and stays at Diphu in Karbi Anglong district of Assam. He is associated with a large number of public institutions and organizations. He is the president of the Upper Assam Electricity Department Contractors' Association, secretary of the Diphu Gurdwara Committee and vice-president of the Diphu Whole Sellers' Co-operative Society. Atma Singh is also a recognized referee of the Assam Football Association.

The Assamese Sikhs and other Assamese communities are engaged in the same kinds of rural and urban occupation. The occupational pattern of the village communities of Assam including the Assamese Sikhs present a changing picture from rural agricultural based economy to salaried job based economy. Such changes have also contributed to the emergence of new dimensions in social and economic relations among the Assamese Sikhs as a whole. Through education, wage occupations and salaried jobs, a section of the Assamese Sikhs have become a part of the wider social milieu. This expansion of their social horizon has also widened the network of their social relations and avenues of social interactions.
(b) Literary Field

An important item in the consideration of Assamese Sikh culture is the language (viz., Assamese) which the Sikhs share with other Assamese people. As in the case of other Assamese communities, Assamese language occupies a central place as a symbol of cultural identity in the case of the Assamese Sikhs. The sharing of a common language by the Assamese Sikhs and other Assamese people has provided various avenues for contact and communication between the Assamese Sikhs and other Assamese people across the community boundaries.

Among the Assamese Sikhs there are a few writers who have made contributions towards the Assamese language and literature. Mention may be made of Bhupen Singh, a college lecturer in Guwahati, who has written a number of books in Assamese on the life of different Sikh Gurus. Miranjan Singh, a government service holder in Guwahati is a poet of repute whose modern Assamese poems have been published in various Assamese journals and newspapers. Gurmail Singh, an Assamese Sikh resident of Lanka and a student of
Gauhati University is a prominent Assamese short story writer. Nanda Singh, another Assamese Sikh, writes articles in Assamese and are being published in local newspapers and journals regularly. Iqbal Kaur is a female Assamese Sikh writer. She has written books in Assamese on Sikh religious tales and prayers. She was also published the Assamese rendering of the Japji Sahib. This is the only Assamese rendering of holy writings of the Sikh Gurus. Among the Barkola Sikhs, Bijoy Singh, a shopkeeper, Manjit Singh, a service holder, Avatar Singh, an engineer and Jiban Singh, a high school teacher have earned reputation as Assamese Sikh writers in different fields. Manjit Singh is the editor of an Assamese monthly 'Avakash', which deals with sports and film. The Assamese book entitled Amurha Praner Kapani is a collection of short stories by Bijoy Singh (1968). The short stories included in this book reflect the manner in which the Assamese Sikhs consider the non-Assamese Sikhs as outsiders and also the sense of belonging the Assamese Sikhs feel towards Assamese society and culture. Ijjat Singh, at present a programme officer in the All India Radio Station in Dibrugarh, is a singer of repute of the state. He has also cut a few discos. He also belongs to Barkola.
The foregoing discussion was devoted to the nature and extent of participation of the Assamese Sikhs in various contexts in the wider society.

A passing reference may be made here to the novel and poems written in Assamese by a few reputed Assamese writers which depict primarily heroism and romance of the Sikh soldiers, who had come to Assam during different historical times. We have already referred to the novel and the poems (Chapter III, pp. 62-63) which depict romance and heroism of the Sikh soldiers. Another poem entitled 'Samurai' by Bora (1978 : 363-366) also describes how the Sikhs had migrated to the banks of the Kapili river and mingled with other indigenous people. Hazarika (1983) in one of his lyrics in Assamese entitled 'Mahabahu Brahmaputra' mentions about Guru Tegh Bahadur "who had come to Assam from the land of five rivers and created the bridge of understanding through religion".

