I The Typical Village Structure of Goalpara

The general arrangement of an average village is very much similar to that of villages in other parts of Assam Valley—a cluster of homesteads, rather loosely arranged, and surrounded mostly by rice fields and often by low-lying areas or patches of marshy land or by jungle. Each homestead generally has a fairly large compound with a profusion of trees like areca nut, banana, mango, jackfruit and almost invariably clumps of bamboo. Besides, each village also has lots of small and big trees standing on the public land. Thus, 'it is groves and not villages that the traveller sees when riding through the more populated portions of the district, and not a house can usually be discerned till he has penetrated into this jungle of plaintains, betel nut trees, and bamboos.' Most villages also do not seem to have well defined boundaries so that often 'it is difficult to tell where one village ends and another begins.'

Villages are in general small, and very large and populous villages are few and far between.

Few villages boast of well-maintained all-weather roads, except those which are served by national highways or P.W.D. or

2. Ibid.
3. 'This district has 3,708 villages which are classified into four different groups according to their population. The first group comprises of 2,778 villages the population of each of which is less than 500 persons. In the second group there are 740 villages with the population between 500 and 999 persons. The third group with the population between 1000 and 1,999 claims 170 villages. The fourth group with the population between 2,000 and 4,999 has
Panchayat roads, many of which are fairly well-maintained. Roads within the villages are mostly indifferently marked out paths full of dust in winter and mud and slush in the rainy season. There is practically no drainage arrangement and water-logging of low-lying areas is a regular feature of the village scene in the wet season.

Village names usually conform to certain set patterns derived by the addition of such suffixes as gāon (literally, a village), pāra and tāri (both meaning a locality), bāri (suggesting the abundance of something, usually trees of a particular species), hāt (a market), ganj (a river-side market), toli, talā and guri (signifying the association with some particular species of tree), jhorā (a spring), jhār (jungle), char (a river island or a riparian flat), etc. Thus we have village names of the following patterns:

with gāon - Kajigāon, Bongaigaon, Gosāigaon, Kachugāon, Haltugāon, etc.

with pāra - Dubāpāra, Rajāpāra, Rabhāpāra, Hāpāpāra, etc.

with tāri - Bakāitāri, Gourāngtāri, etc.

with bāri - Bagribāri, Khagrābāri, Jhāpusābāri, Sālbāri, etc.

with māri - Udmāri, Gerāmāri, Tiāmāri, Koimāri, Baladmāri, etc.

with hāt - Sonāhāt, Tamāhāt, Boxihāt, Paglāhāt, etc.

with ganj - Alamganj, Golokganj, Lokhiganj, etc.

with talā, teli or guri - Simlitala, Āmtala, Bāiganteli, Oxiguri, etc.

with jhorā - Birjhorā, Manglājhorā, Kutkujhorā, Maltijhorā, etc.

with jhār - Kokrājhār, Materjhār, etc.

with char - Sukchar, Mānikāchar, etc.

only 20 villages which represent only 5 per cent of the total villages of this district.' — See District Census Handbook, Goalpara, 1961, p.xi.
Each village is usually divided into several localities called pārās. In villages with a heterogeneous population, a particular locality is inhabited predominantly by a particular community and thus the localities are often named after them — Bāmunpārā, Koltāpārā, Mājhipārā, Bāniāpara and so on. Even a village with a homogeneous population has its own pārās, each with a number of homesteads more or less closely knit together. Often the pārās of a big and sprawling village are themselves self-contained units.

Religious shrines or places of worship are an integral part of a village, be it Hindu, Muslim or tribal. In those parts of eastern Goalpara where Vaiṣṇavism has its influence, some villages have gahē-ghars or prayer-halls with more or less imposing structures. But most of the other Hindu villages have shrines dedicated to various gods and godlings venerated or feared by the local people. Although an occasional Siva or Kali temple with a well-built structure is to be found, most of the shrines are simple bamboo-and-thatch affairs or, at best, small tin-roofed huts. Martin had observed in the second quarter of the last century: 'The temples are the most miserable huts that I have ever seen, and few are sufficiently high to admit anything larger than a goat or a hog.'

In the western parts of the district, villages have public shrines which have practically no regular houses except for a small hut without walls. They are simply spaces marked out and maintained for the purpose of offering puja to the various gods and goddesses.

1. Gahēghar is a corruption of standard Assamese colloqual goxāi-ghar (God's house).
the village-folk have faith in. Here and there, there are also trees, stones and other objects considered sacred by the villagers.

In the Muslim villages also, the mosques are usually modest thatched houses, although brick-built structures with minarets are to be seen in more prosperous villages.

In villages situated near the rivers, people usually draw the water for their daily use from the river from one or two convenient ghats. Many villages also have ponds. But wells are the most common source of water. Most families have their personal wells and those who do not, take their water from their neighbours' or from public wells. Wells are ordinarily kutcha or have earthen rings. Well-to-do families have pucca wells called indrás.

As for sanitation, there is practically no regular arrangement. Excepting the well-to-do and the enlightened, people are generally not in the habit of maintaining and using latrines. The family backyard, the fallow land with wild growth, the river-side or any other place considered suitable is used when one has a call of nature. Dumping of the cowdung is also done indifferently resulting in unhygienic conditions.

Few villages have regular cremation or burial grounds. Usually an area fairly away from the centre of the village is roughly marked out for the purpose of the disposal of the dead and the people avoid the area as far as practicable.

There are regular daily markets in towns and big villages to which the villagers occasionally go to buy provisions. But it is
the hāts, weekly or bi-weekly, that really cater to the needs of the peasantry. A hāt is not only the place where the villager buys what he needs and sells what he can spare, or where he has his hair-cut or shave, but also where he meets people and has his share of the latest news or gossip.

II The Homestead

The overall arrangement of an average homestead of the district differs very little from that of homesteads in Kamrup, or for that matter, in the rest of the Brahmaputra Valley excepting perhaps in the architectures of the houses. B. C. Allen gives the following description of the dwellings:

'The homestead of the ordinary peasant is generally separated from the village path by a ditch or bank, on which there is often a fence of split bamboo. Inside there is a patch of beaten earth, which is always, kept well-swept and clean. Round this tiny courtyard stand two or three small houses which are often little more than huts. The whole premises are surrounded by a dense grove of bamboos, plantains and areca nut trees, and often there are numerous specimens of the arum family covering the ground. The effect is extremely picturesque, but the presence of all these plants and trees makes the whole place very damp and excludes all sun and air. At the back there is generally a garden, in which vegetables, tobacco and other plants are grown. The walls of the houses are made of reeds plastered with mud or of split bamboo. The general standard of architecture is far from high, but Hindus and Muhammadans generally occupy somewhat larger and better built houses than those that are usually
seen in upper Assam, and the houses of the Muhammadans are quite commodious. The houses of the middle class are built on practically the same plan, but they are larger, and wooden posts and beams are often used in place of bamboo. ¹

The above gives an overall picture of the average homestead.

To this we could add certain details which would not only complete the picture but would also bring out certain peculiarities especially of the homesteads to the west of the district, that are usually not met with in the rest of valley.

In west Goalpara, the pattern of the homestead that is almost universally followed is determined by an old maxim traditionally handed down:

\[
\text{pube hās poschime bās} \\
\text{uttare guā dokkhine dhuā}
\]

Ducks to the east, bamboo to the west
Areca nuts to the north, open to the south.

