SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
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In this thesis, the attempt was to present a community who due to their i) long association with their neighbouring dominant people (dominant caste as Srinivas puts it) and ii) the influence of rapid urbanization of the locality, had to adjust and readjust their life style with the passage of time. It is a matter to be observed that the rearrangements were made quite spontaneously and effectively. Today, the change in the community is eye catching and this thesis is a maiden effort of analyzing and focussing the areas that can be considered as determinant of the vibrant change. In the following paragraphs the notable areas of the thesis have been highlighted chapterwise in a summary manner.

SUMMARY:

Chapter-I: Introduction: Society and Social Behaviour:

Society is a system of usage and procedures of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behaviour and of liberties. It is the web of social relationship and it is always changing. Broadly human society is said to consist of two elements i) social groups and ii) social institutions. Social groups are also classified according to blood relations such as family clan, moiety, pharatry, etc. A social group may also make a community. On the other hand social institutions are the functional units based on standardised pattern of social behaviour that the
society has accepted. The accepted behaviour in the society or the standardised behaviour in the society is also called institutionalised behaviour and the whole system of standardisation of a behavioural pattern is called an institution. In order to understand the social behaviour of a given community, it is necessary to understand i) the structural and organisational level of the society, ii) the levels of social stratification and iii) its changing aspect.

Social structure:

Studying and analysing the structural level of a society happens to be the most fundamental aspect of studying a society. In simple terms, social structure is a system of social relations. In a society, family, religion, law, economy and class, all are identified as social structure. On the whole, social structure can be defined as the complex of the major institutions and groups in society, etc.

Social structure can be studied in terms of microstructure and macrostructure. Microstructure is the pattern of relations between most basic elements of social life, which cannot be further divided and have no social structure of their own. Macrostructure, on the other hand is a kind of 'second level' structure, a pattern of relations between objects that have their own structure (for example, a political social structure between political parties). Social structure in the broader sense, known as social system and can be viewed as a structure composed of the economic system, law system, political system, cultural system, etc.
Social Change:

Any change to take place needs some force operating behind it. In other words, force is a prerequisite of change. For Davis (1981: 622), it is the alterations as occur in social organisations that is, structure and function of society. Social change thus forms only a part of what is essentially a broader category called cultural change.

The Research Problem:

The present study is mainly concerned with the analysis of social organization, and social structure of a certain tribal community living in villages originally located at the outskirts of Guwahati but later had to be merged to the expanding Guwahati in course of time. The tribal families residing in the urban centres for occupational purposes had to undergo various changes. The study of the level of change, which family and kinship system and religious values are undergoing with reference to social organization, therefore is a matter assumes great importance today. The tribal community taken up for this study is the Karbis of plains living in Guwahati. The target of the present study is mainly these Karbi villagers who continue to live a village life amidst growing urban atmosphere. The theme of this research in broad terms has been stated as “A Study of the Changing Social System of the Karbis of Guwahati.”
Previous Studies Made:

Various authors have studied the social structure of communities living in urban setting. Communities in almost all these studies are the migrants who made cities their home for occupational purposes. Compared to that, the community in the present study is peculiarly placed as they are the original inhabitants of the city – perhaps staying here before creation of the city - pursuing their own traditional occupation till the beginning of last few decades. So far no studies have been made on the Karbis of plains or for that matter the Karbis of Guwahati. A detailed list of publications having contents of urbanization, social change and tribal or caste population has been prepared and reviewed briefly in the introductory Chapter. The important among the literatures reviewed are Srinivas’s (1962) “caste in Modern India and other essays” and Social Change in Modern India” (1995). In both these books he attempted to analyse the nature of changes taking place in the caste system of India and introduced the concept of sanskritisation and Westernization. Another important literature in this context is Hansa Jain’s (2004) book “Scheduled Tribes: Changes in Socio-economic Conditions” wherein he explains the social change, how it comes over in a traditional society with the development in infrastructure and other related sectors. Another notable publication in this context is Yuginder Singh’s (1999) study of interaction of modernity and social tradition in India is a full-length study. In his book “Modernisation of Indian Tradition”
is a classical theoretical work. It is a comprehensive sociological study of the process and problems of modernisation in contemporary India. It refers to the vast range of changes that are taking place in the form and functions of the Indian social structure and traditions. He argues that Indian society is changing and is undergoing adoptive changes towards modernisation.

**Objectives of Study:**

The basic objectives of the study have been set as i) to identify the present social system of the Karbis of plains vis-à-vis Guwahati. ii) To assess the nature of changes in the macro social structures of Guwahati that have impact on the Karbis of Guwahati. iii) to evaluate the Change in social structure of the Karbis. iv) to identify the various components of their culture, and their present status to understand social change and v) to analyse the role of women and over the changing process.

**Methodology:**

For the present study, a two-layered research design was prepared to realise the objectives. In the first layer there was the fieldwork conducted at different parts of neighbouring plains districts of Karbi Anglong namely Kamrup, Kamrup (Metropolitan) and Nagaon districts for collection of base line data on the plains Karbis. This study was extensive rather than intensive. In the second layer, there was the fieldwork conducted at
the target villages of Guwahati. This survey was designed to collect the primary data for the study.

For identifying the villages for study, help from the Deputy Commissioners concerned in each of the district were taken. A village list having Karbi population was prepared and in both the cases required numbers of villages were identified by simple random sampling (lottery method).

Chapter-II Social Change: An Introduction

Social change is a process in which is discernible significant alteration in the structure and functioning of a particular system. In the simplest meaning, social change refers to change in the nature, the social institutions, the social behaviour or the social relations of a society or community of people.

Various social scientists have forwarded various theories on social change observing and analysing the changes occurred in various societies in various ways and in various degrees and as a result the core elements of different theories differ. These theories provide ample information about various components of a society and how they react to the factors of changes, the process of change and the resultant output. Any study on social change cannot be said to be complete without discussing the theories of social changes. In the following paragraphs only those theories of social change have been briefly discussed which have relevance to this study.
In the *early evolutionary theory* of social change it is assumed that all societies develop from simple, 'small-scale' beginnings into more complex industrial and post-industrial societies thorough a process of change. But the modern evolutionary theory argues that the main source of change is a shift in subsistence/production, each change resulting in greater productivity which in turn leads to greater economic surplus and thus more distributable wealth.

