

CULTURAL ASSIMILATION AMONG THE ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF THE TRIBES LIVING IN THE SOUTH KAMRUP (GUWAHATI) TRIBAL BELT



Abstract:-

moulded into a unified cohesive culture. Due to continuous interaction and cultural adaptation of multiple ethnic groups, a symbolic culture has developed. The tribes of Assam belong to the Mongoloid stock. Each of the tribes has its own importance and unique heritage.

This paper attempts to study the process of assimilation as observed among the different ethnic communities residing in the South Kamrup (Guwahati) Tribal Belt due to continuous interaction with non tribal population. The South Kamrup (Guwahati) Tribal Belt was constituted on 27th February, 1950 (Vide Notification number (RD74/46/172). A tribal belt generally refers to the areas pre-dominated by indigenous and other backward communities notified under Chapter X of the Assam Land And Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 that was amended in the year 1947.

Most of the traditional Assamese cultural elements have made inroads into the culture of the various tribes residing in the study area. These changing trends have gained momentum during the last decades. The adoption of the Assamese way of life is a distinct feature in the study area.

Keywords:

South Kamrup (Guwahati) Tribal Belt, Mongoloid, Saranias, Terang.



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INTRODUCTION

Assam is the congregation of many races, cultures, languages and religion which have largely moulded into a unified cohesive culture. Due to continuous interaction and cultural adaptation of multiple ethnic groups, a symbolic culture has developed. These races with their languages and cultures have mingled together through blood, languages and cultures and given rise to unique culture.

The tribes of Assam belong to the Mongoloid stock. Each of the tribes has its own importance and unique heritage. The term tribe is derived from the old French *Tribu* or Latin *Tribus* (singular or plural) perhaps related to *tri* (three) and referring to the three divisions of the early people of Rome. Different scholars have attempted to define the term tribe. A tribe is viewed, historically as a social group existing before the development states. Many anthropologists used the term tribe to denote a society organized largely on the basis of kinship, especially corporate descent groups.

According to the Imperial Gazetteer of India "A tribe is a collection of families bearing same name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so". The International Labour Organisation has classified tribes as "indigenous people". The Oxford Dictionary has defined tribe as a social division in a traditional society consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious, or blood ties with common culture and dialect, typically having a recognized leader. While according to the *Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary* "a tribe is a unit of social organization, especially among primitive peoples but also surviving in some modern societies, consisting of group of people claiming a common ancestry, usually sharing a common culture and originally living together under a chief or headman".

India also has been the homeland of many tribes since the remote past. Tribes in the Indian context are normally referred to in the language of the constitution as Scheduled Tribes. Listing of tribes in India dates back to 1833 with the establishment of Non-Regulated area. A list of communities that was not directly accessible to the British administration was drawn up in 1870 and in the following decade "Schedule of Tribes". It was B.R. Ambedkar, the chairman of the drafting committee of the constitution who preferred the concept of scheduled tribes to the word Adivasis, meaning earliest settlers or residents. In Indian society particularly, the tribal population has special significance because after Africa India has the second largest tribal population. India is marked by multi ethnicity. 8.20% (8.6 % according to 2011 census) of the total population belongs to the tribal groups according to census 2001 and there are a total 577 such groups. They are scattered in almost all the corners of the country. Regions with predominant tribal settlement have been categorized by B. K. Roy Barman into five territorial groups, viz- Himalayan region (North-Eastern, Central, North-Western region), Middle India region, Western India region, South India region and Island region. The tribal mostly dwell in forest, hills and naturally isolated regions. Their economic life, daily livelihood and cultural traditions are mostly depended on the environment surrounding them. Each tribe has a unique history, language and culture. Their diversified economic and social formation coupled with various ethos and lifestyles have attracted various scholars to study their history.

The term "schedule tribe" first appeared in the Constitution of India in article 366(25) which defines scheduled tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as deemed under article 342 to be schedule for the purpose of the constitution." Article 342 prescribes the procedure to be followed in the manner of scheduled tribes:

"The President may, with respect to any state or Union territory and where it is a state after consultation with the Governor thereof by public notification, specify the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall, for the purposes of this constitution, be deemed to be scheduled tribes in relation to that state or Union territory as the case may be. Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of schedule tribes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any tribe or tribal community or part of or group within any tribe or tribal community, but same as aforesaid, a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification." Thus, the first specification of Scheduled tribes in relation to a particular State/Union territory is by a notified order of the President, after consultation with the state government concerned. These orders can be modified subsequently only through an Act of Parliament. The above article also provides for listing of schedule tribes States/Union territory wise and not on all India basis.