That is, the site plan should provide for a pond (where ducks swim) on the eastern side of the land, for bamboo clumps on its western boundary, for a grove of areca nut trees on the northern side and open space towards the south. ²

² Bodo-Kacharis also follow the same plan. — See Bhaben Narzi: Boro-Kachārīr Samāj Aru Sanskriti, pp.56-57.
The courtyard around which the houses are built is called the aignā or chotā. Besides this there is usually another courtyard—the outer courtyard, near the entrance to the homestead, which is called the kholān-bāri or bāirā-bāri. The practice is to have four main houses on the four sides of the inner courtyard which not only makes for protection and privacy but also helps to maintain customary standards of propriety and decorum which demand that there should be the minimum of direct contact between persons within the family with certain particular relationships. Each house, which is normally single-roomed hut, is called a ghar but the homestead as a whole is called the bāri. Each ghar has its own name and generally serves one particular purpose.

The most important of the complex of houses is known as the baro ghar (lit., the big house) which serves as the main sleeping apartment. Here also tradition demands that it should be on the northern side of the complex and should be south-facing (dokkhin-duāri).¹ This house contains the sacred post (bāisto kham) with a small altar at the root, which houses the deity presiding over the welfare and prosperity of the household, like Bishahari (Vishahari) or Lōkki (Lakshmi). Bāisto is obviously derived from Vāstu-devatā (family god).

For the majority of the villagers who are poor tenant farmers,² the baro-ghar also serves another important purpose— it

¹. The customs that the southern side of the homestead should be open and that the main living apartment should be south-facing are sound on hygienic considerations.

². This is partly the effect of the Zemindary system.
houses the granary (golā, also called machā). They have no separate house meant for storing the grain; a portion of the baro-ghar itself is set apart for this purpose, and the grain is stored in large-size barrel-like baskets of bamboo-work (dol or duli) placed on a bamboo platform (māchā whence the alternative name of the granary). Sometimes enclosures made of bamboo mats (called ber) are used in place of the baskets. Only rich people have separate granaries.

The nakāri is another house which every household is expected to have and which has a traditionally prescribed location. It is always constructed near the entrance to the living apartments and is meant for seating guests and strangers who are not expected to go into the inner quarters. Though some people have commodious nakāris with many households the keeping of a nakāri is a mere formality and a very small hut serves the purpose. The nakāri is also called the dāri-ghar. In some areas it is called dehari ghar.

The rāndhan ghar is the cooking apartment which also serves as the dining room. It generally occupies the western side of the courtyard. One portion of this house is reserved for cooking. Here, around the family oven, are kept the pots and pans and other accessories for cooking. This is called the hari-bāri or hari-māchā and is considered particularly clean. Strict rules are followed to preserve the cleanliness of the hari-bāri and it is not allowed to come in contact with anything considered unclean (chhua). The rest of the space is used for taking the principal meals. The members of the family, and the guests if there be any, sit on low stools on the floor which is kept scrupulously clean by regular wiping.
In a Hindu household, leather shoes or other articles considered objectionable are not allowed into this apartment.

The other houses are built in the remaining spaces around the courtyard according to the necessity of the family and are generally used as sleeping or living rooms (thāka ghar or sotā ghar). They have no specific names but are usually referred to as the east-facing house (pub-duāri ghar), north-facing house (uttar duāri ghar) and so on according to their location.

The gō̄lī ghar or gōlī ghar is the cattle-shed and it is usually a low hut, often without walls, in the vicinity of the outer courtyard. Some households have two such sheds, one for the bullocks and the other for the cows.

One or two structures, however modest, housing the family deity or deities are also found in most Hindu homesteads.

The inner courtyard, which is always kept clean, is used for drying and husking the paddy, curing the fish, peeling and cutting vegetable, etc. It is here that the women-folk sit and gossip when they are alone and perform such pujas, rituals and other functions which are their exclusive preserves.

In a Rajbansi house the south-eastern corner of the courtyard has what is called the tulsir pāt, on which stands the sacred basil plant and a bamboo pole with a standard which is said to represent Siva and is called Mahādeber bāg. A trident is also often planted at the place. The spot is regularly cleaned and wiped and earthen lamps are placed at the foot of the tulsi plant.
The outer courtyard does not have as trim a look as the inner. The cattle-shed, as we have seen, is close to it and feeding and watering of the cattle is done here in big earthenware vessels called charis. Threshing of the paddy is also takes place here and the haystack (punji) is also to be found nearby. It also serves as the parking place for the family bullock-cart when there is any. Men-folk often sit here when there are visitors or to enjoy the sun on winter days and the cool breeze in summer nights. Big functions like marriages and pujas are also held here.

Apart from split-bamboo fences, small hardy shrubs are also often planted to demarcate the boundary of the homestead. Fences are low or high according to needs and have different names, like chāp chekar, māli chekar, etc.

As one approaches the eastern parts of the district on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra, the plan of the homestead and the names of the different units are found to differ a little. The whole compound is called chak. The main house is called bara ghar, the partico dehari ghar and the kitchen pākghar. The other houses are puber ghar, paschimer ghar, etc. according to their location. The inner and outer courtyards are called bhitrā chotāl and bāira chotāl respectively. The granary is bhandar or bhākhri and the container for giving fodder to the cattle is thāli. As the inner courtyard is not completely surrounded by houses, fences (called hāngar) are more common. While the outer boundary has low fences, a high fence called mukh shundi hāngar is placed in front of the main house to ensure privacy.
III House Types

The ordinary houses in the eastern parts of the district look exactly similar to those in other parts of Assam Valley. They are thatched cottages with two roofs sloping from a straight ridge. The posts and rafters are of bamboo, the walls of reed or split bamboo, in most cases plastered with mud. Doors and windows are also of bamboo-work made especially strong and durable. While doors are fitted to door-frames, windows are simply holes cut into the walls and the window panels, when they are fitted, slide horizontally on a bamboo pole fitted on the wall just above the window hole. Occasionally, there are houses with four roofs — two smaller roofs joined at the two open ends of the straight roofs on either side. Some houses also have a verandah, with a separate lower roof above it, on that side of the house which has the door. Sometimes the verandah may also protrude from one end of the house. When it has walls it often serves as the kitchen and without walls it is normally the store room for the firewood.

The granary is however constructed according to a special plan devised both for protection against theft and loss as well as against damage or harm from damp or moisture. An enclosure made of straight vertical bamboo poles is built on a strong platform, also made of bamboo. Within this enclosure is placed a casing of split bamboo matting the inner side of which is finally plastered with a paste made of mud and cowdung so that there are no holes through which the grains can slip out. A small door, no bigger than a window, is kept on one side sufficiently above the level of the floor.
The cattle-shed is a low hut and usually has no walls.

But in the western parts of the district there are certain peculiarities connected with the patterns of the houses which are worth noticing. Here the houses are of two types: one called the bāṅglā ghar and the other called the chowāri ghar. The bāṅglā ghar has more or less the same plan as that followed in the rural houses in east Goalpara as described above. But there are two peculiarities. Almost all houses have a verandah but it is not covered by a small lower roof: one of the two roofs itself slopes down to cover the verandah. A separate lower roof is, however, added in some houses on one end of the structure.

The chowāri is the house with a four-sided roof. Two roofs slope down on either side of a short ridge and the other two meet them at the two ends of the ridge, thus giving the whole structure almost a square look. When there is a verandah on one side, one of the roofs may slope lower down to cover it. Or there may be a separate roof for it, with a less steep slope.

