CHAPTER VII

MATERIAL CULTURE

The gamut of material culture covers the sub-genres of Folk crafts, folk arts, folk architecture, folk custom, folk cookery and farming and fishing which are termed in a nutshell as, "Physical Folk-life" of a community. In contrast to verbal art or oral folklore, physical folklore is generally termed as material culture. According to Dorson, 'Material culture responds to technique, skills, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variations verbal Art' (1972:2). This aspect of folklore and folk life like material culture is visible rather than aural.

In order to get a complete picture of the traditional fishermen community of Namasudras of Dhubri district in Assam, it is essential to analyses their physical life. Because, the potential of this aspect is very great in a country like India where most of the people still live in traditional society and follow their folk ways of life.

After independence, the Indian society has undergone rapid transformation in all aspects. With the growth in the process of development, their transformation is going more rapid in the near future, but the fishermen society of India is still living in the traditional environment. Of course, in case of traditional arts and crafts of Namasudra community have occupied an important place among the Goalparia folk. A noticeable feature in evolution and practice of arts and crafts of the Namasudra fishermen is that many of the crafts have developed around the fishing industry and their physical life.
FOLK ARTS AND CRAFTS

Folk arts and crafts, are artifacts of material culture which give pleasure and serve certain social and economic ends of the society.

'If a pleasure giving function predominates the artifact is called art; if a practical function predominates it is called craft...the inferior of a house is designed primarily as economic; its exterior is designed primarily to be seen, and its function may be classed as primarily as aesthetic' (Glassie: 1972:253).

One of the most enchanting and interesting aspects of physical folk life of fishermen community of Dhubri district is their arts and crafts. These arts have followed definite continuity in the history of folk arts and crafts in Dhubri district. Yet these arts and crafts have not received the due attention of the state and public of the region.

There are some cottage industries, such as, weaving, pottery and terracotta, bamboo and cane work, rope-making, wood work, work on pith, fishing implements making and net making which are being run by the fishermen Namasudras in Dhubri district in a distinctive method.

(i) Weaving

Weaving is an important cottage industry that flourished in Assam from ancient time. It is a universally practiced cottage industry by all classes of people. With the advent of British in India and also in Assam, began the era of depression in weaving industry of these region.

Among the indigenous fishermen communities of Assam, it still continues to be an important subsidiary occupation, especially of the women folk. But, among the
fishermen of Dhubri district the importance of weaving is decreasing with the passage of time. Yet, some of the women of this district are associated with weaving only for fulfilling their family needs. The principal articles woven, are cloth worn by women, smaller shawls called *pachara* and *gamocha* etc.

Raw materials used by the weavers are mainly cotton threads, yarns of various thickness are generally used by the weavers. The yarn is generally purchased from the markets and only a few do the spinning at home.

(ii) Pottery

The tradition of pottery goes back to the ancient period of India. In Assam, pottery bears a long history having its origin from many centuries. From the ancient times pottery was abundantly used for many purposes. It played an important role in everyday life of all communities. Although its utility is decreasing day by day due to the advance of technology, yet its use is not vanished and some of the varieties are used in day to day life, for ritualistic purpose and for decoration by all classes of people.

Like other traditional crafts in India, pottery is also confined to a particular caste. They are commonly known as *Kumar*. In addition to *Kumar* another important caste who makes pottery is called Hira. Moreover, another community are also associated with this avocation who are known as *Kumar pout*. This community are also residing in this erstwhile Goalpara district.

Although, the above communities are pottery manufacturer, but there are some differences in between the Hira caste and other potters. As per Indian constitutional order, 1950, the Hira are scheduled caste in Assam and Kumars are non-scheduled caste. So, the Hira community is living with other scheduled castes communities
specially with Namasudra, Kaibarta and Bonia with their cultural assimilation. For such reasons marriage have been performed among these caste. But most of the marriage are done with the folk of Namasudra community as their rite of passage are same and this results in the acculturation of potter and fishing community.

**Namasudra as a potter**

Proximity of villages and culture have resulted in inter-caste marriages. There are two Hira hamlets found amidst the Namasudra village of Santipur under Chapar circle and Nayagaon village under Bilashipara circle of Dhubri district. Moreover, some of the families of Namasudra community married girls from Hira community. So, some of the Namasudra women associated with pottery industry in Bilashipara sub-division of Dhubri district. Due to the transition caused by cultural assimilation, inter-caste marriage and economic need some of the fishermen of Namasudras have engaged themselves in pottery industry.

The entire process of pot making may be divided into three main stages.

