CHAPTER - II

LIFE AND CULTURE AMONG THE BORO - KACHARIS :

A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE TRIBAL LIFE OF UDALGURI :

The Boros were the first among the Tibeto-Burman groups to have entered this region. The original home of the Tibeto-Burmans speakers was the North-West China from where they moved Southward to enter North-east India.

The term 'Boro' is originally a linguistic one but very often it is used in ethnic sense also. The term 'Boro' is used to denote a large number of tribes like Kachari, Garo, Mech, Rabha, Lalung, Tripuri, Hajong etc. The Boros are found in almost the entire Brahmaputra Valley, however, showing concentration in certain areas.

Traditional stories of migration are told by the Rabhas. The Rabhas had to leave the hilly habitat and came down to the plains for settlement.

The ethnic affinities among population groups can be examined of various levels. In fact, the whole of mankind can be grouped in to three or four categories.

There are differences between the sub-groups of small tribes. The affinities can be observed by taking in to account -
1. biological difference
2. variations in cultural patterns
3. linguistic similarities
4. geographical location.

Again, tribal population of North-east India can be divided into:

1. Arunachal Tribes
2. Nagas
3. Lushai, Kuki
4. Bodos
5. Khasis

The Boro-Kacharis and the Rabhas are the two major tribal communities in the Udalguri sub-division. Some writers use the term 'Boro-Kachari' to include the splinter groups like Sarania, Mahaliya, Sonowal, Pngleal, Brahmas and Burmans.

The Kacharis of Larrang District differ from their Hindu and Muslim neighbours. They have squareset faces, projecting cheekbones with almost shaped eyes, scanty beards and mustache, the last mentioned being often together. They are fit to

1. Das, Dr. B.M.- The Tribes of North East India. P. 39.
2. Medini Choudhury said, "Kachari is a common term that encompasses not only the Boros but also the afore said splinter groups and it is exactly why I have chosen to use the term Boro-Kachari all through."- The Boro-Dimasas Of Assam, Guwahati, March, 1988 1st edition - P. 11.
work in the fields and factories because they have strength and stamina to work. They are not fit to work where skill is required. 3

The Rabhas constitute a separate community. There are eleven kinds of Rabhas viz; Modahi, Banthe, Sandev, Raybande, Bang, Hate, Pam, Rankha, Pati-Rabha, Maifori and Totla. Of these the totlas live in North Kamrup area and in the Northern part of Darrang district particularly around Rowta, Udalguri and Hengrajuli.

Originally, the Totlas were the inhabitants of 'Miru' a place situated near the foothills of Himalayas. When their population increased, they came down to Assam in search of cultivable land. Most of the worshippers were the of Siva. Similarly, the Modahis have lost their tribal characteristics and they are known as Modahi Koches.

In addition to this, the Mai tori Rabhas are said to have come down from the Garo-hills. It is said that the powerful Garos drove them away and came to Assam and settled down in Lakhimpur district. 4

RELIGION:

Most of the Boros of the sub-division are Hindus. But a large number of tribal people were converted to Christianity. They are generally the inhabitants of Harisinga, Udalguri and a few villages around these places.

During the last 25 years, the Baptist Missionaries have so far baptized 14,580 persons in the study area. Among them, there are a few persons belonging to other communities.

POPULATION:

According to the Census Report of 1971, the population of Boro-Kacnaris of the sub-division was 1,85,485 lakhs and the population of the Rabhas was 18 thousand only.

LANGUAGE:

The tribes of the study area fall into two language groups viz; Boro and Assamese. Most of the tribal communities have become bi-lingual. Besides their native languages, they know Assamese. Some Boros have totally forgotten their own language. According to 1971 Census, the number of estimated speakers...


of Bodo is 8 lakhs covering the entire Northern belt of Assam, entire Southern belt of Goalpara and Kamrup districts and parts of Nowgaon, Jorhat and Sibsagar districts.

Similarly, the estimated number of speakers of Rabha is 0.75 lakhs in Assam.7

Provisionally, the Rabhas spoke Assamese, but recently they are also demanding the introduction of Rabha as one of the modern Indian Languages in the Primary Schools of Assam. The Government of Assam allowed the use of Rabha as one of the Modern Indian Languages in 70 Lower Primary Schools of Assam. Rabha, is not yet introduced in the Lower Primary Schools of Darrang district because of a small number of population of the Rabha people.8

**FAMILY:**

A Boro-Kachari family is patriarchal in character and as such father is the head of the family. He is the owner of all the movable and immovable properties.