In some of the houses the ridge is slightly curved but never as prominently as in Bengali houses.

The verandah is called chāli or pirāli and it is normally towards the inner courtyard. Specially made pens for the poultry are also to be seen in many houses.

It appears from Martin's account that there was a third style of building prevalent in these parts at least at the time of writing the account and it was known as the nakāri style. But no
A house type known as *nakāri* is to be found in the district today. Nakāri, as we have already seen, is only one of the houses constituting the dwelling complex and it is built either in the bāngla style or in the chowāri style.

Besides, temporary one-roofed sheds (called *chhāpor*) are also made.

As already mentioned, many people in the western parts do not have a separate granary, but one of the living apartments houses the platform meant for storing the grains. But when there is one, the process of building it is almost the same as the one described in connection with the granary in the eastern parts.

Towards the eastern side, the two main types of houses are called dui-chāliya (two-roofed) and chair-chāliya (four-roofed).

Though bamboo and thatch are the materials most commonly used in house-building, tin-roofed houses with wooden posts and frames are also a common sight in a prosperous village.

**IV Occupation**

As with the rural population in other plains districts of Assam, agriculture is the principal occupation of the vast majority of the people of Goalpara. The dependence on agriculture is, if anything, even greater than elsewhere. Perhaps in no other district

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*In this district, however another style called Nakari is not uncommon. It resembles more the common cottage of England, that is, it has a pent roof of two sides with a straight ridge*. - See Martin: *Eastern India*, Vol.III, p.489.
the rural life is so thoroughly agrarian and the folk-mind deeply engrossed with thought of production and welfare of the crop. In fact, the majority of the rites and ceremonies dear to the heart of the people centre round the agricultural operation at different stages. Moreover, a considerable portion of the religious and semi-religious beliefs and practices of the district reflect an almost primitive obsession with fertility.

The most outstanding feature of the economy of the district is its lack of diversification. There is practically no organised industry. There have been professional workers, both groups and individuals, engaged in other occupations like fishing, pottery-making, ornament making, working on pith weaving, basket-making, etc. Grazing, lumbering and elephant-catching have also attracted some people. But it appears that due to various factors, these occupations themselves could not make those engaged in them economically self-sufficient. Hence such people had always turned to agriculture as a subsidiary means of livelihood. And with the break-down of the village economy and competition from various sides, more and more of these people are flocking to the already crowded field of agriculture.

But ironically, agriculture itself is hardly a profitable business and the majority of the people engaged in it either as cultivators or as labourers are proverbially poor. One of the main factors responsible for this poverty is the zemindary system under which, except for the landlords and their big agents who among themselves owned almost the entire cultivable land, especially in the western

parts, not many of the villagers themselves owned any land. As a result the majority of the cultivators have simply worked as ryots or share-croppers retaining a very small portion of the produce, whereas the lion's share has gone to the absentee land-owners. This is the reason why in those areas of the district where the zemindary system has been particularly strong, there have been few prosperous middle-bracket farmers as in other parts of Assam.

Next to agriculture it is fishing which has the greatest importance as an occupation in rural life. And although the professional fisherman 'is looked down upon and is generally a member of one of the humble castes such as the Jhalo, the Dom or Nadiyal, and the Hira, Majhi and Malla amongst the Hindus, and the Datia among the Muhammadans', all sections of the people, high-caste or low-caste, rich or poor, take delight in catching fish for home consumption. Fishing is both a favourite sport and for many, a part-time gainful occupation that helps to add zest to the family's meal.

As for other occupations, very few people are engaged in trade, either retail or wholesale. Some of the local folk arts and crafts still survive but most of these are either languishing or gradually dying out, being encroached upon by stronger crafts from outside. Weaving gives part-time occupation to women in the eastern parts of the district only. Of course women take part in the various stages of farming, especially in transplanting and harvesting. Some women also augment the family's resources by collecting firewood from the jungle in the winter or by working for daily wages.

V Agricultural Operations

Rice being the staple food of the people, rice cultivation occupies the most important place in the sphere of farming. The other important food crops traditionally grown are millet, pulses, mustard, wheat and sugarcane. Jute is the most important cash crop and tobacco is also widely grown.

Though new varieties of rice and other crops and also modern techniques of cultivation are being introduced in recent years, most villages still retain the traditional pattern of farming.

There are three principal varieties of rice—roā (also called shāli or ḍeuti), āshu (also called bitri) and boā. Roā-dhān is transplanted paddy for which the preparation of the soil starts in April-May and the harvest takes place between November and January. Āshu-dhān is sown broadcast on marshy land. The initial preparations begin in May, the ploughing starts in February and is finally harvested about the middle of July. Āshu is sometimes sown in conjunction with boā and also occasionally transplanted in the rainy season and reaped about the beginning of August.

Boā-dhān is best grown in low-lying fields annually subjected to floods. It is sown broadcast in the middle of March and harvested in early December. There are several kinds of boā, some of which increase in length as the water rises so that the stalks attain extraordinary length and the ear of the grain remain undamaged.¹

Katāri and kāti-sāli are two other varieties, the first broadcast and the second transplanted at about the same time—July-August, and harvested in October-November.

Boro is sown in October-November and harvested in April-May.

Kāun (Setaria italica) and chīnā (Pancium miliacium) are millets and are fairly widely grown in low-lying areas which are not suitable for regular paddy cultivation. For the raising of these crops little labour and care are needed. They are sown in March-April and harvested by May-June before the fields are flooded. Chīnā and kāun supplement the poor man's diet especially when rice is in short supply.

Mustard is another crop quite extensively grown in winter. It is often grown in conjunction with āshu on the riparian flats. The preparations start as early as February and March with the clearing of jungles; the ploughing and sowing are done around October and the plants are ready for harvest in the middle of January. Mustard is also grown sometimes in lands where the cultivation of jute takes place.

Of the pulses that are grown either on the riparian flats or on higher land where summer rice has been raised the principal varieties are másh kālāi (Phaseolus mungo var. radiatus) of a dark coloured variety and thākuri kālāi of a smaller and lighter variety; mung (Phaseolus mungo liun), khesāri (Lathyrus sativus), masuri (Lens esculenta) and arhar (Cajanus indicus).¹

Farmers also grow various kinds of seasonal vegetables. Various gourds, pumpkins, cucumbers, ladies' fingers, etc. are to be found growing in abundance in the compound of almost every household in summer and they need little effort and care. In winter a variety of vegetables like cabbages, cauliflowers, raddishes, potatoes, tomatoes, brinjals, onions and garlics and leafy greens like pālang (spinach), lāi, chukā etc. are cultivated with due preparation and care. As the operations generally start in the month of Kāti (October-November), some people call it Kātināshi abād. Different kinds of arums and yams chillies, ginger and turmeric are also extensively grown.

Jute (pātā, koshtā) is the most important cash crop of the district and grown by most farmers in smaller or bigger quantities. A huge quantity of the fibre is exported while a small quantity is retained by the families growing them for household needs. A little is also consumed as leafy vegetable. The jute sticks are used as fuel or for putting up temporary fences. There are several varieties of jute, the principal varieties being known as heuti and bitri according to the time at which they are ready for cutting — autumn for the former and summer for the latter.

Tobacco is another crop very commonly grown by the people, especially in the western parts of the district, where almost every family has at least one small plot for it. The tobacco that is grown locally is called tāmākur or tāmāuk.