(c) Socio-Cultural Organization and Political Sphere

1. Asam Sahitya Sabha

We may now take into consideration the participation of the Assamese Sikhs in the activities
and functions of the Assam Sahitya Sabha which have provided avenues for interactions between the Assamese Sikhs and other indigenous people. The Assam Sahitya Sabha is the state's paramount literary organization. In 1888 an organization called 'Asamiya Bhasar Unnatisadhini Sabha' (organization for the development of Assamese language) was established. Later on in 1917 this organization was renamed as Assam Sahitya Sabha. The primary objective of this non-political socio-cultural organization is to work for the overall development of the Assamese language, literature and culture including indigenous languages, literature and culture. This organization has its central office in Jorhat and has altogether 700 branches all over Assam. The annual session of this organization is held in different parts of the state with elaborate programmes. The thirtysixth annual session of the Sabha was held in Barpeta, the district headquarters of Barpeta district, situated some 90 km. from Guwahati. The president for this session Late Padmashree Ananda Chandra Barua, in his presidential address, has pointed out the need for the Assamese rendering of the basic tenets of the Sikh religion which would help the Sikhs living in Assam to read such
renderings and would also help in creating amity among different communities (Malik 1969: 83).

On the occasion of the annual session of the Sabha, the local reception committee, where the session is held, brings out a souvenir which contains a large number of articles written in Assamese by different contributors. In this context we may take into consideration the souvenirs published during the sessions held at Dhubri in 1972, at Raha in 1980 and at Kampur in 1986. As pointed out earlier, Dhubri occupies an important place in the history of the Sikhs of this region and the first gurdwara in North-East India was established at Dhubri by Guru Tegh Bahadur around 1666 A.D. Raha, where the annual session of the Sabha was held in 1980, is situated close to Chaparmukh. Kampur, where the annual session of the Sabha was held in 1986, is situated close to Barkola. The souvenirs published by the local reception committees of Dhubri, Raha and Kampur contain some articles on the Sikhs of Assam written by some Assamese Sikh writers. For example, the souvenir published during the Dhubri session of the Sabha contains an article by Singh (1972: 110-113) on the historical background of the Assamese Sikhs. The
The souvenir of the Raha session contains an article on the Sikhs and their migration to Assam by Singh (1980: 85-91). This souvenir has also published the life sketches of a number of important persons of Raha area which include the life sketch of late Kamal Singh who belonged to Chaparmukh. The souvenir of the Kampur session published two articles, one by Singh (1986: 82-89) on the relations between the Assamese Sikhs and their neighbours and the other by Singh (1986: 192-194) on the migration of the Sikhs to Assam. During the Kampur session one of the gates constructed on the way leading to the main pandal was named as 'Ranjit Singh Toran' after the name of late Ranjit Singh, who was a popular teacher, social worker and freedom fighter of Barkola. In the procession which went round through the main roads of the town along with the president during the Kampur session, a group of male Assamese Sikhs took part putting traditional Sikh attire. Two young Assamese Sikh poets, Nanda Singh and Niranjan Singh recited their self-composed poems in the poets' meet during the Kampur session. Jiban Singh of Barkola was the assistant general secretary of the reception committee of the Kampur session. It should be noted that the Sikhs
residing in the villages near to Raosa and Kampur extended all possible help during the sessions through their active participation as well as contributed to the local reception committee fund.

Manjit Singh of Barkola was one of the members of the central executive committee of the Sabha for the year 1987-88. Manjit Singh is at present the general secretary of the Dipamu branch of Asam Sahitya Sabha. A small section of the educated Assamese Sikhs of Barkola and its neighbouring villagers are active members of the Asam Sahitya Sabha. Some of them are also members of a local level branch of the Sabha called Mansoon Kala Parishad of Dakshinpat. One such Assamese Sikh, Jiban Singh, a school teacher and resident of Barkola, was a member of the executive body of Mansoon Kala Parishad for two years in 1970 and 1971.

One of the ex-president of the Asam Sahitya Sabha, Late Padmasree Ananda Chandra Baruah, a renowned Assamese poet, visited Barkola on November 15 in 1969 with a view to collecting historical materials on the Sikhs of Assam. During his visit he addressed a large public meeting of the Barkola villagers.
ii. Freedom Movement

Coming to the political field it may be noted that the degree of participation of the Assamese Sikhs in the political process of the state is more or less similar to that of other Assamese people. During the freedom struggle of India in the 1920s, like many other Assamese Hindus and Muslims, a few Assamese Sikhs also left their studies and services and joined the freedom struggle. Singh (1978 : 39) states in the following manner about the participation of the Assamese Sikhs in the freedom struggle:

"........ There are people [Assamese Sikhs] who claim to have worked with late Tarun Ram Phukan [a renowned freedom fighter of Assam] and particularly a set of volunteers from Barkola was conspicuous for their social services in 1926 Congress Session at Pondeco [it present a railway township in Guwahati] ............."