**Functionalist theory** assumes that as societies develop, they become increasingly more complex and interdependent. Structural-functionalists were concerned with the question how societies maintain internal stability and survive over time. They sought to explain social cohesion and stability through the concept of solidarity. Durkheim (1971) proposed that such societies tend to be segmentary, being composed of equivalent parts that are held together by shared values, common symbols, or, systems of exchanges. In modern, complex societies, members perform very different tasks, meaning that a strong interdependence develops between them. Based on the metaphor of an organism in which many parts function together to sustain the whole, Durkheim argued that complex societies are held together by organic solidarity. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) held that unilineal forms of organisation are efficient mechanisms to transmit social status as well as rights and duties between generations independent of the individuals within them, thus ensuring social stability and the continuous reproduction of the social system. Structural-
functionalism also took on Malinowski's (1947) argument that the basic building block of society is the nuclear family, and that clans are therefore an outgrowth of families, not vice versa.

**Structural Functionalism and Unilineal Descent theory was propagated** by Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Meyer Fortes (1945). In their attempt to explain the social stability of African "primitive" stateless societies where they undertook their fieldwork, Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Meyer Fortes (1945) argued that the Tallensi and the Nuer were primarily organised around unilineal descent groups. Such groups function like "corporate groups", meaning that they are stable and lasting social groups based on kins with clear rules of membership and an internal structure that regulates each member's relation to other members through the assigning of statuses and roles.

**Conflict Theory:** Marxism also saw itself as offering a 'scientific account' of change but, in opposition to Functionalism, it focused on the premise that radical change was inevitable in society. Marxism argued that the potential for change was built into the basic structures of society, the relationships between social classes, which Marx saw as being intrinsic to the social relations of production. According to Marx, eventually society reaches a point where its own organization creates a barrier to further economic growth and at that point, crisis precipitates a revolutionary transformation of the society. Change is therefore ongoing until crisis point is reached and transformation occurs.
Post-Modernists argue that both social reality and knowledge is socially constructed. Post-Modernism rejects 'general' or overarching explanations of change, which rely on the premise of a single total social system or assumptions about class or gender power. Postmodernists see power as dispersed and localised, rather than hierarchical and directed from the top down.

The Theory of Structuration, proposed by Anthony Giddens (1984) in the Constitution of Society, is an attempt to reconcile theoretical dichotomies of social systems such as agency/structure, subjective/objective, and micro/macro perspectives, which consider individuals as either acted upon (as elements within a structural context) or as autonomous agents. In his words, "every process of action is a production of something new, a fresh act, but at the same time all actions exist in continuity with the past, which supplies the means of its initiation. Structure thus is not to be conceptualised as a barrier of action, but as essentially involved in its production, even in the most radical processor of social change, which like any others occur in time. (Giddens, 1984: 2) Gidden's definition of structure inherently involves structuration - the continuity of the past and reproduction of the present structure is what he called structuration.

Cultural theories of Social Change:

Ogburn (1958) in his social change proposed that material or technological change precedes social change. He divided culture
into two parts viz, material and non-material culture. When changes occur in the material culture, these in turn induce changes in the non-material culture. Sorokin (1978) in “Social and Cultural Dynamics” developed a **cyclical theory of change**, in terms of dominant set of ideas or “ideological culture ruling the civilisation in a given period. Thus he defined civilisation as ideational, sensational and idealistic. The ideational culture period emphasised the spiritual and non-material; the sensational period emphasised the material and agonistic values and reality and the idealistic period combine in some form the elements from the two principal types. Sorokin is concerned with the culture than with the historical sequence.

**Application of Social theories on Change in India**

Few of the theories discussed above have partial applicability in the present study while few others have no applicability at all. This is because, the change in the Indian traditional structure is a peculiar and complex phenomenon. It cannot be fitted into a particular theoretical framework. Many social anthropologists and sociologists attempted to explain the Indian society and its change from various angles. The most prominent, of these studies, have been made covering the structural and cultural aspects of the society and both have been identified as the two most prominent approach of studying change in the Indian societies especially the caste societies.
The Indian Tradition:

It is not necessarily that the process which brings social change in the society would also bring change in the tradition. However, the process which brings change in the traditions also necessarily changes the societies (Singh, 1999: 191). This underlines the necessity to study the tradition of a society. Various authors have studied Indian social tradition from various angles. Singh (1999) has identified three major streams of traditions in Indian society i.e. Hindu, Muslim and tribal. All Indian social phenomena and realities get their manifestations in these three streams of traditions. In the following paragraphs a brief discussion is made on these traditions

Hindu Traditions:

Hindu society consists of certain traditions, which are in fact value themes. The society is based on a) hierarchy, b) holism, c) karma and d) transcendence.

a) India is a hierarchical society. Whether in north India or south India, Hindu or Muslim, urban or village, virtually all things, leaving aside the indigenous tribal groups, people, and social groups are ranked according to various essential qualities. b) Holism is yet another aspect of Hindu tradition is manifested in the relationship between individual and groups The individual in Hindu society is not autonomous. He is constrained to abide by the norms and values of the society. It was the society, which determined the behaviour of the individual. Holism has been a dominant value in the Indian Caste society. In all circumstances an
individual was subordinate to the caste, village and religious congregations. c) "Law of Karma" is central in Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism. All living creatures are responsible for their karma - their actions and the effects of their actions - and for their release from samsara. Karma literally means "deed" or "act" and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction, which governs all life. d) Transcendence Yogendra Singh writes "The principle of transcendence also posited the legitimation of traditional values could never be challenged on grounds of rationality derived from the non sacred or profane scales of evaluation. It formed a super concept contributing to integration as well as rationalization of the other values themes of the tradition. (Singh, 1999: 192)." Transcendence is the fourth tradition of Hindu society. It is beyond the limits of possible experience and knowledge of the individual. According to the value of transcendence the legitimacy of the traditional values is not questioned.

