CHAPTER – II

SOCIAL CHANGE AND TRADITIONAL INDIAN SOCIETY
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2.1: Social Change: An Introduction

Kuppuswami (2004: 37) describes social change, as a process in which there is discernible significant alteration in the structure and functioning of a particular system. Change therefore implies some difference through time in the object under study. It has earlier been stated that in its 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. 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. Lundberg (1963: 675) defines social change as modifications in established patterns of interhuman relationships and standards of conduct. Since the mid twentieth century, studies on social change gathered momentum. A series of theoretical approaches were propounded taking cue from the changes taken place in various traditional societies, which were under various stages of transformation. A brief discussion of these theories would make a sound base of this research.
2.2: Theories of social change:

In the succeeding paragraphs, various theories of social change which have some relevance to this study have been briefly discussed. In order to have knowledge about the theoretical works done in the field of social change, it is attempted to summarise various theories of social change in this chapter. The theories can broadly be divided into sociological theories and cultural or anthropological theories. Leaving apart the basic approaches on structure of a society where the two disciplines differ, the sociological theories also have great relevance to this study.

2.2.1: Sociological theories of Social Change:

Although many social scientists like Marx (1848), Toynbee, (1966), Comte (1896) and Spencer (1872) had developed different versions of social change theories, it was not until the late 19th century that in-depth study on change was undertaken and principles were laid down.

The Theories related to social changes can be roughly divided into periods during which different schools of theoretical thought tended to be dominant:

i) From the late Nineteenth/early Twentieth Century until the 1920s, the period of 'Social Darwinism', early evolutionary theory, which was functionalist in its perspective, was a dominant school of thought.
ii) The period between 1940s - 1960s was the era of 'Structural Functionalism' (Parsons, Spencer, Durkheim and Comte).

iii) By the mid-1960s (1960s - 1980s), Marxism, Weberian sociology, Feminism and Symbolic Interactionism were dominant.

iv) Most recently, Post-Modernism (also called Post-Structuralism) has tended to dominate sociological thinking.

This division is of course not absolute in that, different schools of sociological thought agreed with, disagreed with, borrowed and rejected aspects of each other's premises. Even within the different schools of thought, there is acceptance and rejection of other proponents' ideas.

(a) Early Evolutionary Theory

This theory of social change was based on the assumption that all societies develop from simple, 'small-scale' beginnings into more complex industrial and post-industrial societies. This development process was thought to be unilinear, that is, there was one line of development from simple to complex. It also assumed that the changes inherent in this development were all 'progress'. This theory emerged around the time when Charles Darwin was publishing his theories on the origin of species, highlighting the fact that biological species evolved from the simple to the complex and that there was 'survival of the fittest'. Evolutionary theorists applied these ideas to societies - a concept which fitted very
comfortably with this colonial era when Britain and other colonising countries were heavily involved in bringing their "superior" advanced form of society to more "primitive" societies, in exchange for their raw materials, trade goods, etc. Ethnocentrism was rife during this period and early evolutionary theorists reflected the prevailing ideology, legitimising, through their theoretical explanation of social change, the political and economic ambitions of the colonial powers. Early evolutionary theory described change, rather than explained it and ignored the various patterns of development, which were occurring, in reality, as diverse as the countries themselves.

While Early Evolutionary Theory became discredited once anthropological data was published describing the diversity of change in modernising societies, Modern Evolutionary Theory still exists. This more updated version sees socio-cultural evolution as the tendency for social structures to become more complex over time. It also acknowledges that this process is multilinear and that change occurs in different ways and at different rates. Modern Evolutionary Theory concedes that change is not always necessarily progressive, and that it will not inevitably produce greater happiness for all the people concerned. Unlike Early Evolutionary Theory, Modern Evolutionary Theory does attempt to explain change, arguing 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. This leads to improved living...
standards, population growth, cultural diversity and further development.

Neither evolutionary theory nor the modern evolutionary theory has provided any clue as to where actually the change starts and how the progressiveness is to be measured. It is a fact that under the external influence, change takes place at various domains of a society; but these entirely not always affects the basic structure of the society. This theory therefore would not help explaining the change that the present study has observed where we are interested to know where actually the change had started and how it affected the basic structure of the society.

(b) **Functionalist Theory**

Functionalist Theory is also called Structural Functionalism. Functionalist theory assumes, on the whole, that as societies develop, they become increasingly more complex and interdependent. Structural-functionalism drew its inspiration primarily from the ideas of Emile Durkheim (1971), Bronislaw Malinowski (1947) and Radcliffe-Brown (1952). Durkheim was concerned with the question how societies maintain internal stability and survive over time. He sought to explain social cohesion and stability through the concept of solidarity. In "primitive" societies it was mechanical solidarity, the fact that everybody performed similar tasks contributed in holding society together. Durkheim (ibid) proposed that such societies tend to be segmentary, being composed of equivalent parts that are held
together by shared values, common symbols, or, as his nephew Mauss (2006) held, 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. He espoused a strong sociological perspective of society which was continued by Radcliffe-Brown, who, following Auguste Comte, believed that the society is constituted of a separate “level” of reality distinct from both the biological and from inorganic matter. Explanations of social phenomena therefore had to be constructed within this social level, with individuals merely being transient occupants of comparatively stable social roles.

