CHAPTER II
THE SETTING

THE BIKALI AREA

The present study was undertaken in 18 villages out of 52 villages situated in the Bikali area of Goalpara district, under Rangjuli circle. There is one Police Station (Thana) in this area (Map 2). The Bikali Gaon Panchayat covers an area of 15411.77 hectares and the total population of this area is distributed through fifty two (52) villages. The population of Bikali area is essentially rural.

The 18 study villages in Bikali area are predominantly inhabited by the Rabhas. In some of these villages, like Maslam, Kothakuthi (Dhenubhanga), Bakrapara, the Rabhas are the only inhabited groups. In some other study villages like Ambuk (Amguri), Aawimari, Ambuk (Mazpara), Kothakuthi (Hirapara), Salpara, Shamagaon, Piplibari, Jyotigaon, Hakojuli and Rabhapara (Dhupdhara), Gathiapara, Bengdoba, Bahbari, Khutabari, Ambari the overwhelming population are the Rabhas. The total population of
BIKALI MAUZA

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MEGHALAYA

MAP 2

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Bikali area is 28,437 out of which 11,081 are tribals of which majority are the Rabhas, according to 1991 census.

The study area is situated in the south bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra. This area is located in the eastern most part of Goalpara district under Rangjuli revenue circle. The study area i.e. the Bikali area is bounded by Kamrup District in the north eastern part, Dhenubhanga Gaon Panchayat under Rangjuli block and revenue circle and Meghalaya state in the south. The National Highway No. 37 run through the middle part of the Bikali area.

The Bikali Mouza under Bikali Anchalik Gaon Panchayat consists of three tier Gaon Panchayats namely -(1) Dhupdhara, (2) Kothakuthi and (3) Khutabari. This area is inhabited by different ethnic groups such as the Schedule Tribes, the Schedule Castes, the caste Hindus and the Muslim communities. However, this area is predominantly occupied by Tribals namely the Rabhas and the Bodos. The Rabhas of this area are divided specially in four branches. They are (1) North Bikali Rabha Society, (2) East Bikali Rabha Society, (3) South Bikali Rabha Society and (4) Pragati Rabha Society,

It is common belief of the local people that the name "Bikali" has been derived from the name of an early inhabitant known as "Bika Mauzadar". Whatever might be the origins of the name of this area, Bikali has been an area which covers fifty two villages.
THE STUDY VILLAGES

The villages inhabited by the Rabhas are situated on the plains and in layout resemble ordinary non-tribal Assamese villages of Lower Assam. The villages cover a large area as each family owns a very big compound. The villages are inhabited homogeneously by Rabha people. The total number of Rabha families of the villages are 47 families in Hakojuli, 300 families in Maslam, 40 families in Amguri (Ambuk), 60 families in Mazpara (Ambuk), 69 families in Rabhapara (Dhupdhara), 40 families in Kothakuthi (Dhenubhanga), 70 families in Bakrapara, 23 families in Dewlguri, 33 families in Dumanpara, 46 families in Kochubari, 32 families in Bengdoba, 18 families in Salpara, 47 families in Malangkona, 79 families in Jyotigaon, 103 families in Naharpara, 26 families in Bahbari, 28 families in Piplibari, 19 families Bekhnapara, 17 families in Dighali, 26 families in Gulianpara, 49 families in Ghilabari approximately. The villages are surrounded by a number of other villages. Barring one or two most of these villages are inhabited by Assamese Hindu caste population. So, the influence of these caste population is very much noticed on the life and culture of the Rabhas of these villages. The villagers follow their traditional religion, but now a days they worship certain Hindu Gods and Goddesses. This is definitely due to the influence of neighbouring Hindu population. The villagers are neat and clean, and houses are arranged in a planned manner leaving spaces for lanes and byelanes.
The villages are situated on the east, west, north and south part of Bikali area. The villages like Khutabari, Piplibari, Sachibari are on the northern side of Dhupdhara and Rabhapara is situated in the middle part of Dhupdhara. The village Bakrapara on the foot of the Meghalaya hills is to the south of Ambuk. While the village Kothakuthi (Dhenubhanga) is the west of Dhupdhara. The village like Naharpara, Bengdoha, Salpara, Gulianpara are situated on the southern part of Bikali area. The village like Hakojuli, Ambuk (Mazpara), Ambuk (Amguri), Bakrapara are surrounded by hills and river on its south directions. The village Maslam is situated in the Western part is situated in the Western part of Bikali area. The 37 No. National Highway divides the Bikali area mainly in two parts - North Bikali and South Bikali.