Sharma (1961 : 170), in his reminiscence of the events of freedom struggle during the 1920s in this
part of the country, refers to Arjun Singh Punjabi with whom he spent a long sentence in Jorhat jail. They were arrested for their participation in the non-cooperation movement. It has been gathered that Arjun Singh Punjabi originally belonged to Punjab. He migrated to Assam and settled here permanently. During the non-cooperation movement in 1942, a large number of people of Assam including many Assamese Sikhs actively participated in the movement. Late Bairam Singh and Late Dalip Singh of Dibrugarh were prominent among the Assamese Sikhs who had participated in the non-cooperation movement.

iii. Assam Movement

Conflicts between the migrants and autochthones have been a prominent feature of postindependence politics in most of the states of India like Assam, Maharashtra, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh (Weiner 1976 : 75-143). The people of Assam began to realize the magnitude of the problem of migration to the state and the threat it posed to their identity, language and future. The Assam movement between 1979 and 1985 centred round the issue of detection of foreign nationals on the basis of the 1951 National Register of Citizens (NRC),
their deportation and disenfranchisement by striking off their names from the electoral rolls. During the period of Assam movement, disturbances broke out in several places of Assam valley, curfew was imposed in major towns of the valley and hundreds of rioters were arrested on various charges. The police fired at the violent processionists killing a large number. In this movement also the Assamese Sikhs extended their full support and participated in different programmes undertaken by various organizations and regional parties like the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), Assam Sahitya Sabha, Jatiyatabadi Dal, Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad, Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuba-Chatra Parishad, Assam Yuba-Chatra Samaj, Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP, alternately All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, AAGSP, which was formed on August 27, 1979). On February 14, 1983, Chandan Singh, an Assamese Sikh youth of Barkola was killed in the police firing at Jajari, near Nagaon town, while he tried to resist the voters from casting their votes during the state elections which the people of Assam boycotted. Chandan Singh was a student of first year in Nagaon College. He was the ex-general secretary of Barkola M.E. and Higher Secondary School and the secretary
of Barkola Football Association. Chandan Singh was also the general secretary of Barkola unit of AGSP. On March 1, 1983, another Sikh youth of Barkola, Karam Singh, was killed at Jarabari in Nagaon district, while participating in the movement programme. Another villager of Barkola, Balindra Majumdar, was also killed while participating in the programme of movement on March 2, 1983. The villagers of Barkola, one to all, feel proud of these persons who were killed during the movement.

WIDER COMMUNITY FORUM OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

Asamiya Sikh Santha (Assamese Sikh Association)

A small section of the educated Assamese Sikhs feels that if adequate protection and opportunities are not made available to this "backward and minority community", then the Assamese Sikhs are sure to suffer. These educated Sikhs are also of the opinion that "economic backwardness" is the greatest hurdle in the path of progress of the Assamese Sikhs. They, therefore, urge that there is need to deal with various religious,
social, cultural, educational and economic pursuits of the Sikhs residing in the north-eastern states of India, particularly the Assamese Sikhs. Over the years, there have been persons who have tried to bring all the Assamese Sikhs together under a common formal forum. The Sikhs who opine about their protection and opportunities have some positions as prominent persons in their community. They worked for creating a wider community forum with a view to undertaking various developmental works among themselves and moving the state government to undertake measures for their upliftment.

As a result of the effort of this small group of prominent Assamese Sikhs, an association in the name and style of the 'Asamiya Sikh Santha' (Assamese Sikh Association) was formed in the first half of 1980 and the association was registered in 1981. It has three branches: one each in Dibrugarh, Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts of Assam. The primary objective of this association is to work for the cause of their community.

9 Dhyan Singh, in two of his articles, one in Assamese (1984 : 41-44) and the other in English (1984 : 11-14) has pointed out the need for forming a society of the Assamese Sikhs to work for the cause of their community.
association is to organize developmental works in regard to their religion, culture, society and economy and publication of Sikh religious books and souvenirs. The head office of this association is situated at Nanakpur, a small heterogeneous locality of Guwahati, in which there is a gurdwara.

