CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In a society, change comes in the natural course of social evolution. It may be rapid, if the society generates an internal dynamism encompassing all spheres of culture. Such endogenous change may be lasting as it gets reinforced by exogenous contact and continual renewal. On the other hand, change may be slow, even imperceptible, if it gets stagnated by socially caused inertia which thwarts internal dynamism and arrests progress (Ahmad, 1986). Social change, which is associated with transformation of socio-cultural practices in a community or society, on the whole, is inevitable. The degree and direction of this change may of course vary depending on the socio-spatial context. The process of social change which also speaks about the trend of social development in a society/community is greatly influenced by variation in the pattern of social composition of population, educational attainment and occupational structure of the people, social interaction among them, and a host of other factors including degree of urbanization in it. However, it is generally observed that within a particular community, factors like education and occupation among other factors, prove to be quite significant in bringing about social change in an area. Even though this phenomenon holds good in the case of the tribal people in India, the social change among them is still very slow. Living mostly in the interior rural areas of the country, this section of population traditionally occupies a marginal position within the mainstream of Indian society. In terms of socio-economic conditions also, their position has been quite discouraging. It is worth mentioning in this context that with a view to improve the conditions of the socio-economically backward tribal communities in the country, the Govt. of India has rightly recognized them as ‘Scheduled Tribes’ under Article 342 of the Constitution in its modification order, 1956. Unfortunately, despite the constitutional safeguards and regular planning endeavour to uplift their condition for more than five decades, socio-economic progress among them has been far from satisfactory compared to the non-tribal counterparts. The significantly low urban population (8.29 per cent) and literacy rate (47.1 per cent) among this segment of population as compared to the scene in the non-tribal counterparts (urban: 29.56 per cent and literacy rate: 66.37 per cent), among
many other factors, are indicative of their prevailing socio-economic backwardness in the country.

When the whole situation in respect of social development and change is looked at from gender perspective among this section of population in the country, the prevailing scene is even more discouraging. For instance, the literacy rate among the tribal females is as low as 34.8 per cent as against that of tribal males (59.2 per cent) and more so against the literacy rate of the non-tribal females (55.35 per cent) and non-tribal males (76.62 per cent). Similarly, the female participation rate among them in the non-primary sector is significantly low (6.46 per cent) as against that of male (11.88 per cent) and the non-tribal counterpart (21.07 per cent). All these along with many other factors have pervasive impact upon the overall demographic and socio-economic structure of the tribal communities in the country. Undoubtedly, the prevalence of high growth rate of population among them in the country during 1971-2001 (121.82 per cent) as compared to the non-tribal segment (85.13 per cent) has further compounded the problem.

In the case of Assam, which contains 12.41 per cent of tribal population as against 8.19 per cent for the country, the situation of social change and for that matter social development among the tribes is even more disappointing. In addition, the tribal groups with diverse ethnic origin representing racial stocks from Proto-Australoids to Mongoloids with a distinctive socio-cultural system, own cultural ethos, unique way of adaptation to different ecological niches and a distinctive social structure of their own, seem to respond to social change process quite differently and in different orders. This phenomenon gets reflected in their prevailing socio-cultural characteristics and it is more glaring in the case of the female segment. In general terms, the prevalence of low female literacy rate (52.4 per cent), low female participation rate in non-primary sector (6.81 per cent) and low proportion of urban female population (4.55 per cent) among them as compared to the tribal males (literacy rate 72.3 per cent; participation rate in non-primary sector 12.17 per cent; and urban population 4.76 per cent) and non-tribal female counterparts (54.93 per cent; 15.26 per cent; and 14.07 per cent respectively) give testimony to this situation. Further, variation among the social groups as in terms of location of places has also resulted in varying degrees of social change and socio-political scenario. Thus, the pace of social change among the tribal women in the state varies significantly from one area to another and also socially from one group to another. The above phenomena are largely associated with a variety of factors like the variation in the level of development, pace of urbanization and industrialization, tribal-non
tribal interactions, political awareness among them etc. What is however significant is that no detailed study, i.e., up to micro spatial unit level, has been done so far about the spatial pattern of social change and development among the tribal women in the state in terms of demographic, socio-cultural and economic parameters and their impact on the social character of women in different areas of the state. Strikingly, the role of education and occupation is vital towards understanding the degree of social change among the tribal women in the state. Moreover, the patterns of inter and intra tribal variation in social change among them and the processes operating behind it are not clearly known. It is in the above background, the present research problem “Education, Occupation and Social Change: Towards a Social Geography of Tribal Women in Assam” is taken up to investigate objectively the prevailing linkages among education, occupation and social change in the context of tribal women in Assam including other social geographic aspects as outlined in the objectives stated below.