The criterion followed for the specification of a community, as scheduled tribes are indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with community at large and backwardness. This criterion is not spelt out in the constitution but has become well established. It includes the definitions contained in 1931 census, the reports of the first backward classes commission 1955; the advisory committee (Kalekar) on Revision of SC/ST lists (Lokur Committee), 1965 and the Joint Committee of Parliament on the schedule castes and schedule Tribes orders (Amendment) Bill 1967 (Chanda Committee) 1969.

For the study of the tribes of the north east the closest definition could be the one as treated by the anthropological convention. For them the tribe as a whole is a completely organized society having within its boundaries all resources necessary for continued maintenance. It is a whole culture. Each of the tribe has a territory to signify that they are patrilocally autonomous. It also has its own language and dialect to mark the distinctiveness of its culture. In terms of language, tribes of India are categorized into four categories, namely Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. Two of them, the Indo-Aryan and

Dravidian are shared by the rest of the Indian population as well while Austric and Tibeto-Burman languages are primarily spoken by tribal people. In physical and racial terms the tribes of India are classified under Negrito, Austroloid and Mongoloid.

Assam is also the homeland of several tribes like the Rabha, Bodo, Garo, Mishing (Miri), Karbi, Tiwa (Lalung) etc. Each of these tribes has some unique characteristics of their own. It is beyond doubt that the tribes of the north east India are basically Mongoloid. The Mongoloid tribes according to S.K. Chatterji correspond to at least three distinct physical types - the primitive long headed Mongoloids who are found in the sub-Himalayan tracts in Nepal and mostly in Assam, the less primitive and the more advanced. The Mongoloid people entered into this region through various routes and at different periods of time. They differ from each other in the respect of certain traits of physical features, culture and language. The ones that are found in India are the speakers of languages and dialects belonging to the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family. Linguistically the Sino-Tibeto languages of the present day have been classified into two groups or branches and they are a) Tibeto-Burman and b) Siamese Chinese.

The Tibeto-Burman group is divided into two main branches: North Assam and Assam Burmese. The North Assam branch is formed by the various Arunachal tribes: Abors/Galo, Aka/Husro, Dafla (Nyishi), Miris (Mishings) and Mishimis. The Assam Burmese group includes three groups that is, the Bodos, Nagas and Kuki Chins. The term Bodo is used to denote a large number of people-Mech, Rabha, Garo, Kachari, Koch, Hajong, Lalung(Tiwa)and few more belong who speak the Bodo language.

So far as the characteristics of the Mongoloid are concerned W.C. Smith, a Christian missionary and a sociologist from America has given thirteen outstanding characteristics of the Tibeto-Burman tribes of Assam, who he attaches racially to the Indonesians that is the peoples of Malaya and the islands of Indonesia. They are head hunting, common sleeping houses, dwelling houses built on the post and piles, disposal of the dead on raised platform, a sort of trial marriage or great freedom of inter course between the sexes before marriage, betel chewing, dislike to milk as an article of diet, tattooing by pricking, absence of any powerful organization, the double cylinder vertical forge, the simple loom for weaving cloth, a large quadrangular or hexagonal shield, residence in hilly regions with crude form of agriculture. All these traits are of course not found among all the Indo-Mongoloid (whether Bengal or Assam) but there is proof to show that these were at one time spread or current among most or all of the tribes. Some of these traits appear to be of Mongoloid origin like the common club and sleeping houses for the bachelors and betel chewing.

So far as their migration is concerned they came to this part of the country in successive waves at different times from different routes like the north, north east and south east. Some groups became limited to certain small geographical areas while others were spread over larger regions. Some of them were more or less in complete isolation preserving their ethno, biological, identity while had admixture with the non-Mongoloid population to varying extents. The Mongoloid tribes of India are referred to as the Indo-Mongoloid.

Assam is a blend of hills and plains. Assam maintains two scheduled tribe lists, one for the autonomous district of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong called the Hill Tribes and another for the Plain Tribes. There are nine scheduled tribes in the plains and fourteen schedule tribes in the hills area. The scheduled tribes (Plains) are Barmans in Cachar, Bodo Kachari, Deori, Hojai, Kachari Sonowal, Lalung (Tiwa), Mech, Miri (Mishing) and Rabha. The schedule tribes (Hills) are the Chakma, Dimasa Kachari, Garo, Hajong, Hmar, Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyngngam, any Kuki Tribes (37 groups), Lakhar, Man (Tai speakers), any Mizo (Lushai) tribes, Mikir (Karbi), any Naga tribe, Pawi and Syntheng.