As per the social custom, the eldest son inherits the property of his father after his death. In the event of a son less father, the adopted sons inherit or in the absence of adopted sons, the close relatives or married daughters inherit the property.9

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There are definite regulations as regards the construction of a Boro-homestead. The main house stretches from the West to the East. There are three divisions of the main house with the provisions of a floor, facing to the South.

The eastern most portion of the main house is meant for cooking and worship. They place the altar of Bathow, the supreme God with a Sizu (Cactus) plant as the emblem.

The Sizu tree is planted on the North-eastern corner of the courtyard parallel to the eastern most portion of the main house. Moreover, the altars of Kamakhya or Mother Goddess and Maynw, the Goddess of Lakshmi or fortune are placed inside the eastern most portion of the house.¹⁰

Though the Boro-Kachari family is patriarchal yet traces of original matrilineal affiliation could be noticed in certain customs prevailing in the Boro-Kachari Society. For example, among the Boro-Kacharis if a man dies without paying the bride-money, his daughter or in the absence of any daughter, his wife side inherits the property. Thus, it is obvious that the Boro-Kacharis had followed the rules of matriarchal family before they came in contact with the patriarchal Hindus.¹¹


STATUS OF BORO-WOMEN:

The Boro-Women are healthy and industrious. They command respect in their community and their position is not regarded as superior to that of a man. However, the birth a son is more favoured than the birth of a daughter.

During their maidenhood, the girls enjoy freedom to participate in singing, dancing and merri-making on the occasions of marriage and festivals but married women generally refrain from out door exhilarations.

The Boro-women are had working and they work side by side with their sun-burnt husbands. They are also expert weavers and they can weave colourful weaving apparels.12

The Boro-women are allowed to take part in out door economic activities. They go to markets, work in the fields and fishing in the ponds is their favourite job. They donot carry load on their shoulders, climb on the roof of a house or a tree. They are not permitted to plough or ride on elephant.13

The status of Boro-Women are determined by (1) status in the family (2) economic status (3) status in the religions field and (4) political status. Boro-Women, it is said, occupy

a primary status in the maintenance of domestic affairs while the status of male is secondary in this respect. A chaste woman endowed with socially recognised virtuous qualities is honoured as an ideal woman who commands a good deal of respect from the society. Such an ideal woman is compared with 'The Deity', Lakshmi or Maināo. The concept of Maināo among the Bodos is the result of the contact and influence of the Hindu culture and ideology.

In the family the status of the wife is next to that of the husband and even in the absence of the husband her position is higher than that of the eldest son.

In the economic field also, a Bodo woman is equally active with the male while she is busy in transplanting, harvesting, spinning, weaving and in rearing domestic animals etc. A Boro-girl does not inherit father's property, with the progress of education, Bodo women have come to occupy places in the offices. For example, two Boro women were elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1985. One is Miss Rekha Rani Boro from Rarama constituency and the other is Miss Jyotsna Sonowal from Sadia constituency. Miss Rekha Rani Boro has got a berth in the ministry also.

✓ A Boro woman is very essential in the 'Bathow' and in the 'Kharai' festivals. They spin Endi-Yarn and weave their own dresses.14

In the tribal societies, women are governed by their customary laws and practices but the non-tribal women folk are governed by the statutory laws in addition to their traditional practices. Owing to the industrialization and urbanization in the Brahmaputra Valley womenfolk of this tribe are standing in a transitional stage of their culture, Levirate by which rule, a man is bound to marry the widow of his brother either senior or junior. This rule indicates that unlike other Indian societies, the Boro-widows do not live a miserable life. This is a indicator of the raised status of women in the society.\textsuperscript{15}

The Bodo-women are bound to be more industrious than men. They work ceaselessly from morning to evening without leisure. They do all kinds of work except the construction of house or ploughing.

