Chapter 10

URBANIZATION OF TRIBAL PEOPLE: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The Barmans in Silchar town have undergone various changes in their economic life, education, political awareness and material culture. The changes have been measured by their working population, diverse occupations, literacy, income and technological growth. In spite of the fact, many of the tribal and traditional elements have been continuing in their culture and society, mainly in their non-material culture. The major changes and continuities which have taken place under the impact of urbanization of the Barmans are being summed up here.

I. Social Structure

(i) Family Structure

Traditionally the Dimasa follow nuclear family system. But the section of Dimasa who migrated in the plains of Cachar district, i.e., the Barman adopted joint family system as a highly Hinduized tribal community of this region. But presently the joint family
system could not retain its preponderance among the Barman population in Silchar town and most of the families (72.97%) are nuclear type. Because most of the Barmans migrated individually to the in Silchar town in search of jobs or education and after seeking those they got married and remain in the town as nuclear family. Besides, in some cases (27.03%) the people are living jointly with their parents, married sons, grand children or other secondary or tertiary kins.

Alongwith the nuclearization of family type, the influence of modern education and urbanization is seen in their family size. Though medium and large sized families from a common pattern in the Barman villages, yet small sized family is the major pattern in the Barman community of Silchar town. In most of the cases (75.68%) the families consist of not more than four persons.

The traditional patriarchal family system remains more or less the same in both the rural and urban Barman communities. As all the Barman females in the town are educated they take part in all the family matters and the husbands take any final decision after consulting their wives.

Thus, small sized nuclear family is the dominant feature taking place among the Barmans in the town because of joint effects of modern education and urbanization.

(ii) Inheritance of Property

In their customary law of inheritance, daughters have exclusive rights over mothers' property like cloths, ornaments and utensils whereas sons have exclusive rights over paternal property like land, house and cash. In absence of a daughter and a son all the movable and immovable properties are inherited by the nearest female and male relatives respectively.
But the urban Barmans do not follow the custom. The parents may give their movable or immovable property to any one of the sons and daughters or may distribute equally among them as is in practice among the Bengali people in the town. Even in absence of a daughter and a son, they inherit the properties to daughter-in-law and son-in-law respectively instead of any other relative. Thus, the custom of inheritance is changing among the Barmans in the town under the Bengali influence.

(iii) Marriage

Traditionally monogamy is practised in the Barman tribe settled in the rural and urban areas of Cachar district. Remarriage is permissible only after death or divorce of one's spouse. Generally, in the rural areas, the parents get their daughters married at the age of 16-17 years. In the selection of a bride the guardians of the groom pay more attention to beauty as well as weaving skills of the bride.

But in the town most of the parents arrange their daughters' marriages in the age of 25 years onwards. The grooms' families are giving more importance to bride's education and her family status rather than her beauty and weaving skills.

The community traditionally prefers negotiated marriage. Most of the marriages (77.97%) of the Barmans in the town have taken place through negotiations. Even then, a significant proportion of the marriages (17.80%) have taken place through love affair or by elopement of the bride and the groom with or without consent of their parents.

Besides, the community has recognized a few inter-community marriages (5.04%) after the deviants have undergone some sort of punitive action (Dandi) imposed by the committee of the Silchar Dimasa Samaj. Thus, in the given context of modernization and heterogeneity in the urban setup the individual choices are being
accommodated along with the continuing community preference for traditional negotiated marriage. However, they gladly accept only the cases of love marriage whereas they accept the inter-community marriages reluctantly, out of the fear that excommunication of those who violate the rule of tribe endogamy will ultimately result into depopulation of their community. Therefore, the Dandi is used to discourage and to check the growth of inter-community marriages so as to retain their social identity in the midst of urbanization and modernization.

The urban life conditions like spatial shortage, work burden, cost of living and so on have necessitated to introduce the shortened version of the traditional marriage customs among the Barmans as they are not able to follow them in all details and elaborately. They are arranging marriages in Marriage Halls by their relatives and friends. But at the same time many marriages are still solemnized conventionally by following detailed customs and are arranged in their homes.

The tradition of bride price (Rs. 101/-) is maintained by the Barmans in the town at the time of marriage till date. Besides, family presents some gifts to the groom, which is absent in the rural Barmans. It is more or less like dowry system which prevails in the Bengali tradition though the grooms family never demands for the gifts. Here, the change is perceived because of the impact of the Bengali population in the town.