Radcliffe-Brown (ibid) 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. Consequently, he proposed that most stateless “primitive” societies that lack strong centralised institutions or government are based on an association of such corporate descent groups. 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 (Barnard, 2000; Layton, 1997; Kuper, 1988).
The central concern of structural-functionalism was a continuation of the Durkheimian task of explaining the apparent stability and internal cohesion of societies, which are necessary to ensure its continued existence over time. Societies are seen as coherent, bounded and fundamentally relational constructs, who function like organisms, with their various parts (social institutions) working together to maintain and reproduce them. The various parts of society are assumed to work in an unconscious, quasi-automatic fashion towards the maintenance of the overall social equilibrium. All social and cultural phenomena are therefore seen as being functional in the sense of working together to achieve this state and are effectively deemed to have a "life" of their own. They are then primarily analysed in terms of this function they play. Individuals are significant not in and of themselves but in terms of their status, their position in patterns of social relations, and their role, the behaviour(s) associated with their status. The social structure is then the network of statuses connected by associated roles (cf. Layton, 1997:37-38).

The purpose of the structural functionalist was to explain how the society remains at different equilibrium points at different point of time through the roles and functions performed by its organs. As the purpose of the present research is to trace the path of change in social system of a traditional society, the theory serves the purpose only partially. But as there is no tool to measure the equilibrium achieved, if any, by the society at different points of
time, the core purpose of the present study shall not finally be answered and the study would have to remain content only in analysing the path of change.

(c) **Structural Functionalism and Unilineal Descent**

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 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. Corporate groups are characterised by common purposes, such as administering property or defending against attacks; they form a permanent social structure that persists well beyond the lifespan of their members. In the case of the Tallensi and the Nuer, these corporate groups were based on kinship, or more specifically, on unilineal descent; consequently Evans-Pritchard's and Fortes' model is called "descent theory". Moreover, in this African context, territorial divisions were aligned with lineages; descent theory therefore synthesised both blood and soil as two sides of one coin (c.f. Kuper, 1988:195). Affinal ties with the parent through whom descent is not reckoned, however, are considered to be merely complementary or secondary (Fortes created the concept of "complimentary affiliation"), with the
reckoning of kinship through descent being considered the primary organising force of social systems. Because of its strong emphasis on unilineal descent, this new kinship theory came to be called "descent theory".

Before long, descent theory had found its critics. Many African tribal societies seemed to fit this neat model rather well, although Africanists, such as Richards, also argued that Fortes and Evans-Pritchard had deliberately downplayed internal contradictions and overemphasised the stability of the local lineage systems and their significance for the organisation of society (cf. Kuper, 1988:196, 205-6). However, in many Asian settings the problems were even more obvious. In Papua New Guinea, the local patrilineal descent groups were fragmented and contained large amounts of non-agnates. Status distinctions did not depend on descent, and genealogies were too short to account for social solidarity through identification with a common ancestor. In particular, the phenomenon of cognatic (or bilateral) kinship posed a serious problem to the proposition that descent groups are the primary element behind the social structures of "primitive" societies.

Leach's (1966) critique came in the form of the classical Malinowskian argument, pointing out that "in Evans-Pritchard's studies of the Nuer and also in Fortes's studies of the Tallensi unilineal descent turns out to be largely an ideal concept to which the empirical facts are only adapted by means of fictions."
People’s self-interest, manoeuvring, manipulation and competition had been ignored. Moreover, descent theory neglected the significance of marriage and affinal ties, which were emphasised by Levi-Strauss’ (1968) structural anthropology, at the expense of overemphasising the role of descent. To quote Leach: “The evident importance attached to matrilateral and affinal kinship connections is not so much explained as explained away.” (ibid.).

The unilineal decent theory would not hold good in respect of Karbis of plains as their decent group is fragmented and even the clans have insignificant impact of its function on the society as a whole. The Karbi clans are not status based and are identified only in terms of marriage.

(d) Conflict Theory

Marxism (Marx and Engels, 1973: 32) also saw itself as offering a ‘scientific account’ of change but, in opposition to Functionalism, this 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, for example, from feudalism to capitalism or from capitalism to socialism. Marxists
believed that social order was maintained through socialisation, education and ideology. Thus, control is maintained to suit the vested interests of powerful groups and as the interests of these groups change, so does society. Change is therefore ongoing until crisis point is reached and transformation occurs. While Marx focused on class conflict specifically, modern conflict theorists have broadened their explanation of change to social conflict generally. While Conflict Theory is useful in explaining significant events in history and ongoing changing patterns of race and gender relations, it struggles to adequately explain the dramatic impact of technological development on society or the changes to family organisation.

Marx's theory speaks about three basic points namely; that the society preserves within it the force of change, the saturation point, and finally the revolutionary change. The present study and various empirical studies on traditional societies establish Marx's first contention. But it is difficult to fix and determine or identify the saturation point — in fact without reaching the saturation point, gradually the change occurs and finally the contention of revolutionary change which is not visible always as in the present study. Thus, the conflict theory also does not provide any answer to the present study.

(e) Post-Modernist Social Theory (also called Post-Structuralism)

Post-Modernism argues 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. For Post-Modernists, there are many ‘knowledges’ and ‘ways of knowing’, multiple sets of moral rules and ethics, which people in society tap into at their local level. Authority structures may attempt to assert their knowledge and way of doing things, but they do this, not from any intellectual or moral authority, but through political strategies of coercion (ridicule, exclusion), leading to the use of their definition of ‘normal’ to define what is ‘abnormal’. At the micro-level, the out-group is defined by definition of the in-group. Micro power is located within institutions, which use language and practices to control people. Post-Modernists view society, therefore, not as a total system but as an aggregation of fragments. They see post-modern society as the next phase after modern, post-industrial society, so in this sense Post-Modernists are viewing social change in terms of stages that societies go through. In terms of social theory, they confine their analysis to post-industrial societies and rarely attempt to analyse the whole of society, preferring to focus on its component parts, such as institutions like the family, prisons, hospitals, etc.

