CHAPTER : 9

MODERNISATION AND CHANGING LIFESTYLE OF THE KOCHES

As we know, society is dynamic. Dynamic changes have been taking place in every sphere of the society. In present day world, modernisation is found in every aspect of social life. The Koches of West Garo Hills in this regard are not an exception. The waves of modernisation have also touched the Koch society of West Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

Formerly linkages between the Koch and other neighbouring communities were limited to exchange and barter for certain essential commodities. In return for paddy they used to obtain other necessary commodities from different communities. Now-a-days the link between the Koches and the other communities has increased. The neighbouring communities like Garo, Hajong, Rajbanshi and Dalu participate in the ceremonies and festival of the Koch. Similarly the
members of the Koch families also participate in the social events of other communities. For rice growing and marriage ceremonies many Koch families utilize the services of the Bengali Brahmin priest. Some of the Koch have gone to the extend of becoming disciples of some Bengali Brahmins and accepting them as their spiritual guides. Now-a-days, marriage with members of other communities is accepted by the society. This has given rise to a sense of mutual trust and understanding between the communities. A recent phenomenon among the Urban Koch is the adoption of the Bengali Surname.

Among the Koch, the growing interest towards education is evident from the member of the students attending the primary and middle schools in and around the villages. Those who can afford it are receiving high school and college educations in Tura. Some adult and aged Koch women also regularly attend adult education courses. The Koches are conscious of the importance of the modern medicine. For any major ailment they consult the physicians in the public health
centres at Mukdangra or Garobadha or at Tura civil hospital. They say that they have benefited to a great extent from public health schemes like Malaria Eradication Programmes, Child care and Maternity Programmes and Family Welfare Programmes. Drinking water facilities are available in the vicinity of most of the Koch villages. From the Government and banks many of them have received financial and technical assistant for modern agricultural inputs, piggeries, cattle breeding and poultry farming. Some of them have received loans from the District Council Office for constructing houses. The Government has given sewing machine threads in nearly all Koch villages. Their villages are not well connected with the main roads. They feel that lack of proper road communication has put them in great difficulty. A development programme on road communication is their urgent need. Electricity has been installed in some of their villages. But only few have so far been able to make use of this modern amenity for domestic consumption. However the people of these villages are happy to have street lights in their villages. The Government has also initiated a programme on nutrition and food distribution in the
Koch area and occasionally supplies ration at a subsidized rate. It is the feeling of some members of the Koch community that the development programme that have been implemented will be severely hampered if the financial is not accompanied by adequate technical guidance. This is evident from the fact that some of them have failed to achieve the targets set and as consequence have failed to repay the loans that they have taken.