Therefore, both continuity and change are apparent among the Barmans of the town in the matter of mode, arrangement and ceremonial rituals of marriage. But regarding the age at marriage and preferences in selection of a bride, changes are more conspicuous than continuity in the wake of education, modernization and corresponding urbanization.
(iv) Clan System

The Barmans in the Silchar town have double clan system till date. They strictly observe the clan exogamy rule in marriage and the deviants of this rule are excommunicated.

However, some of the young Barmans have married outside the tribe and have violated the rule of tribe endogamy. It posed some problems for their social structure. Since the non-tribals do not have any matri-clan, it becomes problematic in marriage of the offspring born out of inter-community marriages which are unavoidable in the urban setting. Therefore, out of the fear of depopulation the Barman community has decided to allocate a new matri-clan *Phaijindirao* for a non-Barman girl who married to a Barman boy and *Phaifindiaro* for the female descendents of the out going women instead of excommunicating them.

Thus, alongwith continuity of the clan structure certain changes have been introduced in the form of accommodation of new clans and permissiveness in respect of tribe endogamy.

(v) Kinship behaviour and terminology

In their kinship behaviour the urban Barmans are continuing their customary usages of avoidance, joking and deference. Yet, some changes are obviously taking place among the educated ones. In the rural areas, the daughter in-law must veil in front of parents-in-law and husband's elder brother. While interacting they do not touch each other; do not sit together and speak to each other impersonally by using signs as far as possible.

But the urban Barmans are more open and direct in conversations. The
daughter-in-law treats her parents-in-law like her own parents, but with formal regards. She treats her husband's elder brother as her own elder brother but obviously she maintains a distance in her interaction with him. But, those women whose parents-in-law and husband's elder brother are living in villages they do veil themselves and follow all customary usages in interaction whenever they visit their respective villages.

Like the rural Barman community the joking usages are prevailing among the urban Barmans between husband's younger brother and his elder brother's wife and between grandparents and grand children along with reciprocal relationship of love and respect. Besides, the usages of deference exhibit more or less similarity in both rural and urban setting of the Barmans. Yet, a little egalitarianism is perceived because of economic independence of sons in the grown up stage and some working women (23.50%) in the town.

Thus, the three usages avoidance, joking and deference are little affected by the of urbanization and modernization among the Barman's.

Regarding use of kin terminologies some significant changes are discernible mostly in the young generation of the Barmans in the town. In view of mass media and cross-cultural exposure, now-a-days they are using Bengali terms mostly along with Dimasa / Barman terms. They are also using a few English terms. They address father and mother as *Baba* (in Bengali) or *Papa* (in English) and *maa* (in Bengali) instead of *Abai* and *Amai* respectively in their own language. Elder brother and elder sister are addresses as *Dada* and *Didi* by suffixing three Barman specific terms *Gedeba*, *Langerba* and *Khaseba* on seniority basis. Younger brother and sister are addressed simply by their names instead of *Adzi* and *Adeh* in their own language. Hence, the
young generations terminology reflects the syncretization of three languages; viz., Barman, Bengali and English. But, at the same time the middle aged and old aged people are still using many of their specific Barman identificatory terms which are more clear and distinct than Bengali and English terminologies.

Thus, the two processes acculturation and modernization are going on in the young generation whereas the tradition is continuing in the middle and old generations of the Barmans in the town.

(vi) Social Stratification

As in the rural Barman community the urban Barmans also have caste distinctions introduced by the royal decree in the past. But in both the settings the caste distinctions are effective in marriage negotiation only.

Though the feeling of class consciousness is not discerned among the rural Barmans as they are all agriculturalists of more or less similar economy, yet class consciousness surfaces among the urban Barmans on certain occasions because of occupational diversification and educational improvement. Generally, the consciousness is perceived at the time of marriage negotiations wherein education and income are considered measures of status among the urban Barmans. Besides, a section of the Barman women who belong to Jadigiri group (out side of 42 Julus, i.e., matri-clans) is continuing to be considered inferior caste among the Barmans in the town and no marriage relation is possible with them.

Thus, the caste consciousness shows the continuity of tradition whereas the emerging class consciousness signifies a new basis of inequality gaining ground in the urban Barmans.
II. Economic Structure

The rural Barmans are settled agriculturalists and poultry farming, sericulture, brewing and weaving are practised by womenfolk as subsidiary occupations in their families. Their expenditure and consumption patterns are mostly based on their incomes.

But, the Barmans in the town represent a changed picture in their economic life in comparison of the rural Barmans. The traditional occupation has been replaced by non-agricultural occupations in the urban setting. The two fifths of the population are working in Government and private sectors and the rest are non-workers. Most of the workers (75.14%) are engaged as clerks, peons and mechanics; a significant proportion (11.05%) is of teachers and a small fraction consists of engineers, doctors, policemen, security and army personal. Half the non-workers are students and one fourth are housewives. Now-a-days, nearly one fourth Barman females are working in different government and private sectors. Yet, the size of male working population is double the female working population.