Islamic tradition:

The Islamic traditions are different from Hindu traditions. Its religion is proselytizing or converting others to their faith. But it is holistic and socio-centric in its orientation. Islamic holism has elements of exclusiveness. It never accepts anything outside its own traditions. Its holism is based on the unity of the Muslim umma, the collectivity of faithful. This unity in principle transcends the boundaries of territory and nation and is derived
form the conformity of numbers to the religio-ethical codes and principle embodied in the Qura and or Sunna, the hadith and the Shariya (legal code book of Islam).

**Tribal tradition:**

Tribal traditions in India are different from Hindu and Muslim traditions. Each of the tribal groups is endogamous and there is no hierarchy in the tribal society. Such tribal groups are autonomous and have their own identity. The social structure of the tribal community is egalitarian though the forces of modernisation have created stratification and new tradition. The tribes are outside the varna system.

**Social Change in India:**

Having discussed the Indian tradition, we may now have a look at the nature and extent of changes occurred in the Indian tradition.

**Change in the Religious front:**

Hinduism is the religion with unbroken continuity from the past to the present. But with the passage of time, Hinduism has also changed. Recognition of inadequacies of Hinduism gave birth to several heterodox sects; although initially they were ridiculed and denounced but later recognized and even granted social respect. Although it is difficult to assess their impact on the society as a whole yet, undoubtedly it has been very substantial. The later
social reformers were mainly concerned with the key issues such as child marriage, the maltreatment of women (especially widows), sati and inhuman aspects of practices of untouchability. Their ideas have gained acceptance among the intellectuals but the rural people could not however free themselves from these evil spirits. During 1920 and 1940 the sanskritisation process got momentum. Several Jatis made efforts to get themselves upgraded. Some have adopted new names although it not yet assessed how far they have got the benefits of this.

Changes in the Economic front:

India’s primary economic sector mainly manned by three classes - 1) some were peasant proprietors, 2) tenant cultivators, and 3) agricultural labourers. There were two or three tier feudal aristocracy above them. The conditions of the agricultural labourers were pathetic. Tenants were in a slightly better off position then agricultural labourers; but they were in fear of losing their tenancy at any time to the notorious Zaminders. After independence, Government declared its land reforms agenda. Zamindaries were abolished, tenants were given ownership rights, ceiling on land holdings were imposed with an intention to redistribute the acquired land. But there were in fact little effect of these on the poor farmer. The conditions of the village artisans and craftsmen have also not improved. With increasing industrialisation their revival has not been easy. India has registered an impressive progress in the industrial front during the
last few decades. But this growth still remained unbalanced as per the area of concentration of the industries.

The Change in Indian Polity:

In the political front, India is facing some chronic problem having no remedy in hand. The freedom movement had created a degree of national consciousness and independence raised the hopes of Indian people. These two factors had delayed the expression of sub-national consciousness of different ethnic and communities. Linguistic division of States was another source that provoked the micro ethnic groups to go for agitation claiming sovereignty. The problem of sub regionalism manifested itself gradually starting with Telengana rebellion and Naga rebellion. Later, it spread to other areas also. Another notable problem in the political front is the erosion of values in the institutions. The moral authority of the executives has been questioned repeatedly. Criminal activities in election are on the rise signifying crisis of confidence. Such political disorganisations have posed a major challenge to India’s polity.

Change in the cultural front:

Cultural identities in India are formed on the bases of religion, region and ethnicity. But except in respect of belief, forms of worship and rituals, there is little that is common among those follow a particular faith. Even on forms of worship and rituals there are great variations. Ethnic cultures are strong among the tribal groups. In fact the cultural mosaic of India is difficult to
discern and describe. In the country’s cultural landscape, regional cultures with their local variants stand out distinctly. The regional cultures have been influenced and brought up change by various other factors like Westernisation, emergent national cultural style and popular culture. (Bose, 1975: 143)

Chapter-III: The Karbis: The Karbis constitute one of the most important ethnic groups of Assam. Formerly known as the Mikirs, the Karbis prefer to be called as ‘Arlengs’ or hill dwellers. This is true only in case of the Karbis of the hills; the Karbis living in plains do not give much importance whether they are living in hills or in plains. Karbis are basically a hill tribe concentrating mainly in the Karbi-Anglong hill district. However, they are now distributed over a wider area covering both hills and plains from Sibsagar and Golaghat to Nagoan and Kamrup districts of Assam.

It is difficult to ascertain as to when and how this group of Karbis started their permanent settlement in the plains and in and around Guwahati, which has been a known urban centre since 17th century AD. There are various stories in circulation about their migration to this area most of which have no historical support. In their domestic life, the Karbis in the plains are very much similar to that of their Hindu neighbours to whom they are closely allied.

The Karbi concept of village is a simple one. Their village set-up has no impact of their clan system and no separate plots are reserved for clans neither their land holding pattern has any
reflection on their village set-up. In almost every Karbi villages, four sites are generally common. They are i) Than, – a sacred area where the village gods are believed to reside, ii) an open space around it which is usually chosen at the centre of the village. In this open space the "Khels" meet and other important events take place. The third area is the Sil Puta area where the memorial stone monuments are erected and slabs are set-up to commemorate the dead. In this place it is believed that the souls of the dead takes rest and the fourth is the place of Bangthai – the religious and political head of the village.

Most of the Karbi settlements in plains in Assam are now either gradually coming closer to urban centres or already within the grip of urban areas like in Guwahati. This has great impact on the housing pattern of the plain Karbis. A typical Karbi house is made of bamboo and thatch. But most of the Karbi houses in the localities under study have been gradually converted houses from thatch roofed to tin roofed or RCC. One notable feature of the Karbi houses is that one of the rooms adjacent to kitchen is called the Borghor (or the big house to mean that significant importance is attached to it although the room may not be a big one). Karbis of plains erect a post made of Xunaru tree (Cassia fistula) in this room performing specified ritual on a specified day. This is called the Nungpe-aarhi (Mudha Khuta).