Recent social theorists, for example, Anthony Giddens (1990), see a crucial distinction between pre-modern and modern societies based on men’s dependence on increasingly complex and extended social relationships. These rely on ‘expert systems’ with
which people have no face-to-face relationship. In the past, people relied on, or were dependent on, the people with whom they had the closest relationships, for example, spouses, family, etc. In modern society, however people are increasingly becoming independent within traditional relationships (for example, women pursuing a career path concurrently with their husbands) while becoming increasingly dependent on people with whom they have no relationship (for example, when we catch a plane, we are dependent on the 'expertise' of pilots, ground crews, traffic controllers, etc.)

Other recent social theory focuses on forms of collective behaviour as a force for change. While this discussion isn't necessarily formalised as social theory, it is perhaps worthwhile to look at the role of social movements in the change process. For this purpose, "social movement" is defined as a large number of people who come together as part of an organised effort to bring about, or resist, social change. Institutionalised forms of political action are usually important to these groups in the achievement of their goals. There are several types of these movements, ranging from Reformist or Revolutionary groups, through to Reactionary movements (resisting change rather than working towards change). Study of social movements has ranged from micro-level studies, which examine the motives and aspirations of individuals within these movements, to organisational-level studies.
Resource Mobilisation Theory argues that a social movement cannot be sustained simply by discontent with existing structures. The social movement must manipulate discontent and efficiently manage it through the aggregation and distribution of resources (money and labour). For a social movement to succeed there must be an adequate resource base. This can come from participants directly or ‘sponsors’- people or groups outside the social movement who may be sympathetic to the ‘cause’ (conscience supporters), share common goals with the social group, or have a vested interest in the social movement’s success. The social movement must have organisers who can garner this resource support and organise the participants and their activities, utilising existing social infrastructure to achieve the goals of the movement. Resource Mobilisation Theory emphasises the interaction between resource availability, the goal preferences of the movement and the entrepreneurial activities of the organisers in mobilising participants and supporters.

A central fact of recent social theories is the movement away from overarching, ‘grand’ theory towards the partial, the fragmented. It has been, and still is, problematic to try and construct theories which attempt to explain everything - the relationship between social change and all aspects of society.

The ‘grand theories’ of the past arose out of the ideologies of their periods - it may be said in the future that ‘fragmentation’ theories like Post-Modernism have come out of what is
increasingly becoming the ‘me’ era. Social theories are not instruments or tools by which people can examine societies and cultures; they are themselves ‘culture’, the products of the life experiences and locations and cultural milieu of their proponents. They rely on perspectives, they are open-ended; they are metaphors for societies (Beilharz: 1892). Nevertheless, social theory is important because it attempts to address the human condition in change. Theories generalise, but this does not mean that they should totalise or systematise. Social theory offers a way of operating the world, helping us clarify norms and values, political and economic understanding and the relationships of these things.

(f) The Theory of Structuration, proposed by Anthony Giddens (1984) in the Constitution of Society, (mentioned also in Central Problems of Social Theory, 1977) 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.

Calling his theory a non-functionalist manifesto, Giddens (ibid) argued that any theory that treats social system as ends in themselves is invalid. He raises the questions – “Is society made up of the sum of individual actions? Or, is society more than the sum of these actions and is there a social structure that is independent of individual’s actions?” Reflexivity is an important component of Gidden’s theory by which he explains how the actors of the society change the system. “…..it is the regular use of knowledge which institutions and individuals continuously collect and apply to organise and change society.” (ibid: 13) Reflexivity has been defined as an unconscious self, which determines the activity of a person. All other things of the life are either done logically or in a practical way but some of the activities, which are inner part of the self, get their reflection in the activities of the actor. The reflexivity is the inner design of the actor and in the known routine behaviour; he allows his reflexivity to come out.

Discursive consciousness or logical consciousness is different from practical level consciousness, which includes knowledge we cannot immediately account for. A discursive explanation implies that we explicitly express how we travel in a city bus - first queuing for the appropriate bus – then getting up and then getting down in the appropriate station. By highlighting the knowledge of the agent, Giddens emphasizes that system and
structures do not act behind the actor. “Actually the discursive reflexivity in an action gives us the opportunity to change our patterns of action.” (ibid: 16).

Gidden’s non-functionalists manifesto indeed explains the role of individual action in changing a society. His attempt was to say that collection of individual actions is accountable for any change in the society. Despite having its tremendous theoretical value, the theory has little practical value as it is difficult for a researcher studying social change to observe all individual actions and compile to obtain a desired result. The theory therefore has not been taken up for this study.

2.2.2: 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. The response of the latter may be slow and it may result in “cultural lag”. He cited the example of that in the early phase of industrialisation; factories employ machines, technical resources, etc. to attain mass production. The workers in factories however may not readily get the benefit of job security, social welfare measures, etc. They may have to wait for years. In other words technical efficiency is given a high priority, while human welfare is neglected. Likewise improved methods of agriculture may be introduced into traditional society, which does
not take to the new methods quite easily. Social change may also occur out of the change in non-material factors.