**(a) Collection of pottery clay**

The raw materials used for pot making is clay locally known as *aitali mati* or *chitka mati* which is collected from the banks of Dhirbeel. The clay can be had one feet below the surface of the land. Generally, this clay is carried in the winter season. The members of several families contribute their shares to one group of persons who collect money from each family and two or three men go to collect clay. After being procured, the members of each family at first dug out a deep pit in one of the corners of the courtyard. The collected clay is then stored up in their respective pits. The pit is filled
up with clay. This is generally kept for summer season which can be used in winter or any times in accordance to their requirements.

(b) Preparation of Clay lump

The preparations of clay is done by both the sexes. It is observed that the stored up clay is dug out from the pit by spade. Then the clay is cleared by removing any sort of impurities in the form of pebbles, modules and dirts. There after, the clay is struck heavily and repeatedly with gain that is heavy pestle. Most of the Namasudras who are engaged in this pottery have no wheel. They generally use sacks. Then water is poured very slowly into it. The mixture of water and clay is struck heavily and repeatedly by the hammer. Then it is trodden heavily on with the feet. When the clay becomes like paste, some very big lada_(lump) are made.

The big lump is taken out and kept on a wooden plate or cloth which are generally used to avoid impurities into the clay. Then required quantity of water is added for softening it and then big lump is divided into several small lumps. After that, the females make pots out of these lumps.

Having made the pot, the pots are painted with red colour. The act of painting is done just after drying the pots in the sun shine before the burning process.

(c) Methods of burning the pots

Various materials are used in burning the pots. These are dry cow-dung, dry-straw, dry leaves of various plants and firewood. Pots are burnt by each family in an open ground in front their houses, either individual family wise or collectively if the pots are large in number. The pots are arranged in circular rows and are placed on the bed. Then they set fire around the circular bed. When the fire blazes completely in the
circular bed, they gradually cover the heap with dry straws, dry leaves of any plant, torn cloth and dry cow dung whatever materials are available. Then the fire gradually spread in the heap. It takes about one day to burn the pots completely. After completing its burning and grading, the pots are preserved in a room. Pots are sold at various local markets day from such stock. Some times these pots are taken to sell for paddy or cash.

Types of pots and its used

The Namasudra fishermen makes pots of various sizes and shapes as per the needs of the customers and self uses. The main items produced by the Namasudra women of Bilashipara sub-division are as follows with their local names and uses.

**Jaler guli (sinker)**

It is about three cms in length and very small having a circular body. It has a small hole through which a fine chord posses easily. These are used as sinker in gill-net.

**Phuljarir Saj (vessels used for filling up explosive substance)**

It is more or less conical in shape with a circular body. The size of this vessel varies as per needs. The inner side of the vessel is hollow and there is a hole in the pointed end. It is used in Dol festival and marriage ceremony.

**Tawa (Iron pan)**

It looks like a modern iron made tawa. It has got two handles in opposite sides from the rib. It is used for frying chapatis made from flour. Cakes are also prepared with the help of this vessel.
Chillim (chillum)

Chillum is of different sizes. It has a wide mouth with a long stand. There is a small hole from mouth to the base for passing smoke. It is used for smoking purposes.

Gacha (Lamp stand)

This is a stand made of clay. Earthen lamp can be letup on this gacha that is an earthen stand, called gacha.

Khuti (Small pitcher)

Small pitcher different sizes. The neck is short. It is generally used for keeping curds and water for worshiping the deity.

Dhupati

This pot is like a bowl with a stand and handle. It looks like the Assamese sarai. It contains many holes around the body of vessel. It is used in ritualistic context and for domestic purposes also.

Hari (Big mouth size vessel)

It is a very large sized vessel. It is used for storage purposes of paddy and pulses. It is widely used for preparation of rice bear in the tribal and Sutradhar villages.

Tekeli (Jar)

This type of vessels are smaller than the kalah. Tekelis are of different sizes. The mouth is narrow and its neck is narrower than the mouth. It is a smaller jar used for preparing tekeli pitha, a cake boiled in steam. It is also used for liquid materials.
Charu (cooking vessels)

There are two types of Charu are found in the surveyed villages, namely, Asamiya Charu and Bengali charu. The vessels of both categories are wide mouthed. The difference in between the two is that the Asamiya charu is smaller than the Bengali charu. Paddy is fried in such vessels to prepare that rice. The Bengali charu is used for making fried rice and to prepare cakes.

Kalah (Pitcher)

Pitcher is bigger than jar. Pitcher is locally known as Kalash or Kalah. Pitchers are found of different sizes. This vessel is used for keeping and carrying water.

Due to the development of modern technology and supply of durable goods, the profit of this industry is much lower than the labour cost incurred in it. Yet some of the Namasudra fishermen are engaged in this profession for their livelihood.

