Present in the light of the past-

Present pattern of the Kachari society differ drastically from its past. Kachari society has lost its uniformity long time ago due to the interaction of several factors which had played major roles in shaping the destiny of the race and these are, geographical, political, cultural and many.

The progenitors of the Kacharis were plainsmen. The valleys of Yang Tse Kiang and Hoang, the place of their ethnic evolution was a plain area. They were different from the hill tribes of the present times. In the standard of culture and civilisation the Kacharis were not unequal to the Aryan conquerors and the Ahoms and therefore it is a matter of speculation that as to what degree the terms 'tribals', 'plains tribals' or 'hill tribes' applied to them at present are correct. It appears, the close resemblances of the Kacharis with the cultures of south East Asian countries kept them seperated from the mainstream of Indian culture which was Hinduism. Aryan Hinduism was a ideal one in the polity and culture of the sovereigns of India in ancient times and their subjects too, identified with these ideals of the traditional Hindu culture. The Kacharis were no doubt within the horizon of Aryan Hinduism since time immemorial, but their complete seperation from the animistic culture of the south East Asia was unthinkable, say, upto the down of the modern times. Their absorptions within the fold of Hinduism was gradual and
therefore the advanced ethnic groups branded them as 'tribals', a term, the clear meaning of which still require further analysis. Political, cultural and physical factors also had played vital roles for the demarcation of the popular of the North East sentinel of India (and elsewhere) into two broad groups - tribals and non-tribals. If we put this tribal theory into test with the aid of historical factors valuable information will surely enrich our knowledge in this regard.

In the pre-Muhammedan epoch the ethnic set up of Eastern Bengal (present Bangladesh) was primarily Non-Aryan, where the share of the Mongoloid Kacharis was by far the greatest. Now Eastern Bengal is primarily Muhammedan in culture, which became possible due to the sufferings of the masses in a caste ridden social set up of the Hindus and the consequent use of force and liberalism applied by the Muhammedan rulers to convert the down trodden races into the fold of Islam. The net result is that the Kacharis lost their numerical strength. At present, the difference between the Bengalee Muslims of Eastern Bengal (except higher section and nobility) and the Kacharis of North-Eastern India is unbridgable, although most of them belonged to the same ethnolinguistic stock, either pure or mixed.

In ancient times, the Kacharis were not only an agricultural community, but also were famous for their martial valour. It was this martial race which had laid the foundations
of several kingdoms in every nook and corner of the North Eastern India and present Bangladesh. This martial character of the society began to decline with the passages of time partly due to the physical features of Assam and its neighbourhood. Easy going and comfortable life of the Brahmaputra valley brought them much material prosperity but steadily ruined their sturdiness and martial qualities, to the same degree like the Ahoms, who also experienced the same fate.³ To this may be added, the luxurious standard of life which was the motto of many Hauambial kings of the Dhansiri valley save a few memorable exceptions. Evidences are not rare to show that in the midst of success, the enemies purchased their friendship with the offerings of maidens, luxurious presents etc.⁴ Though apparently negligible this factor also should be counted as a cause for the loss of martial character of the race. In many stages of national honour, the kings failed to inspire their subjects and soldiers. The British authorities made vain experiments to revive their valour by recruiting them in the army, but when such attempts failed, they opted for the Kukis, Nepalis and other tribal groups for such purposes.⁵ Thus a class of warriors gradually became a peaceful community of peasants.

The great Kachari tribe was known by the term 'Kiratas' to our lexicographers of the ancient times. With cent per cent truth it can be conjectured that in the classical Hindu age there were few differences among the various Kachari communities of North-Eastern India. It is practically unknown that
by which interaction of forces the differences originated and the tribe became splitted up under various local and regional names. The actual fact is that a Rabha of Goalpara considers himself superior in caste status than a Bodo Kachari, and a Sonowal of upper Assam will fail to understand the tongue of a Bhimal of North Bengal, and a Chutiya will refuse to take his meal in the house of a Tippera under prevailing social conventions. There are numerous such examples. But these aspects are not applicable in the broader field of national life. One thing is clear and that is the present pattern of the Kachari society do not reflect its past in any way.

Still, there is an underlying unity among them. They take active interest to the promotion and development of their heritage and culture. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha a prominent cultural forum of the Kacharis commands support from the Chutias, Rabhas, Dimasas Tipperas, Hajaís and so on. Consciousness for the traditional heritage thus is a binding factor to check the disintegrating forces.