Toynbee (1966) observes two basic elements viz., challenge and response, which create, generate and finally destroy civilisations. These elements interact reciprocally. The natural and geographic environment and the social environment present challenges and require response. However, since each interactional pattern of challenges and response is different, each culture or civilisation has distinctiveness of its own.

In the past, the character of these challenges determined the way these civilisations developed: some remained simple while others became complex. A complex civilisation creates more and more challenges because of its environment. Conflict between the rulers and ruled is a common occurrence when there is a "lack of fit" between challenge and response. In regard to the future society, Toynbee (ibid) predicted the disappearance of distinctions between East and West by 4047 AD as a result of further scientific developments.

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. In fact, historians may not accept this sequence.

These cultural theories undoubtedly have various shortcomings. Ogburn’s (op. cit) theory is deterministic and is confined mainly to the Western hemisphere. Technology is not the product of modern west alone. Even the ancient civilisation had well developed technology in some spheres of life. Toynbee’s interpretation is imaginative. The actual current of history may not necessarily go in accordance with his ideas. Sorokin’s theory tends to ignore the material basis of society.

2.3: Application of Social theories on Change in India

The foregoing discussion on each of the social theory followed a brief note on its applicability to the present study. Few of the theories discussed above have partial applicability 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 made to fit 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 common
element of both these studies has been their sticking into the historical perspectives and identifying the tradition of Indian society while attempting to explain the change. It would therefore be customary to have a discussion on the Indian tradition and its change through the ages.

2.4: 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 society (Singh, 1999: 191). This underlines the necessity to study the tradition of a society. The tradition of a society in India is essentially a sub-set of the Indian social tradition. Thus, an understanding of the social tradition of a micro society would entail knowledge about Indian social tradition. Various authors have studied Indian social tradition from various angles. Singh (ibid) has identified three major streams of traditions in Indian society i.e. Hindu, Muslim and Tribal. The whole of Indian social phenomena and realities get their manifestations in these three streams of traditions. In the following paragraphs a brief discussion is made on each of these traditions.

2.4.1: The 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) Social hierarchy

India is a hierarchical society. Whether in north India or in 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. Societal hierarchy is evident in caste groups, amongst individuals, and in family and kinship groups. Castes are primarily associated with Hinduism, but caste-like groups also exist among Muslims, Indian, Christians, and other religious communities. Within most villages or towns, everyone knows the relative rankings of each locally represented caste, and behaviour is constantly shaped by this knowledge.

Similarly, occupations have a social hierarchy. No person would like to do what a person below his rank is expected to do because the occupation is associated with birth. Even conquest and political supremacy does not affect the social hierarchy. Individuals are also ranked according to their wealth and power. For example, some powerful people, or “big men,” sit confidently on chairs, while “little men” come before them to make requests, either standing or squatting not presuming to sit beside a man of high status as an equal. Hierarchy plays an important role within families and kinship groupings also, where men outrank women of similar age, and senior relatives outrank junior relatives. The older person is respected and younger persons are expected to show due respect to the older. The wife is expected to obey the husband and
the child should obey the parents, the pupil should obey the teacher, the citizen in the village should obey the chief man.

(b) Holism

Holism, yet another aspect of Hindu tradition is manifested in the relationship between individual and group. The individual in Hindu society is not autonomous. He is constrained to abide by the norms and values of the society. It is 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 is subordinate to the caste, village and religious congregations. If the individual violated the sangha or caste and village traditions he is subjected to severe sanctions – excommunicated, exiled or penalised. “The principle of holism, which is subsumed in the notion of hierarchy is maintained through a series of value propositions which though apparently contradictory are yet reconciled together in the higher order of cultural symbolism.” (Singh, 1999).

(c) Karma:

The “Law of Karma” is central in Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism (religions born in Nepal and India). All living creatures are responsible for their karma - their actions and the effects of their actions - and for their release from samsara. As a term, it can be traced back to the early Upanishads. Karma literally means “deed” or “act” and more broadly names the
universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction, which
governs all life. *Karma* is not fate, for man acts with free will creating his own destiny. According to the *Vedas*, if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. *Karma* refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determines our future. The conquest of *karma* lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction. Not all *karma* rebounds immediately. Some accumulates and returns unexpectedly in this or other births.

It is considered to be a spiritually originated law that cannot be abrogated by any person but can be mitigated by God in Hinduism. *Karma* is not punishment or retribution, but simply an extended expression of natural acts. The effects experienced are also able to be mitigated by actions and are not necessarily fateful. That is to say, a particular action now doesn't bind one to some particular, pre-determined future experience or reaction; it's not a simple, one-to-one correspondence of reward / punishment.

The doctrine of *Karma* by itself enunciates only the principle of the moral responsibility of man for his/her own deeds. His action lead to certain consequences and so he / she should be aware of this when he/ she acts. There is yet another link between the doctrine of *karma* and the idea of hell. The evil man is assumed to suffer for the consequences for his evil deeds by having to go to hell after death.
(d) Transcendence

Yogendra Singh (1999) 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.” 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. Legitimacy of caste system, superiority of collectivity, the village panchayats / councils are never questioned. In fact, the question of rationality is never to be raised.