In comparison to other backward area of tribal societies, the Boro-women of this region have little scope for personal pleasure and happiness. Hard work makes their lives extremely busy. Economic and social backwardness very often make them easy preys of greedy and lastful people.\textsuperscript{16}


MARRIAGE SYSTEM AMONG THE BORO-KACHARIS:

The Boro-Kachari society is patriarchal with a few features of matriarchal society. As a rule, endogamy is absent in Boro-Society. One cannot marry a girl from a cognate family. Although they are exogamous marriage with a girl from non-tribal communities is not encouraged by the society. It is considered to be a luxury. One can marry a girl from the same clan. Likewise, a boy from a Bosumata clan is free to marry a girl from any clan. Marriage between Hindu Boros and Christians is not strictly prohibited. Usually, the married girl is bound to accept the religion of her husband.

Levirate is very rare. Senior levirate is also absent. Cross-cousin marriage is strictly prohibited. Of course, parallel cousin marriage is strictly prohibited. Of course, parallel cousin marriage is permitted by the society, while polygamy is rare, polyandry is totally absent.\textsuperscript{17}

There are six types of marriage among the Boro-community and the last two are not regarded as legal in the community.

(1) Marriage in accordance with the social system of the community (Songnay Ḥaba).

(2) The system of marriage where the second husband comes to live, with a widow in her first husband's family (Dongkha Ḥaba).

(3) The system of keeping a boy in the house of the girl's father (Gorgia).

(4) The system of marriage wherein girls willingly
enter the house of a boy (Kharsonnāy)

(5) The system of marriage where in girls are forcibly taken to the bride-groom's house (Raikhās - Hābā)

(6) The system of marriage where in girls elope and get married. (Donkhārnyā)

The last two systems of marriage are not legal and accepted in the society, with the advent of education, the Boros have become enlightened and they have discarded the above mentioned systems of marriage.

Marriage by kidnaping a girl prevalent in the past now has been strictly prohibited. But the system of marriage wherein girls willingly enter the house of their beloved ones and surrender themselves for marriage (Kharsonnāy) is still in the society.

Nearly 40 years ago, some interesting systems of marriage existed in Darrang district. When a Boro-boy attained marriageable stage, the bride chosen by the boy was forcibly taken to the Boy's house. Similarly, when a girl attained nubility, a boy chosen by the girl was forcibly taken to the girl's house. Now-a-days, these systems have become absolute.

There is no system among the Boros to show horoscope to the astrologers. They fix the day according to the custom of the society to search out a bride.

The parents of the bride-groom go in search of the bride. Seeing a dead body on the road side, digging land with a spade and cutting bamboo with a hatchet are regarded as ominous signs while going to see a girl.

**MALSA**:

40/30 years ago, in Larrang and Kamrup districts, there was a system of taking money from Rs. 100/- to Rs. 1000/- for every bride from the boy's house. Now-a-days, these practices have changed from place to place. The educated Boros do not demand the amounts of money for bride's. 18

A Boro-widow may claim her ' Malera ' (bride-money) if she prefers to go to her father's house. This system of taking bride-money back is called ' Khalar - Gathaianay '. Unlike in other communities, it is the bride not the groom who has a price in the Boro-Kachari society. Everything is guided in their society by a strong patriarchal element with the male dominating everywhere. The groom does not go to the bride's house for wedding it is the bride who is brought to his. The payment of body price for the bride and the gifts given and respect, paid

by the groom to the elders of the bride's family with pigs, meat and wine reflect the domination of the male by the female in the Boro-society.  

In the Boro-society, there is the problem of choice also. Generally a slim-figured girl with long nose and long and dark hair is chosen by the groom. Similarly, a tall boy with a slim waist is chosen by the girl.

At present, marriage among the Boros is performed according to two systems viz:

1. according to Brahma rules.
2. according to traditional system.

The Brahmans perform their marriage ceremony reciting mantras in Sanskrit but now-a-days, the Boros appoint Purohits (Priests) from among themselves. They have translated the mantras into the Bodo language.

On the very day of the marriage of the Brahmans the girls only sing their songs. They simply take tea and sweets. The Brahmans do not solemnise the marriage ceremony with pomp and grandeur. On the other hand, those who perform the marriage ceremony according to the traditional system spend a lot of money by arranging a great feast varieties - chicken and rice.

beer. It is said that a Boro-marriage continued for seven days and seven nights. Hence, most of the Boro-families ruined themselves financially by the time marriage ceremony ended. The Brahmas have discarded most of the tribal customs and have adopted Brahmanical rites including performance of Jajna, abstinence from non-vegetarian food, drinks and from dance and merry-making. Even the marriage is performed in the house of the bride as in the case of other Hindus.