In terms of population, the total population of the tribes as referred above 8.6 % of the population of India according to 2011 census. Concentration of tribes is seen in Assam. The tribes of Assam are distributed into various belts and blocks. The provision of Section 160 (1) of Assam Land Revenue Regulation Amendment Act 1947 provided for the constitution of compact areas in regions predominantly peopled by classes of people notified under 160(2) of the above act (to be referred as protected class henceforth). These regions were to be divided into various Tribal Blocks and Belts. While belts were constituted for larger areas blocks were for smaller areas depending upon the boundaries of the *mouzas* (Revenue units). In accordance with the above section there are altogether 14 Tribal Belts and 35 Blocks in Assam. The belts and blocks cover an area of 1,25,46,557 *bighas* or 16,72,873 hectares of land encompassing 3571 number of villages.

Genesis of the South Kamrup (Guwahati) Tribal Belt

The South Kamrup (Guwahati) Tribal Belt was constituted on 27th February, 1950 (Vide Notification number (RD74/46/172). A tribal belt generally refers to the areas pre-dominated by indigenous and other backward communities notified under Chapter X of the Assam Land And Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 that was amended in the year 1947. It was notified with the aim of protecting the land from illegal occupation of other advanced groups.

METHODOLOGY

The work is primarily based on field work. To get the background of the area both primary and secondary source were consulted. The primary sources include the census report, reports on land alienation and reports from revenue circles and block development offices. Published works of scholars like books, articles in journals and seminar proceedings were also consulted. To select the study villages the method of simple random sampling was used. The random sampling method was used in order to afford every individual of the population the same chance of being selected. Data was collected through administration of a structured interview schedule among the respondents as well as through observation. Questions were a combination of both open ended as well as close ended.

Composition of the tribal Belt

The South Kamrup Tribal Belt is inhabited primarily by the Bodos, Karbis, Rabhas, Garos, Tiwas and the Tea tribes besides some non-tribal people. As the random sampling method was used in the selection of the villages, the different tribes being equally represented in the villages were not found. Bodo population was seen highest in the Palashbari/Azara revenue circle followed by the Rabha and the Tea tribes. Garo population was less in the Palashbari/Azara revenue circle. Karbi population was seen highest in both the Sonapur and Chandrapur revenue circles. Rabha population was lowest in Sonapur and not observed in Chandrapur revenue circles. Although the Tea tribes do not fall into the category of the Schedule Tribe list of Assam but they had resemblance of certain characteristics with the tribes residing in the study area. No village was inhabited by a single tribe. It was observed that the tribes had a tendency to cluster in a pocket in individual villages. Clustering of one and more tribes in a pocket was observed. This clustering pattern was also observed among the Tea Tribes. The Tea tribes belonging to one jati (meaning a tribe) was not found in the sample. It was observed that the Tea Tribes did not settle based on caste or tribe. However, it is probable that people belonging to same original district usually settled in the same village. Besides inhabitants of the non tribal generally the Assamese was seen where the Assamese affected upon the social and religious life of the tribes. At the same time certain characteristics of the tribal tradition were also seen to have been maintained.

Table No1 shows the total number of households surveyed

S1 No.	Village	Tea Tribe	Bodo	Garo	Tiwa	Rabha	Karbi	Total house hold	Percentage
1	Shakura Basti	8					3	11	3.4
2	Wooluni	7					5	12	3.7
3	Bhero kuchi				13			13	4.0
4	Diksak		8				5	13	4.0
5	Luri		11					11	3.4
6	Goumaria		5				8	13	4.0
7	Kendubam		2				8	10	3.0
8	Khalaibari		4		2		5	11	3.4
9	Bahupara		16					16	4.9
10	Batabari					22		22	6.7
11	Jobe		10					10	3.0
12	Rangapara		6			5		11	3.4
13	Sajjanpara		15					15	4.6
14	Andherijuli		13					13	4.0
15	Moirapur			13				13	4.0
16	Rajapanichanda	8	9					17	5.2
17	Hohora		2			4	6	12	3.7
18	Thakurkuchi		2				11	13	4.0
19	Topatoli		5		2		3	10	3.0
20	Tepesia		2				9	11	3.4
21	Rewa	2	6				3	11	3.4
22	Dhami	2	2				8	12	3.7
23	Nortap		12				2	14	4.3
24	Dakhin Dimoria			5			6	11	3.4
25	Nispanbari			11			5	16	4.9