2.4.2: The Islamic tradition:

The Islamic traditions are different from Hindu traditions. The traditions of Islam are revealed in its history. 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 *Quran* and or *Sunna*, the Hadith and the Shariya.
The conception of nation in the territorial sense is non-existent in Quran. Quran only speaks of one nation of believers – the *millet*. The holistic principle, which is embodied in the notions of *umma* and *millat*, has unlike in the Hindu tradition a radical egalitarian connotation. The kind of holism which characterizes Islam makes it quite assertive and an exclusive religion. It makes it clear as to who belongs to the community of the *millat*, i.e. faithful and who is outside it. The faithful are declared as *Darul Islam* and those outside are called *Darul Harb*. The Islam if necessary can declare jihad against those who belong to *Darul Harb*.

2.4.3: The Tribal tradition:

K.S. Singh (2002) in his People of India recorded as many as 4635 ethnic communities in India all having some types of caste, sub groups, clan, *moiety*. India is indeed a multi ethnic, multi caste, multi linguistic and, multi cultural society. 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.

Anthropologically tribes are a ‘completely organised society’ i.e. a self-perpetuating system having within its boundaries all the resources necessary for continued maintenance of a
particular collective existence. The tribe is in this sense a whole society and a whole culture. Each tribe has its own territory, which means that it is politically autonomous, whether or not it is politically organised. It also has its own language or dialect, which is the mark of its distinctive culture (Beteille, 1987:78)

The distinctive condition of the tribe in India has been its isolation, mainly in the interior hills and plains but also in the forest region. By and large the tribal communities are those, which are left behind in these ecological niches or pushed back into them in course of expansion of state and civilisation. Their material culture and their social organisation have largely been related to the ecological niches in which they have lived their isolated lives.

The value component in the tribal society is rooted in its religion. They are animistic and have no faith on Hindu value of Mokshya, salvation. They also do not believe in the concepts of heaven and hell. The People of India projects have shown that most of the animist tribes have recorded themselves as Hindus. There are also tribes which follow an amalgamation of more than one religion e.g., animism and Hinduism, animism and Christianity, etc. But almost all of them are ancestors’ worshipers except those who are fully converted to Christianity.

2.5: Tradition as analysed by D.P Mukherjee:

Mukherjee (1942) analysed Indian society from the Marxian perspectives of dialectical materialism. For him there is dialectical
relation between India’s tradition and modernity. His concept of dialectics was anchored in liberal humanism. For him traditions are central to the understanding of Indian society. The encounter of tradition and modernisation created certain cultural contradictions, adaptations and in some cases situate of conflict also. He concludes that Indian society is the result of the interaction between tradition and modernity. It is this dialectics, which help us to analyse the Indian society. He writes, “As a social and historical process ..... Indian culture represents certain common traditions that have given rise to a number of general attitudes. The major influences in their shaping have been Buddhism, Islam and Western commerce and culture. It was through the assimilation and conflict of such varying forces that Indian culture became what it is today; neither Hindu nor Islamic, neither a replica of the western mode of living and thought nor a purely Asiatic product.”(ibid: 76).

He tried to provide a classification of Indian tradition under three heads namely primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary traditions have been primordial and authentic to Indian society. The secondary traditions were given second ranking when the Muslims arrived in the country; and by the time of the arrival of the British, the Hindus and Muslims had not yet achieved a full synthesis of traditions at all levels of social existence. There was a greater measure of agreement between them regarding utilisation of natural resources and to a lesser extent in respect of aesthetic and religious traditions. In the tertiary traditions of conceptual thought, however differences survived prominently.
Criticising Mukherjee, Madan (1994) argues, that the general make up of Indian tradition as stated by Mukheijee could be a synthesis of Vedanta, western liberalisation and Marxism. But what about syntheses of Islam and Buddhism? He fails to provide any such of other major traditions.

2.6: Srinivas’ understanding of tradition:

For Srinivas, it is the village, which retains the traditional components of India’s tradition. According to him the traditions of Indian society are found among the high castes. He narrates that the tradition, rituals and beliefs shared by the Brahmins, the Baniyas and the Rajputs constitute Indian traditions and the beliefs of the lower section of the society, the untouchables and the tribal do not have any status as tradition. Obviously, Srinivas anchors tradition into sanskritisation. His main interest was on caste. He considered caste as the structural basis of Hinduism. Thus, his contention was that, Indian traditions are Hindu traditions and Hindu traditions are found in caste system. Holistic Hinduism is beyond his scope of discourse. (Doshi, 2006: 115) Apart from caste, Srinivas used the terms ‘dominant caste’ which represent another source of tradition. He noted that dominant caste could be a local source of sanskritisation, or a barrier to its spread. Sanskritisation and dominant caste therefore representing of Indian tradition.
2.7: 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. India has witnessed massive changes in the field of social stratification. There have been noticeable changes in the caste system and at the same time there has also emerged class system, which cuts across caste, religion and region.

2.7.1: Changes in the Religious front:

Hinduism is often referred to as sanatana dharma means religion with unbroken continuity from the past to the present. In 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. Poets like Chokha Mela, Eknath, Kabir, Tukaram Raidas, Ramanand, etc. were critiques of the iniquities and injustices of the social order and sought to remove intermediaries between the worshipper and God. Rural people were greatly influenced by the teachings of these saints. There are some strong sects who follow their teachings faithfully; but even those not formally initiated have not remained uninfluenced by them (Dube, 1990:107). 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 has not yet been assessed how far they have got the benefits of this. The blacksmiths have changed their names to Biswakarma, Barbars to Shreewas, tailors to Namdeo and Valmiki for garbage collectors. Some scheduled castes groups have stopped eating meat, even vegetables that have resemblance to meat such as brinjals, carrot, tomato, etc and also drinking. Despite all these, they did not gain an upper jati status and remained as scheduled caste.