The first annual conference of the association was held on March 16, 1981 at Zoo Road in Guwahati which was attended by around 50 male Assamese Sikhs from different parts of Assam. In this conference an executive body of the association was constituted with 21 members including 4 presidents and 4 secretaries, 1 treasurer and 12 members and an advisory board with 5 members. The members of the executive committee and the advisory board belong to various Assamese Sikh localities of the state. Dhyan Singh, a retired government servant and a prominent Assamese Sikh was elected as the president of the association. He has been holding the post of the president of the association since its inception. In the first annual conference it was decided by all the members that as a first step the association would undertake the renovation work of the gurdwara at Chaparmukh. It was also decided to make
necessary arrangements to celebrate each year the birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur in Chaparmukh gurdwara.

According to the programme drawn by the association, a joint meeting of the executive bodies of the Assamese Sikh Association and Chaparmukh gurdwara committee was held in November, 1981. In that meeting the Chaparmukh gurdwara was named as Gurdwara Mataji. The renovation work of the gurdwara also started and for this work donations were raised by the association and Chaparmukh gurdwara committee from the Assamese Sikhs, non-Assamese Sikhs and non-Sikhs.

On April 11, 1982, on the day of 361st birth anniversary of the ninth Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur, the renovated gurdwara at Chaparmukh was inaugurated. The birth anniversary of the Sikh Guru was also celebrated in the gurdwara on that day. A large number of Assamese Sikhs living in parts of Assam and in around Chaparmukh took part in the functions held during the inauguration of the gurdwara and celebration of the birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Besides, a sizeable non-Assamese Sikhs and non-Sikhs participated in the function. On that day a procession of the Sikhs was taken out and kirtan, akhand path and bhog were held
in the gurdwara.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the gurdwara at Chaparmukh and the celebration of the birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur, a souvenir was brought out by the local reception committee constituted of representative members of the Asamiya Sikh Santha, Chaparmukh gurdwara committee and also representatives of different parts of the state. The contributors to the souvenir include various Assamese Sikhs and Assamese non-Sikh writers including two ex-presidents of the Assam Sahitya Sabha. Since 1982, every year birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur has been celebrated in the Gurdwara Mataji at Chaparmukh with elaborate programmes under the joint auspices of the Sikh association and Chaparmukh gurdwara committee. On the cover page of the souvenirs, brought out on such occasions, invariably the Mool Mantra of the Sikh religion and the Sikh religious symbol khand are printed. The Mool Mantra is printed in Gurmukhi script (Plate 8).

Under the plan of publication of the Sikh religious books, the association has published an Assamese book entitled Guru Nanak written by Bhupen
Plate 8. Facsimile of the cover of the souvenir published by the Assamese Sikh Association on the occasion of the 366th birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur.
Singh (1982). This book was published with the help of a donation received by the association from the president of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha of Bangkok. The president of the Bangkok Sri Guru Singh Sabha personally donated Rs. 6000.00 to the Assamese Sikh Association for the publication of Sikh religious books.

Another important task which was undertaken by the association was the holding of its annual conference at Barkola in January, 1934. Originally this annual conference was scheduled to be held in February, 1933 at Barkola. But due to the situation prevailing in the state during that period the conference had to be postponed. Before the annual conference at Barkola, between 1932 and 1933 several executive body meetings of the association were held to draw out plans and programmes for the annual conference. As per instruction of the central executive committee, a local reception committee was formed by the Sikhs of Barkola. This committee constituted of altogether 21 Sikhs from Barkola and the president and secretaries of the branches of the association as general members of the committee.
The annual conference of the association at Barkola was held on January 21 and 22, 1994. This conference was largely attended by the Assamese Sikhs living in Barkola, its vicinity and in different parts of the state. On January 21, the delegates camp was opened in the morning which was followed by the unfolding of the association's flag. On the same day a souvenir, which was published on the occasion, was inaugurated. This souvenir was edited by an editorial board constituted of altogether 14 members, all of whom were Assamese Sikhs. Of the total members of the board, 9 members including the president and the joint editors of the board belong to Barkola. Of the remaining 5 members, 1 each belongs to Nagaon, Chaparmukh, Hatipara and 2 belong to Lenga. The souvenir which has an Assamese and an English section contains a large number of articles written by both Assamese Sikh and Assamese writers on various aspects of the Sikhs of Assam and their historical background. The cultural programme was held in the evening on January 21, which included several items like *sabad*, recitation of passages from the Granth Sahib, Bihu dance, Assamese modern songs, etc.
On January 22, the open session of the conference was presided by the president of the association. The chief guest of this session was Sri Harcovar Goswami, the principal of the Teachers' Training College, Nagaon and the guest of honour was Md. Abu Shamo, president, Nagaon Sahitya Sabha. The appointed speakers of the session were Sri Dharma Singh Deka, principal, Raha Higher Secondary School and Sri Tilak Chandra Bora, principal, Dakshinpat Higher Secondary School.