**Objectives**

The main objectives of the study are

i) to find out the distribution and concentration pattern of major tribal groups in Assam;

ii) to study the pattern of literacy and education among the tribal women as a whole and among the various groups of tribal women in different areas of the state;

iii) to analyse the occupational pattern among the tribal women and its variation among different groups across the state;

iv) to find out the pattern of social change and development among tribal women as reflected through their various demographic and socio-economic characteristics in general and the role of education and occupation on them in particular; and

v) to examine the pattern of interrelationship among education, occupation and socio-economic change and development among tribal women of various groups in the state.

**Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are proposed to be tested in the present study.

i) The low level of female literacy and educational attainment as well as low work participation in non-agricultural sector are acting as impediments towards desirable social change and development among the tribal women.

ii) The slow pace of socio-economic change among the tribal women over the years is responsible for significantly low level of socio-economic development among them in the state.

iii) The variation in the levels of social change and development among different groups of tribal women is primarily the result of varying degrees of influence of the processes
Significance of the Study

The study of the female section of population, that too belonging to a particular social group like the tribal, is extremely essential for understanding the overall demographic and socio-economic structure and social change of any region. It is a pity that general population, both male and female section, has attracted serious attention from social scientists interested in demographic situation of the region, but the question of tribal population more particularly the female section has been glibly glossed over or has been addressed through only fragmented data.

Moreover, research work particularly related to tribal women in geographical context is limited in India. It is more so in the north-eastern part and even scarce in Assam. It is in this background the present problem is taken up to examine and analyse the pertinent issues like literacy, education, occupation and social changes both in spatial and temporal context prevailing among the tribal women in the state. This in turn is expected to fill a gap in research concerning the prevailing scene of socio-economic structure and also the true nature of social change taking place among them, more particularly the female segment. Further, such a study would have both academic and utilitarian value, and based on such a work more intensive research may be carried out in other areas. Finally, this type of objective study would help formulate sound socio-economic plans for all round development of the scheduled tribes in the state, particularly the women.

Methodology and Database

The main purpose of this part is to enunciate the methodology that has been used for studying the socio-economic structure and social change among the tribal women in Assam. This part deals with selection of study area, collection of data, and methods applied for the study.

Selection of the Study Area

With a long history of peopling Assam presents a diverse population composition and accommodates 3,308,570 tribal people, accounting for 12.41 per cent of the state’s total population (2001 Census) living in the hills and plains. The state is the home of as many as 23 tribal groups. They are Chakma, Dimasa, Garo, Hajong, Hmar, Lusai, Karbi, Naga, Deori,
Pawi, Hojai, Synteng, Barman, Boro, Khasi-Jaintia, Kuki, Lakher, Man, Sonowal-Kachari, Tiwa, Mech, Miri, and Rabha. Of the 23 tribal groups only 8 groups which have more than 1 per cent tribal population each, have been considered in the present study. They include Boro (40.09 per cent), Mising (17.80 per cent), Karbi (10.70 per cent), Rabha (8.14 per cent), Sonowal-Kachari (7.01 per cent), Tiwa (5.02 per cent), Dimasa (3.40 per cent) and Deori (1.20 per cent) (2001 Census) (Table 1.1). All these tribal groups together account for 93.36 per cent of the state’s total tribal population. It may be mentioned here that except the hill tribes like the Karbis of Karbi Anglong and the Dimasas of N.C. Hills district the rest are plain tribes occupying distinct plain areas of the state. The areas of concentration of these tribal groups include Kokrajhar for Boros; Dhemaji for Misings; Karbi Anglong for Karbis; Goalpara for Rabhas; Dibrugarh for Sonowal-Kacharis; Morigaon for Tiwas; N. C. Hills for Dimasas; and Lakhimpur for Deoris. In view of such a spatial pattern of tribal population in Assam, the entire state is taken as the study area to get an overall picture of the tribal women in its different parts (Fig. 1.1). Further, in order to assess the intra and inter tribal variations in the pattern of education, occupation and social change among them, three villages – one each in the core, periphery and transition - in the most dominant areas inhabited by the major tribes have been selected for primary survey (Appendix I and Fig. 1.2). In each village thus selected a minimum of 20 per cent of households has been considered for survey through stratified random sampling method with the help of a well designed schedule-cum-questionnaire prepared for the purpose (Appendix II). Here care has been taken to include the households of different economic conditions. While filling up the schedules informal discussions with the local people were also made.