2.7.2: Changes in the Economic front:

Although not well developed, India had a large agricultural and cottage industry sector prior to independence. There were apparently three classes of persons involved in agriculture 1) some were peasant proprietors, tenant cultivators, agricultural labourers. There were two or three tier feudal aristocracy above them. The conditions of the agricultural labourers were pathetic. Tenants were slightly better off then but they were in fear of losing their tenancy at any time. The village landlords and Zaminders were notorious for their ruthlessness and because of their links with government officials they could get away with excess and atrocities they commit (ibid: 109). After independence of India the 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 class. Vinoba Bhave's (1895-1982) experiment with Bhoodan and Gramdan proved to be a utopian dream. The landless farmers either got no land or were given barren lands, which they could not improve due to their poor resource base. In any case, their condition has not improved. Even the inputs provided for the poor farmers through some rural development programmes, reached the powerful rich elite classes.

The conditions of the village artisans and craftsmen have also not improved. Under British rule they suffered a general decline. With increasing industrialisation their revival has not been easy. Through promotion by government agencies, handicraft and handloom industry have received some encouragement and the new ethnic craze has taken traditional art objects into fashionable living rooms. But that was short-lived. The demand was not to the tune that could provide the artisans a sustainable living standard. However, in the later part of the last century with the Government assistance through rural development and other schemes, their condition has improved considerably. With the Panchayat system been given the Constitutional status in the 1990s, the rural situation has changed dramatically.
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 concentration of the industries. Certain areas of the country have achieved tremendous progress while some other areas lagged far behind due to absence of various factors. Another fall out of industrialisation is the poor labour class and the poverty ridden wage earning casual labourers whose numbers are more then those in the labour roll. This poorer class were exploited taking advantage of their helplessness situation. It is because of this, that despite efforts to reduce the numbers of the persons below the poverty line their numbers more or less remained stationary. Population continues to grow at a faster rate than the growth of the economy.

2.7.3: The Changes in Indian Polity:

India being the largest democracy in the world has some unique problem in the political front since its days of independence. These problems have been chronic in nature having no remedy in hand. The freedom movement had created a degree of national consciousness and independence of the nation 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 Mizo hills, Punjab, Kashmir, West Bengal and Assam. The partition generated intractable conflict between the Hindus and Muslims that was already there. Caste tensions are on the rise. The supporters and opponents of reservations for backward classes are arrayed against each other in an aggressive mood. So it was not quite a smooth road for India to pursue democratic course. Yet despite all these, democracy has demonstrated its viability in India.

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. Open demands have been raised to remove the nexus of criminals, bureaucrats and politicians. Such political disorganisations have posed a major challenge to India’s polity.

2.7.4: Changes 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 who follow a particular faith. Even on forms of worship and rituals there are great variations. Culturally, the Hindus are not homogeneous nor are the Muslims. Muslims in Kerala and that of Uttar Pradesh are not similar in their culture. Regional identities appear to be more real. In Assam both Hindus and Muslims take pride in being Assamese and so are in Bengal. 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. But these cultures constantly refer to their respective classical traditions – Hindus to the Vedas and Shastras, Muslims to the Quran/Koran and the Hadis and Christians to the Old and New Testaments. This model itself is a social construction, its interpretation changes according to the changing contexts of life and from time to time it informs and inspires a variety of socio-cultural and political movements.

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). Prior to independence, Western influence could be visible among the aristocrats and top level bureaucrats which gradually influenced the middle class and to some extent some rural areas also. During the time of freedom struggle, following the new national style, people started wearing the Gandhi cap and khadi and that have become a symbol of unity of the country. Then there is the media generated popular culture comprising of items presented in radio and TV. “The modern media, it should be remembered, have promoted both tradition and public interest issues. Some of the styles they convey are widely emulated in various parts of the country; by different sections of the people. (Dube, 1990: 116). Indian media scene has been vibrant, and promising in recent years. Hundreds of television channels have come up to provide viewers options they never had
before. FM radio stations in select cities appear to have done a reasonably successful job of re-defining entertainment for the youths and the old alike. Better films are being made than ever before and short films, documentaries and even regional films, thanks to TV, are increasingly making their mark. The internet penetration is increasing and India is of course the only country in the world where newspaper readership is on the rise. More publications have been coming up in these years.

2.8: Continuity and Change:

The foregoing discussions on social change in India may be reflective of the fact that in the face of such large scale transformation of caste structure the society has lost its traditional form. But in reality, despite all these changes, the basic structure still remains dominant. In the religious front though the faiths like Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism have not accepted many of the attributes of Hinduism (like ritual, purity, pollution syndrome, ashramas, karma, etc.), yet they remained in the beliefs and worldview of the Indian followers of these religions at least among those who have converted to these faiths from Hinduism. Similar is the case with the notions like ritual, purity, pollution, etc. This has been criticised and even mocked and ridiculed by many enlightened personalities of both India and abroad. Dube (ibid) writes, “But the system seems to have remarkable resiliency; it yields some ground, but gradually returns almost to the original position. In the egalitarianism and scientific temper of the
contemporary world the notions of hierarchy and ritual purity still retain some of their strength...'' (ibid: 119).