Most of the Barman households belong to the lower and middle classes because most of the earning members are working as clerks, peons, mechanics, teachers whose monthly salary is hardly more than Rs 6000/-. But in the families in which the number of earning members is more the family income is also higher. Almost all the families are living a simple economic life and none is found under the poverty line.

In the kitchen, the urban Barmans have significantly come-up to use L.P.G in cooking instead of their traditional hearth. Most of them use steel and aluminium made kitchen-wares. Besides the necessary articles, almost all the families possess a
number of modern gadgets at home. Instead of their traditional items like handloom,
musical instruments, *Lautai* (rice beer container), etc., all the urban Barmans possess a
good number of modern household gadgets such as pressure cooker (90%), electric
fan (98.20%), double bed (92.79%), steel almirah (91.89%), Basic phone (45.94%),
mobile (41.44%), refrigerator (55.85%), tape recorder (60.36%), cooking gas (98.20%),
colour TV. (76.58%), black and white TV (24.32%), washing machine (9.01%), motor
cycle (16.22%), scooter (36.04%), car (12.61%), motor (30.63%), etc. which reflect
their economic status trend of their adjustment with urban life style.

Only a few people possess traditional items like handloom (2.70%), *lautai*
(8.11%), musical instruments; viz., *mridongo* (0/90%) and *bashí* (0.90%).

Though, traditionally weaving is considered as one of the important quality for a
Barman female, yet almost none of the urban Barman women practise it and the new
generation even do not know the process of weaving.

Thus, diversification in the economic life of the urban Barmans is result of
expansions of education, new outlook and influence of modernization and urbanization.

**III. The Power Structure**

Like the Barman villagers the urban Barmans have a traditional organization. The
Barmans in the town are guided by the executive body of Silchar Dimasa Samaj
which consists of *Khunang* (headman) two *Deliks* (assistant headman) and six
*Habaiskao* (area-in-charge). But the position of *Daolatho* (assistant *delik*) has been
dropped in the urban setting as there are only 111 Barman households and the two
*Deliks* are sufficient in the town. In both the rural and urban settings the executive body
is empowered to take all social, cultural and religious decisions for the community and
anyone who defies the decisions is excommunicated. But, now-a-days, the executive body has become a bit permissive in the matter of tribe exogamy only. Because such instances are happening and ex-communication of the deviants may lead to depopulation of their society the executive body, has decided to accept the deviants by using the Dandi (atonement or performing of purificatory rites alongwith some monetary penalty decided by the body) to redeem the situation. But, the body never pardon the deviants of clan exogamy rule. Though both the rural and urban Barman communities are bearing their traditional power structure, yet, today, this system remains not as active as in the pre-Independence period.

On the whole, the urban Barmans are continuing their traditional power structure by making a few changes such as dropping of Daolatho and permissiveness in the matter of tribe exogamy.

IV. Cultural system

(i) Housing

In the urban setting, the traditional Assam type houses (full brick or half brick walls with tin roofs or walls made of mud, straw and bamboo splits with thatched roofs) have been replaced by the modern R.C.C. type houses. Half the families are living in their own houses whereas a few families (4.50%) possess their plots of land in the town. The rest (45.95%) are living in rented houses or Government quarters. Almost all those who belong to lower and middle class economy are living in small houses with minimum space for accommodation of the family members.

Thus, they have adopted the urban housing pattern in the changed situation.
(ii) Dress and Ornaments

Major changes of dress pattern are seen among the young boys and girls. The boys wear jeans pant, shirt, jacket, coat, etc. whereas the girls wear salwar, skirt, top, jeans pant, etc. at home, out of home or on special occasions.

The middle aged males and females mostly wear traditional dresses (*dhoti, kurta* and *risa* for male and *righu chador* for female) on social, religious and cultural occasions. But, in their daily life the males wear shirt, pant, coat, etc. and the females wear sari and *righu chador* alternatively.

But, barring a few, the aged males and females wear their traditional dresses invariably.

Thus, the new generation is modernizing fast whereas the old generation is continuing their traditional dresses. In the middle aged the women are mixing the traditional tribal and Indian dresses.

The traditional ornaments of the Barman (*khadudima, kamautai, khumtao, labgbar pondaobar, poali, rangbarsa, jangsam*) are gradually loosing their usage among the urban Barmans and are being replaced by the simple ornaments of gold and silver as found among the Bengalis. A few old women are keeping some traditional ornaments but they do not wear them.