Sources of Data

The study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. The secondary data have been collected from the Census of India, various official reports, records, documents and publications. Data for understanding the average condition of demographic, social and economic characteristics have been collected from district census handbooks. Further, in order to have detailed information on various aspects relating to demographic, economic, socio-cultural characteristics and social change among tribal women household survey has been conducted with the help of a well-designed questionnaire, as mentioned above, in the selected sample villages in the state with a view to understand the location specific patterns and processes.
LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREA (ASSAM)

ASSAM
ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS, 2001

1. Dhubri
2. Kokrajhar
3. Bongaigaon
4. Goa Para
5. Barpeta
6. Nalbari
7. Kamrup
8. Darrang
9. Sonitpur
10. Lakhimpur
11. Dhemaji
12. Morigaon
13. Nagaon
14. Golaghat
15. Jorhat
16. Sibsagar
17. Dibrugarh
18. Tinsukia
19. Karbi Anglong
20. N.C. Hills
21. Karimganj
22. Hailakandi
23. Cachar

Fig. 1.1
Table 1.1: Major Tribal groups in Assam and their Population Size, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant Tribal Groups</th>
<th>Numerical Strength</th>
<th>Percentage out of Total ST Population in the State</th>
<th>District dominated by Tribal Group and Population Size</th>
<th>Percentage of Tribal Population to Total Population in the State</th>
<th>Percentage of Tribal Population in the District to Total Tribal Population of That Group in the State</th>
<th>Percentage of Population of the Dominant Tribal Group in the District to Total Tribal Population of That Group in the State</th>
<th>Percentage of Population of the Dominant Tribal Group to Total Tribal Population in the State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boro</td>
<td>1,352,771</td>
<td>40.09</td>
<td>Kokrajhar (287,268)</td>
<td>33.67</td>
<td>9.23</td>
<td>21.23</td>
<td>94.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mising</td>
<td>587,310</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>Dhemaji (185,906)</td>
<td>47.29</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>31.65</td>
<td>68.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi</td>
<td>353,513</td>
<td>10.70</td>
<td>Karbi Anglong (345,540)</td>
<td>55.69</td>
<td>13.70</td>
<td>9.74</td>
<td>76.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabha</td>
<td>277,517</td>
<td>8.40</td>
<td>Goalpara (93,912)</td>
<td>16.03</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>33.84</td>
<td>71.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonowal-Kachari</td>
<td>235,881</td>
<td>7.01</td>
<td>Dibrugarh (67,311)</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>28.53</td>
<td>76.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiwa</td>
<td>170,622</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>Morigaon (102,070)</td>
<td>15.55</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>59.82</td>
<td>84.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimasa</td>
<td>110,976</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>N.C. Hills (64,881)</td>
<td>68.28</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>58.46</td>
<td>50.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deori</td>
<td>41,161</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>Lakhimpur (13,534)</td>
<td>23.49</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>32.88</td>
<td>6.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, Primary Census Abstract for Scheduled Tribes, Assam, 2001.
Fig. 1.2