India's cultural strength is immense. It is compared to the progress of a river from its origin (Himalaya) through forests and wastelands, orchards and farms, villages and cities. The river assimilates the waters of many tributaries, its environment changes, yet it remains the same. Indian culture shows a similar combination of unity and diversity, continuity and change. In the course of her long history, India has witnessed many changes, made many adjustments, and assimilated elements from many sources, without breaking the continuity.

2.9: The Assamese Tradition and Change:

Assamese social life is unique in the sense that it is shaped by various communities – especially the tribes residing in the region since time immemorial. The trace of present Assamese social life can be found since first millennium AD when the region was under the rule of Varmana dynasty. (Sarma, 1989: 2). It was a time when the aryisation of the province took place. The Nidhanpur copper plate grant reveals that the King Bhuti Varmana (6th Century AD) granted special Agrahara settlements to more than 200 Brahmanas of various gotras for promotion of Vedic religion and culture (Barua 1969: 8). “They not only established Aryan settlements with their own people but brought the earlier inhabitants to their fold by giving them Aryan religion, rites and
language. In this process of Aryanisation even tribes’ names were changed to caste names.” (ibid: 9). The intermixing of the Indo-Aryan speaking Caucasian stock and the Tibeto-Burmese speaking indigenous people contributed to the emergence of a society wherein the Aryan and non Aryan beliefs, practices and customs interfused to form a composite culture (Sarma ibid: 5). The power of assimilation and absorption of the two broad groups, Indic-Sanskritic and Indo-mongoloid that led to the acculturated formation of the great Assamese society is, enviably enormous and unintelligibly superior. Its strength lies in its basic premises - cultural accommodation and toleration. Today Assam is the abode of so many communities – living since long time without involving in any conflict of permanent nature or ethnic war or civil war. Dalton (1978) scaled as many as twenty tribal communities in Assam in his Tribal History of Eastern India. He also recorded innumerable Hinduised aborigines, Aryan and Dravidian communities. The number of such communities varies according to ethnographers.

The Ahoms who entered Assam in the 13th Century AD had ruled the major part of the present Assam for almost 600 years – a time sufficient enough for the communities and tribes living in and around the kingdom to have an established cordial relationship with each other. There are sufficient reasons to believe that Ahom rule gave Assam a strong and efficient governance devoted to keep the country in peace prosperity and order (Sarma: 197: 7). The *Datiyolia Buranji* (The chronicle pertaining to Borders of Ahom
Kingdom) says much about the Ahom rulers and their relation with the bordering kingdoms. It describes Ahom’s administrative relation with the kings of Cachar and Jaintia and the Chieftains of Gobha, Neli, Sora, Mikir (Karbi), etc. Goswami (1967: 77) writes, the “Ahom rulers’ contact with the adjacent tribal chiefs was beset with hurdles which were removed tactfully. Anecdotes of peace and war are marked by an unmitigated desire for permanent peaceful relations, which obviously demand unrestricted contact, easy flow of goods from the plains to the hills and vice versa”. The most notable contribution of the Ahom rule was the political unification of the country from Sadiya in the east to the river Manah in the west under one rule which in the course of years led to social, cultural and linguistic unity and succeeded in awakening the spirit of homogeneity among the people (Barua: 142).

Linguistic unification is an important happening of the medieval period and can be counted as the stimulating factor in strengthening the unity of the Assamese society. Almost all the ruling dynasties of the region during the medieval period were from the Indo-Mongoloid stock, which had their own dialects. The Bodos (within whom are the Kacharis and Koches are included) and Nagas are linguistically closely associated (Chatterji, 1951: 45). Initially they used to speak in their own languages and professed their own animistic faith; but gradually they became bilingual and finally became speakers of Assamese and started patronising Assamese (Das, 1967: 11). Not only the petty rulers but also the other competent prominent rulers patronised Assamese.
The process started since fourteenth century A.D. Under the patronage of Barahi kings of central and eastern Assam during 13th and 15th centuries; under Kamatapur kingdom during 14th and 15th centuries, under Koch kingdom of Coach Beher during 16th and 17th centuries and under Ahom kings from 16th century, Assamese language flourished. This made cultural communication easier. In a multicultural society, understanding between the ethnic groups is both daunting and important while it is a never-ending journey as the process and the endpoints change constantly. Here, a common language understood by all ethnic groups can help removing miscommunication and improve cultural fluency by transmitting social and cultural habits, beliefs and ideas, rites and ceremonies from one group to another in right perspective.

Another notable element that contributed to the formation of a great Assamese society was the religious unification. Ahoms and other frontier kings or rulers have gradually adopted Hinduism. In fact, since 13th century, almost all the plains tribe had an exposure to Hinduism and in the latter Ahom period, the other reform movements like vaishnavism and neo-vaishnavism. Beginning with the Koches and Chutiyas, Ahoms themselves, Kachari kings of Maibong and Khaspur, all came under influence of Hinduism at different times. (Devi: ibid), Gait (1967: 304) refers the coins issued by Kachari Kings Yasonarayana and Pratapnarayan where the image of Hara-Gauri was engraved*. The Hindu preachers received considerable royal patronage and this helped them in

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* Journal of the Asiatic Society, Bengal, 1912, Vol. VIII Pp 556
wining most of the indigenous people and brining them to the fold of Hinduism. Hinduism took an unique form here as the newly converts had even after accepting Hinduism maintained many of their old customs and traditional practices either in old forms or in a reformed or modified form. Ahoms although adopted Hinduism continued some of their traditional rites and practices uninterrupted. This admixture of Hinduism was accepted liberally even by the preachers of Hinduism and thus became very popular among the tribal people also.