The example of keeping a young boy in the house of the bride is rare. Generally, those who have daughters instead of sons search out good boys for their girls. This system existed not only in the Boro community, but in Assamese and Bengali communities also. But now-a-days, this system is disappearing from the educated Boro families.20

The system of marriage where a second husband comes to live with a widow in the house of the first husband is also going to be absolute because this type of marriage was prevalent mainly among the rural people.

Moreover, the choice of a Boro-bride is beautifully reflected through the following Boro-folk song.

20. Ibid - p. 27.
"O my Godly father,
Do not send me to a house,
Where a crow enters and a kite enters,
Please give me in marriage to a family
Where you find a Store-house full of grain
And a cow-shed full of cows." 21

The Boro-Kacharis maintain matrimonial relations with
the Rabhas also. As regards Caste-position and status, the Ra-
bhas hold themselves to be slightly higher than the Boro
Kacharis.

A young Kachari bride-groom selecting a Racha bride
has to satisfy her people by giving them a feast and paying a
bride-price ( gā - dhan ) on a somewhat enhanced scale. Of
course, the children born of such a ' mixed marriage ' belong
to father's tribe. 22

But there are some Boro-bridegrooms who cannot pay
the bride-price or ( Gā - dhan ) demanded by the girl's parents
in that case, the bride-groom has to serve in the house of the
girl's parents. The period of service depends upon the arrange-
ment between the parents of the parties concerned. The period
of service may vary. It may be seven years or twelve or fifteen
years.

21. Bhattacharjya, P.C. - An Introduction to Boro Kachari Society
And Culture - a preface Boro-Kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti,
22. Endle, Rev. S. - The Kacharis, Delhi, 1975, P.P. 83-84.
Of course, after a period of twelve or eighteen months service, co-habitation between the bride and the bride-groom is allowed. Besides, at the conclusion of the full period, they are free to go to the house of the bride grooms' parents.

INFLUENCE OF THE BORO-MARRIAGE SYSTEM:

The influence of the Boro-marriage system in the Assamese Society is also noticeable in respect of widow marriage. In the Assamese Society, widow marriage was prevalent among the non-Brahmin classes particularly in rural areas. Sometimes, some of the non-Brahmins married the widows of the Brahmin community. They were known as 'Sorias'. They were looked down upon by the society. They were regarded as low-caste people in the society. At present, although widow marriage is permitted by law, remarriage of widow is not looked upon with favour by high caste Hindus viz: Brahmins and Kayasthas. But it is usually discouraged by some sections of the people. Hindu widow remarriage is gaining ground with the change in the conservative outlook and spread of education.

In case of gā-dhan (bride-money) the influence of Boro-system of taking 'Malsa' or bride-money was noticeable in the Assamese society also.

In ancient days, in high-caste Assamese families particularly among the Brahmin and Daivajna Brahmin families, the system of taking money for the bride existed in the sub-division of Mangaldai. Those who were not wealthy gave up the idea of marrying a girl. Generally, an amount of Rs. 1,000/- was fixed for a beautiful girl. It was also a custom that no father would welcome a groom until he received the fixed amount of money. Nowadays, this system has become absolute in the Brahmin and Daivajna Brahmin families. A man having several daughters could aspire to be rich man by obtaining bride-money from each of his daughters. This practice, however, does not exist because nowadays, the girls are in a majority in the sub-division in comparison to the boys. 25

Although the marriage ceremony among the Hindus is performed according to Jajurveda citing mantras, some customs are observed in different parts of Assam. Of the light types of marriage mentioned in the Smritics, the Brahma form of marriage is accepted in the Hindu society. Besides, the local customs observed in different parts of Assam, a few other practices such as Darā - Agācha i.e., putting up a barricade against the bride-groom's party by the men of the bride's party, Āngathi Khola i.e., the playing of a ring in the presence of young boys and girls concealing the ring in the heap of rice are taken from the tribal society.