Livelihood: Agriculture is the primary occupation of the Karbis living in plains of Assam and majority of them is orthodox
They usually raise common crops but they also cultivate other crops and vegetables as mixed crops. In Nagaon, in different areas they also grow sugarcane in sufficient quantities. In town areas, gradual shifting in the occupation from farm to non-farm sector has almost annihilated the primary sector.

**Food habits:** Although racially diverse, the Karbis of plains are geographically very close to the Assamese people and thus have abundant influence on their cuisine. Rice in various forms is traditionally eaten by the Karbis living in plains. Their diet also includes various other cereals such as dal & fresh vegetables, fish and nuts. But rice is the main item of food. Apart from the meals, the villagers also have a schedule for light refreshments.

The impact of urbanization on the plain Karbis in their food habit is enormous. In the villages under study, food habits have undergone drastic changes. Earlier they used to take rice prior to their leaving for paddy field, then again at noontime and finally in the evening; but now due to change of occupational pattern, their food intake has been reduced and they are now habituated in taking only two meals a day – one in the afternoon and the other at night. This has necessitated making a provision for breakfast in their food schedule.

**Material Culture:** The plain Karbis use several forms and types of material culture items, like any other community. These material cultural items are also decorated with various designs. They use
fishing basketries like that of Polo, been, laan, Jakoi luhi etc., cooking utensils like choroh, baling, storing buskets like duli, paching, konchor, etc. Making of the baskets are the favourite past time of the aged persons of the Karbis. They do not make these items for commercial use – but for their own household use only.

Clan Organisation: Like that of the hill Karbis, the plain Karbis also have several groups or clans, which they call Ghar or Gharia or sometimes Kur. They have classified themselves broadly into five groups or Gharias - these are Terang (or Terang gharia or Terang faid) Teron (or Teron Gharia), Ingti, Inghi, and Timung. Each of these five clans has many sub-clans. They follow the patriarchal system of family structure and the line of descent is traced through the male members only. Thus, every Karbi must belong to the clan of his or her father. These clans are completely exogamous and marriage between a boy and a girl belonging to the same clan is forbidden as they are considered brothers and sisters.

Family structure: A common a Karbi family consist of a father, a mother and their unmarried children, having a common hearth. The father is considered the head of the unit. The females take charge of the domestic chores and are entrusted with the family treasure. Males leave home and take part in different external activities whereas females are confined within the walls of home. Apart from the nuclear families, they also have the other larger family units which include other kins – who are agnatic and rarely affinal. Although among the Karbis, such joint family system is not very
common yet, it was prevalent among them in the past due to the lack of alternative sources of income except agriculture.

**Karbi marriage:**

For the Karbis, marriage is an important life time event and they attach great significance to it. Marriage is also a moment of great rejoice. As stated earlier, marriage is regulated by the prevailing exogamy rules of clan system which are imposed by the village Khels.

Child marriage is not prevalent among the Karbis. Girls are considered very important in the family and without their consent no marriage takes place.

The Karbi marriage system is complex but interesting. They talk about two types of marriages – 1) arranged marriage, and 2) marriage by kidnap or marriage by elopement. The latter two types of marriage can also be converted to arranged marriage if the Mel so orders. Arranged marriages are of two types. (a) Dangor or Bor-biya, (b) sewa choron biya / siyachoron biya, and (c) secret or confidential marriage performed in presence of close relatives that is why it is called ‘bapek make dekha raije nedekha biya’ or the marriage seen by only parents but not by villagers.

**Political life:**

The political structure of the plains Karbi society shares the features of both traditional and modern elements. They are today at least part of three administrative agencies in addition to their
traditional administrative set up. These agencies are the local police, local revenue authority and urban local body.

In rural areas, a Government appointed Gaon burha is made responsible for reporting all important happenings in the village. This village headman covers several adjacent villages. As such, he may not be a Karbi also.

**a) Khel system & the Mel**

The main body of the village political unit is called *Khel*. The system provides that members of each of the villages must be a member of a *Khel*. Each village has one prominent *khel* and usually the villagers are members of that *khel*. But some villagers may also opt out from their own village *khel* and join the *khel* of another village. The Khel organisation plays an important role in the day to day life of the plains Karbis. In the life cycle events, it is the khel that takes care of the whole proceedings.

Each *khel* has a small council that is similar like the executive body of a political unit. This small council comprises of five to six persons varies from village to village. The council is headed by the Bangthai – or the village priest. He is assisted by a *Riso Bangthai* (Bisar Dhara), Talukder, a *Kotowal*, *Oklengsar* and a Bharali etc. These posts are named differently in different villages. All the village disputes are settled in the village through social norms. The dispute may be either very grave or of serious nature and any person who is at fault is inflicted with punishment.
according to the gravity of the offence made. A Court, commonly
known as *Burha Mel* or *Mel* is called to settle such disputes which
sits in a common place usually in the *Than*. This *mel* is in a sense
exercises customary judicial power where the person committing
any offence is compelled to take oath in front of the *Mel* and say
the truth.

**The Modern Political Unit:**

The modern political elements are manifested through the
statutory Gaon Panchayats, in rural areas, Municipalites urban
areas and in Guwahati it is the Guwahati Municipal Corporation
(GMC).