Of the garden crops, the plaintain or banana is one of the most valuable and also most widely grown. There are several varieties among which the most important one are āthiyā, maṇuṇa, chenichāmpā
and mālbhog. These are valued not only for their fruits, which are of course an important item of food, but also for the leaves, barks and trunks used for various purposes, specially on ceremonial occasions.

Betel nut or areca nut (areca catechu) is also most universally grown and with the plaintain and the bamboo 'forms the great trinity of trees in which houses of the villagers are usually embedded.' The betel leaf or pān vine (piper betle) is trained up the trunks of areca nut trees.

The cultivator goes to his field (bhui) early in the morning, is busy with such works as ploughing, harrowing, weeding, putting up embankments etc. All such work is done by adult males, but boys from the age of 12 or 13 also accompany the grown-ups and help in the work. In referring to a boy of such age the expression frequently used is: 'He is big enough to be able to hold the plough'. Women take part in transplanting and reaping the paddy; sometimes these are their exclusive responsibility. Women also generally bring the lunch or other refreshments to the field when the farmers are too busy to go home for food.

When the crop is ready for harvesting women cut off handfuls (muthi) of the corn near the head and tie them with a piece of straw. The muthiñ are made into larger sheaves called ātis and a number of ātis put together make a bojhā. Two bojhās are affixed to either end of a sharp pointed bamboo called bankuā and are carried by the men across their shoulders. The affluent farmers also use their

bullock carts for the purpose. At the homestead, the threshing is
done by men with the help of bullocks. The separated paddy is
passed through a sieve (chālon, chālni) and winnowed with the help
of winnowing trays called kula. Thus separated from the chaff, the
paddy is stored in the granaries (golā or māchā). Mustard, pulses,
and the smaller grains also go through similar processes of harvest­
ting, threshing and winnowing and are generally stored in big drums
called dhols or dulis.

The straw when dry, is taken home and made into neat heaps
called punji, somewhere near the outer yard. Many well-to-do far­
mers have more than one such haystack. The straw is used as cattle
fodder. Dried jute sticks are also neatly stored by many for future
use.

Almost all families of farmers have a few head of cattle,
including two bullocks, which are generally considered by them to be
invaluable possessions. The cattle are looked after by both men and
women of the family. It is generally the duty of the women to remove
the cowdung, clean the cowshed, feed and water the cattle while the
men take them to graze or tether them in the fields. Older boys and
youths are usually given the chore of looking after the cattle, spe­
cially when the bullocks are not employed in farming. The cowherd
boys (rākhal, lākhal, lāukhar) enjoy a special position in the
village society and some rites and lores revolve round them. Cattle
rites also form an important part of some popular ceremonies.
VI Agricultural and Fishing Implements

Of the large number of different operations involved in farming, the most important are ploughing (हाल बोसा), harrowing (मोइ डेवा), broadcasting (चिता), transplanting (रोआ गरा), weeding (निला), reaping (काटा) and threshing (मारा) and a variety of different implements are used for carrying out these operations.

Nāngal: The plough, made of some hard wood, having a bent body with the handle on one side and the plough-share (पहाल) on the other.

Ish: The pole which joins the plough at the junction of the handle and the body.

Jongal/Jungal: The yoke which is a flat piece of wood fastened by rope at right angles to the pole with pegs affixed to it.

Moi: The harrow, generally a bamboo ladder about eight feet long, on which two men stand as it is drawn across the field to crush the clods turned up by the plough or to reduce the field into a puddle.

Khushi or Kushi-bāri: It is the mallet with which clods are broken.

Bedā: It is a large wooden rake with teeth nearly one foot long, which is dragged over the crop when the आशु crop is about six inches high.

Hāchini/hāsni: A kind of trowel with a long handle, used for weeding आशु rice.
Kodedal: It is the spade or hoe specially used for making embankments (ail/ali) which help to retain the water.

Kasi: It is the sickle, a slim curved knife with teeth.

Pasun/Khurpi: It is the spud used for weeding and loosening the earth.

Rai: It is a large wooden spud with a long bamboo handle used for drawing the grains into heaps while threshing and winnowing.

Penti/Penati: It is the stick for beating and goading the bullocks.

The farmers moreover use choppers (dāos), the beki dao or kekra dao (curved) for such purposes as cutting jute plants and the thuta dao or tharu dao for cutting jungles and bamboos.

Though not to be included in the list of agricultural implements, we can mention the few accessories which the farmers constantly use:

Bhuti, a tightly bound straw-bundle which is lighted and burns very slowly providing the cinders for the farmer's chillum whenever he feels like having a smoke.

Japi/Jhapi: a broad-brimmed hat having a bamboo frame and certain leaves inside it.
In this district a large wooden mortar (urun, oran, ural) and a wooden pestle (gāin) are most extensively used for husking the paddy (bārā bānā) some people also use the husking pedal (dhenki).

b. A majority of the fishing implements are the same as those in use in other parts of Assam although many of them have different names. Only a few are peculiar to these areas.

The various trap-like wickerwork contraptions used for catching fish are the jolongā, the bhāri, the dārki, the ekri, the thosā, the sepā, the thupā, the khāidon and the kātī — all worked on the principle of the lobster-pot and placed in small streams running near the fields. The dhorkā, another trapping device, is a conical basket with a long end. A slight variation of it is called thurki or kānār nāthi. The polo or jhokā, the jākhā or jākhoi, and juluki are portable contraptions meant for fishing in shallow water. The polo resembles a gigantic wine glass with a short stem made of wickerwork. It is mostly used by women walking through shallow water and pressing the rim on the mud. The fish that is caught is removed through the mouth at the top. The juluki is very much like the polo, but it is smaller. The jākhā is a species of wickerwork shovel which is placed in the mud and drawn forward and upward by the user after trampling the mud in front. Women use it to catch small fry.¹

Another device that combines a frame and a net is the chāk. The frame consists of a loop to which four bamboos are fixed in the form of a cone. A conical net is fastened to the loop, and its corner

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¹ The names, descriptions, and modes of working of many of these are to be found in Allen, Goal.Dist.Gaz., p.90.
to the angle where the bamboos unite. When this net has been placed on the mud over a fish, the fisher drops the corner, and instead of groping about until he can catch the fish he secures it at once by the net which prevents the animal from moving. By this means they catch large fish.¹

The wickerwork receptacle for keeping the fish caught is called khalāi.

Different kinds of nets are also used, some only by professional fishermen, others by farmers and fishermen alike. The following description of nets and their uses is given by B. C. Allen.