(iii) Terracotta Toys

It is found from the field study that the terracotta toys are also made by some of the fisher folk for the enjoyment of children and for decorating the houses. Among the toys there are animals like horses, birds, elephants and fishes and human like images are also made. In the fishermen villages of Dhubri district majority of the images are of the birds and variety of bride-grooms. Bride groom toys called bar-kaina putla, while the mother and child putla are called as mao-bachhaa putla. The toys are generally made by female members of the family during their leisure time. The similarity of many of the mother and child toys with some terracotta toys of Mohenjodaro is really striking. However, these folk-toys do not seem to be connected with the mother
Goddess cult with which scholars have associated the *Mohenjo-daro* toys’ (Datta: 1995:268).

The toys are shaped by hands and dried in the sun. A layer of slip is applied to them before they are burnt in fire. The practice of decorating toys with paints is rarely found in the surveyed villages and the toys are about five or six inches in height. Whatever the size but they are also the most attractive. The head is flattened, with a large round bun placed high on its back. Various kinds of cloths and ornaments are used in the main body. Toys are designed resembling the local female dress. The outward appearance of such toys are looked to be beautiful.

The terra cotta toys made by women of the Namasudras are used as play toy for the children at home, but during their leisure period the male member also produced some toys for commercial purposes.

(iv) Work on Pith

Pith is a kind of fibrous reed growing in swampy tracts which is locally known as *sola*. Reed grows in abundance in many swamps and it is left to the native genius of the 'Malakar' and 'Solakar' to put in good use. Not only the Malakars are associated with the pith work, some other Goalparia folk are also associated with this work. Datta rightly observes that —

'There is one particular field of folk art-- work on pith -- in which Goalpara can claim a very special place not only in Assam but in the whole of India. The folk artists of Goalpara engaged in this field turn out numerous articles of highly superior craftsmanship and also extra ordinary artistic quality. Although not many people outside the region know much about the unusually rich material, it has drawn the attention of experts and connoisseurs and received unstinted
praise and admiration. Pith articles from Goalpara have been included in more than one collections of representative specimens of folk-art from all over India' (1995: 270).

It is found that the tradition of working on pith is not confined to Malakars alone. This work is also associated with the fishermen Namasudras in Dhubri district. However, in fishermen villages also the craft is more or less confined to the field of Manasa worship, ornamental head-gears for ceremonial occasions like marriage and annaprasana and decorative pieces, such as, flowers which are used at the time Durgapuja.

Although the craft is primarily connected with Manasa worship, the images of Gods and Goddesses of the local pantheon, figures of various birds and animals, different kinds of flowers and toys of variegated forms and designed are made by some of the Namasudras during their leisure time to supplement their income. This craft is loosing its popularity among the fishermen Namasudras with the departure of old generation and due to lack of interest of the new generation in this line.

(v) Cane and Bamboo works

Cane and bamboo works provide additional employment to a large number of people in rural Assam. This product may be termed as pure handicrafts product where even elementary mechanical devices are not used. Its products have wide range of uses and as such are commonly found in every household through out the state.

In Dhubri district, cane and bamboo works occupy an important place in the fishermen villages. It provides additional employment to some of the fishermen folk and full time employment to those highly skilled artisans who produce fine
decorative baskets, furniture, mates and some domestic usable articles like *Kula, challani, dalijala, japi* and *dhari* for commercial purposes.

Moreover, apart from bamboo products mentioned above, other bamboo works are also made, such as, a broad-brimmed hat made of split bamboo and the leaves of *nahar* (masnafera) or *sal* tree (shorea robusta), bamboo traps for catching fish called *digaru, thupa, sepa, bhari, darji* and *katia*. Some of the fishermen folk of the village are also associated with mate making work. Handicrafts based on cane products have a pivotal role in growth of cottage industry in the state. But due to deforestation of forests in Dhubri district, making of household gadgets from cane products become costlier. As a result, the poor fishermen are not associated with cane-works.

**(vi) Works on Wood**

Although the Namasudras are generally supposed to belong to the fishing community in state, in fact, a large section of Namasudras are engaged in the agriculture, carpentry, business and manufacturing work. The fishermen Namasudras have direct link with the Namasudras who have taken up carpentry as their main occupation. So, due to shortage of income in fishing sector, some of the Namasudras have taken to carpentry as their auxiliary occupation and produced the wooden materials.

Eventually, the fishermen Namasudras have come to manufacture many of the necessary wooden furniture in this locality. Some of the youths of the Namasudra fisherman community have gone out of the native villages to the nearest towns, mainly to Guwahati in search of employment opportunity in carpentry industry. It has also
been found that the fishermen Namasudras are expert in repairing the wooden furniture and in producing certain useful tools for household use.