Thus, the use of traditional ornaments has totally discontinued among the urban Barmans under the acculturation of the Bengali articles in the markets

(iii) Food and Beverage

The Barmans are traditionally non-vegetarians who take fish meat, eggs, dry fish and *sidol* alternatively in their daily meals. Most of the urban Barmans (80.18%) are also non-vegetarians. Yet, a significant proportion of the people (19.82%) in the town
has converted into the vegetarian owing to religious reasons.

The traditional dishes; viz., misagee (made of wild leaves such as misigao, yaolaisa), breyangba (made of soft inner part of bamboo), guduyara (made of small fish and spinach), haingyaba (food baked in fire), mudru (made of leaves of pumpkin) and khar (prepared from banana tree) are being replaced by the Bengali dishes such as dal, bhaja, fish curry, biriyani, polau, kichudi and sweet rice in the town. But almost all the non-vegetarians prefer the naplam (dry fish) and the nagraing (sidol), the two traditional dishes used occasionally.

The tradition of using rice beer (judima) in all social and religious occasions such as marriage, funeral, birth rites, and rituals is also maintained by the urban Barmans but they do not prepare it at their homes in the town. Rather, they purchase it from their rural fellows whenever necessity arises. In the town the people do not take it regularly. Besides, they take tea, milk and health drinks regularly.

Thus, continuity of traditional rice beer, acculturation of Bengali foods and modernization of beverages is going on simultaneously among the urban Barmans.

(iv) Language

Regarding language some changes have taken place in course of time after a section of the Dimasas came down to the plains of Cachar. Barmans speak slightly different language varying in intonations, pronunciation and accent. Even words are spelt differently. For instance, the Dimasa ‘I’ sound is often transformed into ‘U’, and Jilik (female clan) is pronounced as Julu, In Hill Dimasa the words Ning (you), Hagic (hill), Khem (flower), etc. turn into Nung (you), Hague (hill) and Khem (flower) for the same meaning. This is because of living amidst the Sylheti Bengali people from long time. So, some changes have definitely taken place in their dialect which make them
different from the Hill Dimasas.

Due to expansion of education, employment, improved mass media, acculturation, urbanization and modernization, now-a-days, almost all the Barmans in the town speak Bengali and English other than Dimasa (mother tongue). The young generation can speak English and Hindi too and is passing through multilingualization.

(v) Festivals

The main festival of the Barmans, i.e., *Bushu* (harvest festival) is gradually loosing its significance among the urban Barmans under occupational and other changes. In the celebration of the festival the spirit of collectivity has been lost. The urban Barmans celebrate the festival at family level only and therefore the elements of music, dance, games, sacrifice of buffalo and erection of bamboo gate have been dropped out. As a result, the young generation is loosing their interest in the traditional music and dance.

On the other hand, they give more emphasis on the Hindu festivals; viz., *Makar-Sankranti, Karttik-Sankranti, Noboboesha* and *Bijoya-dosomi* owing to their acculturation amidst the Hindu Bengali population.

Thus, the tradition of festival is changing in terms of collectivity and character under the acculturation of the majority community culture among the Barmans in the town.

V. Religious Beliefs and Practices

As the Dimasa and Barman tribes belong to the same ethnic origin they are traditionally worshippers of their legendary ancestral God, Banglaraja, Arikhidima, their inheritors and other ancestral deities; viz., Waraja, Dilaoju, Alaoraja, Landiraja. After the adoption of Hinduism at the time of king Krishnachandra, the Barmans of Cachar
district became followers of Saktism, Saivism and Vaishnavism also.

The urban Barmans also believe in the major Hindu sects, Saktism, Saivism and Vaishnavism. But, now-a-days three fifths of the Barman households in the town are the followers of some dharma gurus (religious masters); viz., Sri Sri Ramkrishna Thakur, Sri Sri Anukul Thakur, Swami Sarupananda, Brahma Kumarij, Saibaba and different Vaishnava gurus.

Though, the Barman in the region have become Hindu, yet, they perform a number of tribal rites on different occasions such as Hego chujaba (birth rites), Mayofars (rituals of testing rebirth), Thaiba (death rites), Nagungainba (initiation) and some magical religious practices. The birth rites; viz., Naisod-Naisodi puja, Kharoba, Sivrai puja, Gamadhi puja, Nanadihanba, Nanabeching jiriba have been dropped by the urban Barmans. Usually a pregnant women is admitted in a hospital for delivery of a baby by doctors and nurses. Therefore, the function of traditional midwife (Hojaijik) assistant midwife (Barowajik) and wait nurse (Annuajik) are not required at all whereas the rites such as Gamadi puja, Nanadhihanaba and Nanabeching jiriba have also become defunct in the urban Barman community. The two birth rites such as Naisod-Naisodi and Kharoba are performed by a Hojai (the traditional male priest). Instead of traditional birth rites now-a-days the Barmans in the town practised Annaprasana (ceremonially giving of rice to a baby) in the same manner as the Bengali Hindus.