The Assamese marriage system is a composite one of Sāstric and local elements. In the system of ghar-jamāi or Chapaniya or Dhokā instead of the girl, the young man stays in his father's in-law house either for a certain period or for the entire life. This custom is not favoured, rather looked with disdain in former days. This is also one of the instances of the influence of Boro-marriage ceremony upon the Assamese marriage ceremony.26

Similarly, the Jorāndiyā or Tekeli-diya ceremony i.e., leaving a party from the bride groom's house with clothes, ornaments, food staff and a sacramental jar of water, 'Nowāni,' the nuptial festivities of taking ceremonial bath by the bride and the bridegroom, the 'Gathian khunda' ceremony in which a sweet scented aromatic root is powdered and put on the head of bride, offering eggs to the bride and the bridegroom etc., have been accepted by the Assamese from the local people belonging to the Mongoloid stock.27

Inspite of all, there is a difference between the tribal marriage and the caste-Hindu marriage. A tribal marriage is very simple and it comprises exchange of words between the two partners. These words are the necessary conditions for marriage and are the final seal for its legitimacy. But in case of Caste-Hindu marriage, the words are, no doubt, regarded as sacred but not the necessary condition between the partners.

The words are to be authenticated by a witness. The witness may be a holy-fire or an idol or any other symbol. This type of marriage is valid in the Caste-Hindu Society. But a tribal bride may be betrayed by an outsider taking advantage of this psychological frame of tribal belief. Thus the Caste-Hindus are one step away from the tribal marriage.28

RELIGION:

There are generally two types of religion among the Boro-Kacharis viz ; Hindu (Primitive) and Brahma. The ancient Boros had a traditional near animistic belief. But many of them worship, Siva also. The Worship of ' Bathow ' or Siva and the erection of the altar of this supreme God with the Sizu (Cactus) plant in their courtyard are the note worthy features of rural life. Besides, the Boros worship other Gods and Goddesses.

The Boro-Kacharis profess or have faith in different religions viz ; Hindu, Christian and Brahma. Some of the Boros have become ' Sarania ' from the Brahmin Goswamis and Mahantas. They follow the Hindu customs and solemnise Hindu festivals. But the Brahmas follow the Brahma religion or faith preached by Shrimat Paramhangsa Sibanarayan of Calcutta. Both the Hindu Boros and the Brahmas observe the Bodo festivals. Unlike the Hindu Boros, the Brahmas spend less in the marriages and other

festivals. They simply take tea and sweets in the marriages. They are in a majority at Kokrajhar in the district of Goalpara.

Besides, some of the Boros have embraced Christianity. They follow the rules of the Christian religion. The Christian Boros are in a majority in the sub-division of Udalguri.29

With the beginning of the 19th Century the religious outlook of the Boro-Kacharis was changed by the preachings of Kali Charan Brahma who was inducted to the Brahma Cult by Shrimat Paramhangsa Sibnarayan Swami of Calcutta.

Guru Kalicharan Brahma could bring the larger sections of the Boro-Kacharis to the wider fold of vedic Sanatan Dharma in and around the district of Goalpara with epicentric at Kachugaon in Dhubri Sub-Division.

In its form and content, the Brahma movement was more than a religious upheaval. It changed the total outlook in all fields - social, religious, political and educational. The converted Boros propagated and tried to spread education and reforms in marriage customs, stoppage of the polygamy system, use of liquor and pig rearing. Therefore, the converted Boros have become more advanced educationally and culturally than the other Boros.30

The courtyard of a Boro family contains the altar of the 'Bathow' who is the supreme God of Boro-religion. This courtyard not only serves as the place of 'Hābā' or worship offered to the supreme God but also serves as a place for diverse duties connected with agricultural activities, weaving and social gatherings. There are some of the Boro-Kachari folk-beliefs related to courtyard, the sowing and reaping of the paddy and some of these folk-beliefs are found among the Assamese and Bengali people also. 31

The religion followed by the Dimasa Kacharis is rather a mixture of their traditional religion and Hinduism. They worship six ancestral Gods known as Madai with great reverence. Sibrai (Hindu Siva) occupies the highest place and his name is to be uttered first in every worship. They believe that in order to get rid of the natural calamities and sufferings the evil spirits must be appeased. They also worship the evil spirits before starting cultivation. The Dimasa Kacharis sacrifice pigs, fowls and buffaloes in worshipping different Gods. But during the reign of the Kachari Kings there was even human sacrifice; at least one man was sacrificed in a year. 32

FOOD:

The principal food of both tribal and non-tribal people of Assam is rice because they mainly live on paddy cultivation both wet and dry (Sali & Ahu).