ASSAM
LOCATION MAP OF SAMPLE SURVEY AREAS

LOCATION OF SAMPLE SURVEY AREAS
1. BORO KACHARI (KOKRAJHAR)
   1. HIBRUBARI
   2. BORO ADABARI
   3. KACHUGAON
   4. MISHING (DHEMAJI)
   5. KARICHUK
   6. JIADHAL DIGHALIGARA
   7. KARBI (KARBI ANGLONG)
   8. PAN ENGTI
   9. BALI GAON
   10. MOHORI RONGPI GAON
   11. BAPUJINAGAR
   12. BHAISKHULI
   13. CHAIHARI
   14. SONWAL KACHARI (DIBRUGARH)
   15. DAKHIN KALIHAMARI
   16. LEPEKTOTA KACHARI GAON
   17. GHACHI GAON
   18. TIWA (MORIGAON)
   19. SIDHABARI
   20. LAOBUHURUNGA
   21. JAMADHARI
   22. DIMASA (N. C. HILLS)
   23. UMANGSHO WARD NO 4
   24. SANKARPUR DEORI GAON

DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS

SAMPLE SURVEY AREAS

Fig. 1.2
Statistical Analysis and Mapping

Data collected from the various secondary sources as well as from the field have been processed and analyzed by applying simple but meaningful quantitative techniques for objective and logical interpretation. The quantitative techniques adopted for the analysis are simple ratios or percentages, Sopher's Disparity Index, and certain other statistical measures including central tendency, dispersion, correlation and regression, change index, Z-scores and principal component analysis (PCA).

The data so processed and analyzed have been represented in the form of maps and diagrams with suitable cartographic techniques for proper illustration of the patterns. Conclusions of the study have been drawn based on the results derived from data analysis and personal experiences gathered through field observations.

Review of Relevant Literature

A review of research is essential to understand the types of work-done, the approaches and methods used there in, the findings arrived at from these studies and limitations of them in different situations.

This part of the work as such is devoted to the treatment of review of certain works related to the present problem. Here review is made to cover the works on social change and development especially to the works on tribal women and pattern of social change and development among them.

Works on Social Change and Development

The study of social change in view of the nebulous nature of its theory is a difficult task. But in spite of this a huge number of works has appeared in different fields of social science both in India and abroad. In this respect mention may be made of Spencer, Comte, Marc and Pareto who gave solid foundation to the study of social change. Henry Morgan, Mc Lennan, Bachofar and Henry Mainne also contributed significantly in this field (Singh, 1997). The concept of social change, however, got a set-back roughly during 1920-50 when the focus shifted from the evolution of social form to their functions. But satisfactorily, since 1958 a revival in the study of social change can be observed especially in the west. Parson (1958), Mills (1959), Hampel (1959), Dahendorf (1964), and others made heroic efforts to demonstrate the effectiveness of their models for the analysis of social change. The urgency of revival of interest in social change probably emerged
because of the process of decolonization of Asia, Africa and Latin America, where not continuity but revolutionary change was the dominant national aspiration and ideology.