Generally, in the Barman villages, 108 types of Mayofars (rituals of welfare) are performed on different occasions. But in their town mainly six types of mayofars are performed by the Barmans. The rite Sengphong puja (worship of respective patri clans)
and Julu puja (worship of respective matri clans) are now-a-days performed collectively in the Kachakanti temple in Udharbond by the urban Barmans totally in the Hindu way rather than the traditional one.

The ritual Shaimang (ritual of testing rebirth) is performed in the town also, but the death rite Thaiba has been replaced by the Hindu Shradh ceremony performed on the 13th day after death of a person. But, they maintain their tradition of offering rice beer to the invites on Shradh ceremony till date.

Besides, the Nagungainba (initiation) rite is performed by the urban Barmans but in their villages and not in the town in order to avoid the extra burden.

Moreover, like the rural Barmans some magico-religious practices are prevalent among the urban Barmans also performed by a Hojai (traditional priest cum medicine man). Despite the fact that the educated urban Barmans believe much in modern medical treatment, they have some faith in it and they go for primitive treatment after failure of modern medical treatment. A few people secretly practice black magic or witchcraft to harm others or to impress upon a girl and her parents to marry her against their will or sometimes out of jealousy.

Thus, the continuity, change and accretion in the tribal cultural elements are perceived in their traditional beliefs and practices. No doubt, some changes are taking place under the impact of urban forces like education and close contact with the Hindu Bengali population, yet the accretion distinguish them from the Dimasa as well as the Bengali Hindus. But, regarding practices of magico-religious activities and witchcrafts, the urban Barmans definitely continuing their traditional beliefs and practices which remain unaffected by corresponding modernization till date.
VI. Education, Health and Communication

(i) Education

All the Barmans in the town are literate and currently they seem to be inclined to higher education. Most of the males (24.21%) and the females (29.95%) are H.S.S.L.C (Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate) pass. A few people have done Graduation (11.09%), Post Graduation (1.07%), M.B.B.S. (Bachelor of Medicines and Bachelor of Surgery, 0.85%), B.E. (Bachelor of Engineering, 1.70%), Polytechnic Diploma (2.13%) and I.T.I Diploma (Industrial Training institute, 2.77%) which is one of the major causes of cultural change. The education of women is also getting equal attention among the Barmans of the town. Though most of the males and the females have chosen Arts stream of education, yet now-a-days, mostly the young males are coming up significantly in Science education. But, except a few males the Commerce stream of education is still uncommon among them. Recently, most of the urban Barman parents who can afford are inclined to admit their children in English medium schools instead of Bengali medium, which is mainly responsible for inclination of the younger generation towards western (modern) culture instead of their traditional one.

(ii) Health

In general, the Barmans of the town live a healthy life. Yet, a significant proportion of the people (15.57%) is suffering from some acute diseases; viz., diabetes, heart related problem, high blood pressure, arthritis, asthma, kidney stone, mental disorder, paralysis, spondylitis and neurological problems which are generally uncommon in rural areas. Because, as the rural people are hard working physically and free from mental tensions. But, these diseases seem to have been caught the urban Barmans under the strains or influences of urban life.
Regarding the treatment, all of them have access to the facilities of modern medical treatments; viz., homeopathic, allopathic and ayurvedic. Besides, like rural Barmans, half the urban Barmans believe in their primitive methods of treatment. But they go for primitive treatment only when the modern treatment methods fail to cure the patients.

Recently, a great health consciousness is perceived among the urban Barmans, specially in the middle aged people. A significant section (one third) of the Barmans is practising physical exercises, yogasana, pranayama and regular walk in the morning or evening for maintaining good health.

Thus, in the matter of disease, treatment and health consciousness the traditional mind setup of the urban Barmans is changing fast as a result of the exposure to modern education, mass media and medical facilities in the urban situation.

(iii) Communication

Like the rural Barmans the urban Barmans have their traditional system of personal communication till date. The residence of the Khunang (headman) is the centre of interpersonal communication where all the important decisions are taken and these are disseminated by the Habaiskao in their respective areas. Besides, on various socio- religious occasions, like marriage, annaprasana, funeral, festivals, religious occasions, etc. they share their ideas, thoughts and emotions.