Besides rice, most of the people of Assam take fish and meat. Only a few Brahmins and Vaisnavas do not take meat. The Boro-Kacharis take the flesh of goat, chicken, pigs and even buffalow. But the non-tribals of Assam generally do not take the flesh of pigs and buffaloes. Moreover, they do not take beef and killing or injuring the cow is regarded as an offence by the Boros.

The Assamese people generally take tea as breakfast. The Boros take 'Laopani' (Rice-beer) but now-a-days most of the tribals take tea. Besides, pickles from bamboo shoots (Kharicha) as well as from mustard seeds (Kahudi - Khārāli), alkaline (Kalākhār), chewing of (Tamolpan) arecanut and betel vine leaves with lime and tobacco are the items of food and drink of the Boros. The non-tribal people of Assam have also accepted these as their items of food.33

The Boro-Kacharis have an aversion to milk. This aversion is possible due to the fact that milk has opposite and harmful reaction if taken along with rice-veer which is used as

their drink in different ceremonies and worships. The preparation of rice-beer or joo with different ingredients is an interesting technique essential to their domestic life. Dried fish and dried meat are regarded as favourite articles of food. They sacrifice rice, goat, fruits, male goat, pigs, cocks, pigeons, ducks etc. in different sacrificial ceremonies.34

The non-tribals particularly the Assamese caste-Hindus have accepted many tribal ingredients in the present day Assamese menu such as alkaline, processed out of cutpieces of plantain trees known as 'Kalākhar', a mixture called 'Kharisa' prepared out of bamboo shoots, 'Pasalā' - a curry prepared out of stem of a young plantain tree, 'Kāhudi - Khārali' - a mixture of thrashed mustard, alkaline and salt mush rooms, eri-cocoons, varieties of creepers such as 'Vedailata', 'Lai', 'Chuka', 'Bābori', 'Khutorā', the offshoots of pumpkin and bottle gourd creepers etc. The Assamese Brahmins have also learnt to take meat, fish, eggs etc. which are strictly forbidden for the Brahmins of other states of India except Bengalis.35

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS:

The Boro-Kacharis have been using clothes woven by themselves from time immemorial. The common man uses two pieces of cloth viz; Bhuni or Dhuti as lower garment and Pacra or Celang (light wrapper) as upper wear. Some men of the well-to-do families use Eria-Borkapor (double-fold endi).

Now-a-days, the Boro-Kacharis have almost given up weaving and spinning in the household. The educated Boros use pants, charts, coats and half-pants etc. They also use Faijama, Persian Coat etc.

The Boro-women are the best weavers in Assam. They produce silk and Endicocoons from endi-yarn. Infact, spinning of endi-yarn and weaving is a household industry and Boro-Kachari woman is expected to excel in the fine art of handloom craftsmanship. The yellow colour is the favourite choice of Boro-Kachari women. The Boro-women use both 'Mekhela' (girdle) and 'Lokhna' (one piece garment covering from breast to ankles). They also use other dresses in the dance recital like Bagrumba and Kherai.36

Now-a-days, many Boro-Kachari women have taken up modern Indian dress like Sari.

Except the widows, the Boro-Kachari women use different types of ornaments. They use Āngathi ( ring ), Khāru ( bracelet ), Kundāla ( earring ) of gold. They also use Bahunti ( armlet ), foot finger rings ( Ujhanti ) and anklets in feet ( Nupura ). The Boro-women generally use 'Khera' or 'Kanpasa', Jahkhring ( ear-ring ) Palinglora ( Dul ), Gachangribali ( Nose ring ), Bowla, a kind of pointed gold ornament. They call 'Ashan' any ornaments used in hands viz : Ashan muth, ( Muthi-Kharu ), Bala Ashan, ( Bala Khāru ), Akhlām ( ring ) etc.

The place of ornaments in the Boro-Kachari Society is of great importance. Poor and needy Boros generally mortgage ornaments for money. If a moth r-in-law cannot offer an ornament to his daughter-in-law, it indicates the impoverished condition of the family.