**Religious beliefs:**

From the point of view of religion, the plain Karbis can
be regarded as animists. Hinduism in its crude form finds
manifestation in their worshipping of Gods, Goddesses and Deities
in their own way. They believe in the concepts of immortality of
soul, life hereafter and reincarnation. They believe the God as the
creator of this universe along with the innumerable deities, some of
whom are considered to be benevolent and some malevolent. Each
disease is associated with a presiding deity. For the appeasement
of deities, the plain Karbis observe many religious rituals
throughout the year when the sacrifice of pigs and fowls and use of
rice bear are indispensable. They also believe in witchcraft and
magic and divination.
Festivals of the Plain Karbis

The Karbis celebrate various festivals. Among these, some are traditional and some are adopted from the neighbouring Assamese community. Bihu is performed enthusiastically along with na- khuwa. Among the traditional festivals, Johong Puja and Dehal Puja, Ai Goxani Puja, Bhel Puja, etc are notable. All these pujas are performed to appease the concerning deities with a prayer for protection. Apart from these, the Karbis of plains also perform various pujas like Pagola- Pagoli puja, Amoti, Janmastami, Lakhi puja, Biswakarma Ganesh, saraswati puja, etc.

Languages and Literature:

So far as the Karbi language is concerned, it belongs to the great family of Indo- Chinese speech called Tibeto-Burman. Grierson’s Linguistic survey of India places it in the Naga-Boro sub group. It has also definite affinity with the Kuki- Chin group of languages. It must also be pointed out that there are considerable differences between the speech of the people living in the hills and those in the plains. An interesting feature of the language is that there are many words or expressions, which are used, only in literary, particularly poetic compositions and not in ordinary speech. Language is a part of culture. The plain Karbis speak their own dialect but when communicating with other people they speak in Assamese language. They do not have written dialect but are rich in oral literature.
Chapter – IV: Approaches to the study of Change:

Srinivas (1966) studied change through sanskritisation and westernisation process. For him, sanskritisation represents actual or aspired for cultural mobility within the framework of the established ‘great tradition’ and stratification system of caste. Westernisation on the other hand implies change resulting from cultural contact with the West. Sanskritisation "as the process by which ‘low caste or tribe or other group takes over customs rituals, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a twice born (dwija) caste. (67-68). Srinivas’ study was mainly based on caste and within his scheme, the tribal society is not clearly fitted although on many occasions, he clarifies that the scheme is equally valid for tribal society also.

Little and great traditions is another approach through which Redfield (1955) studied the change in Mexican society. He postulated that societies having deeper historical past and civilisation maturity has traditions one of elites or the reflective few and the other of the folk or the unlettered peasants. The former he called great and the latter, little traditions. There is however a constant interaction between the two levels of traditions.

The basic approach to which this study is concerned with is the structural change approach. The structural analysis is focused on the network of social relationship. Family, caste, kinship class occupational groups’ factory administrative structures comprise the
structural realities. Singh writes, “A structural analysis of change consist of demonstrating the qualitative nature of new adaptations in the patterned relationships, as when a joint family breaks and becomes nuclear, a caste group is transformed into a class group or when traditional charismatic leadership is replaced by leaders of popular choice etc.

**Approaches to the Present Study:**

The present study is a combination of partly the two cultural approaches and partly of the structural approach. In other words, the study adopted in principle the integrated approach as suggested by Singh (ibid) and attempts to study both orthogenetic and heterogenetic changes with reference to the process of sanskratisation from traditionalisation to modernisation of little tradition. Similarly, in the structural context both macro and micro structural changes have been analysed and attempted to gauge the spill over effect of the transformation of the macro structures.

**Politicization of Guwahati: Changes in Macro structure**

Politicisation of Guwahati began way back in 17th century when the city was under attack of Mughals. The city saw the invaders in Ahoms through, Koches, Mughals and British. The city saw the rise and fall of all the above mentioned kingdoms and rules. Here as we are concerned with the changes in the village segments under study, we are to trace the political growth of the city through the ages. The available records suggests that till the
late 20th century, the villages under study were outside the purview of the city and was not directly under any impact of the town life. The Constitution of India, although provided several political rights to its all citizen's irrespective of caste creeds religion, etc yet these are seldom exercised. The situation however has changed after the constitution of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation.

The Guwahati Municipal Corporation Act, 1969 provides for one councillor for each ward. There are at present 60 wards of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation. Provisions are made for the representation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The GMC has thus become the full-fledged local body and people are given abundant power to develop and administer their own local areas. For this, the Corporation was envisaged with power to take over land within the confines of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation with the intention of building markets, schools, playgrounds, parks, hospitals or for any other public purpose organize plans for the improvement of any area within the sphere of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation, issue trade licences for setting up of factories and business, take measure for Public safety and containment of nuisances etc.

Urbanisation of Guwahati: Change in Macro Structure

Despite having all the major characteristics of a city, Guwahati's urbanisation is not simply industry based. Industrialisation compared to many major towns of the country,
has not picked up in Guwahati. In fact, service sector and tertiary sector are two main contributors towards growth of Guwahati as urban centre. Therefore urbanisation in Guwahati bears some unique characteristics.

The total area of Guwahati Municipality is 813.76 hect. The population growth of the city during the period from 1891 to 1941 was steady. However, the increase was steep since 1951. Rapid urbanisation started since the later part of 1950s with the beginning of construction of Noonmati refinery and Saraighat Bridge. Migration of labourers from the nearby rural areas and also from outside the state added tremendously to the natural growth of population. The period between 1961-66 was significant for urban growth. It was the Third Five-year Plan period. The planners have realised the fact of rapid growth of urbanisation and the necessity to have attention on the urban affairs. The 1971 Census declared Guwahati as the Class I town with an area of 14.24 sq km (Census, 1971).

**Urban Infrastructures**

There has been a rapid growth of infrastructure in the city especially after the shifting of capital from Shillong. Road communication has developed tremendously. The city’s total road network covers approximately 725 kms. The total number of roads is 2270 and the number is rising with the enlargement of the city. Water and sanitation are two indivisible urban basic facilities. The
city so far has provided 22000 water supply connections. The city is directly connected with the rest of the country through rail, road and air. The inland Water transport is also operating between Guwahati and Kolkata, which is mainly, confined to goods transport services. Within the city movement from one place to another through the main arteries is very easier as city bus, auto rickshaw trekker; etc plies regularly on almost all the streets. The city has some historic open spaces such as Judges Field, Church field, new field Sonaram, field, Latasil Field etc. Similarly, there are also few children parks in the city. The core area of the city is comprised of the old city with Pan Bazaar, Palton Bazaar, Fancy Bazaar and Ujan Bazaar, each one facilitating unique urban activities.