The print mass media and the electronic media are also used to keep themselves aware about all the current happenings in the town (Silchar), the district (Cachar), the state (Assam), the nation (India) and the world. The print media such as
newspapers (97.30%), magazines (60.36%) and books (36.04%) are used for self awareness about the origin, history, customs and current activities of their own community (Dimasa / Barman) as well as for the current affairs of local, regional, nation and world level. The electronic media; viz., radio, TV, and phones have become an indispensable part of the urban Barmans for knowledge, entertainment and communication. TV and phones are more popular than radio and almost all the households possess them. Besides, a significant proportion of people (39.87%) has attained the knowledge of computer handling from offices, cyber cafes or schools.

Thus, the urban Barmans are using all the modern means of communication which are enhancing their consciousness about the local, regional and national environments. Yet, they are continuing traditional means to communicate among the fellow members in the town. Hence, the change is perceived alongwith the continuity of the tradition in a well adjusted manner.

**VII. Self Awareness and Uplift Efforts**

The Barmans have formed a number of organizations for uplift of the Barman community in particular. Some of these are Dimasa Historical Heritage Foundation, Nikhil Cachar Haidimbo Barman Samiti, Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad, Dimasa Social Welfare Organization, Dimasa Sahitya Sobha. These working to protect and preserve their glorious Kachari historical heritage, socio-economic development of the Barmans of Cachar, preservation of Barmans culture and literature, welfare of Barmans and introduction of Dimasa language in primary schools respectively. In addition to these, there are two organization; viz., Barman Mohila Samiti and All Dimasa Students Union whose main objective are socio-economic upliftment of the Barman women and of the Dimasa Barman Students of the district respectively. For smooth and proper
functioning of these organizations the executive members collect subscription from each and every Barman household of the district and utilize those in different development programmes.

These socio-cultural organizations are mainly organized and controlled by some educated urban Barmans whose painstaking attempt undoubtedly becomes successful for the development of the Barmans community in diversified fields. Moreover, these organizations also integrate the rural Barmans and urban Barmans in spite of many changes that have taken place in the urban Barman community due to urbanization.

Thus, they are organizing their efforts in a formal manner for collective development and self awareness.

On the whole, there is perceived a significant continuity in the non-material culture and a significant change in the material culture among the urban Barmans. The patriarchal family system, double clan system, prescriptive and proscriptive marriage rules, tribal, socio-religious activities, witchcraft, primitive ways of treatment, kinship behaviour and terminologies, clan and caste consciousness, language and traditional power structure are continuing till date which. On the other hand, occupations, household items, house type, dress and ornaments, food and beverage are changing in a profound manner. Besides, uses of modern medical facilities and health consciousness are the non-material aspects which are changing in a big way among the urban Barmans. The rate of change in the material culture is slow in comparison of the change in the material culture. The continuity of tradition is carried along by the middle and old generations whereas the new generation is adopting new elements in
non-material cultures. Although in most of cases the Barmans in the town maintained the traditional prescriptive and proscriptive marriage rules, i.e., tribe endogamy and clan exogamy rules, yet, in a few cases the young Barmans violated tribe endogamy rule and the community has accepted such cases after performing an atonement measure (Dandi). Because of such instances, the community has introduced two new matriclans for the non-Barman female marrying a Barman boy and their female offspring. Regarding use of kinship terminologies young generation is using Bengali terms alongwith a few English terms whereas the middle and old aged Barmans are using the Dimasa terms. In their dresses almost all the young Barmans are wearing modern dresses whereas the middle and old aged people compulsorily wear traditional dresses on social occasions and both the Bengali and traditional dresses in daily life. Besides, recently, most of the parents admit their children in English medium schools which is one of the reason for fast modernization of the young generation. Because of studying in the English medium schools most of the young Barmans are able to speak English and are getting little opportunity to learn their tribal (Dimasa) language. Besides, most of the young males have chosen Science stream of education for career prospects. Furthermore, due to mass media exposure almost all the young people can speak Hindi. Most of them have computer knowledge also.