Therefore, ornaments in the Boro-Kachari Society serve not only as the articles of beauty and charm but also serve as the assets in times of dire necessity. 37

As regards Assamese dress, decoration and ornaments a close resemblance is marked with those of the plains tribals. The Assamese women wear 'Mekhela Chador' ( girdle with shawl ), Riha, ( Scarf of muga silk ) which have resemblance with the 'Lokhna' and Mekhela of the Boro-Kacharis. The Assamese traditional headgear i.e., 'Japi' formed a prestigious Boro item.

of presentation as early as 7th century and till this day, the item maintains its glorious tradition.

It may be mentioned that the Ta' women still use locally prepared dye. The Assamese weavers know the art of embroidery in clothes which are undoubtedly tribal tradition.

FESTIVALS AND FAIRS:

Kherai is the oldest national festival of the Borokacharis of Assam. It is performed in the form of worship and accompanied with dance and songs. It is observed with a view to provitiation Siva, Maînâo and deities for their good harvest and for their protection from misfortune. The oja (priest) recites Mantras, Doudini (Deodhani) speaks oracles in Kherai.

Revelers sing and dance around the altar of 'Bathow' with drums and Siphung (flute) for the whole night. Birds, fruits, and wine are sacrificed in Kherai.

Like the non-tribal Assamese, the Boros also celebrate the New Year festival, 'Baisãgu' with great pomp and grandeur. On the last day of the month of 'Chaitra', the Boro-women sweep and rub the floor with cow dung. Cows are smeared with a

black substance prepared from a mixture of mustard oil and carbon that sticks to the cooking pots.

After smearing the horns of the cows and buffaloes with the mixture of mustard oil and turmeric juice, the cows are washed and let loose in the grazing field.

On the first day of the New year, the sons and daughters of the Boros take their bath first in the early morning and bow down before the elders who in return bless them. Daughters present their newly woven 'Gamosa' (Towels) to their fathers and brothers.

Like the non-tribal people of Assam, they celebrate the Bhogali Bihu (Domasi). This festival falls on the last day of the month of Pousa or 'Puh' i.e., on 14 or 15 January after harvesting. Generally, they arrange a community feast with meat, eggs and fish. They erect a number of 'Belagurr' (Meji) with paddy straws in an open field and burn them at the dawn of Pousa Sankranti.

'Katri gacha' is popularly known as 'Kali Bihu', or Korgali Bihu in Assamese. This Bihu falls on the last day of the month of Aswina. Earthen lamps are lit in the paddy fields in front of the main dwelling house, granary, cow-shed and in front of the main gate of the homestead.

Another festival of the Boros is known as Moho-honai or Chihonai. At the night of full moon, the youths particularly village cow-herds collect rice and paise from the households. They strike the ground with sticks with song and dance while collecting.
In ancient days, they built a stack of paddy obtained from the first thrash and two boys in the make up of old man and woman danced around the stack. This might refer to Siva and Parvati. 39

The Bisu or Bihu is the festival of both the tribal and non-tribals of Assam. The festival is observed on the last days of the months of Chaitra, Aswina and Pausa. The first is known as the Rangali Bihu which is observed by music, dance and feasting. The second Bihu is known as Kali-Bihu or Kongali Bihu i.e., beggarly Bihu is held on the 14th or 15th October when food scarcity prevails among the poorer section.

The third 'Bihu' is called Bhogali Bihu or the Bihu of dinning and feasting. It is called so because the farmers after harvesting crops and having their granaries full with new crops and indulge in community feast and entertain visitors with varieties of cakes prepared with new crops.

The Bihu festival is a syncretic development of the Hindu and tribal cultural elements. It is therefore, observed by both Hindus and tribals with certain modifications in conformity with their traditional beliefs and customs.

Another popular festival observed by both the Hindus and the tribals known as Moho - Ho or the mosquito driving festival falls on the full moon day of the month of Agrahana in which the village boys and youths sing songs and dance in different households of their respective villages.

Moho-Ho is a compound word the first being a 'Toddhava' of the Sanskrit, Masaka and the second part Ho meaning to drive out is a Bodo word. Inspite of the Bodo origin the festival is observed by both the Hindus and the tribals of western Assam.