Several resolutions were adopted at the annual conference at Barkola. One of the resolutions adopted related to demanding the minority and backward community status to the Assamese Sikhs and to offer special provisions for their educational, economic and social developments by the Government of Assam.

In 1986, the association submitted a memorandum to the chief minister of Assam demanding reserved seats in the technical and professional institutions for the Assamese Sikh students in view of the educational backwardness of the community. The memorandum also demanded special preference to the Assamese Sikh candidates in recruitment to various government jobs. Further, the memorandum listed a nine-point demand which included implementation of the proposed Guru Nanak Chair in Gauhati University; maintenance of the historic gurdwaras at Dhubri and Chaparmukh and the construction of Guru Nanak Library at Barkola. It may be stated here that the scheme of the Guru Nanak Chair in Gauhati University is at present in the final stage of the process. In this context it needs to be pointed out here that in Punjabi University, Patiala, there is a Chair called Saint Sankardeva Chair.
In another resolution adopted, the association expressed its dissatisfaction over not completing the Guru Nanak Bhavan in Guwahati and pressed upon the concerned authority to complete the work. Through another resolution adopted in the conference the association requested the state government to make provision for a reserved seat in the state Legislative Assembly for the Assamese Sikhs in view of the fact that they were not being represented by a member of their community in the Assembly.

The next conference of the association was held at Chaparmukh in April, 1985. Since then no annual conference has held. In the annual general meeting of the association held in Guwahati in 1987 a new executive committee was constituted. Table 22 shows the office bearers of the new executive committee of the association. The composition of the office bearers of the association gives an idea about the nature of involvement of the Assamese Sikhs in the wider community forum.

The Assamese Sikhs are well aware of the important happenings within the state and in parts of the country. The awareness of the Assamese Sikh of such happenings is mostly expressed through the association —
Table 22
Office Bearers of the Assamese Sikh Association (1987)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office held</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age in Yrs</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Home community</th>
<th>Present place of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Dhyan Singh</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Retired govt. servant</td>
<td>Barkola</td>
<td>Guwahati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice</td>
<td>I. Gurdev Singh</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>B.Sc.</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>Guwahati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President (II)</td>
<td>Jagjit Singh</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>B.Com., L.Lb.</td>
<td>Judicial magistrate</td>
<td>Nagaon</td>
<td>Tezpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working President</td>
<td>Hari Singh</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Matriculate</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Lanka</td>
<td>Dibrugarh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Secretary</td>
<td>Manjit Singh</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Divisional accountant</td>
<td>Barkola</td>
<td>Diphm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>Lakshmi Prasad</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>B.Sc.</td>
<td>Bank manager</td>
<td>Chaparmukh</td>
<td>Guwahati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretaries:</td>
<td>Singh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(II) Saheb Singh</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>Retired govt. servant</td>
<td>Chaparmukh</td>
<td>Guwahati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Hardayal Singh</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>B.E.</td>
<td>Retired engineer</td>
<td>Guwahati</td>
<td>Guwahati</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*He has married an Assamese Sikh girl and has now permanently settled in Guwahati.*
the only wider community forum of the Assamese Sikhs. For example, the association sent a telegram on June 25, 1982, wishing best wishes to Giani Jail Singh who was selected as the Presidential candidate. The president of the association through a letter to the editor (The Assam Tribune, December 11, 1982) made appeal to the organizations, which undertook projects to make documentary films on the Assamese Sikhs, not to distort historical facts and to project true picture of socio-cultural life of the Assamese Sikhs.