(vii) Musical Instruments

Many of the musical instruments carved out of wood and other necessary equipment tastefully designed and executed by the fishermen Namasudras of Dhubri district which have been mentioned below:

(a) The dotara

The dotara is used to accompany different types of songs especially the Kharatal (kushangan), bhawaiya gan and chatka gan. The body is shaped from one piece of wood with a belly hollowed out and covered by the thin skin of animal. The strings are of muga silk and the striker is made of ivory or buffalo horn.

(b) The ektara

The ektara is a one stringed instrument with a wooden cup as the resonator. A bamboo stick passes through the cup. One end of the string is attached to one end of the stick and the other end passes over a bridge placed on the skin covering the cup.

(c) The Sarinda

The sarinda is a bowing instrument. It is also made of one piece a wood but is shorter than the dotara. The sarinda has a wider base. There are two hollows, the lower one being covered with skin. The strings are made of twined muga threads.
(d) The dhak

Dhak is a big sized drum which is constructed from the wood of big sized mango-tree. Generally the radius of the Dhak is four feet and this one looks like a straight; wooden cylinder and both sides are covered with skin. The drummer beats both the sides of the drum with two stick in resonance.

Moreover, some other musical instruments are constructed and used by the fishermen Namasudras for their different songs and performing their rituals.

(viii) Fishing Implements

Making of fishing implements is one of the most important folk arts and crafts closely related with the profession of fishermen community of Dhubri district in Assam.

A majority of the fishing implements are similar to those used in other parts of the state. Many of them have different names and uses. Only a few of the implements peculiar to this area have been attempted to discuss.

'The various trap-like wicker work contraptions used for catching fish are the jolonga, the bhari, the darki, the ekri, the thosa, the sepa, the thupa, the khaidon and the katia – all worked on the principle of the lobster-pot and placed in small streams running near the fields. The dhorka, another trapping device is a conical basket with a long end. A slight variation of it is called thurki orl kanarnathi, the polo or jhoka, the jakha or jokhai, and juluki are portable contraptions meant for fishing in shallow water. The polo resembles a gigantic wine glass with a short stem made of wicker work' (Allen, 1905: 90)

The above mentioned fishing implements are used by the fishermen as well as by the non-fishermen. Another device that combines a frame and net is the choke.
'The frame consists of a loop to which four bamboo are fixed in the form of a cone. A conical net is fastened to the loop, and its corner to the angle where the bamboo unite. When this net has been placed on the mud over a fish, the fisher drops the corner, and instead of goofing about until he can catch the fish he secures it at once by the net which prevents the animal from moving. By this means they catch large fish' (Martin, 1838:587).

The wickerwork confiner used for keeping the fish caught is called khalai which is made by bamboo.

In addition to such fish-catching tackles the fishermen of Dhubri district also construct some other common fishing tackles for getting more fish from the fisheries which are enumerated below:

(a) Traps

These are multi shaped cases of bamboo sticks, having slit line mouth where fish can enter but cannot go out. These traps are of different shapes and sizes, such as, cylindrical, sub-cylindrical, rectangular and conical provided with detachable trap door. Traps are set in various types of running waters like streams, rivulets and tide cracks irrigation canals and in paddy fields.

(b) Angling

Rod and line consisting of a tapering bamboo at the tip of which a strong twine is fixed ending with a hook. In case of long line, a number of hooks are attached to a strong thread at short inter-space. Natural and artificial baits are used in the hook. In operating them, the fishes are attracted to the fishing area and bite them and then lifted out of water and caught.
(c) Cast net

This net is cast almost throughout the year in every piece of water. It is a cone-shaped net with strong cord through the peripheral meshes with lead sinkers and various sizes of length and periphery. All types of fishes are caught during operations.

(d) Sieve net

These nets are commonly known as drag nets. The net is rectangular in shape and the length depends on the width of the water area to be hauled. The usual size of the net is 15 meter in length and six meter in width with the mesh size of six mm to 20 mm. In case of greater depth of water the size of the nets may vary with more width. The width of such nets should be at least twice the depth of the ponds water. The nets of big sizes are called Berjal and Mahajal.

(e) Dip net

The shape of these nets are rectangular and triangular of smaller mesh size. The nets are fitted with bamboo frames with a mechanism of dipping and lifting the net alternatively. The rectangular type of nets with mesh size nine mm to eleven mm square are operated from the bank in inland water.

(f) Changla Net

This types of nets are used in catching hilsa fish only in fresh water rivers. The net is triangular bag with the mouth open. The net is operated fixing the net on a boat moving against current. The fish who migrate are caught singly or more in one operation.
Besides these, different types of net are also used by the fishermen community. Martin described some other types of nets which he saw in erstwhile Goalpara district and these are still in use in the Dhubri district of Assam. Other implements of fishing are boat, oar, tent and staid bamboo.