The Kacharis of Upper Assam celebrate a festival which is known as Saragdeo Puja. This is a household worship of every Sonowal Kachari. Formerly they observed it annually. But now-a-days they observe it after long interval because of difficulties in arranging things for the purpose.

This puja is held for the material well being, good harvest and good health both men and domestic animals. There is no priesthood system among the Sonowal Kacharis. Generally, an elderly person conversant with the ritualistic practices is invited to preside over the function. The ideal place for holding this ritual is within the household campus not frequently visited by people.

40. Sarma, S.N.- A Socio-Economic & Cultural History of Medieval Assam (1200 A.D. - 1800 A.D.)
The items required for the worship are somewhat typical and some of them are rice-beer, kaupet, boiled, rice nangal bhat, angulipitha, dried puthi fish, boiled unripe bananas, pat-pitha, curry of 64 varieties of wild pot herbs, reed pipes to offer rice-beer and water, leaves of Sarag Pokha tree, one wooden axe, one wooden sword, one bow and arrow, one white cock and one black hen immature to lay eggs.

However, this religious festival of the Sonowal Kacharis of upper Assam is generally held after the harvesting is over.  

FAIRS:

In Darrang district, many fairs are held in connection with the Sivaratri Mela (fair), Durga Puja, Rash Puja, Dol Jatra. Fairs are held in this connection at the following places viz; Sipajhar, Khatara, Mangaldai, Madha Gosain Than, and Singri. The Singri Mela lasts for several days.

Besides, big fairs were held at Udalguri during the days of British Raj in Assam.

A fair was held during the cold season which was attended by the inhabitants of Tawang, a province subject to Tibet.

The principal articles imported were ponies, sheep, blankets, salt and yakes tails. The chief exports were rice, cotton, silk cloths and brass utensils. The headquarters of the hillsmen were at Amratol which was picturequely situated in the gorge of Dhan-siri river - about six miles beyond the frontier. A Turber was held at Udalgi in the winter when the Tibetan officials known as Gelongs were presented the ' POSA ' allowed them by the British Government.

The effect was very pictureque as the hillsmen were dressed in rich costumes of Chinese pattern and were attended by crowds of quitely dressed retainers mounted on shaggi ponies. The fort at Uralguri was garrisoned in the cold season by six officers and men of Lakhimpur Military Police Ballation.  

Again, in 1833, only two Bhutias came down to this region to meet Lt. Rutherford who was incharge of Larrangi Rajya. It was he who allowed the Bhutanese to hold a fair at Chatgaree. At this fair, the Bhutias brought such articles as rock-salt, redblankets, chowics and musk. 'Chatgaree' which is situated near Bhutia sang - Mangaldai Road is not a suitable place for Mela to-day. Here is a Government vernacular school which was established in 1907.

During the British rule, a fair was held at Udalguri. The Bhutias came to collect tributes. They also brought different articles to this fair. The British Government even had got a road constructed from Udalguri to Hangaldai to enable the people to attend this fair. Now, it is observed for one day only.

Another important fair is held at 'Khatara' 10 kms away from Khoirabari. This festival is observed in connection with the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna. A fair or 'Mela' is held in this connection at 'Khatara' on the Sankranti day of the month of Bhaadra. This fair was attended by the Boro-Kacharis of Udalguri sub-division in large number. Now-a-days, they do not attend this fair.

Besides, Baisakhi 'Melas' or fairs are held throughout the sub-division in the month of Baishakh on different dates. It is called 'Dol' also by the local people. These 'Dols' or fairs are attended by all people irrespective of caste and community. Jalukbari fair is more important because it is held for two days and it is attended by the people of Tangla town in large number.43

43. Darrang District Gazetteer, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati, 1978 - P. 266.
The Boro-Kacharis of Assam can boast of their rich heritage of culture. There are common cultural elements between the tribals and the non-tribals of Assam.

As most of the Boro-Kacharis of Assam were economically backward before independence, they were not able to refine their culture.

After the Fifth Five Year Plan, the Boro-Kacharis of Assam have been extended all possible assistance by the Government. As a result, economic improvement has been noticed in the community with the spread of education, they have realised their religions backwardness. They have now become economic and progressive.