26	Missamari		2	10			10	22	6.7
27	Borkhat				6		4	10	3.0
28	Patgoan		8			3		11	3.4
29	Digaru		4	4			7	15	4.6
30	Kukuria	4	4	5				13	4.0
	Total	31	148	48	23	34	108	392	100.0
	Percentage	7.9	37.8	12.2	5.9	8.7	27.6	100.0	

Social Life of the tribes

The family is the smallest unit in a society. It is the basis of all social groupings. It is the first and immediate social environment to which a child is exposed. The word family comes from the Latin word *famulus*, which means servant. Different scholars have defined a family variously. According to M.F. Nimkoff, "Family is more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without child, or of a man or women alone, with children". Burgess and Locke state "Family is a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household interacting and inter-communicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, father and mother, son and daughter, brother and sister, creating a common culture". Elliot and Merrill describe it as "the biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children". MacIver has described family as "a group defined by sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for procreation and up bring children".

Table No 2 shows the types of family

Type of Family	Tea Tribe	Bodo	Garos	Tiwa	Rabha	Karbi	Total	Percentage
Nuclear	27	145	44	20	30	96	362	92.3
Joint	4	9	4	3	4	6	30	7.7
	31	154	48	23	34	102	392	100.0

Out of the 392 total household 92.3% were nuclear families while only 7.7% were joint or extended families. However, among some of the nuclear families the formal division of the cultivable land have not taken place.

The minimum categories to which the majority of the tribes fall are individual, family, clans and tribes. Each of the tribes has a clan system, which in most of the cases was unilineal where the members claim either patrilineal or matrilineal descent. These clans were both endogamous as well as exogamous. The tribes in the study area even among the Christian converts followed the rules of endogamy and exogamy in marriage. Nevertheless, at the same time inter clan marriage were also observed which were frowned upon.

Rites, rituals and social customs form an integral part. Life is full of changes. In the words of Arnold Van Gennep, "the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of succession of stages with similar ends and beginning: birth; social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to the higher class, occupational specialization and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to

another, which is equally defined. Since the goal is the same, it follows of necessity that the ways of attaining it should be at least analogous if not identical in detail”.

The importance of rituals is recognized all over the world and over the time. The vital events of life such as birth, marriage, and death are looked upon every society as handiwork of God or supernatural powers of the deities and accordingly performance of rituals to propitiate deities was observed. Rituals have significance in their own way. The performance of rituals holds a place of significance in a society as they are in the process of transformation for various external forces. Such performance varies from tribe to tribe. Most of the tribes in the study area are either Hinduised or Christians. Hence, performance of the rituals depends upon the religion professed. However, as the majority of the tribes are Hinduised so most of the traditional Assamese cultural elements have penetrated into the culture of the tribes although they have retained certain traditional practices to religion.

Religion forms an inseparable part of society. The social life of man has many aspects. Besides the economic, political, philosophical, scientific it has also the religious aspect. Man is not only a social being but also spiritual being. The institution of religion is not only permanent but also universal. It is found in all societies past and present. Laws, customs, conventions etc and the means of social control are formulated and shaped by religion. However religious beliefs and practices are not uniform and vary from people to people. The tribal religions have been described as animistic. Animal, ponds, trees, stones, rivers etc are the abode of spirits. Belief in the spirits is one of the important aspects of religion. The respect for the ancestors also finds an important place in the religious beliefs of the tribal people. The people depend on religious and life experience and their oral transmission for their survival and growth. It's very rare that a tribal religion traces itself to a religious founder. Symbolism is very important for interpretation of the invisible world and the human relation with it. Sacrifice also occupies an important place in the religion of the tribal. Sacrifices are offered individually in each of the homestead to the ancestors by the head of the family at least once a year. Sacrifice can again be broadly divided into two, namely, community sacrifices and individual sacrifice. Sacrifices form an important part, of the religious life of the tribes in the study area.