'The principal nets in used are (1) the uthar, a large net which is spread on the surface of the water from a boat. The sides are weighed and sink together, and any fish that were swimming in the areas covered are caught in the pockets round the weighted edges, (2) the jata jal, a triangular net the two sides of which are fastened to two bamboos joined at the apex. A little below their junction, the bamboos are fastened to two stout posts, on which they work on a pivot. The base of the net is allowed to sink into the water, and pressure is then applied to the vertex which raises the net and its contents, (3) the bihiri and langi nets, which are hung from crossed bamboos and are lowered from above into the water, (4) the tanapaji, an ordinary dragnet, (5) the ber paji, one end of which is gradually contracted till all the fish within are caught, and (6) the

¹ Martin, Eastern India, Vol.III,p.587. According to him the chāk is an improvement made on the polo by 'the fishermen of Goyalpara.'
langi, a net which has two of its corners tied a little above the water to two stout posts. The front of the net is then lowered in the fishery and drawn up again, much as a draw bridge is raised and lowered."1

Martin described some other types of nets which he saw in 'Goyalpara' and which are still in use:

(1) the phutki, a man wades and pushes this net before him.
(2) the pāhā which is 11 or 12 cubits in length and is used for catching large fish and raised from the head of a canoe by hand.
(3) The āngthā, of the same size and used in the same way, has a smaller mesh.
(4) Two other types called khorā and phorongi.
(5) Two types of small casting nets called khevyūl and rek.
(6) The roulāgi, much used in small rivers in the eastern divisions.
(7) The ohāl, a kind of floating net, sinks by its own weight.2

Harpoons called jhākrā or kochā are also much in use. And all classes of people 'fish occasionally with the rod, partly for amusement, and partly for a savoury meal', much in the same manner which Martin must have observed in the second quarter of the last century.3

3. Ibid.
Rice constitutes the principal food of the people. Not only is cooked rice consumed at the two principal meals, it also very often serves as a breakfast item. Much rice is also used for the preparation of such items of food as flattened rice (chirā), puffed rice (muri), powdered rice (gurā), and popped rice (khoi). Most of the popular cakes are also made of rice.

Although many varieties of rice are grown, the finer varieties are consumed by the richer sections of the community and the poor content themselves with the coarser varieties. Kāon and chinā — two species of millet — are also consumed in some quantity. They are, however, the poor man's diet, especially when rice is scarce. The expression kāoner bhaṭ (meal cooked with kāon) is frequently found in folk-songs and is meant to indicate object poverty.

The rice is either par boiled (ushā/usnā) or unboiled (alowā). Farmers and other doing hard labour generally prefer ushā chāul (par-boiled rice).

Pānta bhaṭ and kharkhār bhaṭ: Rice soaked in water overnight is pānta bhaṭ and is a very popular item of food. Many people take it at breakfast, especially in summer, with salt, mustard oil, raw onions and chillies. Farmers in the field eat pānta bhaṭ with the greatest of relish as it is cool and refreshing. Exhausted with labour and heat, the farmer eagerly waits for the bowl of pānta (pantar khorā) to be brought to him usually by a female of the family. In a popular folk-song, a brother-in-law complains to his
Behind the homestead is the clump of cane,  
And I have been ploughing in this field,  
O my sister-in-law  
How is it that as yet the pantā has not come to the field?

Kharkharā bhāt (also called karkarā or khakrā) is rice cooked on the previous day and left overnight but not soaked in water. Mostly it consists of the left-over of the previous night, which the poor people eat for breakfast or as a late morning refreshment.

Rice is eaten with various kinds of seasonings called ḍhakā or bejan (Skt. yyanjana). In some parts any kind of curry is called sāk (lit. leafy vegetable), e.g. māser sāk (fish curry), dāil sāk (a preparation of pulses), lāuer sāk (a pumpking preparation). Some people also use the term torkāri or tokāi.

Following are the preparations most popular among the common villagers of the district:

Sekā or khar : This is the alkaline preparation popular throughout Assam as khar. While it is called khar in the eastern parts of the district, and sekā in the western parts, the alkali is prepared by the people themselves from the ashes of dried trunks of the ēthya by an ingenious process. In the older days when salt was scarce in these parts of the country, people used very little of the scarce commodity and depended mostly on the homemade alkali. Even though salt is no longer scarce, the habit of using alkali extensively in food still persists throughout Assam and
Bengal. Of course the practice of preparing alkali at home is gradually being discontinued and sodium bicarbonate powder purchased from the market is taking the place of the home-made sekā or khār. Sekā or khār is also widely believed to have medicinal properties.

Porā or chhubā: This is nothing but roast. Roasted potato is ālu porā or chhubā, roasted brinjal is bāigan porā or chhubā, and so on. Besides vegetables of various kinds, some varieties of small fry are also roasted and such roast (mās porā or chhubā) is said to go well with pānta bhāt.

Sijā or bhattā: Sijā simply means boiled and bhattā means something, generally vegetable, which has been boiled in rice. The boiling may be done by putting the things in the pan of boiling paddy. When the boiled vegetable is mashed or kneaded and made into lumps after adding such seasonings as salt, mustard oil, onions and chillies, it is called sānā. In some areas it is also called pitika. Thus mashed potato is ālu sānā or ālu pitika.

Bhāji or bhājā: A bhāji or bhājā is a fry. Thus green leafy vegetables, fish and potatoes, when fried are called sāk bhāji (bhājā), mās bhāji (bhājā) and ālu bhāji (bhājā) respectively. Though a bhāji is normally prepared by frying in oil, often the practice is to add little quantities of water while the frying is going on, so that the preparation becomes something between a boiled and a fried dish. This is done particularly by the poor people who cannot afford to consume much oil.

Pāṭā or pātra: This is a dish prepared by a special process of roasting or boiling. For example, mās pāṭā or pātra is prepared
in this process: fish is cured and washed, seasonings like salt, onions, garlics, mustard and chillies are added to it, the whole thing is then wrapped in a neat bundle in plaintain or arum or pumpkin leaves, which is then inserted into an oven with a smouldering fire. When the first few layers of leaves of the bundle are scarred, the preparation is ready. Other things like tender shoots of the arum plant also make delicious pātrā. Sometimes the bundle may also be boiled instead of being burnt.

Pelkā: It is an alkaline preparation made with the tender leaves of the jute plant or the lafā plant. A lot of water is added so that when the leaves are properly boiled, the whole thing turns into a thick viscous fluid as the jute and lafa leaves are mucilaginous.

Sukāti/suktā/suktāni: When jute leaves are dried and preserved for future use, this is known as sukāti or suktā. A bitter dish prepared by boiling these dried leaves with a little alkali is also called sukāti or suktā or suktāni.

Nelpā: When vegetables are cooked with broken rice (khudi) or flattened rice (chīrā) with the addition of a little alkali, it is called nelpā. (In some parts, particularly in the south, rice powder is added in some preparations which are called pithāli sak.)

Bhelkā: This is another alkaline preparation with big pieces of vegetables like gourd and pumpkin etc.

Sometimes poor people also make a kind of preparation by boiling the rice gruel with alkali and adding onions, dried chillies and some salt.
Pulses of various kinds (called kālāi) are used but the most popular are mās kālāi, khesāri kālāi, thākuri kālāi and kulti kālāi. A preparation of pulses is called dāil. Sometimes in the absence of dāil, a dāil-like preparation is made with broken rice and the seeds of the local been which is called simār dāil. There are similar other preparations called kochur dāil, lāuer dāil, kum-rār dāil, etc. made with pieces of arum, gourd or pumpkin, etc. 1

Bamboo shoots are also used in some preparations. In the south some Rabhas prepare a kind of juice from bamboo shoots.

Vegetarianism has almost no adherents among the local population 2 and even high-caste Hindus have no scruples about eating fish, meat and eggs except on special religious or ceremonial occasions that demand abstention from them. 3 Although widows of Brahmanas are seen to avoid a vegetarian diet, the practice is generally not followed by widows of other castes.

Fish of course is much more popular among all sections of the people than meat as the former is more abundantly available and can be procured with a little effort. While the bulk of the bigger varieties of fish caught in the big rivers and lakes are either

1. It is interesting to note that very similar preparations are popular in North Bengal and the rest of Assam, particularly lower Assam. In North Bengal even the names of the preparations are identical. — See C.C. Sanyal: The Rajbansis of North Bengal, pp.45-48.