Dhubri district is a land of fisheries where varieties of fishes are found. For catching these varieties of fishes, variety of fishing equipment's and methods are used by the local fisher folk as per nature and form of fishes and fisheries. Catching of fishes is one kind of art and requires skill of the fishermen which is cumbersome for non-fishermen communities. Even then they manage some how to catch some quantity of fishes by means of various methods and appliances as mentioned earlier.

A remarkable characteristics of the arts and crafts of this district is that they have not been organised on a strict caste basis. It is found that some castes have been traditionally associated with some particular craft or avocations. But this custom has been followed more to facilitate functional specialisation than to rigidly bind down particular communities to particular profession. In fact, Dhubri district and also in Assam the castes system has had a much looser structure than in other parts of India, rightly does observe Barua B.K—

'Assam' social system was molded primarily on the vorna system. But because Assam is a border region and its relations are mostly with kirata or Mongloid peoples, the Aryanised social forms and the vedic customs and rites do not adhere to any rigid pattern for the some reason the number of Brahmans here is small and its influence not dominant and further, racial discrimination or the caste system is not so rigid' (1951:198).
So, it is observed that the tradition prevailing in Dhubri district as well as in Assam has been for the people, irrespective of caste and community, to practice almost all kinds of arts and crafts without social dis-approbation.

**FOLK ARCHITECTURE**

During the past few decades the Indian societies have been undergoing rapid transformation in all its aspects. With the process of economic development, these transformations are going to be more rapid in the near future. But the transformations are found among some of the communities which are not creative oriented but gradually they are destroying from the main stream of the society. The fishermen community is one of the community among them who are still living in the traditional type of society.

As face is the mirror of mind so homestead and types of home are the mirror of a community by which we may inform the socio-economic condition of a society. So it is essential to know how a community in tradition-bound society construct their homes following the traditional norms of folk architecture.

(i) **Constructions of Houses**

The ordinary houses in the fishermen hamlets look about similar to those in other non-fisher folk of this district. Most of the houses are thatched and tiles cottages with two roofs sloping from straight ridge. The posts and rafters are of bamboo, the walls of reed or split bamboo, in most cases plastered with mud. Doors and windows are also bamboo work made specially strong and durable. While doors are fitted to door frames, windows are simply holes cut into the walls. The window panels, when they are fitted, slide horizontally on a bamboo pole fitted on the wall just above the window
hole. Only in rare cases, houses with four roofs are constructed two smaller roofs jointed at the two open ends of the straight roofs on either side. Some houses also have a verandah, with a separate lower roof above it. On that side of the house which has the door. The verandah, when it has walls, then it is used as the kitchen or for keeping the livestock or used as store room for the firewood.

But in some of the villages, there are certain peculiarities as regards the pattern of the houses which are worth noticing. Two types of houses are there – one is known as banglaghar and the other is called the chowarighar. The banglaghar has more or less some plan as that followed in construction of the rural houses. It has a verandah but it is not covered by a small lower roof. One of the roof itself slopes down to cover the verandah. A separate lower roof is, however, added it some houses on one end of the structure. The chowari is the house with a four sided roof. Two roofs slopes down on either side of a short ridge and other two meet them at the two ends of the ridge, thus giving the whole structure almost a square look. The verandah is known as chali and the verandah is normally towards the inner courtyard, one of the roofs may slope lower down to cover it. Some of the poor fishermen constructed temporary one roofed sheds where in bamboo and the betel nut leaf are used for the walls due mainly to their poor economic condition. Though bamboo thatch and bamboo tails are the materials most commonly used in house construction, tin roofed houses with wooden posts and frames are also used by some well-to-do fishermen.

Generally, the poor fishermen are living on the outskirts of the village of under thatch and tiles houses. These are the places unhealthy surroundings where the filth of the villages are thrown. Due to their socio-economic circumstances, they are bound to
live in miserable, dirty and insanitary houses without proper doors and lacking of ventilations. It is also found from the study that although there are acute shortage of housing in rural and urban fishermen villages of Dhubri district due to increasing population and poverty. The general outlook reveals that this section of people have still been living in traditional environment and represent the static society.

(ii) Construction of Boundary Wall

Practically, the fishermen folk are so poor that due to their poverty they have not been able to construct boundary wall around their houses. Most of the household have no well defined boundaries. So often it is difficult to find where one boundary ends and another begins. However, economically sound families those who can bear the cost of constructing boundary wall, they apart from split-bamboo fences, plant the small hardy shrubs to demarcate the boundary of the homestead. Fences are low or high according to needs and have these different names, like hanger, chekar, bera and maliakhor. The whole compound is known a chak. The fences made of bamboo or thatches or leaf of battle nut are used surrounded their own chak.