The underlying unity which in largely linguistic no doubt is a strong unifying force but is not essentially universal. In this regard the recent moves of the Lalungs of Karbi Anglong district N.C.hills deserve our attention. The Lalungs have refused to co-operate with the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and they have founded their cultural forum Lalung
Sahitya Sabha in 1980. We have seen before that much ill-feelings and bitternesses prevailed between the Lalungs and the Dimasa Kacharis in the medieval age on political grounds. Linguistic affinities thus is not a binding force in history. The people of Bangladesh and the Bengalees of India, the English speaking communities of Ireland, Rhodesia, England and Australia have their traditional differences inspite of a common language.

Historical forces were constantly at work to disintegrate the linguistic unity among the Kachari tribes and their cognates the Garos, Koches, Rajbansis, Dhimals and even a percentage of Rabhas and Bodo Kacharis have lost their original tongues in favour of Bengali, while in Assam many of them preferred Assamese. The worst sufferers were the Hojongs of Maimensingh (Bangladesh). Overwhelming influence of Bengalees ruined the culture and language of the Hojongs. These who are now living in Assam have developed sharp differences with their traditional life pattern. It is a question of time only when the Hojongs will be unformatically absorbed among the plainsmen - Assamese and Bengalees in a very similar manner like the Rajbansis. So the great Kacharis tribe is now at the threshold of a new ethnic evolution on which the historians and ethnologists of the future will utilise their talents and brains. Let us now take into count the impacts of time and circumstance on other aspects of their life.
Emerging Pattern - Stages leading to the growth of Pan Indianism.

The last remnant of the royal glory of the great Kachari tribe was terminated after the annexation of the Hedambil territories to the East India Company in 1832 A.D., two years after the assassination of Govinda Chandra. As this point has been referred before in the Chapter V, it needs no repetition here. Indian nationalism which was germinated after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, also touched the imaginative Kachari minds of the North East. Hatred against British regime was spontaneous among the tribals. Only three years after the great mutiny, the tribal peasants mostly Kacharis and their allied races of the Phulaguri area of Nowgong took up arms against the British authorities in 1861. In May 1860, British authorities banned poppy cultivation in Assam which was practised mostly by the Lalung section of the Kacharis and low caste Assamese people. This had sufficiently wounded the traditional tribal sentiment and added more fuel to the prevailing discontent against British rule. Rumours aread like wildfire that the British authorities would soon impose taxes on income as well as on betel nuts and pan. The rising took a serious turn and in going to suppress the demonstration in October 1861, an English Officer Lt. Singer lost his life. The Phulaguri rising of 1861 though originated from a petty circumstance of opium habit, but from its character it appears that it was the first symptom of unrest among the tribals against British rule after the Mutiny of 1857.
The next uprising of the Kacharis took place in 1881 in the N.C. hills. The leader of this rising was a person, Sambo-dhan by name which we have referred before in 1881. Hatred against the British regime was widespread in the Naga hills. It is said that from 1839 to 1851 A.D. the British government sent at least ten military expeditions against the Angami Nagas. The glorious uprising of the Angami Nagas against British authority in 1879 also supplied fuel to the Kachari uprising of 1881. Since then the Kachari tribes took active interest in the freedom movement of the country in many walks of national activity. In the Brahmaputra valley they joined the freedom fight under the leadership of the illustrious sons of mother India. Though backward and uneducated most of them in those days their sense of devotion to duty and practical knowledge were admirable.

In the Quit India Movement of 1942 they left their indelible mark as freedom fighters. They took part in the picketings and Satyagrahas in Dhekiajuli (Darrang district), Babejia (Nowgong), Bajali (Barpeta sub-division), and in many other places. Out of thirty seven martyrs in Assam in course of the 1942 movement about sixteen belonged to various Kachari communities and their cognates and they were - Tileswar Koch, Mani Kachari, Ratan Kachari, Mahiram Koch, Somnath Chutiya, Lerela Kachari, Kola Koch, Rauta Ram Boro, Kunda Kachari, Rebond Boro, Rajendra Prasad Basumatari, Gopi Koch, Moiina Kachari, etc. There were a number of remarkable leaders of regional and all-India status among them whose inspiration and encouragement
inspired the Kacharis in many walks of national life in the pre and post independence days. Of them reference should be made to Bipnath Brahma an outstanding leader who was also a cabinet minister of Assam after independence, and the great Dimasa leader J.B. Hagjer.

