The Kachari tribes of Assam form the largest part of the tribal population of the North East. The Barmans are the part of the Dimasa Kachari Tribe who live in the Barak plains, mostly in the Cachar District. In the Barak Valley, they constitute about 90 percent of the scheduled tribe population. The Barmans form a unique Hindu community because though not casteless, they are not caste-ridden. All Barmans belong to the Kshatriya caste because their forefathers embraced Hinduism formally in the late eighteenth century. They were mainly courtiers, attendants and soldiers accompanying the kings to the plains where they were placed in the same Kshatriya caste as their kings.

But the members of a traditional Hindu community by tradition accommodate a priestly Brahmin class to discharge the priestly religious duties for them. The Barmans’ Hindu priests are the Bengalee Brahmins. This keeps them bound to the Bengalee Hindus in their religious aspects of life. Admittedly, the Barmans still have a few remnants of their primitive tribal animistic beliefs, though they too are dying out.

Change is an obvious fact of life and every community has to adjust itself to the changing conditions. The Barmans have undergone changes. A tribal community in the classical sense lives in a groove but that in-groove existence cannot persist, when the impact of urbanisation is relentlessly expanding near their habitats. Fortunately or
unfortunately for the Barmans, industrialisation and urbanisation are not rapid enough to engulf them totally. They retained many of their traditional socio-cultural traits. For instance, in their marriages, because of the prohibitions emanating from the 'double-clan' system, a Dimasa boy cannot marry a girl from his mother’s clan or from his father’s clan.

Though they form a small minority in the Barak Valley, forming less than 1 percent of the total population, their close proximity with their hill brethren, the Dimasas of the North Cachar Hills, with whom they have close ethnic and linguistic affinity enable them to retain their desires to preserve their distinct identity. The Hill Dimasas and the Barmans of the plains speak the same language varying only in some words and phrases and idioms. The social relationships are close enough to seek marital relations. In fact, the Barman girls adorn the Hill Dimasa boys, confirming the similarity of their social conditions. If there is variation, it is only induced by their geographical locations, which again necessitates the preservation of, as many of their traditional institutions as possible for these institutions are inseparable from their tribal identity.

This is why, some of the traditional institutions of the Barmans still exist but these existing traditional institutions also have had to undergo changes in respect of their jurisdiction, influence and functions to survive the impact of modernisation or else their extinction would have been an inevitability.

The present study aims at investigating and finding out the present state of the political institutions of the Barmans, the changes that the impact of modernisation has brought about in them and the trends indicating what future has in store for them.