Response to Urbanisation

The present study is typical and different from many other studies on change in the sense that this study is on a community which is not a migrant community from the rural areas rather original inhabitant of the urban locality under study. Occupational diversification as a result of urbanization is one of the reasons of alteration of the family structure – both by size and type. Reduction of the joint families to nuclear family has relaxed the kinship tie among the families and so also the traditional family norms and interpersonal relationship has become more formal.
Urbanisation also exerted tremendous impact on the division of work in the family. As there is no other adult members available domestic division of duties between husband and wife get changed – and they both have to share the domestic duties. Thus, social life in urban areas faces isolation due to diminishing kinship obligations. The urbanization has also broken down the compactness of their society. Due to the occupational diversification, they had to go out of the village and work in an environment where persons of various identities- tribe, caste and religion work. It is an environment, which demands individual achievement, which in turn generates status both in the place of occupation and in society. Thus the importance of ascription as the basis of social status declines and the significance of achievement takes place.

Chapter V: The Scheme of Structural Approach:

The basic attempt of this study is to examine the change in the micro-structures. In structural analysis, the main focus is on changes occurred in the patterned relationship by way of change in the traditional occupation and their resultant disassociation from traditional occupational obligation and secondly, the change in the family structure due to the break down in the joint family system. In the third place, it is examined if any trend could be observed which establishes break down in the clan endogamy rules and in the fourth place, it was attempted to examine, the changes occurred in the political and economic organisation.
Change in Traditional occupation

Among the Karbis of Guwahati, initially almost all the households possessed agricultural land either individually or jointly. After the death of the head of the family, land is usually divided between the sons. Rice is the most important crop raised by them and it is their staple food. During 1974, there were as many as 121 Karbi families having land of various categories in the villages under study. The average size of holding in the village was only 3.6 acres which is considered as small holding. With this size of holding, more than 85.13 percent (103 families) of the families were engaged in agriculture:

In 2005, while the fresh land records are under preparation for all the villages under study, the area of land used for agricultural purposes was found shrinking abruptly. Number of families still pursuing agricultural came down to only 13 with the size of average holding coming down to only 0.80 acres.

The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation 1886, is the primary legislation dealing with management of land has provision to protect the land belonging to the backward classes of people from being sold out. The objective behind this was to protect those classes of people who on account of their primitive conditions incapable of looking after their welfare in so far as such welfare depends upon their having sufficient land for their maintenance. The villages under study were under the tribal belt till 1969. In the
year 1969, in a major decision, the State Government decided to de-reserve as much as 1,29,202 bighas of land from tribal belt falling mainly within Guwahati. This proved to be crucial decision on three counts – it worked positively for the development of Guwahati and this led to shift of capital from Shillong later in 1972. But it impacted negatively in respect of the tribal populace inhabiting in the area.

**How Land came to the market:**

Immediately after the removal of tribal belt status of the lands in the year 1969, the land gradually started coming to market. The process was expedited by the shifting of capital in the year 1972 and further gained momentum just prior to the enactment of Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act 1976. During 1976 and 1977 highest numbers of land transfer deeds were registered covering 41B-3K-08L and 33B-2K-08L respectively.

**Family Structure:**

The presently prevailing tendency among the Karbis of Guwahati is to raise nuclear family. The Karbis in plains in general also has a tendency to go for nuclear families. In this study, majority of the families is also nuclear families. A detailed study was conducted to find out the origin of these nuclear families among the Karbis of plains in Guwahati and found that majority of the families are newly set up. On analysis it has been found that within a span of 25 years (from 1980 – 2005), as many as 152
nuclear families came into existence. This is quite a quick process and took place at a time (after 1980) when urbanisation process had already taken off in the city.

**Changes in the Central social functions of the family**

With the change in family’s physical structure, the functions and the role structure of the family in the day-to-day affairs has also changed. The primary function of a family is the perpetuation of the family line. This includes the procreation of children along with inducting the children into the basic social heritage and superintending their initial adjustment to the world in which they must live. In this regard, it was observed that there has been a considerable increase in the role of some outside agencies like Doctors, nurses, ANMs, and Hospitals. Till 1970’s there was no hospital in the vicinity of the Sorusojai area. But by 1980s there were two hospitals within the radius of 3-5 km from the villages. Today, the middle income earning Karbis begin their pregnancies with the advice of the Doctors.

When money economy takes over a pre-literate society, money makes inroad to that society in various ways. The availability of economic assistance to the salaried and self employed families from various sources and for various purposes has changed the dependency of the families on their kin groups. It helped them becoming individualistic. Various units today operate
in the Karbi villages, which save money on cooperative basis and advance the same on loan to the needy at nominal rate of interest.

The structural change in the family by way of progression from joint or extended to nuclear ones necessitates reduction of family size. As their basis of creation was economic, they attempt to fit everything within the scope of their available finance. In a preliterate society, people seldom consider the size of the family. Availability of farmland and capability to enhance production were two basic factors why people did not hesitate to raise more children. But the situation has changed drastically and the conditions necessary for raising a big family has been gradually becoming non-existent.

The Other Functional Changes:

Karbi families under study are gradually becoming more modern in using the facilities that the town life provides. In the process they have parted with several non-essential functions of families in favour of some external agencies, which specialise in their respective areas. For example, the traditional tasks of the households such as laundering have been partially shifted to the village washerman. The boys sometimes use dry cleaning of their specialised jeans, jackets. Saving is done in banks and the village cooperatives have their accounts in banks. The contractors and businessman in the villages use bank ATMs frequently and they like disclosing it to others. On certain religious and festive occasions such as marriage, name giving ceremony, etc, cooking is
done by non-Karbi hired cooks, and sometimes-even foods are procured from restaurants. The process advances still further as more and more families rely upon prepared and manufactured goods of consumption, upon text books and teachers and social workers for guidance and education and so on.

