PART THREE
CHAPTER SIX
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

'Tribal and Non-tribal Population of Darrang District, Assam: A Social Geographic Study', aims at studying the existing socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions of the people of Darrang district with reference to their ecological bases. The district is inhabited by people of several social groups comprising of indigenous non-tribal (INT), with both Hindus and Muslims; indigenous tribal (IT), with the Bodo-Kacharis, Rabhas and Garos; immigrant Muslims (IM); Hindu refugees (HR); tea-garden and ex-teagarden labourers, Nepalis and Hindi speaking (Bihari and Rajasthani) people. Naturally all these social groups make the district a socio-cultural mosaic, albeit with varied socio-economic and socio-cultural pursuits. The main occupation of the people is agriculture. Secondary and tertiary economic activities are few and far between. Industrial development in the district is insignificant, except the tea plantation, which does not directly benefit the local people. Economically, the district is less advanced and so is the case educationally. In fact, the district ranks third from the bottom educationally just above Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts of Assam. The percentage of literacy is only 42.00 per cent. Among the IT and IM and also the tea-tribes, it is still lower, being less than 35.00 per cent. It affects the economic modernisation of the society.

This being an analytical study, it was planned to test certain research statements and to analyze the casual factors relating to the socio-cultural aspects. Field-works and surveys were conducted to collect the necessary data. The primary data were collected from the selected villages, heads of some tribal and immigrant villages, persons of social status like school teachers, panchayat presidents, mauzadars, bishops of the Christian churches and even from school and college students, with the help of the interview schedules and questionnaires (Appendix-I). Secondary data were collected from the various government and non-government offices and
official agencies, census reports, Principals of the colleges and from relevant books, bulletins, newspapers, souvenirs, statistical handbooks, etc.

It has been stated in the significance of the problem that for an all round development of a society, all its constituent communities, even the people of weaker sections, must be effectively involved. In doing so, their problems and prospects, must be assessed correctly. The feeling of social inferiority towards the local tribal people and the tea-tribes and the negligence towards the immigrant Muslim people as ‘second class citizens’ of the country must be done away with.

Matters relating to the availability and non-availability of data, have been discussed in the scope of the subject. Although Darrang is a colourful district with various castes and communities, many setbacks prevent the researcher in acquainting with the spatial behaviour of the tribes. For example, the tea-tribes, some of whom follow Hinduism and some others Christianity, they cannot be socially separated due to non-availability of data. Similarly, the population data of immigrant Muslims may lack accuracy. Moreover the past population data were meant for undivided Darrang, which included the present Sonitpur district.

The first Chapter of the thesis contains the statement of the problem, previous works done in this line, objectives including some working research-statements and significance of the study besides methodology adopted and the special terms and terminologies used in this work.

Physico-cultural setting of Darrang district, has been depicted in the Chapter two. The quadrilateral block of alluvial plain of the district, with its international and interstate boundaries, its physiographic settings, the shifting nature of its drainage system, the natural flora and fauna and the spatial-cultural units, have been discussed in this chapter. The four physiographic divisions of the district, viz., Bhabar, Tarai, Central built up zone and the Southern flood plain, have been discussed and illustrated with the help of the materials collected. The shifting nature of the rivers, particularly that of the Jia-Dhansiri, in its lower course, gives rise to a topography of peculiar characteristics, which ultimately had compelled the former inhabitants to leave the area, which has lately been occupied by the immigrant Muslim settlers.
Among the forest products, apart from the valuable timbers, elephants and birds, the one-horned rhino of Rajib Gandhi Wild Life Sanctuary (Orang), which helps in bringing the place in the tourist map of India, is noteworthy.

The historical background of the study area has been discussed in Chapter three. Difference of opinion seems to prevail on the origin of the names of Darrang and Mangaldai. However, the accepted opinion of the origin of Darrang from the Sanskrit word ‘Dwaram’ and Mangaldai from the name of Mangala Devi, derived by one local historian, can hardly be denied.

Darrang district was a part of ancient Kamarupa. Since the prehistoric days, Darrang was inhabited by the Tibeto-Burman people, followed by Indo-Aryans, who perhaps started entering the area from the beginning of the first millennium B.C. The origin of the legendary kings of Asura dynasty, continued for several centuries till the kings of Barmana dynasty ascended the throne and ruled over the territory. However, the most illustrious period in the history of Darrang, was the reign of the Darrangi-Rajas (Koch kings) from 1515 A.D. They were made vassal to Ahoms in 1616. During the battle of Saraighat in 1667, Koch kings assisted the Ahom’s general Lachit Barphukan and defeated the Mughols. Many Mughol captives were settled in Darrang district, around Doomunichowki, Satkhali, Bordoulguri, Marowii, Ghopa, Sanowa, etc. thereby making the area to support a large percentage of Muslim population.