The continuity of tradition is further differentiated between the middle and the old generation. Regarding dress pattern, kinship behaviour and terminology, and language the middle generation is continuing the Sanskritic model (Bengali culture) which the Kacharies adopted when they settled in Khaspur (plains of Cachar) and were Hinduized whereas the old generation is continuing the original Dimasa (tribal) culture.
CONCLUSION

The urban Barmans are undergoing multidimensional changes on the one hand, and are continuing tradition with some adjustments and re-adjustments in the new situation. Due to contacts with the outside world the changes are taking place mainly in the social, economic, religious, cultural and political aspects which gained momentum through urbanization of the people in the post-Independence period. Adoption of the Hindu ways of life, particularly the Bengali culture, sanskritized these people and changed their little tradition in many ways in the rural areas in the plains of Cachar. But the remarkable changes are occurring among the urban Barmans as a result of the expansion of education which led the younger generation to occupational diversification. A state of psychological preparedness towards achieving higher education both in academic and technical fields is now distinctly noticeable among the urban Barmans. Their whole life reflects a combined impact of education, occupation and mass media exposure in the urban setting. The attitudinal change among the people owes ultimately to the reservations of seats for the Scheduled Tribes (plains) in the educational institutions and the Government jobs. The protective discrimination offered the ground for mutual reinforcement between education and occupations. The family economy improved over the generations and therefore the new generation is coming up in the modern houses, with modern dresses, ornaments and food with largely English education and orientation for higher education. In their social structure, i.e., clan family and marriage one comes across a vast continuity but alongwith significant streaks
of change in the form of adjustments and re-adjustments. In a few cases such as family, nuclearization is obvious. In their kinship terminologies, dress pattern, ornaments, house type, festivals, food habits, etc., accretion of elements of the Bengali, Assamese, Hindi and English cultures is clearly visible. Political modernization involves the process of ethnic identification. Besides, there is an awakening brought about by a number of Barman socio-cultural organizations where effort is on to preserve their cultural identity through the heritage of symbols, institutions and places. Because, due to shifting of Kachari Kingdom to Badarpur, heavy influx of Bengali population from East Bengali in the Barak Valley during post-Independence period, adoption of Hinduism and accretion with Bengali culture the Barmans of this valley are facing problem in maintaining their cultural identity. Their keen desire to preserve distinct ethnic identity keep them continuing with as many traditional features as possible. In their non-material cultural aspects such as social structures, modes of inheritance, double clan system, endogamy and exogamy marriage rules, social stratification, kinship structure and behaviour, religious life, power structure continuation of tradition is perceived much more than change but the changes are quite significant. The Bengali Hindus are the reference group for sanskritization, on one hand, and the Dimasas of N.C. Hills are the reference model for revivalism, political integration and tribal identity on other hand. In a way the increased awareness through sanskritization, westernization or modernization is promoting identity consciousness and the movement for Dimaraji, i.e., the formation of new state for the Dimasa. Therefore, the process of revivalism is gaining ground under the ongoing urbanization and social changes. Nonetheless, the very social setup in the urban setting has given them a broad outlook for selective adoption of alien elements and changes. Thus, the patterns
indicate the continuity and selective changes in non-material culture and the immense changes in the material culture.

However, they have not struggled for their existence in the urban centre like the other migrant tribes who are facing numerous problems in urbo-industrial areas. A number of anthropologists studied the tribes of middle India who suffered from exploitation in economic aspect and socio-cultural aspects because of industrialization. L.P.Vidyarth (1971) showed the negative effect of industrialization among the local inhabitants of Hatia industrial zone near Ranchi. The problem of land acquisition and rehabilitation of the uprooted villagers led to manifold problems such as social problems, cultural crisis, economic disorganization and social disintegration which resulted into cultural disequilibrium. The two industrial centres of Chotanagpur, viz., Patratu Thermal Power Project and the Bokaro Steel Plant were studied by R.Singh (1967) and Sarkar (1970) respectively showed the effect of industrialization on the local inhabitants in terms of social disintegration of the uprooted villagers. Das Gupta (1973) studied the changes of the HOs of Chotanagpur who have faced with regards to their economic, social, cultural and religious life after establishment of a cement factory in Jhinkpani area. These studies made discussed the manifold problems of the tribal people because of industrialization and urbanization. But in the Barmans in Silchar town such kind of disorganization in economic, social and cultural aspects is not seen at all among them. But, the Barmans never suffered from any socio-economic crisis. They were already Hinduized and partly shared the culture of the Bengali population in the plains of Cachar. Amidst the Bengali people in the town they are continuing to share
the Bengali culture, on the one hand, and are maintaining their linkages with the tribal fellows in the villages and town, on the other. Thus, their traditional social structure remained strong even in the town and they accepted adaptive changes in it in the event of a need. The continuity in the non-material culture sustained the social structure and cultural identity and absorbed the changes in material culture particularly. The processes of change like sanskritization, modernization and accretion are going on without any disruptions and distortions in their social structure and cultural equilibrium. Therefore, it seems that the setting are smoothly passing through transformation as even in some aspects of non-material aspects; viz., religion, education, health and communication they have adopted very significant changes.