2. The tradition must be very old in these parts for 'the Yogini Tantra recommends in most emphatic words the eating of meat and fish in Kamarupa (Kāmarūpe na tyajet sāmigam).' — See B.K. Barua in A Cultural History of Assam, p.123.

3. 'It is also noteworthy that in Assam unlike the other provinces of India, the Brāhmaṇas and the Vaishnavas both eat meat and fish without any social bar or comment.' — See B.K. Barua: A Cultural History of Assam, p.123.
exported or consumed by the rich, they seldom fall to the lot of the common man who mostly consumes the smaller varieties except on big occasions like feasts and festivities.

Meat is called masam or masang, the most favoured being mutton procured from a he-goat or a castrated goat. Among the Hindus pigeons, ducks, turtle (dur, kāso, pānimās) are also used for meat. Goats, ducks and pigeons are frequently offered as sacrifices to various gods and goddesses and the votaries partake of the flesh of the sacrificed animals. Among Muslims chicken is the most commonly used variety while beef is consumed on special occasions. Among the Bodos and Rabhas the two most commonly used varieties of meat are pork and chicken. Venison is relished by all sections of the people whenever available. Eggs are also freely eaten by all.

Sidal: A most favourite item of food relished particularly by the Rajbansis and Muslims of the district is sidal, a kind of fish preparation meant specially for preservation. After removing the heads, fins and entrails, the small fry is dried in the sun. This is then put into the mortar along with pieces of arum stalks (māṅ or kāḷā kochu) and seasonings like garlic, turmeric and a little alkali (seka). The whole mass is pounded and made into a paste from which small balls are made, dried in the sun and preserved for future use. Various preparations made with sidal (sidal būtā ānja) are much-prized delicacies.

Fish is also preserved by drying either in the sun or over the fire and is called sutkā mās. A large quantity of sundried fish
is exported, for, the local people, consume very little of it. Dried fish is of course popular with the Bodos who call it nā phām.

The condiments used are turmeric, chillies, onions, garlics, dhania, tejpat, etc. Mustard oil is the cooking medium. Very little butter or ghee is used by the common man. Curds are the most popular milk product and is often eaten with rice. Curds made from unboiled milk are favoured.

While rice served with various seasonings is eaten in the principal meals, the most popular item of light food is flattened rice (chīrā), followed by puffed rice (muri). Doi-chīrā (flattened rice and curds with molasses) is invariably served to guests on ceremonial occasions like marriage and shraddha and very heavy quantities are consumed. Doi-chīrā is also welcomed whenever a heavy refreshment is needed. Again doi-chīrā also serves as the alternative meal on religious and social occasions on which custom prohibits the eating of rice. Preparation of chīrā for a festive occasion, specially for a marriage, is a duty which women undertake with great eclat as it provides opportunity for social meeting and merry-making for the womenfolk.

Muri is more favoured as light refreshment. Many people also take it at breakfast.

Gurā is fried rice made into a powder and is another favourite refreshment item. Gurā is also made from barley (pairār gurā) and dhemsi seeds (dhemsi r gurā). Gargari is powdered rice made into balls and boiled in water.

Cakes (pithā) and sweet balls (lāru, molā) of various kinds of which the more popular are chitāi, khola porā, dhāprā, bhakā pithā,
and chungā pithā or dingā pithā, suknā pithā, etc. Eatables are also prepared from banni chāul, a kind of rice with a sticky quality.

All the people of Goalpara are veteran betel-nut chewers. Betel-nut chewing is a habit to which people throughout Assam/addicted. What is peculiar about the habit in these parts is that the betel-nut is not dried and made into supāri as in other parts of India but is taken raw. The nut is shelled, split into pieces and chewed in combination with betel leaf and a little lime. Many people add pieces of tobacco leaves (błowā pātā, hāmāku, sādhā) in the combination. Men, women and even children are found chewing betel-nut (guā in western Goalpara and tāmul in eastern Goalpara) at almost any time of the day and there are many who would rather do without food than without guā-pān. The most favoured form is ripe betel nut preserved under the ground (majā guā, burā tāmul). Even unripe betel nut is chewed. As with the rest of Assam plains, in Goalpara also, areca nut and betel leaf 'have a definite place in many religious and ceremonial functions. They are the first things offered to a visitor ... '.

The habit of smoking is also very common. While the traditional popular smoke is the hookah, the biri is gradually taking its place and huge quantities of it are smoked in the villages.

So far as the drinking of liquor is concerned, a stigma is attached to it in both the Hindu and Muslim societies. But home-made

1. B. K. Barua: A Cultural History of Assam, p.125. The same work quotes the Yogini Tantra according to which the women of Assam would always be chewing betel-nut (tāmulāsāh sadā bhavet) and the Fathiya-i-Ibriyah according to which the people of Assam ate pān in large quantities with unripe supāri, unshelled.
rice-beer is consumed in large quantities in the tribal communities in which drinking is a part of social custom and liquor is an essential article in many religious and social rites. Rice-beer moreover is considered in such communities to be a wholesome beverage that tones up the system.

VIII Dress

Men have the same kind of dress almost throughout the district—a white cotton dhoti or waist cloth with one end taken behind between the legs and tucked below the back and the other end tucked in front. Hindu, Muslim and tribal males dress almost in the same fashion, only the tribal waist-cloths are generally coloured and have distinctive designs. Many Muslims of course use the lungi now. The dhoti rarely goes down below the knees or at least the calf. Boys often wear simply a towel (āngsa or gamsa) wrapped around the waist. Even grown up men similarly use the towel for casual wear. The upper part of the body is mostly left bare when at home, specially in summer. It is only when going out on business that shirts and vests (piran, sola) are put on. Wrappers (pāsrā) are in demand in winter. The head is generally kept bare but farmers often wrap a napkin around their head, specially when working in the sun. Country hats called jāpi are also used by the farmers to protect themselves from rain and sun. Of course the umbrella is also very much a part of the village scene.

The dress of the average male of the village has little distinctiveness—it is very much the same as in other parts of Assam.

It is in the dress of the women that some distinctiveness is
noticeable. In the eastern parts of the district and also amongst a large section in the west, the **patāni** is the apparel commonly used by women. The **patāni** is a piece of cloth about two cubits in breadth and four in length which is wrapped around the body under the armpits and covering the breasts. One end of it is tucked in below the left armpit near the back. The shoulders are usually left bare and the **patāni** actually reaches only to the calf. No blouse or such other garment is generally worn. But many women, specially those who consider themselves more respectable, use a scarf to cover the shoulders and also the head. The women of the Nath community are more particular about covering the head with a scarf called **māthlā**. Sometimes the **patāni** is worn around the waist with one end tucked prominently behind, when a scarf covers the upper part of the body, which includes the head in case of a married woman. The latter fashion is in vogue in eastern Goalpara, where sometimes even saris are folded or cut into two to be used as **patānis**. One piece is used as the lower garment and the other as the upper garment.