FOLK CUSTOM AND FOLK COOKERY

In order to get the entire picture of a traditional society, it is essential to know how people in such socio-cultural environment 'make their cloths, prepare their food, firm and fish, process the earth's boundary, fashion their tools and implements and design their furniture and utensils' (Dorson: 1972: 2-3). Namasudras as traditional fishermen community of Dhubri district of Assam, have been following the folk cultural heritage of Goalparia folk culture. So the periphery of folk custom includes folk custom, such as, making and uses of foods, cloths, ornaments and furnitures.
(i) Foods

Rice is the principal food of all the fishermen people like other people of Assam. Cooked rice is consumed by the fishermen of this district not only as their two principal meals, but it is also sometimes used as breakfast item known as Panthabhat. They also prepared flatten rice (chira), puffed rice (muri), powder rice (gura) and popped rice (khai) from paddy. Sometimes, due to the poverty some of the fishermen families use kaon and china- two special of millet as a rice. The expression kaoner bhat (meal cooked from kaon) is frequently found in Goalparia fok songs and is meant to indicate object poverty.

Rice is eaten with various kinds of seasoning called bejan or tarkari following are the preparations most popular among the fishermen of this district.

Macher tokari, Mangos torkari, dali, bhaja, labra, bhorta, seka or khar, pelka, sukoti, nelpa, bhelka, sidal and machpora are the preparations most popular among the fishermen of this district.

The preparation of fish is known as Macher torkari is popular among the fishermen and all sections of people in this state. Big fishes are used in big feasts and festivities. Mangser torkari, (meat seasoning) is favoured most, being prepared for mutton, he or she goat, pigeon, duck, tortoise and turtle. Eggs and seasoning prepared with boiled eggs are also favorite dish for them.

Pulses (dail or kalai) of various kinds are used. Among the pulses, the most popular are khulti kalai, mas kalai, thakuri kalai and khesari kalai. Some times, in absence of kalai (pulses), a dail like preparation is made with broken rice and the seeds of the local bean, leaf of the sajana or other herbal leaf are mixed in the pulses.
Seka or khar is the alkaline preparation popular throughout the Dhubri district specially among the Goalparia folk. The alkaline is prepared by the people themselves from the ashes dried trunks of the athiya kola by an indigenous process. Sometimes in lieu of dried athiya kola sodium bi-carbonate powder purchased from the market is used.

Pora is another item. This pora is nothing but roast. Roasted potato is known as alupora, roasted brinjal is known as bagun pora and fish fry is known as muchpora. Bhota is called boiled which is prepared from potato, brinjal and other vegetable.

Pelka is an alkaline preparation made with the tender leaves of jute plant or the lafa plant or the powder rice and herbal leaf. Bhelka is another alkaline preparation, prepared with big piece of vegetables like gourd and pumpkin.

Bhaja means fry which is prepared by mustered oil mixing the turmeric and salt.

Sidal is an important preparation among the native Goalparia folk which is prepared by drying the fingerlings in sun rays and preserving it. After removing the heads, fins scales and entrails, small fish is dried in the sun. This is then put into the mortar along with piddles of arum stalks (Manakacha). The whole mass if pounded and made into a paste from which small balls are made, dried in the sun and preserved for future use. Small kinds of fishes are also preserved by drying either in the sun or over the fire such dried fish is known as Sutka mass.

Most of the fishermen Namasudras are closely associated with chewing betel nut. Women folk add pieces of tobacco leaves in the combination. The habit of smoking is also common. The traditional popular smoke is hookah, but this hookah is
not found in present day, the bidi and chada are used in place of hookah. The drinking liquor is common in some of the persons.

The practice of vegetarian diet is not popular among the fisher folk. This kind of diet is used at the time of observing some rites of passage and in any one day of a week. Specially the fishermen prefer Thursday or Saturday. Some of the Satsangis fishermen takes vegetarian dish on Friday.

Cakes (pitha) and sweet balls (laru, mola) are various kinds sweets prepared of which the more popular are dhapra pitha, puli pitha, talua pitha and shukua pitha.

(ii) Dresses

The fishermen have the similar kind of dresses almost the entire district a white cotton dhuti or waist cloth with one end taken behind between the legs and tucked below the back and the other end tucked in front. They some times simply a towel (gamocha) is wrapped around the waist. The upper part of the body is mostly left bare when at home, specially in summer. The shirts or vests are put on when going out for business. Wrappers locally known as pasra or garkapor are in used in winter season.