**COMMUNICATION**

To go to the villages like Maslam, Naharpara, Bengdoba, Gulianpara there is no P.W.D. road but to go to Ambuk and Bakrapara villages one must take the P.W.D. road which runs from Dhupdhara to Adoguri. The road of the Kothakuthi (Dhenubhanga) village is not under P.W.D. and it is a gravel road. The road to go to Khutabari, Piplibari is not smooth. At Ambuk (Amguri) and Ambuk (Mazpara) village, the lanes and bye-lanes inside the village are very narrow and a small vehicle can hardly pass. For inter village travel, people generally use bi-cycle, bullock cart, rickshaws etc., but most of the people generally goes on foot. For long distance journey, they have
to come to Dhupdhara where public and government buses, or private taxis are available for different destinations.

**RELIGIOUS PLACES**

The people of the villages claim as Hindus though they mostly follow their traditional religion.

There is a Namghar (prayer house) in every village and a Than (prayer place) known as *Bura Gohain Than*. In some villages there are some Thans known as *Langa Bura Than, Kechai Khaity Kali Gosanir Than, Barmani Pujar Than* etc., where most of the annual rites are performed. There is another place of worship that is the *Bishohori Than* in Rabhapara (Dhupdhara), where *Marai Puja, Kali Puja* etc. are performed. Moreover, every household has their own place of worship, generally on the courtyard.

**EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES**

In every village, there is a primary school for education of the children and in some areas there is a M.V. or M.E. School, where both boys and girls read up to class VII. For further education, the students go to the neighbouring High School or Girls' High School and for higher education they go to the college at Dhupdhara or neighbouring College at Boko or any other Higher Secondary School.
CREMATION GROUND

There is no cremation ground in the middle part of the Bikali area. But there is a cremation ground by river side of every village, where the people of the village cremate their dead relatives.

POLICE STATION AND POST OFFICE

The villages are under Dhupdhara Police Station. Formerly this Police Station was established as Out Post. On 1st July, 1984, (Govt. No. H, MA-61/84/23, dt. Dispur 25 th May, 84) this out Post was upgraded as Thana. There are two lock-ups in this Police Station, one for male and the other for female. The total number of staff are twenty one comprising of 1 Nayak, 1 Havildar, 14 Constable, 2 Assistant Sub-Inspector and 3 Sub-Inspector. Besides them one platoon of 4 APBN are there in this Police Station. One CRPF camp is established in Bikali area.

A Sub-Post office is situated at Ambuk and Bagdoba where from the villagers get the mailing facilities. The villagers of other villages get the mailing facilities from Dhupdhara Post Office.

MARKET FACILITIES

The nearest weekly market is at Dhupdhara, of all these villages, which is held every Monday. People of the villages buy and
sell their commodities in this market. Moreover, there is a daily market at Dhupdhara and in some villages. People of the villages go to that market for their day-to-day necessities. The villagers of Piplibari, Khutabari and Bagdoba go for shopping in the market of Hekra. Sometimes, the villagers of Ambuk, Bakrapara and Hakojuli go for shopping in the market of Adoguri. In this market, the villagers do their shopping and selling.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

In an ordinary Rabha village of the plain, a family owns four huts, arranged on the four sides of a courtyard. The huts are constructed generally with sloping roofs and the ground plan is invariably rectangular. The whole compound is encircled by a low fence made of earth. Boundary walls and fencings are generally present in most of the houses. Most of the houses are Assam Type with C.I. Sheet tin roofs.

It is however, a fact that with the increasing intercourse with town life and improvement of road communication, the basic characteristics of Rabha villages are in the process of rapid change and constructions of the houses in modern style have already made their head way in Rabha villages. Usually the dwellings of a Rabha household consist of four houses- one main house, one Guest house, one outer house and other used as a cooking-shed.
MEDICAL FACILITIES

There is a primary health centre at Dhupdhara which extends medical facilities to the whole area. Now-a-days, there is a medical sub-centre in every village and the villagers go to that sub-centre for their first-aid treatment.

POPULATION

The total Rabha population of the Bikali area is approximately eight thousand six hundred (8,600). According to the information provided by the Kothakuthi Gaon Panchayat Office in 2002, the highest Rabha population, approximately 706 are to be found in Maslam area. In villages like Kothakuthi (Dhenubhanga area), Naharpara, Rabhapara (Dhupdhara area) Ambuk (Mazpara area), Ambuk (Amguri area), Hakojuli, Bakrapara have 250, 508, 408, 180, 168, 340 and 335 Rabhas respectively.*

* Tables of demographic data of the study villages are presented in Appendix V.