Downfall of Koch-Rajas came after 1795 gradually and during the British annexation of Assam including Darrang district in 1826, none of their royal legacy was recognised in any way.

Darrang was made a district of British India in 1832-33. The British tea companies started tea plantation here in 1835 and imported Adibashi labourers from outside the state as local people did not prefer the ‘coolie-work’. Moreover, along with the extension of the railway line through the district from 1912-1930, many outside labourers were imported, who later on permanently settled in the northern parts of the district.
Settlement of immigrant Muslims in the district started from the first decade of this century in the southern flood-plain of the Brahmaputra, which was left barren. The influx became vigorous from 1931 to 1951 period and ultimately in 1991, accounting for 2.57 lakh.

After independence, Darrang became an administrative district with two subdivisions, Mangaldai and Tezpur, and on 1983, the Mangaldai sub-division upgraded to the present Darrang district.

Social pattern of different ethnic groups of Darrang district has been given in the fourth Chapter. The growth of population of the tribal and non-tribal groups and their concentration, clustering, social behaviour, percentage of literacy, etc. have been discussed elaborately in this chapter. Darrang district comprises people of four main social groups as indicated earlier.

The INT group comprises both the Hindus and Muslims. They live peacefully with unity and amity. Except religion, the difference in social behaviour among them is insignificant. Since the historic past, no record of communal clash between the two communities, can be found.

The IT group consists of three social groups - Bodos, Rabhas and Garos. From the religious point of view, the Bodo tribal group can be divided into three sub-groups:

i) those following their traditional tribal religion - Bathow,

ii) those following Hinduism, and

iii) those embracing Christianity.

It is found that 26.4 per cent of the tribal people of Darrang district of all the three social groups, now follow Christianity. However, resurgence to their traditional tribal religion, mainly from Hinduism, is a recent phenomenon. This researcher recorded few instances of resurgence from Christianity also in Dalakati village, near Kopati.

The impact of immigration from Bangladesh and Nepal, both social and economic, was not very prominent till the fifties. But with population increasing leaps and bound, many
socio-cultural and socio-economic problems have emerged, affecting the INT and IT people, more particularly, the later group. Many IT people had to lose their hearth and home as a result.

Darrang district has four socio-economic regions, viz., Bhabar and Tarai in the north, Central built up zone in the middle and Flood plains in the south. The former two regions have been settled by IT, Nepali and INT people. Some immigrant Muslims have recently intruded into these regions, along the upstreams of the main rivers. Almost all the tea-tribes have been settled there. The central built up zone is chiefly the habitat of INT and IT group of people. But the flood plains of the Brahmaputra has almost been settled by the IM people.

The district is backward in education and literacy. Sanskritised education was in vogue along the western part of the district in the past. But the modern education started only during the British administration and more so during the present century. The Baptist and Catholic missions started schools in the northern areas inhabited by IT people, since 1873, where theological education was given through vernacular medium.

In literacy, the district occupied one of the lowest positions in Assam amongst the plains-districts. One Director of Census, back in 1931, mentioned that a large tribal population was the cause of continued backwardness in this district. Even now, the average percentage of literacy is low (42.00). Among the IT, IM and tea-tribes, it is still lower (35.00).

Some differences are observed in social behaviour among the different groups. Even among the tribals - the Rabhas are more Hinduised, while the Bodo-Kacharis are less so. The Bodo-Kacharis are patriarchal in inheritance, but the Garos are not, they are in a way matriarchal. Similarly, while the married Hindu women smear vermillion marks on their foreheads, no married Muslim lady follows the practice. Among the INT groups, the Hindus cremate their dead, but their Muslim neighbours follow the usual practice of burial. Even among the Muslims - the indigenous ones are more susceptible to routine prayer in the mosques, but the immigrant Muslims are less so.

In Chapter Fifth, the economic basis of each of the social group has been discussed. Subsistence agriculture is the main economic base of all the people. Employment in
secondary and tertiary industries is insignificant, accounting for less than 9 per cent of the working population. Average land holding of the district population is low, only 1.15 hectares against the state average of 1.31 hectares.

Darrang district is industrially backward. So, industrial employment is very low. The district produces a reasonable amount of raw jute, but with no jute mill.

Transport and communication of the district is poor, having road density of only 0.78 km per km$^2$.

Influence of modern amenities in the district has been assessed in the fifth Chapter. It has been tested by a graph, showing a negative value on the co-efficient of correlation. As the IT, IM and tea-tribes live away from the towns, they enjoy less benefits of modern amenities, resulting with a socio-economic backwardness.