The other important factor is the impact of neo-vaishnavism on the Assamese society. Assessing the great impact that the neo-vaishnavism had on the great Assamese society, Sharma (ibid: 9) writes, “....the most important contributory factor for streamlining Assamese society was the expansion of the neo-vaishnavite movement and the impact of its institution on the masses in regulating their religious and social life”. The neo-vaishnavism with its simple set of rules influenced the common people and also people from various tribal societies enabling thereby the assimilation process faster. But the most important handiwork of neo vaishnavism was the cultural renaissance it brought to the Assamese society through literature, dance, drama and most importantly the institutions of namghars and satras, which became the lifeline of Assamese villagers. The basic vaishnavite theories were known to the Brahmins of Assam even during the pre-Ahom period. But it could not penetrate into the societies and therefore failed to bring up any change in the traditional societies where
either fertility cult or Saiba & Sakta religion were the prevailing faith (Gohain: 136). Another reason behind this failure was that the cults were very popular mainly because these were believed to be the providers of daily needs and entertainments to the people. Childe wrote, “The aims of Oriental religion seem to us materialistic. The cult of the Gods was in fact, designed to secure not what we call holiness, purity, and the peace of God, but good harvests, rain in due season, victory in war, success in love and business, children, wealth, health and an indefinitely long life.” (1976: 145). As opposed to this, the neo vaishnavism was based on non-materialistic attitude where sacrifice and obliteration of desire were the main spirit. This attracted the people of the war torn society of Ahoms and Kacharis equally. There was no religious seclusion in the neo vaishnavism of Sankaradeva and thus anyone of any faith could take shelter in it. This is how Gobinda Atoi among Garos, Joyohari and Paramananda from Miris, Naruttam from Nagas and Chanda Khan from the Muslims became the prominent disciples of the Guru (Padun, 1988: 64).

The unification achieved through Ahom rule in Assam was shattered soon after the Mowamoria rebellion and thereafter the famous Burmese attack. The British annexation of the Assam was complete by 1879. The intervening period between 1826 and 1879 was marked by complete destabilisation with hostile attacks on British especially in Assam and in frontier regions. The rebellion of Gomdhar Konwar and the subsequent uprising of the neighbouring tribes namely Khamtis, Mowamariyas, Nagas, Khasis and Garos in
1830 under the leadership of Jiuram Duliabarua are significant. Although the rebel leaders including Bom Singpho fell in the hands of British, but their attempt established the combined aspirations of the people of Assam. Subsequently also, there were various rebellions taking on account of irrational enhancement of land revenues, which helped Assamese people to unite again. The Phuloguri dhewa of 1861, which saw the uprising of Lalung (now Tiwa) community against the British, the 1882 rebellion of Dimasa Kacharis against British under the leadership of Sambudon Kachari who was later killed in an encounter with the British troop, the Bodo and other tribal people’s revolt in Rangia in 1893 against the hike in land revenue, the Naga rebellion under Rani Guidinliu who was arrested in 1932 and put into jail till 1947; Khasi rebellion against the British under the leadership of Tirat Singh are all reflections of common aspiration of the people and their attitude towards British Rule and all were directed towards achieving a common objective of independence. Recalling the role of tribal communities Phukan (c.f. Kakti: 1985) said, “With all the amazing ignorance and absolute poverty, I found them ready to respond to our call more promptly and ungrudgingly as many so called educated did. If they had no education, they had a heart of gold. If they had less intelligence, they had their noble instincts. I can assert without fear of contradiction that without active and willing cooperation of those starving people, the glorious non cooperation in Assam would have been a sad failure. When I recall the determined and concerted action of the Kacharis of Boko, their
ready response, their sacrifices and sufferings my heart bleeds even now. The Miris of Sibsagar, the Daflas of North Lakhimpur became our best workers and gave such splendid sincerity and ability that the trained soldiers of the Government had to look at them with awe and admiration. Not one single instance of violence could be cited by officers commissioned to quell the movement.” (Kakati, 1985)

Till the attainment of independence of India, despite having sufficient grounds for involving in various ethno-political warfare, various tribes of Assam preferred not to indulge in such course of action. Nationalism rather than preserving group identity was the main question. The fragrance of this unity continued for quite some time after the independence. However, the post independence scenario has changed. When India attained independence, Assam was created and recognised as the Part I State. The other present North-eastern States were within it except that of the NEFA. Later, Nagaland was created and so also the other States of North East India. Under the Constitution we have raised a liberal democratic society where there should be scope for preserving identity of all minor ethnic groups.

The brief discussion above has sufficiently made it clear that the liberal cultural attitudes of the Assamese society have generated certain elements such as Hindu-Muslim unity, absence of casteism, etc. which have been identified as virtues in the context of great Indian cultural tradition. The nation is thriving to achieve
these at a very high cost while the Assamese are having it as part of their cultural tradition. The Assamese and Bengali communities in Assam today learnt how to live in harmony. Both are evolved cultures. Hindu-Muslim harmonious coexistence is a historical truth and inherent in Assamese culture. The Muslims in Assam have not hesitated to merge to the culture of majorities, which made it a wonder to the world of Muslims. The Muslim world today would not believe that Muslim women in Assam are so progressive that they sit next to men in the decision-making process in the rural Panchayats (Saikia, 2006: 14). Today much of the concern of Assamese society is towards its tribal populace for their social and economic upliftment.