Politically speaking, the attainment of Independence of in 1947 brought startling changes in the life pattern of different Kachari communities of Assam. In order to facilitate tribal participation in local self government District Councils were initiated in the hills in 1951, and the Dimasa Kacharis, Lalungs and the Hojais of the present N.C.hills and Karbi Anglong districts were brought within its purview. In the plains of the Brahmaputra valley the Gaon Panchayats came into being since 1959 and specific arrangements were made within it to accommodate the Kacharis in its elective offices in places where they form majority. The District Councils and Gaon Panchayats afforded them chances to participate in politics hitherto unknown to them.

Changing Socio-Cultural Life Pattern -

The rate of literacy and growth of education among the Kachari masses was practically nil before the independence of India. In the fifties of the nineteenth century there were only ten schools in the entire Goalpara district, a stronghold of the Kacharis, and in the N.C.hills it was nil. In 1905 in all there were four High Schools at Dhubri, Goalpara, Abhyapuri and Gauripur in Goalpara and a tiny primary school at Halflong in the N.C.hills. Means of
communications were still worse. The cheapest mode of travel of modern times, i.e. the railway, touched Dhubri, the district headquarters of Boalpara in 1902 by a metre-gauge branch line of Eastern Bengal Railway from Calcutta. The Eastern Bengal Railway connected Golokganj and Amingaon (on the opposite of Gauhati, on the bank of Brahmaputra) in 1905 through the intermediary stations of Bansbari, Tipkai, Sisapani, Pakiragram Kokrajhar, Basugaon and Bijni. In the N.C.hills Damchura was connected with Badarpur by rail in 1899, and at the end of the fifth year in 1903 trains took the rail from Damcherra to Lumding through the N.C.hills. The opening up of the means of communications and spread of education through extremely meagre at the initial stage, proved to be matters of great significance in the changing pattern of Kachari socio-cultural lives. Alien culture infiltrated into the interior areas through these two medias.

Thus in ancient times it was customary for the parents to send their boys in the Bachelors' Barracks where some amount of practical education were imparted to them according to traditional tribal way. With the establishment of schools parents felt disinterested in the activities of the Bachelors' Barracks and preferred to send their boys to schools. Thus the traditional character of the society began to decline with the passages of time. Bachelors' Dormitories now survive only in the interior areas of the N.C.hills, and Karbi Anglong districts among the Dimasas and Lalungs, and in these places too, it has lost much of its significance.

Traditional modes of amusements also have provided rooms to modern amenities. In the bygone days village festivals were
the occasions of amusements for the youths and the aged alike. Now cinema houses have been opened in towns like Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Halflong, Lumding and elsewhere, and the educated Bodo Kachari and Dimasa youths have a fascination to witness cinema shows instead of participating in their village festivals. Nodrungs (Bachelors' domitories) and the jhum fields were the convenient places where young boys and girls used to compose folk songs and sung songs for the sake of joy only. Now the appearance of transistor sets have considerably ruined this traditional character of life and most of the boys of the well to do families like to possess a transistor set through which they can conveniently taste the modern Indian film songs at leisure time. The remembrance of the bygone days survive only in the memories of the aged persons only.

But it is unreasonable to conclude that the younger generations have an apathy or aversion to their heritage. The actual fact is that with their adaptability to the changing world they are more eager to modify their cultural life pattern in a cosmopolitan spirit through the aids of modern amenities. In recognition of this desire the Halflong Music College established in 1964, have a proposal to open some classes in tribal dance and music. The Dimasa Kacharis and the Barman Kacharis of the N.C.hills and Cachar have a passionate desire to represent their heritage through the various medias of modern times. They take part regularly in the daily programme of the Akash Vani Silchar. Akash Vani Silchar have a regular programme in Dimasa language
every day in the evening hours where Dimasas vocal musicians and artists of all ranks take part with enthusiasm and pride. Dimasa artists also participate in the North-Eastern Music programme transmitted in every noon. In short Akash Vani Silchar has become a fine media to transmit tribal heritage to their listeners through radio-sets. Similar cultural programme has also been arranged by the Gauhati-centre of Akashvani too. They transmit their Kachari programme every evening from 4-15 to 4-45 p.m. when Kachari artists participate. "Raisumari Affat of Kokrajhar established in 1960, is an well known Bodo Kachari cultural organisation of Assam. Members of this Affat took part in national programmes as well as in Televisi-
on and film. It's members participated in the East India Cultural conference held at Gauhati in 1965 and at Bhubaneswar in 1976. A few more such cultural organisations viz. Bithorai Affat of Kokrajhar, Demagaldl Affat of Basugaon, Narson Affat of Boro Bazar and Reumailon Affat of Sidli are worth mentioning here. Through the efforts of these enterprising forums the hidden treasures of tribal heritage appeared in the stage and readily arrested the admiration and appreciation of the outer world.