The study of social change in India has been deeply influenced by its development in the west. Indian sociological formulation of the concept of social change finds a beginning in the writings of British and Indian scholars in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Some of the major concepts and approaches relating to social change as developed in India include (i) sanskritization and westernization, (ii) little and great tradition, (iii) cultural approach, and (iv) cognitive historical or ideological approach (Singh, 1988). Sanskritization and westernization as a conceptual dichotomy reflect more sharply this change in the orientation of Indian sociology. It has many limitations as an explanatory model of social change. The concept of sanskritization was used by Srinivas (1962) to describe the process of cultural mobility in the traditional social structure of India. In his study of the Coorge in Mysore he found that the lower class in order to raise their position adopted some of the customs of the Brahmins and gave up some of their own. By doing this within a generation or so they could claim higher position in the hierarchy of castes. Accordingly, Srinivas changed the contextual meaning of Brahminization to Sanskritization. The dichotomy of ‘little and great’ tradition which followed this conceptual scheme is based on the theory of tradition, its social organization and its inner structural differentiation. Marriott (1955), Singer (1959), Lambert (1963), Buck and Jacobson (1968), Kappuswami (1972), and Prasad (1977) all wrote series of articles on social and cultural changes in India. Here, mention may also be made of Singh (1997), Sena and Mahapatra (1993), Rao (1971), Mukherjee (1953) who have all contributed significantly in this direction. Singh (1997) in his social stratification and change in India dealt with the concepts, theories and some emerging issues in Indian sociology and social stratification. Sena and Mahapatra (1993) highlighted various concepts, theories, factors, processes and obstacles to social change. A deeper sociological analysis of Marxist or dialectic view in the context of social change in India may be found in the works of Mukherji (1942). It is worth noting here the contribution of Rao (1971) who examined the pattern of social change in a metropolitan fringe village near Delhi. Mukherjee (1953) in the study of ‘urbanization and social transformation’ also throws light on the contrasts between old and new generation. Lambert (1963) in his extensive review of studies concerning the impact of urban society upon village life points out the degree of urban influence on the rural life. The contribution made by Sharma (1975) in this direction on
the impact of urbanization on rural society in India has been worth mentioning. In another significant work Ahmad (1986) discussed about the pattern of socio-cultural change in a developing society.

In North East India, and Assam in particular, the studies on social change and in some cases even urban influences on rural areas were made by sociologists and social anthropologists. The edited work of Barua, Sengupta and Das (2002) throws enough light on the ethnic group's cultural continuities and social change in North East India. Another worth mentioning work is the Women Population of North East India: A Study in Gender Geography by Kar (2002). In this work, the author attempts to throw light on the status of women and demographic and socio-economic changes in the region. Borah's (1985) work on urban influence in the neighbouring areas of Guwahati city and Borah and Sharma's (1984) article on environment and socio-economic changes in the peri-urban villages of Guwahati also draw attention to the combined influence of social change and urbanization. Another example of such work is the socio-economic survey of a peri-urban village of Imphal by Sharma and Sharma (1978). The work on pattern of social change among the major tribal groups in Guwahati city by Das (1999) is also no less significant. Here, the author discussed thoroughly the pattern of social change and development among the Boro, Rabha and Karbi communities residing in the city.

Works on Social Change and Tribal Women

All societies are characterized by the process of continuity and change in the course of development. The tribal society is no exception to this. Tribe is a system of social organization which includes several local groups, village bands, and normally includes a common territory, a common language and a culture, simple economy, religion and belief, primitive law and own educational system. The tribal section of Indian population according to (1968) is characterized as 'isolated in ecology, economy, demography, politics and other social behaviour from other ethnic group'. As far as the tribal women are concerned it is seen that they receive much less attention of social scientists. Reference to the status and role of tribal women has, in fact, been made indirectly in the study of kinship and marriage practices among them. Chauhan (2001) in his work on tribal women and social change in India presents the nature of male dominance in tribal communities. She also highlighted on how new changes are accepted, rejected or adapted by the tribal women and how they cope with the emerging tensions and conflicts, struggle and readjustments. In yet another edited work of Sharma and Mittal
(1999) an attempt has been made to assess the role of tribal women in changing societies. Another edited work of Singh, et al., (1975), a group of renowned anthropologists in India has made a laudable attempt to assess the status of tribal women and its relationship with development across different parts of the country. In the same book, in a study on development and tribal women in India, Roy Burman states that in the context of India's plural social structure, tribal women are not passive stamps on history and they never were. Besides these, Raza and Ahmad's (1990) tribal atlas, Kothari's (1985) work on tribal social change in India, Singh, Vyas and Mann's (1968) contribution towards tribal women in India and North East also deserve commendable mention. In another work, Vir (1990) focuses on the multifarious problems faced by the tribal women in different regions of the country. Here, he also discusses the changing status and various injustices faced by women of different tribal groups in our country. Ahom (2000) touches upon the tribal women workers with change in lifestyle and occupational structure. Besides, a number of valuable works on tribal women in India has appeared in the form of research papers. In this direction mention may be made of Roy Burman (1988), Nayak (1989), Das (2000).