In fact the **patāni** is very much like the **mekhēla**, the lower garment used by women in other parts of Assam, the difference being that while the **mekhēla** is sewn, the **patāni** is an unsewn piece of cloth. Though the **mekhēla** is normally worn around the waist, many women, more particularly women in lower Assam, wear it above the breasts (**bukot kāpur pindāra, methonī marā**). This is more common among women of the lower castes and of the plains tribes who have adopted the dress of the non-tribal neighbours. Even women of the
higher castes use this particular fashion while dressed informally at home. ¹

If one takes a careful look at the dresses of the women of the different tribes living in these parts, one will find that in most of the tribes the principal item of female dress consists of an open piece of cloth worn above the breasts and reaching up to the knees. Thus it is most likely that the pātāni and in turn the mekhelā, were adopted from the female dress of the aboriginal people. Thus something like the pātāni must have been the dress of the women in the whole of the Assam Valley, and in those areas of North Bengal which formed parts of ancient Kamarupa. ² The women of the original inhabitants of these areas, particularly the Rajbansis, seem to have retained this fashion of old Assam. ² The pātāni is also called photā by some and the latter term is current in North Bengal where even today, 'the Rajbansi woman is happy with her photā.' ³

However in the westernmost parts of the district the pātāni is rarely to be seen now-a-days and the use of the sari is most common. Different factors seem to have contributed in different measures in ousting the pātāni, the most important being the discontinuation of the practice of weaving. It is reported that pātānis were woven at home by women not in the distant past. But the cheap mill-made sari

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1. It may be mentioned here that the mekhelā itself was in the past an unwoven garment and the practice of sewing it came later as an innovation. — See B. K. Barua: Asamar Loka-Samskriti, p.109.

2. 'The Rajbansi women ... leave their heads uncovered and wear a cloth or sari reaching only to the knees and bound over the bosom, leaving both shoulders bare, much in the same fashion as the Assamese.' — F. Grunning: Jalpaiguri Dist.Gaz., 1911, p.35.

3. C. C. Sanyal : The Rajbansis of North Bengal, p.28.
has made such inroads into the society that the *patani* has been almost entirely replaced by it in those western regions where the tradition of weaving by women has not been as deep-rooted as in other parts of the district. While this change in fashion seems to be a recent phenomenon in Jalpaiguri, in this region the change-over must have taken place fairly early and the *sari* has been, for all intents and purposes, adopted as the local dress of the womenfolk, so much so that while there are few references to the *patani* in the folk-literature of this region, references to the *sari* are to be found frequently. In many folk-songs the *sari* is endearingly called *kamerer sari* (sari for the waist) and the offering of it merits special favours from the offeree.

B. C. Allen also reported in 1905 that 'Hindu and Muhammadan women wear a *sari*, 15 feet long and 4 feet broad, which is fastened round the waist to form a petticoat and then brought over the head and the shoulder to cover the rest of the body.'

But Martin had observed in the thirties of the last century that a great proportion of the women retained 'the old fashion of Kamrup which consists in covering themselves with a square piece of cotton cloth (*patani*), passed under the arms round the back, so as to cross before, where tucked in above the breast.'

In the eastern parts of the district, however, particularly on the south bank, the use of the *mekhela* is fairly common. In fact,

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1. 'Within the last ten years the "phota" is going out of the market. The village weavers have to close their business as requisite quantity of yarn is not available at economic price so as to compete with the mill made cloth. So the pleasing 'phota' of variegated hue is now being replaced by the mill-made sari of any description'. - See C.C. Sanyal: *The Rajbansis of North Bengal*, p.8.
in these parts it is the mekhela which is now increasingly taking the place of the patani. Some folk-songs, particularly marriage songs, contain references to the mekhela. Here is an example:

The bridegroom's mother is crook-back,
She is wearing a mekhela
She has a garland of dhutura flowers in her neck.

At the same time the sari has also been much sought after, particularly as an object of luxury and on special occasions:

What clothes shall I wear, O mother?
I don't want a muga garment
I don't want a cotton garment
I want a sari from Goalpara.

The dresses of the Bodos and Rabhas of Goalpara are more colourful than those of their non-tribal neighbours.

The dress of the Bodo male consists of a short dhoti worn in the same fashion as described earlier, but his cloth is almost invariably home-woven, coloured and has distinctive designs. On special occasions the Bodo male uses a home-made wrapper generally with designs consisting of stripes and checks. He also wraps a long but narrow cloth (called phali) around his head. A handkerchief is also called phali, and a phali is often the token of the wife's devotion to the husband or the love of a maiden for her lover.

The Bodo woman's dress is most colourful. It consists of the dakhnā, a piece of cloth similar to the patani, which is worn in much the same manner as the latter. However, the dakhnā of the Goalpara Bodo woman is longer and broader. It is tied above the
breasts and reaches almost to the ankles, one end of it being folded and tied below the breasts. A wrapper (ālowān) is also used to cover the upper part of the body. Many pieces contain intricate floral or geometric designs. While the favourite colours are orange, yellow, green and blue, other colours like white, red and black are also used for heightening the effects of the designs.¹

The Rabha male dress is also similar to that of the Bodo male; only the designs are different. The Rabha male often uses a waist-band called phāli and a turban called khopāng. On ceremonial occasions two pieces, one resembling a petticoat and the other a frock-coat are worn and are called kumbār khāmbrāi. It resembles the dress of the Oja of an Ojāpāli performance.² The woman's girdle is called the rufān. She also uses a breast cloth called kambung. These cloths are also made by the Rabha women themselves with colourful designs peculiar to the tribe.³

IX Ornaments

Goalpara women are as fond of ornaments as women anywhere else.

Although gold ornaments are not unknown, their possession is generally confined to the rich few, particularly in the western parts, whereas among the vast majority of the women silver ornaments are in vogue. Very poor women also use zinc and brass ornaments. This is no doubt due to the miserable economic condition of most of the people.

2. See Chap XI. See III
The different ornaments favoured by the local women are the following:

For the head:

The *ṣitā-śati* : It is an ornament made of chains. The main chain, with or without a pendant, runs along the parting of the hair (ṣitā, Skt. simanta). It is worn only on special ceremonial occasions.

The *jethi* ¹: It is a kind of pendant for the forehead. It is also worn on special occasions.

For the ear:

The *onti* : It is the most popular ornament with a distinctive style. It is a kind of ear-ring, with or without decorations. Some varieties of this ornament are called *phul-kari* (c.f. Assamese kariyā), *sonā* (c.f. Kamrup xanā) and *kadmā*.

A *phul kari* with a chain is a *jhinjri lārā phulkari*. The *madan kari* is mentioned in an old ballad.²

The *māchi pāt*, which is an ornament with a pendant is meant for the upper part of the ear.

The *mākri* is another kind of ear-ring very much sought after by young girls.

The *chāki* is a kind of large ear-ring worn on the upper part of the ear and covering the whole ear.

The *thek*³ also called *septā sonā*, is another ornament of the ear and this also finds mention in the ballad referred to above.

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¹ Āi Sitār kapālate manikare jethi. A jewelled jethi [shines] on Sita's forehead. (A marriage song).

² and ³ Dāin kēne madan kari bāo kāne thek. 'A madan kari on the right ear and a thek on the left.' (An old Bārāṃsāi ballad).
The *khiral* is also a popular ornament of the ear.

For the nose:

The *nath* is a ring worn on one of the nose. It has two varieties: one *sādā* or plain and the other *jal tupā* which is connected with the ear with a chain. Another ornament similar to the *nath* is the *bāli*. The *nolok* is an ornament suspended from the septum of the nose. The *phul* or *nakphul* is a flat flower-shaped ornament fitted to the wall of the nose.

For the neck: Various types of necklaces and *strings* known *hār*, *mālā*, *kāthi* are in use.

The *surjya-hār* and the *chandra hār* are very heavy necklaces with intricate and elaborate designs.

The *sīkā hār*, *kāthi mālā* and *gōt mālā* are necklaces with beads, each with a particular design.