The dress of average female of the district has little distinctiveness it is very much the same in other parts of Assam. The cheap mill made sari is commonly used by the women. Datta referred that 'women wear a sari, 15 feet long and 4 feet broad, which is fastened round the waist to form a petticoat and then brought over the head and the shoulder to cover the rest of the body' (1995:37).
The use of *mekhela chadar* is fairly common. Young boys of the fisher-folk wear long-pant and half or full shirt and the young girls put on frock or churider like other young girls of the non-fishermen community.

(iii) Ornaments

The women of this fishermen community use ornaments like other women of this district. Although gold ornaments are not unknown, their possession is generally concentrated to the rich families. Due to poor economic condition most of the women use silver ornaments, very poor women also use zinc and brass ornaments.

The variety of ornaments used by the fisher women are enumerated below:

The *sita-pati* and *jethi*, a kind of pendant use for the head. These are used only on special ceremonial occasions.

The *onti*, the *makri*, the *bauti*, the *junka*, the ring, the *madan kari* the *khirul* are used on ear.

The *nackfull* are also used on nose. The *nath* is ring worn on one side of the nose. Another ornament similar to the *rath* is called *bali*. The *nackful* is used by the fisher women.

Various kinds of necklace and strings known as *har*, *mala*, *kaathi*, the *surya har*, the *chandra har*, the *kabach har* are used around their neck.

For the fingers, they are used rings of different types called *angthi* and the ornament for the *aron* is known as *baju* a kind of band for the leg and feet, the most popular ornament is the *theng kharu* which has two types the *tola kharu* and the *pheta kharu*. Rings are also worn on the toes.
Generally, widow women do not use ornaments. Male persons use ring only in their fingers.

(iv) Furniture

The furniture to the ordinary fishermen consist of few boxes, wicker work, stools and baskets, brass and bell metal utensils, glass bottles and earthen pots and pans. Quilts made out of old cloth, mat and sometimes small bamboo macha (raised platforms) served purpose of beds. The well-to-do fishermen families have in their houses beds, tables, chairs, almirah, sofa set, aalna, dressing table which have gained popularity among all sections of people. Even some decorative furniture and durable consumer goods like television, radio, tape-recorder, sewing machine, bicycle and gas cylinder are in growing use among some enlightened fishermen families. But the percentage of user of such material is very lower than the other non-fisher folk.

FARMING AND FISHING

Fishing is the principal occupation of the vast majority of the people of the Namasudra community in Dhubri district. Because, Dhubri is a land of fisheries where variety of fishes are found.

(i) Variety of Fishes

There 2,500 species of fishes found in India, among these species some of the species are found in the fisheries of Dhubri district. The fishermen have informed that the species of fishes to some extent vary from beel fisheries, riverian fisheries and tanks and swamps. But, over all species of fishes are almost alike. The local name of some of the fishes available in Dhubri district in different fisheries have been enumerated in Table 22, 23 and 24 respectively.
### TABLE-22

**Distribution of Local Names of Some of the Fishes Available in Riverian Fisheries of Dhubri District**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Local name of the fishes</th>
<th>Zoological names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rao Machh</td>
<td>Labio rohita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Katla Machh</td>
<td>Catla catla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mirga Machh</td>
<td>Cirrhina mrigala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kalbaosh Machh</td>
<td>Labeo-callsbu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Essla Machh</td>
<td>Prawnja shriup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Baigor Machh</td>
<td>Bagarius yorreillii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Borali Machh</td>
<td>Wallage attu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Illisha Machh</td>
<td>Hilsa illisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bhangna Machh</td>
<td>Labeo-boga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chittal Machh</td>
<td>Natapterus chitala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Aree Machh</td>
<td>Marchones aor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Puthi Machh</td>
<td>Chora or borbus punit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kachho or dura</td>
<td>Tortoise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Baro Puthi Machh</td>
<td>Barbus stigma, Barbus ticto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Boal Machh</td>
<td>Watta gowaattu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Gharial</td>
<td>Crocodail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE - 23
Distribution of Local Name of Some of the Fishes Available in Beel Fisheries of Dhubri District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Local name of the fishes</th>
<th>Zoological name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chittal Machh</td>
<td>Natapterus chital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ari Machh</td>
<td>Marerones aor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Darika Machh</td>
<td>Nimachilas turio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kawi Machh</td>
<td>Anabas scandens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bhokua Machh</td>
<td>Catler buchanant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Puthi Machh</td>
<td>Chora or borbus punito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Khalisha Machh</td>
<td>Trichogator fasciatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pabo Machh</td>
<td>Callicrus paba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Garai Machh</td>
<td>Ophioccephalus punctatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Magur Machh</td>
<td>Chlarius assamensis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sal Machh</td>
<td>Ophioccephalus marulius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Singra Machh</td>
<td>Macrones cavasustengra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Singhi Machh</td>
<td>Saccabrances fossilis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Esla Machh</td>
<td>Perawuja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Changli Machh</td>
<td>Ophiocrphalus stearlin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Bhagna Machh</td>
<td>Labeo boga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sal Machh</td>
<td>Ophioccephalus striatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Illisa Machh</td>
<td>Hilsa illisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mirika Machh</td>
<td>Cirrhina Mrigula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Boal Machh</td>
<td>Wallagonia attu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Karti Machh</td>
<td>Clupea chapra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover some other varieties of fishes are found in the ponds, swamps and tanks of this district; which are enumerated in Table 24.
TABLE -24