A section of tribal people declared themselves to be Hindu in the study area. While a small section of people was found to be converted to Christianity. Among the Hindus, Saivism and Saktism have strong roots. Influence of Tantricism was also seen felt upon the religion of the study area. The few households who profess Hinduism were also found to be *Sarania*s which means converts who has taken refuge in Hinduism. In this regard L.A. Waddel has commented:

“This semi Hinduism people occupying the plains of Brahmaputra between lower Assam and north Eastern Bengal are in many ways interesting. They do not as stated by Colonel Dalton, Mr. Risley and others belong to the dark Dravidian aborigines of India. But they are distinctly Mongoloid though somewhat heterogeneous. The term Koch has become more of a caste than a tribe, as individuals of the Kachari, Garo, Rabha, Tiwa and allied Indo Chinese tribes are admitted as member. Thus any one from the tribe can become a Koch by taking initiation from a Brahmanical priest and giving up eating beef, though he/she need not necessarily abjure animal food altogether. In this stage he/she is called *Sarania* which means a refugee implying that he has taken refuge in Hinduism.”

RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

Religion forms an inseparable part of society. The social life of man has many aspects. Besides the economic, political, philosophical, scientific it has also the religious aspect. Man is not only a social being but also spiritual being. The institution of religion is not only permanent but also universal. It is found in all societies past and present. Laws, customs, conventions etc and the means of social control are formulated and shaped by religion. However religious beliefs and practices are not uniform and vary from people to people. The tribal religions have been described as animistic. Animal, ponds, trees, stones, rivers etc are the abode of spirits. Belief in the spirits is one of the important aspects of religion. The respect for the ancestors also finds an important place in the religious beliefs of the tribal people. The people depend on religious and life experience and their oral transmission for their survival and growth. It's very rare that a tribal religion traces itself to a religious founder. Symbolism is very important for interpretation of the invisible world and the human relation with it. Sacrifice also occupies an important place in the religion of the tribal. Sacrifices are offered individually in each of the homestead to the ancestors by the head of the family at least once a year. Sacrifice can again be broadly divided into two, namely, community sacrifices and individual sacrifice. Sacrifices form an important part, of the religious life of the tribes in the study area.

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Table No 3 shows the religion professed by the study area.

	Village	Total Surveyed household	Hindu	Percentage	Christian	Percentage
1	Shakura Basti	11	9	81.8	2	18.2
2	Wooluni	12	12	100.0	0	0.0
3	Bherokuchi	13	13	100.0	0	0.0
4	Diksak	13	9	69.2	4	30.8
5	Luri	11	6	54.5	5	45.5
6	Goumaria	13	9	69.2	4	30.8
7	Kendubam	10	10	100.0	0	0.0
8	Khalaihari	11	6	54.5	5	45.5
9	Bahupara	16	16	100.0	0	0.0
10	Batabari	22	22	100.0	0	0.0
11	Jobe	10	10	100.0	0	0.0
12	Rangapara	11	9	81.8	2	18.2
13	Sajjanpara	15	15	100.0	0	0.0
14	Andherijuli	13	13	100.0	0	0.0
15	Moirapur	13	0	0.0	13	100.0
16	Rajapanichanda	17	10	58.8	7	41.2
17	Hohora	12	10	83.3	2	16.7
18	Thakurkuchi	13	11	84.6	2	15.4
19	Topatoli	10	6	60.0	4	40.0
20	Tepesia	11	9	81.8	2	18.2
21	Rewa	11	8	72.7	3	27.3
22	Dhami	12	9	75.0	3	25.0
23	Nortap	14	14	100.0	0	0.0
24	Dakhin Dimoria	11	6	54.5	5	45.5
25	Nispanbari	16	12	75.0	4	25.0
26	Missamari	22	14	63.6	8	36.4
27	Borkhat	10	8	80.0	2	20.0
28	Patgoan	11	9	81.8	2	18.2
29	Digarua	15	12	80.0	3	20.0
30	Kukurua	13	10	76.9	3	23.1
Total		392	307	78.3	85	21.7

Out of a total of 392 households surveyed, 307 households or 78.3% were found to be Hindus while 85 or 21.7% were found to be Christians belonging either to the Baptist or the Catholic Church.

So far as the food habits are concerned the socio economic life plays a great role in determining the food habits. All men have their likes and dislikes and their beliefs about food. Rice is the staple food of the people and consumed either twice or thrice a day according to economic conditions. Their diet also includes other cereals such as lentils which are occasionally taken, fresh vegetables, fish, nuts etc. Rice is the main item of food. Not only are the two primary meals prepared from rice but also products like *Komal chaul* (soft rice), *Akhoi* (popped rice), *Chira* (flattened rice) etc are all made from rice. As fish is abundant in the *beels*, (stagnant pools) rivers, ponds, canals and streams it is caught in huge number. So rice and fish figure prominently in the food habits of the tribes of the study area.