**Effect of Structural Change in Family: Change in Role activities:**

The change in the structure of the family leads to a drastic change in the role expectations in the family. As the basis of the creation of these families is mainly economic, change in the role has become inevitable. In the plains Karbi society members of a family or household have their well defined duty based in part on their age and their position in the family and in part on their sex. The Karbi men when works in the field women manage the house, care for the household, animals and sometimes market the surplus products like poultry and vegetables. But these roles are undergoing vast changes. Today the traditional role of following the custom of looking after the house is in direct contrast to the fact that a vast majority of women are now in full time employment outside the family.

So long as the wife remains a housewife, the situation more or less remains same in the nuclear family except that of the burden in the domestic front which gets enhanced for the wife due to the absence of any partner to share the works. But the problem occurs when she also goes to work. In such families roles of both partners
has to be readjusted and redistributed to suit the daily agenda of the family. In such circumstances husband’s various roles gets extended.

**Changes in the Marriage front:**

In Karbi society we have already seen that women are never forced to marry an unknown or objectionable person. If she dislikes, she can say “no” to the marriage and that has become final. Most good part of Karbi woman’s rights is that her parents do not have to give dowry as prevailing in Indian Hindu and other modern societies. Rather she and her parents have the privilege to seek dowry from boys’ parents as marriage expenses. Child marriage is discouraged and never happens in this society but widow marriage is allowed. The marital status of the villagers under the study reveals that 37.89 percent of the villagers are married while only 3.06 percent of the eligible persons did not marry. The study also found that mean age at marriage is considerably high among the plains Karbis which is 24.28.

**Decreased control of marriage contract:**

The marriage contract today is entered into more autonomously by both boys and girls. Although, finally the marriage is solemnised socially performing the necessary formalities, now a days the boys mostly make the choice and sends the parents to the prospective bride. Thus, today people are less subject to both parental and social control and other forms of social
pressure concerning whom and when they shall marry – the pressure is lightened especially for women on whom it had weighed most heavily. Today, frequent instances can be found where Karbi girls married to non-Karbis and vice versa. Such son-in-laws and daughter-in-laws are adopted to the society after purification.

**Relaxation in elaborate Arrangements**

The character of marriage contract has also been changed even more in fact than in outward form. The traditional marriage ceremony among the Karbis was based on the principle of female dominance and male obedience. But now choice of mate by mate and mutual determination of the relationship that binds them have gradually replaced the older one sided controls.

**Changing economic role of women:**

An important factor in bringing about the new character and outlook in women is the increasing degree of economic independence attained by girls. Many Karbi girls today are either actual or potential wage earners or professional workers. They of course, still far from possessing an equal economic status to that of men, but the trend is towards the equality. The economic independence so far achieved has significant results. Formerly, the young girls had no alternative beyond an early marriage or continued dependence upon and subjection to the parental home. Now she can earn her own living and thus gain a sense of
immediate independence which affects her whole attitude, gives her more power to choose when and whom she shall marry and even to decide in terms of her own life whether she shall marry or not.

**Clan Organisation**

In Karbi society, clan is significant as a reference group for all those who claim to be descendents of one common ancestor and their primary function to regulate marriage relationship. Karbi clans are neither totemic nor hierarchial. Today only the residue of the clan system has remained in their society. As a group, it has no role in social performances, and unlike hill Karbis, the clan members do not unite to discuss matters of common concern, like the views on any government policy, etc rather such matters are discussed in the *Mel*.

**Political organisation**

In case of Karbis of Plains, the *bangthai* who is positioned at the top of their traditional political organisation called "*Khel*" occupies this position of prestige and pre-eminence. But he is not the supreme authority -neither can he impose any order on anybody on his own. Till the sixties, the *Khel* system was very powerful in the villages. It decided almost all the problems of the villages including theft, burglary, physical assault, marriage by elopement or kidnap, etc. But since the mid seventies, the police prominence was gaining in the areas. Shifting of capital was the main ground why police vigil in the areas adjacent to the capital
complex was enhanced. Very soon, the villages have become a place of all communities on whom the village control do not work. This is how the police control reached village.

**Tracing the Transformation Path**

The development of communications and the extension of sanskritisation to innumerable groups have resulted in a radical transformation of traditional culture. Singh (1999) identified several structural pre requisites or developments for sanskritisation to take place. In the present analysis, mainly the religious and other closely associated aspects of the Karbis in plains have been covered and traced their transformation path and direction.

**Karbi-Religious performances: Impact of Hinduism**

The religious belief of the Karbis starts with the soul. They treat soul as the basic item of their belief. For them the nature of life in the land of dead is not different from that of the earth. They are essentially animistic and believe that at every new stage of an individual’s life and in their economic and social pursuits, they are threatened by unforeseen forces. To protect themselves from such unknown forces they offer Puja, etc, to the deities.

The hill Karbis do not have any special type of structure where they offer or perform the pujas. But the practice of plains Karbi, presents great deviation from this norm. In every Karbi village under study, there is a site called the *Than* where usually *Pujas* are offered. Apart from this place, in most of the Karbi...
villages it was found that, there is either a Lakshmi mandir (temple), or a Shiv mandir, where the pujas are offered regularly. In their religious life, impact of Hinduism is prominent.

**Change in Other Areas**

The deviations in the day-to-day life from the norms, establish the fact that people are gradually getting individualistic and this is the direct impact of urbanisation. Their inclination towards the dominant culture pattern becoming more and more prominent with the observance of Bihu, *Na khuwa*, etc regularly. There has been much transformation in the dress of both the sexes during the last three decades. The food habits of the karbis have undergone great changes in recent times. With the change in occupation from agriculture to service type, they are now habituated in taking two meals a day along with a break fast and an evening tea.