Distribution of Local Name of the Fishes Available in Ponds, Swamps and Tanks of Dhubri District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Local name of the fishes</th>
<th>Zoological name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kawi Machh</td>
<td>Anabrs soandenee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Puthi Machh</td>
<td>Chora or Borbus punito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Khalisa Machh</td>
<td>Trichogaster fascios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Garai Machh</td>
<td>Ophiocephalus punctatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Magur Machh</td>
<td>Chlarius assamensis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Singi Machh</td>
<td>Saccabrancus fossilic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cuchia Machh</td>
<td>Amphipuous cuchia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bami Machh</td>
<td>Mastaeem belus armatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bhadai Machh</td>
<td>Nandus Nandus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tangna Machh</td>
<td>Mystus vittatus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Gota Machh</td>
<td>Hag-fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Karti Machh</td>
<td>Clupea chapra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Darka, Botia and Chanda Machh</td>
<td>A kind of small fish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recently, fishes like silver curp, Grass curp and common curp are cultivated in the cultured fisheries.

(ii) Fishing Methods

Different methods are used by the traditional fishermen community of Dhubri district for fishing in the beel fisheries and the river fisheries. Fishing is an art. The skill of the fishermen is not easily imitable by the non-fishermen. The various methods of fishing, some of which are peculiar techniques, are mentioned below:

Most of the fishing methods are same as those applied in other parts of Assam and Bengal although many of them are peculiar to Dhubri district.
(a) Filtering method

The type of fishing includes most important type of fishing gears. Dip nets, falling nets, bag nets, sieve nets and encircling nets are some of the nets that are commonly used in inland fisheries. The dip nets are locally known as *khora jal* which are operated by keeping the nets submerged in water and wandering or feeding fishes are lifted out from rapid operation of the act. A cast net locally known as *Khaewali jal* is thrown on the surface water in shallower area in which the fish of that area are entrapped and get collected in the pockets. Drag nets are commonly used in beel and ponds fisheries which are dragged through the water as a vertical screen driving the fish into the net and later on hauled out of the water.

(b) Floating method

Floating method is a method by which a large net is spread on the surface of the water from a boat. The sides are weighted and sink together and any fish that are swimming in the areas covered are caught in the pockets round the weighted edges. This method is used in beel fisheries and riverine fisheries as to catch up the fishes of bigger size.

(c) Bana fishing method

*Bana* fishing is one of the most important fishing method by which fishes are protected in the beel fisheries, keeping it in the mouth of the river channel of beels, generally in the month of September to November. This type of fishing is mostly done at the eve of main fishing and after the flood season. This is conducted when the water level in the river goes down and the water flows from the beel towards the river through the connecting channel. Trapping the fish, forcing them to move along a narrow and
long closely woven bamboo barricade is the main principle involved in *bana* fishing. One of the fishermen informed that sometimes about one tone of fish is caught each day during the first 15 days of *bana* fishing. After the first 15 days it comes down to about 300 kilograms when the flow of the water cease, then the *bana* is dismantled.

**(d) Katal fishing method**

*Katal* fishing is another peculiar fishing method which is applied in beel fisheries. At the selected points where fishes are concentrated, branches of trees, bushes and water weeds are accumulated at such spots. The fishes take shelter there in. These arcas are subsequently fished by encirclement with drag nets. After the net is spread around, the bushes are removed and the fishes are caught.

Generally, this type of fishing is operated when a large number of marriage ceremonies are to be solemnized and / or on the eve of *Bhogali Bihu* of Assam which is known as *Pushna* among the Namasudra fishermen. In this period generally the fish prices go up.

Some other methods are used in the beel and river fisheries with the help of nylon and cotton nets which are locally known as *fashi jal*, *fachir ber* or *dora jal* respectively. Cloth net is used for catching the smallest varieties of fishes and this net is locally known as *khetar ber* (mosquito nets). In addition to these, *bhatta jals* (nylon nets with wicker work) and *fachir ber* (Nylon net) are also used in riverine fisheries.