Music and dance forms the primary part of the culture of the tribes. The instruments used by the tribes are made locally available raw materials like bamboo, wood, gourd, hides, fibres and it mostly made by local artisans. The musical instruments are owned by the community as whole in the study area. Each of the communities in the study area possesses distinct musical instruments whose uses are seen in festivals and ceremonies.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The South Kamrup Tribal Belt initially comprised of major portion of Guwahati prior to the shifting of the capital to Dispur. The existence of a protected belt or block depended fully or partially upon the policies of the state government. As a result the belts and blocks have been de-constituted a number of times.

The social life of the tribes has been influenced by the non-tribes. This has been found to be borne out by the data collected. Maintenance of traditional rites and rituals were observed to a certain extent. But at the same time the social life of almost all the tribes residing in the study area has undergone a lot of changes. Most of the traditional Assamese cultural elements have made inroads into the culture of the various tribes residing in the study area. These changing trends have gained momentum during the last decades. The adoption of the Hindu way of life is a distinct feature in the study area. This is particularly more prominent among the Rabhas. In the study area only Pati Rabhas were seen to have completely adopted the Hindu way of life. Performance of all the ceremonies connected with life cycle, like birth, marriage and death were seen observed according to Hindu customs. It was also seen that no Pati Rabha women was allowed to enter the kitchen without taking a bath. Women were seen abstaining from cooking during the monthly periods and during the time of the pollution period of birth of a child. Moreover in all the ceremonial functions and the worshipping of the deities, use of incense sticks, conch shell, flower, milk, banana etc were frequently offered, similar to the practice of their Hindu neighbours. But the worship was conducted by the tribal priests and not a Brahmin priest.

In other aspects of social life it was found that wearing of traditional dress was found to be discarded by the tribes. Wearing of traditional dress even at the time of marriage was not observed. Only a small section of the tribes was found to be wearing traditional dress in public functions and ceremonies. This is particularly more visible among the educated middle class who are on the way of asserting their identity.

Marked changes are also seen in the food habits as discussed earlier. The majority of the tribes no longer gather food from the forests. Many are engaged in the agricultural sector. Almost all the surveyed households possess a homestead garden of their own where vegetables are grown. This homestead garden was seen managed by women. Its produce supplements the requirement of domestic need the majority of which is met by the retail outlets. Drinking milk was a taboo earlier among the tribes but now they do take milk. Moreover as the tribes reside in close proximity to the non-tribal Assamese people the Assamese food habits have abundant influence upon their cuisine. At the same time hospitality was seen to extend to the visitors among all the tribes in the study area irrespective of their religion or ethnic affinities. A visitor is never allowed to go away without partaking of a cup of tea in case of elite sections and tamul pan (betel leaf and areca nut) in case of weaker sections.

Language is one of the main factors of acculturation process. The increasing use of Assamese language among the tribes in the South Kamrup Tribal Belt indicates increasing assimilation with the non-tribal Assamese community. The Assamese language has become part and parcel of the daily communication of the majority of the respondents. It is also noteworthy that the low income households felt proud that they can speak Assamese and have adopted the Assamese way of life. Assimilation with the greater non-tribal life was also seen. Participation of all the tribes in the state festivals like the *Rongali*, *Kati* and *Magh Bihu* is seen among the tribes in the study area. *Bihu* has acquired the place of honour and attention even more than their traditional tribal festivals.

Bachelors' dormitory is a common institution among the tribes. The Karbis call it *Terang*, the Garos *Nokpante* and the Tiwas *Samadhi*. But dormitory system is not prevalent among the Tea Tribes, Rabhas and Bodos. These dormitories were not only educational institutions but also acted as co-operative societies which have survived for centuries. These dormitories also serve as law courts where cases were decided. Besides it also undertook developmental activities meant for the uplift of the village. But these

dormitories are gradually dying out among the Garos and partially among the Karbis. The bachelor dormitory was initially built on stilts and known as *Terang*. Nowadays it stands on the ground itself and called a *Lungleterang*. It has failed to withstand the onslaughts of the rapid changes brought about by developmental activities. It still does exist among the Tiwas. Moreover among the Tiwa and Karbi dominated areas there exists Khels system organised on the lines of clans among the Tiwas and village wise among the Karbis.

Most the tribes have lost their identity because of their prolonged contact with the non tribes. This is due to the assimilation of the tribes with the greater Assamese culture and has given rise to mixed culture and paving the way for more harmonious development.

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