**CONCLUSION:**

Social anthropology has achieved a lot by studying the rural and the indigenous societies of primitive nature. A lot has yet to be done on this count. But time is ripe that anthropologists also parallely expand its wings to cover studying the complexities of an urban society and to understand behaviour pattern of an urban society. The area has almost remained unexplored especially in the Northeast. It is an extremely necessity and anthropologists must come forward.
The present attempt of studying the Karbis living in plains especially of Guwahati is a little attempt in this direction. Karbis are a simple and non-aggressive tribe. Their social structure is simple and based on the norms of nuclear family. The study of urban Karbis however exposed the fact that till three decades back they followed joint family norms for economic reasons like meeting the essential demands of labour in the agricultural fields, shortage of land in urban localities, etc. But urban development strategy had pushed this small community to a situation where they were forced to leave their paddy fields. Urban development always leads to expansion of money and marked based economy, which eats up the primary sector bit by bit. The basic input of the primary sector i.e. land also is the basic requirement of urban growth. This requirement is generated by the need to expand the infrastructural facilities, and housing requirements and other urban amenities. In this tug-of war between the primary sector requirements and that of the requirement of urban development sector, wins the latter.

It was a historic situation. A plot of land which bourn no demand or value suddenly accrued a price that this simple tribal people hardly could imagine. A cash starved pesantry in a money economy could hardly overpower the temptation to acquire money alienating the land. So the land came to the market very easily. The outcome of this exercise was devastating for the community. First, they become landless and occupationless; secondaly, they had enough money but no idea how to spend that effectively; thirdly, a major part of the money received by vendaring the land was
wasted in spending for domestic consumption and finally, whatever amount was invested mostly lead to loss.

Under this backdrop, there was none who would help these people as to what to do and what not to do. There were few who gained from this situation and they become rich. This divided the villagers into classes. The poor become poorer. The present study begins here.

Urbanisation of Guwahati took its own progressive path. The villagers took part in it manning mainly the lowest stratum of the work force i.e wage-earning labour. This shift in the occupational pattern was inevitable in the face of large-scale alienation of land and attraction towards cash wages. With this loss of their traditional livelihood and habitat, they underwent changes in their way of life and social structure. Family structure changed and along with it changed the role responsibilities. The changes in the cultural side have become more inclined towards the neighbouring Assamese community. In fact, there was an intention to merge to this dominant cultural pattern. Change in the marriage institution took place in tune with the Assamese marriage system. The significant fact is that Karbis started worshipping of Hindu God and Goddess although it was done in their own way. Construction of temples for Shiva, Lakshmi, offering Puja to them all have impact of the neighbouring brahmanical people. This sufficiently indicates that Hindu religious ideas have penetrated into their culture and it is a continuing process. All these changes have however not led them to any well off position especially because of
their backwardness in the educational front. Education has not penetrated into the society at desired strength.

Social Change: The Direction

The Karbis of Guwahati today are on a transitional phase. Urban impact on the community is very deep and obvious and it is inevitable too, especially because of their migration from traditional occupation to cash yielding jobs in the non-farm sector. The most striking is the fact of abrupt annihilation of agricultural fields by way of alienation for the purpose of using the same for non-farm purposes. It is difficult to trace where actually the change had began. But the change that was brought about by the occupational mobility is undoubtedly offensive to their traditional values. Other cultural changes took place silently and with prolonged intervention. For example religious inclination towards Hinduism was the result of cultural contact and so also certain rites and rituals and festivals.

When money economy is the prevailing myth, their movement towards tertiary sector is positive in direction. But the fact is that, this change came suddenly and they were not ready for it. They are not well equipped to manoeuvre effectively the requirement of time. Lack of skill remained as hindrance to getting well paid jobs which resulted from their low level of literacy. The initial attraction towards the lower level cash paid jobs, resulted in large-scale school drop out. That phase now appears to be over as
the parents, right from the lowest economic strata are taking personal care of sending their wards to schools. Some have put their sons and daughters in English medium schools. All these have created an atmosphere where schooling of children given the highest priority. If this trend continues, there is hope for a bright future.

**The New Problem: Problem of Identity**

The current most alarming issue that has been prominently discussed in various platforms including the various community festivals is their feeling of deprivation. Despite possessing the necessary characteristics of a tribe, they have not been scheduled as yet. This is one of the major reasons why they feel deprived of. They believe that existing policy of Government towards the plains Karbis is not in conformity with the tribal policy of the Government. The denial of the scheduled tribe status which has been accounted to the problems that they are reeling under, has led to the growth of a sense of deprivation, alienation, of being victim of injustice and discontentment which in the recent past have assumed certain organized effort with potentially severe political implication. The issue of special status to the plains Karbis have so far found no taker in the concerned circle not even among the policy makers. Neighbouring common people share their sentiments silently. The situation is gradually aggravating - no doubt. In order to reaffirm their distinctiveness, they have strengthened the base of *Bhaiyam Karbi Adorbar* (an association of Plains Karbis), Karbi *Bangthai, Axom* (an association of Plains
Karbi Heads). They have also adopted a separate symbol for them called Nungpe-aarhi different from the Hill Karbis Jambili Aathon.

All these speak about the growing discontentment among the plain Karbis and the manifestation of a parallel trend toward a separate identity assertion. It is here that an intervention is necessary - an intervention that eases the mounting tension and raise hopes among the marginalised section.

This social research on the Karbis of plains has opened up a new window on how a traditional tribe copes up with a new alien situation and finds out strategies for their survival. The theories of structural changes which have been used as tools in this study do not appear to have any specific answers to the trends of change. However, all along the study, these theories have provided direction and illuminated the approach depending on which progress has been made. The information obtained from the field investigation adds significantly to the database on the material culture of the Karbis of plains. It is hoped that the findings reported here would be useful to large research groups. Future researches might focus more deeply on how Karbis and other equally placed tribes or communities set up their survival mechanism in critical situation and at what cost. Where and to what extent they need Government intervention to maintain a stable path along the inevitable course of change.