In the realm of games and sports too, Kachari youths are showing their interest and worth. Traditional games are fast losing their popularity. Cricket, football and badminton playing are increasingly becoming popular among the students of schools and colleges. Bodo Kachari boys of Kokrajhar Government H.E. and M.P. School won the Deokan Memorial Football shield consecutively for two years in 1979 and 1980.
Kokrajhar district team played a nice game in the thirty-fourth Assam Senior Inter-district Football Championship held at Diphu in July, 1981. Kachari defenders and scorers of the Kokrajhar eleven left a deep impression upon the spectators by their skill and team spirit over the Jorhat district eleven in the semi-finals by a clean victory of 3-1 goals.

Most of the educational institutions of the Kachari predominated areas have introduced N.C.C. (National Cadet Corps, estd in 1948) in their academic curriculum. It is functioning in the Govt. High schools and colleges of Halflong, Kokrajhar and Diphu. The college at Diphu was established in 1965 when the roll strength was about seventy. But the students were so enthusiastic in Youth activities that the Diphu college deputed two lecturers for pre-commission training in N.C.C. at Kamptee (Maharashtra) in the next year to cater to the increasing student participation in N.C.C. A number of Kachari boys and girls have participated in various summer training camps and the Republic Day parade held in Delhi every year. N.C.C. has very nicely substituted the purposes of traditional Nodrung life where all amenities of the bygone days are available through the annual training camps, drill and weapon training etc. In Dimasa areas N.C.C. organisation has practically no difference with traditional girls associations managed by the girls leaders like Matla Hoja and Matla Farai who have their parallels in N.C.C. in the persons of Senior under officers and under officers. In short N.C.C. taught them self help.
Spread of education was a primary factor for the aforesaid changes. The rate of progress of education was very slow due to the dearth of educational institutions in the last century. It began to make steady progress after independence in 1947. In 1954 there were eighty seven graduates in arts, science, medicine and engineering among them. But this is only an apparent side of the Kachari lives. Their sense of practical knowledge and intelligence was by no means inferior to their advanced communities. Literary tastes were very strong and this aspiration first was materialised in the decade of the twenties of this century when the first periodical 'Bibar' saw the light of the day in 1923. Genuine urge of the educated intelligentsia also led to the publications of a few more periodicals in later years. Of them 'Benjar' a quarterly published from Udalguri, Darrang is worthmentioning. From Kokrajhar one weekly "Hatadab" is published, the editor of which is Shri Benudhar Basumatari, and a monthly called 'Arki'. Formerly there was another periodical from Kokrajhar named 'Argang' which is now discontinued. Nodo Sahitya Sabha is another platform which stands for the promotion and welfare of the literacy activities of the community.

In the old good days the fear of ghosts and evil spirits were widespread. Physical ailments were universally attributed to the influences of the evil spirits or Modais. "Modal Hamdang" i.e. the Modai, evil spirits has got hold of me was the usual reply of an ailing Bodo Kachari sick man to the quary of
a stranger. Hence it was customary to sacrifice animals for the appeasement of the evil spirits. Now this tendency is fact fading out at least among the educated persons.

Hygienic living conditions and general cleanliness of the surroundings of homesteads were far from satisfactory. Too much consumption of animal meats and unhygienic living standards were the sole causes of the spread of dreaded diseases like leprosy among all sections of the Kacharis of the North-East. Now the spread of this disease has come under control, evidently due to the spread of education among the masses. Now, leprosy treatment centres of Agi and Dudhnai in Goalpara are giving medical aids to the outdoor patients which can accommodate thirty patients at a time. In the N.C.hills Maibong leprosy colony is doing ample services to bring the disease under control. The actual fact is that the Kacharis have learnt that the priests and quacks can no doubt offer remedy to their ailments by sacrifices to the evil spirits, but the amenities of modern medical science can also provide them the desired help in lieu of the formers. Constant advises of the leprosy workers of the concerned health units also taught them how to live an ideal life in a hygienic condition.