The *sikkā hār* is made with silver (*sikkā*) rupees. The *bisā hār* is a flat and wide chain.

The *poāl mālā* is a necklace of coral beads.

The *hāsli/hāsuli* is a solid heavy ornament with a round shape.

For the waist: A heavy silver chain worn only on special occasions, say at the time of marriage.

For the wrist: Ornaments for the wrist are called *khāru* and various types are found.

The *muthā khāru*: It is a heavy wrist-let, normally with hinges. Some are plain and some are elaborately worked.
Another heavy wristlet is the rotā khāru. Simpler bracelets are called bālā.

For the fingers: There are rings of different kinds, called āngthī.

For the arms: The ornament for the arm is known as bāju — a kind of band — which is of two types: the kātā bāju and the tār bāju.

For the leg and feet: The most popular ornament is the theng khāru which has two types — the tolā khāru and the phelā khāru. The mal is made of silver rings. Other ornaments for the feet are the pāijep, the pāo pata, the gujirī, the torā and the charan padma. Rings are also worn on the toes.

The tribal communities have their own ornaments, some of which, particularly the Bodo ornaments, are the same as, or have a close resemblance with the ornaments described above. Bodos of course use a greater proportion of gold ornaments.

The chief Bodo ornaments are the following:

For the ears: Kherā
Jāp khring
Teling Larā

For the nose: Ganthangni bāli (c.f. bāli described above).
Baulā Jangā

For the neck: Chandra hār and bisā hār (They are the same as those described above).
For the hands: Ornaments for the hands are called *asaṅ*. There are different kinds of *asaṅ*, e.g. *asaṅ* muthi (similar to the mutha described above) and *bala* *asaṅ*.

A ring is called *akhtam* of which there are different types.

The following are the Rabha ornaments:

1. The *khusumākrang* is a hairpin made of brass which is inserted into the bun.
2. The *dhalā-bala*, made of silver, consists of two parts—the *dhalā* and the *bala*. The former is worn on the top of the ear and the latter is inserted into the hole in the ear-lobe.
3. The *nāmbri* is a silver ear-ring.
4. The *khuli* is the bracelet which is nothing but the mutha described above.
5. The *chan* is the *bāju* or arm-band.
6. The *hansa* is a necklace.
7. The *rubāk* is a waist-belt made of ivory. There are six strings of ivory beads with the two ends tied together.

X Dressing up and Idea of Personal Beauty

Although there is a common saying in these parts that the 'slovenly' woman is the best woman, women here, as elsewhere are naturally keen to look their best, particularly on special occasions. Dressing up for such an occasion is an elaborate affair. It starts with a cleaning of the hair and the body, for which the articles
traditionally used are home-made alkali (sēkā) and oil-cake (khoilā). Now-a-days of course the use of soap is very common. Washing and scrubbing of the body is meticulously gone through. The hair is carefully combed and tied into a bun with a parting along the middle of the head (sīsh, sītā). Although poor people cannot afford a daily application of oil, it is profusely applied whenever a woman dresses up for some special occasion so that oil often trickles down the temples. Vermilion (sendur) mixed with water or oil is used to put a mark on the forehead and, in married women, on the parting of the hair. It may be pointed out that the use of vermilion is not confined to Hindus alone. Application of the vermilion mark on the bride’s forehead was an important part of a Muslim marriage till the other day and the custom still persists with some.

Though wavy or curly hair is not very common among the village women in these parts, hair with undulating waves (motuk chul) is considered a mark of beauty. Buns (khopā) are of many types — jāti khopā, jura khopā or hāt khopā, turi khopā, pestā khopā, dhalā khopā, etc. The elaborate dhalūā khopā seems to arouse the highest of admiration, as is evident from the frequent reference to it in the folk songs. To quote a specimen —

She with the dhalūā khopā and wavy hair,
The end of her sāri flying in the air ...

The lips and the mouth reddened with the chewing of betel nut is also regarded as an addition to a woman’s personal attraction.

All this, of course, with the best fineries and ornaments she possesses. The following song gives a description of a young
woman specially dressed-up:

With care have I scrubbed the parting of my hair  
In the hope of applying vermilion,  
Oh, the artful maiden dances  
Swinging like a slim areca nut tree,

With care have I scrubbed my ears  
In the hope of wearing the ear-ring,  
Oh, the artful maiden dances  
Swinging like a slim areca nut tree,

With care have I scrubbed my neck  
In the hope of wearing a necklace,  
Oh, the artful maiden dances  
Swinging like a slim areca nut tree,

With care have I scrubbed my waist  
In the hope of wearing the sari,  
Oh, the artful maiden dances  
Swinging like a slim areca nut tree,

With care have I scrubbed my feet  
In the hope of wearing the nepur,  
Oh, the artful maiden dances  
Swinging like a slim areca nut tree.

A fair-complexioned girl is generally considered beautiful.  
As the popular folk-song says:

O my fair maiden, O my beauteous maiden
Let the two of us agree and elope.

Slimness at the waist is another mark of feminine beauty.
So far as male beauty is concerned, it is the dark well-built man who is considered beautiful. In folk-songs, the object of a woman's love is kāla, the allusion being to Krishna, the dark one. A man with eye-brows joined at the forehead, the hair parted sideways and a bewitching smile on his face is considered particularly desirable.
THE RURAL SCENE

A general view of a village with two women in the foreground.

Two farmers in the field.

A village scene with cattle grazing and villagers out for fishing.

The outer courtyard of a homestead with farmers back from the field. The family shrine is in the background.

Fishermen with nets and baskets and women with loads of firewood.
Reaping done by men (above) and by a woman (left).

Winnowing in a Muslim homestead.

Relaxing in the outer courtyard after harvesting is over.

Fishing in the Brahmaputra.
THE RURAL SCENE: HOUSE TYPES: WEST GOALPARA.

A homestead with chowkī and Bāṅglā type houses.

Inner courtyard of the homestead shown on left.

A modest homestead.

Bāṅglā type house with slightly bent ridge and verandah on the side.

Bāṅglā type house with roof sloping to cover verandah.

House under repair.
THE RURAL SCENE: EAST AND SOUTH GOALPARA.

A Bodo village in South Goalpara

East Goalpara House Types.
(Note the fence in front of the main house).

A new homestead coming up.
The house on the left is the granary.

A Bodo house with a loom-frame and some other household effects.

Women fishing in groups
DRESS

*Sāri-clad women pounding rice in a wooden mortar.*

Woman wearing Pātāni

†Rabha woman in ceremonial dance apparel

South Goalpara Bodo women wearing dākhna and mokhla.
ORNAMENTS

Left and Right: Suryahān (two views)

Left: Chandrāhān
Right: Chandrāhān (detail)

Mukha-Khāra with hinges

Left: closed
Right: open
ORNAMENTS

MUTHÄ (PLAIN)

PÄO KHRU/THENG KHRU

ONTI

GUJRI

TÖRÄ

AR BEKI

KHUSUMÄKRANG

DHALÄ-BALÄ

NÄMBRI
AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS

MOI

JONGAL/JUNGAL

ISH

NANGAL

RAINAN

KODAL

BEKI DAO/KEKRA DAO

KASI

THUTA DAO/THARU DAO
AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS

BEDA

HACHNI/HASNI

KURAL/KUTHAR (SMALL)

KURAL/KUTHAR

KUSHI/KUSHI-BARI

PACON/KHURPI