In North East India and Assam as well, though a number of works on tribal studies has been carried out, but studies relating to tribal women are still very limited. Among the works on the tribes of North East India mention may be made of Taher (1977), Sengupta (1994), and edited works of Karstempret and Donga (1984). Besides, Bordoloi's (1987), and Bordoloi and Sharma Thakurs (1988) works are pioneering in this line and deserves special attention. Mention may also be made of Bhuyan's (1998) work, which reflects the socio-cultural life of Karbi and Dimasa women of the state. In addition, Bhattacharjee (1986), Raha (1989), Brahma (1987), Donga (1978), Das (1986), Phangsho (2001), Deori (2002), Goswami (1984) and Mipun (2002) have carried out systematic works on individual tribal groups of the state in selected areas. However, no systematic and detailed work as such about the tribes of Assam, more particularly the social status and pattern of social change among women, has been undertaken so far from geographical perspective. Although Sen (1999) has briefly described the tribes and castes of Assam from anthropological viewpoint, the study is based on merely secondary data. However, some micro-level works on socio-economic characteristics and changing social status of tribal women of the north-east and Assam have been carried out by a number of researchers. In this context, mention may be made of Sharma Thakur (1992) who has reflected the socio-
cultural life and social status of Karbi women. Terangpi, Terang and Bora (1992) have also worked almost in the same line. Dowerah and Chetia (1990) have discussed the status of Dimasa women of Assam and state that the women enjoy equal status with the men in Dimasa society. Doley (1998) has discussed the role and status of women in Mising society where he states that women have lower position than the men in the hierarchy of social status. Borooah (1994) in a study on women in Pati Rabha society has emphasized on the concept of customary laws and practices among them. Besides, Sonowal (1985) has vividly discussed about gender and household health, gender and education and gender system in economic activity and property rights among the Sonowal-Kacharis of Assam. From his study it is clearly discernable that male dominant behaviour is legitimized in the Sonowal-Kachari society through the process of engenderment. Deori (2002) has described the restriction of women in different religious practices in Deori society.

But most of the works mentioned above are largely based on descriptive analysis of the role and position of women in their respective societies. A very few works contain empirical data. Moreover, all these studies lack spatial treatment in the analysis. Considering literacy and educational levels being the vital dimensions of social development of women, Sharma (1985, 1992 and 1993) has made three valuable works at meso to micro levels to examine the spatial pattern of literacy and education of women and its associated correlates in North East India. Lanusasong (1989) and Bora (1990) have also touched upon the socio-economic condition of tribal women in their studies. In addition, Kar and Sharma (1994) have further analysed the spatial pattern of women literacy in Assam and tried to identify the educationally depressed zones in the state. In yet another work the same authors (1997) have tried to identify the pattern of socio-economic transformation in the tribal society of the state.

Thus, the foregoing review of available literature apparently reflects that works on social change and development among the tribal women of the state are still extremely limited. Whatever is found at the individual district or state level comprises the works primarily done from historical, anthropological and sociological perspectives. Moreover, no comprehensive work has so far been done to find out the pattern of education, occupation and social change among tribal women of Assam from spatial and social perspective. Thus, the present work on education, occupation and social Change among the tribal women of Assam bears immense significance.
Organisation of the Study

The present work is broadly divided into three parts. The part one comprising the first two chapters deals with introduction of the problem and the geographical background of the study region. The part two consisting of four chapters forms the main analytical text. These chapters address the nature of social change and development among the tribal women in the state in terms of education and occupation, demographic characteristics and socio-cultural practices, and the impact of these parameters on the character of social change among the tribal women of Assam in general and the selected areas in particular. This part also deals with the pattern of inter and intra-tribal variation in respect of social change and development among the different groups of tribal women and analyses the prevailing linkages among education, occupation and social change among them from social geographic perspective. The analysis is made on the basis of both primary and secondary data, and field observations.

The final part (chapter 7), contains the summary and conclusions including the major findings of the work. The conclusions and the findings, are the outcome of analysis and synthesis of the relationship prevailing primarily among education, occupation and social change pertaining to tribal women in the state.

References