Educated young generations although have great respect and veneration to their heritage are somewhat free from traditional tribal customs, although such tendencies are not always spontaneous. In ancient times and still now marriage
between a girl and a boy was impossible in a Dimasa Kachari society if the bride and the groom belonged to the same clan of their father and mother respectively due to strict exogamy rules, about which we have made a reference in Chapter VII. Now under altered circumstance, marriage is possible not only outside the same clan but also in the rank of other Kachari tribes particularly among the educated persons. A Dimasa Kachari boy now can marry a girl of Sonowal Kachari of upper Assam. After marriage it was also customary to reside on year in the house of the bride's parents which was known as Minhabba among the Dimasa Kacharis and Samdang Jagarmay among the Bodo Kacharls of the Brahmaputra valley. Now a fair number of educated persons are not willing to go through such traditional modes and they start living in their new homesteads as soon as the marriage is over. Thus the educated young generation is gradually developing a great gulf between the heritage and the present requirements of the society. The next aspect of this transitional character of the Kachari society is greatly due to their growing contacts with the advanced alien groups viz. - the Bengalees, Nepalis, Marwars and other classes of traders and service holders who have flocked into the tribal areas at different times of this century with the opening up of the means of communications.

Businessmen and service holders of the urban and semi-urban areas of the tribal areas were mostly Bengalees, Nepalis, Marwars etc. in the beginning as it is still now. Particularly in the N.C.hills the Dimasa Kacharlis frequent the daily or
weekly markets of these urban areas to sell their surplus hum products and to purchase the essential commodities like match boxes, spices, salt, etc. In these markets they can purchase cheap mill clothes and this availability of mill made clothes has sharply reacted to their traditional culture. We have seen before that most of the tribal families were self-sufficient in the manufacture of their garment requirements in the past, but now they feel disinterested to produce their garments at home at the cost of tremendous labour for the sake of heritage only. Not only in the N.C. hills, in other places too, mill products have greatly ruined their traditional still in sericulture.

Constant contacts with these urban areas gradually taught them the advantages of monetary transactions instead of barter system and family wise self-sufficiency in regard to the primary needs of livelihood, viz. food and cloth. Strong desire to earn money by various devices of modern economy began to be felt among them particularly in the Brahmaputra valley. A class of service holders rickshaw pullers, petty shopkeepers and labourers in the Tea Estates began to emerge from their traditional village based civilisation, partly due to their contacts with the alien ethnic groups and also partly due to the tacit counsel of the educated intelligentsia of their community itself. The net result is that the traditional village based civilisation is gradually assimilating these new trends of the age with growing interest because extra income to each family means greater comfort and better life at par with the villages of the plainsmen of their
neighbourhood. It has a psychological value also. A family finds its status quite high if they have a school going boy or girl and a transistor set purchased by the money earned by another member working in a tea-garden or in an office of Kokrajhar or Guwahati. Thus like other tribals the Kacharis too have a strong desire to glorify their heritage but are willing to adjust themselves with the advantages of the modern world. Thus the young generations are not discouraged by the elders except in matrimonial matters to keep contacts with the outside world and under this congenial surroundings the new generations thus emerging, is at once conscious of their heritage with a passionate urge to adopt more and more advantages of modern life.
2. Muhamedan immigrants of Goalpara (Assam) from Eastern Bengal (Bangladesh) had conflicts with the original populace of the land i.e., the Kacharis. Disputes concerning cattle grazing grounds land etc. were chronic upto the seventies of this century. Many Kacharis of the district failing to adjust with Muhamedan immigrants sought migration to the further east. vide ADG. Goalpara 1978 p.80.
4. DAB p.15.
6. Kachari pp.83-84 states that the Rabhas do not take cooked meal in a Bodo-Kachari house although the later free pertakes the same; The Chutiyas in their own fold too are conservatives no to speak of their terms with others. Thus the Ahom and the Hindu Chutiyas can smoke but cannot eat together vide ADG Vol. VIII 1906 p.83 -- con p.No.
7. By field work.
13. NEFI pp.130-138 ; and article of Dr S.K. Barpujari in the C.O.
17. Ibid 443 ; and ADG UM & NCH 1979 p.372.
19. IGI Vol. VI. 1908 p.79.
25. Ibid p. Ibid.
27. Ibid. July 4, 1981.
29. It was the N.C.C. course S.D. in which the present writer participated as an officer Cadet.
34. By fieldwork.
35. Kachari pp. 33-34.
37. ADG UM & NCH 1979 p. 404.
38. A.J. pp. 70-78.
39. DAO pp. 56-57.
40. POI (WHG) p. 78; and Samanvaya March 10, 1980. pp. 30-31.