Of the three hypotheses formulated in the study the first one "A tribal community is transformed / westernized when it confronts urban modernity" is partially confirmed; the second one "A tribal community adapts to the regional / Sanskritic pattern of life when it confronts urban modernity" is also partially confirmed, and the third one "A tribal community adapts selectively to technology, institutions and values of urban modernity" is fully confirmed.

The mode of change indicates that sanskritization (acculturation), modernization (emulation of urban middle class life style) and accretion (of the elements of the other cultures) are the major processes of change among the tribal people like the Barman who are undergoing urbanization in India. Thus, sanskritization-modernization-accretion is the general framework to understand the continuity and change among the tribals in the Indian urban centres. Hence, no single process can embrace the reality of the changes occurring among these people as a result of
urbanization. These processes have been set in motion through the government jobs they got under the reservation policy for protective discrimination.

Therefore, any development initiative has to be linked with their material improvement but social structure has to be protected. The Barmans are wading through changes smoothly because of their strong and adaptive social structure. The strong social structure owes to their linkages with their rural fellows and hill brethren. They are constantly looking backward to the tribal (Dimasa) tradition and are moving forward to the under modernity. A question arises: **How much tribal are the Barmans in the town today?**

**Question of Tribal Identity**

The Barmans of the Barak Valley are in transition. Though they are the original inhabitors of this valley from the time of king Krishanchandra (1745-57 A.D.) up to the king Govindachandra (1813-30 A.D.). But they lost their political power in 1832 A.D. Now, they constitute a minority group amidst the Bengali majority. After the collapse of the Kachari kingdom many of the Barman people left the valley and migrated to Tripura. After Independence, there was a heavy influx of Bengali population from East-Bengal to the Barak Valley. It was further intensified in 1971 at the time of formation of Bangladesh. As a result, Barak Valley became dominated by the Bengalis. Thus, a feeling of identity crisis emerged amongst the Barman. It gave rise to the process of retribalization among them. They found themselves close to the Dimasa of N.C.Hills in the matter of their identity. On the other hand, after getting the “Autonomous District Council” in N.C.Hills district in 1984 the Dimasa leadership initiated their efforts for integration of the Dimasa and the Barman. Thereafter, a movement demanding “Dimaraji” state was launched in
the region and an attempt was also made to integrate the broken tribes of Dimasa; viz., Barmans of Cachar, Rukmi Barmans of Karimganj, Hojai Kacharis of Nagaon and Kacharis of Nagalabnd (Paul 2001:139). On 23rd September 2004 the chairman of the committee “Dima Halam Daogah” (D.H.D) Dilip Dimasa presented a memorandum to the Home Minister of India, Mr. Shivraj Patil for creation of “Dimaraji” state by carving out the lands inhabited by the Dimasa people in the North-Eastern region under the constitution of India for Dimasa homeland and self-rule. According to the memorandum the areas for their proposed state are to be carved out Dimaraji state.

(i) From Nagaon district Assam: (a) Lumding Reserve Forest, (b) Lumding Town,
(c) Bordolong-Lanka Bheta Tribal Belt, (d) Hoaji Tribal Sub-Plain (TSP),
(e) Jamunamukh

(ii) From Cachar district of Assam: (a) Kalain Block, (b) Katigorah Block, (c) Borkhola,
(d) Dolu, (e) Udharbond, (f) Lakhipur subdivision, (g) Barak Reserve Forest,
(h) Sonai Thana, (i) Dholai

(iii) From Karbi Anglong District: (a) Lumbajong (Lamayung) Development Block,
(b) Dimasa inhabited areas of Howraghat and Langsomepi Development Blocks,
(c) Dimasa inhabited areas of Rongkhoang Development Block of Hamren subdivision.

(iv) From North Cachar Hills district: The entire district is to be carved out.

(v) From Dimapur district of Nagaland: The entire district is to be carved out.

In the recent past the marriages taking place between Dimasa boys and Barman girls have re-strengthened the process of tribal reintegration. Concerned of their cultural identity the Barman prefer the Dimasa boys to the Bengali boys for their daughters to marry. Then, a few of the Barmans are using their Sengphong (patri clan) as surname instead of the title 'Barman' in order to link themselves to the larger Dimasa tribal group as well as to get the facilities available to the Scheduled Tribes of Hills (STH).

Thus, in the wake of the socio-political awakening the Barmans are today caught in-between the urban modernity and the tribal identity.