We have already stated about the participation of the Assamese Sikhs in Assam movement for the detection and deportation of the foreign nationals between 1979 and 1985. During this period the Assamese Sikh Association also expressed its concern in various ways. Between 1983 and 1985, the association expressed its grave concern through several press notes over the police atrocities in different parts of the state and appealed to all sections of people to maintain peace and harmony and to pay tribute to them who were killed during the movement. The executive meeting of the association held at Dipchu on October 27, 1985, adopted a resolution condemning the police atrocities on one of the members.
of the Assamese Sikh Association who participated in
the programme of the movement. In the same meeting
another resolution was adopted congratulating the Asam
Gana Parishad (AGP) which was formed in a political
convention held at Golaghat in Upper Assam on October 14,
1985. The president of the association through a press
statement in December 1985, extended wishes to the AGP
for its landslide victory in the state election and
expressed the hope that the AGP would form a stable
government and would undertake programme for development
of the state. In December 21, 1985, the president of
the association through a press statement congratulated
the AGP party for its winning the election held in
December 16, 1985, by absolute majority in the Assembly.
On December 24, 1985, the AGP formed the government.

The Assamese Sikhs are also aware of the
undercurrent of tension and happenings in Punjab. But
the Assamese Sikhs as a whole do not seem to be
seriously moved by the violence indulged in Punjab. On
June 22, 1984, the president of the Assamese Sikh
Association in a statement released to the press
expressed concern over the happenings of Punjab.
Calling upon the government of India to settle the
Punjab tangle through renewed dialogue, the president of the association alleged that the whole situation could have been avoided if the government had taken a timely decision. In another press release on November 4, 1984, the association expressed its deep sense of sorrow and grief at the assassination of the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, on October 31, 1984, in Delhi and appealed to the Sikhs to pray for the departed soul on the day of Guru Nanak's birth anniversary in that year. On September 20, 1985, the association congratulated through a message the Akali Dal on their landslide victory on the Punjab election. The message further said that the result of the election had shown keen desire of the people of Punjab to completely restore peace and normalcy and outright rejection of terrorism. On September 23, 1987, the president of the association through a press statement urged upon the government to honour the five head priests of the Sikhs, withdrawal of the troops from the Golden Temple complex and handing over the holy shrine to the management. The press statement further urged upon the government to consider seriously both the Punjab and Assam tangles and bring about an amicable settlement without further delay in the interest of the country.
It is pertinent to note here that the participation of the Assamese Sikhs in some wider Sikh organizations appears to be negligible. Almost all the members of the Sikh Pratinidhi Board (Eastern Region), the head office of which is situated at Dhubri, are non-Assamese Sikhs. This board annually organizes the death anniversary of the ninth Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur with elaborate programmes at the Gurdwara Tegh Bahadur Sahibji. There is not a single Assamese Sikh member in this board. However, as pointed out earlier, groups of Barkola Sikhs and Sikhs from parts of Assam go to Dhubri to attend the functions organized by the board during the death anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur. On the other hand, two Assamese Sikhs have held important positions in the state level Rastriya Sikh Sangat – an all India socio-religious organization of the Sikhs. Dhyan Singh, the president of the Assamese Sikh Association is the state co-ordinator and another Assamese Sikh, Joginder Singh, a lawyer of Guwahati, is the convenor of this organization. Dhyan Singh is the only Assamese Sikh member of the gurdwara committee of the Sikh Temple situated at Fancy Bazar in Guwahati.

Quite evidently the foregoing discussion lights upon that the social relations of the Assamese Sikhs
go beyond the spheres based on their religious, social, economic and cultural life. There are also certain wider bases of social relations which have helped in creating a sense of belonging among the Sikhs to the Assamese society. In this regard the Assamese language and the participation of the Sikhs and other Assamese people in a 'common culture' have played an important role. The long established tradition of Assamese-Sikh relations has made it possible for the Assamese Sikhs to identify themselves closely with the Assamese society. Thus, such a context has made easier for the Assamese Sikhs to think themselves as more Assamese than merely Sikh.